

A Gradual Awakening

A Book of Essays

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Preface

This book was written, compiled and edited at the request of the World Buddhist University, which is a part of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which has its world headquarters located in Bangkok, Thailand. Part of the WFB and WBU programs is to sponsor both written publications and public lectures. This present text was planned, originally, to become a series of lectures and, then, ended-up becoming a full-length book. After an opening essay on contemporary relevancy, the rest of the essays and textual material follows a gradual process of awakening much in the manner of the gradual sayings.

What's Wrong at the Root of our Society?

Rather than pointing the finger at others within our own socio-cultural environment and laying deserved blame on them, [arousing their resentment and enmity and hate], and, thereby causing them to act aggressively [and probably covertly] towards us, [which is obviously potentially and personally dangerous], we should be collectively, as the silent majority, coming to the same conclusion, which is that if we were, each, to work individually and independently on developing our own wholesome, internal, mental culture, (*bhavana*,) our culture and society, on the whole, over time, would, — while being based upon concurrently strengthening and enforcing law and order, — our society could eventually be considerably, collectively-improved.

The [bad guys] the unwholesome element would, of course, inevitably and inexorably still be there, trying to take advantage of others, characteristically, [both secretly and openly], and selfishly and ignorantly increasing their bases of wealth and power and reinforcing their personal 'self-images' with no care for anybody but themselves and their cronies and a flock of fellow-conspirers and accomplices who must also be paid-off.

But it is not uplifting to the mind to dwell on the selfish actions of others, so let's look at the problem from a personal perspective.

Quite paradoxically and rather ironically, we should start criticizing what is wrong with our society by looking within ourselves, and, then, begin to strive diligently to correct the not-so-wholesome elements which we slowly-but-surely begin to recognize within ourselves, which we know are common to all of humanity, [regardless of land or culture or country].

Rather than asking what is wrong with today's changing society and eroding culture, one ought to ask first, "What is wrong with me?" or "What is wrong with ourselves that we have created such an insufferable society, especially against the background of what may be called a pure and noble ancient cultural tradition?"

"Why is it that the majority of people, in a land which has long been primarily based on Buddhist culture [while protecting and respecting other religions and minority groups] — why is it that the majority of people in contemporary society do not follow the Noble Eightfold path in the way which it was outlined by the Buddha, based on his understanding of the wisdom of the Dhamma?"

Why are individuals not striving to be good citizens? Why are our people culturally-conditioned to stand back passively and allow the blatantly-selfish rogues around us to acquire money and power unlawfully, and go on feeding-frenzy after feeding-frenzy, continuously and relentlessly, in a way which, both undermines the ancient values of our highly-revered culture and is detrimental and deconstructive to the base of our contemporary society.

Despite the fact that the attachments and tendencies within the minds of all mundane people, [from the rural poor, street vendors, merchants, business people, politicians, social reformers and corrupt tycoons alike, for example], many people of our nation are far-too- frequently, like lotuses, born in darkness and muck and, causally dependent only

upon their own ignorance, and, thus, unfortunately and inevitably, blindly following the immediate impulses of their own untrained, untamed, bodies and minds, and will, still, continue to almost always do that which is advantageous for themselves, at the moment, before, considering the wider-good of others and the good of society at large.

Is there not some way to change this?

What is wrong with our culture, on the whole, is to be found within each single, individual citizen, whether he be rich or poor, — whether he be wealthy, privileged and high-born or conceived on the lowest of social levels.

In this mundane and mucky cultural climate of today, we could all strive to seek to find and uncover our common faults if we continued to follow our valuable cultural tradition and weighed our words and actions and heedfully controlled them before they had the time through contact and reaction to cause trouble.

Indeed, we could all improve our minds through concentration on and the eradication of the objects of worldly attachments which would lead to unwholesome and unsavoury actions.

We all have the equipment and instructions needed to do it, and this would, thereby contribute to raising our social and cultural level through our also abstaining from attachment to greed, envy hate, and delusion, and avoiding the dangerous delusion that it is important to become somebody big, respected, and feared and powerful in the clouded-views of the unfortunately, under-educated and otherwise-neglected masses.

But pointing the finger is not the way to go.

In short, instead of laying the blame on anybody in particular, we should rather have compassion for all of the deluded and ignorant (*avijja*) within this sorry society and, then, set a good individual example for others to see and emulate, especially within our own immediate surroundings and circle of acquaintance and influence, especially within the family.

It is the children within our families who are the hope of the future, and while we, ourselves, may not be able to change the present evils of society, immediately, the values which we pass on to our children will, hopefully, eventually, help lead to a slow but gradual evolution in which the blatantly conspicuous, scandalous behaviour of those we see grinning with no apparent sense of shame and blame in the media and on TV today becomes a thing of past- history.

In the words of the Buddha:

“Start and then continue.”

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato sammāsambuddhassa

“This Generation is all in a Tangle”

by

Anagarika Tevijjo

Introduction

In *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Samuttya Nikaya, Chapter IV, 625, in the Brahmanasamyutta (p.259), edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi,

A Brahmin asks the Buddha:

“A tangle inside, a tangle outside
This generation is entangled in a tangle.
I ask you this, O Gotama
Who can disentangle the tangle?”

This is a question that we could ask, now, about the *generation of our own day, in our own country, right now*. But, before we can answer such a question, which is framed in a simile, let’s begin by explicating the imagery, line-by-line, just as students of literature might do with stanzas of poetry: first, attempting to clarify the words in the lines, before going on to explain what they mean within in the broader context in our society and culture and within the wider world.

The straight-forward paraphrase would be that, because there is something wrong with our way of thinking and behaving in our own day, we need to figure out why the problem has arisen and who can help us to see to the root of the problem and how to solve it.

The central image in the Buddha’s words is a ‘tangle,’ in the sense of a tangled ball of string, twine or line, which may be compared to the mental tangle in the mind and what is going on in there.

Our thoughts can also be likened to a tangled web of some predatory creature, as a web in which we have been caught-up and enmeshed and from which we cannot escape, as the intensity of the tangle inside becomes tighter and tighter.

In a wider sense, the tangle, both inside and outside, can be likened to being lost in a jungle where everything within it grasping upwards, for light and life, and striving for nourishment, whilst being entangled from all sides by encroaching creepers and vines.

Awareness of this jungle may be described as an acute consciousness of mental anxiety fraught with exasperation and anguish, arising out of our compulsive need for continuing existence. The implication is horrific—nothing in this world can continue to exist except through the starkest struggle just to ‘keep one’s head above others.’

We often feel that it is like that in the struggle of life in our generation too.

In this generation, everyone seems to be seeking to satisfy his own desires, and everyone is in conflict with everyone else to get what each thinks he needs to fulfil his expectations.

Because such needs and desires for self-nourishment conflict with each other, life becomes, indeed, like a tangle of creepers reaching for light in a dark jungle where even the strongest and highest of trees are in competition with encroaching creepers and vines figuratively arising up on every side, seeking every advantage, so that it requires unrelenting, striving force, just for organisms and forms of growth, like plants and people, to continue to fight to survive and stay alive. It is an extreme but apt comparison.

There is no letup in the personal, inter-personal and cultural jungle. Everything seems to be getting further enmeshed and interlaced within the tangle of the tangle and becoming so totally entwined with mental images, continually arising and ceasing, until, with exasperation, we feel that there is no apparent way we would ever be able to untangle the overwhelming tension and confusion within in our minds.

Our minds are snagged, intertwined and knotted with conflicts, coming into the mind from both inside and outside the body. Even our own contradictory wishes and motivations are pulling us one way and another, this way and that way, in a whirling mental process that keeps jerking our perceptions and conceptions — here and there and everywhere — with no realistic prospect of our ever being able to do anything about it—other than hang on to the drive to stay alive and survive— at least for as long as mental energy outlasts mental anguish.

Similarly, in interpersonal relations, while people will be brought together by mutual needs, they will frequently also have conflicting needs, which they blindly follow to the verge of absurdity and even insanity.

Moreover, in society at large, we want to be one thing and are told to be another. We are presented a whole pallet of conflicting ideals and goals to achieve, and either we fit in to such mass-insanity of wrong view of the world or we are shut-out—punished and made to suffer, one way or another.

Furthermore, as a result of vain hope of escape, alternative sets of ideas arise in our minds, [or sneak in somehow from somewhere outside], giving us false expectations, so we continue to pursue our self-delusive goals and imagined ways of escape, even though we know, inwardly, that they are wholly unrealistic. This is the way of the conventional world.

In the above-cited stanza, the Brahmin is not putting a foolish question to the Buddha. He is asking about the root of existence, asking the Buddha to help, by asking the Buddha to explain the pain at the root of existence and how to avoid it.

Before the Buddha's time, there was no answer to such a question, which was, incidentally, why the Buddha left his former teachers and continued to strive alone in seeking the cause of suffering.

The Buddha's answer, in the stanza below is a formula based on his understanding of the Dhamma for healing such mental pain and anguish. The words about finding peace on the path may seem, to some, just a familiar recitation at first, but if we look more closely at what those words mean and how they inter-relate, we may find an answer there which will also help us in our generation of today.

The Buddha's reply begins with a reference to virtue and wisdom and then goes on to take-apart existence, explaining in stages how to alleviate pain in a permanent way. First, he says:

“A man established in virtue, wise,
Developing the mind and wisdom
A bhikkhu ardent and discreet
He can disentangle the tangle.”

Paraphrased, this means that one who has learned the path, an ardent bhikkhu, established in virtue and wisdom knows the way to disentangle the tangle. In other words, there are many bhikkhus, besides himself, who have been able disentangle the tangle. In the next stanza, he proceeds, in explaining the formula or process, which, if properly perceived, will answer the Brahmin's query.

“Those for whom lust and hatred
Along with ignorance has been expunged,
The arahants with taints destroyed:
For them the tangle is disentangled.”

This needs some explaining:

Let's start first on the level of “lust” and “hatred” and, then, work our way through sensation and experience to realize how to reach towards “virtue” and “wisdom,” because this is the way it works, at least in the practice of those who become wise — “with little

dust in their eyes,” — those who can see ‘the way things are’ — the way the phenomenal world really is.

The reason that the mind gets all-entangled is from initially seeing things as other than they actually are and, then, getting attached to one’s own conceptions and views in a way which leads into the stress of mental suffering. The bhikkhu, whose mind is trained, will not fall into the trap of such body-mind ties and attachments. He will not get snagged on senses and views. He will not give-in to urges and impulses because he knows that they lead to frustration, anxiety and pain.

Life in the conventional, everyday world, on the other hand, is not so easy.

The word ‘lust’ [in the cited quotation] means just what one may imagine it to be in one’s wildest imagination, plus a few things you may not have imagined too. In this well-known quotation from the texts, ‘lust’ means, in the first place, full-blown sexual desire. Once we come of age and start giving in to our inclinations, there is no knowing where the mind will stop in attempting to fulfil its sexual fantasies.

The Sakyan princes knew full-well from their own experiences about such a life of sensual pleasures, so let’s leave at that and ask, rather, why those who came for acceptance as bhikkhus were able to leave such a world of sensual satiation behind.

The answer is that one simply gets sick-and-tired of it; because, it doesn’t bring any sort of permanent, lasting happiness. On the contrary, after bodily-satisfaction ceases, the mind keeps running after new desires to fill the empty moments with new, pleasant sensations, to replace those which have passed and ceased.

Then, the mind will not be satisfied until such new desires have been satisfied again- and-again, and, thus, the vicious cycle runs. Either one sees the emptiness of it all or finally runs out of energy and, one way or another, is left in a dissatisfied-state.

“There must be something better than this,” one mutters, and indeed there is, as will be explained shortly.

Today’s generation needs no introduction to sensual lust, so let’s go on to other forms of lust that cause dissatisfaction. We can start with seemingly little things like lusts for certain tastes or smells or sounds or sights of sensations of touch or cravings in the mind. People are really hooked on these, and will go to great expense and lengths to get the things they like and want and desire.

This has always been so since men have lived in towns, cities and communities which could supply such needs. Then, just as now, there are always a lot of merchants and businessmen and their workers/employees who live-off such mental-sensual desires and use every means and trick they can to awaken even more desires so they can get more of our money [and other favours].

Indeed, this generation lives within a stream of the same kinds of thoughts and desires. People's minds are filled with unfulfilled desires and wishes, and few would ever think of trying to empty the mind of their coveted but frustrated desires because the world doesn't work like that—people don't think like that—some do but not many.

“This generation is entangled in a tangle.” Nowadays, everybody seems to have big dreams about getting an impressive education and earning a lot of money, buying land, building an expensive house and ‘being somebody in the world.’ But who is this ‘somebody’ really? — Just a consumer of services and goods who is nourishing his needs for self-satisfaction.

He's just the fool that the world wants to fool into expending all his energies, into feeding his imaginary needs, often having to borrow money based on visions of supposed, future satisfaction to come in the future. This is a familiar picture. We see it everywhere.

The irony is that the undeveloped, untrained mind (due to ignorance) only sees what it wants to see. Moreover, usually, just as we don't notice when we're being selfishly greedy, so we do not notice when others are suffering and needy. Seldom do we really focus our attention on things that are not so attractive, such as the prevalence of poverty, for up-country people or the anxiety of students uncertain about the future, or other people under stress in fear of losing their jobs, with a lot of others living carelessly beyond their means, buying things they cannot afford and being totally dependent on money-lenders and networks of so-called friends, allies and supporters, who will only be there as long as there is mutual dependence.

The outside world fools us, but we also fool ourselves. There is a part of the mind that wants to be tricked and there is a part of the mind that wants to trick.

The untrained mind is like a wild tusker, and very difficult to bring under control. It runs wild through the jungle, trampling everything in its way, and it doesn't even know there is another way. When the mind is free to go anywhere it wants, it becomes a danger to itself, and when it is disturbed in its single-minded pursuit, it growls like a wild animal protective of its food. At moments like this, we exhibit aggressive feelings which others see as anger and sense as dangerous, and, if we allow the mind to follow its very basic instincts, we can actually become much like mad dogs.

Normally, we wouldn't want this to happen so, like the mahout with the wild elephant, we should try to bring the mind under control, slowly but surely.

While the mind may be indifferent to what it doesn't know or notice or care about, the mind is also attracted and attached both to what it likes and to what it does not like. Whatever gets in the way of what the mind wants is disliked, and if the mind continues to be thwarted, this dislike develops, through irritation and anger, which, when increased, can turn into outright hate—a hate which is totally irrational and based on ignorance of the basic elemental body process, as a reaction to the frustration to what is going on

(largely unknown to us) within our own energy-systems. This is an ignorance which must be ‘expunged,’ in other words, removed, destroyed and got rid-of.

‘Hate’ is the evil sister of ‘lust,’ and the two are resolutely to be avoided. We feel resentment and aversion when others hinder us from indulging our physical senses and mental desires, so that our cravings, which were, at first, little things can become magnified into big things.

When the hindrances which prevent pleasure are not just momentary and passing, but long-continuing and seemingly permanent, our aversion grows into a more and more intense hatred toward those whom we see as continuing to thwart our wills and dreams, (whatever they may be), and, consequently, our hatred towards them, will, then, result in as much or even more hatred, coming back from them in return.

Hate begets hate. It is all cause and effect dependently leading back to an original desire, urge or impulse but, normally, the common worldly mind cannot see that.

We also develop strong negative and aggressive feelings towards those who oppose or oppress us in our education, in our work, or our attempts to get money. We have strong and stressful emotions when we run into opposition while trying to gain and maintain acquisitions, and attempting to live indulgently in luxurious circumstances. The strongest irrational feelings, however, are perhaps connected to those who oppose us in our attempt to become ‘somebody’— a person, big and important in this world.

It is in this idea of self-importance, that we see the greatest explosion of socially harmful energy.

This ‘need-to-be-somebody’ seems to be were this generation is going most-crazy. If people could only see themselves as they actually are, they would know that all their wills and lusts and desires and hatreds are all delusional, based on the idea of a ‘self’ having certain rights to enjoyment and power in the world without considering the rights of others.

Seen in the right light, however, all people—including the greedy and needy— are, actually, to be pitied, whatever the cause of their suffering may be, and one, who is wise, with right view of the world, will feel deep compassion rather than look down upon and despise them.

Right view means understanding that the way that people see themselves in the world is based on a false supposition of a self that is getting what it wants. The one who can disentangle the tangle is the one who can disentangle this network of false views which is always busily at work in the world, driving many, indeed, almost to the point of madness.

Right view of the world entails understanding that the way worldly people see that the world is crazy and the way things really are is the opposite—not a burning-selfishness ...

burning ... burning, but a detached, cooling ... calming ... and stilling of energy, until the last remaining ember or taint of worldly-self is eventually burnt-out.

While there may be few who can understand this, there may be others who imagine that, if there were be an ‘opposite to burning’ in the ‘stilling of energy,’ this could be an approach worth trying, following the examples of the Noble Ones who have little dust in their eyes. “Dust,” incidentally, means lust or ignorance.

The word, “taints” means impurities or imperfections, and “right understanding” means that we see the taints in ourselves and the world and renounce wrong view and begin to develop the mind so that lust and hate are eventually replaced, as virtue and wisdom develop.

This is a gradual training and does not happen all in one moment, in a flash of insight. First, the mind has to be slowly refined of its impurities, through constant mindfulness and training, attempting always to be focused in the moment, to catch any wayward impulses or inclinations, to catch the tricks of the trickster-mind as it tries to lead the mind-body astray.

At first, the mind will still be all in a tangle, so the thing to do is, (while trying to avoid new entanglements), slowly to begin, gradually, cutting away the old and embedded entanglements as we recognize them for what they are. We can create a new mental environment, in which the mind is ‘under the microscope,’ so-to-speak, and in which the gross impurities will stand out clearly, once we have learned how to look for them.

“Developing the mind” is an essential part of the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path, in which, (after the mind has gained right understanding and has right view of the way things really are), through mental cultivation, it begins to practice on the path to purification in a way which will eventually extinguish the fire.

Through right mindfulness, we begin to watch and observe ourselves in all of the actions that arise in thought, deed or speech. When we see an unwholesome thought arising and we recognize it for what it is, just being recognized as it appears often makes it go away.

When the mind is tricking us into wanting to do an unwholesome deed, the detached-mind which watches and observes the trickster-mind can usually stop an unwholesome action before it happens—the mind being much faster than the body. This process may be called right thought leading to establishing the mind in right action, which is what is meant by “virtue” in the second stanza. In this part of the practice the emphasis is on morality.

Since the mind precedes all actions, we try to watch and analyse every motivation that precedes every action. We watch what we are about to say before we say it, and, if there is any harm in it, we do not say it. We watch the mind to see what is motivating it to do a bodily action. In every thing we do in our work, to earn our livelihood, the part of the mind which we sometimes call “the one who knows” observes and analyses if there is

any dishonesty or impurity in “the one observed” and, if there is an inclination towards imperfection, we catch it like a thief and stop it from doing the impure deed.

This is not quite as easy as we would wish, however. The hardest thing in the world to do is to control the mind; the easiest thing in the world is just to let the mind wander and, then, follow it, (like a dog its master), wherever it wants to go.

When the Buddha says that “a bhikkhu who is “ardent” and “discreet” can disentangle the tangle,” he is referring to just this difficulty. He is referring to bhikkhus who are practicing the threefold training of virtue, meditation and wisdom on the path that leads to liberation and deliverance from this world.

There are very few who can arouse and maintain enough energy to put-out the burning fires of the worldly world within themselves. The word “ardent” means “constant untiring, resolute effort,” sometimes translated as “unrelenting diligence” or “sustained energy.” Perhaps the word “energy” is the best word to use here because it implies that in the practice we must arouse an effort which is so strong that it can counteract and, eventually, put-out the burning energy that is driving the forces of worldly world within ourselves.

It can cool the hot fires of the mind into a coolness that extinguishes lust and hate without a trace. People who say that the monk’s life is easy have no idea about the energy and ardency required for the noble practice.

The word “discreet” is very subtle. At first glance, it seems to connote, shy, secluded, retiring, prudent, tactful, judicious, and, indeed, it means all these things, but in terms of mental cultivation, it has an even more important meaning. The word, “discreet” implies developing the ability, over no short time, to discern between motivations and intentions that arise in the mind, in such a way that we not only know the good from the bad, but we can discern even subtle differences in perception that would be hidden to those with less training of the mind. It indicates an ability to refine and refine until eventually the mind becomes entirely free of impurity, without residue remaining.

In the next stanza, the Buddha explains how right concentration develops through awareness of the non-reality of “name-and-form,” without residue remaining, into the Nibbana element:

“When name-and-form ceases,
Stops without remainder
And also impingement of name and form:
It is here that this tangle is cut.”

This is even more subtle than the section on “discretion,” because it alludes to a process of basic perception and consciousness which eventually comes to an end. This short stanza in the words of the Buddha is not easy to understand, but, fortunately, there are

other well-known records in the Pali texts that outline this process, in more detail than in the above-quoted short stanza.

Indeed, the Abhidhammists are fond of seeing existence through this approach. What we like to call experiences of objects or phenomena are “impinging” (through sensation, getting into, or infringing) on the field of the common mind as forms or images, upon contact with which, there are reactions of basic feelings like or dislike or neither like nor dislike.

Simultaneously, perceptions are arising and coloring bare sense experiences, depending on how they are conceived and perceived. Out of perceptions, mental formations are arising which are assigning things names and forms and certain sets of characteristics at the same time as inherent, accompanying consciousness, which has been active from the beginning and which, then, will continue-on in a multiplex of processes leading, inevitably, to further nets and tangles of free and uncontrolled processes intermingling in ever-intertwining associations—especially when they start becoming interlaced and enmeshed with the inestimable number of other associations and views that have, been stored in memory as they were arising in the mind, both in the recent or in the distant past.

It is no wonder the mind becomes perplexed and entangled and almost impossible for an average human being to control.

Does this sound complicated? It certainly does! Is there a way to untangle the tangle within the tangle? Yes! Who can disentangle such a tangle for this generation? The answer is the well-trained practitioner—who sees that the free association of consciousness is leading nowhere but to confusion and trouble—who sees that mental formulations are just constructs in the mind with no corresponding substance in reality—who sees that perceptions are colored personally and individually and have relativity only to themselves—(with no shared-universality)—who sees that even bare forms are merely illusory sense impressions, with only seeming substantiality, when, actually, they are merely constituted of uncountable tiny particles or impulses, within the mind, which are moving and changing so fast that an image is like a picture in memory which has already passed, in the process of arising and ceasing due to the insubstantiality of all seemingly-solid-enduring-things made of the four elements.

The Arahant sees the changing nature and the impermanence of all things, and so do many monks and meditators in the modern world. The Dhamma is not for dead people in old books. The Dhamma is the true nature of things as they really are. The Dhamma is there to be discovered and, as it unfolds itself to the ardent bhikkhu or meditator, wisdom arises in intervals, in no short time.

The man with no Dhamma is like the swimmer who drowns in the sea and sinks to the bottom. The man with virtue may go under the surface of the water, but he will rise again and see the shore in the distance. The one with virtue and wisdom will stay afloat on the surface and swim for the further shore. The one with virtue and wisdom who is ardent

and discreet will near the shore so that his feet are touching the bottom. And the one who is refined and free from all taints stands safe and secure on the further shore.

The man, who in this life, just gets carried-away by his (as yet unexamined) stream of consciousness can never see the true nature of reality streaming as nothing but invisible waves of energy. The man who hangs on to mental formations for psychological security may feel safe in the fortress of his views and concepts, but he will never see actual reality. The man who is looking for truth in his perceptions will have attachments dependent on the colored perspective dependent on the person he believes himself to be.

The man who is fixed in bare awareness of feeling is still a human being caught within the flow of feeling and perception, and he may get stuck there as long as he thinks and believes he is a self seeing. The man who believes in corporeal form is himself just a changing corporeal form, only focused on trying to see truth inherent in changing corporeal forms.

However, the man who experiences sense images as just as flashes of light and color moving in impulses and waves of energy, with no fixed or permanent form, will be nearer to the truth, though he will still be focused on outward impressions, dependant on the transitory nature of self as observer.

Once the one who is aware of sensation as merely transitory and fleeting images gains insight into the impermanence of everything, (the one who suddenly sees the emptiness of all sensory and mental images) will be standing on the firm ground of the sea bed and nearing the shore.

“It is here that the tangle is cut” alludes to an unconditioned state, freedom of the net of the world in the Nibbana element. While this will be too subtle for those entangled in the tangle of this generation, there will be a few who understand.

The secret to cutting through to ultimate reality is in contemplating how conditioned realities, being impermanent, as long as they are connected to the idea of self, inevitably cause suffering.

When, through contemplation, insight reaches its peak, the breakthrough to ultimate reality occurs on its own.

In that world which we have initially presumed to be form, there is nothing. In actual reality, there is only an unborn, unformed, unconditioned. In the words of the Buddha:—

“There is, Bhikkhus, that base where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air, no base consisting of the infinity of space, no base consisting of the infinity of consciousness, no base consisting of nothingness, no base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world nor another world nor both; neither sun nor moon. Here, Bhikkhus, I say there is no coming, no going, no staying, no deceasing, no uprising. Not fixed, not moveable, it has no support. This is the end of suffering.” (See Udana 8.1)

No one but a Buddha who is a tamer of men can explain as well as that.

Contrariwise, here in our contemporary world, that wave of mortality which is designated as “this generation,” being still unaware of the “unborn, unformed and unconditioned,” is trapped in a bog of ignorance, vainly grasping after a commonly and socially-shared set of words and concepts and hopes and desires which is foolishly dependent on a false view of permanency.

This generation attaches to the vain hope that what it conceives as real will be a lasting source of satisfaction, although nothing could be further from the truth. As long as there is a corporeal person who believes that attachment to forms, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness will bring permanent happiness, this world is bound to be a place of unsatisfactoriness and unhappiness, and the whole delusion is based on one thing—believing what is impermanent is permanent.

In summation, concepts and conceptions of fixed forms are not real, and as long as people hang onto their wrong idea of the fixed form of the world, ignorance will prevail and no one can ever be happy for long. Why people cannot see the impermanency of things is a mystery.

At best, the view of fixed concepts is an oversimplification of apparent forms which the ignorant can use for continuing self-nourishment and self-survival, but this brings us back to the unpleasant analogy of the world as a jungle. Everyone hopes for something better than that, but few can see that the way to freedom from stress is—adapting to impermanency—seeing the beginning and ending of things and striving for an ultimate mental purity in which one sees oneself arise and cease.

In conclusion, what we say about “this generation” has, indeed, been the same for every generation since the time of the Buddha. This is the way of the world, and it is not going to change. Those who know ultimate reality will know that, even if the world were to burn up—even if there were no men or earth or galaxy—the vibrant energy of the dhammas would still continue on.

A few people see the vibrant light of Enlightenment, but most do not. There is the way of the Noble Ones and there is the wanton way of the world—some swim against the stream of attachment to worldly want, but most do not.

Unfortunately, (for themselves and others), most common, everyday ‘individuals’ in today’s world, particularly within our swiftly-developing and changing society, do not make the above-mentioned effort to ‘swim against the stream’ or current-of-attraction-to the immediate, selfish-satisfaction of desire, want and need.

Moreover, this ignorance of (and blindness to the way things really are) is an ominous factor, which is, [silently but surely] swirling and spiralling wider-and-wider, and, thereby, gaining a firmer-foothold within our contemporary and materially-oriented culture. This is an ominous factor which has (for some number of decades) been eroding-away at the heart of ancient, traditional Buddhist values and views and, now, quite rapidly, is going the wavering way of world-wide-capitalism and-corporate greed, so that, as a consequence, we are [often quite unconsciously, without our knowing,] becoming more and more dependant-upon (and similar-to) the rest of the financially-oriented world of business and banking.

Hence, unfortunately for core values, we are being influenced by newly-evolving cultural patterns [creeping in surreptitiously] from the West, especially through the over-riding and inexorable influence of globalization and the brazenly bold-faced networks and efforts of both the media and advertising industries.

In final summary, most members in what may be called “today’s evolving culture and society” are caught-up in a world of blind delusion, falsely assuming that the external world out-there is only there and things are “up for the grabs” for the sake of their own survival and immediate, material selfish, sensual-nutrition and material-satisfaction.

Paradoxically, however,

- (i) while on the one hand, the people of our country, in this new millennium, seem to have been caught-up in a whirlwind of sensation and lust for material and mental satisfaction, security and permanence,
- (ii) on the other hand, we are, at the same time, faced with the perplexing irony that traditionally-practicing Buddhists [and there are still, of course, many of them at the core of our culture] would see as wrong view an arising and false “me first” thirst and sense of perception that ‘things in the world are there just there for their own personal use, nutrition and consumption.

Such a self-centred assumption is based on an inwardly-directed wrong view of ‘me and mine’ which causes delusion, dissatisfaction, pain, throughout society, and suffering in the untrained minds of people — for the people from all classes in society, — from the lowest and poorest levels right up through and into the so-called the upper-crust.

So what can we do to help us disentangle the tangle in our generation?

The answer is that the word and teachings of the Buddha on the Dhamma are too-often overlooked (or even wholly ignored and forgotten) by contemporary individuals in their current quest for survival, success, and struggle for name-and-fame, although Buddhist values still unquestionably constitute a vital force within the inner-most foundation of Buddhist culture.

The Buddha gave us the instructions and described the path for the training of the individual entity, (whether he may be monk or layman or laywoman) and, in the sections

which follow, we will try to explain and explicate these teaching for the sake of those [few] who are willing and able to follow.

I.

The Mind Watching the Mind

We may begin our explication, with a few words on ‘nourishment’ or ‘nutriment,’ as it is often translated, from the Theravada texts.

