



The Shape of Suffering

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of
Suffering

A Study of
Dependent Co-arising

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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PREFACE

This book started as a handful of readings from the Pali Canon that I have used to teach dependent co-arising at various centers in the United States. I planned to turn the readings into a brief study guide, but the project quickly grew in size as I came to realize how much explanation the readings needed in order to be useful and clear.

I was especially struck by the need for apt analogies to explain how dependent co-arising works as an explanation both for the arising of dukkha — *stress*, or *suffering* — and for the fact that dukkha can be ended through a path of practice. The two most prominent analogies offered by the post-canonical Buddhist tradition — depicting dependent co-arising as a wheel or as a circle of mirrors — are inadequate to this task. The wheel is too deterministic in its implications; the circle of mirrors, too static. Thus I felt the need to search elsewhere for appropriate analogies, and I came across two.

The first analogy is in the Pali Canon itself, where the Buddha compares causality as a whole — and dependent co-arising in particular — to the process of eating. Eating entails suffering because it requires hunger and yet cannot put an end to hunger, which the Buddha described as the foremost illness ([Dhp 203](#)). However, the path of practice to the end of suffering depends on eating both physical and mental food.

The second analogy was inspired by another canonical image, comparing the effects of dependent co-arising to a tangled skein. This image inspired me to look for parallels in modern scientific studies of tangled skeins, i.e., complex nonlinear systems, such as the weather, the behavior of financial markets, and the forces interacting within physical structures, such as bridges. Studies of these systems have helped to explain how complex systems can behave in unexpected ways, containing the seeds for a radical reconfiguring of their behavior — as when the factors of dependent co-arising can be converted to a path to the end of suffering — and for their total collapse — as when the path leads to a goal totally undefined in causal terms.

I want to make it clear that in using this latter analogy I am not trying to equate Buddhist teachings with the science of complex nonlinear systems or to engage in pseudo-science. Fashions in science change so rapidly that we do the Buddha's teachings no favor by trying to "prove" them in light of current scientific theories. I am simply pointing out similarities as a way of helping to make those teachings intelligible in modern terms. The study of complex nonlinear systems is one of the few modern bodies of knowledge that have worked out a vocabulary for the patterns of behavior described in Buddhist explanations of causality, and so it seems a natural source to draw on, both to describe those patterns and to point out some of their less obvious implications.

In doing so, I realize that I run the risk of alienating non-scientists who feel intimidated by scientific terminology, as well as scientists who resent the application of terminology from their disciplines to "non-scientific" fields. To both groups I can say only that the terms in and of themselves are not "scientific." Much of our current everyday terminology for explaining causal relations is derived from the science of the eighteenth century; I expect that it will only be a matter of time before the terminology of more recent science will percolate into everyday language. Ultimately, of course, science will never be able to prove or disprove the truth of the Buddha's claims. That proof can be found only within the awareness of the person who puts those claims to the test in the way the Buddha recommended: by developing the factors of the noble eightfold path.

One final point: This is a book primarily about dukkha, but as you may have already noticed, I do not translate this word in a consistent way. "Suffering" is a traditional equivalent, but it has many weaknesses; "stress" is an equivalent I tend to prefer — it can apply to many subtle levels of dukkha that "suffering" misses, and it helps to de-romanticize the issue — but it has its weaknesses as well. In particular, it is too mild to convey the more blatant and overwhelming forms that dukkha can take. Thus, where it seems appropriate, I have alternated between the two renderings, and have also combined them as a phrase, *suffering and stress*. I hope that this will not prove confusing.

I would like to express my gratitude for those who have helped in the writing of this book. This includes all those who have taken the courses I

have taught on this topic at the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in Redwood City, California, at New York Insight, in New York City, at Laguna Beach, California, and at Bellingham, Washington. Your questions have helped sharpen the presentation here in many important ways. I would also like to thank those who have looked over the manuscript and offered suggestions for improvements. In addition to the monks here at the monastery, this includes Peter Doobinin, Gil Fronsdal, Bok Lim Kim, Nathaniel Osgood, and Michael Zoll. Ruby Grad has kindly provided the index. Any mistakes, of course, are my own responsibility.

Thānissaro Bhikkhu

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INTRODUCTION

“Only stress, and the cessation of stress.”

Dukkha — the experience of stress, pain, suffering — is not a simple thing. As the Buddha once observed, we respond to its complexity in two ways:

§ 1. “And what is the result of stress? There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?’ I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.” — [AN 6:63](#)

The problem is that the bewilderment often guides the search, leading to more suffering and stress. To resolve this dilemma, the Buddha devoted his life, after his Awakening, to showing a reliable way to the end of stress. In summarizing the whole of his teaching, he said:

§ 2. “Both formerly and now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress.” — [SN 22:86](#)

These were the issues he taught for 45 years. In some cases, he would give a succinct explanation of stress and its cessation. In others, he would explain them in more detail. His most detailed explanation is called dependent co-arising — *paṭicca samuppāda*. This detailed summary of the causal factors leading up to stress shows why the experience of suffering and stress can be so bewildering, for the interaction among these factors can be very complex. The body of this book is devoted to explaining these factors and their interactions, to show how they can provide focus to a path of practice leading to the ending of stress. But first, here is a list of these factors, enough to give a general sense of the shape of dependent co-arising, and to show how unwieldy it can seem. The factors will be explained in more detail in the body of the book. Here they are numbered

starting with the most fundamental factor, *ignorance*, for *ignorance* is the most strategic factor in causing the other factors to contribute to stress.

1. *Ignorance*: not seeing things in terms of the four noble truths of stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to its cessation.
2. *Fabrication*: the process of intentionally shaping states of body and mind. These processes are of three sorts:
 - a. *Bodily fabrication*: the in-and-out breath
 - b. *Verbal fabrication*: directed thought and evaluation
 - c. *Mental fabrication*: *feeling* (feeling tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain) and *perception* (the mental labels applied to the objects of the senses for the purpose of memory and recognition).
3. *Consciousness* at the six sense media: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect.
4. *Name-and-form*: mental and physical phenomena.
 - Mental phenomena include:
 - Feeling
 - Perception
 - Intention
 - Contact
 - Attention
 - Physical phenomena include:
 - Earth (solidity)
 - Water (liquidity)
 - Wind (energy and motion)
 - Fire (warmth)
5. The *six internal sense media*: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect.
6. *Contact* at the six sense media. (*Contact* happens when a sense organ meets with a sense object — for example, the eye meets with a form — conditioning an act of *consciousness* at that sense organ. The meeting of all three — the sense organ, the object, and the act of consciousness — counts as contact.)
7. *Feeling* based on contact at the six sense media.

8. *Craving* for the objects of the six sense media. This craving can focus on any of the six sense media, and can take any of three forms:
 - a. *Sensuality-craving* (craving for sensual plans and resolves).
 - b. *Becoming-craving* (craving to assume an identity in a world of experience)
 - c. *Non-becoming-craving* (craving for the end of an identity in a world of experience).
9. *Clinging* — passion and delight — focused on the five aggregates of *form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness*. This clinging can take any of four forms:
 - a. Sensuality-clinging
 - b. View-clinging
 - c. Habit-and-practice-clinging
 - d. Doctrine-of-self-clinging
10. *Becoming* on any of three levels:
 - a. The level of sensuality
 - b. The level of form
 - c. The level of formlessness
11. *Birth*: the actual assumption of an identity on any of these three levels.
12. The *aging-and-death* of that identity, with its attendant sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair.

Even a cursory glance over these twelve factors will show two of the major ways in which dependent co-arising is an unwieldy topic: (1) The factors seem to fit in different contexts and (2) many of the sub-factors are repeated at seemingly random intervals in the list.

In terms of context, some of the factors seem more psychological, referring to events within the mind in the present moment, whereas others seem more cosmological, referring to events over the course of a lifetime, and even many lifetimes. And in the centuries after the Buddha's passing, there have been many attempts to make the list less unwieldy by fitting all the factors into a single interpretation, as referring either to events occurring right now or over a long course of time.

There have even been attempts to — literally — impose a shape on the list as a whole. That shape is a circle, and there are two primary ways in which the circle has been described. The first — an idea proposed in medieval India — is as a wheel, with the sorrow, etc., of aging-and-death leading to more ignorance and so on to another round of suffering and stress. The second circle — proposed in medieval China — is a circle of mirrors surrounding a lamp, with each mirror reflecting not only the light directly from the lamp, but also the lamplight reflected from other mirrors.

In Chapters One and Two we will discuss the formal reasons for why these simplified images are inadequate as depictions of dependent co-arising. But here we will offer a thought-experiment to show how they are also inadequate for depicting an everyday, concrete example of how people suffer.

For the sake of this experiment, assume that you are walking to your parents' home on a Friday evening after a long day's work. The upcoming weekend is a holiday, and your parents are hosting a dinner for your extended family. Your uncle will be at the dinner, and this fact has you upset: He has long been an alcoholic and has been very abusive to you and your mother ever since you were a child. The factors of dependent co-arising — inserted in the discussion as numbers drawn from the above list — can be applied in three time frames to show different ways in which you might create suffering and stress around this event.

In each of these examples, assume (1) that you are operating in *ignorance* — i.e., you are not thinking in terms of the four noble truths, and instead are looking at your situation in light of your personal narratives about the family situation and your own place in it.

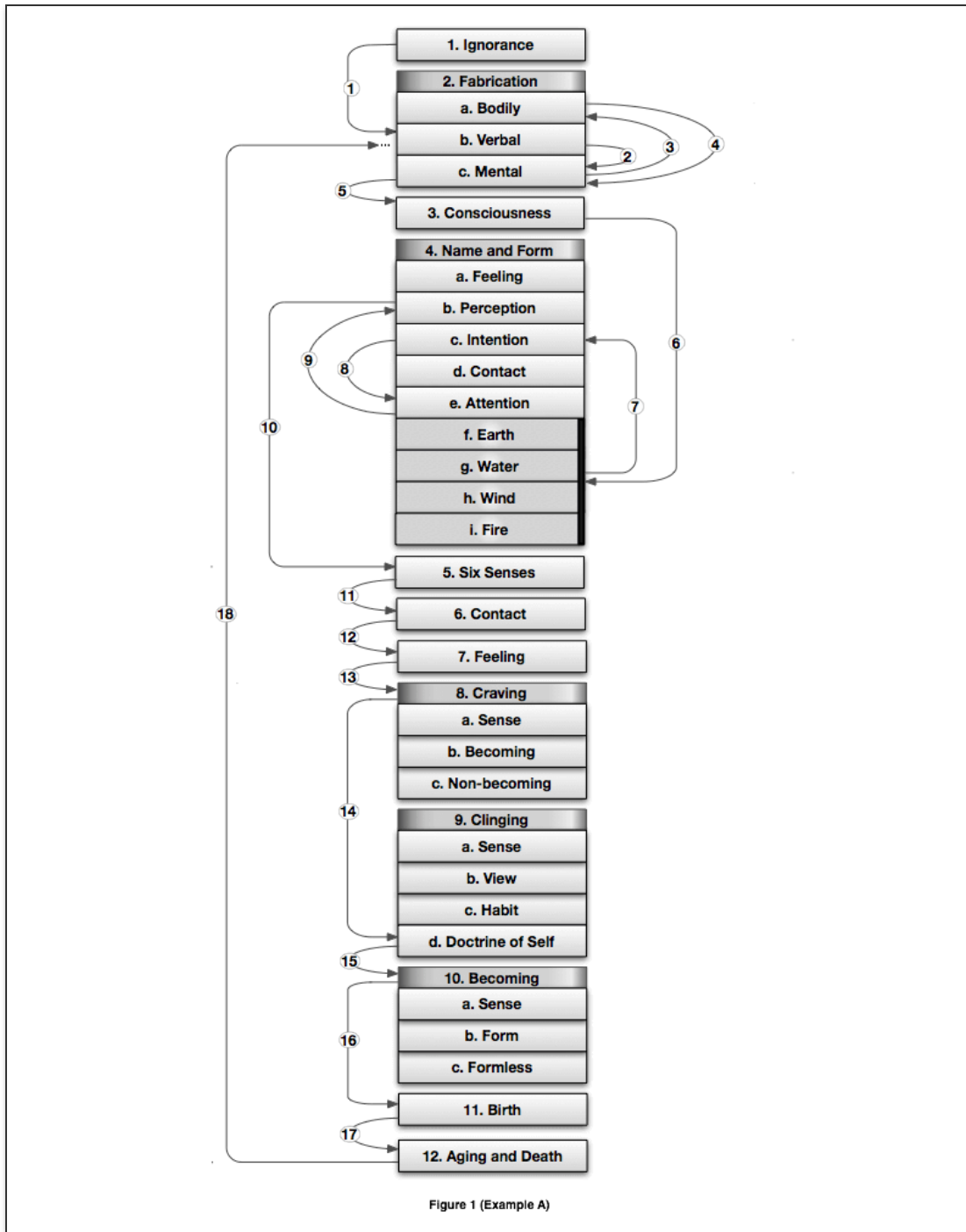
As you walk to the door of your parents' house, thinking about the situation (2b — *verbal fabrication*), you pull up memories of things your uncle has done in the past (2c — *mental fabrication*). This provokes anger, causing your breathing to become labored and tight (2a — *bodily fabrication*). This makes you uncomfortable (2c — *mental fabrication*), and you are aware of how uncomfortable you feel (3 — *consciousness*). Hormones are released into your bloodstream (4f through 4i — *form*). Without being fully aware that you are making a choice, you choose (4c — *intention*) to focus (4e

— *attention*) on the *perception* (4b) of how trapped you feel in this situation. Your *consciousness* of this idea (5 and 6 — *mental contact*) feels oppressive (7 — *feeling*). You want to find a way out (8 — *craving*). At this point, you can think of a number of roles you could play in the upcoming dinner (9d and 10 — *clinging and becoming*). You might refuse to speak with your uncle, you might try to be as unobtrusive as possible to get through the dinner without incident, or you might be more aggressive and confront your uncle about his behavior. You mentally take on one of these roles (11 — *birth*), but unless you keep your imaginary role actively in mind, it falls away as soon as you think of it (12 — *aging and death*). So you keep thinking about it, evaluating how your parents will react to it, how you will feel about it, and so on (2b — *verbal fabrication*). Although the stress of step (12) in this case is not great, the fact that your role has to be kept in mind and repeatedly evaluated is stressful, and you can go through many sequences of stress in this way in the course of a few moments.

You have been walking to your parents' house with the above thoughts in mind (2 through 4), already in a state of stress and unhappy anticipation. You knock on the door, and your uncle answers (5 and 6) with a drink in his hand. Regardless of what he says, you feel oppressed by his presence (7) and wish you were someplace else (8c). Your mother makes it obvious that she does not want a scene at the dinner, so you go through the evening playing the role of the dutiful child (9c, 10a, 11). Alternatively, you could decide that you must nevertheless confront your uncle (again, 9c, 10, and 11). Either way, you find the role hard to maintain and so you break out of the role at the end of the dinner (12). In this way, the entire evening counts as a sequence of stress.

Instead of dropping the role you have taken on, you assume it for the rest of your life — for instance, as the passive, dutiful son or daughter, as the reformer who tries to cure your uncle of alcoholism, or as the avenger, seeking retributive justice for the many hardships you and your mother have had to endure. To maintain this role, you have to *cling to views* (9b) about how you should behave (9c) and the sort of person you are or should be (9d).

You keep producing (10) and assuming (11) this identity until it becomes impossible to do so any further (12). In this way, a full sequence of dependent co-arising could cover an entire lifetime. If you continue craving to maintain this identity (8b) even as you die, it will lead you to cling (9) to opportunities for rebirth (10 and 11) as they appear at the moment of death, and the full sequence of dependent co-arising could then cover more than one lifetime, leading to further suffering and stress on into the indefinite future.



As these scenarios show, there is no single, definitive time frame for the ways in which dependent co-arising can produce suffering and stress. A single sequence can last a mere moment or many years. However, even the longest sequence, to continue functioning, requires repeated loops of momentary sequences, as one maintains an identity through thinking about it (2b) and intentionally attending to whatever factors are needed to

maintain it (4c and 4e). Thus, even though we may speak of a single sequence crossing over lifetimes, that sequence doesn't yield stress only as it ends in aging-and-death, for it is maintained by myriads of momentary sequences that produce repeated stress at varying levels — sometimes more, sometimes less — all along the way.

To further complicate this picture, the factors within the sequence can feed back into one another before completing a full sequence. This is the meaning of the specific factors and sub-factors that occur in different positions within the sequence. *Feeling*, for instance, appears in at least four factors of the list (counting the suffering in factor 12 as a *feeling* as well). *Consciousness*, appears twice, as does *perception*. In each of these cases, a later appearance of the factor, instead of leading directly to the factor following it in the list, can be treated once more in the role it plays in an earlier appearance. (This fact accounts for the way in which the mind can spin through many cycles of thought before coming up with a definite decision to take action on a matter.) For example, a feeling of pain appearing in (7), instead of inevitably leading straight to *craving*, could be treated as a type of *mental fabrication* (2c) or as an event under *name* (4a). If, as a mental fabrication, it is subjected to further *ignorance*, that would simply compound the stress in the subsequent cycle through the causal change. A similar result would occur if, as an event under *name*, it is subjected to further inappropriate *attention* (4e), which is equivalent to *ignorance*. In terms of Scenario A, this would correspond to the point at which you feel oppressed at the prospect of going to the dinner. If you keep focusing on this feeling in an ignorant or inappropriate way, you simply compound the stress of your situation, enflaming the sense of oppression until it becomes unmanageable.

However, if the *feeling* in (7) is treated with *knowledge* as a type of *mental fabrication* (2c) or with *appropriate attention* (4e) — another synonym for *knowledge* — as an instance of *name*, that would redirect the sequence in a skillful way, reducing the amount of suffering and stress produced. For example, if — when you start feeling oppressed at the prospect of the upcoming dinner — you reflect on the fact that your labored breathing is causing unnecessary stress, you can stop to adjust your breathing so that it feels more refreshed (2a). You can think about the situation in different ways, seeing the dinner as an opportunity to

develop skillful qualities of the path, such as right resolve and right speech (2b). You can remember the positive things that your uncle has done in the past, and your own personal need to think in that way (2c). You can make up your mind to do or say whatever seems most skillful in the situation (4c). In this way, you can defuse the sense of oppression and abort the particular sufferings it would have caused.

In this way, although the reappearance of *feeling* at different points in dependent co-arising has the potential for compounding the problem of stress and suffering, it also opens the opportunity for a particular sequence of suffering to be alleviated. The fact that a long sequence of dependent co-arising requires the repeated occurrence of many short sequences — full or partial — similarly offers the opportunity for unraveling it at any time, simply by unraveling any one of the short sequences.

For these reasons, it is best not to view dependent co-arising as a circle, for such a simplistic image does not do justice to the many different time frames simultaneously at work in the production of suffering. Nor does it do justice to the ways in which the complexity of dependent co-arising provides an opening for suffering to be brought to an end. A better image would be to view dependent co-arising as a complex interplay of many feedback loops that, if approached with ignorance, can produce compounded suffering or, if approached with knowledge, create repeated opportunities to redirect the sequence and dampen the experience of suffering or stress.

Of course, the untrained mind is changeable. Having once dealt with feeling in a knowledgeable way, it can revert to ignorance at any moment. However, the Buddha's discovery on the night of his Awakening is that it is possible to train the mind in such a way that its tendency to ignorance can be eliminated once and for all. And a common theme in the strategies he employed in this training is that ignorance can be overcome by developing sustained knowledge of any of the factors of dependent co-arising. Here again, the complexity of dependent co-arising plays an important role in allowing this strategy to work. These points form the underlying theme for this book.

[Chapter One](#) explores the formal reasons for why the wheel image used to describe dependent co-arising is inadequate for understanding the

problem of suffering and stress. This chapter also points out the practical advantages offered by the complexity of dependent co-arising, in that the complex interplay of its lines of causality means that the causal process as a whole can be unraveled by developing knowledge focused on any one of its factors.

[Chapter Two](#) explores the inadequacies of the circle of mirrors image by examining an underlying image that the Buddha himself used to describe dependent co-arising: the image of feeding. While the circle of mirrors suggests a harmlessly beautiful and static vision of dependent co-arising, the image of feeding reveals the inherent instability of dependent co-arising and the desirability of putting an end to the process. This chapter also explores the theme of feeding with reference to the way this theme was viewed in classical Indian thought, and discusses the Buddha's strategic use of physical and mental feeding to lead the mind to a point where it no longer needs to feed. In other words, the causal process — as exemplified by feeding — can be converted from one that produces suffering to one that brings suffering to an end.

[Chapter Three](#) explores the practical aspects of points made in Chapters One and Two. On the one hand, it shows how specific practices in the Buddhist path are meant to bring knowledge to bear on specific factors of dependent co-arising. On the other, it shows how specific factors in dependent co-arising — particularly, *fabrication* and *name-and-form* — can be shaped into tools for use in the path to the end of suffering and stress. Once they have performed their functions as tools, these factors can be contemplated so as to abandon any remaining passion for them.

The upshot of this chapter is that a person aiming to put an end to suffering does not need to know all the ins and outs of dependent co-arising, because the practice can be completed by focusing on any one of its component factors. Once that one factor is understood, that understanding will spread to the other factors as well. Still, an appreciation of the complexity of dependent co-arising helps to explain why this is so. At the same time, a knowledge of its various factors gives a sense of the full range from which a focal point can be chosen, and an understanding of the practices the Buddha recommended with regard to

each focal point assists in gaining the practical benefit this knowledge is intended to give.

Thus this book. The material is presented as a collection of readings from the discourses of the Pali Canon — our earliest record of the Buddha's teachings — interlaced with discussions to bring out their most salient points. I have not attempted a complete discussion of all the relevant topics, for that would have created a book too complex to be of use. Instead, I have provided the discussions as food for further thought. Training the mind to feed itself in this way is an important step in using the teachings on dependent co-arising to attain their intended goal.

CHAPTER ONE

“A tangled skein”

Dependent co-arising — *paṭicca samuppāda* — is the Buddha’s most complete analysis of the conditions leading to suffering, together with the conditions leading to suffering’s end. A passage in the Canon states that this was the topic he contemplated on emerging from his first week of meditation after his Awakening.

§ 3. I have heard that on one occasion, when the Blessed One was newly Awakened — staying at Uruvela by the banks of the Nerañjarā River in the shade of the Bodhi tree, the tree of Awakening — he sat in the shade of the Bodhi tree for seven days in one session, sensitive to the bliss of release. At the end of seven days, after emerging from that concentration, in the third watch of the night, he gave close attention to dependent co-arising in forward and reverse order, thus:

When this is, that is.

From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

When this isn’t, that isn’t.

From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.

In other words:

From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.

From name-and-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-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.

Now from the remainderless fading and 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-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-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-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress and suffering. — [*Ud 1:3*](#)

Another passage states that even the first stage of Awakening — *stream entry* — involves a fourfold insight into any one of the factors of dependent co-arising: knowing the factor, knowing how the origination of its requisite condition leads to its origination, knowing how the cessation of its requisite condition leads to its cessation, and knowing the path of practice leading to its cessation. Here, for example, is how the passage treats the factor of fabrication:

§ 4. “Which fabrications? These three fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications. From the origination of ignorance comes the origination of fabrications. From the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. And precisely this noble eightfold path is the way of practice leading to the cessation of fabrications: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“And when a disciple of the noble ones discerns the requisite condition in this way, discerns the origination of the requisite condition in this way, discerns the cessation of the requisite condition in this way, discerns the way of practice leading to the cessation of the condition in this way, he is called a disciple of the noble ones who is ‘one consummate in view,’ ‘one consummate in vision,’ ‘one who has come to this true Dhamma,’ ‘one who sees this true Dhamma,’ ‘one endowed with the knowledge of one in training,’ ‘one endowed with the clear knowing of one in training,’ ‘one who has attained the stream of Dhamma,’ ‘a noble one of penetrating discernment,’ ‘one who stands squarely in the door of the deathless.’” — *SN 12:27*

This is why Ven. Sāriputta equated vision of the Dhamma with vision of dependent co-arising:

§ 5. *Ven. Sāriputta*: “Now, the Blessed One has said, ‘Whoever sees dependent co-arising sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent co-arising.’” — [*MN 28*](#)

For anyone who aims at Awakening to the Dhamma that provides release from suffering and stress, these facts can prove daunting. Dependent co-arising is an extremely complex topic, so complex that the Buddha compared its effects to tangles and knots:

§ 6. *Ven. Ānanda*: It’s amazing, lord, it’s astounding, how deep this dependent co-arising is, and how deep its appearance, and yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be.

