

# Beyond I-Making

A Contemplative Investigation of the Concept  
of *Anattā* and the Path to its Realization

Ajahn Thiradhammo

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*With gratitude to all my teachers,  
past, present and future.*

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**Ajahn Thiradhammo**

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# abbreviations

.....

A.	Aṅguttara Nikāya, by book and page
AN.	Aṅguttara Nikāya, by chapter and discourse
Bud.	Buddhist Dictionary
Dict.	
CDB	The Connected Discourses of the Buddha
D.	Dīgha Nikāya, by book and page
Dhp.	Dhammapada, by verse
DN.	Dīgha Nikāya, by discourse
GDC.	The Great Discourse on Causation
It.	Itivuttaka, by sutta
LDB	Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha
M.	Majjhima Nikāya, by book and page
MLDB.	The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha
MN.	Majjhima Nikāya, by discourse
PED.	Pali-English Dictionary
S.	Saṃyutta Nikāya, by book and page
Sk	Sanskrit
SN.	Saṃyutta Nikāya, by chapter and discourse
Sn.	Suttanipāta, by verse
Ud.	Udāna, by sutta
Vin.	Vinaya Piṭaka

*All references are to the Pali Text Society's Romanized version of the Pali texts.*

*'House builder, you have been seen!  
You will not build a house again;  
Your rafters are broken,  
Your ridgepole is destroyed.  
My mind has arrived at the unconditioned,  
The destruction of craving attained.'* Dhṛp. 154

.....

## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to breathing.
- As you become aware of breathing, notice the quality of the breathing.
- Is the breathing relaxed or constrained? Are the breaths deep or shallow?
- Can you sense why the breathing is that way?
- Do you notice any associated sensation in the body?
- Bring attention to the state of the mind. Is the mind busy or quiet?
- Does the state of mind affect the breathing?
- Try to just observe whatever is most prominent in your experience without judging, interpreting or elaborating. Can you be the observer of experience?
- When suitable, open your eyes and resume your activities.

# introduction

.....

While researching the Pali Canon for my previous book, *Working with the Five Hindrances*, I occasionally came across an intriguingly cryptic phrase: ‘I–making, mine–making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ (*ahaṅkāra–mamaṅkāra–mānānusaya*). This phrase was intriguing because it suggests a completely new perspective to the universal inquiry into self and selflessness, and provides a glimpse into the unique realization which the Buddha was awakened. He designated this realization with the Pali term ‘*anattā*’, which is usually translated as ‘non–self’, ‘not–self’ or ‘no–self’. While the translation is literally correct, it unfortunately fails to convey the correct meaning of what the Buddha is saying. The Buddha did not deny self. What he denied was that self has any permanent, imperishable essence. The Buddha realized that self is essentially a constantly changing process, artificially created through the interaction of craving and ignorance. And, since it is ‘made–up’ by activities which we have some influence over, craving and ignorance can also be ‘unmade’ so that the deleterious effects of grasping self as permanent can come to cessation.

Where the phrase ‘I–making, mine–making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ is mentioned, the emphasis is upon its cessation in the context of full awakening. The Buddha awoke to the realization that the cessation of ‘I–making, mine–making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ is ultimate well–being through complete liberation from the suffering which ‘I–making’ entails. All the Buddha’s teachings facilitate this realization, some indirectly (for example the practice of ‘selfless’ generosity) and some directly (for example, meditations on

impermanence). This is, of course, exactly what the Buddha's teaching excels in, giving us an extremely wide range of perspectives applicable to a variety of temperaments. The Buddha's teaching guides us from the delusion of self-centredness to a liberating reality-centredness, and thus Buddhist spiritual practice is ultimately directed to liberation from the insidious 'I-making' process.

In order for this experience to be realized, the Buddha provided many approaches. Therefore, through investigating the various contexts in which this phrase is used in the Pali Canon, it is possible to understand the processes leading to the cessation of I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit, and the means to arrive at liberation.

The first challenge is that, in the particular contexts in which this phrase is mentioned, the Buddha mostly responds with either terse stock formula or formal technical language. However, it is possible, with some patience and contemplative investigation, guided by various relevant teachings in the Pali Canon, to unravel these responses for the ultimate reward of realizing penetrating insight into some of the most profound aspects of the Buddha's teachings.

To accomplish this, it is necessary firstly to look closely at the processes contributing to 'I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit' to obtain some clearer understanding of what we are dealing with. For most people, 'I' is an unquestioned reality which gains strength and comprehensiveness, complexity and sophistication, over an entire lifetime. 'I', and its developing maturity and refinement, is assumed to be the normal, natural process of living, and the resulting happiness and suffering is life's usual drama. If the process of I-making were not pointed out to us by someone like the Buddha, most people would never notice this insidious enterprise unfolding nor the serious impact it has

on their lives. Otherwise, very simply, we are subversively co-opted into supporting this I-making process, what I commonly refer to as the 'I-making Project', even against our best interests. And this I-making Project has been exceedingly successful in fooling the vast majority of human beings throughout history. We are therefore fortunate to be able to obtain some insight into this deeply entrenched, insidious and seriously deluding process.

Being thus drawn to investigate this intriguing and immensely valuable theme of I-making and its cessation, little did I anticipate how my investigation would open up doors into some of the most profound, and in some cases, obscure and rarefied aspects of the Buddha's teaching. Not only that, it also revealed some quite startling and disturbing aspects of the human mind, particularly its incredible propensity for deception and distortion.

Since the Pali Canon provides little explanation about the process of 'I-making' (the Buddha being more interested in its cessation), I thought that a study of contemporary neuroscience and psychology would supplement my investigation. Neuroscience has made rapid advances in recent years and much of what has been discovered supports Buddhist principles<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, detailed psychological studies have uncovered some of the more unsavoury aspects of the human mind<sup>2</sup>.

The Buddha, of course, outlined some of the delusive aspects of the mind, for example, the 'distortions of perception', the underlying dispositions to sensuality, aversion and ignorance, and the power of craving and grasping. However, the Buddha's special contribution in this regard was to delineate a clear path of spiritual development which leads us beyond delusion to complete liberation.

1 Of note is Prof. Davidson's research into the effects of meditation on brain activity. See Davidson 2013.

2 For a general overview see Fine; also Goleman, Kahneman and Harari.

I personally find it very beneficial to orient to a particular theme from the Buddha's teaching to fertilize meditative insight. If I could organize and explain the results of my research and provide some of my reflections in an accessible format, would other people find it useful? I hope so.

As you may observe from the Contents page, the topics cover a wide range of the Buddha's core teachings. The Buddha had a unique outlook on reality and came from a cultural context unfamiliar to most of us, so this may require some flexibility to appreciate. For example, one of his teachings which can be difficult for many people to grasp is the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of human existence (*dukkha*). The Buddha is not being a pessimist, but rather is pointing out a basic characteristic of human existence which few people would voluntarily acknowledge. Once acknowledged, however, it can be the basis for a thorough and vigorous investigation into the true meaning of life. It was this fundamental existential unsatisfactoriness of human existence – youth becoming old age, health becoming illness and life ending in death – which incited the Buddha on his spiritual quest and resulted in him discovering a path to the complete liberation from unsatisfactoriness.

The Buddha taught the path to liberation for forty-five years, often re-visiting and cross-referencing familiar themes from various angles, while sometimes adding new perspectives as the occasion called for. What we are then given is a multi-dimensional approach to spiritual practice, the usefulness of which depends upon each individual's interest, dedication and diligence to apply the teachings to their own life situation.

To experience the deepest levels of wisdom requires a contemplative meditation practice, as a mere intellectual understanding is not sufficient for liberation. Hence, while it is possible to gain some increased knowledge of the Buddha's teaching through reading most of this book,

I have provided meditation exercises to help facilitate contemplative wisdom. For myself, this book began as a meditative inquiry into the process of I-making and, as I delved deeper into the various aspects of the process, meditation practice continued to be a source of valuable insight and increased understanding.

The following material, as with my previous book *Working with the Five Hindrances*, is simply a ‘workbook’ giving information and relevant themes for contemplation. It is by no means a definitive exposition of the topics covered! I have relied, as much as possible, on the Buddha’s own words as recorded in the Pali Canon, giving my own explanations only as I felt it necessary.

I have also attempted to make this ‘workbook’ accessible to as many people as possible. Thus, the early parts of some chapters are introductory, with later sections becoming more detailed and specialized. I suggest initially reading only as far as seems understandable, rather than becoming too overwhelmed with details. I have also added exercises to assist direct experience of some of the concepts, as well as personal examples.

The material is presented in three main parts. Part 1 gives an overview of some relevant background and theoretical information to help provide the context for this particular Buddhist teaching, Part 2 explains the causes or processes involved in ‘I-making’, and Part 3 outlines the various means and practices to engage in for the cessation of I-making. For those familiar with Buddhist practice, Part 1 could be skipped over or lightly read (although I do have some useful contributions to understanding the Buddha’s unique awakening insight and explanation of *anattā*). For those who know about the Underlying Dispositions, the Five Groups of Grasping and Dependent Origination, Part 2 could also be lightly read, in order to focus meaningfully on Part 3: Cessation.

May you also find this material beneficial for your progress on the path.

## The Contexts of the Phrase ‘I-Making, Mine-Making and the Underlying Disposition to Conceit’

Of the many discourses of the Buddha recorded in the Pali Canon, only about twenty-five make reference to the phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’, or to a similar phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and conceit’. It is thus not an overly daunting task to undertake a study of these references. However, even though they are small in number, we immediately encounter some challenges.

Firstly, ‘I-making’ and ‘mine-making’ (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra*) are not explained in detail anywhere in the Pali Canon. Similarly, while ‘I’ is referred to fairly often, ‘mine’, as in ‘what belongs to self’ (*attaniya*), is mentioned rarely. More broadly, ‘mine-making’ refers to one of the forms of identification, for example, the body as being ‘mine’, ‘my’ possessions or what belongs to ‘me’.

The term ‘underlying disposition to conceit’ (*mānānusaya*) is one of the seven underlying dispositions (*anusaya*), and ‘conceit’ is the last of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) to be relinquished by the fully-awakened arahant.