Concerning ‘nourishment’

Human life begins as a small, dark speck, which needs nourishment, in Pali (*ahara*), as a condition (*paccaya*), to evolve, through a dependent process of coming-to-be (*bhuta*)—which, (in conventional parlance), we call being—‘b-e-i-n-g’—which is a somewhat obscure ‘word’ designating a process which we shall have to look at and analyze more closely as we go along.

And just as every living thing or ‘being’ in this world—(and even this world itself)—needs the condition of *nourishment* to develop and continue being—so, even this galaxy, needs the sun and a certain set of co-existent conditions for the continuance of its just ‘being there’ within the so-called equilibrium and balance of the universe.

Everything living, large or small, in one way or another, depends on nourishment. Just as the earth needs certain conditions of oxygen, elements, and temperature, to continue-becoming-and-being, so human existence, depends, on a certain balance of conditions—of oxygen, of elements, and temperature—just to continue ‘being.’

However, what we call man’s ‘coming to be,’ as we conventionally understand it, is not at all what it ‘seems’ to be, from the ordinary, every-day common man’s perspective—it is not as it ‘appears’ to be to the ordinary, individual human eye.

On the contrary, it is not, at all, what we—in everyday language—commonly conceive of as—‘being born into and existing in the world—as an independent person, self or entity.’

Man, in a state of being, is not the way he apparently sees and believes himself to be—in the image of, what he is convinced, is his own concrete reality—in contrast, for example, to the way a modern physicist would see all apparently solid states and bodies as merely consisting, as ‘bundles of energy,’ as waves and vibrations, moving relatively to one another, within vast networks of dependent relations.

To start with a short, analogy: the seemingly solid ‘form’ (or image) of the man whom the physicist’s wife knows and sees as her husband, coming home from the university, for his dinner, is not the same ‘picture’ which the physicist, himself, sees when he, is at work in the laboratory, focussing-his-mind, and doing-concentrated-research, knowing himself

(like all other bodies⁰ to be merely a ‘non-solid state body or bundle of burning psychophysical energy.’

What a human being—‘seems to be’—seems to be confusing, doesn’t it?

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The subject for our present analysis will be, primarily, this apparent discrepancy between, the way things ‘seem to be,’ to the mind’s eye first, from a limited, human, cognitive perspective, on the one hand, and, then, secondly, on the other hand, ‘the way they really are,’ as viewed from a wider, non-physical, universal, and even cosmic perspective, based on ever-wider and ever-changing vibrations of energy.

To narrow the focus, considerably, to an object of analysis, with which we are more familiar:

The Buddha described the state of ‘human being’ in terms of two component parts—*the mind and the body*—both of which require nourishment (co-dependently and independently) in order to continue to survive.

Just as the body needs certain conditions and combinations, in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and medicines, to maintain and nourish its existence, so the mind apprehends and perceives, from the very earliest stages of mental consciousness, what it needs to do to contrive to get what the psychophysical (mind-body) organism (which we call man) requires, to continue to survive, and, subsequently, to devise strategies to nourish its various wants and needs—both necessary and unnecessary—on both basic-elemental-essential and wholly-non-essential levels.

Now, if ‘nutriment’ is the ONE single fact about life which first needs to be understood, let’s start from there and proceed to explain.

Stating the Buddha’s point, quite succinctly, the Venerable Nyanaponika, Maha Thera, in *The Four Nutriments of Life*, printed by the Buddhist Publication Society, (in The Wheel Series 105-106)—The Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera says,

“All beings subsist on nutriment.”

This, according to the Buddha—and the Venerable Nyanaponika:

“Is the one single fact about life that, above all, deserves to be remembered, contemplated and understood. And, if understood widely and deeply enough, this saying of the Buddha reveals, not only a truth that leads to the root of all existence, but also to its uprooting.” (i.e. in the sense that a palm tree, once uprooted, receives no more nourishment and ceases to continue to survive.)

Venerable Nyanaponika explains further:

“The Buddha proved to be the one who saw to the root of all things, and he saw the root of all things as ‘nourishment.’

Moreover, he saw that,

“The laws of nutriment govern four kinds of nutriment: (i) first, edible foods (ii) second, sense impressions (iii) third, volitions and (iv) fourth, consciousness.”

This means one level of nourishment feeding the body and another three more feeding the mind.

Each of these four types of nourishment will need further explanation which we shall undertake to provide, sequentially, as we go along.

To continue to quote, the Venerable Nyanaponika’s explication, still in an introductory note,

“It is hunger that stands behind the entire process of nutrition, wielding its whip relentlessly. The body, from birth to death, craves ceaselessly for material food; and the mind, similarly, hungers ceaselessly for its own kind of nourishment—for ever-new-sense-impressions—and for an-ever-expanding-universe of ideas.”

To reiterate the problem, quoting, still, from the Venerable Nyanaponika:

“The body from birth to death craves for material food; and the mind hungers ceaselessly for its own kind of nourishment.”

Notice the words, “The mind hungers ceaselessly its own kind of nourishment.”

This is something that we all need to think about.

And I think we all, inherently, know, and we will admit, quietly to ourselves, at least, that this “hungering ceaselessly” is also at the root of our own personal, mind-body problems—distractions and mental dissatisfactions.

Have you ever felt that way? Most of us have.

Moreover,

—if we were actually able, to observe and analyze, with sufficient detachment and objectivity, the meanderings of mental consciousness, as it is ceaselessly and relentlessly, and continually hungering, and gnawing away at our mind-and-substance, (like a dog on a bone), in a way that will eventually eat away even the very substance of our physical-mental being—through restless worry and fear and resultant ill-health—

—if we were actually able to analyze properly and see things the way they really are, we would, realize, indeed, and eventually gain the clear and irrevocable insight that it is exactly this uncontrolled, uncurbed and untamed, process of ceaseless hungering, which causes us most of our personal suffering in life.

This is the problem of craving for nourishment, and the solution to the problem has been clearly explained by the Buddha, for those who are fortunate enough to hear and listen:

To quote the Buddha, from the texts:

“Monks, when a monk becomes totally dispassionate towards one thing, when his lust for it entirely fades away, when he is entirely liberated from it, when he sees the complete ending of it, then he is one, who, after fully comprehending the goal, makes an end of suffering, here and now.

“What one thing?” The Buddha asks,

And the answer is, “All beings subsist by nutriment.”

Explaining further, the Buddha says:

“When a monk becomes totally dispassionate towards this one thing (nutriment), then his lust for it entirely fades away, when he is entirely liberated from it, and when he sees the complete ending of it, then O Monks, he is one who, after fully comprehending the goal, makes an end of suffering here and now.” (AN 10, 27)

This means that the craving for nourishment, when it is finally uprooted, will bring the suffering of existence to an end.

Venerable Nyanaponika also explains how, not only the mind, but also the physical body—has its untamed roots of hunger and craving, from the very beginning, to the very end of life.

Craving for something is the principal condition for what he calls the need for ‘intake’ or ‘uptake,’ (*upadaana*) which means—‘nutriment’ in its widest sense—and the needy body and the greedy mind may both be viewed as ‘craving’ (*tanhaa*) what they hunger-for and desire and want in the widest sense, which is often translated, using the Latin-based word, as ‘*volition*’ which, in English, has come to mean wanting and desiring in both the positive and negative sense (or *cetanaa* in Pali).

Normally, we are not actually, consciously-aware that such hidden needs and volitions are even present—except for the obvious recognition of the fact that, concerning bodily needs—there is obviously a certain minimum amount of basic nourishment—which requires fulfilment—for man just to continue to survive—in a healthy and functioning on-going state.

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Concerning mental needs of the mind—especially in early development stages—we are seldom aware of—we lack insight into—we are, indeed—wholly ignorant of—what is not so obvious on the surface—which is the way the mind subversively works,—in its relentless and ceaseless hungering, on unconscious levels.

The mind is also a trickster, so we also have to learn its tricks.

Normally, we are unaware of what the craving mind needs and wants—beyond the obvious grasping of the senses—reaching after the perceptible, desired six sense-objects-of-contact—although we may also be, vaguely aware of a subliminal-perceptual sense of mental irritation and dissatisfaction, which is always there, which is always arising, with an uneasy sense of gnawing-awareness, that is perpetually present, because the mind knows it still needs and wants something more—something more than it's already got,—something more—which it does not yet have and is, therefore dissatisfied.

Indeed, the craving mind may even be observed yearning for ultimate satisfaction in regions so vast and totally and wholly beyond the borders of imagination, that even the human mind becomes incapable of conceiving what it might be mentally yearning for.

Have you ever felt that way? If you have, you are not alone.

Unfortunately, what the ceaselessly hungering mind may actually and potentially want—in—both pure and wholesome—and impure and unwholesome realms—remains, ultimately, an uncertain psychological enigma, which is always present in the psychophysical sense of endless-yearning, which is—in-and-of-itself—a further-continuing and ever-endless perpetual source of mental distress and dissatisfaction.

It is our lack of understanding of such unfathomable, such unconceivable needs, for nourishment—especially for mental nourishment—which leads the mind into unsatisfactory, conscious and subconscious and unconscious states, arising out of feelings, leading into and dependent upon—an ever-present lack of fulfilment—an ever-present sense of incompleteness—of lack of final-unity, that plagues us, in greater-and-lesser-degrees, throughout the entire course of the rest of our lives, usually—even up the very last moment—in our last gasp of life.

Actually, psychologically, because the mind is always thirsting for things—in both healthy and unhealthy—in both wholesome and unwholesome ways—it is how the mind develops strategies to deal with such hungering, thirsting, craving, seeking, needing and hankering after—both, certain-and-uncertain-desired-conditions—which determines the body-mind's continually arising and changing moods, and states of mental balance or imbalance.

If you suffer from such changing moods and feelings of mental imbalance, you are not the only one.

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Now this is a subject worthy, not only of further study and consideration, but, also, most certainly, a worthy object for insight meditation.

We all somehow, inherently, know, especially those of us who have been training in the practice, that in the back of a man's mind, the main problem in maintaining mental health is that the untrained mind so often wilfully wants more than it actually needs to maintain a bare-balanced, (middle-path) existence, thereby causing a psychophysical-imbalance, dependent upon, in proportion to, and resultant from, the mind's self-obsessive, greedy needs.

Indeed, such gathering of wilful ego-centric needs, may slowly increase in intensity, to the point where an existentially dreadful tug-of-war then arises, between, on one hand, realistically-seeing the base, essential needs requisite for momentary, conditioned existence, and, on the other, a senseless and obsessive, struggle to obtain, unessential and even unreasonable, needs of the body-mind—such needs, just to take, as one example—the popular demand, for a self-assuring sense that 'self-as-being' will be 'guaranteed' continuing existence on a permanent basis forever.

To reiterate the problem of craving nourishment, perhaps more fundamentally and essentially, the untrained body and mind, indeed, are always scanning the field of experience, looking for new things to feed on, and the mind-body organism always finds itself in a distressing state of psychophysical imbalance, being pulled back-and-forth, (as we keep saying), between what it basically needs, just to continue to live and survive, on the one hand, and, on the other, what it might potentially desire, if, for example, the mind and body and the six senses were all, simultaneously, allowed to go on an unruly and uncontrolled-rampage of feeding-frenzy.

Most people in today's world, especially in the younger generation, seem to be more inclined towards the feeding-frenzy side of life.

Fortunately, for us and the world, there are also a few others, who, in the words of the Buddha, know how "craving for nourishment, when it is finally uprooted, will bring the suffering of existence to an end."

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Indeed, there some among us, in our society, today, who know, through direct experience, that the appetite of desire is like an ever-growing fiery-dragon, with a never-ending voracious appetite, which can never be fully-satisfied, no matter how intense and no matter how long-lasting its greedy feeding frenzies may permitted to persist and prevail,—even often to the point of becoming life-threatening, and,—ultimately—fatal addictions.

Indeed, there are a more than a few people, (both laymen and monastics) in Buddhist society, who, with little dust in their eyes, through insight, and through developing-wisdom, know—that—just as it's in the nature of wealth to always-be-diminishing—it is also in the nature of desire—ever-to-be-developing-a-greater appetite—it is in the nature of desire ever-to-be increasing—and, therefore—never-to-be satisfying, never-to-be-fulfilling-or-lasting—for anything longer than just an anxious, furtive, expectant, fearful, fraction-of-a-fleeting-thought-moment of perception, in what is falsely perceived of as time.

In their delusory perception of time, such desirous individuals always have the inherent, in-built, unconscious fear that their sources of momentary physical and mental pleasures will not last—will be ripped-out from under them. People live like this, as unknowing victims—in self-made, fractional-time-frames—in-mentally-projected, temporally-restricted-prisons—in perpetual, momentary-fear of losing the impermanent source of their present, fleeting pleasures and satisfactions.

But, fortunately for our society and culture, not everybody is like that.

There are a few—there are those who know—the secret of how the Buddha's diet of balanced-nourishment brings the highest happiness in the end.

Indeed, there some few individuals, also, here, (in our culture and society), who, with insight and wisdom, have developed the skill to know—how to diligently observe and analyze mental states—how to carefully arouse skillful impulses and maintain wholesome arising states.

There are those who know how to maintain wholesome states—which nourish the mind—as with a steady, balanced hand, to heedfully tend, with delicate energy, the focus needed, to nourish, the firm and un-flickering flame, of wholesome practice, which is required for progress, in the process of purity, which leads to the point of final relinquishment, of the last remaining strands and filaments of contact to unwholesome traits and states of mind in this world.

To put it in one sentence, there are those, who along with the Venerable Nyanaponika, and the Lord Buddha know how: “Craving for nourishment, when it is finally uprooted, will bring the suffering of existence to an end.”

Rather than speaking, here, however, about how to establish oneself upon a firm foundation and be able to dwell, in ease and comfort, within sublime states, we must re-direct our focus back to the topic of our discourse: which is to show how the mind watching the mind may continually try to pry into, to try to examine and analyze, the very reverse of sublime states—which is the terrible truth of the debilitating results of wrong view—(which we shall, now, continue to do)—through digging away at and scraping into, continuing causes of unwholesome, harmful roots—and further exposing the deep roots of unwholesome states—through magnifying, and closely observing—and carefully probing, prior to doing, further diagnosis—preparatory to preventive mental surgery.

A highly-developed disciple, who can so carefully scan the mind, will be able to pick up on wider, on-going movements of the waves and effects of the process of the vibrational workings of the unwholesome factors, conditions and causes resulting in continual mental imbalances, in the mind, conditioned by lack of restraint and arising impurities—and he will be able to observe them, as arising and gaining and gathering—in potentially damaging and destructive powers—resultant from having been allowed time and space to linger and ‘hang-out and conspire’ together—(to use a socially crude comparison)—on the seemingly indefinable borders—between the habitats of jungle bands of hungry brute beasts—and urban gangs of treacherous, bad comrades and companions.

Or—(to use a more simple-elemental simile, followed by a somewhat more complex, extended epic-image):

Just as the building-up of negative charges of accumulating electrical energy—can eventually develop into potentially-explosive, destructive forces. Just as such waves of energy may be said to be building-up—in just such a way—so ocean waves of water may be comparatively seen—as the arising of a steadily-increasing, of ever-more-powerful series of curling-and-snarling, white-caped waves—of accumulations of bad influences and ill-intentions—which have long been mentally-gathering—(through the mind’s persistent carelessness in nourishing unwholesome contacts).

Just so, can the gathering force of ocean waves be compared—to the building-up-and-becoming—of a great, heaving, forceful wave of emotion—which can strike with potentially-intensifying, Tsunami-like force—at any moment—in which the unheedful mind is unfocussed—(having been inadvertently but inextricably hooked into and caught-up in and drawn into—an inescapable network of voracious needs for sense-conscious—and mentally-fabricated objects of lust and desired states in the world)

Just so, from within our minds accumulations of emotive energy may strike out at another (or others) with highly destructive mental force in order to get what the mind highly-energized self-centred mind wants.

Does this sound like you? If so, you are certainly not alone. This is the way of the world. This is the way that conflicts and wars begin.

By contrast, however, the highly-skilled mental surgeon—who through insight, knowledge and vision, can scan mind-conditions—to obtain an wider view of the tangle of unsavoury contacts—of the mind’s potential intentions—just so, the highly skilled mental surgeon will know—when and how to heedfully and carefully un-hitch and un-hook—to un-snarl and expertly and slowly disentangle and cut-out—the twisted and knotted tangle-within-the-tangle—which can, in fact, be untangled—through careful, constant concentration—using the skilful knife of knowledge—in the mental-surgical practice of meditative right mindfulness.

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This brings us to the end of our first section on the explication of the roots of nutriment.

II.

Now, we come to the second section which will deal with the nourishment of the mind and body.

Concerning Mind and Body

According to the Lord Buddha, man's 'being-in-the-world' may be analyzed in terms of two coexistent parts, which are dependent upon one another, in what we have been calling a '*psychophysical*' sense. (psycho=mind/physical=body)

The mind could not exist without the body, and the body could not exist without the mind.

The culturally influential monk, Luang Por Viriyang, has said, in the opening paragraph of his *Meditation Instructor Course I*. (p.1):

“The body and the mind are intimately connected throughout the life span. A person cannot live his life solely with either existence. During a meditation session, the mind and the body must be co-functional. To study meditation, the meditator must begin with studying the correlation of this co-function.”

Once we know, that meditation practice, depends on observing the balance of correlating factors of the mind and body, the initial insight we have—the first thing we realize is—that balanced meditation practice goes totally and directly against the common, conventional worldly current of desire—the current of nourishment of the mind's cravings, wants and needs—against a state in which the craving mind is always energetically and hotly grasping after the things which it wants, but does not essentially or necessarily require—always grasping hotly to nourish its momentary greedy needs.

The way of mindfulness goes against this way of common, conventional worldly thinking and acting—goes against the worldly way of craving for desire, for satisfaction of such selfish needs—and, therefore—to reap the benefit of this insight—we must be prepared to make a complete, one hundred-and eighty-degree 'about-face'—a total 'about-turn'—a 'paradigm-shift,'(as it is called in science), and adopt the directly opposite view to the way people-in-the-world are constantly concentrating on their own momentary cravings and normally seeing things (and people)—as just being there to be used—as objects of the senses—there for the satisfaction and nourishment, of pleasure and happiness—as many would say, with a sensual, 'eat drink and be merry attitude.'

To repeat the point, for the sake of emphasis, we must make a ‘*paradigm-shift*’ to be able to see things in the directly opposite way to which everyday people see themselves and the world—which might otherwise be called “seeing the world as a source of self-nourishment for its own sake.”

We must come to realize that the needs of the mind and the body and the resultant, arising of uncontrolled processes and increasing desires for such over-nourishment are, actually, the worst enemies of man’s happiness, because they lead him down an inevitable road to frustration, dissatisfaction and disappointment—a road which invariably leads to certain suffering in the long term.

In other words, we must come to a clear understanding that an attitude of “I want what I want, right now! And I’m not going to be satisfied until I get it!” is not the right view. And it is certainly not the way to happiness, because such a view’ is based on a wrong understanding of ‘happiness,’ as being the ‘nourishment of self-centred, ego-centric needs.’

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The common worldly view is wrong view.

And why is this so?

To explain we must, (for the purposes of observation and mental analysis at least), separate a human being, (and this means *you* and *me*) into its TWO component parts and examine, “What is the body?” and “What is the mind?”

Let’s take, “*What is the body?*” first. Once we’ve understood that everything depends on nourishment, then, we must examine the nature of the body to see it, not for what we might like it to be, but for what it actually is—which the Buddha describes in a well-known, detailed, discourse as follows:

The Buddha says:

“In this body, there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine and so on.” (MN.119)

Now, is this you? Do you see your ‘self’ this way? The way a medical surgeon, who is equally well-trained in the Dhamma, might see the body, as just the way it physically is? Do you see the body the way the Buddha sees the body?

No? How then?

In the same dialogue, the Buddha uses an analogy to compare the body to a “fathom-length-long sack,” the kind which normally contains grain, open at two ends, as it were, but instead of containing grain, imagine it is stuffed-full of the above-mentioned body parts and ask ourselves how we would feel if our own body-sack were being shaken, so that we might see each of our body parts, as it was slowly slipping and sliding, and slithering out, and falling, and we could observe these individual body parts, as they were slowly running—down into a heap, and piling up, upon the ground, and we would have ample time to examine and contemplate each one of these body parts individually — falling and accumulating there in a pile—with each actually being just one of the many component parts of our own physical body.

How would we feel then? Would we be enamoured with the physical body if we examined it in this way—as just a composite of components—being aware of its nature as a mere compound of connected individual parts?

One who meditates on the body—contemplates himself as just such a body—as just made up of individual parts. And that’s a good starting point—a good place for beginning-to-see-the-body as it really is, and not as one might want or imagine it to be—especially as an independently imagined entity—as though you, yourself, were somehow intellectually or mentally separated from the physical ‘bag-of-bones’ itself.

Moreover, no matter how well the body parts may usually function together, to sustain life, and even to provide momentary pleasures, they are still just body parts that have, through a process of evolution, come together in order to sustain life.

Using a simile, again, for comparison’s sake—the Buddha goes on to add that it is as if:

“A skilled butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a cross road cutting it up into pieces,” ...

And thus the monk or meditator learns to contemplate the body ... as though it were just made up of component parts.

Elsewhere, the Buddha says that even king’s chariot is not a unity but just made up of its individual parts.

In the same Sutta as above, the Buddha also reminds us that this body is composed, not only of component parts, but that the parts are made up of combinations of “matter, liquid, heat and gas”—and this being so—we should know, that this sack-full-of-elements, in accordance with bio-chemical laws, contains an ever-changing process of the arising and ceasing of solidity, liquidity, burning-energy and gaseous-aridity, and has no fixed or permanent reality.

Imagine solidity turning, through heat, into liquidity, and burning as energy, and turning into invisible gaseous-aridity within your own body. Imagine your body as continually consuming itself. Can you imagine that?

The body is just a sack or sheath full of elements, which are ever-changing, ever-being-burned-up, internally, as sources of nourishment, and ever-being replaced by new bodily sources of energy.

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Now, how about you? Do you assume that you are a ‘fixed unity to be nourished’ called ‘self-to-be-satisfied,’ rather than just a simple aggregation of component parts, made up of elements, which in turn nourish the body parts with energy just to keep them functioning? How do you see your own body?

If you have never thought this process through before, perhaps it is time to start.

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Concerning conventional view of the body

Luang Por Viriyang has said:

“The first media is the body. It refers to our physical body which is capable of obtaining all of the feelings and emotions and communicating through its five senses. The body can co-function with the mind, and it is also under its control.

And further, “One usually thinks of the body as his whole self.

“Since the life span of our body is 50 to 100 years, human beings usually compete with their life span and try their best to use their bodies to the fullest potential.” (ibid. p.22)

In other words, for good or for worse, in the conventional sense, we try to get the most out of our lives and our bodies, for as long as we can, for as long as they last, especially in terms of physical pleasure, because, in our heads, (and especially in present day culture), we mistakenly consider the body as being a source of satisfying-sense-experience, as being beautiful, as being pleasurable and satisfying—despite the obvious fact that—as in my case—for example—we may, ourselves, be growing older and becoming weaker and inherently knowing we are slowly dying.

The so-called beauty of the body or—the body beautiful—is a deeply-embedded socio-cultural myth which the mind just does not want to let-go-of and will not give up.

But the body, we must accept, (our own or another’s), is not a beautiful object in the way which we would desire it to be (or the way we see it advertised on TV). The body is not there in the world, solely, for the purpose of bringing us the fulfilment of our dreams.

Despite the truth, that the body is not, in reality, at all what we imagine it to be, within the distortions of our own mind’s eye, we foolishly continue believing in the reverse of

the truth—often ironically ignoring even our own bodily aches and pains—as undeniable, physical indications of decay, deterioration and dissolution, contrary even to obvious visual and physical discrepancies, which anyone else can see.

In summary, despite all obvious evidence to the contrary, we continue hanging onto wrong belief about the pleasing and satisfying nature of the body, with such a stubborn tenacity, that it becomes almost impossible for most men (and women) to shake loose and see the actual corporeal truth of the body—‘the way it really is’—as being slowly in a state of ultimate decay and dissolution.

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Moreover, if we may be allowed to diverge, somewhat, from the main point about ultimate truth, for a moment, the psychophysical organism, actually, enjoys becoming and being an *economic, commercial, product-consumer* in the mundane physical world, even when it has the occasional insight, that, socio-economically, men are now being overtly and subliminally trained and bred by advertising and the media, within the popular structure of modern society, (especially through TV), to become even more willing and enthusiastic consumers, whom manufacturers and entrepreneurs can actually continue to stimulate and cultivate, to train and brainwash, in order to continue feeding off—ever-new-generations arising—and flowing along in waves—of constantly arising needs, indefinitely and forever—if the world might ever be imagined to last that long.

Everything is nourishment, and in such a scenario, those who feed-our-needs are also well-rewarded, well-provided-for, and well-nourished, through their cleverly manipulative marketing strategies and contrivances, through their attracting our attention to the appeal to the six senses.

In plain words, such service-providers live off supplying our unexamined, unskilful wants and needs, and there is hardly an ounce of morality in it. It’s just plain consumer-greed taking advantage of people’s inherent weaknesses, wants and needs for psychophysical stimulation and nourishment in a way that is intended, not so much for the good of society, as it is just to make money, just for money’s sake, wherever there is a market need.

Such greed, based on unnecessary need, is morally reprehensible, from both the consumer and producer perspective, but there are very few, in today’s world, who would want and be willing to see it that way.

People feed wherever there is need. And this, it seems, has become the predominant way of life.

And why is this so?

The answer is as follows: If ONE is the need for nourishment, and TWO is the mind and the body (*nama-rupa* in Pali), there are as yet THREE THINGS of which so-called ‘normal mortals,’ in the conventional, socio-cultural sense, are wholly ignorant.

Ignorance (or not knowing) is the problem.

There are the three things which common men (and women) do not want to know—which they unconsciously want to overlook and ignore because their view is based on wrong seeing, wrong attitude and wrong view.

These are the so-called ‘Three Signata,’ (the three signs): which are, namely, (i) first, impermanence (*anicca*), (ii) second, suffering (*dukkha*) and (iii) third, non-self (*anatta*)—the three causes of ignorance (*avijja*)—which we shall go on to discuss in greater detail in the subsequent text.

But prior to taking that next big step in our explication, let’s first, devote some time to probing into man’s paradoxical, existential predicament* which may be, preliminarily, diagnosed, through digging-away at the roots of false perception and prescribing the medicine that serves as the antidote to the delusions of the mind, *(See endnote)

To echo Luang Por Viriyang’s quotation on the body as cited above, it is our physical body in which the feelings and emotions arise, through the sequence of perception of the five senses and the mind.

Coming back to the body

A common, everyday, person in this world, usually thinks of his body as being solid and his consciousness as somehow permanently-connected to his body and other perceptual objects in what he thinks is ‘his world.’

People simply believe that everything they see and conceive of, including their bodily-selves, is fixed and permanently there to be used for fulfilment and enjoyment, although this is certainly not true and is based on delusional wrong view.

A human being’s identifying bodily *perception* and arising consciousness, with any sense of a permanent self is actually based on ignorance (*avijja*)—delusion about self-in-the-world and the way things really are or ignorance of non-self.

Such wrong view, is dependent, as we have indicated, on the delusive compulsion to nourish an ego-centric need—for a substantial-sense of self-assurance—for an undeniable and absolute guarantee—that we will always be able to nourish and feed our personal desires for continuing self-satisfaction and continuing existence—an assumed satisfaction-and-existence—which we wish to imagine can never be taken away from us.

This wrong view arises out of the dangerous and harmful part of the mind which greedily reaches after the things—which it hopes and thinks can guarantee it lasting happiness—including good family, good home and good neighbours (and even continuing existence

for all eternity)—but which, in the long run, because of the impermanent nature of all things, in actual fact, leads to a continuing and disturbing sense of uncertainty, to insecurity instability, and to unhappiness and unsatisfactoriness—because—as we all know—things almost never turn out to be ‘*as we dreamed.*’

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By contrast, those few who do not want to ignore the bare facts of existence, those few, who are not ignorant and deluded by bodily and mental wrong view, who are not deluded by vain hopes and false dreams, come clearly to see the mind in terms of two parts, through insight meditation.

There is always a part of the mind which is aggressively selfish, wishing it can have anything it wants, and there is part of the mind that can stand back and be capable of observing and analyzing what the obsessed, ego-centric, energy-consumer-of-the-mind is selfishly capable of doing, in trying to ‘wrest’ what it wants from a world—which it sees through a clouded, passion-crazed, delusional haze of false perception.

This part of the mind, which can observe and analyze with detachment, sees, with ‘*dissociation*’ and ‘*disenchantment,*’ that selfish, worldly, energy burning and grasping is not the right path to follow, because it always results in the same unsatisfactory and disappointing, uncomfortable sense of ‘dis-ease,’—in other words—lack of ‘ease-and-comfort,’ lack-of-fulfilment, followed by dissatisfaction, disappointment and unceasing unsatisfactoriness in the end.

The part of the mind which stands back and watches is sometimes figuratively called the—**Mind-Watching-the-Mind**—which might even be said to be morally and analytically, one step ahead of the part of the mind which is often called —“**The-One Who-Knows**”—the one who knows, even if only furtively—secretly—that which no one else can know—when one is telling a lie or subversively wishing harm on another or committing a selfish act at the expense of others.

The mind watching the mind acts based on the observations of ‘the one who knows’—the one who knows—inherently—feeling a sense of shame and blame—for so-long as the reactions and actions, resultant from the mind watching the mind, begin to become less and less shameful and blameful, and more and more morally satisfying.