The Buddha: Don’t say that, Ānanda. Don’t say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance. It’s because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond the cycle of the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations. — [*DN 15*](#)

However, the complexity of dependent co-arising does not have to act as a deterrent to the practice. Many of the aspects of dependent co-arising that are most useful to know for the purpose

of putting an end to suffering appear right on the surface. In fact, they are so obvious that they are often overlooked. And even the complexity of dependent co-arising, although it may be initially confusing, is actually an aid in bringing suffering to an end. So it's good to look both for the obvious features of the process and for the ways in which the complexity is actually a friend in disguise.

First, the obvious features:

- **When the conditions give rise to one another, they lead to suffering.** Unlike later Buddhist teachers, the Buddha did not see the interconnectedness of conditions as something to celebrate. He saw that it inevitably leads to stress, suffering, and pain. This is because:

- **The causal system is essentially unstable.** Nothing caused can be permanent, for there are no permanent causes. Any happiness based on impermanent causes will have to be impermanent as well. When a cause passes away, its effect will — either immediately or over time — pass away, too. This point may seem obvious, but it is a sharp break from the causal teachings of other philosophies in the Buddha's time, and from any philosophy in which impermanent events owe their existence to a timeless, permanent cause or emanate from a metaphysical ground of being. For example, the Upaniṣads — Indian religious texts that predated the Buddha — proposed many explanations for how the visible world came into being, and although the explanations differ in their details, they all follow a pattern in which Being, as an abstract, timeless principle, gives rise to a series of other powers and principles that in turn produce the world we experience. Theories of this sort cannot adequately explain how a permanent cause can lead to an impermanent effect. They also give no practical guidance on how undesirable effects can be alleviated.

Because dependent co-arising begins with unstable causes, any happiness produced by the causal process will have to be unstable, inconstant, and unreliable. This is the downside of dependent co-arising. The Buddha conveyed this point by likening the causal process to the act of eating; effects feed off their causes. Inter-being is inter-eating. Although we may think that the suffering inherent in feeding is primarily felt by those forced into the role of

food, the Buddha points out that it's also stressful for those who need to feed. Their continued survival is uncertain, requiring that they continually look for new sources of nutriment.

However, the instability of dependent co-arising has its upside as well. To put an end to an effect, you simply have to put an end to its cause. This means that:

- **The suffering caused by this system can be ended.** The Buddha's solution to the problem of suffering was not to accept suffering as an inevitable part of life. It was to find the causes of suffering and to bring them to total cessation, so that suffering could be brought to total cessation as well.

- **The causal system follows a pattern.** It is possible to point to a cause for each factor in dependent co-arising, and the particular relationship between each cause and effect holds true over time. It is not dependent on the vagaries of time, culture, or place. Unlike some thinkers who state that each moment is so radically new that lessons learned from the past obscure it, the Buddha saw that knowledge of dependent co-arising can fruitfully be applied to every moment of suffering. Thus dependent co-arising provides a precise body of knowledge that can be applied to the problem of suffering in all times and all places.

- **The factors most important in leading to stress and suffering occur prior to sensory contact.** This means that suffering is not caused primarily by unpleasant sensory contact; it is caused by the attitudes and views that are brought to any sensory contact, pleasant or not. This further means that the crucial causes for stress and suffering are internal, and thus not dependent on outside circumstances. They are subject to one's knowledge and will. In this way, the quest for the end of suffering is primarily an internal matter of training the mind.

- **Ignorance is the primary cause of suffering; knowledge is the primary factor leading to its cessation.** As passage [§14](#) shows, ignorance here means not seeing events in terms of the four noble truths: stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path of practice leading to its cessation. These four noble truths are best understood, not as a body of facts about stress, but as categories

for framing any and all experiences in a way that allows you to diagnose and cure the problem of stress. Instead of looking at an experience, for instance, in terms of self or other, of what your true nature is, or of what you like and dislike, you look at it in terms of where there's stress, what's causing it, and how to put an end to the cause. Once you can divide the territory of experience in this way, you realize that each of these categories is an activity. The word "stress" may be a noun, but the experience of stress is shaped by your intentions. It's something you do. The same holds true with the other truths, too. Seeing this, you can work on perfecting the skill appropriate for each activity. The skill with regard to stress is to comprehend it to the point where you have no more passion, aversion, or delusion toward doing it. To perfect this skill, you also have to abandon the cause of stress, to realize its cessation, and to develop the path to its cessation. Once you have fully mastered these skills, you have developed the knowledge that puts a total end to the ignorance underlying all the other factors in dependent co-arising.

• **All the factors of dependent co-arising are processes and events that are immediately present in one's awareness.** There is no need to search outside of your immediate present awareness for any hidden causes underlying these factors. Every factor is right here to be observed. Even the factor of *becoming* — the sense of identity within a world of experience fashioned from the data of the senses — is a process, a sense of being that comes from doing and that can be observed to change as your intentional actions change.

The ability to see all of these factors simply as processes and events, without any reference to the question of whether there is anything underlying them, is an important skill in learning how to see them in terms of the four noble truths. This point is emphasized in many passages where the Buddha refuses to entertain the question of whether there are substances or agents — such as a world outside or a self or soul inside — underlying the direct experience of the factors of dependent co-arising.

For example, he refuses to entertain such questions as, "Who feels?" or "Who clings?" "Whose is the aging-and-death?" (Or, "The

aging-and-death of what?)” or “The birth/rebirth of what?” because such questions lead inevitably to related questions of how to define the “who” or “what” being affirmed or denied, a process that leads further and further away from a direct vision of the processes of suffering and stress as processes, in and of themselves, as they occur.

§ 7. *The Buddha*: “From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.”

Ven. Moliyaphagguna: “Lord, who makes contact?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘makes contact.’ If I were to say ‘makes contact,’ then ‘Who makes contact?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is ‘From what as a requisite condition comes contact?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.’”

“Lord, who feels?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘feels.’ If I were to say ‘feels,’ then ‘Who feels?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is ‘From what as a requisite condition comes feeling?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.’”

“Lord, who craves?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘craves.’ If I were to say ‘craves,’ then ‘Who craves?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is ‘From what as a requisite condition comes craving?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.’”

“Lord, who clings?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “I don’t say ‘clings.’ If I were to say ‘clings,’ then ‘Who clings?’ would be a valid question. But I don’t say that. When I don’t say that, the valid question is ‘From what as a requisite condition comes clinging?’ And the valid answer is, ‘From

craving as a requisite condition comes clinging. From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.” — [SN 12:12](#)

§ 8. The Blessed One said, “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering.”

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One: “Which is the aging-and-death, lord, and whose is the aging-and-death?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which is the aging-and-death, and whose is the aging-and-death?’ and if one were to say, ‘Aging-and-death is one thing, and the aging-and-death is something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. It’s not the case that when one is of the view that the soul is the same as the body there is the leading of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when one is of the view that the soul is one thing and the body another there is the leading of the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-and- death.”

“Which is the birth, lord, and whose is the birth?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.”

“Which is the becoming, lord, and whose is the becoming?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming.”

“Which is the clinging, lord, and whose is the clinging?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging.”

“Which is the craving, lord, and whose is the craving?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.”

“Which is the feeling, lord, and whose is the feeling?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.”

“Which is the contact, lord, and whose is the contact?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.”

“Which are the six sense media, lord, and whose are the six sense media?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.”

“Which is the name-and-form, lord, and whose is the name-and-form?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.”

“Which is the consciousness, lord, and whose is the consciousness?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said.... “From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.”

“Which are the fabrications, lord, and whose are the fabrications?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which are the fabrications, and whose are the fabrications?’ and if one were to say, ‘Fabrications are one thing, and the fabrications are something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. It’s not the case that when one is of the view that the soul is the same as the body there is the leading of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when one is of the view that the soul is one thing and the body another there is the leading of the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“Now from the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance, all of these writhings and wriggings and wiggings — ‘Which is the aging-and-death, and whose is the aging-and-death?’ or ‘Aging-and-death are one thing, and this aging-and- death are something/someone else’s’ or ‘The soul is the same as the body,’ or ‘The

soul is one thing and the body another’ — are abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising.

“From the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance, all of these writhings and wriggings and wiggings — ‘Which is the birth.... Which is the becoming.... Which is the clinging.... Which is the craving.... Which is the feeling.... Which is the contact.... Which are the six sense media.... Which is the name-and-form.... Which is the consciousness.... Which are the fabrications, and whose are the fabrications?’ or ‘Fabrications are one thing, and these fabrications are something/someone else’s’ or ‘The soul is the same as the body,’ or ‘The soul is one thing and the body another’ — are abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising.” — [SN 12:35](#)

The ability to remain focused on the processes of dependent co-arising also works at cross-purposes with any attempt to posit the existence or nonexistence, the oneness or the plurality, of the cosmos as a whole.

§ 9. Then a brāhman cosmologist went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Now, then, Master Gotama, does everything exist?”

“‘Everything exists’ is the senior form of cosmology, brāhman.”

“Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?”

“‘Everything does not exist’ is the second form of cosmology, brāhman.”

“Then is everything a Oneness?”

“‘Everything is a Oneness’ is the third form of cosmology, brāhman.”

“Then is everything a plurality?”

“‘Everything is a plurality is the fourth form of cosmology, brāhman.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications....”

— [SN 12:48](#)

§ 10. “By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is supported by/takes as its object a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world with right discernment as it has come to be, ‘non-existence’ with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world with right discernment as it has come to be, ‘existence’ with reference to the world does not occur to one.

“By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings/sustenances, and 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 mere stress, when arising, is arising; stress, when passing away, is passing away. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It’s to this extent, Kaccāyana, that there is right view.” — [SN 12:15](#)

The ability to remain focused on the processes of dependent co-arising also requires abandoning any questions of who is the agent behind the process or the subject experiencing the process. To overcome ignorance, there has to be an exclusive focus on the process as a causal process, in and of itself, as it is actually happening.

§ 11. Then a certain brāhman went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “What now, Master Gotama? Is the one who acts the same one who experiences (the results of the act)?”

“(To say,) brāhman, ‘The one who acts is the same one who experiences,’ is one extreme.”

“Then, Master Gotama, is the one who acts someone other than the one who experiences?”

“(To say,) brāhman, ‘The one who acts is someone other than the one who experiences,’ is the second extreme. Avoiding both of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle:

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications....” — [SN 12:46](#)

§ 12. “Whatever brāhmans and contemplatives, teachers of kamma, who declare that pleasure and pain are self-made, even that is dependent on contact. Whatever brāhmans and contemplatives, teachers of kamma, who declare that pleasure and pain are other-made... self-made and other-made... neither self-made nor other-made, but arise spontaneously, even that is dependent on contact.

“That any brāhmans and contemplatives — teachers of kamma who declare that pleasure and pain are self-made — would be sensitive to pleasure and pain otherwise than through contact, that isn’t possible. That any brāhmans and contemplatives — teachers of kamma who declare that pleasure and pain are other-made... self-made and other-made... neither self-made nor other-made, but arise spontaneously — would be sensitive to pleasure and pain otherwise than through contact, that isn’t possible.

“When there is a body, pleasure and pain arise internally with bodily intention as the cause; or when there is speech, pleasure and pain arise internally with verbal intention as the cause; or when there is intellect, pleasure and pain arise internally with intellectual intention as the cause.

“From ignorance as a requisite condition, then either of one’s own accord one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure and pain arise internally, or because of others one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure and pain arise internally. Either alert one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure and pain arise internally, or unalert one fabricates the bodily fabrication on account of which that pleasure and pain arise internally. [Similarly with verbal and intellectual fabrications.] “Now, ignorance is bound up in these things. From the remainderless fading and cessation of that very ignorance, there no longer exists (the sense of) the body on account of which that pleasure and pain internally arise. There no longer exists the speech... the intellect on account of which that pleasure and pain internally arise. There no longer exists the field, the site, the dimension, or the issue on account of which that pleasure and pain internally arise.” — [SN 12:25](#)

These, then, are some of the important features of dependent co-arising that are immediately apparent. The arising of conditions leads to suffering and stress. The causal system is unstable but follows a pattern. The primary causes giving rise to suffering and stress occur prior to sensory contact. Ignorance — not seeing things in terms of the four noble truths — is foremost among these primary causes. And the ability to see things in terms of the four noble truths — which involves seeing the factors of dependent co-arising simply as processes and events immediately experienced — is the knowledge that puts an end to ignorance and thus to all suffering and stress. What's important to note is that these features are not simply facts about suffering; they are also ways of viewing suffering that aid in bringing about its cessation. The ability to see dependent co-arising as dependent co-arising is a first step in developing the clear knowledge that brings ignorance to an end.

* * *

Complexity is another obvious feature of dependent co-arising. What is less obvious is that this complexity is precisely the feature that allows for the causal connections leading to suffering to become undone. Even though, as the Buddha noted, the many complexities of dependent co-arising have caused people to be entangled and trapped in the cycle of suffering, they actually explain why it is possible to unravel the chain of factors leading to suffering. To understand why, it is useful first to understand a few points about the nature of complexity as displayed in nonlinear systems such as the weather, turbulence in air or liquids, the rise and fall of animal populations or predators and prey, and the behavior of physical structures, such as bridges. These systems are apt analogues for dependent co-arising in that — despite the fact that their behavior sometimes seems chaotic — their behavior actually contains deep, regular patterns. Furthermore, in some cases, these patterns can be utilized so that the system will behave in a desired way.

In a nonlinear system, the behavior of the system as a whole is more than the simple sum of the individual behavior of its

component parts. When such a system is sufficiently large, and its members sufficiently interrelated, it can organize itself into new and complex patterns of behavior. The interrelations that underlie these patterns often take the form of feedback loops, which are patterns of the sort where A influences B, B influences C, and C influences A. In a complex nonlinear system, these feedback loops interact with one another, causing further feedback loops on larger and larger scales. These interactions can either amplify any change occurring in them — causing “positive feedback” — or they can dampen it — causing “negative feedback.” An example of a positive feedback loop would be the one created by a speaker placed next to a microphone feeding into it. The howl created by this loop simply grows stronger and stronger until the equipment can no longer handle it. An example of a negative feedback loop would be the action of a thermostat that turns off a heater when the temperature in a room is too high, and turns it on again when it gets too low.

Scientists studying nonlinear systems simply to observe and understand their internal dynamics tend to be interested in the deterministic side of these systems: the fact that given a certain set of parameter values, the systems will invariably behave in a certain way. However, doctors and engineers working with such systems tend to be more interested in their non-deterministic side: the fact that the parameters affecting the system can be adjusted to certain values to achieve a desired effect. In this regard, the Buddha falls clearly into the second category: He taught dependent co-arising not simply for its own sake, but to show how its factors can be manipulated to lead to the end of suffering. This is why he argued against strict determinism ([AN 3:62](#)) and why he often compared himself to a doctor, curing the illnesses of the mind ([Iti 100](#); [AN 3:22](#); [AN 10:108](#)).

Thus, in looking among complex nonlinear systems for useful parallels for dependent co-arising, it is important to focus on the areas where their behavior can be changed. And although not all complex nonlinear systems display the same behavior, many of them provide useful parallels of just this sort. For instance:

- **In some of these systems, the feedback loops are so persistently interconnected that changes caused by a small feedback loop can affect the system very quickly or over longer stretches of time.**

- **In some of these systems — called “scale free” or “scale invariant” — the behavior of their many intersecting feedback loops follows the same pattern on larger and smaller scales.** These systems are thus said to be “self-similar” across scale. For instance, in a Mandelbrot set — the famous fractal set used to illustrate chaos theory — the “bug” shape of the set as a whole is found repeatedly as one zooms into the fractal at smaller and smaller spatial scales. Another example is turbulence in water or gases, which can be fruitfully studied on many different scales.

- **When subject to different parameter values, the behavior of these systems can change radically, yielding different results, even though they continue to follow the same underlying causal patterns.** When the parameter values governing them approach certain threshold or tipping points, the behavior of some complex nonlinear systems can shift from one “basin of attraction” to another, in which its behavior will exhibit a qualitatively different pattern. An example is water flowing through a pipe, which will display a certain pattern of turbulence when subjected to one set of parameter values, such as the width of the pipe and the speed and pressure of the flow, and other patterns when the parameter values are increased or decreased to certain threshold levels. In systems such as population dynamics or the behavior of financial markets, where these patterns of behavior can be either desirable or undesirable, certain parameter values can cause the feedback loops to form “vicious” cycles, where they make the overall behavior progressively more undesirable, while other parameter values can turn the same feedback loops into “virtuous” cycles, where they make the overall behavior progressively more desirable.

- **When the crucial parameter values shift back and forth over a threshold or tipping point, the system can shift back and forth between the corresponding basins of attraction.**

• **When settled in some sets of parameter values, these systems are stable — in other words, their internal feedback loops tend to reinforce the stability of the system — but when settled in others, those same feedback loops can drive the system toward collapse.** A classic example here is the interactions among the structural elements of a bridge. In most situations, the elements are mutually stabilizing. But when the bridge is subjected to rhythmic pressures — as from wind, an earthquake, or a marching column of soldiers — those same structural interactions can amplify those disturbances. If the frequency of the disturbances reaches a resonance point — determined by the frequencies at which the whole bridge vibrates — the equations expressing the bridge's response to the disturbances will contain a factor divided by zero. This, of course, produces an undefined result, which breaks the feedback loops described by those equations. If the rhythmic pressure is persistent enough to bring a crucial number of individual feedback loops into the resonance, their cascading effect can cause the whole bridge to collapse.

These five characteristics are analogous to features of dependent co-arising that play an important role in the quest to reduce or put an end to suffering:

• **Because all the feedback loops in dependent co-arising interact in a persistent way, changes in a momentary sequence of dependent co-arising can have both immediate and long-lasting effects on the longer sequences.** For example, when an unskillful intention is replaced with a skillful one, it can immediately lessen suffering, at the same time creating conditions for more skillful intentions in the future. Similarly, when the causes leading to the rebirth of attachment in the mind are severed, suffering is immediately ended; at the same time, the causes leading to future rebirth on the physical level are severed as well.

• **Dependent co-arising can be observed at many scales.** This means that lessons drawn from observing the world can be applied to the mind, and lessons drawn from observing the mind can be applied to one's interactions with the world. Lessons about the process of death and rebirth on the physical level, for example, can

be gained from observing the present-moment death and rebirth of attachments in the mind.

- **Dependent co-arising can be influenced, without breaking the causal patterns underlying the system, so that the factors of the system can function not as causes of suffering, but as factors of a path leading to the end of suffering.** The main parameter exerting this influence is knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. Where this knowledge is absent, the factors of dependent co-arising lead invariably to suffering. Where it is present in varying degrees, it can turn the vicious cycle of suffering into a more virtuous cycle of the path. In particular, if the factor of fabrication is informed by knowledge, it can be gradually fashioned into the central factor of the noble eightfold path: *right concentration*. Similarly, if the sub-factor of *intention*, under *name*, is informed by appropriate *attention* — another sub-factor under *name* — it can be gradually fashioned into all eight factors of the path.

- **When ignorance of the four noble truths alternates with knowledge of those truths, the relationships within dependent co-arising will alternate between a pattern in which they produce suffering and one in which they put an end to suffering.**

Knowledge in terms of the four noble truths is not an all-or-nothing affair. Each of the truths has a task appropriate to it: Stress is to be comprehended, its origination abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. Because these tasks need to be mastered as skills, their mastery will follow the gradual path of any skill, growing by fits and starts, with setbacks alternating with periods of progress.

- **When the skills appropriate to the noble eightfold path are consistently and masterfully applied to dependent co-arising, they can cause the entire system of suffering and its causes to collapse.** This is because this knowledge brings about a form of vision that inclines neither to becoming nor to non-becoming. This mode of vision functions as a resonance in that it causes the many feedback loops connected with becoming or non-becoming to become undefined. If applied consistently enough, this mode of vision can have a cascading effect, causing all the feedback loops in

dependent co-arising to become undefined, thus bringing about the collapse of the entire system.

The specific features of dependent co-arising as described in the Pali Canon show how these general principles operate in practice.

To begin with, the causal principle underlying the processes of dependent co-arising is a complex principle, allowing for feedback loops to develop, to interact persistently, and to intersect on different time scales. The principle is this:

§ 13. “[1] When this is, that is.

“[2] From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

“[3] When this isn’t, that isn’t.

“[4] From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.” —

[Ud 1:3](#)

This pattern is called this/that conditionality — *idappaccayatā* — because it describes the interaction of events that can be pointed to as “this” or “that” in immediate experience. It is best understood as the interaction of two principles. The more obvious of the two, expressed in [2] and [4], connects events over time. The arising of A will, at some point in time, cause the arising of B. The ceasing of A will, at some point in time, cause the ceasing of B. An example here would be the relation between a physical feeling of pleasure or pain and a complex emotion (or, to use the Buddhist technical term, *saṅkhāra*, a *fabrication*) based on the feeling. There can be a lapse in time between the arising of the feeling and the arising of the emotion, just as there can be a lapse in time between their ceasing.

The second principle, expressed in [1] and [3], connects two events in the present moment. When A is present, B exists. When A is absent, B doesn’t exist. This principle operates primarily on the level of subtle mind states persistently arising and passing away. An example would be the way in which the process of each moment of attachment’s aging-and-death occurs simultaneously with the process of its taking birth. The Buddha stated that his ability to detect this level of causality was a “breakthrough of discernment” ([SN 12:10](#); [SN 12:65](#)), which suggests how difficult it is to perceive.

Nevertheless, the principle can be readily observed in the relation between contact and feeling. When contact is present at any of the senses, a corresponding feeling tone immediately comes into being; when the contact is absent, the feeling tone is immediately gone.

These two causal principles intersect, so that any particular experience will be conditioned by both past and present events. Applied to dependent co-arising, this fact means that events included in any one factor of the list can be affected not only by past events in the factors that act as their conditions, but also by the persistent on-going, interacting presence of whole streams of events in those factors. All factors can be present at once, and even though two particular conditions may be separated by several steps in the list, they can be immediately present to each other. Thus they can create the possibility for the feedback loops to behave in unexpected ways. This is what allows for the complexity of dependent co-arising, and for the fact that it contains many feedback loops, operating on different time scales.

The feedback loops in dependent co-arising are most clearly shown in the Buddha's most complete analysis of its individual factors, although even this analysis does not show all the feedback loops that can be discovered when the factors are pursued in greater detail. To illustrate the principle of feedback, the most important fact to note about the following passage is the number of times feeling appears, both as a factor on its own and as a subfactor of fabrication and name-and-form.

Given that suffering is also a feeling, this means that the suffering produced by one sequence of influences can feed back into the system at several places. If it feeds back at the factor of feeling, it would simply condition more craving. If it feeds back at the factor of fabrication, it could be subjected to verbal fabrications (directed thought and evaluation) and even to the physical fabrication of the way one breathes around them. If these fabrications are unskillful — applied with ignorance — they could lead to another sequence culminating in more suffering and stress. If skillful — applied with knowledge — they would dampen the tendency for this suffering to lead to more suffering in the present or future. If supremely skillful,

they could cut the fabric of suffering once and for all. If the feeling feeds back at the factor of name-and-form, it would be subjected to an act of attention, which could be inappropriate, appropriate, or supremely appropriate, inciting unskillful, skillful, or supremely skillful intentions, yielding a similar range of possibilities. The feeling that results directly from contact at the six senses could feed back into fabrication or name-and-form in similar ways. Thus the precise way in which these factors could play through the system shows not only the complexity of the system, but also the precise way in which the system offers opportunities for amplifying suffering, mitigating suffering, or putting suffering to an end.

§ 14. “Now which *aging-and-death*? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break-up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

“And which *birth*? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, and acquisition of sense media of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

“And which *becoming*? These three becomings: sensuality-becoming, form-becoming, and formless-becoming. This is called becoming.

“And which *clinging/sustenance*? These four clings: sensuality-clinging, view-clinging, habit-and-practice-clinging, and doctrine-of-self-clinging. This is called clinging.

“And which *craving*? These six classes of craving: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for aromas, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for ideas. This is called craving.

“And which *feeling*? These six classes of feeling: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.

“And which *contact*? These six classes of contact: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact.

“And which *six sense media*? These six sense media: the eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. These are called the six sense media.

“And which *name-and-form*? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention: This is called name. The four great elements [earth, water, wind, and fire] and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name and this form are called name-and-form.