Thus to explain the meaning of ‘I-making’ and ‘mine-making’ we need to reference some other concepts including the phrase ‘I am’ (*ahaṃ asmi*) and ‘the conceit “I am”’. Often, reference is also made to ‘self’ (*attā*) or the ‘doctrine of self’ (*attavāda*), as well as ‘individual existence’ (*attabhāva*). And, of course, there is the very specific Buddhist teaching on ‘*anattā*’ or not a permanent self. Further references are ‘identity’ (*sakkāya*) and ‘identity view’ (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*).

## The Contexts

Of the twenty-five discourses which mention the phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ or ‘I-making, mine-making and conceit’, many are repetitions. We are then reduced to the following seven unique contexts in which these phrases are used.

### 1 | No Longer Exists

The most common context in which the phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ is used is repeated in six discourses. Various bhikkhus ask the Buddha: **‘Venerable, how should one know and see so that, in regard to this body with consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit no longer exists?’** S.II,252;III,79f;103;135f;169; M.III,18f.

### 2 | Uprooted

The same phrasing as 1, except the ending is **‘... I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit have been uprooted (samūhata).’** M.III,32ff.

### 3 | Free Of

The similar phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and conceit’ is repeated in four discourses. **‘Venerable, how should one know and see so that, in regard to this body with consciousness and all external signs, the mind is free of (*apagata*) I-making, mine-making and conceit, has gone beyond distinctions (*vidhā samatikkanta*) and is peaceful and thoroughly liberated.’** S.II,253;III,80f;136f;170.

In all of these enquiries there is reference to knowing and seeing **‘in regard to this body with consciousness (*saviññāṇake kāye*) and all external signs (*bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*)’**. ‘This body with consciousness’ refers to one’s own body and mind, while ‘all external signs’ are all external objects, all other sentient and insentient objects. These two categories cover all the possible objects which can become the subject of I-making. The third context adds the phrase **‘gone beyond distinctions and is peaceful and thoroughly liberated’** which the commentary says means that one has gone beyond all distinctions of conceit<sup>3</sup>, and is peaceful and liberated through the ending of defilements<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4 | I-Making and Collectedness (*samādhi*)<sup>5</sup>

Venerable Ananda asks the Buddha: **‘Venerable, could a bhikkhu obtain such collectedness that he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit in regard to this body with consciousness, that he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit in regard to all external signs; and he would acquire and abide in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, which has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit for one who acquires and abides therein?’** A.I,132f.

‘Liberation of mind’ refers to the fruit of arahantship by way of development of the meditative absorptions, while ‘liberation by wisdom’ is the fruit of arahantship developed through wisdom.

3 The threefold conceit of superiority, inferiority and equality (cf. S.IV,88).

4 cf. CDB. p.814, n.342.

5 I use ‘collectedness’ as a translation of *samādhi* as ‘concentration’, its usual translation, is only one factor in *samādhi*. For example, in the threefold expression of the Eightfold Path, the *samādhi* section represents Right Effort, Right Concentration (*samādhi*) and Right Mindfulness. At the level of the first absorption, *samādhi* has five factors: initial and sustained thought, rapture, well-being and one-pointedness of mind, i.e., concentration (see Chapter 14).

## 5 | I-Making and Views

The Buddha responds to questions from the Wanderer Vacchagotta: **‘Therefore, I say, with the wasting, waning, cessation, giving up, relinquishing of all conceivings, all mental disturbances (*mathita*), all I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit, the Tathāgata<sup>6</sup> is liberated without grasping.’** M.I,486.

## 6 | I-Making and the End of Craving

Sariputta is told by the Buddha to train himself to have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body, in regard to all external signs and to acquire and abide in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit. He is then called a bhikkhu **‘who has cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering.’** A.I,133f.

The Buddha adds that this experience is what he refers to in his teaching to Udaya:

**‘Abandoning both sensual desire and distress (*domanassa*),  
The dispelling of lethargy and warding off of remorse,  
Equanimity and mindfulness purified, preceded by Dhamma reflection,  
This, I say, is deliverance by final knowledge (*aññā vimokkha*)  
– the breaking up of ignorance.’** Sn. 1106-7

6 ‘Tathāgata’, lit. ‘the thus gone one’, is the name the Buddha used when referring to himself.

## 7 | Liberated

Several other references mention the phrase as a way of indicating that the speaker is liberated, and thus:

**‘It must be that I-making ... have been uprooted...’**

- a. Venerable Sariputta states that even if the Buddha were to **‘undergo change and alteration’**, sorrow and despair would not arise in him (S.II,275);
- b. Venerable Sariputta explains that as he enters and abides in each of the nine different absorptions, he has no thoughts of ‘I’ doing so (S.III,235–238);
- c. When Venerable Upasena is fatally bitten by a poisonous snake, he shows no ill effects yet communicates that he is about to die. When asked why he shows no ill effects he explains that it is because he does not identify with any of the six senses (S.IV,41).

In none of these seven contexts are we given any detailed explanation of the process of I-making. Instead, the Buddha gives different means to realize the cessation of I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit that provide a rich treasure trove of skilful means to realize liberation without grasping.

.....

## note on translation

The role of a translator is to translate the text accurately to the best of their ability. While the aim is accuracy, the result can often be overly literal. My experience with translators translating from Thai to English is that there are two main schools. There are those who translate literally what was said and there are those who translate more the meaning of what was said. That is, there is translation of the 'letter' and translation of the 'spirit'. While it is best to try to marry the two as much as possible, sometimes one must make a choice.

In this work, I have inclined toward translating more the meaning or spirit rather than being literally accurate. My intention is to try to make some of the more specialized aspects of the Buddha's teaching more accessible to the interested general reader, particularly in regard to the teaching on no permanent self and the Five Groups of Grasping. To do this, I have used my own translations of Pali words, with the Pali in italics and references for those wishing to investigate in more detail or consult more literal translations<sup>7</sup>.

My translations of Pali passages are quoted in bold script, while summaries or precis are quoted in regular type. I have tried as much as possible to maintain a consistency in the translation, although some variations do exist. Some of the Pali has been simplified and I have left out diacriticals for personal names.

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7 For more detailed explanation of key terms see Analayo (2015).



PART ONE

# Background

.....

## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position and focus attention on the breathing.
- When suitable, try to observe non-judgementally the sensations you experience in the body, i.e., the posture of sitting, the back upright, feet touching the floor, any tightness in the neck, shoulders or back, etc.
- What is the feeling associated with these sensations? Is it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral?
- When it seems suitable, observe the general condition of the mind at this time, i.e., alert or dull; energized or fatigued; calm or busy; etc.
- What is the feeling associated with this mental condition?
- Is this mental condition and/or feeling familiar to you, or is it something new?
- When suitable, bring attention back to the breathing, then resume your usual activity.

ONE

# Historical and Theoretical Background

.....

A thorough and meaningful contemplative investigation of the process of ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ and its cessation, requires a delving into and unpacking of almost all of the unique aspects of the Buddha’s teaching. It is helpful to start with some historical and theoretical information. Historically, it is useful to know something of the background and context to the Buddha’s Teaching, for example, his unique experience of awakening and the cultural context in which the teachings were given.

Theoretically, it is useful to know of the religious concepts the Buddha dealt with and the definition of terms he used in his approach to teaching. Part 2 also gives detailed knowledge of the various conditioning processes of ‘I-making’, which are explained in the teaching on Conditional Causality, or Dependent Origination, and the Perceptual Process. Also important to know is that the processes of ‘I-making’ are directed at the Five Groups of Grasping and the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases. To gain this knowledge requires a degree of study and, of course, no small amount of thorough contemplation.

A useful point to begin is the Pali Canon, the scriptural collection of the Buddha’s teachings.

## The Pali Canon

The Pali Canon is the body of scripture preserved in the Pali language of the Theravada or Southern School of Buddhism. Shortly after the Buddha's passing, the senior members of the monastic order (Sangha) convened a council to review the large body of the Buddha's orally-preserved teachings, called the 'Dhamma-Vinaya'. With the addition of a third collection this was codified into Three Baskets (*Tipiṭaka*), commonly referred to as the Pali Canon.<sup>1</sup> The Three Baskets are the 'Vinaya Piṭaka' (Basket of Monastic Discipline), five collections of discourses called the 'Sutta Piṭaka' (Basket of Discourses) and the later-compiled 'Abhidhamma Piṭaka' (Basket of Systematized Teachings). The five collections of the 'Sutta Piṭaka' consist of:

- 1 | Dīgha Nikāya (Long Discourses),
- 2 | Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses),
- 3 | Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected [by theme] Discourses),
- 4 | Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses) and
- 5 | Nikāya, the 'Minor Collection' of various texts, including the Dhammapada, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Sutta Nipāta, Theragāthā, Therīgāthā, etc.

My main reference has been the first two 'Baskets' of the Pali Canon, with only passing reference to the third 'Basket'. Most of the material in the first two 'Baskets' of the Pali Canon is in narrative style because it is a record of the Buddha's teachings remembered and recited by two of the Buddha's foremost disciples at the convening of the First Council.

<sup>1</sup> Following the custom of India at that time, the Pali Canon extant at the Buddha's death was preserved orally and passed down from teacher to disciple. Some 400 years later it was committed to writing in Sri Lanka.

The only way to communicate in the Buddha's time was directly through speech or physical demonstration, there being no writing material available. The particular style of the Pali Canon, with its repetitions, stock phrases, formal lists and recurring templates, is the product of this oral tradition. The Buddha gave teachings and engaged in dialogue with a wide range of people, including his own disciples, followers of other beliefs, learned brahmins, political leaders and the general public. We thus not only learn about the Buddha's teachings, but gain an understanding of the political, social, religious and cosmological world of 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE India.

The Buddha was intimately interacting with his immediate audience and so provided a variety of teachings suited to the temperament of the audience and the content of that teaching. A skilled teacher knows that students can not hold too much information in their mind at any time.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we find that the teachings were preserved in different 'formats'. Some formats are short, succinct notations (for easy remembering), often merely lists. For more advanced or interested students there are detailed explanations, as well as lengthy dialogues, sometimes covering a range of topics. This specific contextual aspect of the teachings was significant and explains the exceptional diversity of the teachings as they expand, cross-reference, interweave and overlap in an astounding variety of ways. For the rationalist, this can appear convoluted or even confusing, not to mention sometimes apparently contradictory; however, a reflective meditator will find a nutritious feast for insightful contemplation.