So, as one begins feeling positive results, one attempts to maintain and continue to nourish the cause and effect process, for the sake of the benefit it brings.

This stand-back-and-watch, knowing-part-of-the-mind, moreover, as we have already indicated, is, even subliminally present in the most common, worldly-based-people, but only so faintly and only so vaguely-illuminated, that it usually remains hidden and little-developed.

Indeed, in the case of most conventional people, it is pushed, unconsciously, far back into the deep, dark hidden recesses of the unexplored cavernous realms of the mind, because the pleasure-seeking psychophysical part of the mind—‘Just doesn’t want to know,’—‘Just doesn’t want to see,’ because it so strongly wants to believe that it is a permanent, abiding individual—an abiding self—capable of satisfying the six senses forever.

Such a form of *self-delusion* obviously serves as an obstacle to clear seeing and the development of moral virtue.

Such a wholly ego-centred mind, firmly-fixed in worldly pleasure and self-satisfaction, moreover, is not aware when it is subconsciously ignoring and blocking out an inherent sense of moral responsibility for any negative consequences which may arise from the effects of its intentions and actions, now or in the future, because of its short-sighted and morally-clouded, grasping, clinging human nature.

“Human nature” has a hidden side, and, indeed, ‘hidden ignorance’ goes deeper than we have as yet mentioned. There are, in fact, even more-coarse, and even deeper hidden, gross and insidious hidden levels of the mind that are potentially harmful and damaging, which can possibly emerge and turn into volatile and violent actions.

There are always treacherous, unconscious and even savage motives, deeply-embedded in a man’s mind, that normally do not arise into consciousness, to become overt actions, especially in our so-called ‘socio-cultural,’ civilized surroundings.

We must, however, through gradual insight, through observing the tendencies of the deep, dark, hidden parts of the mind, eventually realize and come to know, clearly, that particular part of the mind which is based on totally blind, primitive, and potentially destructive, compulsive and explosive impulses, arising out of the deepest destructive primordial urges, flowing from sources within the subterranean gorges of the mind.

To put it in a simile:

One must approach the brutes and demons within the mind and try to round-up and break-them-in, like wild beasts, (similar to the way, in which a king’s game-keeper in the time of the Buddha, may have, formerly, have caught and tamed wild elephants and horses)—

One must approach, and round-up the brutes and wild demons of one’s own mind and try to catch and break-them-in and train them to a point in which one is eventually able to subdue and train their potentially-uncontrolled energies to become more focussed, useful and beneficial.

We would be just deluding ourselves if we did not admit that the mind has such unrefined, ugly, nasty, brutish, perverse, pernicious and intractable, primitive levels, and, comparatively speaking,

Or, to use another simile—which lurk, in the mind, like ‘sparks,’ which are almost invisible, like fireflies, seen and unseen, in the dark of night, which might, (dependent upon arising conditions), be capable of igniting potentially negative and explosive energies and forces, which lurk there, like ghastrly, grisly, ghoulish spooks and naughty, impish, mischievous sprites in the clouded-gloom of the unfocussed-mind.

Such wild, untamed forces may also be figuratively likened to, as-yet un-to-fore and-as-yet unseen jungle-creatures, being metaphorically sought-out and either dragged and brought or leashed and led—out of the darkness—into the light—as, for example, one might—one day—observe a wild band of never-before-seen anthropoid apes being lured with their families and siblings, all trailing along behind them—coming out of the jungle—scrambling along the top of a wall leading to a temple, into the clear open light of day, and, therein, being gathered and mustered, and inspected and admonished, and patiently trained and gently calmed, and carefully cultivated by the powers of the skilled meditative mind so-as-to, eventually, become tamed and trained and harmless through the powers of the skilled and practiced mind of the tamer and trainer.

To reiterate, we must arouse ourselves, to penetrate into the dark to seek-out and locate those hidden, dangerous primitive sparks of potentially explosive energy, located within the deepest, darkest recesses of the caverns of unconsciousness, so they can eventually be brought out and exposed and examined under the *bright light of analysis*—

And, then, so persistently inspected, observed and admonished and blamed, or so well-cared-for and loved and tamed and trained, that they lose their aggressive power and, eventually, become calmed—and, ultimately, so sorted-out and balanced, that they finally either work in harmony with the mind—

Or—they slink away in shame—upon knowing (quite cleverly as the *kilesas* always do)—in their turn—once they have been seen and recognized for exactly what they are (as the siblings of Mara) in the light of right understanding, against which they have no defence.

Battling such wild powers of the mind sounds courageous, and echoes of mighty warriors and Ajahn Maha Boowa, but the problem still remains, that—in our present world, today—(so far away from the Buddha’s time)—there are, unhappily, only a very few meditation practitioners and teachers who are able to strive to purify and liberate themselves, in such a way, (either wholly or even partially), from the ever-pervasive and deep-seated, unwholesome, disturbing impulses and attachments and entanglements, within the jungle of the defilements, within the worldly-mind.

If it is difficult even for the few ‘with little dust in their eyes,’ what about the rest of us? How do we begin to untangle the tangle of the jungle of the world as it becomes ever-more-entangled within our own minds? How does this affect you? What are *you* going to do with your so-called self?

Despite the fact that we may read in the texts, or hear in a Dhamma talk, that there are hidden hindrances, which must be sought out and clearly exposed by concentrated acts of the analytical mind watching the mind, that strives to know and sees itself fully for what it really is

—despite what we secretly know about ourselves, and our attachments and shortcomings

—despite the fact that we know that our lack of effort will just lead to more and more suffering

—despite all these debilitating factors, most of us cannot manage to muster the requisite determination and energy, to arouse the necessary effort, to proceed, with diligence and mindfulness, to provide and empower the mind with the wholesome mental nourishment needed to persist in cultivating the seed and the sapling—to continue to grow and develop on the path to awakening. This is the result of *avijja*.

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This is the way of the world, which, while it seems—if you go along with the common flow—to be an easy way out—is in actual truth, the longest and most difficult and most intensely painful route, through endless rounds of existences—the long, interminable and terrifying way, along the interminable path of insufferable, excruciating existence—which is the unending path of *samsara*.

In contrast to the longest way, there is also the shortest way, as recommended by the Buddha—which is by penetrating straight through the hindrances—with mind-motivated power and energy, until the raft of the mind is no longer necessary—although this way is not for everybody—at least not now.

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The path you choose to take depends on you alone.

Indeed, to achieve the goal described by the Buddha, we must undergo an enduring, a long and arduous process of purification which may take many years, or even a lifetime (or more) of one-pointedly concentrated, constant attention and effort, directed to catching and refining away momentary negative, potential intentions and actions of the mind—catching them as they are arising—and gradually eliminating them, to a point where there is nothing negative left there to arise, and, all that remains, may be compared to an extinguishing-ember, the last remains of the last weak impulse of worldly craving, becoming extinguished, and finally going out, like a flame in a lamp with no oil left for it to feed on as fuel for nourishment.

In insight meditation practice, the mind is wholly concentrated on the act of purification of what is arising in the mind, at the moment, —The Mind Watching the Mind — and this is a process of continually attentive, wholesome mental action, through which, over time,

the meditative mind develops insight into the conditions which lead to the arising of—both fine and coarse impurities, imbedded within the bedrock and soil of the mind, which are always capable of arising, both in the mindfully-controlled meditative mind and in the uncontrolled worldly-oriented mind—which are incessantly seeking their own form of nourishment, as long as the mind is still in connection with the body and the senses.

It is noteworthy that, as long as there is still some sense consciousness present, the mind cannot be wholly purified, although the highly-attuned and concentrated mind, watching the mind, may know when and where there is impurity attempting to arise, and the mind will continue to strive to eradicate all such impulses, tending towards achieving total purity—until the mind watching the mind ultimately only sees clear mind.

This is the way to eradicate impurities, but it is subtle and difficult to explain and not as easy as it sounds—just as leaving the raft of the mind behind, once it has served its purpose, is also subtle and difficult to explain.

The path you choose to take depends on you alone.

*

Analyzing further,

Those who are—experienced in the path—but still within the world—will know that, when the body and mind get together, and make contact (*phassa*)—they more-often-than-not—get up to some sort of mischief; and, for this reason, they need to be constantly and carefully monitored by a skilful, heedful, attentive mind, every moment, both day and night, until the cause for mischief declines and ceases to the point at which the opposite begins to arise and prevail, due to unrelenting-focus and concentration on more purified wholesome states.

As unwholesome states subside, and as they are being relinquished and set aside, we arouse wholesome states, which can take their place and replace them, and which not only give the mind a much-needed rest from wasteful expenditure of over-heating energy, but allow the mind to dwell, rather, by contrast, in mentally-healing, cooling and curative states instead.

There is more to the mind than just hotly-arising unwholesome mental states. There are also wholesome, sublime and, even ‘abiding-sublime states’ which we may eventually attain and which we shall discuss in their turn in the sequence of our exposition.

Concerning insight meditation

Some of us are already skilled in concentration on the path; some are practicing and increasing insight and gradually purifying their minds. And some are just beginning.

Those who are at the very beginning should start by practicing noting the arising of mental impurities leading to resultant irritations until such continued-noting begins to focus and clarify what would otherwise be clouded, irritated states of mind caused by unwise seeking.

Those who are on the path will, as we have said before, be motivated to continue with right concentration, once they start to see the positive effects of the practice in the development of insight and even of wisdom arising in their developing mind states.

The main point about body-mind, as discussed so far, in this exposition, is that the meditative mind—the Mind Watching the Mind—separates and filters out and refines arising perceptions and consciousness—which lead to unskilful attachments to the physical and mental objects connected to this world.

In summary, in the skilful meditator, the mind observes and watches arising contacts to physical and mental objects, constantly—while carefully guarding the doors of the senses—to slowly become more-and-more capable of controlling whatever delusive compulsions may be arising—out of dependent feelings and emotions—through the workings of consciousness and attachment within the psychophysical body-mind organism— which we call man.

Now, if (as we have explained above) the need for nourishment is the ONE THING we must understand before all others, dependent on TWO THINGS called the mind and the body or (*nama-rupa*), there are THREE THINGS, often called the three “*signata*” or three marks or signs) which if not seen clearly — the way they really are — which if not properly understood, become the cause of ignorance (*avijja*).

III.

Concerning *The Three Signata*, which are: (i) first, impermanence, (ii) second, suffering, and (iii) third, non-self

The Buddha said concerning ‘impermanence,’ (*anicca*), which is sometimes translated as ‘transience’ that the way to deliverance from attachment to worldly mind objects and false delusions of self is to be able to see through “the impermanence of all compounded things.”

This is the first of the three signs.

The Buddha teaches us to see—“the impermanence of all compounded things.”

Whatever has arisen and become is in the process of passing away. *[See endnote.] At the core of insight meditation is the realization that man himself is a compound of changing psychophysical elements and conditions that are constantly arising, coming together, and passing away, with no lasting reality.

In a Wheel booklet from the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1982, entitled *The Three Signata*, Dr. O. H. de A. Wijesekera, former Professor of Sanskrit, at the University of Ceylon, writes, (in BPS Wheel 20)

“[This] is to say that material form, sensations, perceptions and dynamic processes and consciousness are merely mental-physical perceptions, in the moment, that are in the process of arising and passing away. Everything is—in a state of becoming—in a process of passing away.”

This means that even every impression, whether strong or weak, is only the result of changing dependent factors that will continue changing so that any arising impression will, in turn, be impermanent and pass away.

In the exact words of the Buddha:

“All compounded things, indeed, are subject to arising and passing away; what is born comes to an end, and blessed is the end of becoming on the path to peace.”

There is no state of being as a permanent thing, and what we experience as a seemingly fixed form in corporeal psychophysical perception is just a mental over-simplification of the complex world of appearances based on commonly accepted social-linguistic conventions and mutually-shared conventional-behavioural patterns and norms regarding self-preservation and expected individual self-satisfaction, arising out of the dependent conditions of wishful thinking and comforting self-deception.

Whatever has origination is subject to cessation.

The Buddha has said:

“There is no materiality. O monks, no feelings, no perceptions, no formations, no consciousness. There is nothing that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, changeless, identically abiding forever.”

“Then, the blessed one took a bit of cow-dung in his fingernail and spoke thus: ‘Monks, if even that much of permanent, changeless, individual selfhood, identically abiding forever could be found, then, this living a life of purity for the complete eradication of suffering would not be feasible.’” (M.56)

And elsewhere, the Buddha says:

“Here, O Monks, feelings and perceptions and thoughts are known to him as they appear, present, and as they disappear. Cultivation of this kind ... conduces to mindfulness and awareness.” (A.VII, 62)

This is the heart of Buddhist meditation.

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We will keep coming back to an analysis of the impermanence of consciousness and the problem of the six senses, but, now, let's explain more about how the fact of impermanence (*anicca*) serves as a cause leading to an unsatisfactory effect due to a wrong view, of anticipation and expectation, leading to irritation in the common, everyday, human being's undeveloped non-cultivated mind.

If what the Buddha says above about impermanence (*anicca*) is true, it follows that our tenacious insistence upon dependence on self and its wishes will result in anxiety, mental stress and tension, the moment they are threatened, due to an apparent contradiction between what we want to get but do not receive, due to an apparent paradox between what we want to believe and what is actually true—'the way it is'—in terms of the Buddha Dhamma.

Anxiety, mental stress and tension will always show themselves in the arising and experiencing of disappointed anticipation and expectation, ultimately resulting in a pattern or process, leading through frustration, *irritation and suffering*, which in Pali is called *dukkha*.

Ironically, seen against the background of the larger picture, how "we feel" about the existence and importance of our own puny, "supposed-selves" is completely insignificant, because not only human consciousness and the four basic elements are impermanent—the whole world as we conceive it is impermanent.

"A time will come," the Buddha said, "when the *watery element* will rise in fury, and when that happens, the earthly element will disappear, unmistakably revealing itself as transient and subject to ruin, destruction and vicissitude ...

"A time will come when the watery element will dry and no water is left in the ocean that will cover just one joint of a finger.

"On that day, the watery element will unmistakably reveal itself as transient and subject to ruin, destruction and vicissitude.

"A time will come when the *fiery element* will rage furiously and devour the whole surface of the earth, ceasing only when there is nothing more to devour. On that day, the fiery element will unmistakably reveal itself as transient and subject to destruction.

"A time will come when the *airy element* will rage in fury and carry away village and town and everything on this earth ... till it exhausts itself completely.

"On that day, this great airy element will unmistakably reveal itself as subject to transience and itself subject to ruin, destruction and all vicissitude." (M.I.187)

Thus, everything that is composed of the four elements, including this earth, shows itself as transient and subject to the law of impermanence (*anicca*), and this is as true for the four elements, of the body; matter, liquid, heat and air, as it is true for any other body on this earth. This is a natural fact. This is the law of the Dhamma.

Everything, which is also subject to arising, is subject to ceasing, so we should not take it personally. The body is born and lives and dies in a process that is accompanied by physical pain at birth, during illness and suffering in life and, unless we happen to pass away peacefully in our sleep, there is pain leading into the moment of death.

Moreover, in life, in addition to physical pain, there is also the mental pain of anxiety, tension and stress. It is not only the components of our individuality, which are based on the body and its organs, which are impermanent.

The Buddha says:

“The corporeal form, Brethren, is transient and what underlies the arising of corporeal form, that too is transient. As it is arisen from that which is transient, how could corporeal form be permanent?”

Also the components of the psychophysical elements of our body are transient. We know that we must die and are, therefore, we are somehow transient, but this realization for most of us is too painful to face full-on, so we shove it aside and put it in the back of our minds and continue to ignore it for the rest of our lives, suffering all the while mentally unconsciously — resultant from knowing, inherently, that we are actually hiding something from ourselves.

There is always “the one who knows,” even in an ignorant person: the one who inherently somehow senses when he is deceiving himself and the world. This is another form of self-delusion, but, *as most of the world is similarly self-deluded, it seems easier to go along with the flow of the maddening crowd*, following in the current of common illusion and fashion, acting in what we may actually recognize as being based ‘bad faith,’ playing along with the game, while secretly seeing and knowing that it is all just nothing more than a bizarre and absurd sham, a selfish game.

Rather than live in ‘bad faith,’ unauthentically, it is better to strive authentically with determination of mind against the world of worldly sham and delusion, arousing the exceptional ardency and diligence needed to see clearly through the wholly wrong view of worldly delusion to the true base of actual truth and reality which brings ultimate freedom from (i) first, ignorance, (ii) second, suffering and (iii) third, self. These are the *Three Signata*, which we often call—‘the three ‘signs or marks’ on the face of reality.

Quite paradoxically and ironically, we cannot even identify ourselves as continual receptors of impressions and feelings.

Regarding what we may call our psychological selves, the Buddha, says:

“Sensations and feelings are transient, what underlies the arising of these (such as the sense organs depending on the body) is also transient.” (S.111, 23)

“Arisen form is transient. How could sensations and feelings be permanent?”

“Similarly, perceptions, dynamic processes of the mind, and consciousness—all these, arising from what is transient, cannot but be transient.”

To put it in few words, trying to hang onto impressions identified with a sense of self, which we do not want to let go of, is an unsatisfactory feeling (*dukkha*), which is usually translated into English as suffering, but should also include a continuing sense of on-going uncertainty, instability, incessant irritation and dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, in the perceptions and the dynamic processes of the untrained mind, what is observed by the trained mind is seen as arising—solely within vain, mental formulations—and then passing away as the accompanying impression or moods or moments of consciousness change.

The trained mind expects and sees that everything arising will be temporary, and this way of seeing, observing and analyzing allows us insight into how the transient nature of things can never lead to a mental state that will be satisfactory for long.

In an oft-quoted dialogue, the Buddha asks:

“What think yea, Brethren, is the body permanent or transient?”

“It is intransient, sir.”

“Now, that which is transient—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

“It is unsatisfactory, Sir.”

“What think yea, Brethren, sensation, perception, mental process and consciousness,—are all these permanent or unsatisfactory?”

“They are transient, Sir.”

“Now, what is transient— is that satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

“It is unsatisfactory, Sir.”

Thus, a general state of ‘unsatisfactoriness’ has become the general state of the mind of mankind in this worldly world in which people, are frantically struggling to escape their mental feelings of uneasiness, dissatisfaction and a perverse and pervading sense of general worldly ‘malaise,’ whilst vainly grasping at any fleeting external sensation and resultant expectation that may arise—which promises freedom from mental stress and uneasiness—which promises, at least, some alluring satisfaction to momentarily ‘ease’ in their everyday state of mental ‘dis-ease,’ in this on-going, ever-turning dependant and conditioned world of samsara.

This can be explained in other words. To quote Professor O. H. de A. Wijesekera: “The Master has said that the sentient being is so constituted that he hankers [for what is] pleasurable and shuns what is non-pleasurable ... He hankers after what is satisfactory for himself and recoils from what is unsatisfactory.” (*Three Signata*, Wheel Series 20)

Put simply, this means that man selfishly seeks what is satisfactory for nourishing his needs, and when he doesn't get what he wants, he feels dissatisfied and casts about in frustration and irritation, trying to avoid dissatisfaction in the fulfilment of personal desires—often, consciously or unconsciously, (it may be added), at the expense of others.

That the truth of suffering is not obvious to most who hear about it in a talk or read about it in a Dhamma book is most clear in the declaration of the Buddha—that there are only very ‘few’ in this world—who have developed their vision sufficiently clearly to see the truth of the cause of human suffering.

We may, now, close this section pertaining to the teaching on impermanence by reading another well-known quotation.

The Buddha has said:

“This indeed, brethren, is the Noble Truth of Dukkha, namely the fact that birth itself is *dukkha*, disease is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; to be joined with what is unpleasant is *dukkha*, to be separated from what is unpleasant is *dukkha*; failure in getting what one wants is *dukkha*. In short, the five groups of the physical and mental qualities making up the individual due to grasping are themselves *dukkha*.” (Vin. I. p. 10; s.V.421)

“Without an understanding of this Noble truth of Dukkha, the meditative practitioner will not make much progress on the path. The Buddha once summed up his teaching in one sentence:

“I teach suffering and the end of suffering.” (M. 22)

Moreover, if what the Buddha has said about impermanence (*anicca*) and suffering (*dukkha*) are true, it follows that any sense which consciousness may cling to in the mind of itself, as being a permanent self or entity is also delusory. ‘Permanent consciousness,’ in the Buddhist view, is a contradiction in terms based on Wrong View which will be explained in more specific detail, as we continue with our exposition. Any conception which we hold about self is just plain Wrong View.

Concerning the ‘*delusion of self*,’ the Buddha said:

“Give up what does not belong to you. Such giving up will long conduce to your weal and happiness. And what is it that does not belong to you? Materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.

“These do not belong to you, and these you should give up. Such giving up will long conduce to your weal and happiness.” (S. XXII, 33)

And further,

“It is impossible that anyone with right view could see anything or view or dhamma as self.” (M..115)

And furthermore,

“The learned and noble disciple does not consider materiality, feelings, perceptions, formulations of consciousness as self, nor self as the owner of these groups.” (S.XX, 117)

And most important perhaps,

“One should not imagine oneself as being identical with the eye, should not imagine oneself as being included in the eye, should not imagine oneself as being outside the eye, should not imagine, “The eye belongs to me.” And so on with the ear, nose, tongue, body and conscious mind.

“One should not imagine himself as being identical with physical objects, sounds, odours, tactile and mental objects. One should not imagine oneself as being included in them or outside of them. One should not imagine, ‘They belong to me.’

In short, one should not imagine experience or consciousness to be self:

“Consciousness is not self. Causes and consequences of the arising consciousness, they are, likewise, not self. Hence, how could it be possible that consciousness, having arisen through something that is not self, could ever be self.” (S.XXXV,141)

In an more comprehensively analytical vein, Professor Wijesekera writes,

“The Buddha admonishes his disciples to analyze the whole of the conception of self or abiding personality and thereby the whole of experience (*loka*) along with every single component of the process, whereby the fallacy of self or abiding personality, viewing this whole process of the arising of *nama-rupa* [will become clear] in a perfectly objective manner”

This may be seen perhaps more clearly in yet another quotation from Dr. Wijesekera, (BPS, Wheel 20), which follows:

“From sight and physical objects arises visual consciousness, and the meeting of all three is contact, from which contact come feelings, which may be pleasant or unpleasant or

neither. When experiencing a pleasant feeling, a man rejoices in it, hails and clings tight to it, and a trend of passion (attachment) ensues.

“When experiencing an unpleasant feeling, a man sorrows, feels miserable, wails, beats his breast and goes distraught and a trend of repugnance ensues.

“When experiencing a feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, he has no true and causal comprehension of that feeling’s origin, disappearance, agreeableness and outcome, and a trend of ignorance ensues.

“It can never possibly result that without first discarding the pleasant feeling’s trend to passion, without first discarding the pleasant feelings trend to repugnance, and without first getting rid of the neutral feeling’s trend to ignorance, without discarding ignorance and stopping it from arising, he will put an end here and now to *dukkha*, and what is equally true of sight is true of the other five senses.”

This means, in plain terms, that any form of consciousness is subject to distortion, and that, as long as there is a sense of ‘I-ness,’ even the sense of ‘I experience’ or ‘I think’ or ‘I am’ or ‘I am perceiving with bare awareness’ or ‘I am concentrating with bare attention’ as long as there is this ‘sense of self or I’ present, the meditator will not have attained pure clarity of knowledge of things and non-self as they really are.

The Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, in *The Vision of the Dhamma*, edited and published in 1994, the year of his demise at the Forest Hermitage, in Kandy, affirms what we have said about understanding the Three Signata (or the three signs of impermanence) as essential to seeing things as they are in actual truth as follows:

“If we contemplate even a minute sector of life’s vast range, we are faced with a variety of living forms so tremendous that it defies description. Yet three basic features can be discerned as common to everything that has animate existence, from microbe to man, from the simplest sensations to the thoughts of a creative genius: (i) first, impermanence or change (*anicca*), (ii) second, suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and (iii) third, *non-self* or insubstantiality (*anatta*) ...

“The Buddha applies the characteristic of suffering to all conditioned things in the sense that for living beings, everything conditioned is a potential cause of experienced suffering and is at any rate incapable of giving lasting satisfaction. Thus, the three are truly universal ‘marks’ pertaining even to what is below or beyond our normal range of perception.

“The Buddha teaches that life can be correctly understood only if these basic facts are understood. And this understanding must take place, not only logically, but in confrontation with one’s own experience. Insight wisdom, which is the ultimate liberating factor in Buddhism, consists in just this experiential understanding of the three characteristics as applied to one’s own bodily and mental processes and deepened and matured in meditation.

“To see things as they really are means to see them consistently in the light of the three characteristics. Not to see them in this way, or to deceive oneself about their reality and range of application, is the defining ‘mark’ of ignorance (*avijja*), and ignorance is by itself a potent cause of suffering, knitting the net in which man is caught—the net of false hopes, of unrealistic and harmful desires, of delusive ideologies and of perverted values and aims.

“Ignoring or distorting the three basic facts ultimately leads only to frustration, disappointment and despair. But if we can learn to see through deceptive appearances and discern the three characteristics, this will yield immense benefits both in our daily lives and in our [mental] striving [for higher states.]

“On the mundane level, the clear comprehension of impermanence, suffering and non-self will bring us a saner outlook on life. It will free us from unrealistic expectations, bestow a courageous acceptance of suffering and failure and protect us against the lure of deluded assumptions and beliefs. In our quest for the supramundane, comprehension of the three characteristics will be indispensable.

“The meditative experience of all phenomena as inseparable from the three marks will loosen and finally cut the bonds binding us to an existence falsely imagined to be lasting, pleasurable and substantive.

“With growing clarity, all things, external and internal, will be seen in their true nature: as constantly changing, as bound up with suffering and unsubstantial, without an eternal or abiding essence. By seeing thus, attachment will grow, bringing greater freedom from egoistic clinging and culminating in Nibbana, mind’s final liberation from suffering.”

The two key words in the last phrase were ‘mind’ and ‘suffering.’ And the overall meaning of the whole quotation above is to show how to free the mind from suffering.

And how exactly do we free the mind from suffering?

The key or answer may be found in a proper understanding of the root of suffering (*dukkha*) as it is clearly outlined and explained in the Buddha’s **Four Noble Truths**, which, if properly understood and practiced, will lead to a dissolution and deliverance from the state of ignorance and delusion (*avijja*) which leads to suffering and permeates the experience of all conditioned things.

IV.

Concerning the Four Noble Truths

If what the Buddha says about impermanence and suffering is true, it follows that any idea a mind may have of itself is delusory and based on *avijja* which is translated as “ignorance.”

When the Buddha uses the word ‘ignorance,’ (*avijja*) this is not a slur on a person’s intelligence or his upbringing, because the Buddha, as is well-known, considered all people born into nature to be on the same level and worthy of the same compassion and respect.

The difference is that common man, in his mind, assumes the conventional world (as he individually views it) to be actually real—which it is not—so this makes his life-experience different from that of others.

The reason that seeing phenomena, as they appear to the senses, is worldly wrong view, is that the common mind of man allows itself be dependently tied and attached to fleeting objects of appearance in his world, as he thinks/imagines he sees it, believing them to have abiding substance, which is the total opposite to the actual nature of things in the world where all phenomena are impermanent and cannot be grasped and clung to for long, due to the law of constant change and impermanence.

Ignorance means having a clouded mind and ‘not knowing’ that the world, as most men view it, is not actually real and substantial and has no continuing reality. There is no self and no substance. For most, in this world, this is hard to grasp.

The basic core of the Buddha’s teaching is found in the doctrine of the **Four Noble Truths** which he proclaimed to his disciples shortly after his enlightenment. So let’s look more closely at these four truths.

Referring to his own former ‘ignorance’ of the true nature of things, the Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, it is through not realizing, through not penetrating the Four Noble Truths that this long course of birth and death has been passed through and undergone by me as well as by you. What are these four?

“They are

1. the Noble Truth of Dukkha.
2. the Noble Truth of the Origin of Dukkha
3. the Noble truth of the Cessation of Dukkha
4. the Noble Eight-fold Path.

“But, now, Bhikkhus, that these have been realized and penetrated and cut-off at the point of craving for existence, destroyed is that which leads to renewed becoming and there is no renewed becoming.”

Surprisingly, perhaps, for many Buddhists in today’s world, The Four Noble Truths seems just a summary, short list or simple formula of truths to be memorized and quoted but, unfortunately, generally, understood only superficially and shallowly.

This is in no way surprising, however, for within these teachings, lie hidden the most deep and penetrating truths which are said to be accessible to only a few.

The reason why we don't understand easily and clearly is explained in the *Avijja Sutta* (DN 16) on the nature of not seeing (or not being able to know) which is broadly translated as 'ignorance' (*anicca*)

The Buddha said:

“Monks, ignorance is the leader in the attainment of unskilful qualities followed by lack of conscience and lack of concern.” (S.N.45) In an unknowledgable and ignorant person, ignorance in wrong view arises. In one of wrong view, wrong resolve (intention) arises. In one of wrong resolve, wrong speech arises. In one of wrong speech, wrong action arises. In one of wrong actions, wrong livelihood arises.

“Consequently, knowing is the leader in the attainment of skilful qualities, followed by conscience and concern. In a knowledgeable person immersed in clear knowing, right view arises. In one of right view, right resolve arises. In one of right resolve, right speech arises ... In one of right speech, right action arises ... In one of right action, right livelihood arises ... In one of right livelihood, right mindfulness arises ... In one of right mindfulness, right concentration arises ...”

In other words, if mind precedes action, wrong-mindedness leads to wrong action, whereas right-mindfulness leads to right and beneficial action.