“And which *consciousness*? These six classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

“And which *fabrications*? These three fabrications: bodily fabrications [in-and-out breathing], verbal fabrications [directed thought and evaluation], mental fabrications [feeling and perception]. These are called fabrications.

“And which *ignorance*? Not knowing in terms of stress, not knowing in terms of the origination of stress, not knowing in terms of the cessation of stress, not knowing in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.” — [SN 12:2](#)

In addition to the feedback loops involving feeling, there are other feedback loops in dependent co-arising that are not explicitly shown in the above passage. [MN 18](#) shows that consciousness, in addition to preceding name-and-form, can also follow on the six sense media. Perception, in addition to its appearance in fabrications and name-and-form, can also follow on feeling and, as shown in § 110, form an alternative locus for craving.

§ 15. “Dependent on eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives [labels in the mind]. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions and categories of

objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, and future forms cognizable via the eye. [Similarly with the other sense media.]” — [MN 18](#)

Thus the many interlocking feedback loops in dependent co-arising show clear parallels with complex, nonlinear systems. For practical purposes, this point is extremely important. Many later schools of Buddhism depicted dependent co-arising as a circle or a wheel of causes, with the bewilderment caused by stress and suffering looping back into ignorance, thus setting up the conditions for another round of stress. But any system described by a circle offers no pathways for deviating from the circle. When subjected to different parameter values, the sequences of cause and effect simply go faster or slower around the circle but cannot leave it. A system with many feedback loops, however, does offer alternative pathways for intensifying or lessening the effects of the system by shifting it into alternative basins of attraction, in which it exhibits distinct modes of behavior. It also offers the possibility of using different parameter values to nudge the system from one basin of attraction to another until it gets nudged consistently into a resonance where it comes to a point of collapse. (We will further explore the ways in which the factors of dependent co-arising can influence one another in this way, thus acting as the path to the end of suffering, in Chapters Two and Three.)

As we have already noted, the primary parameters that have this influence on dependent co-arising are measured in terms of the presence and absence of knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. This is why ignorance of the four noble truths is listed as the first factor in dependent co-arising. This is not because ignorance is an uncaused cause for the system (see [§61](#)), but because it is the factor that can be manipulated into a new set of parameter values that can cause the entire system to break down. This is why the standard description of the end of stress invariably describes the ending of stress as a result of severing the first link, ignorance. Only then do the other conditions cease.

However, the feedback loops in dependent co-arising are so arranged that, in practice, the knowledge that puts an end to stress can be applied to any one of the factors. When that factor is no longer conditioned by ignorance at all, it reaches a resonance point. Its cessation, combined with the cessation of ignorance, can send ramifications through the entire sequence, bringing the entire sequence to cessation. When people speak of cutting dependent co-arising at one of its links — such as the link between *feeling* and *craving* — what is actually happening is that full knowledge with regard to that link has replaced *ignorance* with regard to that link. With the ceasing of *ignorance*, *fabrications* cease, and so cessation cascades throughout the entire sequence.

The fact that the ending of ignorance can occur by developing knowledge in terms of the four noble truths with reference to any of the factors of dependent co-arising is explored in great detail in two discourses: [MN 9](#) and [Sn 3:12](#). The ways in which these discourses make this point can be illustrated by the way each approaches the factor of *feeling*.

§ 16. *Ven. Sāriputta*: “When a disciple of the noble ones discerns feeling, the origination of feeling, the cessation of feeling, and the way of practice leading to the cessation of feeling, then he is a person of right view, one whose view is made straight, who is endowed with verified confidence in the Dhamma, and who has arrived at this true Dhamma.”

“And what is feeling? What is the origination of feeling? What is the cessation of feeling? What is the way of practice leading to the cessation of feeling?

“There are these six feelings: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.

“From the origination of contact comes the origination of feeling. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. And the way of practice leading to the cessation of feeling is just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“Now, when a disciple of the noble ones discerns feeling, the origination of feeling, the cessation of feeling, and the way of practice leading to the cessation of feeling in this way, when — having entirely abandoned passion-obsession, having abolished aversion-obsession, having uprooted the view-and-conceit obsession ‘I am’; having abandoned ignorance and given rise to clear knowing — he has put an end to suffering and stress right in the here-and-now, it is to this extent, too, that a disciple of the noble ones is a person of right view, one whose view is made straight, who is endowed with verified confidence in the Dhamma, and who has arrived at this true Dhamma.” — [MN 9](#)

§ 17. “‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from feeling as a requisite condition’; this is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading and 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, and resolute — one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here and 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,
deceptive,
dissolving,
seeing 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.” — [Sn 3:12](#)

The knowledge described in [MN 9](#) is more explicitly related to the four noble truths than is the knowledge described in [Sn 3:12](#), yet even the latter knowledge implicitly follows the same basic pattern, seeing the arising of stress as coming from a cause, and the cessation of stress as coming from the cessation of the cause. [MN 9](#) simply provides greater detail in describing the path of practice leading to that cessation.

[Sn 3:12](#) applies this analysis to seven of the factors of dependent co-arising: *ignorance*, *fabrications*, *consciousness*, *contact*, *feeling*, *craving*, and *clinging*. [MN 9](#) applies this analysis to all twelve of the factors. This means in practice that there is no need to know the entire sequence of factors in order to put an end to suffering and stress. A person merely needs to focus on a particular factor or relationship within the sequence — whichever is easiest to focus on — and to apply knowledge in terms of the four noble truths to that spot. This is why the Buddha, in teaching the way to the end of suffering and stress, did not have to explain the entire sequence every time to every student. He could focus simply on whichever factor or set of factors was most transparent to the student, recommend a relevant meditative practice, and that would be enough for the student to bring suffering to an end. This tactic will be explored in further detail in Chapter Three, where different aspects of Buddhist practice are listed under the factors of dependent co-arising to which they are most closely related.

The complexity of the feedback loops in dependent co-arising not only allowed the Buddha and his students to focus attention on particular factors as appropriate to his audience. It also allowed them to explore further feedback loops within the loops, and alternative ways of expressing the sequence as a whole. For example, in [DN 15](#) the Buddha plays two changes on the basic sequence. On the “results” end of the sequence, he explores another way in which feeling can lead to suffering. On the “cause” end, he replaces the standard sequence of *ignorance*, *fabrication*, *consciousness*, and *name-and-form* with another pattern in which *name-and-form* and *consciousness* condition one another. This latter change is less radical than it may appear at first glance,

because *name-and-form* contains the sub-factor of *attention*. Inappropriate attention is a synonym for *ignorance*; appropriate attention is a synonym for *knowledge*. Thus in both patterns, *ignorance* is the prime cause for stress, and *knowledge* is the prime cause for bringing stress to an end.

§ 18. “If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does name-and-form come?’ one should say, ‘Name-and-form comes from consciousness as its requisite condition.’...

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does consciousness come?’ one should say, ‘Consciousness comes from name-and-form as its requisite condition.’

“Thus, Ānanda, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form 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. From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress....

“Now, craving is dependent on feeling,
seeking is dependent on craving,
acquisition is dependent on seeking,
ascertainment is dependent on acquisition,
desire and passion is dependent on ascertainment,
attachment is dependent on desire and passion,
possessiveness is dependent on attachment,
stinginess is dependent on possessiveness,
defensiveness is dependent on stinginess,
and because of defensiveness, dependent on defensiveness, various evil, unskillful phenomena come into play: the taking up of sticks and knives; conflicts, quarrels, and disputes; accusations, divisive speech, and lies....

Thus, Ānanda, these two phenomena [the chain of conditions leading from craving to birth, aging, and death, and the chain of conditions leading from craving to quarrels, etc.], as a duality, flow back into one place at feeling....

“*From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.*’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. If consciousness were not to descend into the mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?”

“No, lord.”

“If, after descending into the womb, consciousness were to depart, would name-and-form be produced for this world?”

“No, lord.”

“If the consciousness of the young boy or girl were to be cut off, would name-and-form ripen, grow, and reach maturity?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for name-and-form, i.e., consciousness.

“*From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.*’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness. If consciousness were not to gain a foothold in name-and-form, would a coming-into-play of the origination of birth, aging, death, and stress in the future be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for consciousness, i.e., name-and-form.

“This is the extent to which there is birth, aging, death, passing away, and rearing. This is the extent to which there are means of designation, expression, and delineation. This is the extent to which the dimension of discernment extends, the extent to which the cycle revolves for the manifesting/discernibility of this world, i.e., name-and-form together with consciousness.” — [*DN15*](#)

§ 19. On one occasion Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita were staying near Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then in the evening, arising from his seclusion, Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Sāriputta: “Now tell me, Sāriputta my friend: Is aging-and-death self-made or other-made or both self-made and other-made, or — without self-making or other-making — does it arise spontaneously?”

“It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that aging-and-death is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made and other-made, or that — without self-making or other-making — it arises spontaneously. However, from birth as a requisite condition comes aging-and-death.”

“Now tell me, friend Sāriputta, is birth.... is becoming.... is clinging/sustenance... is craving.... is feeling.... is contact... are the six sense media self-made or other-made or both self-made and other-made, or — without self-making or other-making — do they arise spontaneously?”

“It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that the six sense media are self-made, that they are other-made, that they are both self-made and other-made, or that — without self-making or other-making — they arise spontaneously. However, from name and form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.”

“Now tell me, friend Sāriputta, is name-and-form self-made or other-made or both self-made and other-made, or — without self-making or other-making — does it arise spontaneously?”

“It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that name-and-form is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made and other-made, or that — without self-making or other-making — it arises spontaneously. However, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.”

“Now tell me, friend Sāriputta, is consciousness self-made or other-made or both self-made and other-made, or — without self-making or other-making - does it arise spontaneously?”

“It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that consciousness is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made and other-made, or that —

without self-making or other-making — it arises spontaneously. However, from name-and- form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.”

“Just now, friend Sāriputta, I understood your statement as, ‘It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that name-and-form is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made and other-made, or that — without self-making or other-making — it arises spontaneously. However, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form’ But then I understood your statement as, ‘It’s not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that consciousness is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made and other-made, or that — without self-making or other-making — it arises spontaneously. However, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.’ Now how is the meaning of these statements to be understood?”

“Very well then, Koṭṭhita my friend, I will give you an analogy, for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said. It is as if two sheaves of reeds were to stand leaning against one another. In the same way, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name and 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-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering and stress.

“If one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if one were to pull away the other, the first one would fall. In the same way, from the cessation of name-and-form comes the cessation of consciousness, from the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-and-form. From the cessation of name-and-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-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering and stress.”

“It’s amazing, friend Sāriputta. It’s astounding, friend Sāriputta, how well that was said by Ven. Sāriputta. And I rejoice in Ven. Sāriputta’s good statements with regard to these 36 topics [the three qualities—teaching, practice, and attainment — Ven. MahāKotṭhita is about to mention with regard to each factor in the twelve-factored formula for dependent co-arising]. If a monk teaches the Dhamma for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to aging-and-death, he deserves to be called a monk who is a speaker of Dhamma. If he practices for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to aging-and-death, he deserves to be called a monk who practices the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. If — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, and lack of clinging/sustenance with regard to aging-and-death — he is released, then he deserves to be called a monk who has attained Unbinding in the here-and-now.

“If a monk teaches the Dhamma for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to birth, he deserves to be called a monk who is a speaker of Dhamma. If he practices for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to birth, he deserves to be called a monk who practices the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. If — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, and lack of clinging/sustenance with regard to birth — he is released, then he deserves to be called a monk who has attained Unbinding in the here-and-now.

[Similarly with becoming, clinging/sustenance, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense media, name and form, and consciousness.]

“If a monk teaches the Dhamma for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to fabrications, he deserves to be called a monk who is a speaker of Dhamma. If he practices for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to fabrications, he deserves to be called a monk who practices the Dhamma in

accordance with the Dhamma. If — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, and lack of clinging/sustenance with regard to fabrications — he is released, then he deserves to be called a monk who has attained Unbinding in the here-and-now.

“If a monk teaches the Dhamma for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to ignorance, he deserves to be called a monk who is a speaker of Dhamma. If he practices for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to ignorance, he deserves to be called a monk who practices the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. If — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, and lack of clinging/sustenance with regard to ignorance — he is released, then he deserves to be called a monk who has attained Unbinding in the here-and-now.” — [SN 12:67](#)

The primary constant throughout the various formulations of dependent co-arising is that the knowledge applied to each factor — the knowledge leading to disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation — invariably follows the pattern of the four noble truths. Viewed in terms of the general pattern of complex nonlinear systems, this knowledge induces something like a resonance, a point at which a relationship within a system becomes undefined in terms of the forces constituting the system as a whole. The reason why this knowledge would function in this way can be explained by a paradox found in the second noble truth.

§ 20. “And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress, the craving that makes for renewed becoming — accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there — i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.” — [SN 56:11](#)

The paradox here is that craving for non-becoming — the desire for the ending of one’s identity in the world of one’s experience — is actually a cause for further becoming. This is because craving combined with passion and delight — a synonym for clinging — is a cause for becoming, regardless of whether it aims at building a new becoming out of the raw material of what has come to be, or at destroying whatever becoming has come to be. [Iti 49](#) shows the

way out of this impasse, which is to crave neither becoming nor non-becoming, but to simply have vision of what has come to be as having come to be.

§ 21. “Overcome by two viewpoints, some human and divine beings adhere, other human and divine beings slip right past, while those with vision see. “And how do some adhere? Human and divine beings delight in becoming, enjoy becoming, are satisfied with becoming. When the Dhamma is being taught for the sake of the cessation of becoming, their minds do not take to it, are not calmed by it, do not settle on it, or become resolved on it. This is how some adhere.

“And how do some slip right past? Some, feeling horrified, humiliated, and disgusted with that very becoming, delight in non-becoming; ‘When this self, at the break-up of the body, after death, perishes and is destroyed, and does not exist after death, that is peaceful, that is exquisite, that is sufficiency!’ This is how some slip right past.

“And how do those with vision see? There is the case where a monk sees what’s come to be as what’s come to be. Seeing this, he practices for disenchantment with what’s come to be, dispassion for what’s come to be, and the cessation of what’s come to be. This is how those with vision see....

Those, having seen
what’s come to be
 as what’s come to be,
and what’s gone beyond
 what’s come to be,
are released in line
 with what’s come to be,
through the exhaustion of craving for becoming.
If they’ve comprehended what’s come to be —
 and are free from craving
 for becoming and not -,
 with the non-becoming
 of what’s come to be —
monks come to no renewed becoming. — [*Iti 49*](#)

In other words, the ability to put an end to stress depends not on views, but on a type of vision that sees things simply as they arise, without trying to make a world or a self out of them, and without trying to destroy them. Knowledge in terms of the four noble truths leads to this sort of vision in several steps. To begin with, it divides experience into four useful categories for understanding stress. Then it recommends tasks appropriate for mastering each category as a skill: stress is to be comprehended to the point of dispassion, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. The knowledge gained while following these tasks takes advantage of the opportunity to convert the factors of dependent co-arising into factors of the path, thus inducing a new pattern for their behavior.

The pattern of dependent co-arising places this knowledge at two strategic points, replacing ignorance on the one hand, and converting inappropriate attention to appropriate attention on the other. These factors are immediately adjacent to the factors responsible for the element of choice: fabrication in the first instance, and intention (as attention's co-sub-factor under *name*) in the second. Thus this knowledge is in an excellent place to convert unskillful potentials into skillful ones with an immediate effect for reducing suffering and stress.

When the tasks appropriate to the four truths are fully mastered as skills, they arrive at a point where there is nothing further to be done, nothing further to develop, nothing further to abandon, nothing further to comprehend. The factors responsible for choice thus have nothing to choose from. The ability to see this situation as it has arisen induces dispassion for any and all types of craving and clinging, whether for the causes of stress or for the path to its cessation. This combination of knowledge and dispassion fully replaces ignorance, thus preventing fabrication from functioning; it also induces a supremely appropriate form of attention, thus preventing intention from functioning as well. The whole fabric of dependent co-arising then begins to unravel, revealing total Unbinding. Which is why — as the Buddha noted in his first sermon

— the complete knowledge and vision of the four noble truths as they have come to be constitutes full Awakening.

§ 22. “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’... ‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’... ‘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 realized’... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress has been directly realized.’

“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 and vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be — was not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras, and Brahmās, with its contemplatives and priests, its royalty and commonfolk. But as soon as this — my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge and 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, and Brahmās, with its contemplatives and priests, its royalty and commonfolk. Knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no renewed becoming.’” — [SN 56:11](#)

As one is no longer obsessed either with building the raw materials of the aggregates into a state of becoming or with destroying them, one is no longer defined in terms of any of the factors of dependent co-arising.

§ 23. Then Ven. Rādhā 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: “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādhā: When one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being [*satta*].’

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, Rādhā; When one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’” — [SN 23:2](#)

§ 24. “If one stays obsessed with form, that’s what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

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

“If one stays obsessed with fabrications...

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

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

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

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

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

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured/limited by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.” — [SN 22:36](#)

In this way, one is freed from the system. However, as stated before, this freedom is found not by defying the causal relationships underlying the system, but by consistently changing the system's parameter values. This is accomplished by consistently applying knowledge to the system as it is immediately experienced. This is where the principle of self-similarity across different scales comes into play. Several discourses point out that dependent co-arising explains not only the origination of suffering, but also the origination of the cosmos ([SN 12:44](#)). The factors of dependent co-arising — and in particular, the factor of intention — can operate not only in the immediate present, but also over enormous time scales of many eons.

§ 25. “Monks, don’t be afraid of acts of merit. This is another way of saying what is blissful, desirable, pleasing, endearing, charming — i.e., acts of merit. I am cognizant that, having long performed acts of merit, I long experienced desirable, pleasing, endearing, charming results. Having developed a mind of good will for seven years, then for seven eons of contraction and expansion I didn’t return to this world. Whenever the eon was contracting, I went to the realm of Streaming Radiance. Whenever the eon was expanding, I reappeared in an empty Brahmā-abode. There I was the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, All-seeing, Wielder of Power. Then for thirty-six times I was Sakka, ruler of the gods. For many hundreds of times I was a king, a wheel-turning emperor, a righteous king of Dhamma, conqueror of the four corners of the earth, maintaining stable control over the countryside, endowed with the seven treasures—to say nothing of the times I was a local king. The thought occurred to me: ‘Of what action of mine is this the fruit, of what action the result, that I now have such great power and might?’ Then the thought occurred to me: ‘This is the fruit of my three [types of] action, the result of three types of action, that I now have such great power and might: i.e., generosity, self-control, and restraint.’” — [Iti 22](#)

Although the Buddha would occasionally explain the workings of intention on the cosmic scale in this way (see, for instance, [DN 1](#), [DN 26](#), and DN 27), there is no need to examine the entire cosmos to master the processes of dependent co-arising. Because these

processes operate in the same way on the micro level as they do on the macro level, one can examine them and master them completely through one's immediate experience in the here-and-now.

§ 26. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthī, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then Rohitassa, the son of a deva, in the far extreme of the night, his extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta's Grove, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he stood to one side. As he was standing there he said to the Blessed One, "Is it possible, lord, by traveling, to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away or reappear?"

"I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear."

"It is amazing, lord, and awesome, how well that has been said by the Blessed One.... Once I was a seer named Rohitassa, a student of Bhoja, a powerful skywalker. My speed was as fast as that of a strong archer — well trained, a practiced hand, a practiced sharpshooter — shooting a light arrow across the shadow of a palmyra tree. My stride stretched as far as the east sea is from the west. To me, endowed with such speed, such a stride, there came the desire, 'I will go traveling to the end of the cosmos.' I — with a one-hundred year life, a one-hundred year span — spent one hundred years traveling — apart from the time spent on eating, drinking, chewing and tasting, urinating and defecating, and sleeping to fight off weariness — but without reaching the end of the cosmos I died along the way. So it is amazing, lord, and awesome, how well that has been said by the Blessed One, 'I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear.'"

[When this was said, the Blessed One responded:] "I tell you, friend, that it isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering and stress without reaching the end of the cosmos. Yet it is just within

this fathom-long body, with its perception and intellect, that I declare that there is the cosmos, the origination of the cosmos, the cessation of the cosmos, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the cosmos.”

It's not to be reached by traveling,
the end of the cosmos—
regardless.

And it's not without reaching
the end of the cosmos
that there is release
from suffering and stress.

So, truly, the wise one,
an expert with regard to the cosmos,
a knower of the end of the cosmos,
having fulfilled the holy life,
calmed,
knowing the cosmos' end,
doesn't long for this cosmos
or for any other. — [AN 4:45](#)

In fact, when the Buddha uses the term “world” or “cosmos” (*loka*), his primary meaning is the cosmos as experienced in terms of the six senses. As with the other factors of dependent co-arising, there is no need to study the cosmos “out there” behind our experience of the senses. It is enough simply to understand the cosmos as directly experienced for that experience to be brought to an end.

§ 27. 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: “‘The cosmos, the cosmos [*loka*],’ it is said. In what respect does the word ‘cosmos’ apply?

“Insofar as it disintegrates [*lujjati*], monk, it is called the ‘cosmos.’ Now what disintegrates? The eye disintegrates. Forms disintegrate. Eye-consciousness disintegrates. Eye-contact disintegrates. And whatever

there is that arises in dependence on eye-contact — experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor- pain — that too disintegrates.

“The ear disintegrates. Sounds disintegrate....

“The nose disintegrates. Aromas disintegrate....

“The tongue disintegrates. Tastes disintegrate....

“The body disintegrates. Tactile sensations disintegrate....

“The intellect disintegrates. Ideas disintegrate. Intellect-consciousness disintegrates. Intellect-contact disintegrates. And whatever there is that arises in

dependence on intellect-contact—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-

nor-pain—that too disintegrates.

“Insofar as it disintegrates, it is called the ‘cosmos.’” — [SN 35:82](#)

* * *

The concept of the cessation of the experience of the cosmos naturally sparks the question, “What then is left?” This question, however, assumes the dimensions of space and time — something existing in space after a certain point in time — but because these dimensions do not apply beyond the experience of space and time, the question is invalid.

§ 28. *Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita*: “With the remainderless dispassion-cessation of the six contact-media is there anything else?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “Don’t say that, my friend.”

Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: “With the remainderless dispassion-cessation of the six contact-media, is there not anything else?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “Don’t say that, my friend.”

Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: “... is it the case that there both is and is not anything else?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “Don’t say that, my friend.”

Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: “... is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “Don’t say that, my friend.”

Ven. MahāKotṭhita: “Being asked... if there is anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend’. Being asked... if there is not anything else... if there both is and is not anything else... if there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend.’ Now, how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “Saying, ‘... is there anything else?’... ‘... is there not anything else?’... ‘... is it the case that there both is and is not anything else?’... ‘... is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?’ one is objectifying nonobjectification. However far the six contact-media go, that is how far objectification goes. However far objectification goes, that is how far the six contact-media go. With the remainderless dispassion/cessation of the six contact media, there comes to be the cessation, the allaying of objectification.” — [AN 4:173](#)

The allaying of objectification is experienced by a type of consciousness that — because it lies beyond the dimensions of space and time — is not classified as sensory consciousness under the five aggregates.

§ 29. “Having directly known the all [the six sense media and their objects] as the all, and having directly known the extent of what has not been experienced through the allness of the all, I wasn’t the all, I wasn’t in the all, I wasn’t coming forth from the all, I wasn’t “The all is mine.” I didn’t affirm the all....

“Consciousness without surface,
without end,
luminous all around,

has not been experienced through the earthness of earth... the liquidity of liquid... the fieriness of fire... the windiness of wind... the being-ness of beings... the deva-ness of devas... the Pajāpati-ness of Pajāpati... the brahmā-ness of Brahmā... the radiant-ness of the radiant (devas)... the beautiful black-ness of the beautiful black (devas)... the sky-fruit-ness of the sky-fruit (devas)... the conqueror-ness of the conqueror... the allness of the all.” — [MN 49](#)

As we have seen, a basic feature of the Buddha's teachings on causality is that if x arises because y arises, it will cease when y ceases. Thus, for instance, the Buddha was harshly critical of any attempts to depict sensory consciousness, which arises and passes away based on conditions, as existing independently of those conditions.

§ 30. “Is it true, Sāti, that this evil view has arisen in you? — ‘As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is just this consciousness that runs and wanders on [from birth to birth], not another.’”

“Exactly so, lord. As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is just this consciousness that runs and wanders on, not another.”

“Which consciousness, Sāti, is that?”