<sup>2</sup> Gilovich 2016, loc. 2180, quotes Miller, G. A. who suggests that we can only hold in mind between 5 and 9 pieces of information.

The Buddha taught for forty–five years, so it is not uncommon to find his early teachings overlapped by later, more developed teachings. A possible example of this is the teachings on the Underlying Dispositions. Initially, they are mentioned in a general sense as being predisposed towards something (S.III,35). Later, they are referred to more specifically, as, for example, passion, aversion and ignorance (M.III,285–6) and eventually they are formalized into a standard list of seven underlying dispositions (S.V,60).

Failing to take into account the narrative style, the context and the Buddha’s special methods of teaching has led to some idiosyncratic interpretations of the teachings, usually based on overly literal interpretations, or out–of–context and/or selective representation of certain aspects of the teachings while ignoring others. In this way, some people have come up with their own categorical interpretations of what the Buddha taught, and even founded their own school of Buddhism based on this limited perspective. The classic example is the ‘Personalist School’ which is based on a single discourse that mentions a ‘person’ (as taking up the burden S.III,25) as proof that a real entity exists that is neither identical to nor different from the Five Groups of Grasping<sup>3</sup>.

Another important element consistently missed by many translators is the amount of humour, word play and irony which threads its way through many of the narratives<sup>4</sup>. Humour, of course, takes many forms. One form the Buddha applied was a light–hearted or indirect criticism of some of the dominant Brahmanical practices and beliefs. For example, the Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN.5) records the Brahmin Kūṭadanta absurdly asking the Buddha (a non–Brahmin ascetic) about how to conduct a proper Brahmin sacrifice which involves the slaughter of many hundreds of animals. This situation then provides the Buddha the opportunity to

3 cf. CDB. p.1051, n.37 for Bhikkhu Bodhi’s notes.

4 cf. Walpola Rahula, JPTS Vol. IX, 1981, p.156f.

explain his ‘more profitable’ method of spiritual practice which results in Brahmin Kūṭadanta realizing the ‘eye of Dhamma’ and becoming a follower. In a following discourse (DN.11), in a not-so-subtle parody, a bhikkhu travels to the various heavenly realms through his psychic abilities and questions the highest Brahma god, who is forced to admit that he does not know the answer, and then directs the bhikkhu to consult the Buddha, who of course provides the wise answer.

‘Interpreters both ancient and modern have taken little account of the historical context of the Buddha’s teachings, but relating them to early brahmanical texts, and also to ancient Jainism, gives a much richer picture of his meaning, especially when his satire and irony are appreciated.’ (Gombrich 2013, vii).

## **The Buddha’s Special Approach to Spiritual Investigation**

The investigation into the ultimate essence of a human being – an intrinsic self or soul – has confounded spiritual seekers since before the Buddha’s time. For some people, the Buddha’s unique contribution to this investigation adds more to their confusion than to clarity. Partly this is due to the limitations inherent in translating the teachings into other languages and cultures. I would suggest that this is also partly due to a failure to correctly explain the Buddha’s special approach to spiritual investigation and the resulting extraordinary insight that arose from his deep, contemplative enquiry.

The Pali Canon records the Buddha-to-be leaving the home life on a spiritual quest modelled on that of the dominant brahmanical religious values in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE India<sup>5</sup>. This was an era of rapid social change and religious ferment. The emergence of the samana, or wandering ascetic traditions, challenged the dominant orthodoxy of Brahmanism, and thus new philosophies and beliefs arose which centred around four fundamental principles:

- 1 | each individual has an intrinsic, permanently-abiding essence (Skt: *ātman*; Pali: *attā*);
- 2 | this essence transmigrates through continuous cycles of death and rebirth (*samsāra*, lit. 'wandering on');
- 3 | it is action (*kamma*) which conditions future rebirth; and
- 4 | one can be liberated (*vimutti*) from the round of rebirth through spiritual exercises, resulting in the experience of nirvāna (Skt.) or nibbāna (Pali).

Of course, there was a great variety of interpretations and on-going debate regarding these principles. The view which emerged from the Upanishads, the late Vedic literature, was that the goal of spiritual practice was the union of the individual essence (*ātman*) with the universal essence (Brahman) achieved through various practices, e.g. spiritual study, austerities, yoga, etc.

<sup>5</sup> cf. MN. 26: The Discourse on the Noble Search and MN. 36: The Greater Discourse to Saccaka.

Most spiritual seekers in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE India were on a quest to directly experience the supreme individual essence of ‘*ātman*’. The Buddha-to-be himself ardently sought to achieve this through the established spiritual exercises of concentration meditation and then austerities for six long years. However, he was dissatisfied with the results, despite being recognized by his teachers as an exceptional student. He then decided to try another approach, and returned to his initial spiritual enquiry of investigating the cause of human suffering, which was, in fact, a radical and significantly new approach.

The new approach was not to seek what the true nature of a human being is, but rather to investigate how a human being experiences reality, starting from the universal experience of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) as expressed through old age, sickness and death. These were the shocking realities which had initially shaken the wealthy, pampered young man out of his complacency to seek a spiritual solution. That is, rather than look for some intrinsic essence within a human being, he sought the causes of the imperfection of human existence<sup>6</sup>.

6 ‘For the Buddha, the important thing is to understand the *nature* of the human condition and we see that he emphasises not what things are but how they operate. ... So he does not give us a different answer to the same question “*what is man?*” but asks an altogether more sophisticated question: “*how is man?*” And he sustains this approach systematically throughout his teachings. The Buddha thus substitutes processes for objects.

Perhaps because our everyday commonsense world consists very much of what we think of as objects, and our tendency to want to know *what* things are, this important point has frequently been missed even within the Buddhist tradition itself.’ Hamilton, xxiv.

An effect of this particular approach to spiritual practice, possibly unexpected, was a diminishing of self-referencing and increase in humility. The traditional spiritual path, looking for one's ultimately 'true' and 'pure' self, is based on self-referencing and fused with self-affirmation, which could lead to self-inflation, since that ultimate, eternal self (*ātman*) is equated with the essence of the universe (Brahman). (Of course, for the rare few who followed this path to its end, the self dissolved in the universal essence.)

The Buddha's quest focussed on the imperfections of human existence which lead to everything human beings identified with as 'self' being destroyed by old age, sickness and death. It also led to a diminishing of self-affirmation as the self was depersonalized and de-constructed into constituent processes: grasping, craving, ignorance, etc.

In the Pali Canon (S.II,72f) the Buddha explains that both dukkha and 'the world (*loka*)' arise from sense-knowing, which includes contact, and can lead on to feeling, craving, grasping, etc. In other words, the world to the Buddha is the world of subjective experience.

**'Rather, it is in this fathom-long body, endowed with perception and mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world and the way to the cessation of the world.'** S.I,62.

With his new approach to spiritual practice, the Buddha-to-be recalled an occasion in his childhood when his mind innocently settled into absorption concentration. Recognizing that he had chanced upon an exalted state which was not involved with sensual pleasures or unwholesome states<sup>7</sup>, he used this as a basis for a contemplative investigation of the causes of existential unsatisfactoriness.

7 M.I,246f; also see M.III,233.

‘Indeed, this world has fallen into difficulty, in that it is born, ages, dies, passes on and re-arises, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering of ageing-and-death. When, for sure, will an escape from this suffering of ageing-and-death be evident?’

Then, bhikkhus, it occurred to me: “When what exists does ageing-and-death come to be? By what is ageing-and-death conditioned?” Then, bhikkhus, through appropriate attention, in me there was a realization by wisdom: “When there is birth, ageing-and-death comes to be; ageing-and-death has birth as its condition ...” S.II,10f.

The Buddha’s innovative approach to spiritual practice – a penetrating investigation supported by a calm and focused mind – became the key to his breakthrough to Awakening, revealing an extraordinary insight into reality.

## The Insight of Awakening: Causally-Conditioned Processes

The second challenge to understanding the Buddha’s teaching is his unique insight into the universal principle of causally-conditioned processes, formally called Dependent Origination. Rather than discovering a permanent, intrinsic ‘*ātman*’ at the source of human life, the Buddha awoke to the liberating insight that what appears to be permanent is in fact a series of causally-conditioned processes. This is the liberating truth of *anattā*: nothing has any ultimate, permanent essence. Included in this profound insight was the realization that the fundamental cause of human *dukkha* is ignorance. Therefore the cessation of ageing-and-death and this ‘whole mass of *dukkha*’ could be realized by the ending of ignorance through the development of wisdom culminating in the realization of unconditioned Nibbāna.

The Buddha's experience of awakening was an unimaginably extraordinary and exceptional experience transcending time, space and self-imposed limitations on reality. What this awakening produced was a significant shift in human consciousness – from object-oriented consciousness to process-oriented consciousness. For people whose minds are rigidly object-oriented there are only two options available: something either exists or it does not exist<sup>8</sup>. The principle of causal conditioning provides another option, what the Buddha called the 'Middle Way'. That is, when we see that what appears as 'things' are actually dynamic, causally-conditioned processes, we understand that they do not have any 'existence in themselves' or 'non-existence in themselves'. When all there is is continuously unfolding processes, at what point can one say that anything actually 'exists', or 'doesn't exist'?

**'Kaccāna, the world usually depends upon the duality of "existence" (*atthi*) and "non-existence". But for those who see as it really is with right wisdom, the truth of the arising of the world, there is not for them any "non-existence" in the world. And for those who see as it really is with right wisdom, the truth of the passing away of the world, there is not for them any "existence" in the world.**

**Kaccāna, this world is mostly bound by taking up, grasping and adherence. But this one [of right view] does not obtain or take hold of that attachment and grasping, that resolution, adherence and underlying disposition, does not take a stand upon "my self".<sup>9</sup> They have no doubt or uncertainty that what arises is only *dukkha* arising, what ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing, and their knowledge is independent of others. In this way, Kaccāna, there is right view.**

<sup>8</sup> In the Indian system of logic two more options were given: something both exists and not exists, or neither exists nor not exists. Since these are rarely referred to in western thinking they will be excluded from the discussion.