We often forget that the even the Buddha himself made many mistakes along the path before he achieved his final goal. In the course of trying everything that might lead him to the ultimate truth, he, even, perpetrated physical harm on himself through practicing extreme austerities.

When the Buddha starts off by mentioning his own mistakes, he thereby implies that others may have also been making mistakes in their approach to achievement on the path of purity.

When we think about this, we realize that, although we may certainly have to admit that we have been making own inherent mistakes, this is not unusual, and it is nothing to be ashamed of. Making such mistakes is, in fact normal, in the process of the search for truth, and there is no reason for feeling guilt or anxiety either. What we learn from this is not to keep making the same mistakes over and over and again and again.

After failing in attempt after attempt, each time we see our approach is mistaken, through insight, we simply say, “Oh! That is not the right way” and we abandon it, and continue to strive on with diligence and perseverance in further search of the truth.

Francis Story*, in his oft-reprinted booklet on *The Four Noble Truths*, (BPS Wheel 34-35), 1982, goes into close analytical and significant detail in describing The Four Noble Truths, relating how the Buddha,

“At last, after those arduous, agonizing and fruitless austerities ... was able to say, ‘I discovered the profound truth, so difficult to perceive, difficult to comprehend, tranquilizing and sublime, which is not to be grasped by mere reasoning and is visible only to the wise.’

And further,

So long, O Bhikkhus, as the absolutely true knowledge, as regards those Four Noble Truths, were not quite clear in me, *so long* as I was not sure whether I had attained that supreme Enlightenment which is unsurpassed in all the world. But as soon as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear to me, there arose in me the assurance that I had attained that supreme, unsurpassed enlightenment.”

[*Francis Story, as many will know, was an intellectual and Buddhist scholar, born in London, England, in 1910, who became a declared Buddhist at the age of only 16, after studying a course in comparative religion. He later qualified in medicine and served in the Army Medical Corps in 2WW, after which he lived in India as a volunteer worker for the Maha Bodhi Society, of which he was a life member. He lived in Asia, as an Anagarika, or homeless one, for 25 years—after his initial stay in India—in Rangoon in Burma, and, after 1957, in Sri Lanka.]

Francis Story was a well known lecturer and author, who was close to the Buddhist Publication Society, in Kandy, in its nascent stage, from 1958 onwards, and in later years. Since his book, on the *Four Noble Truths*, is considered to be by many, long-time, BPS adherents as the definitive text in English, we shall now begin to follow his tight and coherent guidelines and the way he has broken down and structured the explanation for us.

And what are these Four Noble truths?

Concerning the First Noble Truth

Francis Story addresses the fact of suffering by quoting the following words, which run like a recurring theme through the Buddhist scriptures:

“What, Bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering? Decay is suffering. Death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering. To be separated from the pleasant is suffering. To be in contact with the unpleasant is suffering. In short, the Five Aggregates* of Existence connected with attachment is suffering.”

*(The five aggregates are material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and attachment and wanderings of human consciousness in the mind.)

Let's break this statement down into its parts following, condensing and summarizing some of the author's main points. "Suffering" seems like such a simple, all-inclusive word. Everybody suffers, but what does that mean? The Buddha explained there were three kinds of suffering: (i) first, physical bodily pain; (ii) second, mental pain related to uncontrolled consciousness, and (iii) third, existential pain related to the impermanence, the transience of all compounded things, including self and the universe.

The first and third types of pain mentioned are obvious to most of us who are familiar with suffering in its various manifestations. We don't want physical pain to continue, and we don't want transient existence to stop.

The second kind of 'mental pain,' [mental pain related to consciousness] is perhaps the most perplexing to understand and the most hidden and subtle.

The author explains that in the suffering of the aggregates "lies a state of dis-ease, unrest and instability of which we are normally unaware but which is present all the time." He says it is mental pain related to uncontrolled consciousness that calls for special understanding.

In this analytical section of the paper, we shall follow the explications of Francis Story closely on the Four Noble Truths because they are close-knit and yet expansive and have stood the test of time.

The so-called aggregates are the groups (*khandhas*) which consist of the components which constitute a living sentient being, including physical body form, sensations "derived from the six sensory organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile organs and mind—perceptions" arising from these organs in contact with their object; mental properties, including intellection, imagination, memory and volition (which may mean 'will,' 'wish' or 'desire') and finally the sum content of consciousness any given moment.

This content of consciousness is dangerous mental territory.

All of these aggregates are in a condition of arising and passing away and there is nothing constant in them. The suffering inherent in the aggregates is that they are no more than the flux of conditionality.

There is subtle suffering and fear of realization that existence has no self-existing-core of individual personality, but is rather just a momentary confluence of cause and effect consciousness, flowing in a continuum converging in a space and time moment of conscious awareness.

There is also fear and instability inherent in the insight that, in the process of mutability, what is coming to be will be continuously ceasing before it may ever reach a state of abiding being.

All this goes completely against the common, everyday, ignorant man's way of thinking, and to the extent that he is aware of the flux of existence, he will constantly feel himself to be in a conscious or unconscious state of uncertainty, instability and irritation.

Even the subtlest impression or mood in the mildest-mannered man is subject to uncertainty, instability and is the cause of some resultant sense of subtle irritation.

Furthermore, in case it is not already obvious, from what has been explained above, there is absolutely no human personality beyond the consisting momentary confluence of the five aggregates.

What we consider as self is a conceived conditioned phenomenon in a series of mental events which is always temporary—always arising and ceasing.

When, through ignorance, consciousness of the idea of self wants to cling to life or the objects it thinks it wants in this life, there will be a gaping-discrepancy between what is expected to remain in existence (being) and that which is constantly disappearing.

The urge for perpetual life is called grasping after continued existence, and the body-grasping is constantly casting out multiple networks of innumerable grappling hooks to catch new things to nourish it.

Concerning the term 'mental irritation,' Francis Story also makes the point that "like all other organisms, man is conditioned to respond to irritation, for the principle of irritation plays a leading role in organic evolution."

There is always some form of irritation present, conscious or unconscious.

Our wishing for a life free from pain is often based on fear and anxiety that the pain we have known will come back again and, perhaps, in a much worse form.

The pleasure-pain principle, indeed, may be part of nature that teaches us to keep things in balance and follow the Middle Way as an expedient way of surviving in the process of evolution.

Furthermore, "pleasure in itself is a source of pain"—as long as it lasts, there is the anxiety that it will cease and become a source of longing—a longing for the returning of an already past and no longer existent state that can never be repeated the way it was.

While it takes a long time to figure this out, there is also the accompanying lesson in the fact that, while, on the one hand, self-indulgence eventually leads to pain, on the other hand, self-restraint results in the opposite.

In any case, suffering and pain are here to stay, even if *we* are not, so you may either accept the reality of suffering or falsely imagine it to be whatever else you may want.

It all you depends on you, looking into the mind and having insights into what is true.

That suffering and pain are here to stay are also inextricably bound up with the Three Signata: impermanence, suffering and non-self. Indeed, everything in the universe is inextricably bound to arise and pass away.

In its cosmological aspect, suffering even has an existence independent of man's awareness. If even our own galaxy will break up into elements and particles in space, one day, so who are we to say that we are here to stay?

Energy and nourishment are what make things change. Energy draws and compacts particles together, and energy blows them apart. This is the law of the cosmos, throughout all galaxies.

So when we consider that man is nothing more than a relatively small, composite bundle of such energies and particles, acting in the way all compounds arise and cease, in this world and in all galaxies, it is hard to see how such a minor and insignificant compound of elements as the tiny speck of a man, having arisen and grown in proportion and size only relative to his immediate environment—it is hard to conceive of how such a insignificant compound of aggregates could believe it had an 'individual' personality at all.

Bhante G., the Venerable Gunaratna, has inferred that this compound of elements which we call 'self' is a simplified psychophysical frame of referents which we need and require to be able to continue cope and exist within our environment and survive rather than die.

But even if this were so, such a frame of referents and skills as tools, just to survive would be an over-simplification of how the cunning, human mind had evolved over time, so that man would know how strive, to continue to survive, for at least a while, as long as dependent arising conditions allow.

If this were so, such an implied survival-of-the-fittest view would be a narrow, and only partially true view, providing man with only the requisite knowledge needed for the task of survival, but as Bhante G. would surely agree, providing no knowledge of goodness or morality or a higher and wider cosmological view.

This means the theory of survival of the fittest, seen alone, leaves little or no room for morality or inherent goodness and does not account for man's tendency to take more that he needs. These are matters upon which we may muse and perhaps gain some insight.

But it also stands to reason that a man struggling for his life in hostile surroundings will seldom have time to pause and contemplate and philosophize upon the wider

cosmological aspect of transience and impermanence as it affects his existence or non-existence. Nor will he have time to stop and philosophize about the transient nature of matter.

He will not know (through prolonged mind concentration) that everything in life depends on the changing nature of natural substances and waves of matter.

According to the Buddha, matter is made up of four primary elements in different combinations arising under different conditions dependent on different factors.

Francis Story writes, "Matter is made up of the four great primaries.

"For convenience, they are defined as the elements of solidity, cohesion, temperature and motion. Space is sometimes added as a fifth.

"For philosophic purposes, this is an adequate definition, denoting as it does, the varied transformations as well as the atomic functions of the atomic units (*kalaapa*) of matter.

"These atoms and their components are in a continuous state of movement and change, a process in which energy can assume the physical aspect of solid, physical substance.

"That this is only an appearance is fully confirmed by modern physics,

"For as Bertrand Russell has pointed out:

"In pursuit of something that could not be treated as substantial, physicists analyzed ordinary matter into molecules, molecules into atoms, atoms into electrons and protons, but now electrons and protons themselves are dissolved into systems of radiations by Heisenberg and systems of waves by Schroedinger. The two systems amount mathematically to the same thing. And these are not wild metaphysical speculation, they are sober mathematical calculations accepted by the majority of experts."

Francis Story comments further,

"Since matter has resolved itself into energy, whether it be as radiations or waves, all phenomena are seen as a succession of *events* in the space time continuum, not as static entities.

"To be properly understood, they must be observed as processes bearing the unitary characteristic of all forms of energy, that is to say perpetual movement and transmutation.

"Here again, the problem of individuality obtrudes itself, for like the protozoan, the atom has no real identity from one moment to another in the phases of its hectic existence.

"The basic structure of the universe itself is energy, something that can only be described as an unceasing restlessness and agitation.

“Thus, for us, what we consider as body, solidity or corporeality is, in the final analysis, not what it appears to be, but belongs to the same category of phenomena, wherever they happen to be, internally or externally and “subject to the same laws of dissolution wherever [they are] found.

“The same is true of the factors of cohesion, temperature and motion, and the same is true of what appears to the senses be form, feeling, perception, arising mental formations and the resultant restlessness and motions of consciousness as energy events.

“To put it in Buddhist language, one should try to understand according to reality and true knowledge that the body is just a component of changing forms of energy whether, organically or mentally, dependent changing factors and conditions.

“Even the simplification of phenomena into the simile of basic elements is not what it seems to be because in physics there is nothing that can be called absolutely solid, gaseous or liquid, but each partakes in some degree of the nature of the others.

“Phenomena, wherever they may arise and appear may be said to be of one kind in its fundamental structure, and Buddhist cosmic analysis defines it by the characteristics of (*lahutta*) lightness or buoyancy, (*mudita*) softness or plasticity, and (*kammannatta*) motion or activity.

“Since in physics, there is nothing that can be called solid, gaseous or liquid, but each partakes in some degree of the nature of the others, this gives contemporary evidence of what the Buddha said about the nature of matter to disabuse the mind of any belief that the human body as an organism distinct from other material objects and to counteract the tendency to regard the body as the ‘self’ or integral to the self.”

The main point Francis Story is making is that suffering (*dukkha*), in its broadest sense, designates a kind mental and physical uneasiness, continually coming together and breaking up, evolving and dissolving, appearing and disappearing in processes of inevitable change, in everything in life, from the most subtle impressions, to mild discomforts and dissatisfactions to wild explosions of agony or madness in a dynamic process that an ordinary man with wrong view cannot control and yet considers to be ‘his life.’

The mental problem for man, and this means you and *me*, is that man cannot accept the ever-changing process of nature, which is the central problem that suffering (*dukkha*) is inseparable from the process of coming to be which will ever be in a state of becoming and never reach an ultimate state of coming-to-be.

Common man may become agitated or angry when he realizes that he cannot be as he desires to be, but this is *avijja* or ignorance of seeing things as they really are.

Similarly, in the mental aggregates of what seem and appear to be form, feeling, perception, arising mental formations and restless motions of consciousness, subtle irritation and restlessness take on diverse forms such as fretfulness, excitability, frustration, anger, worry, conflicting desires and emotions, and all sorts of other wild and distressful states. Heat consumes energy and this is as true for you as it is for me.

Furthermore, we realize:

“Seen in this light, even what we know of happiness is not free from the *dukkha* of agitation.

“Happiness exists only in contrast to its opposite mode of restlessness which we call sorrow.

“Since pleasure and pain are merely relative states, neither of which can be experienced without its opposite, Buddhism denies the possibility of a perfect, unchanging and unalloyed (pure) happiness where the conditions of conscious life prevail.” (Wheel 34-35)

Even the vaguest impression of agitation still consumes energy as heat, so again, we come up against the ever-recurring hindrance that, as long as there is still any trace of worldly human consciousness-irritation in the body-mind aggregate, liberation on the path to deliverance from human suffering is still bound to fail.

The cause of the truth of *dukkha* is that the origin of craving inevitably leads to suffering, which becomes even more clear once we understand the Second Noble Truth.

Concerning the Second Noble Truth

Francis Story, discusses the Cause of Suffering:

“It is usually explained that unfulfilled desire or craving causes suffering, so the way to cut out suffering is to cut out desire or craving, but, unfortunately for us, it is not as simple as that, as will be explained in the sentence below:

“In a single sentence the Buddha said, “Thus it is, Ananda, that craving comes into being because of sensation.”

“But for the sensation to be there must also be the mind and the body, and that body and mind must have been brought about by prior craving so that the sequence of cause and effect extends infinitely into the past.”

This is precisely the idea which dependent origination presents; it is a system of related conditions rather than of temporal events. It is a system which necessitates close observation and analysis.

In the *Abhidhammatthasangha* (VIII.I), it says

“Through ignorance, a human being fails to understand the impermanence and ‘substanceless’ nature of existence as it truly is.

“He enjoys the things of the world, taking them to be real and lasting, and so creates a craving for them.

“On account of his cravings, he seeks to obtain one and avoid the other.

“This leads to the continuity of his life process, a chain of the struggle for living ... his good and bad activities (*sankhaara*) ... determine his mental disposition and all of his subsequent consciousness ...

“Dependent on the mental and physical aggregates, he acquires the six fields of sense cognition. Depending on the six fields of sense cognition, he gets contact with the object of sense.

“The *contact produces sensation; the sensation gives rising to craving; and craving to grasping.*

“Grasping continues the life process ... and thus (the life continuum flows).

“Thus ... *he becomes old and dies, experiencing all kinds of grief, lamentation, suffering, anxiety and despair.*

“Perpetually he moves on in the round of birth and death, so long as he is in bondage to ignorance.”

We are further reminded that,

“Sensual craving, which is generated by contact of the organs of sense with their objects, is six-fold: craving for pleasurable sights, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental impressions. These are known as the fields (*aayatana*) of sense perception.

The craving for existence takes three forms, corresponding to the spheres in which life manifests: that is craving for existence

- (i) in the sensual spheres (*kaamaa loka*);
- (ii) in the fine material spheres (*ruupaa loka*); and
- (iii) in the formless spheres (*anuurupa loka*) or mental planes.

The craving for self-annihilation is the group of desires that accompany the erroneous view that the aggregates of phenomenal personality constitute a soul which is annihilated at death.”

To continue the analysis,

“Thirty-six streams of craving are recognized in Buddhist psychology: eighteen of them internal (*ajjhatta*), depending on subjective concepts, and eighteen external (*bahhirra*) associated with subject-object relationships. But every type and degree of craving contributes to the sum total of the grasping which fastens living beings to the wheel of rebirth.

“This is especially true of the lower forms of craving connected with the unwholesome mental concomitants: lust, ill-will and delusion.

So we find in the *Anguttara Nikaaya* (III,33)

“Where so ever beings spring into existence, there their deeds will ripen, and wherever their deeds may ripen, there they will gather the fruits of those deeds, be it in this life, be it in the next or be it in any future life.”

The pith of the point, here, is:

“Every volitional act is motivated by some kind of desire; consequently, thought itself is practically inseparable from desire in the mind still dominated by ignorance.

“And it is the thought-impulse that radiates outwards in the last moment of consciousness which gives rise to another psychophysical organism, thus renewing the sequence of cause and effect in a fresh life continuum.

“Throughout the creative process, the urge which maintains this perpetual renewal of energy is the desire to experience conscious life, ‘seeking now here, now there’ for satisfaction.” (Wheel 34-35)

We may throw some fresh light on the subject by considering that if neurological impulses in the brain create and emit energy, which even medical research can measure, to some degree, we are not just using a loose metaphor when we use the term “brain waves.”

And it figures that if everything in the universe works in systems of processes of tiny vibrations and waves, the process of thinking will work and be the cause of determined psychophysical effects in the same way.

Just as there are uncountable invisible forms that create and radiate energy in this world, (beyond the ones we all know, like electricity and light and solar radiation, etc.) so the psychophysical system, when it is in an process of seeking and desiring, with increasing intensity, will throw-off or emanate energy in the same way.

Often, we can even feel, within ourselves, the arising energy connected to basic, natural instincts, and, perhaps, just as often, or, perhaps, even more frequently, those close to us feel the effects of our aggressive energy arising. They may ‘pick up on’ and ‘feel the effects of the mental energy burning within us resultant of our hidden frustrated, subconscious and conscious desires, even though we ourselves, in our own mental confusion, distraction and delusion, may not consciously be aware of the energy field we are creating and emanating around us.

Our arising mind-body energy, however, many will be happy to hear, can, depending on circumstances, be either harmful or healing to the body and the mind, in their psychophysical interplay, but, unfortunately, in the world of common-place human interaction, it usually works negatively rather than in a positive way.

Such positive energy, moreover, as we have mentioned before, can also be aroused for the establishment of sublime states, which we will discuss later in our section entitled: *The Four Sublime States*.

The mind and the body and their inter-relationship with our environment, as an inter-dependent field for such consummation of energy, can be either creative or destructive.

Unfortunately, as we have said, it is usually destructive, especially when we are so intently self-absorbed in grasping after consciously or unconsciously created desired mental objects, that we are unaware that the mental energy thus being created and further radiated, will inevitably be both harmful to others and to ourselves.

Why we can be so blind to the harm we do to ourselves and others is due to (*avijja*)—our own subjective ignorance of the root causes of our passions, resentments, desires, and so on.

Unfortunately, even though it is often the case that, such individuals secretly know that the cause of harmful desires will lead to negative long-term effects, they obstinately, out of habit, continue to resist even their own insight.

They will not consciously confirm what the mind inherently knows about the harmfulness of their actions, even to themselves, and, they continue in their obdurate and unwise course, all the way through to an increasingly negative and harmful and, usually, painful end.

If the ignorant man could train his mind to go the opposite way, the result for his mental and physical health would be positive and wholesome, but the obdurate mind which resists like a stubborn animal, cannot be prodded, even in moments of occasional insight, into admitting there may be any the other way than his own.

Another clear point Francis Story makes is that,

“It was under the domination of the craving urge that the rudimentary forms of life evolved into the complex structures of the higher animals and man.

“More and better sensory organs were needed to satisfy the unconscious craving for sense experience, and so the vital urge worked through the processes of biological evolution to produce them.

“Life is not the work of a conscious creator, with his object fully in view; it is the life of a blind groping force.”—a force to survive and stay alive and get whatever you need and want if there is nothing in the way to stop you.

Thus we may say that “Man is not a distinct and special creation. He merely represents the highest peak to which organic evolution has reached on this planet.”

Unfortunately, he has developed more than the force which he needs to get only what is requisite to survive in a healthy and relatively peaceful manner, and this is why he strives to get more than he needs and develops the tendency to be aggressive and greedy to protect his possessions.

The Buddha also reminds us, in total contrast, to the above, (for the few who may know) that there are also those who have the good fortune to be born into this world, who develop the capacity to strive on the middle path, maintaining only what is needed to develop a healthy mental and physical balance, to develop the moral faculty on the path of right concentration and wisdom to ultimately attain a peace that surpasses understanding. It depends on why and where you were born and on what dependent factors.

Concerning the Third Noble Truth

Francis Story discusses the Cessation of Suffering:

We are told that the Buddha’s Enlightenment was attained in three stages:
in the first watch, he acquired knowledge of previous states of existence.
in the second watch he achieved knowledge of how beings pass
from one state of existence to another in accordance with their deeds.

“At this [third] point he has discerned the truths of suffering and moral causality as it operates through *kamma*.”

And, at the fourth stage, “At the conclusion of the last watch, he penetrated to the knowledge of the underlying causes of existence, with its root in craving and ignorance and the means by which the process could be brought to an end.”

And now comes the important part for those who want to know:

“In the last watch of the night, out of compassion for living beings, by fixing his mind on dependent origination, and meditating on it both in order of becoming and in order of cessation, at sunrise, he obtained Supreme Enlightenment, and then he uttered these words:

“Vainly, have I wandered
through many births,
seeking the builder of this house.
Painful indeed is repeated birth.
Now, O builder of the house,
Never again shall you build.
All of your rafters are shattered.
The ridge pole cast down.
My mind has attained the unconditioned;
The cravings are extinguished.”
(*Dhammapada* commentary and *Dhammapada* vs. 134-135)

And what do these words mean? The Buddha, having been well-educated, was accustomed to speaking in figurative language, in analogies, comparisons, similes and metaphors, just as cultivated men have done in the development of all languages, and, here, he is using a comparative analogy.

He means that the house is the body,
the builder is craving,
passions are the rafters
and the ridge pole is ignorance.

In the Buddha’s words,

“For, through the complete fading away and extinction of craving (*tanhaa*),
clinging to existence (*upadaana*) is extinguished;
through the cessation of clinging,
the process of becoming (*bhava*) is extinguished,
through the extinction of becoming, rebirth (*jaatti*) is extinguished, and
through the extinction of rebirth, decay and death, grief, lamentation,
suffering, sorrow and despair are extinguished.

Thus comes about the extinction of the entire mass of suffering.
And thereby comes about the cessation and overcoming of bodily form, of sensation,
perception, mental formations and consciousness; this is the cessation of suffering, the
end of disease, the overcoming of decay and death.” (*Samyutta Nikaaya*, 12)

We should speed-read this selection from the texts before we go quickly on to the next passages. On the contrary, we should go back to the beginning of this quotation, and

review the intention of each individual word and statement, until we are sure that we have got the meaning of each symbol and step clearly in our heads.

Otherwise, if we do not read carefully and with close attention, our minds will soon go fuzzy, become unclear and begin to wander, even though wouldn't want admit it, not even to our selves.

Here we shall not delve deeply, into a discussion of Nibbana, because it is beyond the scope of our above-stated topic; however, concerning form, the Buddha is explaining that Nibbana is the cessation of the process, the extinction of the aggregates of clinging that formerly gave rise to a phenomenal life continuum. "It is the only state in which suffering cannot find a foothold."

In the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the Buddha declares:

"This, *Bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of the cessation of ill: the complete cessation, giving up, abandonment of that craving, complete release from that craving and complete detachment from it."

Here, Francis Story says, we have the psychological state presented in terms that relate to an attitude towards the world and towards the contents of sensory perception. This, we may confidently state is the end of the mind watching the mind and its reactions to external perceptions. The mind becomes free from dependence on changing external conditions—it is detached it is unconditioned.

Unfortunately, for us, all but disciples who have been liberated, live in a world which is conditioned.

To illustrate, Francis Story says, "All terms of reference we use in thought and communication are founded upon things and ideas belonging to the realm of conditionality," so that we have no means of formulating an idea that is not related by comparison or contrast to some other idea."

And further, "The whole content of our experience is a complex of relationships. Thought swings continually between the opposites, light and dark, heat and cold, good and bad.

All these are relative values representing oppositions or degrees of contrast, none of which has any real meaning apart from that relatedness.

Since nothing in the world of sense-experience has any character except in relation to something else, the only way to regard the sensible world is as a sphere of merely apparently relative reality."

Things seem apparently real on one particular level of sense awareness, — the one on which consciousness normally functions, — although, it must also be noted that the nature of perceived phenomena will never be altogether the same for any two individual entities in all details) because individual perceptions are coloured by and dependent on personal past experience.

But on a more highly-developed and sharpened-level of the mind, however, the disciple's trained-consciousness, will be observing and understanding the changing nature of any and all actions of consciousness as mundane mind-body reactions to apparent fixed concepts and ideas, and any all phenomenal appearance will, ultimately, become known for what they are: as wholly unreal and ultimately non-existent.

Francis Story states: "The physicist sees the universe in terms of electronic forces, the mathematician reduces it to mathematical formulae; and while both have to deal with the world as though it were really what it appears to be to the ordinary man, the physicist's picture of it on the level of their work is something quite different and unsubstantial."

Indeed, such scientists have to live simultaneously in a world of the senses, taking an image to be just as their sensory faculties conventionally report it to be, and in yet another world of the scientific enquiry in which they know that the sensory picture or image is not a true one...

And the author states further: "The 'solid' objects we see and feel consist more of space than of matter. This fact is demonstrated by the structure of the smallest atom known, that of hydrogen. In the hydrogen atom the distance of the electronic orbit from the nucleus is, relative to its size, twice the distance of the earth from the sun a matter of 96,000,000 miles.

On comparison, 'solid' matter contains more space than our solar system.

What we cognize through the senses, therefore, is not the 'thing as it is' but a relative aspect of it—relative, that is, to our own particular mode of consciousness.

To say that the physical world as it appears to us is unreal or false, because it exists as a fact in our consciousness, [or] to say that it is real, as an external and objective reality, is even further from the truth."

Another reason we can't really talk about Nibbana is because of the limits of language, because language is just a set of social assumptions based commonly accepted grammatical conventions.

Words and ideas are, in fact, unreal constructions, born of the "mistaken belief that ultimate truth can be understood through conceptual thinking bound to the realm and the terminology of sense-data."

It is for this reason, Francis Story tells us "that the brave attempts of philosophers, profound and intricate though they may be, have never succeeded in giving a final and completely satisfying account of reality."

He also says another thing which summarizes it all in one sentence: "The final *Nibbana* is the point at which cause and effect become identical, and, by cancelling one another out, annihilate space, time and all the categories of thought." How is that for concise?

In the Buddha's words:

"O Bhikkhus, of all the states, compounded or un-compounded, Liberation is the best—namely, the expulsion of pride, the relief of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of the round of

birth and death, the extinction of craving, emancipation, cessation, the going out of worldly desire.” (A. II, 34.)

The Buddha also said the well known but little understood words: “O Bhikkhus, there is an Unborn, Unmade, Unoriginated, Unformed. Were there not such a state, Unborn, Unmade, Unoriginated, Unformed, there would be no escape from that which is born, made, originated, formed. But since, O Bhikkhus, there is indeed this state of the Unborn, Unmade, Unoriginated and Unformed, there is truly an escape from the born, made, originated and formed.”

The meaning is clear, but few achieve the end of the path and finally attain it.

Concerning the Fourth Noble Truth

Francis Story describes the way to the cessation of suffering—which is called the Noble Eight-fold Path:

“And what, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the way that leads to the cessation of suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.”

Before outlining the eight factors of the path, which requires some detail, first let’s relate what the Buddha said about the Middle Path or the Middle Way.

In the first discourse after his Enlightenment, which the Buddha delivered to the five ascetics who had deserted him when he abandoned the path of self-mortification, he explained that there are two extreme courses to be avoided:

“On the one hand, that of sensual indulgence, which is ‘base, low, vulgar, impure and unprofitable,’ and on the other, the practice of extreme physical asceticism, which is ‘painful, impure, vain and unprofitable.’

In contrast to these stands The Middle Path, which the Enlightened One has discovered; the Path which enables one to see and to know, which leads to peace, to discernment, to full knowledge, to *Nibbana*. Free from pain and torture is this path, free from lamentation and anguish; it is the perfect path” (*Samyutta*, 56).

Francis Story ends his exposition with yet another one-liner which is precious for its conciseness: “The Noble Eightfold Path is a way of life that begins with the mind and ends with the mind transcended.”

Those who knew and remember Francis Story are aware of the significant contribution he made to the Buddhist Publication Society and to his dissemination and understanding of the Buddha Dhamma for readers in English, both in the East and the West, and in the condensation and editorial commentary above, we have depended on him, firstly, for his concise critical expertise and, secondly, as a tribute to a Buddhist scholar and teacher who is still being read, in learned Pali-English circles although, he was born just short of one hundred years ago, in 1910.

The Noble Eight-fold Path

Arising out of the Four Noble Truths is the Noble Eight-fold Path—the way to liberation on the path to purity.

This Eightfold path is the centre and the apex of what makes the Buddha-Dhamma unique in comparison to all other religions and philosophies and forms of moral practice.

So let's look at it more closely to see what makes it different.

Much of what needs to be said has been discussed above, under the heading of *The Three Signata*, in particular the nature of ignorance (*avijja*), suffering (*dukkha*) and the impermanent nature of all things (*anicca*), including non-self (*anatta*).

The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's book, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*. (Wheel 308-311) contains the best explanation to read in present-day English for a detailed description of the factors on the path.

Bhikkhu Bodhi was the former Editor and President of the Buddhist Publication Society, who worked closely with, and acted as successor to the Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, in Kandy, in the Forest Hermitage, to bring the BPS mission to the fulfilment of its quest in the final years of the twentieth century before the turn of the millennium.