“This speaker, this knower, lord, that is sensitive here and there to the ripening of good and evil actions.”

“And to whom, worthless man, do you understand me to have taught the Dhamma like that? Haven't I, in many ways, said of dependently co-arisen consciousness, ‘Apart from a requisite condition, there is no coming-into-play of consciousness’? But you, through your own poor grasp, not only misrepresent me but also dig yourself up (by the root) and produce much demerit. That will be for your long-term harm and suffering.” — [MN 38](#)

But because consciousness without surface — unlike dependently co-arisen sensory consciousness — exists outside of time, it does not arise. Because it is known independently of the six sense media, it will not cease when they do. This consciousness provides no footing for any of the causal factors — personal or cosmic — that would lead to any further suffering or stress.

§ 31. “Then the monk attained to such a state of concentration that the way leading to the gods of the retinue of Brahmā appeared in his centered mind. So he approached the gods of the retinue of Brahmā and, on arrival, asked them, ‘Friends, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind

property — cease without remainder?’ “When this was said, the gods of the retinue of Brahmā said to the monk, ‘We also don’t know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there is Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. He is higher and more sublime than we. He should know where the four great elements... cease without remainder.’ “But where, friends, is the Great Brahmā now?’

“Monk, we also don’t know where Brahmā is or in what way Brahmā is. But when signs appear, light shines forth, and a radiance appears, Brahmā will appear. For these are the portents of Brahmā’s appearance: light shines forth and a radiance appears.’

“Then it was not long before the Great Brahmā appeared. “So the monk approached the Great Brahmā and, on arrival, said, ‘Friend, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?’

“When this was said, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, ‘I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.’

A second time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, ‘Friend, I didn’t ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder.’

“A second time, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, ‘I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.’

“A third time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, ‘Friend, I didn’t ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror Unconquered, the All-Seeing, Wielder of Power, Sovereign Lord, Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid

property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder.’

“Then the Great Brahmā, taking the monk by the arm and leading him off to one side, said to him, ‘These gods of the retinue of Brahmā believe, “There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not know. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not see. There is nothing of which the Great Brahmā is unaware. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā has not realized.” That is why I did not say in their presence that I, too, don’t know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. So you have acted wrongly, acted incorrectly, in bypassing the Blessed One in search of an answer to this question elsewhere. Go right back to the Blessed One and, on arrival, ask him this question. However he answers it, you should take it to heart.’

“Then — just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm — the monk disappeared from the Brahmā world and immediately appeared in front of me. Having bowed down to me, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to me, ‘Venerable sir, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?’

“When this was said, I said to him, ‘Once, monk, some sea-faring merchants took a shore-sighting bird and set sail in their ship. When they could not see the shore, they released the shore-sighting bird. It flew to the east, south, west, north, straight up, and to all the intermediate points of the compass. If it saw the shore in any direction, it flew there. If it did not see the shore in any direction, it returned right back to the ship. In the same way, monk, having gone as far as the Brahmā world in search of an answer to your question, you have come right back to my presence.

““Your question should not be phrased in this way: Where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without trace? Instead, it should be phrased like this:

““Where do water, earth, fire, & wind
have no footing?
Where are long & short,
coarse & fine,

fair & foul,
name & form
brought to a stop without trace?

“And the answer to that is:

“Consciousness without surface,
without end,
luminous all around:
Here water, earth, fire, & wind
have no footing.
Here long & short,
coarse & fine,
fair & foul,
here name & form
are all brought to a stop without trace.
With the cessation of (the aggregate of) consciousness
each is here brought to a stop.” — [DN 11](#)

Having experienced this type of consciousness at the time of Awakening, the arahant may return to the experience of sensory consciousness if he/she still has the kammic potential to continue living. In doing so, he/she continues to create further kamma by producing further intentions. However, because the mind is now free of the craving and clinging associated with greed, aversion, and delusion, those intentions lead to no further becoming.

§ 32. “Just as when seeds are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind and heat, capable of sprouting, well-buried, planted in well-prepared soil, and a man would burn them with fire and, burning them with fire, would make them into fine ashes. Having made them into fine ashes, he would winnow them before a high wind or wash them away in a swift-flowing stream. Those seeds would thus be destroyed at the root, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.

“In the same way, any action performed with non-greed — born of nongreed, caused by non-greed, originating from non-greed: When greed is gone, that action is thus abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a

palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. “Any action performed with non-aversion ...

“Any action performed with non-delusion — born of non-delusion, caused by non-delusion, originating from non-delusion: When delusion is gone, that action is thus abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.” — [AN 3:34](#).

One of the reasons why the arahant’s intentions are free of craving, clinging, or becoming is because his/her experience of the senses is now radically different. No longer aflame with the fires of greed, aversion, and delusion, it is like a fire that has ceased to burn, but with a few embers still glowing. At the moment of death, however, the arahant is entirely freed from the stress of conditioned consciousness, like a fire so thoroughly out that all its embers have totally cooled.

§ 33. “Monks, there are these two forms of the Unbinding property. Which two? The Unbinding property with fuel remaining, and the Unbinding property with no fuel remaining.

“And what is the Unbinding property with fuel remaining? There is the case where a monk is an arahant whose effluents have ended, who has reached fulfillment, finished the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, ended the fetter of becoming, and is released through right gnosis. His five sense faculties still remain and, owing to their being intact, he is cognizant of the agreeable and the disagreeable, and is sensitive to pleasure and pain. His ending of passion, aversion, and delusion is termed the Unbinding property with fuel remaining.

“And what is the Unbinding property with no fuel remaining? There is the case where a monk is an arahant whose effluents have ended, who has reached fulfillment, finished the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, ended the fetter of becoming, and is released through right gnosis. For him, all that is sensed, being unrelished, will grow cold right here. This is termed the Unbinding property with no fuel remaining.”

These two

proclaimed

by the one with vision,
Unbinding properties,
the one independent,
the one who is Such:
one property, here in this life
with fuel remaining
from the destruction
of the guide to becoming,
and that with no fuel remaining,
after this life,
in which all becoming
totally ceases.
Those who know
this unfabricated state,
their minds released
through the destruction
of the guide to becoming,
they, attaining the Teaching's core,
pleased with ending,
have abandoned all becoming:
they, the Such. — [*Iti 44*](#).

CHAPTER TWO

“Abandon food, having relied on food”

To understand an abstract teaching, it is often useful to focus on the analogies with which it is explained. This gives not only a concrete reference point to make the teachings intelligible, but also an idea of the initial insight that led to the teaching to begin with. Abstractions come from concrete experience, and the analogies with which they are explained often provide a hint as to what those initial experiences were. This in turn gives an indication of how the teachings can be best understood and where best applied.

This point is especially important in understanding dependent co-arising, for over the centuries the Buddhist tradition has changed the analogies and images with which this teaching is explained. We have already noted that medieval Indian Buddhists interpreted dependent co-arising as a circular wheel, distorting the complexity of the original teaching in many important ways. Another distortion has been the tendency, first articulated in medieval China, to depict the inter-relations of the factors of dependent co-arising through another image of a circle: light reflecting from mirrors arranged in a circle around a lamp. Each mirror contains not only a reflection of the lamp, but also the reflections of the other mirrors in the circle. Although this image conveys an idea of the complex interplay of conditions in dependent co-arising, it is essentially static, as the pattern of light never changes. In fact, in the original formulation of this image, it is not meant to change. The causal interplay is meant to be seen as innocent and even beautiful, something to be celebrated and admired, and never to end.

The Buddha, however, depicted the interplay of conditions in dependent co-arising in another light entirely. When introducing the topic of causality to young novices, he illustrated it with the act of eating, a process that is inherently stressful not only for those fed

upon, but also for those who, through the disease of hunger ([Dhp 203](#)), keep needing to feed.

§ 34. “What is one? All beings subsist on nutriment.” — [Khp 4](#).

In making this statement, the Buddha was drawing on a long tradition of speculation on the topic of food that dated back to early Vedic times in India and continued to excite new theories in the Upaniṣads that were composed around his own time. This speculation was prompted by the fact that the Vedic ritual — in which animals were slaughtered and offered into the fire — was meant as an offering of food to the gods and to one’s dead ancestors, as well as a stock-piling of food for one’s own future use in the life after death.

As the Upaniṣadic seers contemplated the deeper meaning of this ritual, they focused on the importance of food for all life. This became the underlying image for all of their thinking. In this, they differed radically from modern Western philosophy, whose underlying image is the act of seeing an object. Of the physical senses, the visual sense requires the most active participation of the brain to interpret its sensory data. The eye simply provides patches of colors, while the brain has to point it in different directions, focus it at different depths, and then interpret the color patches, together with the movements of the eye muscles, to perceive objects in three dimensional space. Thus the primary questions that arise in this context are: How much can we trust our interpretations of reality “out there”, and how can we best test them? These are the questions that have provoked most philosophical thought in the Western tradition for many centuries.

The central activity that provoked the thought of the Upaniṣadic seers, however, was the act of ingesting food. The essential questions in this context are: Given that we know we have to eat in order to survive, how do we distinguish what is good to eat from what is bad to eat? And how do we insure a continuing source of good food? This line of thinking provides the paradigm for a more general contemplation of how to find a basis for true happiness, and how that basis for happiness can be maintained.

Although the different Upaniṣadic seers explored this topic in different ways, a summary of some of their conclusions shows the general drift of their speculation.

In the original emanation of the cosmos, Being gave rise to fire, which gave rise to water, which gave rise to food. Only then were individual beings able to come into existence (ChU VI.2.4). Food was thus the eldest among beings (TU II.2.1): in some cases identified as a god (BAU III.9.8; ChU I.11.9), in others identified with Brahman, the great cosmic principle itself (TU III.2.1). Some thinkers stated the food was one's true self (MaiU VI.11- 13).

Upaniṣadic thought is marked by a strong tendency to internalize the Vedic ritual, claiming that knowledge of the inner meaning of the ritual or of the true nature of Brahman and the self can provide rewards similar to — or better than — the physical performance of the ritual. This same tendency appears in Upaniṣadic thought about food. The reward of understanding the esoteric meaning of the Sama Veda, for example, is ample food in this life and the next (ChU I.13.4). Knowledge of the true nature of the self supplies one with food in all possible worlds (ChU V.18.1). One attains immortality through the ability to keep producing food in this way again and again (BAU I.5.2).

The basic assumption of this speculation is that one's continued survival as a being is an unquestioned good. The ability to produce and consume an unlimited supply of food is an even greater good. Thus this mode of speculation conceives of a cosmos created with the express purpose of providing food. The act of eating is given value as an expression of the way things were meant to be.

The most succinct expression of these ideas is stated in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.2.1, a passage that bears comparing with the passage from [Khp 4](#), quoted above: "From food, indeed, are produced those creatures that dwell on earth. Furthermore, solely through food do they live, and then also into it they pass at the end." Because food is sometimes equated with Brahman and sometimes with the self, the pattern of this image parallels the larger pattern of most Upaniṣadic thought, that the self comes from Brahman, eventually returns to Brahman, and is sustained by Brahman in the interim. In fact, this

larger pattern may derive from the more concrete experience of food and feeding as depicted in this passage.

Although the Buddha drew on the image of feeding to illustrate his teachings, he made a number of changes on the theme. The most important was that he called into question the desirability of engaging in the act of feeding for eternity. He agreed that the attainment of an ultimate happiness was the ultimate goal of all human thought and endeavor, but because he had found a happiness that was totally unconditioned, attained only through abandoning his identity as a “being” of any sort — either as self or Brahman — he was able to look past the supposed goodness of the act of eating to see the suffering and stress that it inevitably involved. One of the marks of nibbana as a superior goal was that it freed one from the need to feed, at the same time freeing other beings from being subject to one’s feeding. Because one’s attachment to food derives from one’s attachment to one’s identity as a being, he would often find ways of calling that identity into question and encouraging his followers to do their best to abandon it.

§ 35. Then Ven. Rādhā 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: “‘A being,’ lord. ‘A being,’ it’s said. To what extent is one said to be ‘a being’?”

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādhā, when one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be ‘a being [*satta*].’ “Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications...

“Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Rādhā, when one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be ‘a being.’

“Just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles [literally, ‘dirt houses’], as long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, and craving for those little sand castles, that’s how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, and craving for those little sand castles, then they

smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play.

“In the same way, Rādhā, you too should smash, scatter, and demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form.

“You should smash, scatter, and demolish feeling, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for feeling.

“You should smash, scatter, and demolish perception, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for perception.

“You should smash, scatter, and demolish fabrications, and make them unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for fabrications.

“You should smash, scatter, and demolish consciousness and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for consciousness, because the ending of craving, Rādhā, is Unbinding.” — [SN 23:2](#)

This analysis applies not only to the sense of individual, separate self, but also to the idea of a cosmic self.

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

The way to abandon one’s attachment for the raw material of any sense of identity is to follow the same process explored in Chapter One, learning to look at it in terms of the four noble truths, training oneself to see the origination of one’s identity as based on a type of food or nutriment, and then trying to induce a sense of disenchantment both for the identity and for the food. Because the Pali term for disenchantment — *nibbida* — can also mean disgust, revulsion, or distaste, the process of abandoning attachment is thus similar to the process of overcoming an addiction to a particular type of food.

§ 37. *Ven. Sāriputta [speaking to the Buddha]:* “One sees with right discernment, lord, that ‘this has come into being.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘this has come into being,’ one practices for disenchantment with, for dispassion toward, for the cessation of what has come into being. One sees with right discernment that ‘it has come into being from this nutriment.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘it has come into being from this nutriment,’ one practices for disenchantment with, for dispassion toward, for the cessation of the nutriment by which it has come into being. One sees with right discernment that ‘from the cessation of this nutriment, what has come into being is subject to cessation.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘from the cessation of this nutriment, what has come into being is subject to cessation,’ one practices for disenchantment with, for dispassion toward, for the cessation of what is subject to cessation. This is how one is a learner.

“And how, lord, is one a person who has fathomed the Dhamma?

“One sees with right discernment, lord, that ‘this has come into being.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘this has come into being,’ one is — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, through lack of clinging/sustenance — released from what has come into being. One sees with right discernment that ‘it has come into being from this nutriment.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘it has come into being from this nutriment,’ one is — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, through lack of clinging/sustenance — released from the nutriment by which it has come into being. One sees with right discernment that ‘from the cessation of this nutriment, what has come into being is subject to cessation.’ Seeing with right discernment that ‘from the cessation of this nutriment, what has come into being is subject to cessation,’ one is — through disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, through lack of clinging/sustenance — released from what is subject to cessation. This is how one is a person who has fathomed the Dhamma.” — [SN 12:31](#)

Both [MN 9](#) and [Sn 3:12](#) show that when the pattern of the four noble truths is applied to the topic of nutriment, it brings the same results as when applied to any of the factors of dependent co-arising.

§ 38. “Whatever stress comes into play is all from nutriment as a requisite condition’: this is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading and 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, and resolute — one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here and now, or — if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance — nonreturn.”

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,
rightly seeing
freedom from disease
through the total ending
of effluents,
judiciously associating,
a judge,
he, an attainer-of-wisdom,
goes beyond judgment,
beyond classification.” — [Sn 3:12](#)

[MN 9](#) expands on this point in two important ways. 1)
“Nutriment” covers not only physical food for the body, but also
three kinds of “food” for the growth of sensory consciousness into
states of becoming: contact at the senses; the intentions that lead

one to engage in contact at the senses and then proliferate on that contact; and consciousness of all these processes. 2) In listing craving as a condition for nutriment, [MN 9](#) places nutriment in the position normally held by clinging in the standard description of dependent co-arising, immediately after craving. This position is connected to several facts. To begin with, the Pali word for craving, *taṇha*, also means thirst; the Pali word for clinging, *upādāna*, also means sustenance — both the act of taking sustenance and the nutriment that provides sustenance. Thus thirst leads to the act of clinging to nutriment. As [§40](#) points out, any passion and delight — any clinging — for nutriment underlies the growth of consciousness; as [§113](#) points out, consciousness acts as the seed for becoming. Thus, by placing nutriment in the same position as clinging, [MN 9](#) is simply providing more detail on the way in which nutriment, clinging, and consciousness act as conditions for becoming. Only when the mind is freed from craving and clinging is it freed from its tendency to feed. And only then is it freed from the need to keep producing the becoming that leads to suffering and stress.

§ 39. “And what is nutriment? What is the origination of nutriment? What is the cessation of nutriment? What is the way of practice leading to the cessation of nutriment?

“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. From the origination of craving comes the origination of nutriment. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of nutriment. And the way of practice leading to the cessation of nutriment is just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“Now, when a disciple of the noble ones discerns nutriment, the origination of nutriment, the cessation of nutriment, and the way of practice leading to the cessation of nutriment in this way, when — having entirely abandoned passion-obsession, having abolished aversion-

obsession, having uprooted the view-and- conceit obsession ‘I am’; having abandoned ignorance and given rise to clear knowing — he has put an end to suffering and stress right in the here-and-now, it is to this extent, too, that a disciple of the noble ones is a person of right view, one whose view is made straight, who is endowed with verified confidence in the Dhamma, and who has arrived at this true Dhamma.” — [MN 9](#)

§ 40. “Where there is passion, delight, and craving for the nutriment of physical food, consciousness lands there and increases. Where consciousness lands and increases, there is the alighting of name-and-form. Where there is the alighting of name-and-form, there is the growth of fabrications. Where there is the growth of fabrications, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging, and death, together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, and despair. “Where there is passion, delight, and craving for the nutriment of contact.... “Where there is passion, delight, and craving for the nutriment of intellectual intention....

“Where there is passion, delight, and craving for the nutriment of consciousness, consciousness lands there and increases. Where consciousness lands and increases, there is the alighting of name-and-form. Where there is the alighting of name-and-form, there is the growth of fabrications. Where there is the growth of fabrications, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is the production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging, and death, together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, and despair.

“Just as — when there is dye, lac, yellow orpiment, indigo, or crimson — a dyer or painter would paint the picture of a woman or a man, complete in all its parts, on a well-polished panel or wall, or on a piece of cloth, in the same way, where there is passion, delight, and craving for the nutriment of physical food... contact... intellectual intention... consciousness, consciousness lands there and increases. Where consciousness lands and increases, there is the alighting of name-and-form. Where there is the alighting of name-and-form, there is the growth of fabrications. Where there is the growth of fabrications, there is the production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is the

production of renewed becoming in the future, there is future birth, aging, and death, together, I tell you, with sorrow, affliction, and despair.

“Where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or increase. Where consciousness does not land or increase, there is no alighting of name-and- form. Where there is no alighting of name-and- form, there is no growth of fabrications. Where there is no growth of fabrications, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging, and death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.

“Where there is no passion for the nutriment of contact.... “Where there is no passion for the nutriment of intellectual intention.... “Where there is no passion for the nutriment of consciousness, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or increase. Where consciousness does not land or increase, there is no alighting of name-and- form. Where there is no alighting of name-and- form, there is no growth of fabrications. Where there is no growth of fabrications, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging, and death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.

“Just as if there were a roofed house or a roofed hall having windows on the north, the south, or the east. When the sun rises, and a ray has entered by way of the window, where does it land?”

“On the western wall, lord.”

“And if there is no western wall, where does it land?”

“On the ground, lord.”

“And if there is no ground, where does it land?”

“On the water, lord.”

“And if there is no water, where does it land?” “It doesn’t land, lord.”

“In the same way, where there is no passion for the nutriment of physical food... contact... intellectual intention... consciousness, where there is no delight, no craving, then consciousness does not land there or increase. Where consciousness does not land or increase, there is no alighting of name-and- form. Where there is no alighting of name-and-

form, there is no growth of fabrications. Where there is no growth of fabrications, there is no production of renewed becoming in the future. Where there is no production of renewed becoming in the future, there is no future birth, aging, and death. That, I tell you, has no sorrow, affliction, or despair.” — [*SN 12:64*](#)

This freedom can be attained only by developing a form of knowledge that induces a strong sense of disenchantment/revulsion/disgust/distaste for the four nutriments. To induce perceptions that would help in this endeavor, the Buddha gave some graphic analogies for what it means to feed.

§ 41. “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. These are the 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.

“And how is physical food to be regarded? Suppose a couple, husband and wife, taking meager provisions, were to travel through a desert. With them would be their only baby son, dear and appealing. Then the meager provisions of the couple going through the desert would be used up and 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 and 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, dear and appealing, and make dried meat and 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 and endearing, and make dried meat and 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.

“And how is the nutriment of contact to be regarded? Suppose a flayed cow were to stand leaning against a wall. The creatures living in the wall would chew on it. If it were to stand leaning against a tree, the creatures living in the tree would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to water, the creatures living in the water would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to the air, the creatures living in the air would chew on it. For wherever the flayed cow were to stand exposed, the creatures living there would chew on it. In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of contact to be regarded. When the nutriment of contact is comprehended, the three feelings [pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain] are comprehended. When the three feelings are comprehended, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

“And how is the nutriment of intellectual intention to be regarded? Suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man’s height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along — loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, abhorring pain — and two strong men, having grabbed him by the arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. To get far away would be that man’s intention, far away would be his wish, far away would be his aspiration. Why is that? Because he would realize, ‘If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.’ In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of intellectual intention to be regarded. When the nutriment of intellectual intention is comprehended, the three forms of craving [for sensuality, for becoming, and for non-becoming] are comprehended. When the three forms of craving are comprehended, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

“And how is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded? Suppose that, having arrested a thief, a criminal, they were to show him to the king: ‘This is a thief, a criminal for you, your majesty. Impose on him whatever punishment you like.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears. Then the king would say at noon, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him at noon with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him at noon with a hundred spears. Then the king would say in the evening, ‘Men, how is that man?’ ‘Still alive, your majesty.’ So the king would say, ‘Go, men, and shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears.’ So they would shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears. Now what do you think, monks: Would that man, being shot with three hundred spears a day, experience pain and distress from that cause?”

“Even if he were to be shot with only one spear, lord, he would experience pain and distress from that cause, to say nothing of three hundred spears.”

“In the same way, I tell you, monks, is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded. When the nutriment of consciousness is comprehended, name and form are comprehended. When name and form are comprehended, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.” — [*SN 12:63*](#)

As the image of the flayed cow in the above passage suggests, one of the most disconcerting aspects of feeding is that the things the mind tries to take for nourishment end up chewing on it — or even chewing it up.

§ 42. “Thus an instructed disciple of the noble ones reflects in this way, ‘I am now being chewed up by form. But in the past I was also chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form. And if I delight in future form, then in the future I will be chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form.’ Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past form, does not delight in future form, and is practicing for the sake

of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to present form.

“[He reflects] ‘I am now being chewed up by feeling ... perception ... fabrications ... consciousness. But in the past I was also chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness. And if I delight in future consciousness, then in the future I will be chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness.’ Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past consciousness, does not delight in future consciousness, and is practicing for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to present consciousness.” — *SN 22:70*

Although the path of practice aims ultimately at going beyond the need for nutriment, it cannot be accomplished by starving oneself of physical food.

§ 43. “I thought: ‘Suppose I were to practice going altogether without food.’ Then devas came to me and said, ‘Dear sir, please don’t practice going altogether without food. If you go altogether without food, we’ll infuse divine nourishment in through your pores, and you will survive on that.’ I thought, ‘If I were to claim to be completely fasting while these devas are infusing divine nourishment in through my pores, I would be lying.’ So I dismissed them, saying, ‘Enough.’

“I thought, ‘Suppose I were to take only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup.’ So I took only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup. My body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo.... My backside became like a camel’s hoof.... My spine stood out like a string of beads.... My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old, run-down barn.... The gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like the gleam of water deep in a well.... My scalp shriveled and withered like a green bitter gourd, shriveled and withered in the heat and the wind.... The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well; and when I thought of touching

my spine, I grabbed hold of the skin of my belly as well.... If I urinated or defecated, I fell over on my face right there.... Simply from my eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair — rotted at its roots — fell from my body as I rubbed, simply from eating so little.

“People on seeing me would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative is black. Other people would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative isn’t black, he’s brown.’ Others would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative is neither black nor brown, he’s golden-skinned. So much had the clear, bright color of my skin deteriorated, simply from eating so little.