<sup>9</sup> I have been guided in this translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, CDB p.736, note 32. See also his note 29, page 734 regarding 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

**“All exists” is one extreme; “All does not exist” is the second extreme. Not going to either extreme, the Tathāgata expounds a teaching in the middle: With ignorance as condition, willing and habiting come to be; with willing and habiting as condition, consciousness ... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.’** S.II,17.

This was an entirely new insight into the nature of reality and one not easy to comprehend, especially by those still seeking ultimate essences. Quite understandably, the Buddha was initially reluctant to announce this reality–altering insight to the world.

**‘It occurred to me, bhikkhus: “This Dhamma which I have found is profound, difficult to see, difficult to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond logic, subtle, comprehensible only to the wise.”’**

M.I,167f; Vin.I,4f; S.I,136f; cf. D.II,36f.

However, the highest brahmanical god<sup>10</sup>, Brahma Sahampati, convinced him that his teaching would be of benefit for **‘those with little dust in their eyes’**.

## Teaching Challenges

A significant challenge the Buddha faced was the need to express his unique insights within a culture steeped in traditional religious concepts. The template which he thus developed over his many years of teaching is based upon the world–view prevalent in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE India, but adapted to his own strategy for awakening.

Some of the concepts the Buddha used were well–understood by his audience, although they may appear unfamiliar to us in the present

10 In Buddhist cosmology the celestial ‘gods’ are beings who are born into higher planes of existence (levels of consciousness) through development of skilful kamma, the lower gods through exalted virtues such as generosity and morality, the higher gods through advanced degrees of collectedness meditation. Metaphorically, then, the Buddha was invited to teach through the prompting of higher spiritual values.

era. An example is the definition of physicality into the four elemental qualities of solidity (earth), heat (fire), fluidity (water) and motion (air), whereas today we would tend to think in terms of ‘material substances’ such as molecules and atoms.

When the Buddha gave more detailed explanations of certain themes he often introduced a number of technical terms, many of which have become the topic of lengthy discussion up to the present time. Some of these terms can be better understood if reference is made to their use in the other religious traditions present at the Buddha’s time, since some of the Buddha’s main teachings were formulated as direct challenges or indirect refutations to certain of the, principally brahmanical, teachings. For example, on the night of his awakening, the Buddha experienced through his meditative abilities what he called the Three Knowledges (*tevijjā*). These are obviously a challenge to the brahmanical view of the Three Knowledges as referring to the learning of the three Vedas, the brahmanical scriptures.

The Buddha was obviously an exceptionally gifted teacher, able to communicate his uniquely original message to a wide range of people (of course, the records mention only a few of the people who did not comprehend!). One of his special methods, very likely learned from spending many hours with his tribal chief father adjudicating disputes, was what in English is called the ‘Socratic method’ of encouraging people to present their particular view, and then drawing them, in a non-confrontational way, into a dialogue while picking apart their reasoning. A classic example of this, recalled in the Buddhist tradition as a verse in the Chant on the Eight Verses of Auspicious Victory (*Jaya-mangala-aṭṭha-gāthā*), is the Buddha’s refuting of ‘the debater and clever speaker, Saccaka’ (MN.35 and 36).

It has been noted<sup>11</sup> that some of the Buddha's teachings were formulated in such a way as to refute followers of other beliefs through giving their terms his own meaning. However, if one doesn't know what that original meaning was, then confusion is likely to follow. For example, he often used the term 'brahman' to refer to someone who is spiritually evolved rather than as a member of the brahman caste.

Also, while trying to explain the experience of the unconditioned, ineffable reality, he resorted to the use of metaphor, allegory and similes. Of course, these can only be fully appreciated and understood by knowing their significance within the culture of ancient India of the time. One of the most significant examples is the use of fire imagery, which takes its lead from the literal meaning of Nibbāna as 'going out', as a flame 'goes out' through lack of fuel. In one of the Buddha's early teachings<sup>12</sup>, to a group of former fire-worshipping ascetics, he gave the suitably dramatic image that the sensory world was burning with the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion. This was an allusion to the practice of the brahman layman who was obliged to attend to three sacrificial fires in the home<sup>13</sup>. The Buddha was thus pointing to the importance of attending to the internal fires which 'burn up' human life. Also, the Pali word '*upādāna*' has two meanings. The main one is 'grasping', however, it also literally means 'fuel'. This implies, of course, that 'grasping' is also the 'fuel' for sustaining the cycles of existence.<sup>14</sup>

11 Gombrich, 2013, p.7

12 The 'Fire Sermon' (Āditta Pariyāya Sutta: S.IV,19–20).

13 Gombrich, 2013, p.112

14 'In my opinion the term *khandha* too was a part of the fire metaphor. The word *upadana* has both a concrete and an abstract meaning. In the abstract it means attachment, grasping: in this sense it is much used in Buddhist dogmatics. Concretely, it means that which fuels this process ... So when the context deals with fire is simply means fuel.

Pali has a common expression for a blazing fire, *aggi-kkhandha*. In the compound *upadana-kkhandha* I believe the word for fire, *aggi*, has been dropped ... I therefore translate *upadana-kkhandha* as 'blazing masses of fuel', and consider it to be a coherent part of the same metaphor as the word *nibbana*.' (Gombrich 2013, p.114).



When the Buddha proceeded to teach, he did so in a way which was consistent with his new approach to spiritual practice and his profound new insights, yet he had to take into account his audience who were cultured in the beliefs of the time. As the Buddha commenced his forty-five year teaching career he had to explain to his listeners his unique understanding regarding three of the principal beliefs dominant in India at the time. These are the belief in the principle of kamma, the eternal ātman and the liberation of Nibbāna. We will thus cover these in the three following chapters.



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## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and settle your attention on the breathing process.
- As you continue to direct attention to the breath, do you notice the mind calming down, or do you notice more distractions?
- Can you observe any cause and effect relationship between the action of meditation and any result?
- Are there various conditions which need to come together in order for a result to manifest?
- Return your attention to the breathing.
- When suitable, see if you can discern the intention which motivates your doing meditation. There may be a number of different intentions; just observe whatever is present at the time. If it is hard to discern intention, just return to the breathing and try another time.
- When suitable, open your eyes and resume your activity.

TWO

# Kamma

.....

**'Beings are the owners of their kamma, the heirs of their kamma; they have kamma as their origin, kamma as their relative, kamma as their resort; whatever kamma they do, whether good or evil, they will inherit (its results).'**' A.V,288.

The term 'kamma' ('karma' in Sanskrit) literally means action, and its associated result is *vipāka*. The principle of kamma is the principle of moral causality, which, in some form, is acknowledged by all major religions. The simplest expression of this principle is that good actions give pleasant or positive results, while bad actions give unpleasant results.

**'Mind precedes all things, mind is foremost,  
produced by mind are they.  
If one should speak or act with corrupted mind,  
Then suffering follows, as a cart follows the hoof of the drawing ox.**

**Mind precedes all things, mind is foremost,  
produced by mind are they.  
If one should speak or act with a pure mind,  
Then well-being follows, like a never-departing shadow.'**

Dhp. 1-2.

In the Buddha's time, the dynamics of this principle were interpreted in a wide range of ways, as is the case today. Theistic religions interpret it as a punishment–reward system, overseen by an all–powerful deity. In the Buddha's teaching, the principle of kamma is a natural universal principle, like the laws of physics. The Buddha gave prime importance to the efficacy of action: '**... I teach a doctrine of kamma, a doctrine of doing (*kiriyā*), a doctrine of energy**'<sup>1</sup> (A.I,287). Of course, when this principle is applied to complex human beings, the causal relationship is usually far from clear and simple. Hence Buddhists refer to conditional causality – the results of action being conditional upon various factors.

In contrast to the Buddha's knowledge of kamma, there are doctrines that lead to inaction (*akiriyā*: lit. 'non–doing'), three of which are: 1) the view that all we experience is due to what has been done in the past; 2) the view that all we experience is due to God's creation; or, 3) the view that all we experience is without cause (*hetu*) or condition (*paccaya*). Holding any of these beliefs undermine any initiative for action, since we see ourselves as the prisoners of past action, the will of God or non–causal events. Thus people who adhere to these doctrines '**have no desire and make no effort regarding what should be done or what should not be done**' (A.I,173f).

The most significant teaching on kamma initiated by the Buddha, as a meditator devoted to the development of the mind, was to radically redefine kamma to be intentional or willed actions:

**'It is intention (will, volition) that I call kamma. Having willed, one produces kamma through body, speech and mind.'** A.III,415.

<sup>1</sup> In Bhikkhu Bodhi's analysis of the 37 Aids to Enlightenment (CDB. p.1489), energy is the most common factor, mainly because of the emphasis on the right form of energy as exemplified in the Four Right Efforts.

That is, our volitional actions give results dependent upon the particular conditions of the action and the characteristics of those conditions<sup>2</sup>. As perhaps you can appreciate, this conditional action–result process can be quite intricate and complex, since conditioning factors, particularly the moral quality and the intensity/continuity of a particular volition, exert a wide range of influences. This action–giving–result principle also means that the result is neither a simple random occurrence, since particular actions give particular results, nor is it rigidly determined, since the result is dependent upon the quality and intensity of the intentional action.

## **Intention, Will, Volition**

Intentional actions are initiated by our will or volition, which is a primary aspect of the sense of a self. Most people believe they have complete free will and control over their lives, and can do whatever they intend or direct their will to do. The Cambridge Dictionary defines will as ‘The mental power used to control and direct your thought and action’. This is commonly referred to as ‘will power’. Whether we are aware of it or not, will is functioning in the background throughout our life, mostly in subtle, and often devious, ways. If you have tried the second part of the meditation exercise above, you may be familiar with some of the characteristics of intention. Are your intentions clear to you? Are they steady and enduring?

<sup>2</sup> And there may be a great variety of them, for example, very personal: ‘I enjoy it’; seemingly impersonal: ‘It seems like a good thing to do’; or altruistic: ‘Meditation helps me be kinder to people.’ Investigation of intention is particularly helpful for activities we do regularly and/or habitually, since habitual activity can easily become automatic, without awareness of the purpose. However, be warned that you might discover some surprising aspects about your behaviour.