There is also a book by the present author on this same topic, called *The Heart of Theravada Buddhism, The Noble Eightfold Path*, but, as it depended heavily on Bhikkhu Bodhi's own research and editorial advice and citations from the works of Ledi Sayadaw and the Venerable Nyanatiloka Maha Thera, it covered the same territory, albeit perhaps in somewhat simpler words.

In the present context, we cannot quote as extensively, on *The Noble Eightfold Path* as we have done with Francis Story on the *Four Noble Truths*, so we will confine ourselves, rather, to a tight, coherent, lexicographic summary, in hopes that the reader may be motivated to undertake wider study on the subject on his own.

1. Concerning Right View

We must understand that the common way in which mundane men see themselves and the things they sense and experience as being permanent and there for their own pleasure is a totally Wrong View because of their failure to see the nature of impermanence as it affects their personal views towards things they want and their resultant false expectations of the way they want things to turn out to be for themselves.

Ironically, right understanding means being able to see through such a personal and worldly-based wrong view and, thus, being able to see through its dependency on wrong understanding of the assumption of the world being there for the sake of self-satisfaction. Right View is sometimes translated as right perspective, which means

that we must see the world from the perspective of *The Four Noble Truths* as explained by the Buddha.

Bhikkhu Bodhi writes:

“To follow the *Noble Eightfold Path* is a matter of practice rather than intellectual knowledge, but to follow the path correctly, it has to be understood. In fact right understanding itself is a part of practicing the path.”

In a quote from the preface to his book, he states:

“The path claims primacy because it is precisely this that brings the teaching to life. The path translates the Dhamma from a collection of abstract formulas into a continually unfolding disclosure of truth.”

In short, the path becomes a new way of life.

Regarding the term suffering or *dukkha*, he says:

“It refers to the basic unsatisfactoriness running through our lives, which sometimes erupts as sorrow, grief, disappointment or despair” but more often as something that “hovers at the edge of our awareness as a vague, unlocalized sense that things are never quite perfect, never fully adequate to our expectations of what they should be.

“Even our pleasures, the Buddha says, are not immune from *dukkha*. They give us happiness while they last, but they do not last forever, [and] eventually, they must pass away, and when they go, the loss leaves us feeling deprived.

Our lives are, for the most part, strung-out between the thirst for pleasure and the fear of pain. We pass our days running after the one and running away from the other, seldom enjoying the peace of contentment; real satisfaction seems always somehow out of reach.”

The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi echoes the same essential truths as Dr. Wijesekera and Francis Story, in the foregoing sections, because they are the truths, expressed in the actual words of Buddha, (being translated into what have gradually become more-and-more polished and refined English renderings, under the hands of Sri Lankan Pali Scholars, Professors and Noble-Minded Monks like Venerable Nyanaponika, Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi) based upon the one and only original Dhamma, in the classic Pali texts.

It was Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi’s teacher, the Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, who visualized, the dissemination of the Dhamma as the mission of the Buddhist Publication Society, beginning in 1958, following the inspiration of his own teacher, the Venerable Nyanatiloka Maha Thera, who was the first foreign monk ordained in the Pali Theravada Tradition, in the first years of the twentieth century, and who devoted his monk’s life to translating and explicating, the Buddha Dhamma reliably, to the wider world, in English language renderings based on the tradition of Theravada monastic and meditative practice, as outlined in the words of the Pali texts.

The essential thing for us in terms of “The Mind Watching the Mind” is to see that no part of the Noble Eightfold Path may be skipped-over or left out on “The Path to Purification,” as we shall see in the instructions and guidelines which follow:

Concerning the cause of suffering

Bhikkhu Bodhi rightly says that if we want to put an end to suffering, we have to stop it where it begins, with its cause.”

How does this apply to you?

In order to understand and end suffering, we each need to seek out and examine its cause.

What makes the Buddha’s approach unique is that it gradually reveals to us a process which slowly trains, enables and allows the mind to observe and analyze, and eventually see, how the root causes of our own sufferings arise, within our own minds—as bothersome, hungry, irritating, stress-causing, self-satisfying needs—and how they can be eliminated if we, with mental detachment, consistently stand back and continue watching the grasping mind’s greedy mental habits, movements and actions—watching with unrelenting objective energy and endurance—until we are able to isolate and clearly see the burning and hungry sources and causes for the untrained mind’s grasping mental actions, before or as they are arising.

If we can do this and allow the trained mind watching the mind to gradually work on extinguishing and eliminating the wildly, untamed and untrained grasping of the mind—which still greedily needs to continue nourishing and feeding itself through contact to external and internal mental objects—

If we can concentrate, until the trained and watchful side of the mind observing the mind, finally, clearly sees and is able to relinquish the last latent impulses of self-nourishment and, thereby, exhaust the last embers of the burning energy of arising attachments to contacts and mental needs-to-feed—

If we can, eliminate the last embers of consuming and already consumed nourishment at the end of the process, the detached part of the mind will become cool and calm—“like a cool, clear pool,” to quote an oft-cited image.

While this process of purification sounds consistent and balanced, (at least in language and words) it is still not so easy to go through and finally accomplish, at least while we are still subjectively-willing-victims of the uncontrolled and wild sides of our own minds.

So how do we stop the perverse process of becoming our own willing-victims?

The answer is that, once we have right view or understanding, we may have the good sense, (the good intention) to start with right view and, then, begin to attempt to curb the arising, distressing and harmful effects of the powerful, self-destructive intentions of the untrained and errant, wild side of the mind.

2. Concerning Right Intention

Based on right view, with the right attitude, we must want to do the right thing for the right reason.

It means making a commitment to avoiding harmful actions for the purpose of self-training as a form of mind-development.

For the sake of mind-development, we begin by trying to exercise relinquishment towards the pull of any desire or force that is arising in the mind which may lead to wholesome results.

This does not mean development of self-control by force but rather by slowly developing the wisdom to foresee the effects of mental causes.

Right Intention acts on the ability to see a cause and effect relationship, based on dependent origination — [or in other words] — ‘When this happens, that happens.’

Right Intention is conducive to harmlessness. It means seeing and understanding that good-will leads to more good, and knowing that bad-will (or bad intention) leads to more ill. It [also] means the development of loving-kindness and compassion, as an antidote, in place of anger violence and cruelty.

Right Intention practiced, in itself, is a beginning, which, when continued, consistently and with mindfulness, can take us towards the end of the path.

Since the path both begins and ends with Right View and Right Intention, we can, now, proceed with the subsequent, six factors, dependent on these two primary definitions, because, at the end of our discourse, we will finally have to tie right view and right understanding together with all the other six threads of the chord into one, when binding all eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path in the end and comprehending them further in connection with the gradual attainment of right wisdom through right insight.

Since, **from the very beginning**, everything depends on right mindfulness and morality, we have to learn to practice awareness in our every thought, word and deed. As thought precedes action, for example, we have to think about everything we say before we say it. Based on the noble intention, we even have to be attentive to catching potential thoughts which might lead to spoken words which contain any potential harmfulness to others or ourselves.

The best way to keep right practice before the mind in our daily routine is always to be careful about practicing right speech

3. Concerning Right Speech

We have to be careful about what we say because words can break or save lives, make enemies or friends, and create war or peace.

To abstain from false speech, we should

Not deliberately tell lies and avoid speaking deceitfully;

Abstain from slanderous speech and not speak maliciously;

Abstain from harsh words that may harm or hurt others;

Abstain from idle chatter and gossip that is shallow and contains no depth;
In short, we should tell the truth, speak kindly and thoughtfully to others;
Speak softly and gently, warmly and compassionately to others; and
Remain silent when speech is not necessary.
Ideally, we should speak only about the Dhamma with like-minded individuals.

It follows that,

—if we are paying close attention and being mindful of every thought before it turns into an action of speech,

—then, we should be *even more careful* about controlling the way thought may turn into action.

The good thing for us is that the mind is quicker than the body, so the person who develops mindfulness will develop the skill of catching the mind when its arising inclinations or intentions are potentially harmful and dangerous and, thus, be capable of halting all actual unskilful bodily actions before they occur. This is called right action.

4. Concerning Right Action

We should avoid any and all bodily actions which are expressions of unwholesome or harmful intentions, to ourselves or other persons or any form of living being in the world. Unwholesome actions lead to clouded or unsound states of the mind Right action means

Abstention from harming sentient beings, especially the taking of life in all its forms;

Abstention from the intention of suicide;

Abstention from doing any intentional sort of harm or delinquency;

Abstention from taking what is not given, including stealing, robbery, fraud, deceptiveness and dishonestly; and

Abstention from any sort of sexual misconduct.

In short, we should always act kindly and compassionately and respectfully and honesty towards the others and their belongings, being mindful that our relationships to ourselves and others and to the world-at-large is harmless. Right action will be discussed again when we deal with the five moral precepts.

It follows that, if we must be mindful that there is no harmfulness intended in our actions, then, we should earn our living and carry on an occupation that does no harm to others or to anything else in any way. This is called right livelihood.

6. Concerning Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood means that

We should earn our living in a clean, moral, sound, innocent, guiltless, upright and virtuous (righteous) way,

We should earn our income legally and peacefully.

In earning our living, we must abstain from harming others in any way.

In particular, we should abstain from dealing in arms and weapons.

We should abstain from dealing in living beings, including human beings for slavery or prostitution or animals for slaughter.

We should abstain from producing, butchering and selling meat.

We should abstain from selling intoxicants and poisons such as alcohol and drugs and other harmful substances.

Lastly, but not least, we should abstain from following any sort of occupation that would violate the principles of right speech and right action in any way.

What this means is that if most of us looked at ourselves, and closely examined the ways we earn our livings, we might possibly see ourselves as being somehow compromised in our occupations in some ways.

And, if this is so, we should be asking ourselves about what we can do about that. Some, like teachers and nurses, for example, would be in a good position to practice right livelihood, if they mindfully observed their actions in every detail of their daily routine and practice.

In all cases concerning right speech, right action and right livelihood, there is only one person who can ever know if his/her actions are virtuous and that will be you yourself—‘the one who knows,—and you yourself are the only one who can do anything about it.

The terrible thing about morality (*sila*) is that the responsibility falls solely upon you, including the sense of blame and shame that you feel, when you know, through the mind watching the mind, how you are secretly deceiving yourself and others.

But the good news is the resultant sense of moral dread that you feel which motivates you to do what you have to do in order to set things straight and be morally wholesome [rather than commit unwholesome actions and have to pay for them sooner or later].

There are all too few of us who can say, “I have done what needed to be done, and now, I have set things right.”

The reason for this is that it takes the greatest effort possible to overcome the inertia of just plain remaining in the worldly world with the rest of the worldly folks, it takes the greatest effort to perform the almost impossible, making a ‘paradigm shift’ by swimming against the current of the mundane and muddy life, with no other guarantee of success but your own ardent single-mindedness and confidence, which may or may not lead in the practice to a happy or supramundane state.

The blessing is that, once you are faced with this state of mixed, moral-consciousness—being pulled between two worlds—for the one (practitioner) with right view, there is no turning back to worldly ways—and so you continue to go forward because of your sense of right intentions, and you'll never want to return to face the consequences of any wrong actions.

This is the moral dilemma, and those who do fall back into unwholesome thoughts and actions, will usually also inherently know, with an inclination towards a feeling of dread, that they are and will be returning to yet another round of the kind of hell they have come from.

So what do we do?

We try to continue striving our best, without any particular expectation, and without any particular end in view, because this is the best thing to do.

We continue to tidy-up the workshop of the mind and sharpen our tools in preparation for formulating right mental actions, leading to purer and clearer states, following what is called right effort.

6. Concerning Right Effort

What we must know in addition to the inclination towards right action, is that (with continuing concentration upon developing the skill of abstaining from unwholesome states and developing wholesome states in their place), we will be proceeding on the path, (whether we, at first, notice a marked-difference or not) through the penetration of insight wisdom into the inner recesses of the mind where the base-intentions hide themselves, waiting for the chance to emerge and appear out of the gloomy darkness to attempt and try to overtake the mind whenever they can.

On the Noble Eightfold Path, it is necessary to make an arduous, unrelenting effort to overcome the tendencies that lead directly into temptations to indulge in wrong speech, wrong action and wrong livelihood.

Moreover, while it takes a lot of vital energy to swim against the stream of the current of attachment and dependency upon satisfaction from external things, it takes even more concentrated and focussed, burning energy to strive to overcome the hoards of unwholesome tendencies and intentions which try (often successfully) to sieve power and gain control over the mind within the mind even when it is striving to eradicate other sets of conditions and hidden unskilful mental associations and thought perceptions.

Without the pre-requisites of right effort and right energy, it is, frankly, impossible to make further progress on the path.

When we realize this, we have developed the insight to see how mental energy can be either controlled or uncontrolled, focussed unfocussed, within the mental states.

When we realize this, we have the insight to see how a lot of mental energy is uselessly-wasted and dissipated in running after unskilful states and unrealizable goals.

We have the insight to see how most people waste most of their energy in vain, in worldly pursuits that lead to little more than an unhappy path in the end.

There are some of us, however, within our society and culture, who learn how to cultivate and focus and direct their energy away from unwholesome ends and learn how to turn and focus concentrated energy upon wholesome states that, with time and perseverance, lead to a wholesome result in the end.

The same energy that serves as fuel for desire, envy, hatred and aggression and violence can be turned-around and used as fuel to develop and sustain more beneficial states of self-discipline, honesty, benevolence and kindness—leading away from the detrimental effects of wrong mindfulness—and, focussing, instead, on cultivating more pure and wholesome states.

Instead of being burned and wasted on useless desire, Right Effort may be used to develop the skills and powers of right mindfulness which may will have a enervating, radiant effect on our states of mind.

Right effort should be the way you are burning the energy of your life—on the one hand, to burn away, consume and extinguish wrong intentions and—on the other, to fuel right actions, that lead to right mindfulness and right concentration on the path to right wisdom.

Properly explained, right effort becomes entirely wholesome once one has reached the state where one is able to subdue unwholesome states.

Right effort may be broken-down into four types of endeavour that rank in four levels of achievement of purity and perfection:

The first is to prevent the arising of un-arisen unwholesome states.

The second is to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen.

The third is to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen, and

The fourth is to maintain and protect wholesome states already arisen.

This fourth factor of right effort—to protect and maintain wholesome states already arisen—is essential for the proper cultivation of meditation.

You cannot succeed in breathing or insight meditation without first, yourself, being able to cultivate the mental power of right effort.

Without right effort, the moment you begin to try to meditate, the untrained mind, having superior and unrestrained power, temporarily at least, for the moment, will be running off in search of something which it likes a whole lot better and which is a whole lot easier.

If you want to develop on the Noble Eightfold Path, however, you must be able to concentrate your mental effort in a way that keeps the mind one-pointed and controlled, and this takes firmly-determined and soundly-developed power of mind.

You must be able to develop the power of mind that controls the tendencies of the potential energy of mind to stop the latent impish-impulses of the mind before the

imp of the perverse appears unexpectedly from out of a dark corner somewhere and gets control of your mental actions.

It is perhaps worthy of mention, here, that we should never make the mistake that a lot of people make of thinking that ‘right effort’ is a skill that can be learned from a book, and then practiced a bit, to fall back upon, for example, if we happen to need it when we attend a meditation session with our friends.

Furthermore, we should never make the mistake of thinking that someone can teach us how to switch on the skill of right effort, like a light, so we can draw on its power just in case we need it sometime. It takes continual individual effort all the time. All day, every day and there is no other way.

Moreover, we cannot keep giving in to the whims and impulses of the mind all the time and, then, possibly, once a year go to a three-week meditation session and sit on a cushion and imagine that doing some breathing meditation exercises for a while will help you to clear and develop and empower your mind.

Periodic sessions like this have only limited, periodic success, which lasts more-or-less for as long as the mind is able to remain focused and concentrated and has not yet become distracted by the stress and madness of life back at work or at home in the everyday world.

The only way you can free your mind from strife is by constantly watching it all of the time and not allowing yourself to be distracted by one thing or another. How you arouse the effort is up to you, but whatever happens, there will surely be things you will have to relinquish, and exactly what they will be and only you yourself will be able to ultimately discern and distinguish.

On the level of morality, *sila* must co-exist and develop with meditation in everyday life if there is to be progress in the process of development of wisdom.

Luang Por Viriyang has said in his instructions for meditation teachers (ibid. I. pp.40-41) that:

“Meditation can fine-tune the fundamentals of the mind and strengthen its condition. It promotes happiness and peacefulness, from a family unit to community unit. Meditation is a path to conscious everyday life. It need not only be specifically a path to the supramundane on other planes of life.”

And further,

“Meditation is an achievement for those who would like to obtain the peace of mind which promotes happiness, strength for perseverance, wisdom, careful consideration and problem solving skills.”

In yet another place, putting it very specifically, Luang Por Viriyang says:

“Meditation is a scavenger hunt of the mind.”

This is a good sentence to remember, when our minds are running after trashy or nasty thoughts and getting wholly off-the-track of concentration on wholesomeness.

Right mindfulness also works as a garbage collector, picking up mental trash, useless thoughts and foul elements, along the way, and discarding and eliminating them, so they cannot mess-up your mind or leave a dirty track behind.

Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood and Right Effort, properly practiced, can purify our minds in the domain of morality, which in Pali, we call '*sila*.'

Without a firm foundation in '*sila*,' or morality, there can be little or no progress on the Noble Eightfold Path to purity, and those who make little or no progress in this domain are bound to remain in the realm of delusion, and, in contrast to the true practitioner, will eventually suffer the effects of their bad actions, in this life and/or the next, in the form of suffering and torment which is equal to the intensity of the bad actions they have performed in this world.

By contrast, the disciple who practices good thoughts and actions, in this world, avoiding the impulses of the senses to rush blindly right into the fiery pit of rash and unskillful deeds, will develop the skill of avoiding immoral actions and reap the benefit of the good and moral actions that his mind and body perform in this life.

The Pali word for such action, bad or good, is '*kamma*,' and, thus, we are said to reap the fruit of our actions—to reap the fruit of our *kamma*.

Directing the mind towards wholesome and beneficial actions is called right concentration, and while the word 'concentration' can be easily misapprehended, because it has a wide range of meanings and connotations in English, what it means here is simply right mindfulness, concentration on one mental object, as described and discussed above.

To summarize, the first four steps of the Noble Eightfold Path fall into the domain of morality or *sila*, but the path does not stop there, and the next two steps in the list take place within the mind, as opposed to arising out of contacts to in the external, outside, world.

They concern the mind looking inward—the mind watching the mind—which falls into the realm of meditation, which may be broken-down and discussed under the headings: Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, signified by the Pali word, '*samathi*.'

7. Concerning Right Mindfulness

We may define right mindfulness as “the controlled and perfected quality of cognition.” It is the mental ability to see things clearly as they actually are, free of mental distortion. But, as may be expected, this is not so easy.

Normally, as we have explained above, the cognitive process starts with an impression produced by a perception (or an arising thought in the mind) which does not remain and abide as the mere arising mental sense

impression, but, instead begins a process of further arising and associating, related and inter-connected memories and impressions with other arising thoughts and conceptions all developing together, which grow into more numerous and wider networks of impressions and conceptualizations, scanning (as it were) through the whole range of experience, fears and pains and previous sets of expectations, which will be different in the development of every individual and different in the expectations of every arising moment.

Moreover, this process happens almost instantaneously, depending on the factors and faculties of each individual mind, so that every different person formulates and develops a different complex of associations, to use a metaphor, as a picture in the mind. That's why they say no two people ever see the same thing in the same way.

And, further, as the process happens so-quickly, that we cannot follow it consciously, we cannot normally know in what way our individual mode of perception colours the picture in its own peculiar and particular way. The result always contains individual distortion.

So the question becomes, how do we get rid of those individual distortions that arise within our own minds? It sounds impossible.

Normally we believe that the human mind works according to certain sets of patterns that will be the universally the same and based on commonly-shared bodily and mental perceptions, but this is not true.

Human perceptions will yet always be individually different in some ways, depending on the individual and personal sets of systems of experiences we have had in the past—which may have been good or bad or mixed, depending on different sets of arising conditions, as they mixed with arising impressions appearing in the mind in what can only very instantaneously ever be defined as the changing present.

This sounds like a problem for psychology, but the Buddha knew the truth of reality and the individual distortions of perceptions and taught his disciples the way around the problem.

And what is this way?

The Buddha explained it in terms of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in terms of (i) contemplation of the body, (ii) contemplation of feeling (as unpleasant, pleasant or neutral), (iii) contemplation of the state of mind, and (iv) contemplation of phenomena.

The Buddha taught how to be aware of the psychophysical process in a way which we can actually observe and control the individual direction in which our thoughts are going.

The Four Factors of Mindfulness are a topic deserving of further study and practice on their own, but to do that, here, in more detail would disturb the

coherence of our outline of the Noble Eightfold Path, so, let's leave this for later and finish our comments on the path first.

The next and last factor in The Noble Eightfold Path, following Right Mindfulness in the factors is right concentration.

8. Concerning Right Concentration

What we need to remember is the fact that, even in the everyday mundane person's mind, the faculty of consciousness is present but at such a very low level that common people are normally not aware of it in normal states of mind in their everyday lives. Because such concentration occurs in natural human consciousness, at such a relatively low level of mental energy, it normally does not rise into conscious awareness.

Concentration may, however, be described as a capacity of mental force that can be aroused and forced and focussed, on one point or object for the sake of analyzing perception, even in the flow of consciousness, which we have described above in connection with the process of cognition.

Man's mind has the inherent capacity to develop and use this tool even though a man himself may not be consciously aware of it.

Conversely, for a practitioner who is trained in mental awareness and focussed attention, this capacity gradually develops into a one-pointedness of mind into a state in which all the mental faculties can be unified and directed onto one particular object.

In the development of the Noble Eightfold Path one learns, in particular, to direct this capacity for concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions as opposed to their opposites. Right Concentration comes to mean the capacity to discern and direct one's mind on wholesome concentration rather allow it to dwell in states of unwholesome concentration.

This means developing the capacity of discerning between arising awareness of mental actions as bare perceptions before they are categorized by the mechanical functioning of the mind, as good or bad or indifferent, and watching the process of the mind as it picks-up on associations and wants or does not as yet want to go after them.

It means developing the capacity of the mind to remain detached and the objectivity not to assign values to arising perceptions and, then, follow the train of pleasing or displeasing or indifferent mental associations which appears and follows them, like a one-tracked series of illusions arising in a self-directed home-made-movie in the mind.

The development of this capacity to discern does not happen from one moment to another, but, rather evolves during a process that can normally only be learned through the maturation and cultivation of meditation and insight practice which, as we have said, takes a long time and develops

dependent on the result of determined and concentrated perseverance and unrelenting endurance.

Normally, it would be expected that one would achieve this state of concentration only after a long period of association with like-minded, highly-developed monks or like-minded meditators and friends in the Dhamma, or—in some cases—even alone in solitude, in isolation, having wholly freed the mind from unwholesome associations and become firmly-established in states of wholesome, noble concentration.

Right Concentration so understood is “not for everyone,” but according to the Buddha, everyone is equipped with the tools and equipment to try it. As the saying goes, “One only has to start and continue,” and the place to start will be through concentration on one thing only.

And what should that one thing be?

While some may suggest that the best place to start is with the worst thing that is wrong with you (but while this can be helpful advice in some cases), the worst thing wrong with you will probably also be mentally distracting), so a wise teacher may know what form of practice might be best-suited to you and suggest which form of practice you might try to achieve the best results—or, once you are well-established on the path—you may just keep on experimenting yourself, until you find the form of one-pointed concentration that is at the same time the most comfortable, the most suited to you and the most beneficial.

An obvious place is with the breath, which we will come back to and talk about later in closer detail.

In the Noble Eightfold path, we begin with the factor of right view, which although most people are not aware of it is a very good place to start too.

Some textual evidence from the Pali texts, may be in order here, so we can know the words as they are translated from Pali (M.44), in this case by Venerable Nyanatiloka:

“What now is Right Concentration?”

It is defined as having the mind fixed to a single object (*cittekeggaataa*) which is one-pointedness of mind.

“Right Concentration (*sammaa-samaadhi*), in its widest sense is the kind of mental concentration which is present in every wholesome state of consciousness (*kusala-citta*) and hence is accompanied by at least Right Thought, Right Effort and Right Mindfulness.

“Wrong Concentration is present in unwholesome states of consciousness and hence is only possible in the sensuous realm and not in a higher sphere. *Sammaadhi*, used alone, always stands in the sutta for *sammaa-samaadhi* or Right Concentration.”

We shall not try to talk here about the higher states of concentration, (the so-called Four Absorptions or *Jhana* states). They can only be known through direct experience and are outside the range of our present topic.

In actual practice, the first two factors, Right View and Right Intention come both at the beginning and the end of the Noble Eightfold Path in a way that may be compared to sowing a small seed, which one plants on the path in the practice, and which, as it develops and grows, simultaneously with all the other path factors finally develops into a giant tree, comparable to a great oak tree, with its roots planted so firmly in the ground that while the odd gale force winds may shake it a bit, no storm can uproot it.

Right view (or understanding) and Right intention (or thought) fall within the domain of wisdom, and, just as a tree grows from a sapling, so wisdom, through proper practice, may be said to grow from the beginning to the end of a process of mind development, through constant and ardent practice, until the disciple has completed the process—until he has done what has to be done according to the word of the Buddha—finally reaching full fruition.

Full fruition is beyond comparison on the linguistic level of men and trees and solid things and forms like rocks and bricks,

Full fruition blooms beyond the conventional level in what the texts call the supramundane realm, beyond worldly perception or non-perception, which is another thing we cannot stop to talk about, now, because that would be wider and broader and different topic, from our focus a present, which we may state once again is—the inside, detached view of the one who knows—the mind watching the mind.

This is, rather, an appropriate juncture to include some quotations, from Bhikkhu Nanamoli (BPS Wheel 428-430), on the subject of Right View, and we will do this both—

- (i) for the sake of pulling together a summary of the factors of the Noble Eightfold path, leading to the end, and
- (ii) explaining the apparent paradox of why Right View is always said to be both the beginning and end of the path.

From the *Sammaditthi Sutta*, Right View, Bhikkhu Nanamoli translates:

“Bhikkhus, just as the dawn is the forerunner and first indication of the rising of the sun, so is right view the forerunner and first indication of wholesome states.

“For one of right view Bhikkhus, right intention springs up.

For one of right intention, right speech springs up.

For one of right speech, right action springs up.

For one of right action, right livelihood springs up.

For one of right livelihood, right effort springs up.
For one of right effort, right mindfulness springs up.
For one of right mindfulness, right concentration springs up.
For one of right concentration, right knowledge springs up.
For one of right knowledge right deliverance springs up.”

(Anguttara Nikaya 10:121)

In the end, one who has practiced the factors of the path according to the Buddha’s instructions, and through direct application and experience, with proper diligence and right effort, proceeds to the point of developing (cultivating) right knowledge and the wisdom which clears and opens the path to deliverance from suffering in the end.

These are the words of the Buddha, the one who knows how to clear the path. The end of the process seems to be stated clearly in the above reading, at least in common language.

If we look more closely at the language of the first sentence, however, on a second reading, we may see —looking back to the beginner’s perspective,

—how in the beginning, for the disciple, who has just awakened to right view,

—how, “just as the dawn is the forerunner and first indication of the rising sun,” we come to see

—how, from the beginning of proper practice, in avoiding being captivated and held by the appearance of wrong views and wrong intentions,

—how we proceed through the subsequent steps, through the forerunners of right mindfulness and right concentration, to the achievement of wisdom which leads to a firm foundation in wholesome states

—which, as beginners, we had only perceived vaguely, in the dawn of our understanding, as the opposite of unwholesome states arising out of wrong view.

Once more, following Bhikkhu Nanamoli’s translation of the wording which the Venerable Sariputta, uses in the same sutta, on Right View, we get a picture of what it means to travel the figurative arc of the sun in the simile from the first dawning of awareness to a perception of fully arisen awareness with regard to nutriment in the process of liberation.

A Bhikkhu asks the Venerable Sariputta:

“But friend, might there be another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view ... and has arrived at this true dhamma?”

“There might be friends.”

“When friends the noble disciple understands nutriment, the origin of nutriment, the cessation of nutriment, and the way leading to the cessation of nutriment, in that way, he is one of right view ... and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

“And what is nutriment and what is the origin of nutriment? What is the cessation of nutriment? What is the way leading to the cessation of nutriment?”

“There are these four kinds of nutriments for the maintenance of beings that have already come to be and for the support of those seeking a new existence. What four? They are physical foods as nutriment, gross or subtle; contact as the second; mental volition as the third; and consciousness as the fourth. With the arising of craving, there is the arising of nutriment.

“With the cessation of craving, there is the cessation of nutriment; the way leading to the cessation of nutriment is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“When a noble disciple has thus understood nutriment, the origin of nutriment, the cessation of nourishment, and the way leading to the cessation of nourishment, he entirely abandons the underlying tendency to greed.

“He abolishes the underlying tendency to aversion; he extirpates the underlying tendency to the view and conceit, ‘I am,’ and by abandoning ignorance and arousing true knowledge, he here and now makes an end of suffering.

“In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma.”

This about sums it up and confirms everything we have said above. The only thing that remains is to try and do it yourself and develop knowledge based upon direct experience. No one can do it for you, but, if you are one of the few who can make the ardent effort needed, you can do it yourself.

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Now, let’s make some more prefatory remarks on the subject of meditation.