“I thought, ‘Whatever priests or contemplatives in the past have felt painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None have been greater than this. Whatever priests or contemplatives in the future will feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None will be greater than this. Whatever priests or contemplatives in the present are feeling painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None is greater than this. But with this racking practice of austerities I haven’t attained any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to Awakening?’ “I thought, ‘I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful mental qualities — I entered and remained in the first jhāna, rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. Could that be the path to Awakening?’ Then following on that memory came the realization, ‘That is the path to Awakening.’ I thought, ‘So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities?’ I thought, ‘I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities, but that pleasure is not easy to achieve with a body so extremely emaciated. Suppose I were to take some solid food, some rice and porridge.’ So I took some solid food, some rice and porridge. Now five monks had been attending on me, thinking, ‘If Gotama, our contemplative, achieves some higher state, he will tell us.’ But when they saw me taking some solid food — some rice and porridge

— they were disgusted and left me, thinking, ‘Gotama the contemplative is living luxuriously. He has abandoned his exertion and is backsliding into abundance.’

“So when I had taken solid food and regained strength, then — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities — I entered and remained in the first jhāna, rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the stilling of directed thoughts and evaluations, I entered and remained in the second jhāna, rapture and pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation/internal assurance. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the fading of rapture I remained equanimous, mindful, and alert, and sensed pleasure with the body. I entered and remained in the third jhāna, of which the Noble Ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the abandoning of pleasure and pain — as with the earlier disappearance of joys and distresses — I entered and remained in the fourth jhāna, purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.” — [MN 36](#)

Thus one must consume food in moderation to provide body and mind with the strength needed to develop the path factor of right concentration. Monks and nuns are encouraged to contemplate and monitor their consumption of food to prevent greed from abusing this fact for its own ends.

§ 44. *Ven. Ānanda*: “‘This body, sister, comes into being through food. And yet it is by relying on food that food is to be abandoned.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said? There is the case, sister, where a monk, considering it thoughtfully, takes food — not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification — but simply for the survival and continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, (thinking,) ‘Thus will I destroy old feelings [of hunger] and not create new feelings [from overeating]. I will maintain

myself, be blameless, and live in comfort.’ Then, at a later time, he abandons food, having relied on food. ‘This body, sister, comes into being through food. And yet it is by relying on food that food is to be abandoned.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.” — [AN 4:159](#)

The process of developing right concentration is a type of feeding — providing food for the mental qualities that foster concentration — while at the same time starving any mental qualities that stand in its way.

§ 45. “Now, what is the food for the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of mindfulness... once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that act as a foothold for mindfulness as a factor for Awakening [well-purified virtue and views made straight]. 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 and increase of mindfulness... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of analysis of qualities... once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that are skillful and unskillful, blameworthy and blameless, gross and refined, siding with darkness and with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of analysis of qualities... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen persistence as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and 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 and 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 and increase of rapture... once it has arisen? There are mental qualities 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 and increase of rapture... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen serenity as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of serenity... once it has arisen? There is physical serenity and there is mental serenity. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen serenity as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of serenity... once it has arisen. “And what is the food for the arising of unarisen concentration as a factor for Awakening, or for the growth and increase of concentration...once it has arisen? There are themes for calm, themes for non-distraction [these are the four frames of reference—§83]. 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 and 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 and increase of equanimity... once it has arisen? There are mental qualities 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 and increase of equanimity... once it has arisen.

“Now, what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen sensual desire, or for the growth and 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 and 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 and increase of ill will once it has arisen? There is the release of the mind [through good will, compassion, appreciation, or equanimity]. To foster appropriate attention to that: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen ill will, or for the growth and increase of ill will once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen sloth and drowsiness, or for the growth and increase of sloth and 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 and drowsiness, or for the growth and increase of sloth and drowsiness once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen restlessness and anxiety, or for the growth and increase of restlessness and 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 and anxiety, or for the growth and increase of restlessness and anxiety once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen uncertainty, or for the growth and increase of uncertainty once it has arisen? There are mental qualities that are skillful and unskillful, blameworthy and blameless, gross and refined, siding with darkness and with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen uncertainty, or for the growth and increase of uncertainty once it has arisen.” — [SN 46:51](#)

As right concentration grows stronger, it becomes a type of food for the mind.

§ 46. “Just as a royal frontier fortress has large stores of grass, timber and water for the delight, convenience, and comfort of those within, and to ward off those without, in the same way the disciple of the noble ones, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first jhāna — rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation — for his own delight, convenience, and comfort, and to alight on Unbinding.

“Just as a royal frontier fortress has large stores of rice and barley for the delight, convenience, and comfort of those within, and to ward off those without, in the same way the disciple of the noble ones, with the stilling of directed thoughts and evaluations, enters and remains in the second jhāna — rapture and pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation/internal assurance — for his own delight, convenience, and comfort, and to alight on Unbinding.

“Just as a royal frontier fortress has large stores of sesame, green gram, and other beans for the delight, convenience, and comfort of those within, and to ward off those without, in the same way the disciple of the noble ones, with the fading of rapture, remains equanimous, mindful, and alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhāna, of which the Noble Ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding,’ for his own delight, convenience, and comfort, and to alight on Unbinding.

“Just as a royal frontier fortress has large stores of tonics — ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, molasses, and salt — for the delight, convenience, and comfort of those within, and to ward off those without, in the same way the disciple of the noble ones, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, as with the earlier disappearance of joys and distresses, enters and remains in the fourth jhāna — purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain — for his own delight, convenience, and comfort, and to alight on Unbinding.” — AN 7:63

§ 47. How very happily we live,
we who have nothing.
We will feed on rapture
like the Radiant devas. — [*Dhp 200*](#)

However, because jhāna is composed of aggregates, there comes a point in the practice where one must stop using even jhāna as food for continued being, and instead develop disenchantment for it.

§ 48. “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, and despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering and stress.” — [SN 22:39](#)

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

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

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

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

‘This is peace, this is exquisite — the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation, Unbinding.’

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

[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.] — [AN9:36](#)

Perhaps to counteract the common fear that the release of nibbana is a type of starvation, [Khp 6](#) depicts it as a form of consumption in which one’s food is totally free — freely available, free from debt, and free from suffering.

§ 50. Those who, devoted, firm-minded,
apply themselves to Gotama’s message,
on attaining their goal, plunge into the deathless,
freely eating the liberation they’ve gained. — [Khp 6](#)

However, verses in the Pali Canon more generally depict nibbana as a dimension in which there is simply no more need for food of any kind.

§ 51. With the stilling of consciousness, the monk
free from hunger
is totally unbound....

While those who comprehend contact,
delighting in stilling through discernment,
they, by breaking through contact,
free from hunger,
are totally unbound....

See the world, together with its devas:
conceiving not-self to be self.
Entrenched in name and form,

they conceive that 'This is true.'
In whatever terms they conceive it
it turns into something other than that,
 and that's what's false about it:
 changing,
it's deceptive by nature.
Undeceptive by nature
is Unbinding:
That the noble ones know
 as true.
They, by breaking through
 to the truth,
free from hunger,
are totally unbound. — [Sn 3:12](#)

§ 52. Not hoarding,
having comprehended food,
their pasture — emptiness
and freedom without sign:
 their trail,
like that of birds through space,
 can't be traced.

Effluents ended,
independent of nutriment,
their pasture — emptiness
and freedom without sign:
 their trail,
like that of birds through space,
 can't be traced. — [Dhp 92-93](#)

CHAPTER THREE

“All phenomena are unworthy of attachment”

The most important practical consequences of the discussion so far are these:

- The sequence of dependent co-arising can be unraveled only by replacing ignorance with knowledge in terms of the four noble truths.
- The complexity of the sequence is such that knowledge can be effectively developed with reference to any of its factors, at any point in the sequence
- And although the ultimate goal of the practice is to go beyond causality, the actual practice consists of using causality, converting the causal factors of dependent co-arising to a new role. Instead of using them as factors to create suffering and stress, the meditator learns to use them as factors of the path.

This chapter explores these practical principles in further detail. The first two principles, taken together, provide the framework for the chapter as a whole. Under each causal factor of dependent co-arising, beginning with *ignorance*, are listed practices aimed at developing clear knowledge around that factor, i.e., learning to see the factor not as part of one's identity or as part of a larger world view, but simply as an action/event in a sequence of causes and effects. The third principle will become clear in the course of the readings, which show that some of the factors function in two roles. In the first role, they are objects of a contemplation that tries to develop knowledge and dispassion for them. In the second role, they are tools used to help in the contemplation. *Perception* is a prime example here. As one of the five aggregates, *perception* is an object contemplated by appropriate attention, which tries to develop dispassion for all five aggregates. As a mental fabrication,

perception is used to develop the concentration needed to provide a basis for contemplation. When applied to sensuality, under the factor of clinging, or to the factors of becoming, birth, and aging-and-death, perception is used in such a way as to develop dispassion for those factors.

These dual roles reflect an important point about the path to the end of stress. As we noted in Chapter One, the Buddha's analysis of dependent co-arising is aimed at showing how the causal sequence leading to suffering and stress can be brought to an end without having to defy the causal patterns underlying the sequence. The path works by developing skillful versions of the factors contained in the sequence, even though all the factors — whether skillful or not — must eventually be abandoned. Thus when a factor functions as a tool, it is being shaped and used in a skillful way to help in the contemplation needed to abandon unskillful qualities. When it has fulfilled this role, it then becomes the object of contemplation itself, so that in the final stages of the practice it is abandoned as well.

As you go through the following readings, take note of the many places in which the factors of the noble eightfold path appear. As a form of skillful kamma, the path as a whole appears in conjunction with the factor of *intention* under *name-and-form*. Individual path factors, however, will also appear in conjunction with other factors of dependent co-arising. *Right view*, for instance, appears in conjunction with *ignorance*; *right resolve* and *right concentration*, in conjunction with *fabrication*; and *right mindfulness* — all of the passages from [DN 22](#) — in conjunction with *ignorance*, *attention*, *form*, the *sense media*, *craving*, *feeling*, and *aging-and-death*. A useful image for understanding these multiple relationships is that dependent co-arising forms the terrain through which the meditator must walk, while the path is the part of the terrain on which it is possible to walk.

Another useful exercise is to compare the practices listed here with the standard description of the stages of practice found in [DN 2](#). There the practice is described in steps:

virtue (see, for example, [§54](#), [§61](#)),
restraint over the sense faculties (see [§§102-104](#)),

mindfulness and alertness (see all the passages from [DN 22](#)), contentment (see [§§120-121](#)), abandoning the hindrances (see [§45](#), [§97](#)), developing the jhānas (see [§68](#), [§§85-88](#)), and mastering the cognitive skills based on jhāna, including the knowledge of the end of mental effluents, full mastery of the four noble truths (see [§22](#)).

As the following discussion shows, all of these stages are intimately related to different factors in dependent co-arising, a fact that explains why they are essential elements in the path leading to the end of suffering and stress.

IGNORANCE

The knowledge that puts an end to ignorance starts with the ability to see experience in terms of the four noble truths.

§ 53. “Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and 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 and delight, relishing now here and now there, i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading and cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and 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.” — [SN 56:11](#)

§ 54. *Ven. Sāriputta*: “And what is right view? Knowledge with reference to stress, knowledge with reference to the origination of stress, knowledge with reference to the cessation of stress, knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress; this is called right view. And what is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, resolve for freedom from ill will, resolve for harmlessness; this is called right resolve. “And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from abusive speech, abstaining from idle chatter; this is called right speech.

“And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct; this is called right action.

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

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

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

“And what is right concentration? There is the case where a monk — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters and remains in the first jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts and evaluations, he enters and remains in the second jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and

evaluation/internal assurance. With the fading of rapture he remains equanimous, mindful, and alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure and pain — as with the earlier disappearance of joys and distresses — he enters and remains in the fourth jhāna:, [with] purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called right concentration.” — [MN 141](#)

Each of the four noble truths involves a task, which means that the knowledge needed to put an end to ignorance is not only knowledge about something. It also includes the knowledge that comes as these tasks are mastered as skills. As with any skill, that mastery is gradual, and thus the knowledge is not an all-or-nothing affair. Instead, it grows incrementally until the point of full mastery is reached.

§ 55. “‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’.... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’.... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced’.... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed.’” — [SN 56:11](#)

Right view begins with the ability to see the suffering inherent in one’s unskillful actions. At first it goes only that far, but with proper effort and mindfulness applied to developing right view, it gradually grows.

§ 56. A fool with a sense of his foolishness is — at least to that extent — wise. — [Dhp 63](#)

§ 57. “One tries to abandon wrong view and to enter into right view; this is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong view and to enter and remain in right view; this is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities — right view, right effort, and right mindfulness — run and circle around right view.” — [MN 117](#)

Right view matures with the realization that these efforts should be aimed at a knowledge that induces dispassion. This dispassion is developed by viewing all events in the six sense fields as separate from one oneself — so that one can observe them clearly — and separate from one another, as events in and of themselves, so as to see how they interact in a causal chain.

§ 58. 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, is there any one thing with whose abandoning in a monk ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises?”

“Yes, monk, there is one thing with whose abandoning in a monk ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises.”

“What is that one thing?”

“Ignorance, monk, is the one thing with whose abandoning in a monk ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises.”

“But how does a monk know, how does a monk see, so that ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises?”

“There is the case, monk, where a monk has heard, ‘All phenomena are unworthy of attachment.’ Having heard that all phenomena are unworthy of attachment, he directly knows every phenomenon. Directly knowing every phenomenon, he comprehends every phenomenon. Comprehending every phenomenon, he sees all themes as something separate.

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

“He sees the ear as something separate....

“He sees the nose as something separate....

“He sees the tongue as something separate....

“He sees the body as something separate....

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

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

An important part of seeing these things as something separate is to view them in and of themselves, without reference to how they relate to one’s sense of the world. This frame of reference is an essential aspect of right mindfulness.

§ 59. “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and distress, for the attainment of the right method, and for the realization of Unbinding — in other words, the four frames of reference. Which four?

“There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings... mind... mental qualities in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.” — [DN 22](#)

§ 60. “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the four noble truths. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the four noble truths? There is the case where he discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is stress. He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the origination of stress. He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the cessation of stress. He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of stress’.... “In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on mental qualities in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental

qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by/not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the four noble truths.” — [*DN 22*](#)

The ability to view events on this level, however, cannot occur in a social vacuum. This is because the ignorance it is meant to replace doesn’t occur in a social vacuum, either. As we mentioned in Chapter One, even though ignorance is listed first among the factors of dependent co-arising, it is not an uncaused cause. Like the other factors, it has its nutriment and conditions. Among its nutriments are a series of mental and social factors that can be traced back to unwise friendship, associating with people of no integrity. Thus, to overcome ignorance, one must be willing to develop wise friendship with those who can teach and embody the true Dhamma. This, in turn, helps to foster a willingness to act and speak in skillful ways. This willingness is necessary in overcoming ignorance, for if one’s actions are willfully unskillful, one will have trouble admitting the suffering and stress they cause. This is why right action, right speech, and right livelihood are essential factors in the path.

§ 61. “A beginning point for ignorance, (such that one might say), ‘Before this, ignorance did not exist; then it came into play’, cannot be discerned. This has been said. Nevertheless, it can be discerned, ‘Ignorance comes from this condition.’ And I tell you, ignorance has its nutriment. It is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for ignorance? The five hindrances.... And what is the nutriment for the five hindrances? The three forms of misconduct.... And what is the nutriment for the three forms of misconduct? Lack of restraint of the senses.... And what is the nutriment for lack of restraint of the senses? Lack of mindfulness and alertness.... And what is the nutriment for lack of mindfulness and alertness? Inappropriate attention.... And what is the nutriment for inappropriate attention? Lack of conviction.... And what is the nutriment for lack of conviction? Not hearing the true Dhamma....

And what is the nutriment for not hearing the true Dhamma? Associating with people of no integrity [or: not associating with people of integrity].”

“Just as when the gods pour rain in heavy drops and crash thunder on the upper mountains, the water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies. When the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies are full, they fill the little ponds. When the little ponds are full, they fill the big lakes... the little rivers... the big rivers. When the big rivers are full, they fill the great ocean, and thus is the great ocean fed, thus is it filled. In the same way, when not associating with people of integrity is brought to fulfillment, it fulfills (the conditions for) not hearing the true Dhamma... lack of conviction... inappropriate attention... lack of mindfulness and alertness... lack of restraint of the senses... the three forms of misconduct... the five hindrances. When the five hindrances are brought to fulfillment, they fulfill (the conditions for) ignorance. Thus is ignorance fed, thus is it brought to fulfillment.

“Now, I tell you, clear knowing and release have their nutriment. They are not without nutriment. And what is their nutriment? The seven factors for Awakening.... And what is the nutriment for the seven factors for Awakening? The four frames of reference.... And what is the nutriment for the four frames of reference? The three forms of right conduct.... And what is the nutriment for the three forms of right conduct? Restraint of the senses.... And what is the nutriment for restraint of the senses? Mindfulness and alertness.... And what is the nutriment for mindfulness and alertness? Appropriate attention.... And what is the nutriment for appropriate attention? Conviction.... And what is the nutriment for conviction? Hearing the true Dhamma.... And what is the nutriment for hearing the true Dhamma? Associating with people of integrity....

“Just as when the gods pour rain in heavy drops and crash thunder on the upper mountains, the water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies... the little ponds... the big lakes... the little rivers... the big rivers. When the big rivers are full, they fill the great ocean, and thus is the great ocean fed, thus is it filled. In the same way, when associating with people of integrity is brought to fulfillment, it fulfills (the conditions for) hearing the true Dhamma... conviction... appropriate attention... mindfulness and alertness... restraint of the senses... the three forms of right conduct... the four frames of reference...

the seven factors for Awakening. When the seven factors for Awakening are brought to fulfillment, they fulfill (the conditions for) clear knowing and release. Thus is clear knowing and release fed, thus is it brought to fulfillment.” — [AN 10:61](#)

Another way of analyzing the conditions leading to the end of ignorance focuses attention on what is essentially a change of heart. Instead of the common pattern of repeated suffering, in which the search for someone who knows the way out of stress keeps leading to the wrong “someone,” the experience of stress can also incite a search that leads to the right person — someone of integrity who knows the true path out of suffering — and to conviction in that person. In this way, ignorance can lie at the beginning of a sequence leading to the end of ignorance. In other words, ignorance leads to suffering, and suffering is what can bring the mind to a state where it is ready to undertake the Buddha’s path.

§ 62. “Monks, the ending of effluents is for one who knows and sees, I tell you, not for one who does not know and does not see. For one who knows what and sees what is there the ending of effluents? ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is perception, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such are fabrications, such their origination, such their disappearance. Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’ The ending of effluents is for one who knows in this way and sees in this way.

“The knowledge of ending in the presence of ending has its prerequisite, I tell you. It is not without a prerequisite. And what is the prerequisite for the knowledge of ending? Release, it should be said. Release has its prerequisite, I tell you. It is not without a prerequisite. And what is its prerequisite? Dispassion.... Disenchantment.... Knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be.... Concentration.... Pleasure.... Serenity.... Rapture.... Joy.... Conviction.... Stress.... Birth.... Becoming.... Clinging.... Craving.... Feeling.... Contact.... The six sense media.... Name-and-form.... Consciousness.... Fabrications.... Fabrications have their prerequisite, I tell you. They are not without a prerequisite. And what is their prerequisite? Ignorance, it should be said....

“Just as when the gods pour rain in heavy drops and crash thunder on the upper mountains: The water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the mountain clefts and rifts and gullies... the little ponds... the big lakes... the little rivers... the big rivers. When the big 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-and-form has consciousness as their prerequisite,
the six sense media have name-and-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,
serenity has rapture as its prerequisite,
pleasure has serenity as its prerequisite,
concentration has pleasure as its prerequisite,
knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be has
concentration as its prerequisite,
disenchantment has knowledge and 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](#)

The arising of conviction is thus a major turning point in the search for an end to suffering. The discourses define conviction in

two ways. [SN 48:8](#) says that conviction can be seen in the four stream-entry factors, which [SN 55:5](#) defines as follows:

§ 63. “Association with people of integrity is a stream-entry factor. Listening to the true Dhamma is a stream-entry factor. Appropriate attention is a stream-entry factor. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a stream-entry factor.” — [SN 55:5](#)

In terms of this analysis, the arising of conviction covers many of the causes for the arising of clear knowing mentioned in [§61](#).

More commonly, though, the discourses define conviction as conviction in the Buddha’s Awakening.

§ 64. “Now what, monks, is the faculty of conviction? There is the case where a monk, a disciple of the noble ones, has conviction, is convinced of the Tathāgata’s Awakening, ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine and human beings, awakened, blessed.’ This, monks, is called the faculty of conviction.” — [SN 48:10](#)

The implications of this form of conviction are that the Buddha found the end of suffering through his own efforts, and that the way to that goal depends on developing qualities of mind that, in principle, any human being can develop. Although this conviction does not provide a full measure of clear knowing, it does count as a rudimentary form of appropriate attention. Thus all of the analysis in [§§61-64](#) intersect with the standard formula of dependent co-arising at the sub-factor of *attention*, under the factor of *name-and-form*. The change of heart that leads to the arising of conviction involves a change of focus, as one attends appropriately to the problem of stress and one’s potential ability to bring it to cessation. As we will see below, under the discussion of appropriate attention ([§§94-97](#)), this change of focus provides the nutriment for abandoning the causes of suffering and developing the factors of the path in their place.

FABRICATIONS

Fabrication is the intentional process by which one shapes one's experience. It is fundamental to conditioned experience, in that it takes the kammic potentials for the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and sensory consciousness — which cover all of conditioned experience — and shapes them into actual aggregates.

§ 65. “And why do you call them ‘fabrications’? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called ‘fabrications.’ What do they fabricate as a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood... For the sake of fabrication-hood... For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications.” — [SN 22:79](#)

Fabrications are of three sorts.

§ 66. *Visākha*: And what, lady, are bodily fabrications, what are verbal fabrications, what are mental fabrications?

Sister Dhammadinnā: In-and-out breathing is bodily, bound up with the body, therefore is it called a *bodily fabrication*. Having directed one's thought and evaluated (the matter), one breaks into speech. Therefore directed thought and evaluation are called *verbal fabrications*. Perception and feeling are mental, bound up with the mind. Therefore perception and feeling are called *mental fabrications*. — [MN 44](#).

Concentration based on mindfulness of breathing is the primary practice for viewing all three sorts of fabrication in relation to one another, for it brings all three together in the immediate present. The breath itself is bodily fabrication. Mindfulness employs various perceptions of the breath in order to stay focused on it and to produce feelings of pleasure in association with the breathing process, and when the first jhāna — or state of mental absorption

— is reached in the course of this practice, it includes the verbal fabrications of directed thought and evaluation as well.

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

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

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

“[9] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.’ [10] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in gladdening the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out gladdening the mind.’ [11] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in steadying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out steadying the mind.’ [12] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in releasing the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out releasing the mind.’

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

focusing on relinquishment.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.’” — [MN 118](#)

§ 68. “Furthermore, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities, he enters and remains in the first jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder — saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without — would nevertheless not drip, even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers and settles inwardly, grows unified and centered.” — [MN 119](#)

Verbal fabrication, in addition to playing a role in right concentration, can also be converted into the path factor of right resolve, which essentially covers forms of directed thought and evaluation that lead to and through the first jhāna, only to be transcended when entering the second jhāna.

§ 69. “And what are unskillful resolves? Being resolved on sensuality, on ill will, on violence.... What is the cause of unskillful resolves?... They are said to be perception-caused.... Which perception? — for perception has many modes and permutations.... Any sensuality-perception, ill will-perception, or violence-perception, that is the cause of unskillful resolves. Now where do unskillful resolves cease without trace?... There is the case where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities, enters and remains in the first jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. This is where unskillful resolves cease without trace. And what sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire... for the sake

of the nonarising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the... development and culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves.

“And what are skillful resolves? Being resolved on renunciation [freedom from sensuality], on non-ill will, on non-violence.... What is the cause of skillful resolves?... They are said to be perception-caused.... Which perception? — for perception has many modes and permutations.... Any renunciation-perception, non-ill will-perception, or non-violence-perception, that is the cause of skillful resolves. Now where do skillful resolves cease without trace?... There is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts and evaluations, enters and remains in the second jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation — internal assurance. This is where skillful resolves cease without trace. And what sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire... for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the... development and culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves.” — [MN 78](#)

Skillful resolves can be developed in line with a wide variety of meditation topics. A primary example is the development of the *brahma vihāras*: unlimited goodwill, unlimited compassion, unlimited appreciation, and unlimited equanimity.

§ 70. Think: Happy, at rest,
may all beings be happy at heart.
Whatever beings there may be,
weak or strong, without exception,
long, large,
middling, short,

subtle, blatant,
seen and unseen,
near and far,
born and seeking birth:
May all beings be happy at heart.