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## personal story

In hindsight, I received a very valuable lesson about intention during my early years in Thailand. After an initial retreat in Sri Lanka, a year later I travelled to Thailand intending to do a similar intensive meditation retreat, and then continue travelling on to Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia, before returning to university in Canada for the Fall term. My plans began to fall apart when it took me three weeks to find a meditation monastery and I then had to apply for another one-month visa to attend the month-long retreat in the northern city of Chiang Mai. The government officials had to send the visa application to Bangkok for authorization and told me to return in two weeks.

To make a long story short, this 'return to the visa office in two weeks' went on for seven months! Every two weeks I had to ask myself, 'What am I going to do?'. In other words, what was my intention – to continue my travels, or stay and meditate? Each time I inquired, the answer changed! Sometimes, when my meditation was going well, I was inspired: 'My mind is so peaceful and clear, another two weeks and I will be enlightened'. At other times, my intention was more practical: 'Here I am halfway around the world, in a Buddhist country, in a Buddhist monastery with many supportive conditions. Who knows where I will be in future? Better to stay here and make use of these beneficial conditions'.

Eventually, I stayed in Thailand for nine years, and didn't get to Australia until 2001, after a sabbatical in Wellington, New Zealand.

By defining kamma as intention, the Buddha is pointing to the power of intentionality. Many people have heard the saying, ‘Where there is a will there is a way.’ Combining this with an understanding of the liberating potential of skilful actions and the dangers of unskilful actions gives us the power to ‘control’ our lives. Through training our will to engage with skilful action it is possible to free ourselves from unskilful habits and realize liberation.

I put ‘control’ in quotes because we rarely have complete control or free will. The Cambridge Dictionary defines free will as ‘The ability to decide what to do independently of any outside influences.’ While we may be ‘independent of any outside influences’, we are unfortunately not independent of ‘inside influences’, that is, our will is not entirely free of our self-preserving baggage, habit tendencies, and social conditioning.

According to the Buddha, our intentional actions are conditioned by ignorance (see chapter on Conditional Causality). We may think we are making free choices, but we mostly just follow our old habitual ways of reacting. Ever notice how often our ‘free choices’ are so familiar and repetitive? Habits are energy-efficient because we don’t waste time or energy thinking about an action or an alternative, and neuroscience is finding out how much these habits are ‘hard-wired’ into the brain, not to mention the influences of priming, biases, etc<sup>3</sup>.

We do, however, have the ability of ‘instigation’<sup>4</sup> (*ārambha*), which is the ability to initiate action towards selected goals (cf. A.III,337f). We could say then that we have ‘limited free will’ in the sense that we have a degree of freedom to direct our will, while still taking into account conditioning influences. Thus, while we do not have complete free will, nor are our

3 ‘Studies of priming effects have yielded discoveries that threaten our self image as conscious and autonomous authors of our judgments and our choices... We now know that the effects of priming can reach into every corner of our lives.’ Kahneman, 2012, p.55. For a short summary on ‘free will’ see Harari, Ch.8.

4 Bhikkhu Bodhi translation, NDB. p.1756, n.1309.

actions completely pre-determined, we have some degree of choice whether to continue following old habits or try to break new ground.

Through understanding the causally-conditioned nature of action-result, we gain more 'control' through wisdom, and come to know what we can change easily, what may take more persistence, and what we must endure. For example, while we cannot change the fact that the body ages, we may be able to change our attitude to ageing such that it is not seen so negatively.

Rather than 'I' maintaining the illusion of control over 'my' life, we acknowledge the pre-eminence of causality and humbly accept to work harmoniously with it. Causality controls our life, but through knowing cause-effect processes, we can be the skilful director of it, and this is really the true purpose of spiritual practice.

In the present day, it is most important to keep this aspect of kamma in mind since many people have mistakenly taken kamma to mean 'fate'<sup>5</sup>. For example, one continues to hear people (including Buddhists) say (usually by way of excuse), 'It's just my kamma'. What they really mean is, 'This is the result of my previous action (kamma).' (Even though they are the one who did it, so even this is not an effective excuse!) Kamma means 'action' but if we do not carefully distinguish between the action and its result, they become fused, and thus fixed or 'fated'. This becomes Fatalism, not Buddhism. In Buddhism the action and result are separate but causally associated. Thus we have the possibility to change the result by further appropriate action. We can choose to act in a new way to alleviate the potential result. The choice is ours, not fate's.

5 One problem with the Buddha appropriating brahmanical (Hindu) terminology and giving it new meaning, is that on cursory glance it can be hard to tell the difference between the old and the new. The Buddha himself was obviously very successful with this method, as he convinced many people to follow his path, however, later followers, without his skill and unfamiliar with the relevant context, have frequently not been as successful in presenting the fundamental difference between karma as understood in Hinduism and that in Buddhism.

We do not need to experience the results of all previous kamma (A.I,249f), and not every experience we have is the result of previous kamma (S.IV,230). Moreover, since kamma depends upon the type and quality of intention, strong skilful kamma can alleviate the results of previous unskilful kamma.

## The Ethical Quality of Intention

The most important aspect of intentional action is its ethical quality, which is presented in the suttas in various forms, most commonly as skilful (*kusala*) or unskilful (*akusala*), but also as meritorious (*puñña*) or unmeritorious, and through the lens of such themes as purities (*soceyya*: A.I,271f) or failures/accomplishments (*vipatti/sampadā*: A.I,268f). This intentional action is enacted through body, speech and mind.

**‘There are three sources for the origin of kamma. What three? Greed, aversion and delusion are the sources of the origin of kamma. An action done in greed, aversion or delusion — born of, originating in or arising out of greed, aversion or delusion — is unskilful, blameworthy and its result is suffering. It leads to the arising of [further] kamma, not to the cessation of kamma.**

**That action done in non-greed, non-aversion or non-delusion — born of, originating in or arising out of non-greed, non-aversion or non-delusion — is skilful, not blameworthy and its result is pleasant. It leads to the cessation of kamma, not to the arising of [further] kamma.’<sup>6</sup> A.I,263<sup>7</sup>; cf. A.I,215f.**

6 Another six causes for the origination of kamma are given at A.I,264f: Desire (*chanda*) arises regarding things in the past, future or present that are the bases of desire and lust, and desire does not arise regarding things in the past, future or present that are the bases of desire and lust. At A.V,86f two more causes of bad (*pāpa*) kamma are mentioned: inappropriate attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) and a wrongly directed mind (*micchāpaṇihita citta*). Their opposites are causes for good (*kalyāṇa*) kamma.

7 See A.I,215f, Venerable Ananda’s answer to the wanderer Channa on the disadvantages of greed, aversion and delusion.

Actions motivated by greed, aversion or delusion are the unskilful origins of kamma, not only because they are socially disruptive, but because, at their root, they are self-centred, self-affirming actions: greed is 'I want'; aversion is 'I don't want'; and delusion is 'I don't know'. In general, all unethical, immoral action is fundamentally self-centred and supports self-affirmation.

Actions performed in non-greed, non-aversion and non-delusion, even though initiated by will, are self-surrendering, self-sacrificing actions. These self-surrendering actions at least do not compound our sense of self, and often provide a loosening and lightening up of our sense of self. Investigating the cause of greed, aversion or delusion can lead us back to intention, and an investigation of intention may lead us back to the sense of an 'I' and the process of 'I-making'. Ultimately, this understanding can help to free us from the deluded habit of self-affirmation.

One expression of skilful intentional action is the ten kinds of conduct in accordance with Dhamma or upright conduct<sup>8</sup>, given in detail at MN.41. These are: three kinds of skilful bodily conduct – refraining from killing living beings, stealing and sexual misconduct; four kinds of skilful verbal conduct – refraining from lying, malicious speech, harsh speech and frivolous speech; and three kinds of mental conduct – refraining from covetousness, ill will and wrong view (M.I,47;287f). Adhering to a refined standard of morality, rather than following our selfish compulsions, often requires no small degree of self-surrender.

In many Buddhist countries, kamma is popularly referred to as either meritorious (*puñña*; 'boon' in Thai) or unmeritorious. In the Pali Canon, meritorious kamma has three bases: generosity, morality and meditation (A.IV,241). Increasingly meritorious designations are

8 Many other designations are given for these ten skilful actions at A.V,273ff.

mentioned such that generosity proceeds from feeding one person **‘endowed with right view’** (i.e., a stream–enterer) to feeding individuals at different levels of awakening, through to feeding the Buddha, then the Sangha headed by the Buddha and finally to building a dwelling for the Sangha. The gradations of morality proceed from going for refuge to Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, to practising the five precepts, while elsewhere, practising the eight precepts is seen to be of exceptional benefit (A.IV,248ff). The two gradations of meditation mentioned are to practice friendliness meditation (*metta–bhāvanā*) **‘for the time it takes to milk a cow’** and to develop the perception of impermanence **‘for the time of a finger snap’** (A.IV,394f).

The quality of giving is also significant – the good person gives respectfully and beautifully, gives with their own hand, gives what is not discarded and gives with a view to the outcome (A.III,172). Another series of types of proper giving is to give a gift out of faith, give a gift respectfully, give a timely gift, give a gift out of consideration and give a gift without hurting oneself or another (A.III,172f).

## Results of Kamma (*vipāka*)

Intentional actions yield associated, causally–conditioned results. In this way a sense of moral justice is maintained. In ordinary language we might say, ‘You reap what you sow’ or ‘What goes around, comes around’. We must be careful, however, not to oversimplify this situation. We must keep in mind that, while the principle is simple, it is enacted by complex human beings with quickly changing minds and intentions which they are mostly unaware of. Thus, due to the uncertainty of conditioning factors, it is uncertain exactly when ‘justice’ will be delivered:

**'Bhikkhus, any kamma made, born, caused, arising through greed ... hatred ... delusion ripens wherever the individual (atthāva) comes into being. Wherever that kamma ripens, there it is experienced, either in this life, the next or a subsequent one.'** A.I,134f.