Before we take our first breath in breathing meditation, there are some things we should know which will help to make us firm in the realm of morality, before we can proceed to right concentration in the realm of wisdom, because, without a firm foundation in morality, we will always fall victim to delusion in a way that will hinder progress on the path to wisdom.

If the body and the mind are not developed on the path to purity, it will be impossible for us to advance to a level of pure wisdom, no matter how much breathing meditation we may do.

This is why the path is very clearly divided, in the discourses, into ‘*sila*’ (morality), ‘*sati*’ (concentration) and ‘*panna*’ (wisdom).

As we have said earlier, there are no shortcuts, no jumping over stages or leaving out any of the steps, that develop and intertwine, as when strong rope or cord is in the process of being tightly bound and twisted, so that it will hold firm and secure in its grip when it is severely tried-and-tested.

That is why a lot of people get confused about meditation, because they have heard about the destination but are not ready to take the necessary steps on the path in the process of which, if resolutely continued, will get them to the desired end.

A lot of people also get confused about meditation because they become impatient before they reach the desired end, and, then, just give up in desperation, letting their minds unconsciously run back to the world and start chasing after worldly things again.

This is because of personal wrong view and delusion, which may be corrected by a good teacher, if the meditator is able to turn his impatience into humility and condescend to be so humble as to seek such help and guidance.

Before we continue, it must also be noted that breathing meditation, seen alone, is useful to many people for many things—from the warrior who calms his mind before the kill, to the manager who is so stressed he cannot maintain equanimity in the face of fierce competition, or to the ascetic who meditates to reach highly ecstatic heights through transcending the extreme outmost, transcendental bounds of the universe.

There are many kinds of meditation used for many kinds of purposes.

Meditation was originally not even particularly Buddhist in nature. In fact, it had existed in India in all the extant religions and practices even before the Buddha’s time.

Indeed, before his own Enlightenment, the Buddha had already become a fully-advanced yogi or meditator to the level of neither-perception nor non-perception, yet, despite this, he was still not satisfied that this was the ultimate end, so he went off on his own, leaving his former teacher, to continue seeking the root of suffering—a quest he had not yet fulfilled, based on a question he could still not yet answer.

What makes Buddhist meditation unique is that it shows us how to uncover and eradicate the source of the root of suffering in the mind, which no ascetic had yet uncovered before the Buddha’s time.

This special method of meditation, of which we are now speaking, is the mind watching the mind, in order to seek out and eradicate the source of suffering, as it is arising in the mind, and, thus, it would be a diversion which would, again, take us off topic, in our present discussion to talk about any other forms of meditation of any other kinds.

It should be noted that in the specific method of Buddhist meditation, of which we are now speaking, in connection with the Noble Eightfold Path, there can be no

enlightenment without perfect *sila* and perfect *sati*, working in balance and harmony, and to be perfectly truthful, we must stress again that such harmony and balance can only be achieved with the most ardent perseverance, here, in the mundane world, in which we live and breathe.

Earlier, we compared the mind watching the mind to a scavenger hunt, quoting Luang Por Viriyang. He has also said that the mind, so meditating, is ‘blessed’ because every step it takes is a step in the right direction, that every attempt at discernment is an increment in developing the power of the mind.

And, to quote, again, directly, using yet another analogy:

“Meditation is quite similar to walking. The one who walks may not be able to see his destination from the very beginning of his first step, however, he is getting closer to the destination [with each step.] If he consistently walks, he will finally find his destination.” (*Meditation Instruction Course*. I, (p.60)

And, (if we may be allowed the liberty of combining the two above analogies), if, as we are walking, and we see and pick up trash and unwholesome objects and discard them as we travel along the way, no matter how unpleasant and painful this may seem to be at the time, (because we are recognizing and extracting and discarding the trash of unwholesome elements from within our own minds), the more we persevere, the more we make the mind empty of impure mental objects and the more we are able replace them with their opposites, so through the mind’s determined application of mental energy, the further we may proceed along the path.

The irony of such practice is that you treat yourself both harshly and gently, in successive and alternating sequences, and the good news is that the more progress you make, the less harsh you have to be on yourself, and the more gently you may treat yourself as, with time, there is less-and-less there to cause blame and shame and hinder you on the way to *anatta*, (selflessness).

Putting it in another way, first you begin walking, and then you carry on along the path, increasing your efforts as you see the beneficial effects, enduring with mindfulness and energy, then you begin to see you are developing a mental culture as you travel the path which is more pure and satisfying than that of this world and much more satisfying than the place where you were on the path before, earlier, at some time in the recent past.

You begin in *sila*; you develop *sati* and keep detaching yourself from the mundane world and see how far you get towards the end, which may be defined simply as the mind ultimately purified.

Luang Por Sim Buddhacaro, who, like Luang Por Viriyang, was also a disciple of Ajahn Mun, in an uplifting talk for monks, called “Simply So” has said the following about being firmly founded in the focus of meditation:

On the one hand,

“Sitting here our bodies are in a tranquil posture.

“The knowing is abiding in the heart, and each one of us is aware.

“This present knowing is our true mind.”

That is the mind watching the mind with present knowing

Whereas, on the other hand

“The conditioned mind of thought and proliferation is almost like a demon.

“Through its actions eternal phenomena tend to become preoccupations that then obstruct or destroy meditation,

“But if the meditator grounds himself in the present moment, then, he is able to make use of the various meditation techniques.

“He may develop inner recitation for example or perhaps focus on parts of the physical body such as head hair, body hair, nails teeth skin sinews and bones.

“When contemplation of the body ensues in perception of its unattractiveness or of its consistent elements of hardness, cohesion, temperature and vibration, then, this is meditation.

“When the mind [for example] is at peace in the recitation of “Buddho,” then, that too is meditation.

“The mind itself has no colour shape or form but it has energy.

“It is our duty to let go of and abandon the conditioned, proliferating mind.

But the mind of present knowing, that which concentrates on the Buddha, listens to Dhamma and reflects on its meaning, having ... clearly observed that the true mind should be developed.”

“In this case, ‘to develop’ means to give care and attention to establishing the mind in peace.

“Peace comes by countering the outgoing stream of mentality and penetrating this present knowing.

“The normal, unrestrained mind is absorbed by the thought consciousness seeking distraction.

“Go against the stream by looking at the source of mental activity.

“It originates from this knowing. The source of the mind lies within us.

“However, this knowing is nothing substantial.

“It has no colour, form or shape in the way that material objects do. It is a formless element.

“To speak in the terms of the five aggregates there is:

1. *rupa*—this body of ours
2. *vedana*—the experience of objects as pleasant or unpleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable

3. *sanna*—discrimination based on memory—this is a human being, this is an animal, this is red or this is black
4. *sankhaara*—conditioning mental activity
5. *vinnana*—cognition conditioned by mental activity

“The four formless aggregates of *vedana*, *sanna*, *sankhaara*, and *vinnana* arise within the knowing.

“The Buddha taught that during sitting and walking meditation we should make the knowing converge on itself, not allowing it to go outwards. Thoughts of good and bad are all exterior matters and are endless.

“All movement proceeds from this present knowing. That being the case, don’t be deceived by these expressions of mind.

“They are merely shadows flitting off into the past and future, thinking about and elaborating on the things that we like and the things that we don’t [like].

“This proliferation is what conditions the mind.

“What is it that knows the true mind, and what is it that knows the conditioned mind?

“It is just this one single knowing, the same thing [for example] that hears the sound of the discourse and meditates on ‘Buddho.’

“As there is just this single knowing, muster your energies and vow to yourself:

‘I will not indulge the thinking mind. I will gather the mind into itself.’

“Not allowing the mind to wander means that it stays with ‘Buddho.’

“All you have to do then is maintain ‘Buddho.’”

What Luang Por Sim is saying here. is the same as we have discussed above concerning cognition and one-pointedness. When he says “the knowing is abiding in the heart” he means that the psychophysical organism has stopped the process of cognition and thought proliferation and turned the mind inwards cutting-off inter-relations to outside contacts (the aggregates) so the mind stays with the prescribed meditation topic whether it be the body or ‘Buddho’ or what ever.

When he says, “I will gather the mind into itself,” he means focussing the mind abiding in a state of meditative tranquillity within oneself, remaining in a state of knowing the process of consciousness and stopping it before it starts trouble—abiding in a mind-body state detached with equanimity, perhaps using the qualities of the Buddha as the object of mind contemplation.

Monks who can practice like this do not feel the stress of the outside world and do not have mental health problems.

How to go from being a stressed executive in the world to being such a calm serene monk or nun would seem, however, almost impossible for majority of people fully engaged in gaining their livelihood and caring for their families, so the question arises:

“What do we do to escape the stress that is affecting our mental health and will sooner or later ruin us—both mentally and financially?”

Quitting your job and abandoning your responsibilities and becoming a monk or nun would not be practical, especially as you would be taking your internal stress into the temple with you, which would be a disturbing factor to the whole community.

The answer is to make a ‘paradigm shift’ but not change your outward life too radically, at least in the beginning. Just work slowly and keep walking consistently under the guidance of a good teacher or by following the teachings now so widely available from various Buddhist sources. Or perhaps you can find a good friend in the Dhamma who can carry on a dialogue with you, which may also aid and assist you make a new start on the path.

The Buddha once said: “Just start and continue.”

This sounds so simple, yet in this world, it sometimes seems so hard.

So where do we start? Where do we begin?

One way is by being mindful of the thoughts and intentions in our minds and keep on continuing to pick out the mental trash. This is good advice for people who are not easily distracted and who are capable of moral discernment.

But there is another way which anybody can try to practice, to see what benefits it may bring, and that is by following the various precepts and processes laid down by the Buddha as guidelines for lay practitioners and nuns and monks, according to certain designated conditions.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Another way to prepare the mind in *sila* or morality through practicing meditation is through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which, if you like figurative images, may be seen as a slowly building up a strongly-supported mental foundation on four deeply-set pilings, upon which to stand firmly, and in balance, in our resolve to grapple against and abandon the dangers arising out of a sometimes savage sea of churning mental contacts through the body, feeling, mind and phenomena which invariably cause disturbing and dissipating mental imbalance and turbulent suffering in our lives.

If you do not trust such analogies of language, there is another way to explain, which is to say that if we want to overcome and become free from the prevalence of suffering, we must develop the skill to liberate ourselves from the three roots of all unskilled and harmful action, free ourselves from three basic unwholesome actions (*akusalakamma*) — the three basic roots of evil—which are often translated to be “lust, (*lobha*) hatred, (*dosa*) and delusion, (*moha*).” If we want to wrest or ease ourselves free, we must do so through the development of a mental culture (*bhavana*).

The development of virtuous conduct helps us relinquish lust. The calm of true concentration and mental culture (*bhavana*) helps us to relinquish hatred. Insight through right understanding developed through meditation develops direct wisdom which helps us see through and dispel delusion or ignorance.

The opening passage of the *Mahasatipanna Sutta* reads as follows:

“This is the only way monks for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for reaching the Noble Path, for the realization of Nibbana, namely the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

“Herein Monks (in the teaching), a monk dwells in contemplating *the body in the body*, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, overcoming covetousness and grief in the world; he dwells *contemplating the feeling in the feelings*, ardent clearly comprehending and mindful, overcoming covetousness and grief in this world; he dwells *contemplating the consciousness in the consciousness*, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, overcoming covetousness and grief in this world; he dwells *contemplating the dhamma in the dhammas*, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, overcoming covetousness and grief in this world.”

We should note that, in the above quotation, the Buddha is saying that the way for the purification of beings is to follow the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*—which means not only is there no other way other than going (penetrating) directly through the contemplation of body, feeling, consciousness and the dhammas, but that there is only one person who can penetrate through for you and that is you.

There is only one way to purification and freedom from pain and grief and that is through the one mind that can see what is going on within you as long as you continue to pursue satisfaction through observing, comprehending and contemplating sensation and feeling.

There is only one person who can complete the cleaning of the mind as it is functioning in process and that is you.

This means that the mind can become strong enough through clear comprehension and mindfulness so that such emotions as attachment, hatred, depression and sorrow will slowly but finally disappear.

Sati means full objective penetration without losing clear awareness when we penetrate to the core of an impression or emotion, and we see that there really is nothing there any more which could cause covetousness and grief.

The seventh factor of the Noble Path is called the controlling factor. Venerable Nyanasatta Thera, (in BPS Wheel 19) citing the *Satipatthana Sutta*, says:

“Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*) has to be present in every skillful or karmically wholesome thought moment (*kusala acitta*).

“It is the basis of all earnest endeavors (*appamada*) for liberation and maintains in us the ardent energy to strive for Enlightenment or Nibbana.”

In his highly-respected and helpful book, *The Path to Deliverance*, the Venerable Nayanatiloka Maha Thera, has translated in slightly different wording, cites the Buddha from the classical texts (MN. 77) as follows:

“And further ... I have shown to my disciples the way to develop the four applications of mindfulness (*satipatthana*):

“Here the monk dwells in contemplation of the body ... feeling ... mind... mind-objects, ardent, clearly conscious and mindful, after putting away worldly greed and grief.

“And, further, I have shown them the way to develop the four right efforts (*sammappadhana*): Here the monk incites his will, strives, puts forth his energy, strains his mind, in order to avoid the arising of evil, unwholesome states ... To overcome them ... to arouse wholesome states ... to bring them to growth and full development.

“And further I have shown them the way to develop the four paths of power (*iddhipada*): Here the monk develops the road to power accompanied by concentration of will ... energy ... mind ... reflection.

“And further, I have shown them the way to develop the five mental faculties (*indriya*): Here the monk develops faith ... energy ... mindfulness ... concentration ... wisdom ..., leading to peace and enlightenment.

“And further I have shown them the way to develop the five mental powers (*bala*). Here the monk develops the power of faith ... energy ... mindfulness ... concentration ... wisdom, leading to peace and enlightenment.

“And further I have shown them how to develop the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*): Here, the monk develops the factors of enlightenment, bent on solitude, on detachment, on cessation, and ending in deliverance, namely, mindfulness ... investigation of phenomena ... energy ... rapture ... tranquillity ... concentration ... equanimity.

“And further I have shown them the way to develop the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-atthangika-magga*): Here the monk develops right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.”

Now, this may seem a lot to understand in just one reading, so the thing to do is to go back again to the beginning of the preceding quotation, and, with focussed concentration, think your way mentally through what the Buddha is saying as a proper introduction to doing it properly yourself as you begin to become more firm in the foundations of your practice.

The above text might possibly intimidate us and, indeed, make us tend to shy off, thinking, “This is too much for me to comprehend! It is too much to accomplish all at once!”

But don’t fall into the mental trap of backing-off and saying it would be impossible for you to accomplish. It doesn’t work that way:

We have to go in progressively developing stages. Just as a temple is built, stone by stone, with the monks (as sometimes happens) physically working, concentrating with one-pointed mindfulness on the laying of one stone at a time, one by one, so the practice is comprehended and built up on series of successive actions, one by one, one by one [and one by one] in succession.

[It is all there to read in the above quotation. If you know how to read and understand it, carefully, and there are no secrets about the path—there are only the stages that cannot be explained in comparative terms using common language, and the best things in developing *bhavana* can only be known through direct practice and direct knowing.]

Actually, there is no permanent, physical temple being built; there is only a series of stones, built-up, one by one, which will, come together forming into a temporary unity and, eventually, over time, begin to break apart and deteriorate, slowly one by one, until eventually, everything is gone, and all has turned into particles of dust which will, in turn, go through a process into differing combinations of elements which will also arise and cease, one by one, with everything dependently arising and ceasing, through a process that knows no beginning and knows no end.

Actually, there is no monk either. What we call “he” or “him” is just a process of changing elements in a part of a larger process of changing elements that has no beginning and no end. Yet, in common language, as a result of wrong view we continue to speak of temples and monks and bricks as though they were really there.

Someone may ask if it is a big job to write a big book on the Dhamma, and we would have to answer that this is the wrong way of putting the question.

Actually, just as in the analogy of a temple being, merely, an accumulation of bricks and other materials, so a book is just an accumulation of words, sentences, and punctuation marks, and a writer, like a monk (working as a mason), puts the bricks or sentences and pieces and bits and dots and blocks into sequence and series, one by one; and, if one observes and analyzes the process of writing closely and carefully, the sentences become accumulations of words which are typed with concentration, one by one, and, moreover, if the writer is, fully concentrated, if he happens to be writing by hand, [using a pencil or pen], he will write even each curl and loop and line of each letter of each word with the same kind of focussed and one-pointed precision, with totally focussed concentration, absorbed in a process of focussed mental-physical energy that is arising and ceasing.

Just as in the oft-quoted analogy that, “There is no flag and there is no wind.”— as explained in one of Ajarn Chah’s popular Dhamma talks—similarly there is no writer and there is no book, It is all just a process of elements arising and ceasing, in a process of energy arising and eventually burning-up to the point of ceasing and extinction.

How energy should be directed or expended depends on right view and right intention.

In learning the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, we start by focussing, with skilfulness—in every thought moment—and the most obvious place to begin is on the body and the breath, which is always there in ever-present consciousness, and this is where breathing meditation plays its primary important role in Buddhist meditation.

The Buddha recommends mindfulness of breathing in these words:

“This concentration through mindfulness of breathing, when developed and practiced much, is both peaceful and sublime, it is an unadulterated blissful abiding, and it banishes at once and stills evil, unprofitable thoughts, even as they arise. Breathing meditation helps calm agitation from the start and helps establish tranquillity.”

The Buddha says:

“Herein monks, having gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or an empty place, sits down with his legs crossed, keeps his body erect and his mindfulness alert. Ever mindful, he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing in a long breath.’ Breathing out a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing out a long breath.’ Breathing out a short breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing in a short breath,’ he knows. Breathing out a long breath, he knows, ‘I am breathing out a short breath.’ ‘Experiencing the whole breath body, I shall breathe in, thus he trains himself. ‘Experiencing the whole breath body, I shall breathe out,’ thus he trains himself. ‘Calming the activity of the breath body, I shall breathe in.’ Thus he trains himself. ‘Calming the activity of the whole breath body, I shall breathe out.’ thus he trains himself.”

This is another one of those famous quotations that people hear or read and gloss-over as though they have already heard it thousands of times before, so that like many students in university literary analysis classes, their minds would soon be wandering off, long before they got to line four of the text.

The Buddha’s lines are not actually meant for beginners, as some might assume, which we will see if we look more carefully at the beginning of line three, which states, “Ever mindful he breathes ...”

The words “ever mindful” indicate that the monk has already reached a state in which he is able to maintain an ardent state of attention without allowing the mind to be distracted by extraneous thoughts or emotions.

Also in the final statement of the above quote we read the words, “Calming the activity of the breath body ...” This kind of calming is not something the beginner is able to achieve but, rather, a state which usually only a trained and developed meditator is able to attain—a monk who is already advanced in the path. This is the only way out.

This is concentrated breathing meditation that the Buddha is explaining and not some preliminary state in which the mind is still wobbly and can easily fall off track.

But how do we reach the stage, we may ask, in which we, too, may also do it in the one and only right way?

The answer is start from wherever you are and then continue and observe how much progress you make.

If you get confused, there is always advice you can get and take—or which you may even find for yourself in the classical scriptures—and you don’t have to look very far. Take the Four Sublime States or The Five Precepts for example.

The Four Sublime States

A good meditation teacher, for example, may start a disciple off on contemplation of one of the Four Sublime States as an antidote to balance harmful states such as anger, hatred, greed and passion causing distraction and delusion in mundane states.

The Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, in a booklet of the same name, *The Four Sublime States*, (BPS Wheel 6) explains that the Buddha has taught that the four sublime states are:

1. Loving-kindness (*metta*)
2. Compassion (*karuna*)
3. Sympathetic Joy (*mutita*)
4. Equanimity (*upekka*)

These states are said to be sublime because they are the right moral way to behave towards other living beings. They represent the right way to react in all situations of external contact.

To quote Venerable Nyanaponika, “They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism.”

These four sublime states when fully developed are incompatible with their opposites. One can feel one or the other but one cannot feel both at the same time.

Meditation on these sublime states precludes their opposites. As they become dominant in mind, mundane contacts can no longer get in.

Such sublime states can sometimes just be temporary places, visited on rare and infrequent occasions, or, as we develop, they can become more frequent abodes or even long-term dwelling places.

“Long-term dwelling” means that the mind is saturated with love, compassion sympathetic joy or equanimity, and we dwell in that state for a long time before we come out of it. How long one can stay depends on conditions and, skill in long-term practice.

“In all positions,” Venerable Nyanaponika tells us, “when walking, standing, sitting or lying down ... let him [the monk] establish mindfulness of the sublime states of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity in which their perfections are boundless, because they cannot be limited in range but are boundlessly-extended. They are all-inclusive and impartial and cannot be bound by personal preferences and prejudices. A mind that has attained to such a boundless-state will not harbour any national, racial, religious or class hatred.”

It is a wonderful thing that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Four Sublime States can be practiced simultaneously, because one, who is prone to loss of mindfulness due to anger, hatred, envy or delusion, is constantly being distracted in his concentration.

First, concerning loving-kindness

As a soothing alternative to hate or aggravation, one can consciously start to practice loving-kindness, for example, which will serve to cool one’s mind and help to still the harmful effects which are still dormantly working in his consciousness.

These two forms of practice on mindfulness and sublime states can be complementary to one another in helping free us from unsettling attachments to the six senses. Such simultaneous practice can also help us equalize a balance of energy in our minds on a plane between mundane and sublime states.

Instead of constantly always hammering away at yourself and blaming and scolding yourself for lack of mindfulness in breathing meditation, you may turn away, temporarily, from that particular form of frustration and mental distraction and practice the meditation on loving-kindness as an antidote to the shame and blame you may be laying on yourself.

There is more than one form of meditation, and you should, with time, try them all to see which ones are most advantageous to your practice and development..

To quote the Venerable Nyanaponika again, in a more specific context:

“Generally speaking, such meditative practice will have two crowning effects: First it will make the four qualities of the sublime states sink into the heart, so that they become spontaneous attitudes, not so easily overthrown; second, it will bring out and secure their boundless extension, the unfolding of their all-embracing range.

“In fact, the detailed instructions given in the Buddhist scriptures for the practice of these four meditations are clearly intended to unfold gradually the boundlessness of the sublime states. They systematically break down all barriers restricting their application to particular individuals or places.”

In the case of loving kindness, for example, one begins with loving-kindness towards oneself, thinking or saying, “May I be well and happy ... and so on,” and then extends the same sense of loving-kindness to those near to one, to those who are neutral to one, to all living beings in all the world, all around and in all quarters of the world and the zenith and the nadir.

Some quotations from the discourses of the Buddha are as follows:

“Here monks a disciple dwells pervading in one direction, with his heart filled with loving-kindness ...compassion ...sympathetic joy ...equanimity; likewise, the second third and fourth directions; so above below, around; he dwells pervading the world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with loving-kindness, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.”

Let us add a few short random quotations regarding contemplations of the four sublime states before we go on:

First, **concerning love (loving-kindness)**,

“Love without desire to possess, knowing well in the ultimate sense that there is no possession and no possessor: This is the highest love.”

“Love without thinking and speaking of ‘I, knowing full-well that this so-called ‘I’ is a mere delusion’

“Love embracing all beings, small, great, far and near, be it on the earth, in the water or in the air.”

“Love but not the sensuous fire that burns, scorches and tortures, that inflicts more wounds than it cures, flaring up now, at the next moment being extinguished, leaving behind more coldness and loneliness than was felt before.”

The highest manifestation of love is “to show the world the path leading to the end of suffering, the path pointed out, trodden and realized to perfection by Him the Exalted One, The Buddha.”

Second, concerning compassion,

“The world suffers but most men have their eyes and ears closed. They do not see the unbroken stream of tears flowing through life. They do not hear the cry of distress continually pervading the world.

“Their own little grief or joy bars their sight, deafens their ears. Bound by selfishness, their hearts turn stiff and narrow.

“Being stiff and narrow, how should their hearts be able to strive for any other goal, to realize that only release from selfish craving will effect their own freedom from suffering.”

“It is compassion that removes the heavy bar, opens the door to freedom, makes the narrow hearts as wide as the world. Compassion takes away from the heart the inert weight, the paralyzing heaviness, it gives wings to those who cling to the lowlands of self.”

“And what is the highest compassion? To show to the world the path leading to the world of suffering, the path pointed out, trodden and realized to perfection, by Him, the Exalted One, the Buddha.”

Third, concerning sympathetic joy

Someone with a hateful, spiteful, vengeful attitude may have to practice loving-kindness before being able to develop feelings of satisfaction in seeing and enjoying others' happiness. First, consciously expanding the strength and range of his meditation even for a number of years just to achieve a balance of love and hate in his karmic field, before a positive effect begins to tip the scales to the positive side, to the opposite state of seeing and feeling joy in beholding others' successes and achievements, due to a more positive energy of mind, in the direction of equanimity, being cultivated simultaneously with *karuna* and *mutita* and *upekka*, practiced in the same way, as one's foundations, become firmer in the path.

This sounds like hard work demanding perseverance, but it is worth it if one is thereby eventually enabled to pay-off one's negative karmic debt and, then, actually begins to feel the scales tip, in the opposite way, into a state in which now the practice of cultivation of mindfulness begins to progress, gradually enfolding, with less stress and more ease, so that the practitioner's whole mind and body literally and figuratively become changed in the course of years, but this is another thing which can only be known through direct experience, so let's not try to talk about it too much here.

In short, the Venerable Nyanaponika is telling us that, no matter how long it takes, the ultimate aim of striving to achieve these sublime states is “to produce a state of mind that can serve as a firm basis for liberating insight into the true nature of all phenomena as being impermanent, liable to suffering and unsubstantial. A mind that has achieved meditative absorption induced by the sublime states will be pure, tranquil. Collected and free of coarse selfishness. It will thus be prepared for the final work of deliverance which can be completed only through insight.”

Venerable Nyanaponika ends his explanation with a sentence that is to the point: “Meditative development of the sublime states will be aided by repeated reflection, on the qualities, the benefits they bestow and the dangers from their opposites.”

The Buddha sums it up in an even shorter statement: “What a person considers and reflects on for a long time, to that his mind will bend and incline.”

Before we conclude this section on The Four Sublime States, let us cite a few more random quotations which the Venerable Nyanaponika has included from the dialogues of the Buddha on love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

“Love without selecting and excluding, knowing well that to do so means to create love’s own contrasts, aversion and hatred.”

“Love embracing all beings, be they noble-minded or low-minded, good or evil. The noble and good are embraced because love is flowing to them spontaneously.

“The low-minded and evil minded are included because they are those who are most in need of love. In many of them the seed of goodness may have died merely because the warmth of love was lacking for its growth, because it perished from cold in a loveless world.”

“Love embracing all beings, knowing well that we are all fellow wayfarers through this round of existence, that we are all overcome by the same law of suffering.”

“Unbounded love compassion against turning into partiality, prevents it from making discriminations by selecting and excluding, and, thus, protects it from falling into partiality or aversion against the excluded side.”

“It is compassion that removes the heavy bar, opens the door to freedom, makes the narrow heart wide as the world.

“Compassion takes away from the heart the inert weight, the paralyzing heaviness. It gives wings to those who cling to the lowlands of self.”

“Compassion reconciles us to our own circumstances by showing us the life of others, often much harder than ours.”

“Behold the endless caravan of beings, men and beasts, burdened with sorrow and pain! ... Behold this and hold your hearts open to compassion.”

“The compassion of the wise man does not render him a victim of suffering. His thoughts, words and deeds are full of pity. But his heart does not waver. Unchanged it remains, serene and calm. How else would he be able to help?”

“May such compassion arise in our hearts! Compassion that is sublime nobility of heart and intellect, which knows, understands and is ready to help.”

“Small indeed is the share of happiness and joy allotted to beings! Whenever a little happiness comes to them, you may rejoice that at least one ray of joy has pierced through the darkness of their lives.”

“Your life will gain in joy by sharing the happiness of others as if it were yours. Did you never observe how in moments of happiness men’s features change and become bright with joy? ...Is it in your power to increase such experience of sympathetic joy by producing happiness in others, by bringing them joy and solace?”

“Noble and sublime joy is a helper on the path to the extinction of suffering.”

“The more noble and sublime the joy of others is, the more justified will be our own sympathetic joy.”

“Sympathetic joy means a sublime nobility of heart and intellect which knows, understands and is ready to help.”

Fourth, concerning equanimity (*upekka*), we read

“Equanimity is perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight.”

“Equanimity, rooted in insight is the guiding and restraining power for the other three sublime states. It points out to them the direction they have to take and sees to it that this direction is followed.

“Equanimity guards love and compassion from being dissipated in vain quests and going astray in the labyrinths of uncontrolled emotion.”

“And what is the highest manifestation of love ...compassion ... sympathetic joy ... equanimity? To show the world the path leading to the end of suffering, the path pointed out, trodden, and realized in perfection by Him, the Exalted One, the Buddha.”

“In what way is equanimity perfect and unshakeable? Whatever causes stagnation is here destroyed, what dams-up is removed. What obstructs is destroyed. Vanished are the whirls of emotion and the meanderings of intellect. Unhindered goes the calm and majestic stream of consciousness, pure and radiant.

“Watchful mindfulness (*sati*) has harmonized the warmth of faith (*saddha*) with the penetrative keenness of wisdom (*panna*); it has balanced strength of will (*viriyā*) with calmness of mind (*samāthi*); and these five inner faculties (*indriya*) have grown into inner forces (*bala*) which cannot be lost again.

“They cannot be lost because they do not lose themselves any more in the labyrinths of the world (*samsara*), in the endless diffuseness of life (*papañca*). These inner forces emanate from the mind and act upon the world, but being guarded by mindfulness, they nowhere bind themselves and they return unchanged.