Let no one deceive another
or despise anyone anywhere,
or through anger or irritation
wish for another to suffer.

As a mother would risk her life
to protect her child, her only child,
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart
with regard to all beings.

With good will for the entire cosmos,
cultivate a limitless heart:
Above, below, and all around,
unobstructed, without hostility or hate.
Whether standing, walking,
sitting, or lying down,
as long as one is alert,
one should be resolved on this mindfulness.
This is called a sublime abiding
here and now. — [*Khp 9*](#)

§ 71. “Now, Kālāmas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones — thus devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, and resolute — keeps pervading the first direction [the east], as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth, with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction — as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth — with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all encompassing world with an

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

“He keeps pervading the first direction — as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth — with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all encompassing world with an awareness imbued with equanimity, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.” — [AN3:66](#)

§ 72. “Wise and mindful, you should develop immeasurable concentration [i.e., concentration based on immeasurable good will, compassion, appreciation, or equanimity]. When, wise and mindful, one has developed immeasurable concentration, five realizations arise right within oneself. Which five? “The realization arises right within oneself that ‘This concentration is blissful in the present and will result in bliss in the future.’

“The realization arises right within oneself that ‘This concentration is noble and not connected with the baits of the flesh.’

“The realization arises right within oneself that ‘This concentration is not obtained by base people.’

“The realization arises right within oneself that ‘This concentration is peaceful, exquisite, the acquiring of serenity, the attainment of unity, not kept in place by the fabrications of forceful restraint.’

“The realization arises right within oneself that ‘I enter into this concentration mindfully, and mindfully I emerge from it.’

“Wise and mindful, you should develop immeasurable concentration. When, wise and mindful, one has developed immeasurable concentration, these five realizations arise right within oneself.” — [AN5:27](#)

Other meditation themes can also be used to convert verbal fabrication into right resolve, so as to counteract a wide variety of unskillful mental states that can prevent mindfulness practice from developing into concentration.

§ 73. “There is the case of a monk who remains focused on the body in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on the body in and of itself, a fever based on the body arises within his body, or there is sluggishness in his awareness, or his mind becomes scattered externally. He should then direct his mind to any inspiring theme [according to the Commentary, this means, e.g., recollection of the Buddha]. As his mind is directed to any inspiring theme, delight arises within him. In one who feels delight, rapture arises. In one whose mind is enraptured, the body grows serene. His body serene, he feels pleasure. As he feels pleasure, his mind grows concentrated. He reflects, ‘I have attained the aim to which my mind was directed. Let me withdraw (my mind from the inspiring theme).’ He withdraws and engages neither in directed thought nor in evaluation. He discerns, ‘I am not thinking or evaluating. I am inwardly mindful and at ease.’

“Furthermore, he remains focused on feelings... mind... mental qualities in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on mental qualities in and of themselves, a fever based on mental qualities arises within his body, or there is sluggishness in his awareness, or his mind becomes scattered externally. He should then direct his mind to any inspiring theme. As his mind is directed to any inspiring theme, delight arises within him. In one who feels delight, rapture arises. In one whose mind is enraptured, the body grows serene. His body serene, he is sensitive to pleasure. As he feels pleasure, his mind grows concentrated. He reflects, ‘I have attained the aim to which my mind was directed. Let me withdraw.’ He withdraws and engages neither in directed thought nor in evaluation. He discerns, ‘I am not thinking or evaluating. I am inwardly mindful and at ease.’” — [*SN 47:10*](#)

§ 74. I have heard that on one occasion a certain monk was dwelling among the Kosalans in a forest thicket. Now at that time, he spent the

day's abiding thinking evil, unskillful thoughts, i.e., thoughts of sensuality, thoughts of ill will, thoughts of doing harm.

Then the devatā inhabiting the forest thicket, feeling sympathy for the monk, desiring his benefit, desiring to bring him to his senses, approached him and addressed him with this verse:

“From inappropriate attention
you’re being chewed by your thoughts.
Relinquishing what’s inappropriate,
contemplate
appropriately.

Keeping your mind on the Teacher,
the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, your virtues,
you will arrive at
joy,
rapture,
pleasure
without doubt.

Then, saturated
with joy,
you will put an end
to suffering and stress.”

The monk, chastened by the devatā, came to his senses. — [*SN*](#)
[*9:11*](#)

§ 75. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Park. Now at that time Mahānāma... went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “I have heard that many monks are at work making robes for the Blessed One, (thinking,) ‘When the robes are finished, at the end of the three months, the Blessed One will set out wandering.’ For those of us living by means of various dwelling places (for the mind), by means of which dwelling place should we live?”

“Excellent, Mahānāma..., excellent! It is fitting for clansmen like you to approach the Tathāgata and ask, ‘For those of us living by means of

various dwelling places (for the mind), by means of which dwelling place should we live?’

“[a] One who is aroused to practice is one of conviction, not without conviction... [b] is one with persistence aroused, not lazy... [c] is one of established mindfulness, not muddled mindfulness... [d] is centered in concentration, not uncentered. [e] One aroused to practice is discerning, not undiscerning.

“Established in these five qualities, you should further develop six qualities. [1] “There is the case where you recollect the Tathāgata: ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine and human beings, awakened, blessed.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Tathāgata, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Tathāgata. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the Buddha while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

[2] “Furthermore, there is the case where you recollect the Dhamma: ‘The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Dhamma, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Dhamma. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal... the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the Dhamma while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting,

while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

[3] “Furthermore, there is the case where you recollect the Saṅgha: ‘The Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples who have practiced well... who have practiced straight-forwardly... who have practiced methodically... who have practiced masterfully — in other words, the four types of disciple of the noble ones when taken as pairs, the eight when taken as individual types — they are the Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples, worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, the incomparable field of merit for the world.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Saṅgha, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Saṅgha. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal... the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the Saṅgha while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

[4] “Furthermore, there is the case where you recollect your own virtues: ‘(They are) untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting virtue, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on virtue. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal... the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of virtue while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

[5] “Furthermore, there is the case where you recollect your own generosity: ‘It is a gain, a great gain for me, that — among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness — I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, openhanded, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests,

delighting in the distribution of alms.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on generosity. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal... the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of generosity while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

[6] “Furthermore, you should recollect the devas: ‘There are the devas of the Four Great Kings, the devas of the Thirty-three, the devas of the Hours, the Contented Devas, the devas who delight in creation, the devas who have power over the creations of others, the devas of Brahmā’s retinue, the devas beyond them. Whatever *conviction* they were endowed with that — when falling away from this life — they re-arose there, the same sort of conviction is present in me as well. Whatever *virtue* they were endowed with that — when falling away from this life — they re-arose there, the same sort of virtue is present in me as well. Whatever *learning* they were endowed with that — when falling away from this life — they re-arose there, the same sort of learning is present in me as well. Whatever *generosity* they were endowed with that — when falling away from this life — they re-arose there, the same sort of generosity is present in me as well. Whatever *discernment* they were endowed with that — when falling away from this life — they re-arose there, the same sort of discernment is present in me as well.’ At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the conviction, virtue, learning, generosity, and discernment found both in himself and the devas, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the (qualities of the) devas. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the devas while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.” — [AN 11:13](#)

In all of these contemplations, the aim is to bring the mind to a state of right concentration, for the resolves leading to right concentration are the highest form of right resolve.

§ 76. “And what is the right resolve that is without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path? The thinking, directed thinking, resolve, mental fixity, mental transfixion, focused awareness, and verbal fabrications in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without effluents, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right resolve that is without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path.” — [MN 117](#)

Mental fabrications can be observed in the way they shape the mind into various states — the important part of the observation being to focus on mind states as events in and of themselves, to see how they are developed — rather than focusing on what they are about or how they relate to the world. As the following passage suggests, the categories by which these mind states are categorized grow progressively more and more refined as one’s powers of concentration and discernment develop to progressively higher levels.

§ 77. “And how does a monk remain focused on the mind in and of itself? There is the case where a monk, when the mind has passion, discerns that the mind has passion. When the mind is without passion, he discerns that the mind is without passion. When the mind has aversion, he discerns that the mind has aversion. When the mind is without aversion, he discerns that the mind is without aversion. When the mind has delusion, he discerns that the mind has delusion. When the mind is without delusion, he discerns that the mind is without delusion.

“When the mind is restricted, he discerns that the mind is restricted. When the mind is scattered, he discerns that the mind is scattered. When

the mind is enlarged, he discerns that the mind is enlarged. When the mind is not enlarged, he discerns that the mind is not enlarged. When the mind is surpassed, he discerns that the mind is surpassed. When the mind is unsurpassed, he discerns that the mind is unsurpassed. When the mind is concentrated, he discerns that the mind is concentrated. When the mind is not concentrated, he discerns that the mind is not concentrated. When the mind is released, he discerns that the mind is released. When the mind is not released, he discerns that the mind is not released.

“In this way he remains focused internally on the mind in and of itself, or externally on the mind in and of itself, or both internally and externally on the mind in and of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the mind, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the mind, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to the mind. Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a mind’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by/not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the mind in and of itself.” — [DN 22](#)

Perception, as a mental fabrication, plays several roles in the path. As we have already noted, perception is used by mindfulness to get the mind into right concentration and to keep it there. Once the mind is nourished by right concentration, it is in the strong, well-grounded position required for adopting the skillful perceptions used to deconstruct its ignorant ways of thinking, for many of these skillful perceptions are quite stark. If the mind is not operating from a deep sense of well-being, these perceptions can lead to depression and disorientation.

§ 78. “Monks, there are these four perversions of perception, perversions of mind, perversions of view. Which four? ‘Constant’ with regard to the inconstant is a perversion of perception, a perversion of mind, a perversion of view. ‘Pleasant’ with regard to the stressful.... ‘Self’ with regard to not-self.... ‘Attractive’ with regard to the unattractive is a perversion of perception, a perversion of mind, a perversion of view.” — [AN 4:49](#)

§ 79. “Ānanda, if you go to the monk Girimānanda and tell him ten perceptions, it’s possible that when he hears the ten perceptions his disease may be allayed. Which ten? The perception of inconstancy, the perception of not-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks, the perception of abandoning, the perception of dispassion, the perception of cessation, the perception of distaste for every world, the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications, mindfulness of in-and-out breathing.

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

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

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

[4] “And what is the perception of drawbacks? There is the case where a monk — having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling — reflects thus: ‘This body has many pains, many

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

[5] “And what is the perception of abandoning? There is the case where a monk does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill-will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, and wipes them out of existence. This is called the perception of abandoning.

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

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

[8] “And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains

from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.

[9] “And what is the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, and disgusted with all fabrications. This is called the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications. [10] “And what is mindfulness of in-and-out breathing? [See §67] — [AN 10:60](#)

Ultimately, however, perception can be used to help develop dispassion for perception itself, as well as for all forms of fabrication.

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

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

empty, void, without substance, for what substance would there be in fabrications?” — [SN 22:95](#)

A similar strategy applies to the role of **feeling** as a mental fabrication on the path. Skillful feelings of pleasure are developed in the practice of right concentration to help wean the mind away from its tendency to feed on sensual pleasures, for if the mind does not have an alternative means of escape from painful feeling, its attachment to sensual pleasures will remain strong.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor pain, he senses it disjoined from it. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones disjoined from birth, aging, and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is disjoined, I tell you, from suffering and stress.” — [SN 36:6](#)

The contemplation of feelings in and of themselves — one of the four frames of reference — is intimately entwined with the development of right concentration. On the one hand, this contemplation is one of the four themes of right concentration.

§ 83. *Visākhā*: “Now what is concentration, lady, what qualities are its themes? ...”

Sister Dhammadinnā: “Singleness of mind is concentration, friend Visākha, the four frames of reference are its themes.” — [MN 44](#).

On the other hand, once the mind is in right concentration, it is in an excellent position to observe feelings in and of themselves as they grow progressively more refined.

§ 84. “And how does a monk remain focused on feelings in and of themselves? There is the case where a monk, when feeling a painful feeling, discerns that he is feeling a painful feeling. When feeling a pleasant feeling, he discerns that he is feeling a pleasant feeling. When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he discerns that he is feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. “When feeling a painful feeling of the flesh, he discerns that he is feeling a painful feeling of the flesh. When feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh, he discerns that he is feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh. When feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns that he is feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh. When feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh [e.g., in the first three *jhānas*], he discerns that he is feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh. When feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns that he is feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling of the flesh. When feeling a neither painful- nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh [e.g., in the third and fourth *jhānas*], he discerns that he is feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling not of the flesh.

“In this way he remains focused internally on feelings in and of themselves, or externally on feelings in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on feelings in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to feelings, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to feelings. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are feelings’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by/not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on feelings in and of themselves.” — [DN 22](#)

However, as one observes the refined feelings in *jhāna*, one can see that even they have their drawbacks.

§ 85. “Again the monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts and evaluations, enters and remains in the second jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation — internal assurance... With the fading of rapture he remains equanimous, mindful and alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasant abiding’... With the abandoning of pleasure and pain — as with the earlier disappearance of joys and distresses — he enters and remains in the fourth jhāna, [with] purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. At that time he does not intend his own affliction, the affliction of others, or the affliction of both. He feels a feeling totally unafflicted. The unafflicted, I tell you, is the highest allure of feelings.

“And what is the drawback of feelings? The fact that feeling is inconstant, stressful, subject to change; this is the drawback of feelings. “And what is the escape from feelings? The subduing of desire-passion for feelings, the abandoning of desire-passion for feelings; that is the escape from feelings.” — [MN 13](#)

The texts describe two ways in which the practice of right concentration can be used to develop dispassion for perceptions and feelings. The first is to view both of these processes as they function within any particular level of jhāna or the formless attainments based on the fourth jhāna.

§ 86. “I tell you, the ending of the mental 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 mental effluents depends on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.... “Suppose that an archer or archer’s apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the first jhāna, [with] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected

with form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and 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 resolution of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding.’ “Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the mental effluents. Or, if not, then — through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight, and from the total wasting away of the first five Fetters [self-identity views, grasping at precepts and practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation] — he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“I tell you, the ending of the mental effluents depends on the first jhāna.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said. [Similarly with the other levels of jhāna up through 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 and the attainment of the cessation of feeling and perception — I tell you that they are to be rightly explained by those monks who are meditators, skilled in attaining, skilled in attaining and emerging, who have attained and emerged in dependence on them.” — [AN 9:36](#)

The other approach is to observe how each level of jhāna involves abandoning the grosser levels of perception and feeling — and fabrication in general — inherent in the more elementary levels. This observation can lead to progressively more refined levels of concentration, to the point where perception, feeling, and fabrication entirely cease.

§ 87. “I have also taught the step-by-step cessation of fabrications. When one has attained the first jhāna, speech has ceased. *When one has attained the second jhāna, directed thought and evaluation [verbal fabrications] have ceased.* When one has attained the third jhāna, rapture has ceased. *When one has attained the fourth jhāna, in-and-out breathing [bodily fabrication] has ceased.* When one has attained the dimension of

the infinitude of space, the perception of forms has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of nothingness, the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of neither-perception nor non-perception, the perception of the dimension of nothingness has ceased. *When one has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, perception and feeling [mental fabrications] have ceased.* When a monk's effluents have ended, passion has ceased, aversion has ceased, delusion has ceased." — [*SN 36:11*](#)

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

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

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

"Now there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the first jhāna.... If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *sensuality*, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain arises as an affliction in a healthy person, even so the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Unbinding is pleasant.

"Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the second jhāna.... If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *directed thought*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the third jhāna.... If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *rapture*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the fourth jhāna.... If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *equanimity*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *form*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of space*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the dimension of nothingness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness*, that is an affliction for him....

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

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

§ 89. “There is the case, Ānanda, where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters and remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.... Though some might say, ‘That is the highest pleasure that beings experience,’ I would

not grant them that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure, more extreme and refined than that.

“And what, Ānanda, is another pleasure more extreme and refined than that? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is another pleasure more extreme and refined than that.

“Now it’s possible, Ānanda, that some wanderers of other persuasions might say, ‘Gotama the contemplative speaks of the cessation of perception and feeling and yet describes it as pleasure. What is this? How is this?’ When they say that, they are to be told, ‘It’s not the case, friends, that the Blessed One describes only pleasant feeling as included under pleasure. Wherever pleasure is found, in whatever terms, the Blessed One describes it as pleasure.’” — [SN 36:19](#)

CONSCIOUSNESS

As with mind states, it is important to view sensory consciousness not in terms of its objects or how it relates to the world, but in terms of how it plays a role in a causal process, nourished by its supports and then nourishing, in turn, the proliferation of states of becoming. Viewing it in this way, one can develop dispassion for sensory consciousness, and — in allowing it to become unestablished by preventing it from feeding on its supports — allow it to be released.

§ 90. The Blessed One said: “Monks, there are these five means of propagation. Which five? Root-propagation, stem-propagation, joint-propagation, cutting-propagation, and seed-propagation as the fifth. And if these five means of propagation are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind and sun, mature, and well-buried, but there is no earth and no water, would they exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation?”

“No, lord.”

“And if these five means of propagation are broken, rotten, damaged by wind and sun, immature, and poorly-buried, but there is earth and water, would they exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation?”

“No, lord.”

“And if these five means of propagation are not broken, not rotten, not damaged by wind and sun, mature, and well-buried, and there is earth and water, would they exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Like the earth property, monks, is how the four standing-spots for consciousness should be seen. Like the liquid property is how delight and passion should be seen. Like the five means of propagation is how consciousness together with its nutriment should be seen.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to form, supported by form (as its object), established on form, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation.

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to feeling....

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to perception....

“Should consciousness, when taking a stance, stand attached to fabrications, supported by fabrications (as its object), established on fabrications, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation.

“Were someone to say, ‘I will describe a coming, a going, a passing away, an arising, a growth, an increase, or a proliferation of consciousness apart from form, from feeling, from perception, from fabrications,’ that would be impossible.

“If a monk abandons passion for the property of form....

“If a monk abandons passion for the property of feeling....

“If a monk abandons passion for the property of perception...

“If a monk abandons passion for the property of fabrications....

“If a monk abandons passion for the property of consciousness, then owing to the abandonment of passion, the support is cut off, and there is no base for consciousness. Consciousness, thus unestablished, not proliferating, not performing any function, is released. Owing to its release, it is steady. Owing to its steadiness, it is contented. Owing to its contentment, it is not agitated. Not agitated, he [the monk] is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life

fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.” — [SN 22:54](#)

§ 91. “Now suppose that a magician or magician’s apprentice were to display a magic trick at a major intersection, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, and appropriately examine it. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance, for what substance would there be in a magic trick? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, and appropriately examines any consciousness that is past, future, or present, internal or external, blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in consciousness?” — [SN 22:95](#)

NAME

Because *perception* and *feeling*, two of the factors of *Name*, occur at several points in dependent co-arising, they form feedback loops allowing different stages in the sequence to run past *intention* and *attention* as they reenter the sequence at *Name*. When these two sub-factors are unskillful, they can compound the resulting stress and suffering. But if they are skillful, they can mitigate the resulting stress and suffering, or even abort the sequence before stress and suffering are produced. Thus they are among the most important factors in dependent co-arising as a whole. When the noble eightfold path comes together, it functions right here at the factor of *intention*.

§ 92. “Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, and intellect.” — [AN 6:63](#)

§ 93. “There is kamma that is dark with dark result, kamma that is bright with bright result, kamma that is dark and bright with dark and bright result, and kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.... And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading

to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.” — [AN 4:237](#)

As for attention, the Buddha recognized two types: appropriate and inappropriate. There is no role for bare attention in his teachings at all. Given the place of attention in the sequence of factors, conditioned by fabrications and consciousness, an utterly bare attention would be impossible. Instead, the Buddha advised developing appropriate attention, which is functionally equivalent to right view in focusing on issues that help in solving the problem of suffering and away from issues that would get in the way. In its broadest role, it draws the mind’s focus away from questions of being and self, and directs it toward viewing present experience in terms of the four noble truths.

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

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

“As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: the view ‘I have a self’ arises in him as true and 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 and established, or else he has a view like this: ‘This very self of mine — the knower that is sensitive here and

there to the ripening of good and 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, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

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

“He attends appropriately: This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices. These are called the effluents to be abandoned by seeing.” —

[MN 2](#)

In line with the duties appropriate to the four noble truths, appropriate attention fosters comprehension of — and dispassion for — the clinging-aggregates that act as the heart of suffering and stress.

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

“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? Form as a clinging-aggregate, feeling...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

§ 96. “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates? There is the case where a monk (discerns): ‘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.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on mental qualities in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by/not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five clinging-aggregates.” — [DN 22](#)

As noted in [§45](#), appropriate attention also acts as food for developing the seven factors for Awakening, factors conducive to the path, and as a means for starving the hindrances, mind states that contribute to the origination of suffering and stress. In this way, appropriate attention informs the practice of right mindfulness focused on the theme of mental qualities in and of themselves.

§ 97. “There is the case where a monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five hindrances. And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in and of

themselves with reference to the five hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns that ‘There is sensual desire present within me.’ Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns that ‘There is no sensual desire present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of sensual desire that has been abandoned. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining hindrances: ill will, sloth and drowsiness, restlessness and anxiety, and uncertainty.]....

“Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening? There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is present within me.’ Or, there being no mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is not present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for Awakening. And he discerns how there is the culmination of the development of mindfulness as a factor for Awakening once it has arisen. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining factors for Awakening: analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, and equanimity.]

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on mental qualities in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by not clinging to anything in the world.” — [DN 22](#)

FORM

Form as a topic of meditation is used primarily in two ways: to develop equanimity for the objects of the senses and to develop the perception of not-self with regard to the body.

§ 98. “Rāhula, develop the meditation in tune with earth. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with earth, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as when people throw what is clean or unclean on the earth — feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood — the earth is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with earth, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind.

“Develop the meditation in tune with water. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with water, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as when people wash what is clean or unclean in water — feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood — the water is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with water, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind.

“Develop the meditation in tune with fire. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with fire, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as when fire burns what is clean or unclean — feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood — it is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with fire, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind.

“Develop the meditation in tune with wind. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with wind, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as when wind blows what is clean or unclean — feces, urine, saliva, pus, or blood — it is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted by it; in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with wind, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind.

“Develop the meditation in tune with space. For when you are developing the meditation in tune with space, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind. Just as space is not established anywhere, in the same way, when you are developing the meditation in tune with space, agreeable and disagreeable sensory impressions that have arisen will not stay in charge of your mind.” — [MN 62](#)

§ 99. *Ven. Sāriputta*: “And what is the form clinging-aggregate? The four great elements and the form derived from them. And what are the four great elements? The earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property.

“And what is the *earth property*? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property? Whatever internal, within oneself, is hard, solid, and sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is hard, solid, and sustained: This is called the internal earth property. Now both the internal earth property and the external earth property are simply earth property. And that should be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus with right discernment as it has come to be, one becomes disenchanted with the earth property and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth property.

“Now there comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked, and at that time the external earth property vanishes. So when even in the external earth property — so vast — inconstancy will be discerned, destructibility will be discerned, a tendency to decay will be discerned, changeability will be discerned, then what of this short-lasting body, sustained by clinging, is ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘what I am’? It has here only a ‘no.’ “Now if other people insult, malign, exasperate, and harass a monk (who has discerned this), he discerns that ‘A painful feeling, born of ear-contact, has arisen within me. And that is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact.’ And he sees that contact is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant,

consciousness is inconstant. His mind, with the (earth) property as its object/support, leaps up, grows confident, steadfast, and released.

“And if other people attack the monk in ways that are undesirable, displeasing, and disagreeable — through contact with fists, contact with stones, contact with sticks, or contact with knives — the monk discerns that ‘This body is of such a nature that contacts with fists come, contacts with stones come, contacts with sticks come, and contacts with knives come. Now the Blessed One has said, in his exhortation of the simile of the saw [[MN 21](#)], ‘Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely into pieces with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding.’ So my persistence will be aroused and untiring, my mindfulness established and unconfused, my body calm and unaroused, my mind centered and unified. And now let contact with fists come to this body, let contact with stones, with sticks, with knives come to this body, for this is how the Buddha’s bidding is done.’ “And if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established, he feels apprehensive at that and gives rise to a sense of urgency: ‘It is a loss for me, not a gain, ill-gotten for me, not well-gotten, that when I recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established within me.’ Just as when a daughter-in-law, on seeing her father-in-law, feels apprehensive and gives rise to a sense of urgency (to please him), in the same way, if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established, he feels apprehensive at that and gives rise to a sense of urgency: ‘It is a loss for me, not a gain, ill-gotten for me, not well-gotten, that when I recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is not established within me.’