The coming into being of the individual is explained as happening according to the principle that, if one does 'afflictive'<sup>9</sup> (*sabyābajjha*) kamma, one is reborn or 'arises' (*upapajjati*) in an afflictive world (*loka*) where extremely unpleasant feelings are experienced, as in the 'hell realm'. Whereas non-afflictive kamma results in rebirth in a non-afflictive realm of extremely pleasant feelings, such as in a 'heavenly realm', and a combination of afflictive and non-afflictive kamma leads to a realm with both pleasant and unpleasant feelings, such as the human realm (A.II,231f). In total there are five basic 'realms' (extended to many in detail)<sup>10</sup>:

**'Bhikkhus, there is kamma which is to be experienced in the 'hellish' realm, in the 'animal' realm, in the 'ghost' realm, in the 'human' realm, in the 'heavenly' realm. This is called kamma's distinction.'** A.III,415.

These realms of existence were directly perceived by the Buddha and some of his disciples. In the Buddha's teaching materiality and mentality are inter-related, so it can sometimes be difficult to determine if a 'realm' refers to a material place or a mental space (or a combination). It might be more helpful to reflect upon the experience you associate with being in a hellish or other realm. When our emotions are very strong, it can sometimes seem as if we have been transported to either a heavenly or hellish realm.

9 Bhikkhu Bodhi translation.

10 For a list of the 'thirty-one planes of existence' see CDB. p.70–71 or LDB. p.38–39.

If you have tried the exercises on investigating intention you may appreciate how hard it is to determine precisely your motivating intentions. How much more so to determine the results of those intentions? In fact, it is rarely possible to know conclusively the action–result relationship:

**‘The results of kamma cannot be known by thought, and so should not be speculated about. Thinking thus, one would come to distraction and distress.’** A.II,80.

Most people are curious to know why certain things happen to them, and usually look for a simple, logical answer. However, since we are generating kamma continuously throughout life, most of the time without clear awareness, it is virtually impossible to trace a particular result back to a specific action. However, it is possible to know the general pattern of action–result through some continuity of self-awareness and reflection. The best we can do is consider possibilities rather than actualities. Trying to discover specific reasons for particular results only distracts us with useless speculations, and often leads to false assumptions about ourselves and other people.

## **Kamma and No Permanent Self**

Understanding the principle of kamma is an important foundation for understanding the teaching on no permanent self. People who do not understand the Buddha’s teaching focus attention on the person who they presume does the action and receives the associated result. For the Buddha, however, it is the action which creates the presumed ‘person’.

Actions are generated by a self-affirming self-structure called 'a person', the results then re-generate a similar self-affirming self-structure, slightly modified by the action. 'A person' acting in anger results in 'an angry person'.

In the Pali phrases for 'I-making' and 'mine-making' (*ahañ-kāra-mamañ-kāra*), the word for 'making', 'kāra', has the same root as kamma. The 'I-making' process is one of 'making' or 'doing'.

In other words it is kamma which is the generator of the 'I-making, mine-making' processes. The will of 'I' generates self-affirming action which produces self-affirming results. If self-affirming actions are not generated, then the results are selfless. There are just non-personal actions giving non-personal results, and 'I-making' comes to an end.



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## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes lightly and bring attention to breathing.
- Sense breathing in and breathing out.
- What is doing the breathing? Are you breathing, is the body doing the breathing, or is breathing just happening?
- Bring attention to the body sitting.
- Be aware of any tense muscles in the body. Are you tensing those muscles? Can you relax them?
- Do you sense any discomfort anywhere in the body? Can you relieve it?
- Turn your attention to your condition of mind.
- Is the mind quiet or busy, clear or dull?
- Can you quieten the busy mind or make the dull mind clearer?
- Can you stop memories from arising or stop the elaborating on the memories?
- Bring attention back to the breathing.
- When suitable, open your eyes and resume your reading.

## THREE

*Anattā*

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*Anattā* is one of the three universal characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*), together with impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, which are present whether Buddhas appear or not (A.1,286). While impermanence and unsatisfactoriness are reasonably easy to understand, at least intellectually, the teaching on *anattā* is the most profound, and also the most misunderstood aspect of the Buddha's teaching.

The root term of *anattā*, *attā* (in Pali, and 'ātman' in Sanskrit), is difficult to translate into a succinct English word since it has two different connotations. Literally, *attā* means the personal self, as in 'my self', or 'your self'. But, it also means some permanent, inherent entity or essence that survives death and continues into the future in some form, close to what, in an English-speaking, Christian-cultural context, is often referred to as 'soul'. At the time of the Buddha, the word '*attā*' was understood to hold both connotations, the personal self is merely a fleeting manifestation of the ultimate, permanent, soul-like self or 'Self'.

Most translators of Buddhist teachings have simply translated *attā* quite literally as 'self' and the negative, *anattā* as 'non-self' or 'not-self'. While technically correct, unfortunately, the translation 'non-self' or 'not-self' results in losing the connotation of the eternal 'soul', and thus causing no end of confusion.

Non-self or not-self implies a denial of the personal or relative self, and yet everyone can directly experience a sense of their self – ‘What do you mean there’s no self, here I am’. At the worst, this interpretation can even be quite disturbing. Most of us take our ‘self’ very personally and definitively, since we have invested so much time and effort looking after our ‘self’, constantly trying to keep it happy and comfortable as our main goal in life. Then to have it denied is quite an insult. Even many Buddhists are confused by ‘not-self’, drawing the conclusion that they have to get rid of their personal ‘self’ to be enlightened!

What the Buddha said was: *Sabbe dhammā anattā*. According to Gombrich<sup>1</sup>, former Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, this literally means: ‘All things are not *attā*’, that is, from the Buddha’s point of view, all things are not a permanently-abiding self. The Buddha was therefore not denying a self, but rather denying that this self is a constant, stable, permanent, soul-like thing.

To tackle this confusion Gombrich<sup>2</sup> suggests simply inserting ‘unchanging’ to the usual translation of ‘no self’ to have ‘no unchanging self’.<sup>3</sup> Harvey (2017), in a clear and detailed article, suggests using the translation ‘non Self’, with a capital ‘S’. While this may be useful for people familiar with Indian religious culture, unfortunately it introduces yet another unfamiliar concept to the general public – how does ‘Self’ differ from ‘self’?

1 2013, p.70

2 2013, p.9

3 “... all the fuss and misunderstanding can be avoided if one inserts the word ‘unchanging’, so that the two-word English phrases become ‘no unchanging self’ and ‘no unchanging soul’. ... for the Buddha’s audience by definition the word *anatta/anattā* referred to something unchanging; in that linguistic environment, to add a word meaning ‘unchanging’ would have been redundant.

... it applies to everything within our normal experience. ... So the cardinal teaching becomes: ‘Nothing in the world has an unchanging essence,’ or ‘There is nothing in our normal experience that never changes.’”

Today, when people hear the word 'self' they most likely reference their personal self the majority of the time. This constant self-referencing gives the impression that this self is stable and permanent, since it seems to keep referring to the same thing. However, if we investigate more carefully, we may observe that this self actually changes over the course of our life, through, for example, education and life experience. And, although the word 'soul' is rarely mentioned in modern, secular society, many people still (unconsciously) presume that some aspect of their 'self' has some soul-like continuity or persistence after the death of the body. Emotionally, there is often still some lurking residual 'soul theory'. This is a belief, hope or wish that some part of 'I' persists in some way, shape or form. We might even say that this belief is instinctual since, if I did not believe that 'I' persist, then I would not worry about taking care of 'I' for the future, or be afraid of losing my self in death. Therefore, there is usually a conflation between the fluctuating relative self and a belief in a more persistent soul-like self. (Just try to observe how you conceive your self.)

What the Buddha realized was that your experience of self is really a collection of ever-changing, causally-conditioned processes. Therefore, relating to this self as something permanent causes disharmony with reality, and suffering follows accordingly. As you can imagine, in the Buddha's time (and also today) the teaching on '*anattā*' was quite a radical insight; although these days an increasing number of people are beginning to see the truth of this insight.<sup>4</sup>

4 Damasio, p.165: 'Self ... is not a thing; it is a dynamic process.' Hood, 2013, p.ix: 'This daily experience of our self is so familiar, and yet the brain science shows that this sense of our self is an illusion. ... We all certainly experience some form of self, but what we experience is a powerful deception generated by our brains for our own benefit.'

I am often confronted with these confusions on my teaching tours around the world. To help prevent these confusions I will thus use ‘not a permanent self’ or ‘no permanent self’ as a new translation of ‘*anattā*’. Hopefully, this will help to make it clear that the Buddha’s teaching of ‘*anattā*’ is referring primarily to refuting the permanent, ‘soul-like self’ rather than the relative, personal, ‘sense of your self’.

### **A Causally Conditioned ‘Self’**

In the first two chapters, I explained that the Buddha’s unique insight into the nature of reality was the experience of causally-conditioned processes: that what appears as ‘things’ are actually dynamic, causally-conditioned processes. Therefore, nothing has any ultimate existence in itself; everything is just flowing manifestations of continuously-changing processes. Most importantly, this process of reality includes what we take to be our self. Therefore the Buddha found himself in the very exceptional position of seeing and understanding reality and self in a completely different way.

The Buddha did not categorically affirm or deny that a self exists or does not exist, because he had a radically different understanding of what ‘self’ is in comparison to the average person. The average person understood self to be a permanent entity, even after the death of the body, whereas the Buddha understood self to be constantly changing processes.

Observe how you mainly experience your ‘self’. Do you notice that sometimes your ‘self’ is predominantly a physical experience – ‘I ache’, ‘I am tired’, etc. At other times your ‘self’ is mostly a mental experience – ‘I feel’, ‘I think’, etc. And do you notice how this is changing, a flowing

variety of physical and mental experiences? So which of these on-going self-experiences is your real self?

One gets a sense of the Buddha's challenging position in the following passage where the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta visited him and asked:

**'How is it, master Gotama, does a permanent self exist?'**

**When this was said the Revered One was silent. 'But then, master Gotama, does a permanent self not exist?'** For a second time the Revered One was silent. Then the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta got up from his seat and went away. Now, not long after he had gone, the Venerable Ānanda asked the Revered One, 'How is it, sir, that when the Revered One was asked a question by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, he did not answer?'

'If, Ānanda, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, "Does a permanent self exist?", I had replied, "a permanent self exists", this would be agreeing with those *samana-brahmana* who are eternalists (*sassatavāda*). If, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, "Does a permanent self not exist?", I had replied, "a permanent self does not exist", then, Ānanda, this would be agreeing with those *samana-brahmana* who are annihilationists (*ucchedavāda*).