“Love, compassion and sympathetic joy continue to emanate from the mind and act upon the world, but being guarded by equanimity (*upekka*), they cling nowhere and return on weakened and unsullied.”

If you have not yet achieved perfect equanimity, don't feel a sense of blame. Reaching equanimity is near the end of the road; indeed, it's close to reaching the end.

If you have problems with equanimity—as everybody naturally will—instead of getting frustrated and losing balance, you can switch back to the path of the four foundations of mindfulness of the moment, developing morality and curbing sensuality through practicing concentrated breathing meditation—all the while, remembering and understanding that the practicing the four foundations of mindfulness and the four sublime states simultaneously twist and intertwine and combine towards achieving the same ultimate end, so equanimity may develop by itself in the end.

V.

The Five Precepts

When or before we start in the process of meditation, there are things we must know and preparations we should make. Since no one rooted in the world is perfect, we should start off by preparing the mind in *sila* as indicated above. Before we can achieve and attain and maintain *sati*, we must have a firm foundation in *sila* or morality on the Noble Eightfold Path.

Thus, it is recommended that the lay meditator begins to observe five precepts as a foundation for morality in his daily life; and these precepts should also, be observed by lay persons, who visit meditation courses or go to the temple, for example, to make offerings or on full-moon days. These five precepts provide at least a fundamental starting-point from which to develop and provide enough *sila* to give *sati* a base from which to develop.

Translated directly from the Pali, word-for-word, they are as follows:

1. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from killing living beings.
2. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking what is not given.
3. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from false speech.
5. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

In BPS (Wheel Series 55), Dr. Paul Dahlke has translated and condensed the five precepts into compact English as follows:

Not to take the life of any living being.

Not to take what is not given.

Abstaining from sexual misconduct.

Abstaining from wrong speech.

Abstaining from intoxicants.

If one does not know where to start practicing *sila*, these are five basic precepts one may “undertake to observe,” voluntarily, as a preliminary set of guidelines to follow for one’s own good and development, as a means of abstaining from copying the kind of behaviour one observes around oneself in the world of everyday life and, too often, unconsciously follows and gets drawn into, if one is not careful.

At first, it may be hard not to act impulsively in the way that most other people do, but, if one is heedful and is able to observe the precepts, one’s following them may gradually begin to serve as the basis for a marked sense of improvement in one’s attitude to avoiding the sort of problems and conflicts which normally plague people rooted in the world in their daily lives.

Then, once practicing the precepts starts to feel right, one will want to continue to follow the precepts to maintain the sense of well being that thereby begins to arise and develop. When this begins to work, it is time to follow the Eightfold Path in closer detail.

Once one realizes that not taking life or stealing or engaging in sexual misconduct, indulging in wrong speech or drinking alcohol or taking drugs that cloud the mind and lead to unskilful conduct, — once one realizes that this kind of abstinence actually leads to a less-complicated and happier life, one may be motivated to continue one’s practice on the path of *sila* until, sooner or later, one reaches the point where the mind has become pure enough for the concomitant practice of *sati*, which will soon begin to show beneficial effects and which will further-encourage and motivate one to continue to stay on the path.

The Eight Precepts

Many meditators, satisfied with the good results of following the Five Precepts, go on to follow the Eight precepts—which are also followed by people who stay in the temple as lay practitioners and nuns—wearing white, as a sign of their dedication to bodily and mental purity. The eight Precepts are:

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual activity.
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness
6. I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at the improper time i.e. after noon

7. I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics.
8. I undertake the precept to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.

There are also the Ten Precepts, followed by novice monks and nuns, which split the precept on entertainment into two parts and add, as the last point, the final precept to refrain from handling money.

Every time something new is added, there is a good reason for it: two cases in point being that refraining from all forms of sexual activity and handling money tend to make one's life much simpler and more free from outside influences connected to lust and greed.

It also follows that some, who are totally dedicated to the practice of the Buddha Dhamma, and who have also become ordained as monks and will also follow the 227 Bhikkhus' rules declared and explained by the Buddha at various times, according to circumstances, to serve as guidelines for monks' discipline and practice.

The Buddha's laying down rules, over a period of time was based on arising examples and there was always a good reason for what he said as it applied to the code of the monk's training, and the practice of reading and understanding the Buddha's explanations of why he made such rules is full of lessons that have traditionally become part of the teaching intended for every monk's moral guidance.

Addicted to rules and regulations

There are also many householders who follow Buddhist rules and regulations and various other ritual practices to-the-letter, making it a strict discipline which almost becomes a religion within itself.* This may be declared to be wrong view, because you do not make rules and regulations an end in themselves: they must be seen as meditation guidelines which are meant to be helpful as pointers along the path to purity.

We must note that rules are merely meditation tools used as a means to an end. Even a monk as famous as Buddhadasa (who's word is highly respected in Thailand and also abroad) has warned against the practice of rituals for their own sake. He also warns against the hope of accumulating merit through practicing ritual acts, comparing it to accumulating money which may be kept in reserve to be used for oneself in this life or another, as being a form of wrong view.

To the contrary, the Buddha Dhamma is based upon, going within oneself, becoming an island unto oneself, and seeing things as they really are—through constant mindfulness and ardent practice and—in the end, transcending the need for rituals and ceremonies and—even the mind itself.

Few understand that even the mind is just a meditation tool which, once it has been used for its purpose, can then be set aside and abandoned.

It is worthy of note that before his demise the Buddha declared that there was no necessity for the monks to retain the Bhikkhu's minor rules, because the way he taught

was based on practicing concentrated and meditative internal-development of the mind, and his teaching, when properly practiced, did not depend on blind adherence to merely external rules and rituals but, rather, upon a clear understanding of how a human being, becoming an island unto himself, extinguishes the causes of suffering based on the insight and wisdom which evolve out of a right psychophysical view and clear understanding of the nature impermanence as the cause of suffering and a false idea of self which is based on sensation and mental agitation.

The Bhikkhus, however, after the Buddha's demise, decided to keep the rules anyway, and today, they have become the basis of a monastic and religio-cultural society—which is another topic that would make a good diversion, but which we will not go into today.

*Have you ever seen people spending a lot of money on amulets and images? This is more of the same incomplete view. It is based on wrong understanding and wrong intention, just as it would be useless to donate millions to a famous monk who is thought to be an Arahant just for the sake of one's own personal benefit, in this life or another.

Such self-motivated giving of *dana* is often based on an incomplete view based on only a partial understanding of the Dhamma, or based, on an abridged and incomplete, sometimes even superstitious view of the Buddha's teaching. What one needs to do in such a case is not to give more and more money, but to delve more and more deeply, with ardent energy, into the meaning of the words of the Buddha on mind training, *bhavana*, right concentration, thereby, eventually, achieving complete understanding of right view.)

The Five Mental Hindrances

Having elaborated on the Five Precepts above, with some explanation, we should also explicate and comment on the so-called Five Mental Hindrances-to-progress on the path and their relationship to concentration and meditation. The Venerable Nyanaponika in his booklet, *The Five Mental Hindrances and Their Conquest*, (BPS Wheel 26) starts off in his introduction with some words that will sound familiar to us:

“Unshakable deliverance of the mind is the highest goal in the Buddha's doctrine. Here, deliverance means the freeing of the mind from all limitations, fetters and bonds that tie it to the wheel of suffering, to the circle of rebirth. It means the cleansing of the mind of all defilements that mar its purity; the removal of all obstacles that bar its progress from the mundane (*lokiya*) to the supramundane consciousness (*lokuttara-citta*), that is to Arahantship.”

“Many are the obstacles which block the road to spiritual progress, but there are five, in particular, which, under the name of hindrances (*nivarana*), are often mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures.”

The Five Mental Hindrances are:

1. Sensual desire
2. Ill-will

3. Sloth and torpor
4. Restlessness and remorse
5. Sceptical doubt.

They are called ‘hindrances’ because they hinder and cloud or envelop the development of the mind (*bhavana*) in many ways. They can hinder right concentration so the mind remains bound within the mundane state and blocked from attaining access to supramundane states. The mind which demands nourishment based on fetters to mundane states and will thereby be tied to attachments and cannot be delivered from them.

Concerning nourishment, Venerable Nyanaponika says, again quoting the texts,

“Just as monks, this body lives on nourishment, lives dependent on nourishment, does not live without nourishment—in the same way monks, the five hindrances live on nourishment, depend on nourishment, do not live without nourishment.” (SN 46:2)

Concerning nourishment of sensual desire, the Pali text says,

“There are beautiful objects; frequently giving unwise attention to them—this is nourishment for the arising of sensual desire that has not arisen and the nourishment for the increasing and strengthening of sensual desire that has already arisen.” (SN 46:51)

Concerning nourishment of ill-will, the text says,

“There are objects causing aversion; frequently giving attention to them—this is the nourishment for the arising of ill-will that has not yet arisen, and for the increase and strengthening of ill-will that has not already arisen.” (SN 46:55)

Concerning the nourishment of sloth and torpor, the text says,

“There arises listlessness, lassitude, stretching of the body, drowsiness after meals, mental sluggishness; frequently giving unwise attention to it—this is the nourishment for the arising of sloth and torpor that have not arisen and for the increase and strengthening of sloth and torpor that have already arisen.” (SN 46:51)

Concerning restlessness and remorse, the text says,

“There is unrest of mind; frequently giving unwise attention to it—that is the nourishment for the arising of restlessness and remorse that have not yet arisen and strengthening of restlessness and remorse that have already arisen.” (SN 46:51)

Concerning the nourishment of doubt, the text says.

“There are things causing doubt; frequently giving attention to them—that is the nourishment of the arising of doubt that has not yet arisen and strengthening of doubt already arisen.” (SN 46:51)

From our own experiences, we all know about sensuous desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry and sceptical doubt. For most, they appear daily as bad companions which hang around and will not go away. This is one of the worst forms of ignorance, and if we do not want to be ignorant, in such a way, due to such bad influences, there is a proven way of making each hindrance go away in due turn. The conquest of the Five Mental Hindrances can be achieved by starving them—giving them nothing to feed on— through what Venerable Nyanaponika calls “de-nourishment”—depriving the hindrances of energy to feed upon.

The first hindrance

1. When we note an object of sensual desire entering the perceptive field, we can catch it before it catches us and observe and analyze it as a source of impurity despite its alluring and apparent beauty. Supposing that the object of perception is a beautiful young woman or man, we are able to note that, despite our eye being caught by what seems to be apparent outward beauty, we can remind ourselves that what we see outwardly is only the external sheath or form of what is internally full of blood and pus and guts and gorge and faces and actually not-so-attractive in reality as it had seemed at first impression. Close observation and analysis is de-nourishing.

When we know that this beautiful form is also ruled by feelings, perceptions, arising mental associations and resultant consciousness, we will soon come to know that the object of eye-consciousness (which one at first seems to want) is actually also a bundle of urges and energy aggregates which are certain to spell trouble if and when you get what you want and start to call it ‘mine.’

Hence, we have the idiom, ‘Be careful what you want because you might get it.’ The odds that you and she/he both want the same things may be a million-to-one, yet the body-mind is fooling itself when it says (without even thinking): ‘I’d like to get my hands on that! I’d like to be married to a woman/man like that!’

So the point is—what the mind-body at first wants will more-likely be a source of disappointment, if you let the untrained mind follow its first impulse and wish. Whatever it is you want, the odds are still probably a million or a thousand to one that you would achieve the satisfaction and fulfilment of your mental and imagined wishes.

And so it is with all of the Five Mental Hindrances—what at first attracts the senses or consciousness will be more likely to start a fire in the mind than evoke a sense of soothing satisfaction. Yet the eye and the other senses are in the habit of looking for trouble by picking up perceptions from their environment. The six senses, when not trained, want to get up to mischief and, therefore, they have to be ever-contained.

The second hindrance

2. Conversely, it is not pleasant for the senses to reach out for perceptions and find things that they do-not-like—dislike—such as things which are ugly, noisy, smelly, distasteful or repulsive to touch—and the mind makes mental associations that cause reactions to perceptions of such things we find distasteful and dislike. Suppose our neighbour’s music is too noisy or his garbage too smelly, it is so easy to get involved and react to the

perception and develop a sense of consciousness thinking, ‘This is not right! I’m going to tell him!’”

No sooner have you reacted than the neighbour is reacting back, and you are both feeling ill-will, which may even last until eventually one of you moves-out or dies. The moment you react to an exterior impulse and get involved like that you lose whatever sense of wise, detached equanimity you had developed prior to that and run right back into acting like an ignorant untamed animal—like a dog that barks at the neighbour because it has not been properly trained.

The antidote to ill-will is a good grounding in the mental training of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity—when these four factors are there, you will not make your neighbour your enemy no matter how badly he behaves, you will not lose your foundations in the four sublime states of *metta*, *karuna*, *mututa* and *upekka*. You will not nourish feelings of ill-will, anger and hate.

Usually the causes of hate lie deeper than loud music and stinking garbage, so we must be very mindful and wise in the cultivation of sublime mental states that can contain the and eliminate any tendency to bad kamma. While this may not be so easy to do, the alternative is to allow ourselves to fall into the fire of contention which arises from the following of bad intentions on both sides, by both persons.

If this seems hard, just remember that every moment of our lives is a test of our equanimity. Under no circumstances should we fail the test and lose composure and equanimity. Loss of equanimity affords an opportunity for ill-will to nourish itself and run rampant, and that is just what ill-will wants to do with you.

We all know how easy it is to let down our guard, even for a moment, but when we do, we open ourselves to innumerable dangers from the outside world. Even worse, (if even only internally), if we lose mindfulness for just one moment, there is no telling what action we could potentially do to harm ourselves and others.

The third hindrance

3. We have all, at one time or another, had the tendency to allow ourselves to fall into the hindrances of sloth (lack of motivation and laziness) and torpor (lethargy and listlessness) in which we cannot seem to arouse enough energy to do anything and, then, tend to want to fall into a state of inertia and even go to sleep. The way to combat such a lack of energy (thus letting down one’s guard) is to make an exertion to overcome inertia—to arouse sufficient energy when it is lacking through an energetic act of the will. If through lack of wisdom one’s mind becomes dull, one should rouse it through reflecting on such stirring subjects as the danger of the perils of birth, decay, disease and death; of lack of constant attentiveness and its possible consequences; and suffering in the worlds of misery.

One should also arouse energy through awareness of the suffering of impermanence. Some monks with indolent tendencies are also told to avoid over-eating or change body postures to keep alert or contemplate the perception of light or remain in the open air, and, in some cases, even to do walking meditation in places where there are some sharp-sided stones, or, better yet, engage in suitable conversation about the problem of

indolence with suitable friends in the Dhamma and, then, cultivating the practice of sympathetic joy. Note also that a psychophysical slowing-down of the mental process will also allow the defilements more time and opportunity to enter the sense doors and establish and nourish-themselves there. That is a real danger.

The fourth hindrance

4. We have all, also, at other times felt restless, uneasy, nervous, full-of-**worry** or **remorse**. The antidote for de-nourishing of the restlessness is right mindfulness and application of wise attention to arousing the mind into calmer mental states of quietude and tranquillity. Another way is through talking to more mature members of the community and coming to know and practice the monk's rules more thoroughly through discussing and understanding them, and, thereby, also developing a healing calmness through Noble friendship. The more restlessness there is in the mind the more opportunities the defilements will have to stir-up nervous energies and create a spark in the mind that then gets heated-up and uses-up nervous energy as fuel for negative nourishment. That's why at all times one should cultivate a calm mind.

The fifth hindrance

5. We may all at times also have experienced **doubt** about the practice, which is the last of the five hindrances. There are usually doubts that are already there in the mind as residue or which get inside from outside influences in moments of lack of confidence and lack of certainty or from bad influences. Once uncertainty has arisen, as a little spark to ignite doubt in you, it is hard to establish and maintain confidence, especially as you are always engaged in putting out other little or big fires in the mind, usually several simultaneously, many of which may even be due to spontaneous combustion because there are piles of fuel just lying around in there, unprotected and susceptible to conditions accompanying increasing breakdown of firmness of mind causing the gradual arising of increased mental heat and energy as confusion increases. Uncertainty lurks and hides in the dark corners of the mind and can be a dangerous enemy because it attacks from inside from where we are defenceless, due to our lack of focussed attention and concentration.

It is a good thing that we have the Five Precepts to help balance the Five Hindrances, otherwise, who knows what potentially destructive energies could break loose in our minds?

VI.

The Six Sense Doors

Now, as much suffering also arises out of and depends on sensuality, contact and attachment, we should speak some more about the dangers of the six senses which can easily make us stray away from the path. In this context, we shall quote from a little-known dialogue from Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, which appears *In the Words of the Buddha* (Wisdom 2005).

Concerning the pitfall of fever for sensual pleasure, the Buddha is reported to have explained to a householder:

“Magandia, formerly, when I lived the household life, I enjoyed myself, provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure: with forms cognizable to the eye ... with sounds cognizable to the ear ... with odours cognizable to the nose ... with flavours cognizable to the tongue ... with tactile contacts cognizable to the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. I had three palaces; one for the rainy season, one for the winter and one for the summer. I lived in the rains palace for the four months, enjoying myself with musicians, none male, and I did not go down to the lower palace.

“On a later occasion having understood [them] as they really are, the origin and passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape in the case of sensual pleasures, I abandoned the craving for sensual pleasures, I removed the fever of sensual pleasures, and I dwell without thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace. I see other people who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures being devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, burning up with fever of sensual pleasures, indulging in sensual pleasures, and I do not envy them, nor do I delight therein. Why is that? Because there is, Magandia, a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior, nor do I delight therein.” (MN 75)

Obviously there is something higher than fulfilment of sensual desire; otherwise, the influence of the Buddha’s teaching and the existence of the Sangha would have died-out long ago. Once a monk has experienced higher states through practice, he will not crave for lower ones. As the Venerable Sri Rahula Ampitiya was fond of saying, “As long as there is a group of monks practicing the Dhamma as it was practiced at the time of the Buddhism, Buddhism will never die.”

Perhaps, now, this may be a good place to pause for a change in tone, and relate an anecdote about something based on the texts. Ajahn Chah once asked his monks, in connection to the six senses:

“What is the most dangerous smell?” and the monks looked perplexed.

They were not sure what to answer.

So let me ask that question here and now again..

“What is the most dangerous smell?” Does anybody know?

The answer is the smell of a woman.

Now why? That is a good question, isn’t it?

Does anyone want to tell me about it?

Well, yes that’s all right. I think we all know.

And what is the most dangerous sound?

The alluring sound of a woman's voice, and, once more, we don't have to explain why.

And what is the most dangerous sight?

The sight of an attractive and evocative woman.

And what is the most dangerous taste?

Is it the sweet taste of a woman's mouth?

Well, let's not get into that here."

And what is the most dangerous thought in this connection? Is it perhaps the thought of a beautiful woman to love and care and look after you and the thought that she will do what ever you want her to do?

Women rightly say this question does not apply to them because they're not monks, but there are many women who might also say that the most dangerous smell is the natural scent of the man whom they adore and desire. That's what the wife of one of my friends connected to the Maha Bodhi society said to me, one day, anyway.

So what are we to say about that? (Pause) No answer? That is what might be expected.

Now, it is time now to leave this sensitive and touchy topic and change the subject again.

So let's look at another analogy from the texts which compares the form of a man's head to a fortress or a citadel with six doors or gates. In order for the fortress to be safe, every one of the doors must be closely-guarded, at all times, so no or enemy can get in. Have you heard of this analogy? Can you explain it?

The sense of the analogy is that a man must guard himself from falling victim to the wiles and strategies of the senses, and the six doors are nose the ear, the eye, the mouth, the tactile feel of sensation and the resultant cravings of mind as the sixth sense which goes wild when the six gates are opened so all the senses can rush in together at the same time and leave him totally vulnerable and defenceless—defenceless in the face of an overwhelming army of sensations which will totally overcome him, trampling the disciplined part of his mind like a herd of wild elephants. And once he is under the rule of the senses, he will do whatever the senses urge him to do.

We are all in danger of being overwhelmed by the invading horde of the senses, and that is why we must continue to arouse, with a sense of urgency, the energy required to always safely guard the six doors of the senses and the mind.

This is not intended as an amusing analogy, or aside, applicable only to the layman, because just this is an integral part of the monks' discipline—to guard the six doors of the mind—against the harmful effects of sense consciousness, which once it gets in, can totally distract even a monk's mind from his meditation which he must be practicing relentlessly all the time if he is determined and self-disciplined enough to make his mind an island unto itself and keep it free of the rule of sensuality.

Indeed, a man who counts himself as such island refuge, and leaves even one of the sense doors insufficiently-guarded, can suddenly be flooded by the senses and wholly washed-away, together with the man who has lost concentration and been drowned in his own senses and been helplessly washed away.

Yet another point which we must always remember and carefully consider is that the sixth sense of the mind does not only nourish itself on what it can find in the physical-sensual realm.

The dragon of mental craving is always seeking to gobble-up whatever it can get to nourish its never-ending and ever-increasing cravings for more and more mental objects being spawned through desires and memories of the senses which arise only in the mind as mental objects without the stimulus of external contact.

How does this affect you? Are you sufficiently guarded? Could the dragon of the mind overcome and conquer you? Or has it already done so?

This is a question we should also be asking about ourselves within the realm of our present-day individual development and socio-cultural environment.

Speaking of lay practitioners, again, even if you think you don't have time for meditation, just as a mental exercise, [in the place of unskilful restless thinking] during the day, you may try to think of all the instances in which consciousness arising through eye contact... could become a mental hindrance to you, leading you, at least temporarily, off the path to deliverance. Then think of consciousness arising through the ear ... and how it could be detrimental for you ...consciousness arising through the sense of smell ...consciousness arising through a craving for tastes ...consciousness arising and developing through imagined mental conditions and desired states, which might bring you to the point of ecstasy.

If you do not take time to observe and analyze the consciousness-process of your mind, it is both capable of and likely to fall victim to the insatiable dragon of the mind and is certainly sure to bedevil you. Who can deny that?

You should search out and find and isolate and bring all these potential conscious arisings of cravings of yours out into the bright-light-of-day, if you are able to, and examine and observe and analyze just what it is about them that so attracts or repels you.

You should develop the powers of analysis to learn to discern the actual root causes of why you want what you want or don't want, and ask if the short term result of fulfilling your volitions would be good for you in the long run—and if you know they will not be good for you, you need to decide exactly what you should do then.

Since no one else can get into your mind except you, you should become familiar with its leanings and tendencies and know what to do when they try to catch you by surprise and gain control over you. If you can learn to control your mind, you can learn how to avoid letting whole hoards of unwholesome tendencies [of Mara's armies] gain power over you. But to be able to do this successfully, first you must learn to be a successful sentinel watching the doors of the citadel of the mind.

You should learn to examine your mental life so there is nothing that can sneak-in or leak-out, preparatory to a surprise attack which will bring harm on you.

Impulses are usually just fleeting phenomena of the moment which bring no lasting pleasure, and if you can learn to control such fleeting impulses or simply let them go as momentarily passing flashes in the dark, if you can learn not to grasp after what are only empty phenomenal images, you will be a lot better-off in the long run.

Then, if you feel you have gained benefit from the above mental exercise of the mind watching the mind, you can also analyze the relationship in your consciousness between the six sense doors and anger hate and envy.

Learn to live an examined life so you will be prepared and better in control of the mind when such potentially arising states can hit you right between the eyes, when you are not looking, and momentarily blind you, making it possible for you to strike-out at someone on impulse, thereby provoking an action which could potentially harm you in a way that you would regret for the rest of your life or even for many lives to come.

Think of the example of the farmer who killed his beloved-mother in an impulsive moment because she was late in bringing his lunch box out to the field. This could be you. It has been said that a monk could kill his mother in a moment of rash impulsiveness, but most people would not want to believe that such a thing could be true.

Learn to live the self-examined life so that you may be careful about the consequences of everything you do, in any momentary act of your life, until, one day, you suddenly have the insight that reacting to a psychophysical impulse is just energy combusting wastefully and likely harmfully. Learn to, remain independent and detached from any such potential action arising, standing-back with the mind watching the mind, watching, dispassionately, with equanimity.

The key to understanding the dangers of the sense doors is maintaining detachment and equanimity as a continuing mental exercise in going against the stream.

You should think of potential situations that could arise and arouse anger, hate or envy in you in a harmful way that would potentially backlash on you.

The key to such examining is that instead of thinking about what you do not like about others, ask what is at that moment wrong with you, how and why and where you have the latent potential to lash out in anger—react with intense hate—or be so envious of another that you want to inflict or perpetrate harm upon him.

Once you really get to know the potential of the mind for both harm and good, you can practice feeling compassion for yourself for the potential harm you might do and you can also practice loving-kindness and sympathetic joy arising out of knowing the good you can do as a result of avoiding unwholesome states and replacing them with wholesome states in which you radiate goodness towards others, who might have potentially hated you had you reacted harmfully.

Once you learn to feel compassion for yourself, in your sorry state, you will not continue to hate; you will begin to feel compassion for others who are in the same state as you.

If you want to see what is wrong with the world observe and analyze the roots of your own unmindful actions, and, then, ask yourself how the world would be if everyone felt and acted like you. And if you don't want the world to be like that, the place to start changing the world is by starting on changing yourself.

If you can start to set yourself straight because you see the potential for suffering which uncontrolled impulses of consciousness can do to others in the world, then, it is just possible that there are a few more or even many more individuals, like you out there, somewhere within the world, who have compassion and pity for others, and do not want others to suffer in the way that you and he have both had to do in the course of your lives.

If you can practice controlling the six senses, and this starts working for you, and you can also, continue countering the Five Hindrances while simultaneously practicing the Four Sublime States, this form of practice will be very beneficial for you [and others within your society and culture too].

VII.

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

The Buddha described the path to enlightenment very clearly, and he explained how the seven factors of enlightenment when brought to maturity allow the clear seeing necessary for full awakening**. All mental efforts on the path are concerned with one or more of these factors. **('The word 'enlightenment' is often translated as 'awakening'.')

The factors are as follows:

1. Mindfulness (*sati*)
2. Keen investigation of the Dhamma (*dhammavicaya*)
3. Energy (*viriya*)
4. Rapture (*piti*)
5. Calm (*passadhi*)
6. Concentration (*samadhi*)
7. Equanimity (*upekka*)

Some people may shy away from a heading like the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, because the word 'enlightenment' intimidates them, because, in their secret hearts, they inherently feel they are lacking in skill and confidence regarding these seven factors in their practice. As a result, they flounder in uncertainty and remain wobbly, being aware within their own minds that they have not yet established a firm enough base upon which to build up an unshakable foundation for practice.

If, however, through the guidance of good teachers, and noble friends in the Dhamma, and, most of all, their own continuing individual and determined efforts, they continue to persevere in their quest, eventually the gradually accumulating filaments and threads of their karmic actions and development will slowly start to twist and turn and twine

together, in a way which they may never have expected or imagined, eventually becoming a strong cord, which might, then, serve as their security line, on their ascent to the top of the mountain where the view eventually and finally becomes clear.

The Buddha explains it in a more classical analogy by saying,

“Just as in a peaked house, all rafters whatsoever go to a peak, slope to the peak, join in the peak, and of them all is reckoned chief; even so monks, the monk who cultivates and makes much of the seven factors of wisdom, slopes to Nibbana, inclines to Nibbana, tends to Nibbana.” (SN 46.7)

If the rafters are the factors, this means that, if you practice the factors as best you can, both individually and simultaneously, making your best effort, there will be growth and development reaching upwards towards higher states of concentration.

The Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera, who was one of the original founders of the Buddhist Publication Society, in Kandy, in 1958, in his book on *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment* (Wheel 1) has written:

“Life, according to the right understanding of a Buddha, is suffering, and that suffering is based on ignorance or *avijja*. [Ignorance is the experience of that which is unworthy of experiencing—namely evil.]

Further, it [right understanding] is the non-perception of the conglomerate nature of the aggregates; non-perception of sense organ and object in their respective and objective natures; non-perception of the emptiness or the relativity of the elements; non-perception of the dominant nature of the sense controlling faculties; non-perception of the thusness—the infallibility—of the four truths. And the five hindrances, because they completely close in, cut off and obstruct. They hinder the understanding of the way to release from suffering. These five hindrances are: sensuality, ill-will, obduracy of mind and mental factors, restlessness and flurry and doubt.

“And what is the nourishment of these hindrances? The three evil modes of life: bodily, vocal and mental wrong-doing. This three-fold nutriment is in turn nourished by non-restraint of the senses which is explained by the commentator as the admittance of lust and hate in to the sense-organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.”

This above quotation ties together the things we have said above, albeit in somewhat different words. It all seems to fit together, dependent on right understanding of the word of the Buddha in the Pali texts.

And the Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera continues:

“The nutriment of non-restraint is shown to be lack of mindfulness and complete awareness. In the context of nutriment, the drifting away of the object (dhamma)—the lapsing of the mind from the knowledge of the *lakkhanas* or characteristics of existence. (impermanence, voidness and suffering itself), and forgetfulness of the true nature of things—is the reason for non-restraint. It is when one does not bear in mind the transience and the other characteristics of things that one allows oneself all kinds of liberties in speech, in deed and gives reign to full thought-imagery of an unskilful kind. Lack of complete awareness is lack of these four: complete awareness of purpose ... of

suitability ...of resort ... and of non-delusion. When one does a thing without right purpose; when one looks at things or does actions that do not help the growth of the good; when one does things inimical to improvement; when one forgets the dhamma which is the true resort of one who strives; when one deludedly lays hold of things, believing them to be pleasant, beautiful and substantial—when one behaves thus—then too, non-restraint is nourished.