“But if, in the monk recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in this way, equanimity based on what is skillful is established, then he is gratified at that. And even to this extent, friends, the monk has accomplished a great deal.

“And what is the *liquid property*? The liquid property may be either internal or external. What is the internal liquid property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is liquid, watery, and sustained: bile,

phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is liquid, watery, and sustained: This is called the internal liquid property. Now both the internal liquid property and the external liquid property are simply liquid property. And that should be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus with right discernment as it has come to be, one becomes disenchanted with the liquid property and makes the mind dispassionate toward the liquid property.

“Now there comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked and washes away village, town, city, district, and country. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean drops down one hundred leagues, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred... six hundred... seven hundred leagues. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven palmyra-trees deep, six... five... four... three... two palmyra-trees deep, one palmyra-tree deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven fathoms deep, six... five... four... three... two fathoms deep, one fathom deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands half a fathom deep, hip-deep, knee-deep, ankle deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean is not even the depth of the first joint of a finger. “So when even in the external liquid property — so vast — inconstancy will be discerned, destructibility will be discerned, a tendency to decay will be discerned, changeability will be discerned, then what of this short-lasting body, sustained by clinging, is ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘what I am’? It has here only a ‘no’...

“And what is the *fire property*? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and sustained, that by which (the body) is warmed, aged, and consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed, and savored gets properly digested, or whatever else internal, within oneself, is fire, fiery, and sustained, this is called the internal fire property. Now both the internal fire property and the external fire property are simply fire property. And that should be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus with right

discernment as it has come to be, one becomes disenchanted with the fire property and makes the mind dispassionate toward the fire property.

Now there comes a time, friends, when the external fire property is provoked and consumes village, town, city, district, and country, and then, coming to the edge of a green district, the edge of a road, the edge of a rocky district, to the water's edge, or to a lush, well-watered area, goes out from lack of sustenance. There comes a time when people try to make fire using a wing-bone and tendon parings.

“So when even in the external fire property — so vast — inconstancy will be discerned, destructibility will be discerned, a tendency to decay will be discerned, changeability will be discerned, then what of this short-lasting body, sustained by clinging, is ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘what I am’? It has here only a ‘no’....

“And what is the *wind property*? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Whatever internal, belonging to oneself, is wind, windy, and 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 whatever else internal, within oneself, is wind, windy, and sustained, this is called the internal wind property. Now both the internal wind property and the external wind property are simply wind property. And that should be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus with right discernment as it has come to be, one becomes disenchanted with the wind property and makes the mind dispassionate toward the wind property.

“Now there comes a time, friends, when the external wind property is provoked and blows away village, town, city, district, and country. There comes a time when, in the last month of the hot season, people try to start a breeze with a fan or bellows, and even the grass at the fringe of a thatch roof doesn't stir. “So when even in the external wind property — so vast — inconstancy will be discerned, destructibility will be discerned, a tendency to decay will be discerned, changeability will be discerned, then what of this short-lasting body, sustained by clinging, is ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘what I am’? It has here only a ‘no.’” — [MN 28](#)

§ 100. “Furthermore... just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, the monk contemplates this very body — however it stands, however it is disposed — in terms of properties: ‘In this body there is the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on the body in and of itself, or externally on the body in and of itself, or both internally and externally on the body in and of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself.” — [DN 22](#)

§ 101. “Suppose that a large glob of foam were floating down this Ganges River, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, and appropriately examine it. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance, for what substance would there be in a glob of foam? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, and appropriately examines any form that is past, future, or present, internal or external, blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in form?” — [SN 22:95](#)

SENSE MEDIA, CONTACT, FEELING

The primary practice focused on the sense media is the practice of restraint. Instead of looking to the processes of sensory perception to gain information about the world, one watches them to see how they act as tools of defilement, seeking out details that will give rise to greed, anger, or delusion, or to enflame any greed, anger, and delusion already there in the mind. Because sensory contacts and their resulting feelings are among the foods nourishing the process whereby consciousness proliferates into becoming

(§41), one must exercise care not to feed that process. This involves focusing away from details that feed these defilements, and focusing instead on other details that help to starve them. By engaging in this practice, one is in an excellent position to see how the feelings produced by sensory contact are ephemeral and unreliable. This observation helps to develop dispassion for those feelings, thus undercutting any clingings or fetters that might arise based on them.

§ 102. “And how does a monk dress wounds? There is the case where a monk, on seeing a form with the eye, does not grasp at any theme or details by which — if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye — evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices with restraint. He guards the faculty of the eye. He achieves restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. [Similarly with the other sense media.]

“This is how a monk dresses wounds.” — [MN 33](#)

§ 103. “And how does restraint of the senses, when developed and pursued, lead to the culmination of the three courses of right conduct? There is the case where a monk, on seeing a pleasant form with the eye, does not hanker after it, does not delight in it, does not give rise to passion for it. Unmoved in body and unmoved in mind, he is inwardly well composed and well released. On seeing an unpleasant form with the eye, he is not upset, his mind is not unsettled, his feelings are not wounded, his mind does not become resentful. Unmoved in body and unmoved in mind, he is inwardly well composed and well released. [Similarly with the other sense media.]

“This is how restraint of the senses, when developed and pursued, leads to the culmination of the three courses of right conduct.” — *SN 46:6*

As we noted under *Form*, contemplation of the four properties helps to strengthen equanimity. This is because mindfulness of the body provides an anchor for the exercise of sense restraint.

§ 104. “And what is lack of restraint? There is the case where a monk, seeing a form with the eye, is obsessed with pleasing forms, is repelled by

unpleasing forms, and remains with body-mindfulness unestablished, with limited awareness. He does not discern, as it actually is present, the awareness-release, the discernment-release where any evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen utterly cease without remainder.

“Hearing a sound with the ear....

“Smelling an aroma with the nose....

“Tasting a flavor with the tongue....

“Touching a tactile sensation with the body....

“Cognizing an idea with the intellect, he is obsessed with pleasing ideas, is repelled by unpleasing ideas, and remains with body-mindfulness unestablished, with limited awareness. He does not discern, as it actually is present, the awareness-release, the discernment-release where any evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen utterly cease without remainder.

"Just as if a person, catching six animals of different ranges, of different habitats, were to bind them with a strong rope. Catching a snake, he would bind it with a strong rope. Catching a crocodile... a bird... a dog... a hyena... a monkey, he would bind it with a strong rope. Binding them all with a strong rope, and tying a knot in the middle, he would set chase to them.

“Then those six animals, of different ranges, of different habitats, would each pull toward its own range and habitat. The snake would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll go into the anthill.’ The crocodile would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll go into the water.’ The bird would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll fly up into the air.’ The dog would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll go into the village.’ The hyena would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll go into the charnel ground.’ The monkey would pull, thinking, ‘I’ll go into the forest.’ And when these six animals became internally exhausted, they would submit, they would surrender, they would come under the sway of whichever among them was the strongest. In the same way, when a monk whose mindfulness immersed in the body is undeveloped and unpursued, the eye pulls toward pleasing forms, while unpleasing forms are repellent. The ear pulls toward pleasing sounds.... The nose pulls toward pleasing aromas.... The tongue pulls toward pleasing flavors.... The body pulls toward pleasing tactile sensations.... The intellect pulls toward pleasing ideas, while unpleasing ideas are repellent. This, monks, is lack of restraint.

“And what is restraint? There is the case where a monk, seeing a form with the eye, is not obsessed with pleasing forms, is not repelled by unpleasing forms, and remains with body-mindfulness established, with immeasurable awareness. He discerns, as it has come to be, the release of awareness, the release of discernment where all evil, unskillful mental qualities that have arisen utterly cease without remainder. [Similarly with the other sense media.]

“Just as if a person, catching six animals of different ranges, of different habitats, were to bind them with a strong rope... and tether them to a strong post or stake.

“Then those six animals, of different ranges, of different habitats, would each pull toward its own range and habitat.... And when these six animals became internally exhausted, they would stand, sit, or lie down right there next to the post or stake. In the same way, when a monk whose mindfulness immersed in the body is developed and pursued, the eye does not pull toward pleasing forms, and unpleasing forms are not repellent. The ear does not pull toward pleasing sounds... the nose does not pull toward pleasing aromas... the tongue does not pull toward pleasing tastes... the body does not pull toward pleasing tactile sensations... the intellect does not pull toward pleasing ideas, and unpleasing ideas are not repellent. This, monks, is restraint.

“The ‘strong post or stake’ is a term for mindfulness immersed in the body. “Thus you should train yourselves: ‘We will develop mindfulness immersed in the body. We will pursue it, give it a means of transport, give it a grounding. We will steady it, consolidate it, and set about it properly.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.” — [SN 35:206](#)

§ 105. “Dependent on eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives [labels in the mind]. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions and categories of objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, and future forms cognizable via the eye. [Similarly with the other sense media.] — [MN 18](#)

§ 106. “Now suppose that in the autumn, when it’s raining in fat, heavy drops, a water bubble were to appear and disappear on the water, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, and appropriately examine it. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance, for what substance would there be in a water bubble? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, and appropriately examines any feeling that is past, future, or present, internal or external, blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near. To him — seeing it, observing it, and appropriately examining it — it would appear empty, void, without substance, for what substance would there be in feeling?” — [SN 22:95](#)

§ 107. “Now if internally the eye is intact but externally forms do not come into range, nor is there a corresponding engagement, then there is no appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and externally forms come into range, but there is no corresponding engagement, then there is no appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and externally forms come into range, and there is a corresponding engagement, then there is the appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness.

“The form of what has thus come into being is gathered under the form clinging-aggregate. The feeling of what has thus come into being is gathered under the feeling clinging-aggregate. The perception of what has thus come into being is gathered under the perception clinging-aggregate. The fabrications of what has thus come into being are gathered under the fabrication clinging-aggregate. The consciousness of what has thus come into being is gathered under the consciousness clinging-aggregate. One discerns, ‘This, it seems, is how there is the gathering, meeting, and convergence of these five clinging-aggregates. Now, the Blessed One has said, “Whoever sees dependent co-arising sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent co-arising.” And these things — the five clinging-aggregates — are dependently co-arisen. Any desire, embracing, grasping, and holding-on to these five clinging-aggregates is the origination of stress. Any subduing of desire and passion, any abandoning of desire and passion for these five clinging-aggregates is the cessation of stress.’ And even to this extent,

friends, the monk has accomplished a great deal. [Similarly with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect.]” — [MN 28](#)

§ 108. “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal and external sense media. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal and external sense media? There is the case where he discerns the eye, he discerns forms, he discerns the fetter that arises dependent on both. He discerns how there is the arising of an unarisen fetter. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of a fetter once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of a fetter that has been abandoned. [The same formula is repeated for the remaining sense media: ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect.]

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in and of themselves, or both internally and externally on mental qualities in and of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by/not clinging to anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal and external sense media.” — [DN 22](#)

§ 109. “As a monk is dwelling thus mindful and alert — heedful, ardent, and resolute — a feeling of pleasure arises in him. He discerns that ‘A feeling of pleasure has arisen in me. It is dependent on a requisite condition, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on this body. Now, this body is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. Being dependent on a body that is inconstant, fabricated, and dependently co-arisen, how can this feeling of pleasure that has arisen be constant?’ He remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the body and to the feeling of pleasure. He remains focused on dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to

the feeling of pleasure. As he remains focused on inconstancy... dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to the feeling of pleasure, he abandons any passion-obsession for the body and the feeling of pleasure.

“As he is dwelling thus mindful and alert — heedful, ardent, and resolute — a feeling of pain arises in him. He discerns that ‘A feeling of pain has arisen in me. It is dependent on a requisite condition, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on this body. Now, this body is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. Being dependent on a body that is inconstant, fabricated, and dependently co-arisen, how can this feeling of pain that has arisen be constant?’ He remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the body and to the feeling of pain. He remains focused on dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to the feeling of pain. As he remains focused on inconstancy... dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to the feeling of pain, he abandons any resistance/obsession for the body and the feeling of pain.

“As he is dwelling thus mindful and alert — heedful, ardent, and resolute — a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain arises in him. He discerns that ‘A feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain has arisen in me. It is dependent on a requisite condition, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on this body. Now, this body is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen. Being dependent on a body that is inconstant, fabricated, and dependently co-arisen, how can this feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain that has arisen be constant?’ He remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the body and to the feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He remains focused on dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to the feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. As he remains focused on inconstancy... dissolution... dispassion... cessation... relinquishment with regard to the body and to the feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he abandons any ignorance-obsession for the body and the feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain.

“Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he discerns that it is inconstant, not grasped at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pain.... Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he discerns that it is inconstant, not grasped

at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain.... Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he senses it disjoined from it. When sensing a feeling limited to the body, he discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ When sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ He discerns that ‘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 burns in dependence on oil and wick; and from the termination of the oil and wick — and from not being provided any other sustenance — it goes out unnourished; in the same way, when sensing a feeling limited to the body, he discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ When sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ He discerns that ‘With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here.’” — [SN 36:7](#)

CRAVING

As we noted in Chapter Two, the Pali word for craving — *taṇhā* — also means *thirst*. This is thus one of the factors of dependent co-arising that relates most directly to the image of feeding.

As a factor of dependent co-arising, craving is defined in terms of the objects of the six senses. However, craving can take any of three forms and can focus on a large number of locations related to the senses. In fact, in many of the discourses, the role of craving — together with clinging — is to create a sense of location around which a state of becoming can coalesce.

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

“And where does this craving, when arising, arise? And where, when dwelling, does it dwell? Whatever is endearing and alluring in terms of

the world; that is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“And what is endearing and alluring in terms of the world? The eye is endearing and alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“The ear.... The nose.... The tongue.... The body.... The intellect....

“Forms.... Sounds.... Aromas.... Tastes.... Tactile sensations.... Ideas....

“Eye-consciousness.... Ear-consciousness.... Nose-consciousness.... Tongue-consciousness.... Body-consciousness.... Intellect-consciousness....

“Eye-contact.... Ear-contact.... Nose-contact.... Tongue-contact.... Body-contact.... Intellect-contact....

“Feeling born of eye-contact.... Feeling born of ear-contact.... Feeling born of nose-contact.... Feeling born of tongue-contact.... Feeling born of body contact.... Feeling born of intellect-contact....

“Perception of forms.... Perception of sounds.... Perception of aromas.... Perception of tastes.... Perception of tactile sensations.... Perception of ideas....

“Intention for forms.... Intention for sounds.... Intention for aromas.... Intention for tastes.... Intention for tactile sensations.... Intention for ideas....

“Craving for forms.... Craving for sounds.... Craving for aromas.... Craving for tastes.... Craving for tactile sensations.... Craving for ideas....

“Thought directed at forms.... Thought directed at sounds.... Thought directed at aromas.... Thought directed at tastes.... Thought directed at tactile sensations.... Thought directed at ideas....

“Evaluation of forms.... Evaluation of sounds.... Evaluation of aromas.... Evaluation of tastes.... Evaluation of tactile sensations.... Evaluation of ideas is endearing and alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“This is called the noble truth of the origination of stress.

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

“And where, when being abandoned, is this craving abandoned? And where, when ceasing, does it cease? Whatever is endearing and alluring in terms of the world: that is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“And what is endearing and alluring in terms of the world? The eye is endearing and alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“The ear.... The nose.... The tongue.... The body.... The intellect....

“Forms.... Sounds.... Aromas.... Tastes.... Tactile sensations.... Ideas....

“Eye-consciousness.... Ear-consciousness.... Nose-consciousness.... Tongue-consciousness.... Body-consciousness.... Intellect-consciousness....

“Eye-contact.... Ear-contact.... Nose-contact.... Tongue-contact.... Bodycontact.... Intellect-contact....

“Feeling born of eye-contact.... Feeling born of ear-contact.... Feeling born of nose-contact.... Feeling born of tongue-contact.... Feeling born of body-contact.... Feeling born of intellect-contact....

“Perception of forms.... Perception of sounds.... Perception of aromas.... Perception of tastes.... Perception of tactile sensations.... Perception of ideas....

“Intention for forms.... Intention for sounds.... Intention for aromas.... Intention for tastes.... Intention for tactile sensations.... Intention for ideas....

“Craving for forms.... Craving for sounds.... Craving for aromas.... Craving for tastes.... Craving for tactile sensations.... Craving for ideas....

“Thought directed at forms.... Thought directed at sounds.... Thought directed at aromas.... Thought directed at tastes.... Thought directed at tactile sensations.... Thought directed at ideas....

“Evaluation of forms.... Evaluation of sounds.... Evaluation of aromas.... Evaluation of tastes.... Evaluation of tactile sensations.... Evaluation of ideas is endearing and alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“This is called the noble truth of the cessation of stress.” — [DN 22](#)

The following passage expands on the concept of location. Although it is possible to feel desire or passion for forms that one has not yet seen, the desire and passion is actually located at the idea of those forms. This is an important point to keep in mind when trying to observe the role of location in the workings of the mind.

§ 111. “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, that 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.” — [SN 35:95](#)

The first of the three types of craving, *sensuality-craving*, is — strictly speaking — aimed not at attractive sensual objects but at the mind’s plans and resolves surrounding those objects. The mind is actually more attached to the activity of planning and resolving on its sensual pleasures than to the pleasures themselves.

§ 112. “There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing; sounds cognizable via the ear... aromas cognizable via the nose... flavors cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. But these are not sensuality. They are called strings of sensuality in the discipline of the noble ones.

The passion for his resolves is a man’s sensuality,

not the beautiful sensual pleasures
found in the world.

The passion for his resolves is a man's sensuality.

The beauties remain as they are in the world,

while the wise, in this regard,

subdue their desire. — [AN 6:63](#)

The second of the three types of craving — *becoming-craving* — is focused on the process whereby the mind takes on an identity within a world of experience. This combination of identity-within-a-world is produced by consciousness and craving focused on the potentials provided by the field of one's kamma, past and present.

§ 113. *Ven. Ānanda*: This word, 'becoming, becoming'—to what extent is there becoming?

The Buddha: If there were no kamma ripening in the property of sensuality, would sensual becoming be discerned?

Ven. Ānanda: No, lord.

The Buddha: Thus kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture. The intention and determination of living beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving is established in/tuned to a lower property. Thus there is the production of renewed becoming in the future.”

[Similarly for the more refined properties of form-becoming and formless becoming.]

— [AN 3:77](#)

The following passage is the only place in the discourses where a working definition of non-becoming — the object of the third of the three types of craving — can be found. It also is one of the few passages providing a sense of how to escape the paradox of craving and becoming. If craving for becoming produces suffering, and craving for non-becoming also produces becoming — which involves more suffering — it would seem that there would be no way to escape suffering. However, as this passage points out, it is possible to develop a state of mind that focuses not on the process

of becoming or non-becoming, but simply on the raw material of experience as it has come to be. When the mind is in this state, it can avoid both kinds of craving and thus arrive at the end of suffering and stress.

§ 114. “Overcome by two viewpoints, some human and divine beings adhere, other human and divine beings slip right past, while those with vision see. “And how do some adhere? Human and divine beings enjoy becoming, delight in becoming, are satisfied with becoming. When the Dhamma is being taught for the sake of the cessation of becoming, their minds do not take to it, are not calmed by it, do not settle on it or become resolved on it. This is how some adhere.

“And how do some slip right past? Some, feeling horrified, humiliated, and disgusted with that very becoming, relish non-becoming: ‘When this self, at the break-up of the body, after death, perishes and is destroyed, and does not exist after death, that is peaceful, that is exquisite, that is sufficiency!’ This is how some slip right past.

“And how do those with vision see? There is the case where a monk sees what has come into being as come into being. Seeing what has come into being as come into being, he practices for disenchantment with what has come into being, dispassion toward what has come into being, cessation of what has come into being. This is how those with vision see.”

— [*Iti 49*](#)

To bring the mind to the point where it can develop this vision, however, one has to develop strong concentration. And concentration builds on the desire to get the mind centered. In this way, even though craving and desire are ultimately abandoned at the end of the path, they first need to be skillfully developed through conviction to provide the original impetus to get on the path.

§ 115. I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Ānanda was staying in Kosambī, at Ghosita’s Park. Then the brāhman Uṇṇābha went to Ven. Ānanda.... After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ānanda: “Master Ānanda, what is the aim of this holy life lived under the contemplative Gotama?”

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

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

“Yes, there is a path, there is a practice, for the abandoning of that desire.”

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

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

“If that’s so, Master Ānanda, then it’s an endless path, and not one with an end, for it’s impossible that one could abandon desire by means of desire.” “In that case, brāhman, let me question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think, didn’t you first have desire, thinking, ‘I’ll go to the park,’ and then when you reached the park, wasn’t that particular desire allayed?”

“Yes, sir”

“So it is with an arahant whose effluents are ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who is released through right gnosis. Whatever desire he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining arahantship that particular desire is allayed.... So what do you think, brāhman? Is this an endless path, or one with an end?”

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

§ 116. *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-and-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered and remains in the

effluent-free awareness-release and discernment-release, having known and realized them for himself in the here and now.’ The thought occurs to him, ‘I hope that I, too, will — through the ending of the effluents — enter and remain in the effluent-free awareness-release and discernment-release, having directly known and realized them for myself right in the here and now.’ Then, at a later time, he abandons craving, having relied on craving.” — [AN 4:159](#)

CLINGING

As we noted in Chapter Two, the Pali word for clinging — *upādāna* — also means sustenance, both the food that provides sustenance and the act of taking sustenance from that food. This is thus another factor directly related to the image of feeding. Clinging takes sustenance from the five aggregates — which, as we have seen in [§107](#) — develop from sensory contact and provide sustenance for becoming.

§ 117. *Visākha*: “Is it the case, lady, that clinging is the same thing as the five clinging-aggregates or is it something separate?”

Sister Dhammānā: “Friend Visākha, neither is clinging the same thing as the five clinging-aggregates, nor is it something separate. Whatever desire and passion there is with regard to the five clinging-aggregates, that is the clinging there.” — [MN 44](#)

As noted in [§14](#), there are four types of clinging: sensuality-clinging, view-clinging, habit-and-practice-clinging, and doctrine-of-self-clinging. To develop dispassion for **sensuality-clinging**, the Canon recommends weighing the allure of sensuality against its drawbacks. This is because the mind addicted to any form of unskillful behavior tends to exaggerate the allure and to turn a blind eye to the drawbacks of that behavior. Thus both the allure and the drawbacks have to be clearly seen for what they are. To help in this process, the Canon also recommends a number of perceptions for bringing the drawbacks of sensuality into sharp relief.

§ 118. “Now what, monks, is the allure of sensuality?... Whatever pleasure or happiness arises in dependence on the five strings of sensuality, that is the allure of sensuality.

“And what is the drawback of sensuality? There is the case where, on account of the occupation by which a clansman makes a living — whether checking or accounting or calculating or plowing or trading or cattle-tending or archery or as a king’s man, or whatever the occupation may be — he faces cold, he faces heat, being harassed by mosquitoes and flies, wind and sun and creeping things, dying from hunger and thirst.

“Now this drawback in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason, sensuality for its source, sensuality for its cause, the reason being simply sensuality.

“If the clansman gains no wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught: ‘My work is in vain, my efforts are fruitless!’....

“If the clansman gains wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he experiences pain and distress in protecting it: ‘How will neither kings nor thieves make off with my property, nor fire burn it, nor water sweep it away, nor hateful heirs make off with it?’ And as he thus guards and watches over his property, kings or thieves make off with it, or fire burns it, or water sweeps it away, or hateful heirs make off with it. And he sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught: ‘What was mine is no more!’....

“Again, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source, sensuality for the cause, the reason being simply sensuality, that kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brāhmans with brāhmans, householders with householders, mother with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father, brother with brother, sister with sister, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. And then in their quarrels, brawls, and disputes, they attack one another with fists or with clods or with sticks or with knives, so that they incur death or deadly pain....

“Again, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source... that (men), taking swords and shields and buckling on bows and quivers, charge into battle massed in double array while arrows and spears are flying and swords are flashing; and there they are wounded by arrows

and spears, and their heads are cut off by swords, so that they incur death or deadly pain....