'If, Ānanda, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, "Does a permanent self exist?", I had replied, "a permanent self exists", would that have been in conformity with the understanding that all things are not a permanent self? If, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, "Does a permanent self not exist?", I had replied, "a permanent self does not exist", then, Ānanda, the bewildered Vacchagotta would be even more bewildered, thinking: "Formerly, surely I had a self, but now I have not!"' S.IV,400ff.

Can you recognize the inherent self-reference of the enquirer, summarized by the Buddha in the last line? Even though the enquirer framed the question objectively, 'Does a permanent self exist?', he was, in fact asking, 'Do I have a permanent self?'. This is the same unconscious self-reference most of us bring to every situation. If you think otherwise, just try to recall some personal experience without mentioning yourself – try to explain the pure experience without self-reference.

The Buddha was well aware of this unconscious and deluded self-referencing. He understood that even the thought 'I am' was a causally-conditioned process which, if believed in, became a blinding delusion. However, it is also an underlying disposition which we all inherit at birth. Thus we are pre-programmed to easily slip into I-making, unless we are exceptionally well-informed and vigilant. For people who have built their reality around 'I am', it is very hard to accept that this fundamental basis of their reality is really just a flow of ephemeral, tentative processes. Since a causally-conditioned process is continuously unfolding, we are not able to define it in any conclusive way (other than as continuously unfolding).

## Processes Rather Than Things: The How Rather Than the What

From the realization that every ‘thing’ is actually process, the nature of those processes became the Buddha’s main focus. How a human being is took precedence over what a human being is. In philosophical terms, epistemology was more important than ontology. Therefore, most of the Buddha’s teachings on more advanced or technical aspects of spiritual development emphasize the causally–conditioned factors which make up the experience of reality, rather than referencing the self as the experiencer<sup>5</sup>.

Unfortunately, this particular non–personal or objective teaching can appear quite mechanical, abstract or heartless. Where we might expect a teaching to be more personal or heartfelt we receive a list of spiritual factors or a stock technical phrase.

**‘Venerable sir, who then grasps?’**

**‘Not a proper question’, the Revered One replied. ‘I do not say “One grasps”. ... Since I do not speak thus, you should ask, “Venerable sir, what is the cause of grasping?” , this is a proper question. For this the proper explanation is: “With craving as cause, grasping arises; with grasping as cause, coming–into–existence arises... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.”’** S.II,14 abridged.

This mode of presentation is partly due to the fact that the Buddha emphasized the non–personal processes of how a human being functions in life. It also indicates a carefully–crafted teaching skill to continuously direct students away from any attempt at slipping into I–making or self–referencing, as evidenced by the questioner in the above passage.

<sup>5</sup> This tendency has been noted by Collins (p.77 and 78).

## The Conventional Self

When referring to the teaching on *anattā*, it can sometimes be helpful to refer to two kinds of truth, what became known in the Commentarial tradition as conventional or relative truth (*sammuti-sacca*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*). That is, sometimes the Buddha used the conventional or commonly understood ways of expression to convey his meaning. For example, one chapter of the Dhammapada, the Att Vagga, is devoted to a collection of verses relating to the conventional self.

**‘Oneself, indeed, is one’s own protector; what further protector would there be? With oneself well-tamed, one obtains a protector difficult to obtain.’** Dh.p.160.

At other times, particularly for more spiritually-mature persons, he resorted to using expressions conveying ultimate truths<sup>6</sup>. However, the Buddha and his disciples, even though beyond conceit, still had to make references in the conventional sense.

**‘With conceit given up no ties remain,  
All ties of conceit are scattered.  
The wise, having overcome the conceived,  
(Still) might say ‘I speak’,  
Or say, ‘They speak to me’.  
Skilfully knowing the world’s designation,  
He uses them as mere expressions.’** S.1,14.

<sup>6</sup> One of the most confusing situations is when people flip back and forth between *anattā* in its ultimate sense and its relative sense. That is, in the ultimate sense everything is not a permanent self, however, until one has fully realized this truth, there is still a definite relative ‘self-ness’ acting out its self-confirmation. Especially annoying are those who engage in what I call the ‘*anattā* shuffle’ which occurs when, discussing practical issues that involve them personally, they ‘shuffle’ the issues off with ‘It’s all not-self anyway’, and then become stubbornly self-defensive!

## The Great Self (*mahattā*)

A rare but notable addition to the two commonly mentioned forms of self, the conventional self (*attā*) and not a permanent self (*anattā*), is the 'great self' (*mahattā*). This is mentioned in the context of explaining the (subtle) difference in two views regarding kamma and its result. That is, if someone has the view that a person experiences the result of kamma exactly as they created it, then there cannot be any possibility of liberation, since one is held prisoner to kamma and cannot develop a liberated state of mind. However, if one has the view that the results of kamma one creates will be experienced in terms of the general principle, then there is the possibility of liberation, since the experience of results depends upon the state of mind of the experiencer, which can be developed to more exalted levels.

The Buddha then gives the example of two persons who create a small amount of bad kamma (*pāpakamma*). For one person, this action leads them to the hell realm, whereas for another person, they experience the result in this life without any residue. The result is different for the second person because of their spiritual development.

**'Here, bhikkhus, some person is developed in body, developed in morality, developed in mind and developed in wisdom. They are unlimited, are a great self (*mahattā*) and abide immeasurable.'** A.I,249f.

In contrasting the two types of person, the Buddha gives the simile of comparing a lump of salt being dropped first in a small bowl of water. He inquires if this would make the small amount of water in the bowl salty. He then contrasts this with dropping a lump of salt in the Ganges River. Would this make the large volume of water in the river salty?

The implication seems to be that someone who is spiritually developed has such a 'great self'<sup>7</sup> that small amounts of bad actions are experienced within 'a greater context of being' such that the results are not significant. This should not be taken as any form of antinomian context, since the results of kamma are still received. However, the receiving context of the 'great self' is so large (like water in the Ganges River) that the results merely seem insignificant.

A possible example is, if someone with a large amount of unprocessed anger encounters an irritating situation, they very likely will have a strong reaction. Whereas, if someone who has done much work on their anger, for example, developed the meditation on friendliness, were to encounter an irritating situation, they would likely not be inclined to react as severely. Although both individuals encounter irritation, they each react differently.

This 'great self' is therefore a spiritually developed form of the conventional self, resulting in a more attenuated or unlimited sense of a self, or paradoxically, a more selfless self (although not fully liberated).

7 Bhikkhu Bodhi translates as 'lofty character' NDB p.332.



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## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, allow your eyes to close lightly and settle attention on the breathing.
- When suitable, bring attention to the sensations of the body – the sensation of sitting, the sensation of the hands touching, the sensation of the feet touching the floor, or some other sensation.
- Is the feeling of these sensations pleasant or unpleasant?
- Adjust the posture, relax and try to release any discomfort, allow the body to feel comfortable.
- Abide for some time in the comfortable, pleasant feeling.
- Then when suitable, bring your attention to the condition of the mind.
- Is this condition of mind pleasant and comfortable?  
Or not so comfortable?
- Try to relax the mind; release, put down, let go of disturbing thoughts or emotions. Try to abide with a peaceful, relaxed, spacious mind.
- Is it possible to be in a comfortable state of body and/or a peaceful state of mind?
- Can you observe some general process that could induce that comfort or peace?
- When suitable, bring attention back to the breathing.  
Then open the eyes and resume your activity.

## FOUR

# Nibbāna

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Nibbāna is the Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit 'nirvāna'. The commentaries on the Pali Canon derive the word from *nir + vana*, which means 'to go out' or 'extinguish'. Nibbāna is the complete cessation of 'I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit' and is realized by the 'going out' of the various forms of 'fuel' which keep the 'I-making' process going (S.II,85; M.I,487). It is this 'I-making' process which keeps human beings tied to the inherent unsatisfactoriness/imperfection (*dukkha*) of human existence, in the present, and through the cycles of endless renewed existences (*saṃsāra*, literally the 'perpetual wandering'). It is personified as the realm of Māra, (lit. 'death') the Evil One, the Tempter.

As explained in the chapter on Anattā, when referencing the refined aspects of spiritual practice, the Buddha refrained from any mention of 'self', referring instead to impersonal processes. He also refused to engage in metaphysical speculations and focussed instead on direct human experience, specifically that of *dukkha*.

## *Dukkha*

*Dukkha* is one of the universal characteristics of all conditioned things, specifically human existence. The word has a variety of meanings depending on the context, and is hard to translate into a single word in English. Its meaning as a feeling (*dukkha vedanā*), i.e., pain, suffering, discomfort, dis-ease, etc., is a symptomatic expression of its universal meaning, i.e., unsatisfactoriness, incompleteness, imperfection, etc.

Succinctly, the practice of the Buddha's teaching is to fully realize the nature of *dukkha* and its cause, in order to experience its cessation in Nibbāna. Sometimes this aspect of the Buddha's teaching, formally called the Four Noble Truths, is expressed in the form of a doctor's diagnosis: observing the symptoms of *dukkha*, determining its cause, indicating its cure by removal of the cause, and prescribing a method of treatment as the remedy. Thus, we need to recognize the real nature of *dukkha* clearly and comprehensively in order to determine its cause (craving), and then undertake a course of spiritual treatment (the Eightfold Path<sup>1</sup>) in order to facilitate the removal of the cause. In this way we can arrive at the cure, which is the ultimate well-being of Nibbāna.

**'Nibbāna is the ultimate well-being.'**<sup>1</sup> Dhṛp. 204.



**'Nibbāna, as taught by the Fully Awakened One, is indeed the highest happiness: the sorrowless, stainless peace, wherein *dukkha* is dissolved.'** Theragāthā 227.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 12 on the Progressive Path for details.

## The Fuel

It is because human beings are ‘hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving’ that they face continual unsatisfactoriness and countless renewed existences (*punabbhava*: lit. ‘again-becomings’) (S.II,178ff). The active ‘fuel’ for unsatisfactoriness, which goes out in Nibbāna, is craving, although the spectre of ignorance filters through in a variety of forms. Since the experience of Nibbāna is a complete and ultimate experience, it involves the fullest extent of humanness in all its aspects – physically, emotionally and intellectually. Most commonly, this is expressed through the cessation of the three roots of unskillful kamma, which are the defilements (*kilesa*) or ‘fires’ of greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*).