“And below this lack of mindfulness and complete awareness lies unsystematic reflection ... The books say this unsystematic reflection is reflection that is off the right course; that is taking the impermanent as permanent, the painful as pleasure, the soul-less as soul, the bad as good. The constant rolling on that is *samsara*, is rooted in unsystematic thinking. When unsystematic thinking increases, it fulfils two things: nescience* and lust for becoming. Ignorance being present, the origination of the entire mass of suffering comes to be. Thus a person who is a shallow thinker, [who is] like a ship drifting at the wind’s will, like a herd of cattle be swept into the whirlpools of a river, [or] like an ox yoked to a wheel contraption, goes on revolving in the cycle of existence, *samsara*. *(unknowingness)

“And it is said that the imperfect confidence ... in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha is the condition that develops unsystematic reflection; and imperfect confidence is due to non-hearing of the True Law, the Dhamma. Finally one does not hear the Dhamma through lack of contact with the wise, through not consorting with the good.

Thus want of *kalyanmittata*, good friendship appears to be the basic reason for the ills of the world. And conversely the basis and nutriment of all good is shown to be good friendship. That furnishes one with the food of the sublime dhamma, which in turn produces confidence in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. When one has confidence in the Triple Gem, there come into existence profound or systematic thinking, mindfulness and complete awareness, restraint of the senses, the three good modes of life, the four arousings of mindfulness, the seven factors of enlightenment and deliverance through wisdom, one after another in due order.

Then, the Venerable Piyadassi goes on to talk about the enlightenment factors one by one.

The first factor of enlightenment is *sati* or mindfulness, which is the most effective instrument to be used in attaining self-mastery and finding the path to deliverance. Mindfulness is fourfold: mindfulness in contemplation of the body, feeling, mind and mental objects

The Venerable Piyadassi says, “The man lacking in this all important quality of mindfulness cannot achieve anything worthwhile.”

The Buddha’s final admonition on his deathbed was: “Transient are all component things. Work out your deliverance with heedfulness.”

The last words of the Venerable Sariputta, the Master’s foremost disciple, who pre-deceased the Buddha were, “Strive on with heedfulness. This is my advice to you.”

In both injunctions, the significant word in Pali is *appamada* which means incessant heedfulness. It means being continually heedful of your actions every waking moment of your life.

The Venerable Piyadassi says, “Only when a man is fully aware and mindful of his activities can he distinguish good from bad and right from wrong. It is in the light of mindfulness that he will see the beauty or ugliness of his deeds.”

The Buddha said,

“Monks, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of good thoughts not yet arisen, or to cause the waning of evil thoughts if already arisen, as heedfulness. In him who is heedful, good thoughts not yet arisen, do arise, and evil thoughts, if arisen, do wane.”

The Venerable Piyadassi says, “Constant mindfulness and vigilance are necessary to avoid ill and to perform good. The man with presence of mind who surrounds himself with watchfulness of mind (*satima*), the man of courage and earnestness gets ahead of the lethargic, the heedless (*pamatto*), as a race horse outstrips a decrepit hack.”

The true image of the Buddha is the picture of mindfulness, or as the Venerable Piyadassi says, “He is the *sada sato*, the ever mindful the ever vigilant. He is the very embodiment of mindfulness.”

And further, “Right mindfulness or awareness, in a way, is superior to knowledge, because in the absence of mindfulness, it is just impossible for a man to make the best of his learning. Intelligence devoid of mindfulness tends to lead a man astray and entice him from the path of rectitude and duty. Even people who are well informed and intelligent fail to see a thing in its proper perspective when they lack this all important quality of mindfulness ... Mindfulness is the chief characteristic of all wholesome actions tending to one’s own or other’s profit.”

In the *Dhammapada*, it says,

“The man who delights in mindfulness and regards heedlessness with dread, is not liable to fall away. He is in the vicinity of Nibbana.” (32)

The second factor of enlightenment is keen investigation of the Dhamma. “It is the sharp, analytical knowledge of understanding the true nature of all constituent things,” as Venerable Piyadassi puts it. “It is seeing things as they really are; seeing things in their proper perspective. It is the analysis of all component things into their fundamental elements, right down to their ultimates. Through keen investigation one understands that all compounded things pass through the inconceivably rapid moments of *uppada*, *thiti* and *bhanga*, or of arising, peaking and ceasing, just as a river in flood sweeps to a climax and fades away. The whole universe is constantly changing, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. All things in fact are subjected to causes and conditions and effects (*hetu*, *paccaya* and *phala*).”

The man who is heedful using keen investigation will come to see the true nature of things as they arise and peak and cease.

The Buddha says,

“The doctrine is for the wise and not for the unwise.” And those who become wise will see “cause and effect, seed and fruit, the rise and fall of all compounded things.”

Buddhism does not call for blind faith; it calls for keen investigation. Investigate, by observing and analyzing closely, the phenomena of life as they continuously roll on, arising and ceasing, beginning and ending, according to the law of impermanency.

“He that cultivates *dhammavicaya*, investigation of the dhamma,” says Venerable Piyadassi, “focuses his mind on the five aggregates of grasping and endeavours to realize the rise and fall or the arising and passing away of this conglomeration of bare forces ... this conflux of mind and matter ... It is only when he reaches the evanescence of his own mind and body that he experiences happiness and joyful anticipation.”

“Thus it is said,

“Whenever he reflects on the rise and fall of the aggregates, he experiences unalloyed joy and happiness. To the discerning one that reflection is deathless—
Nibbana.” (Dhp 374)

“What is impermanent and not lasting, he sees as sorrow fraught. What is impermanent and sorrow fraught he understands as being void of a permanent and everlasting soul, self or ego entity. It is this grasping, this realization of the three characteristics, or laws of transience, sorrow and non-self—*anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*—that is known to Buddhists as *vipassana-nana* or penetrative insight, which like the razor-edged sword, entirely eradicates all the latent tendencies (*anusaya*) and with it all of the varied ramifications of sorrow’s cause are finally destroyed.”

The man that is so liberated can penetrate into the darkest recesses of the mind to cognize the true nature of all that underlies appearance. He has a clarity of vision that sees the true nature of phenomena.

The third factor of enlightenment is energy (*virīya*). It is a mental property (*cetasika*) which is the sixth factor in the Noble Path, which is called Right Effort. The same zealous effort the Buddha made to attain enlightenment. The Noble Path is not for the lazy, lethargic and indolent. The Buddha is not a savior who will give the gift of salvation to the indolent, but rather a teacher who can set men on the path and show them how to save themselves from wrong view and wrong attitude if they are ready to rouse the required effort to overcome the allusive powers of the world of appearance that, seem to bid us welcome—that seem to beckon us to come in and enjoy ourselves— while all the while they know perfectly well they are alluring us by appealing to a false illusion of sense that makes us imagine that we are forms of a personalized self that may be satisfied through personal psychophysical lust, craving and greed which are actually only phenomena of the mind with no ultimate substance and no pleasing or permanent or reality.

The man who is mindful in the search for ultimate truth and cultivates keen investigation needs to be able to arouse the energy necessary to fight his way free from the inclination to fall for vain hopes of satisfaction in the world of appearances and, through keen

observation and analysis comes to see that the truth lies in the very opposite view—that appearances are void and empty of any abiding substance that can fulfil any individual expectations of happiness.

As this realization gradually begins to dawn on him, the man, so threatened, must be able to keep rousing the energy to overcome the power of the illusions that arise out of sense perception, in every moment, to ultimately defeat them in their continuous attempts to captivate the mind and, through heedfulness and energy, escape the perils of self delusion so that he may learn to gradually cool the heat of burning passion and craving, and, then, having conquered his sense of self and its inclinations, may live and breathe in a state of balance, with a calm and tranquil mind. The man who accomplishes that becomes his own refuge. He becomes an island unto himself through his own efforts.

To quote the Venerable Piyadassi further: “Thus the path of purification is impossible for an indolent person. The aspirant for enlightenment should possess unflinching energy coupled with fixed determination. Enlightenment and deliverance lie entirely in his own hands.”

To quote the Buddha again,

“The idler who does not strive, who, though young and strong, is full of sloth who is weak in resolution, that lazy and idle man will not find the way to wisdom, the way to enlightenment.”

The fourth factor of enlightenment is rapture (*piti*) which in Buddhist language means a state of happiness (rather than a romantic state of ecstasy with associations of being carried-away by sensations and emotions). This happiness, too, is a mental property (*cetasika*) described as “a quality which suffuses both the body and the mind.”

According to Venerable Piyadassi, “The man lacking in this quality cannot proceed along the path to enlightenment. [But rather] there will arise in him a sullen indifference to the dhamma, an aversion to the practice of meditation, and morbid manifestations”

When we speak of *piti*, here, we are talking not about the shallow kind of happiness that comes from seeking satisfaction in the external, outside world but of a happiness that, instead, develops internally within as a result of being free from the effects of suffering arising out of coveting material external objects.

The kind of happiness we are talking about, here, may better be called a sense of contentment arising out of effort to relinquish inclinations towards lust, hate and delusion. It also grows out of the insight that leads to realization and abandonment of external things that do not make one healthier and happier.

It is a happiness that grows in proportion the development of purity and holiness of the mind. It is a happiness which increases in proportion to harmlessness. It grows as a result of development of morality, meditation and insight culminating in wisdom.

It arises concomitantly with the wisdom which reveals that sense-pleasure is inconstant as compared to mental-contentment which becomes calmer in proportion to abandonment of mundane interest in the images of fleeting consciousness. It is a sense of contentment

that can be developed through *bhavana* by one who knows the effects of the mind watching the mind, guiding it on the path to purity.

Concerning pleasure, Venerable Piyadassi writes, “seeing a form, hearing a sound, perceiving an odour, tasting a flavour, feeling some tangible thing, cognizing an idea, people are moved, and from those sense objects and mental objects they experience a certain degree of pleasure. But it is all a passing shadow of phenomena. Unlike the primitive compilation of aggregates, whose sole feeling is to derive a feeling of pleasure from any source at any cost of pleasure, [the heedful] man should endeavour to gain real *piti* or happiness. Real happiness or rapture comes not through grasping or clinging to things animate or inanimate, but by giving-up (*nekkhamma*). It is this detached attitude towards the world that brings about true happiness.”

Concerning harmlessness, Venerable Piyadassi writes, “Unalloyed joy comes to a man who ponders thus, ‘Others may harm but I will become harmless. Others may slay human beings, but I will become a non-slayer. Others may live unchaste but I will live pure. Others may utter falsehood, but I will speak the truth. Others may talk harshly, indulge in gossip, but I will use only words that promote concord, harmless words agreeable to the ear, full of love, [with] heart courteous, worthy of being borne in mind, timely, fit and to the point. Others may be covetous. I will not covet. Energetic, steeped in modesty of heart, unswerving as regards the truth and rectitude. Peaceful, honest, contented and truthful and generous in all things will I be.’” Thus conducive to full realization, perfect wisdom to Nibbana is this fourth enlightenment factor.

“**The fifth factor of enlightenment** is calm or tranquillity (*passaddhi*). *Passaddhi* is two-fold. *Kaya passaddhi* is calm of body. *Kaya* here means all the mental properties rather than the physical body; in other words, calm of the aggregates of feeling ... perception ... and the volitional activities or conformations. *Citta-passaddhi* is the calm of the mind—that is the aggregate of consciousness.

“*Passaddhi* is compared to the happy experience of a weary walker who sits down under a tree in a shade or the cooling of a hot place by rain. Hard it is to tranquilize the mind. It trembles and it is unsteady, difficult to guard and hold back. It quivers like a fish taken from its watery home and thrown on the dry ground. It wanders at will. Such is the nature of this ultra subtle mind. It is systematic reflection (*yoniso manasikara*) that helps the aspirant for enlightenment to quieten the fickle mind. Unless a man cultivates tranquillity of mind, concentration cannot be developed. A tranquilized mind keeps away all superficialities and futilities.

“The Tathagata, the tamed, teaches the Dhamma for the purpose of training the human heart ... All the havoc wrought in the world is wrought by men who have not learned the way of mental calm, balance and poise... The calm attitude at all times shows a man of culture ... To be composed in the mind in the midst of unfavourable [conditions] is hard indeed.

“A man who cultivates calm of mind does not get upset, confused or excited when confronted with the eight vicissitudes of the world. He endeavours to see the rise and fall of all things conditioned, how things come into being and then pass away. Free from anxiety and restlessness, he will see the fragility of the fragile ... as he came so he went.

“Such is the advantage of a tranquilized mind. It is unshaken by loss or gain, blame and praise and undisturbed by adversity. This frame of mind is brought about by viewing the sentient world in its proper perspective. Thus calm or *passadhi* leads a man to enlightenment and deliverance from suffering”

The sixth factor of enlightenment is *samadhi*, concentration. “It is only the tranquilized mind that can easily concentrate on a subject of meditation. The calm concentrated mind sees things as they really are... The unified mind brings the five hindrances under subjugation.

“Concentration is the intensified steadiness of mind comparable to a flickering flame of a lamp in a windless place. It is concentration that fixes the mind aright and causes it to be unmoved and undisturbed. Correct practice of *samadhi* maintains the mind and the mental properties in a state of balance like a steady hand holding a pair of scales. Right concentration dispels passions that disturb the mind, and brings purity and placidity of mind. The concentrated mind is not distracted by sense objects. Concentration of the highest type cannot be disturbed under the most adverse circumstances.

“One who is intent on the development of *samadhi* should develop a love of virtue, *sila*, for it is virtue that nourishes the mental life and makes it coherent and calm, equable and full of rich content.

“Many are the impediments that confront a yogi, an aspirant for enlightenment, but there are five particular hindrances that hinder concentrative thought, *samadhi*, and obstruct the way to deliverance... They are known as the five hindrances, (*panca nivarana*) the five hindrances. The Pali term *nivarana* denotes that which hinders or obstructs mental development (*bhavana*). They are called the hindrances because they close in, cut off and obstruct. They close the doors to deliverance.”

The five hindrances that block the door to deliverance are: (i) sensual desires for the pleasant and delightful which arouses craving which when frustrated turns into wrath and destructiveness, (ii) ill-will, resentment and indignation which arises in face of the unpleasant and painful; which hates being separated from what is loved and desired and which is revolted by what it deems to be unpleasant smells, tastes, dishes or drinks or behaviour and a thousand other trifles (iii) lassitude or laxity of mind that, sometimes even stubbornly retard mental development, (iv) restlessness and worry, arising from impatience, brooding or guilt causing agitation or mental worry connected to past deeds or future wants (v) and doubt which means perplexity and mental agitation in the face of lack of confidence and mental itching due to taking a cynical view of things, inability to decide things and doubts about one’s ability to reach higher states. The five hindrances are the field in which we have to work to improve our mental health or suffer the consequences. It is a field in which vipassana provides us insight to improve our mental development on the path.

And so it is said that the yogi, far from the maddening crowd’s ignoble strife, fixes his mind on an object of meditation and by struggling with unceasing efforts inhibits the five hindrances thereby relentlessly washing out the impurities of his mind and turning his mind to an understanding of reality in the highest sense, “He has broken through the eggshell of ignorance.”

The seventh factor of enlightenment is *equanimity*—(*upekka*), which means neutrality or mental equipoise as opposed to hedonic indifference. Equanimity arises out of a calm concentrated mind. It is the quality of not being disturbed by the welter of experience and the vicissitudes of life. One with perfect equanimity never wavers or rocks no matter what happens in life. One with equanimity through impartiality avoids wrong paths such as greed, hate and delusion. He has developed a detached attitude towards all beings and inanimate things—the proximate cause of his equanimity being an understanding that all beings are the results of their actions in accordance with the law of *kamma*.

The Venerable Piyadassi concludes his exposition by saying, “The only thing necessary on our part for the full realization of the truth is firm determination, endeavour and earnestness to study and apply the teaching, each working it out for himself to the best of his ability.”

That about sums it up and, thus, ends our discourse on binding the eight cords of the path as laid-out and explained by the Buddha for the sake of those “with little dust in their eyes” who are capable of striving to see the ultimate truth by following the Noble Eightfold Path — a path of development which is open to everybody in human society because everybody has the equipment to do it, but too few have the strength of will to actually follow and apply it in their everyday actions and lives.

VIII.

This Generation Compared to the Simile of the Lotus

In *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi, in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta, 26.18, 26.19, 26.21 (p. 260-262), the Buddha, following his Awakening, uses the simile of the lotus as an analogy to help explain why, he was, at first, reluctant to attempt the “worrisome and troublesome” task of teaching the Dhamma to those of his own in generation.

We shall let the words of the Buddha in the texts speak for themselves:

19. “I considered: ‘This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.

But this generation delights in attachment, takes delight in attachment, [and] rejoices in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely specific conditionality, dependent origination. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, cessation, Nibbana.

If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand me, and that would be worrying and troublesome for me.’

Thereupon, there came to me stanzas never heard before:

‘Enough of the teaching of the Dhamma
That even I found hard to reach;
For it will never be perceived
By those who live in lust and hate.

Those dyed in lust, wrapped in darkness
Will never discern this abstruse Dhamma,
Which goes against this worldly stream,
Subtle, deep, and difficult to see.’

“Considering this, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma.”

20. However, at that time, the Brahma Sahmpati knew with his mind what the Buddha was considering, and the Brahma Sahmpati thought to himself:

‘The world will be lost, the world will perish, since the mind of the Tathagata accomplished and fully enlightened, inclines to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma.’

“Then, just as quickly as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, the Brahma Sahmpati disappeared in the Brahma-world and appeared before me...and said:

‘Venerable sir, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma, let the Sublime One teach the Dhamma. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are wasting, through not hearing the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.’

Thus the Brahma Sahmpati spoke, and he said further:

‘In Magadha there are those who have appeared till now
Impure teachings devised by those still stained.
Open the doors of the deathless!
Let them hear the Dhamma that the Stainless One has found.

Just as one who stands on a mountain-peak

Can see below the people all around,
So, O Wise One, All-Seeing Sage,
Ascend the palace of the Dhamma.
Let the Sorrowless One survey the human breed,
Engulfed in sorrow, overcome by birth and old age.

Arise, victorious hero, caravan leader,
Debtless One, and wander the world.
Let The Blessed One teach the Dhamma,
There will be those who understand.’

And the Buddha hearing the words of the Brahma Sahmpati said:

21. “Then I listened to the Brahma’s preaching, and out of compassion for beings I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha. Surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear and blame in the other world.

And, then, the Buddha said:

Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water, thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some other lotuses, that are born and grow in the water, [then] rest on the water’s surface, and some of the other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear unwetted by it; so too, surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen facilities and with dull facilities, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear and blame in the other world.

Then, the Buddha states, “I replied to the Brahma Sahmpati in stanzas:”

‘Open for them are the doors to the Deathless
Let those with ears now show their faith.
Thinking it would be troublesome, O Brahma,

I did not speak of the Dhamma subtle and sublime.

Then, the Buddha discerned the Brahma Sahmpati's thought:

“The Blessed One has submitted to my request that he teach the Dhamma.”

And after paying homage to me, keeping me on the right, he thereupon departed at once.”

Commentary on the simile

Firstly, from the textual context of the above quotation(s), we know that the Enlightened Buddha was reluctant to teach the Dhamma because, in his wisdom, he knew that it would be “worrying and troublesome” to try to teach people the Dhamma because he was aware that their ignorance (*avijja*) was the cause of their suffering.

Indeed, the cause of the Buddha's setting-out on his quest had been to answer the question: “Why is there suffering in this world?”

So, after his Enlightenment, he, then, considered that, if it had been so hard for him to reach an understanding of the cause of suffering, how would he be able to have success in teaching the Dhamma to worldly people, “dyeed in lust and wrapped in darkness?” How could he teach the Dhamma to those who had not, themselves, followed the same arduous process of developing the mind which was “so subtle, difficult and so hard to see?”

This is an understandable hesitation, on the Buddha's part, but, as he is pondering, the Brahma Sahmpati who knows in his mind what the Buddha is thinking suddenly and respectfully appears and appeals to the Buddha to reconsider out of compassion for those few with “little dust in their eyes” who would have the capacity to learn from the Buddha.

The Brahma Sahmpati's assertion implies, we may note, that if there were at least some “few” who would understand the Dhamma, there would always be some “with little dust in their eyes” who could pass-on their understanding and knowledge to others. This is a wise and subtle point which the Buddha considers and, with which, he immediately concurs.

The Buddha tells us:

“Surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach and some who dwelt feeling fear and blame in the other world.”

Then, the Buddha begins a simile as a comparison to explain his vision:

“Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water, thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it”...

If the simile of the lotus is taken to signify contemporary levels of humanity and their capacity for knowledge within society, the above quotation might mean, here, that there would be those who are born in the muck and thrive, immersed in the unclear and muddy waters of worldly, mundane society, without ever rising out of it, or knowing that there might be anything above and beyond it.

Moreover, this is due to the fact that all they [the lotuses] can ‘sense’ is the eco-level in which they live and thrive and, consequently, take it to be the sole way which ‘organisms’ interact to nourish themselves and their needs on what they falsely take to be the, one-and-only level in the natural environment.

Moreover, this also implies that they would be, while on that level, at least, incapable of reaching any higher level above their own, and, as a result would be, as yet, wholly-ignorant of the possibility that there might be any other level above submersion in the water.

The Buddha expands the simile by saying that there are, also, some other lotuses which are born and grow in the water and, then, come to rest upon the water’s surface, which might, then, be taken to mean a higher and more-developed ‘sense’ level than that of those still submerged within murky water.

The lotus which rests upon the water, indeed, ‘senses’ a wholly different environment than the lotus which is wholly submerged, and, as this stage, is further-away from the darkness of being submerged in-the-muck and rising out of the clouded-water, this would imply that it, at least, represents a higher level of understanding relative to the former.

Then, he Buddha goes to the next level, saying that, in his vision, he has seen some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water and “rise out of it and stand clear, unwetted by it.”

If what we say about the first two levels is true, then it follows that this third level would [in this rendering and translation of the simile] represent a yet-higher level, than the first two levels, due to being “unwetted” by the unclear and dirty water below and reaching-up to the light, thereby implying the purest and highest-yet level of understanding and knowledge in the simile which would, of course, be the level of those “with little dust in their eyes.”

This is the moment in which he makes his decision disseminate the Dhamma, when, in surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, he sees a “few with little dust in their eyes” whom he determines to teach with loving compassion for all of suffering mankind, on all levels of humanity, however far they may have as yet reached, whatever their limitations and levels or incapacities may be, because there would always be the potentiality that some of the “few” whom he teaches might pass on the message of the Dhamma to help many others through the passing-on of the word and teachings of the Buddha, in the oral tradition, from generation to generation.

Indeed, if this continues to happen, the Dhamma will never die.

It is good for us that he made that decision for, otherwise, we would all be clashing swords in darkness, as in the midst of an endless-moonless night, in an unending, anguishing battle to the death, in which everyone around us would be an enemy and no one would be a friend.

Have you ever sensed that life is like that? If you have felt that way, remember that the Buddha, out of pure loving-kindness made the decision to teach because he wanted and intended to be a compassionate friend to all those who are suffering in darkness and seeking a way out of their existential confusion and pain.

In summary, the Buddha gave us the instructions to follow for the development of the mind and control of the senses which includes all the steps outlined in this book, plus a few things unexplainable in mere words which we can only learn from direct experience on the path to wisdom and ultimate deliverance.

When things seem bad within in our present generation, turn away from the agitation caused by contact and interaction within the lower levels of an ignorant and a deluded society and strive to be more like the lotus which reaches high-up out of the dirty muck of civilization. Learn how to rise above covetousness and corruption and further attachments to greed and hate and envy, craving for sense satisfaction, by developing your mind and reaching towards the source of light and liberation by following what we have discussed about nourishment; the mind and the body; the three characteristics of existence; the four noble truths; the four foundations of mindfulness; the four sublime states; the five hindrances; the five precepts; the six sense doors; the seven factors of enlightenment; and the noble eightfold path. Strive with diligence to continue to practice and follow your way through steps of the path, as outlined in the texts, while simultaneously, practicing all of the techniques you have been learning and continuously at the same time, and see what the result will be.

If the practice feels positive continue what you are doing for the sake of the wholesome feeling it develops in the mind, and who knows? Maybe one day you will be one of those people who are setting a good example for others to follow for the sake of the future in our present-day culture and society.

And if the results you are getting feel pure and wholesome enough, just forget this generation and this civilization and turn inward and carry-on on your own, for the sake of the progress it brings you, and one day, once you are ready, some friends in the Dhamma may find you and include you in their community.

In the process of the Dhamma, like attracts like, and good vibrations will automatically find their own wave-lengths.

Though the best advice is to “Be like the rhino and go alone.”

Thus ends this exposition.

Notes:

Concerning the abbreviations and translations in the above-prepared text, the writer of this exposition has used the preferred abbreviations and Pali renderings of the individual authors and scholars, when quoting their individual works, assuming that readers will understand varied-spellings of Pali words and can to find them in the original texts themselves, if need be.

The writer also asks for indulgence for depending on Roman script, due to a lack of capacity to produce Pali fonts. Perhaps in a later edition, it would be possible to format the text using a consistent Pali font system.

When citing somewhat loose translations of Luang Por Viriyang's original Thai, the present writer has, now and again, changed a word or two for the sake of consistency, to comply with the language of the Dhamma as it is consistently used throughout the rest of this book.

When citing long paragraphs from other writers, the author/editor has often broken long passages, (which are visually formidable, especially when projected onto a big screen), into shorter units, as a visual-aid for readability, eye-focus, and concentration's sake.

Since the above material was originally prepared to be given as the basis for a series of talks, (rather than a long academic paper or book), layout and punctuation have been adapted to make visual presentation easier, not only for the reader, but also for the lecturer himself.

Sometimes, as one is getting older and one's eyesight is becoming poorer, and one has trouble following the tight internal directional-signals of conventional sentence syntax and punctuation, and small, detailed footnotes, etc, squeezed into big blocks on a small page—sometimes, when using such material as the basis for the purpose of giving a presentation, one may have to lay *The Handbook for Writers* aside, and let ease in visual recognition become one's guide.

**Endnote: Since the following diversion would have caused an imbalance in structure in the original outline of the text, concerning The Three Signata, we have put it at the end to let it stand on its own:*

Concerning man's existential predicament and anxiety

Preparatory to discussing the Three Signata, (of impermanence, delusion and non-self,) it may, first, be appropriate and helpful for the present-day reader to consider, what might be called—common-man's 'existential predicament in the face of impermanence.'

As, a man's false assumptions about 'being and existing' begin to become challenged through a sense of knowing within the mind itself,
—in particular, in some slowly-awakening individuals,
—they begin to feel both subconsciously and consciously
—existentially threatened as so-called permanent entities

- once they have started to gradually and eventually realize
- through their own arising doubts and suspicions
- through their own clear, mental observations
- through their own individual developing insights
- that their here-to-fore, certain sense of self-awareness’ and ‘self-confidence’
- concerning their own so-called ‘rightful place in the world and the universe,’
- may, indeed,

- after all, not have been quite as certain as they at first, assumed
- but merely a false illusion based on a wrong view
- based on a wrong way of seeing things with the world.

And the problem is that dependent upon developing insight, such individuals begin to ‘feel,’ with uncertain and anxious emotion, that everything they have believed here-to-fore is a transient illusion, and they come ‘fear’ with deep-seated anxiety that their ‘so-called-sense of self-existence’—might just plain, one day, just ‘pop’ like a bubble’ of foam—and might—like a disappearing image or mirage—just plain dissolve into thin air.

This is the existential predicament, and it is a treating feeling, which those who have been there may tell you.

The paradoxical irony is that while this sort of uncertainty leads towards more realistic insight, which is bringing the mind closer to the truth of ‘the way things really are,’ the fear of the threat of the ‘popping of the bubble,’ would invariably, to the untrained mind, be a confusing and agonizing cause of arising distress and dread—in the face of being ‘spread-eagled in thin air,’ as it were—between being and nothingness—with nothing to clutch at, either in existence or in emptiness.

—The good news is that such states of fear and acute anguish, while they may be compared to continuing forms of living hell, are, in some cases, only temporary states, which can, again, gradually change, once one—somehow, through the endeavour of developing even more clear insights leading to a radical turn-around in change of view, (with, perhaps, some guidance),

—The good news is that eventually, one learns and adapts one’s perspective to become more comfortable with a gradually unfolding of understanding and comprehension of what release into the lightness of emptiness actually means—which, finally, replaces, the formerly unfounded fear of forever hurtling through an empty abyss with a calm and emptiness devoid of self..

Adapting one’s view, to make the necessary ‘paradigm shift’ with regard to ‘existence,’ of course, necessitates compassionate teaching and guidance on the one hand, and, on the other, persevering, energetic meditative practice focussed upon the changing of states of mind,—but one who feels he has been through living hell of existential anxiety and fear of annihilation will feel that the effort is worth it.

The Buddha was fully-aware of all forms of human suffering, delusion and madness, including this one [existential Angst], and the Buddha knew that a man, having existential doubts has the capacity if freeing himself from self-delusion,—despite whatever continuing, wavering inclinations he may still have towards unskilful thoughts and actions— the Buddha knew that such a man, in a state of acute human suffering, was deserving of his fullest compassion and loving-kindness. This is one of the reasons the Buddha returned to the worldly world, following the period of his enlightenment.

The Buddha's instructions, regarding man's self-delusional-madness, and his antidote therefore, may be found prescribed in the original texts, in the practices and gradual processes which he taught, leading towards an awakening, through continuing energy and perseverance, to eventual deliverance and liberation from 'suffering-self,' through the truth of sublime states, to the ultimate achievement of 'non-self' (*anatta*).

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