“Again, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source... that (men), taking swords and shields and buckling on bows and quivers, charge slippery bastions while arrows and spears are flying and swords are flashing; and there they are splashed with boiling cow dung and crushed under heavy weights, and their heads are cut off by swords, so that they incur death or deadly pain.... “Again, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source... that (men) break into windows, seize plunder, commit burglary, ambush highways, commit adultery, and when they are captured, kings have them tortured in many ways. They flog them with whips, beat them with canes, beat them with clubs. They cut off their hands, cut off their feet, cut off their hands and feet. They cut off their ears, cut off their noses, cut off their ears and noses. They subject them to [many graphic tortures]. They have them splashed with boiling oil, devoured by dogs, impaled alive on stakes. They have their heads cut off with swords, so that they incur death or deadly pain. Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason, sensuality for its source, sensuality for its cause, the reason being simply sensuality.

“Again, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source... that (people) engage in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, mental misconduct. Having engaged in bodily, verbal, and mental misconduct, they — on the breakup of the body, after death — re-appear in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress in the future life, has sensuality for its reason, sensuality for its source, sensuality for its cause, the reason being simply sensuality.

“And what, monks, is the escape from sensuality? The subduing of desire/passion for sensuality, the abandoning of desire-passion for sensuality: That is the escape from sensuality.” — [*MN 13*](#)

§ 119. “Suppose a dog, overcome with weakness and hunger, were to come across a slaughterhouse, and there a dexterous butcher or butcher’s apprentice were to fling him a chain of bones, thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, smeared with blood. What do you think?

Would the dog, gnawing on that chain of bones — thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, smeared with blood — appease its weakness and hunger?”

“No, lord. And why is that? Because the chain of bones is thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, and smeared with blood. The dog would get nothing but its share of weariness and vexation.”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a chain of bones, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose a vulture, a kite, or a hawk, seizing a lump of flesh, were to take off, and other vultures, kites, or hawks, following right after it, were to tear at it with their beaks and pull at it with their claws. What do you think? If that vulture, kite, or hawk were not quickly to drop that lump of flesh, would it meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point, ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a lump of flesh, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose a man were to come against the wind, carrying a burning grass torch. What do you think? If he were not quickly to drop that grass torch, would he burn his hand or his arm or some other part of his body, so that he would meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point, ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a grass torch, of

much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man’s height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along, loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, abhorring pain, and two strong men, grabbing him with their arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. What do you think? Wouldn’t the man twist his body this way and that?” “Yes, lord. And why is that? Because he would realize, ‘If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.’”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point, ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a pit of glowing embers, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose a man, when dreaming, were to see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes, and on awakening were to see nothing. In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a dream, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose a man having borrowed some goods — a manly carriage, fine jewels, and ear ornaments — were to go into the market preceded and surrounded by his borrowed goods, and people seeing him would say, ‘How wealthy this man is, for this is how the wealthy enjoy their possessions,’ but the actual owners, wherever they might see him,

would strip him then and there of what is theirs. What do you think: Would the man justifiably be upset?”

“No, lord.

And why is that? Because the owners are stripping him of what is theirs.”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point, ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to borrowed goods, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.

“Now suppose that, not far from a village or town, there were a dense forest grove, and there in the grove was a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, but with no fruit fallen to the ground. A man would come along, desiring fruit, looking for fruit, searching for fruit. Plunging into the forest grove, he would see the tree... and the thought would occur to him, ‘This is a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, and there is no fruit fallen to the ground, but I know how to climb a tree. Why don’t I climb the tree, eat what I like, and fill my clothes with the fruit?’ So, having climbed the tree, he would eat what he liked and fill his clothes with the fruit. Then a second man would come along, desiring fruit, looking for fruit, searching for fruit and carrying a sharp ax. Plunging into the forest grove, he would see the tree... and the thought would occur to him, ‘This is a tree with delicious fruit, abundant fruit, and there is no fruit fallen to the ground, and I don’t know how to climb a tree. Why don’t I chop down this tree at the root, eat what I like, and fill my clothes with the fruit?’ So he would chop the tree at the root. What do you think: If the first man who climbed the tree didn’t quickly come down, wouldn’t the falling tree crush his hand or foot or some other part of his body, so that he would meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: ‘The Blessed One has compared sensuality to the fruits of a tree, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.’ Seeing this with right discernment, as it has come to be, then avoiding the

equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity, he develops the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, where sustenance/clinging for the baits of the world ceases without trace.” — [MN 54](#).

Because a person engaged in the practice cannot do without sensory pleasures, the Buddha recommends developing alertness in one’s use of the requisites so as not to be pulled into sensual clinging. One is advised to develop contentment with what one has — and to beware of any pride that might develop around that contentment — and to reflect on the valid reasons for the requisites each time they are used.

§ 120. “There is the case where a monk is content with any old cloth at all. He speaks in praise of being content with any old cloth at all. He doesn’t, for the sake of cloth, do anything unseemly or inappropriate. Not getting cloth, he isn’t agitated. Getting cloth, he uses it unattached to it, uninfatuated, guiltless, seeing the drawbacks (of attachment to it), and discerning the escape from them. He doesn’t, on account of his contentment with any old cloth at all, exalt himself or disparage others. In this he is diligent, deft, alert, and mindful. This is said to be a monk standing firm in the ancient, original traditions of the noble ones.”
[Similarly with food and lodging.] — [AN 4:28](#)

§ 121. “There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, uses cloth simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles, simply for the purpose of covering the parts of the body that cause shame.

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

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses lodging simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind,

sun, and reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion.

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

Although **view-clinging** is the second type of clinging, and so eventually must be abandoned, a person engaged in the practice cannot do without right views. This continues a pattern that has appeared repeatedly throughout these passages: Just as one needs to feed skillfully in order ultimately to go beyond the need to feed, and just as one needs to use perception and feeling in order ultimately to go beyond attachment to perception and feeling, one needs to use skillful views in order to go beyond the need for views.

We have already seen that right view is defined as seeing things in terms of the four noble truths. In the most advanced stage of right view, one engages the mind in the process of watching the events of the sensory world arise and pass away. When the mind is engaged in this process, concepts of “existence” and “non-existence” do not occur to it as relevant to what one is watching. This places the mind in a position where it can view the factors of dependent co-arising purely as events, and events purely as stress. When one sees them purely in these terms — instead of as necessary aspects of one’s self or the world — one is in a position to abandon them.

§ 122. Then Ven. Kaccāyana Gotta approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “Lord, ‘Right view, right view,’ it is said. To what extent is there right view?”

“By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is supported by/takes as its object a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world with right discernment as it has come to be, ‘non-existence’ with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world with right discernment as it has come to be, ‘existence’ with reference to the world does not occur to one.

“By and large, Kaccāyana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings/sustenances, and 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 mere stress, when arising, is arising; stress, when passing away, is passing away. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It’s to this extent, Kaccāyana, that there is right view.

“‘All exists’: That is one extreme. ‘All 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....” — [*SN 12:15*](#)

Right view, in seeing all things as events, is also in a position to see itself as an event. Thus, when it has done its job in cutting through attachment to views about one’s self or the world, it can turn back on itself as well. In this way, it contains the means for its own transcendence.

§ 123. Now on that occasion the wanderers of other persuasions had come together in a gathering and were sitting, discussing many kinds of bestial topics, making a great noise and racket. They saw Anāthapiṇḍika the householder coming from afar, and on seeing him, hushed one another: “Be quiet, good sirs. Don’t make any noise. Here comes Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, a disciple of the contemplative Gotama. He is one of those disciples of the contemplative Gotama, clad in white, who lives in Savatthī. These people are fond of quietude, trained in quietude, and speak in praise of quietude. Maybe, if he perceives our group as quiet, he will consider it worth his while to come our way.” So the wanderers fell silent.

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 and 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 and 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 and 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 for the other positions.]

When this had been said, the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, “We have each and 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. — [AN 10:93](#)

§ 124. “This, monks, the Tathāgata discerns. And he discerns that these standpoints, thus seized, thus grasped at, lead to such and such a destination, to such and such a state in the world beyond. And he discerns what surpasses this. And yet he does not grasp at that act of discerning. As he is not grasping, Unbinding [*nibbuti*] is experienced right within. Knowing, as they have come to be, the origin, ending, allure, and drawbacks of feelings, along with the emancipation from feelings, the Tathāgata, monks — through lack of sustenance/clinging — is released.” — [DN 1](#)

Habit-and-practice-clinging is the third type of clinging, and here a similar dynamic holds. A person engaged in the path needs to develop the skillful habits of right speech, right action, and right livelihood, and the skillful practices of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, even though eventually he/she will have to abandon these habits and practices. But their abandoning does not

mean reverting to unskillful behavior. Instead, it means continuing to follow skillful habits and practices but without fashioning a sense of self-identity around them.

§ 125. “Now where do unskillful habits cease without trace?... There is the case where a monk abandons wrong bodily conduct and develops right bodily conduct, abandons wrong verbal conduct and develops right verbal conduct, abandons wrong livelihood and maintains his life with right livelihood.... Now where do skillful habits cease without trace?... There is the case where a monk is virtuous, but not fashioned of virtue [*na sīlamaya*].” — [MN 78](#)

§ 126. “A person of no integrity... enters and remains in the first jhāna. He notices, ‘I have gained the attainment of the first jhāna, but these other monks have not gained the attainment of the first jhāna.’ He exalts himself for the attainment of the first jhāna and disparages others. This is the quality of a person of no integrity.

“A person of integrity notices, ‘The Blessed One has spoken of nonfashioning [*atammayatā* — literally, “not-made-of-that-ness”] even with regard to the attainment of the first jhāna, for however they construe it, it becomes otherwise.’ So, making non-fashioning his focal point, he neither exalts himself for the attainment of the first jhāna nor disparages others. This is the quality of a person of integrity.” — [MN 113](#)

A similar dynamic also applies to the abandoning of the fourth type of clinging, **doctrine-of-self-clinging**. To function on the earlier stages of the path, one needs a sense of oneself — even if it is not fully articulated as a self-doctrine — as being responsible and self-reliant.

§ 127. “I am the owner of actions [*kamma*], heir to actions, born of actions, related through actions, and have actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.’ This is the fifth fact that one should reflect on often, whether one is a woman or a man, lay or ordained.” — [AN 5:57](#)

A perception of self defined around self-honor, combined with a sense of urgency in relieving one's own suffering, can also function as a skillful impetus to practice.

§ 128. “And what is the self as a governing principle? There is the case where a monk, having gone to a wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, reflects on this, ‘It’s not for the sake of robes that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness; it’s not for the sake of almsfood, for the sake of lodgings, or for the sake of this or that state of [future] becoming that I have gone forth from the home life into homelessness. Simply that I am beset by birth, aging, and death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress, [and I hope,] “Perhaps the end of this entire mass of suffering and stress might be known!” Now, if I were to seek the same sort of sensual pleasures that I abandoned in going forth from home into homelessness — or a worse sort — that would not be fitting for me.’ So he reflects on this: ‘My persistence will be aroused and not lax, my mindfulness established and not confused, my body calm and not aroused, my mind centered and unified.’ Having made himself his governing principle, he abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is unblameworthy, and looks after himself in a pure way. This is called the self as a governing principle.” — [AN3:40](#)

In these early stages of the path, the perception of not-self can be applied to the unskillful habits and practices one hopes to abandon. But as skillful habits and practices become more firmly established, the perception of not-self can be applied to the five aggregates in all their aspects, as a means for cutting through clinging to any source of suffering.

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

“Feeling is not-self

“Perception is not-self

“Fabrications are not-self

“Consciousness is not-self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not-self, consciousness lends itself to disease. And it is 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 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 with right discernment as it has come to
be as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'" — [SN 22:59](#)

§ 130. "Monks, you would do well to cling to that doctrine-of-self-clinging, clinging to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. But do you see a doctrine-of-self-clinging, clinging to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair?"

"No, lord."

"Very good, monks. Neither do I....

"What do you think, monks? If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches and leaves here in Jeta's Grove, would the thought occur to you, 'It's us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes'?"

"No, lord."

Why is that? Because those things are not our self, nor do they belong to our self."

"Even so, monks, whatever isn't yours, let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness. And what isn't yours? Form isn't yours... Feeling isn't yours... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness." — [MN 22](#)

Ultimately, the perception of not-self is applied not only to the five aggregates, but also to the lower stages of Awakening, where one experiences the deathless as a phenomenon, or object of the mind, and can still develop a sense of passion for it (see [§86](#)). The

perception of not-self, applied at this stage, can help to develop a sense of dispassion even there.

§ 131. When you see with discernment,
‘*All dhammas [phenomena] are not-self*’ —
you grow disenchanted with stress.
This is the path
to purity. — [Dhp 279](#)

At the ultimate stage of Awakening, one arrives at the point where the deathless is experienced not as a phenomenon, but as the ending of phenomena.

§ 132. “All phenomena gain a footing in the deathless.
“All phenomena have Unbinding as their final end.” — [AN 10:58](#)

At this point, one no longer holds to any doctrine of the existence or non-existence of the self, for as we have seen in [§122](#), concepts of existence and non-existence are now irrelevant to one’s mode of experience.

§ 133. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he asked the Blessed One: “Now then, Master Gotama, is there a self?”

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

“Then is there no self?”

A second time, the Blessed One was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “Why, lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?”

“Ānanda, if I — being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self — were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with

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

“No, lord.”

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

§ 134. *Upasīva:*

One who has reached the end:
does he not exist,
or is he for eternity
free from affliction?
Please, sage, declare this to me
as this phenomenon has been known by you.

The Buddha:

One who has reached the end has no criterion
by which anyone would say that —
it does not exist for him.
When all phenomena are done away with
all means of speaking
are done away with as well. — [Sn 5:6](#)

BECOMING

Stages of right concentration are states of becoming on the level of form and formlessness. Thus the path involves bringing states of

becoming into being. However, as we have noted many times, one must ultimately learn to see the drawbacks even of these refined states of becoming if one is to gain full Awakening.

§ 135. “Just as even a small amount of excrement is foul smelling, in the same way I do not praise even a small amount of becoming, even for the extent of a finger-snap.” — *AN 1:202*

§ 136. I have heard that on one occasion, when the Blessed One was newly Awakened — staying at Uruvela by the banks of the Nerañjara River in the shade of the Bodhi tree, the tree of Awakening — he sat in the shade of the Bodhi tree for seven days in one session, sensitive to the bliss of release. At the end of seven days, after emerging from that concentration, he surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As he did so, he saw living beings burning with the many fevers and aflame with the many fires born of passion, aversion, and delusion. Then, on realizing the significance of that, he on that occasion exclaimed:

This world is burning.
Afflicted by contact,
it calls disease a ‘self.’
By whatever it construes (things),
that’s always otherwise.
Becoming otherwise,
the world is
 held by becoming
 afflicted by becoming
and yet delights
 in that very becoming.
Where there’s delight,
 there is fear.
What one fears
 is stressful.
This holy life is lived
for the abandoning of becoming.

Whatever priests or contemplatives say that liberation from becoming is by means of becoming, all of them are not released from becoming, I

say.

And whatever priests or contemplatives say that escape from becoming is by means of non-becoming, all of them have not escaped from becoming, I say.

This stress comes into play
in dependence on all acquisitions.
With the ending of all clinging/sustenance,
there's no stress coming into play.
Look at this world:
Beings, afflicted with thick ignorance,
are unreleased
from delight in what has come to be.
All levels of becoming,
anywhere,
in any way,
are inconstant, stressful, subject to change.
Seeing this — as it's come to be —
with right discernment,
one abandons craving for becoming,
without delighting in non-becoming.
From the total ending of craving
come fading and cessation without remainder:
Unbinding.
For the monk unbound
through lack of clinging/sustenance,
there's no further becoming.
He has conquered Māra,
won the battle.
gone beyond all becomings:
Such. — [Ud 3:10](#)

BIRTH

Perceptions [8] and [9] in [§79](#) are examples of perceptions meant to induce dispassion for birth on any level of becoming. This dispassion is necessary in the path to the end of suffering, for birth

leads not only to inevitable aging and death, but also to all the pains and instabilities that come from having to subsist on food.

§ 137. Then, early in the morning, Calā the nun put on her robes and, taking her bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvatthī for alms. When she had gone for alms in Sāvatthī and had returned from her alms round, after her meal she went to the Grove of the Blind to spend the day. Having gone deep into the Grove of the Blind, she sat down at the foot of a tree for the day's abiding.

Then Māra the Evil One, wanting to arouse fear, horripilation, and terror in her, wanting to make her fall from solitude, approached her and said, "What is it that you don't approve of, nun?"

"I don't approve of birth, my friend."

Māra:

"Why don't you approve of birth?
One who is born
enjoys sensual pleasures.
Who on earth
ever persuaded you:
'Nun, don't approve of birth?'"

Sister Calā:

"For one who is born
there's death.
One who is born
sees pain.
It's a binding, a flogging, a torment.
That's why one shouldn't approve
of birth.

The Awakened One taught me the Dhamma
— the overcoming of birth —
for the abandoning of all pain.
He established me in
the truth.

But beings who have come to form
and those with a share in the formless,
if they don't discern cessation,
return to becoming-again."

Then Māra the Evil One — sad and dejected at realizing, "Calā the nun knows me" — vanished right there. — [SN 5:6](#)

In addition to these reminders of the drawbacks of birth, the Buddha also recommended the recollection of peace — the peace that comes from finding the unborn — as a reminder of the unhungering freedom that can come from discarding any desire to be reborn.

§ 138. "There is, monks, an unborn—unbecome—unmade—unfabricated. If there were not that unborn—unbecome—unmade—unfabricated, there would not be the case that emancipation from the born—become—made—fabricated would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn—unbecome—unmade—unfabricated, emancipation from the born—become—made—fabricated is discerned." — [Ud 8:3](#)

§ 139. *Sister Guttā:*

Discarding birth and wandering-on,
comprehending further becoming,
free from hunger
in the right-here-and-now
you will go about
totally calmed. — [Thig 6:7](#)

AGING-AND-DEATH

Reflecting on the aging and death of other individuals helps to undercut lust. Reflecting on one's own inevitable aging and death inspires heedfulness in developing skillful qualities of mind and acting in skillful ways, the sort of skillful kamma that will lead to rebirth on pleasant levels of becoming. Reflecting on the inevitability

of aging and death in any level of becoming on which one might take rebirth, however, induces a sense of urgency in pursuing the path that leads beyond all becoming, birth, aging, and death so as to arrive at the deathless.

§ 140. “Now what, monks, is the allure of forms? Suppose there were a maiden of the noble caste, the brāhman caste, or the householder class, fifteen or sixteen years old, neither too tall nor too short, neither too thin nor too plump, neither too dark nor too pale. Is her beauty and charm at that time at its height?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Whatever pleasure and happiness arise in dependence on that beauty and charm, that is the allure of forms.”

“And what is the drawback of forms? There is the case where one might see that very same woman at a later time, when she’s eighty, ninety, one hundred years old, aged, roof-rafter crooked, bent-over, supported by a cane, palsied, miserable, broken-toothed, gray-haired, scanty-haired, bald, wrinkled, her body all blotchy. What do you think? Has her earlier beauty and charm vanished, and the drawback appeared?”

“Yes, lord.”

“This, monks, is the drawback of forms.

“Again, one might see that very same woman sick, in pain, and seriously ill, lying soiled with her own urine and excrement, lifted up by others, laid down by others. What do you think? Has her earlier beauty and charm vanished, and the drawback appeared?”

“Yes, lord.”

“This too, monks, is the drawback of forms.

“Again, one might see that very same woman as a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, one day, two days, three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing. What do you think? Has her earlier beauty and charm vanished, and the drawback appeared?”

“Yes, lord.”

“This too, monks, is the drawback of forms.” — [*MN 13*](#)

§ 141. “Furthermore, as if he [a meditating monk] were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, one day, two days, three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing, he applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too, such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate’...

“Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, picked at by crows, vultures, and hawks, by dogs, hyenas, and various other creatures... a skeleton smeared with flesh and blood, connected with tendons... a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons... a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons... bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions... here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull... the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells... piled up, more than a year old... decomposed into a powder... He applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.’” — [DN 22](#)

§ 142. *Ven. Mahākāla:*

This swarthy woman
[preparing a corpse for cremation]
— crow-like, enormous —
breaking a thigh and then the other
thigh,
breaking an arm and then the other
arm,
cracking open the head,
like a pot of curds,
she sits with them heaped up beside her.
Whoever, unknowing,
makes acquisitions
— the fool —
returns over and over
to suffering and stress.
So, discerning,

don't make acquisitions.

May I never lie
with my head cracked open
again. — [Thag 2:16](#)

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

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

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

“Now, a disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one subject to death, who has not gone beyond death. To the extent that there are beings — past and future, passing away and re-arising — all beings are subject to death, have not gone beyond death.’ When he/she often reflects on this, the path takes birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, and cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed.” — [AN 5:57](#)

§ 144. “Monks, mindfulness of death — when developed and pursued — is of great fruit and great benefit. It gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end. And how is mindfulness of death developed and pursued so that it is of great fruit and great benefit, gains a footing in the deathless, and has the deathless as its final end?

“There is the case where a monk, as day departs and night returns, reflects, ‘Many are the (possible) causes of my death. A snake might bite me, a scorpion might sting me, a centipede might bite me. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me. Stumbling, I might fall, my food, digested, might trouble me, my bile might be provoked, my phlegm... piercing wind forces (in the body) might be provoked. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me.’ Then the monk should investigate: ‘Are there any evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by me that would be an obstruction for me if I were to die in the night?’ If, on reflecting, he realizes that there are evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him if he were to die in the night, then he should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, and alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, and alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head, in the same way the monk should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, and alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. But if, on reflecting, he realizes that there are no evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him if he were to die in the night, then for that very reason he should dwell in joy and rapture, training himself day and night in skillful qualities.

“Further, there is the case where a monk, as night departs and day returns, reflects, ‘Many are the (possible) causes of my death....’ Then the monk should investigate: ‘Are there any evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by me that would be an obstruction for me if I were to die during the day?’ If, on reflecting, he realizes that there are evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him if he were to die during the day, then he should put forth extra

desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, and alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities.... But if, on reflecting, he realizes that there are no evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him if he were to die during the day, then for that very reason he should dwell in joy and rapture, training himself day and night in skillful qualities.

“This, monks, is how mindfulness of death is developed and pursued so that it is of great fruit and great benefit, gains a footing in the deathless, and has the deathless as its final end.” — [AN 6:20](#)

§ 145. *Ven. Valliya:*

What needs to be done
with firm persistence,
what needs to be done
by one who hopes for Awakening:

That I will do.

I will not fail.

See: persistence and striving!

You show me the path:

straight,
gaining a footing
in the deathless.

I, through sagacity,
will reach it, know it,
as the stream of the Ganges,
the sea. — [Thag 2:24](#).

GLOSSARY

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

Bodhi: Awakening.

Brahmā: An inhabitant of the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahman: In Upaniṣadic texts, the source from which the cosmos as a whole emanates.

Brāhman: A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, “brāhman” 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 (devatā): Literally, “shining one.” An inhabitant of the heavenly realms.

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

Gotama: The Buddha’s clan name.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion.

Kamma: (1) Intentional action, (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

Khandha: Aggregate, physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa* — physical form, *vedanā* — feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain, *saññā* — perception,

mental label, *saṅkhāra* — fabrication, thought construct, and *viññāṇa* — sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha*.

Māra: The personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from the round of death and rebirth.

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. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

Pajāpati: A high-ranking deva, second in command to the king of his particular deva realm.

Pāli: The language of the oldest extant Canon of the Buddha’s teachings.

Sakyan: An inhabitant of the Sakyan republic, the Buddha’s home territory.

Saṅgha: On the conventional (*sammatti*) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns. On the ideal (*ariya*) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry.

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

ABBREVIATIONS

PĀLI TEXTS

<i>AN</i>	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
<i>Dhp</i>	<i>Dhammapada</i>
<i>Iti</i>	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
<i>Khp</i>	<i>Khuddakapāṭha</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</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). Those to Dhp are to verse. References to other texts are to section (saṃyutta, nipāta, or vagga) and discourse.

All translations from these texts are by the author, and are based on the Royal Thai Edition of the Pali Canon (Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rājavidyālaya, 1982).

UPANIṢADS

<i>BAU</i>	<i>Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
<i>ChU</i>	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>MaiU</i>	<i>Maitrī Upaniṣad</i>

TU Taittirīya Upaniṣad

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