**Sāriputta: ‘The ending of greed, aversion and delusion, friend, is called Nibbāna.’** S.IV,251.

Elsewhere, Nibbāna is described as the ending of the active factors conditioning *dukkha*, which are ignorance, craving and grasping:

**‘But with the complete, dispassionate cessation of ignorance comes cessation of Willing and Habiting ... cessation of Knowing ... cessation of craving ... cessation of grasping ... cessation of ageing-and-death. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering (*dukkha*).’** S.II,1-2.



**‘Radha, the end of craving is Nibbāna.’** S.III,190.



**‘Ananda, one without grasping realizes Nibbāna.’** M.II,265.

**‘Bhikkhus, when ignorance (*avijjā*) is eliminated and true knowledge (*vijjā*) has arisen in a bhikkhu, with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge he no longer grasps sensuality, no longer grasps views, no longer grasps rules and observances, no longer grasps a doctrine of self. Not grasping, he is not excited. Not being excited, he personally [reaches] Nibbāna. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”** M.I,67.

Other forms of ‘fuel’ are collected into various groupings. The most succinct of these groupings is called *āsava*, literally ‘flowing’, thus ‘outflows’, a word borrowed from the Jain tradition. I translate *āsava* as ‘outflows’, as I understand them as the primary ‘outflows of self-hood’. These *āsava* are most often mentioned as sensuality, existence and ignorance (D.III,216; A.III,414), although sometimes a fourth, views, is mentioned (D.II,81). These four *āsava* are also listed under the Floods (*ogha*) and Bonds (*yoga*) (S.V,59).

A more complete grouping of ‘fuel’ are the Ten Fetters (*saṃyojana*), which are gradually eliminated at different stages of awakening. These are: 1. identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), 2. doubt (*vicikicchā*), 3. adherence to rules and observances (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), 4. sensual lust (*kāmarāga*), 5. ill-will (*vyāpāda*), 6. lust for fine-material existence (*rūparāga*), 7. lust for immaterial existence (*arūparāga*), 8. conceit (*māna*), 9. restlessness (*uddhacca*), 10. ignorance (*avijjā*) (S.V,61).

While the Buddha primarily directed people's attention to the path of practice, he also pointed to where the path leads. For people immersed in 'I-making', it is difficult to comprehend the complete cessation of 'I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit' or Nibbāna. However, to give some idea of it the Buddha used many epithets of Nibbāna, the most common being 'the unconditioned' (*asaṅkhata*) (S.IV,359f), but also 'the deathless', 'the undecaying', 'the unageing', 'the unailing' (S.IV,368ff). However, it is also expressed in positive form: 'the truth', 'the far shore', 'the subtle', 'the stable', 'the peaceful', 'the exalted', 'the fortunate', 'the secure', 'the marvelous', 'the extraordinary', 'the untroubled', as well as: 'dispassion', 'purity', 'release', 'the lamp', 'the shelter', 'the protection', 'the refuge', 'the goal' (S.IV,368ff)<sup>2</sup>.



**'There is, bhikkhus, a not-born, a not-become, a not-made, a not-constructed ... Since there is a not-born, a not-become, a not-made, a not-constructed, thus there is a leaving behind of the born, become, made, constructed.**

**There is the escape, the peaceful,  
The beyond-conceptual-thought, the stable,  
The not-born, the unproduced,  
The sorrowless, stainless state:  
The end of painful things,  
The calming of conditions — bliss.'**

It. 2.16, abridged.

2 For a more extensive review of Nibbāna see *The Island* by Ajahns Pasanno and Amaro, [abhayagiri.org/books](http://abhayagiri.org/books)

'There is, bhikkhus, that sphere where there is neither earth element, water element, fire element nor air element; nor the spheres of infinite space, of infinite consciousness, of nothingness, nor of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; neither this world nor another world, nor both; nor sun and moon. There, bhikkhus, I say there is no coming, no going, no abiding, no passing away, no arising; that is not-established, non-functioning, without foundation. Just this is the end of *dukkha*.' Ud. 8.1.





PART TWO

# The Process of I-Making

## The Process of I-Making

The Pali Canon does not give a detailed or comprehensive explanation of the process of ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ as you would expect to find in a modern book on developmental psychology. I think, primarily, because the Buddha was more concerned with explaining the various means to the cessation of I-making. However, scattered throughout the Pali Canon various aspects of the process are outlined, mentioned or alluded to. Thus, by gathering them together, a fairly clear overview of the on-going processes begins to emerge. While, of course, these are dynamic flowing processes without distinct boundaries, for the sake of easy explanation, I have distinguished four progressive stages.

- 1 | The first stage of ‘I-making’ (and also ‘mine-making’) is the ‘underlying disposition to conceit’ (*mānānusaya*) which we inherit upon being born;
- 2 | The second stage is the arising of (the idea) ‘I am’, the emerging of a subjective ‘I’;
- 3 | The next stage is that of ‘I’ identifying – the subject ‘I’ relating to an object. There are three main types of ‘objects’ which ‘I’ identifies with: the Five Groups of Grasping, the Six Sense Bases and the Elements (S.IV,24);

- 4 | The establishing of an identity results in some sense of a self. This is then supported and reinforced by a range of various 'self views'. Most specifically this is 'identity view' (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), or 'view of self' (*attānudiṭṭhi*), or the 'doctrine of self' (*attavāda*). There is usually also a wider range of philosophical views which directly involve a belief in a permanent self, the most prominent being those of eternalism: 'I will continue after death', and annihilationism: 'I will be extinguished at death'. Following on from these views is a range of attendant mental turmoil (S.III,5f;18f).

We see then that the processes of I-making progresses from a subtle, 'pre-conscious' level as an underlying disposition, through increasingly more developed stages of ideas of 'I' to various types of identification, culminating in self views, which are often unconsciously grasped and aggressively defended. In order to engage in a contemplative investigation of these processes, it may be useful to proceed step by step through these developmental stages.

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## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind is somewhat settled, observe if there is some particular physical sensation, feeling or mental/emotional state which you experience as your familiar sense of self.
- Is that physical sensation, feeling or mental/emotional state pleasant and comfortable, or not so pleasant or comfortable?
- Do you notice a thought of 'I', 'me' or 'mine' associated with that experience?
- Is that sense of 'me' immediately present, or do you need to search for it?
- Are you able to just observe that experience as it is?
- When it seems appropriate, bring attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and slowly resume your activities.

## FIVE

# Underlying Dispositions

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The term ‘underlying disposition’ (*anusaya*) is referred to in several different contexts throughout the Pali Canon. In general it implies a latent or dormant predisposition towards something, as at S.III,35 where the Buddha explains to a bhikkhu that if one has an underlying disposition (*anuseti*) towards something, then one is defined in terms of it. The bhikkhu then explains his understanding that if one has an underlying disposition towards any of the Five Groups of Grasping, one is defined in terms of them<sup>1</sup>.

Perhaps the most significant reference to the underlying dispositions is to the ‘five lower fetters’ (M.64/1,432f) where the Buddha is quoted as saying that a young infant, even though they as yet do not have a notion of identity (*sakkāya*), still has an underlying disposition to identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhānusaya*) that lies within. **When someone uneducated in the noble one’s teaching ‘lives with a mind pervaded and overcome with identity view and does not clearly know as it really is the escape from identity view; when identity view has become steadfast and has not been dispelled in them, it is a lower fetter.’**

A similar argument is made regarding the other four ‘lower fetters’ in terms of:

- not having a notion of Dhamma, still having an underlying disposition to doubt;

<sup>1</sup> cf. CDB.1053n.47: Bhikkhu Bodhi gives an interesting interpretation of the kind of person one would be due to identifying with a particular member of the five groups, i.e. a “physical” person’ through identifying with physical processes, a ‘hedonist’ through feeling, an ‘aesthete’ through apperceiving, a ‘man of action’ through mental processes [dominated by will], a ‘thinker’ through bare knowing.

- not having a notion of rules (*sīla*), still having an underlying disposition to adherence to rules and observances;
- not having a notion of sensuality, still having an underlying disposition to sensual desire, and
- not having a notion of ‘beings’, still having an underlying disposition to ill-will towards beings.

Thus we are all naturally predisposed towards these unskilful qualities, and the frightening aspect is, that if we do nothing about them, they will tend to increase, particularly under the influence of inappropriate attention. These ‘fettters’ then become increasingly ingrained and habituated as fundamental modes of being.

The most basic of the underlying dispositions are passion (*rāgānusaya*), aversion (*paṭighānusaya*) and ignorance (*avijjānusaya*) (M.III,285-6; M.I,303). Another designation is mentioned as passion, aversion, and the conceited view ‘I am’ (*asmī’ti diṭṭhimāna*), the last one (possibly) representing the most basic form of ignorance (M.9/1,47). In another discourse, the underlying dispositions are referred to as delight in sense pleasures, delight in ill-will, delight in harming, delight in embodiment, and delight in identity (A.III,246). Eventually they were formalized into the definitive seven underlying dispositions as:

1. sensual passion (*kāmarāga*), 2. aversion (*paṭigha*), 3. views (*diṭṭhi*), 4. doubt (*vicikicchā*), 5. conceit (*māna*), 6. passion for existence (*bhavarāga*), 7. ignorance (*avijjā*) (S.V,60; A.IV,9; D.III,254).

The Ten Fettters (‘fettering’ one to existence) are similar to the Underlying Dispositions with #6, passion for existence, divided into passion for material existence and passion for immaterial existence, and the addition of adherence to rules and observances and restlessness.

The third Underlying Disposition is defined as identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*). The Ten Fetters gain strength when the Underlying Dispositions, which are initially only latent, are not attended to with appropriate attention and wisdom.

The Commentary to MN<sup>2</sup> explains that defiling tendencies occur at three levels: a) *anusaya* level, where they are latent or dormant, b) *pariyuṭṭhāna* ('possessed') level, where they obsess the mind, and c) *vītikama* level, 'where they motivate unwholesome bodily and verbal action'.

### Conceit (*māna*)

Conceit is used in several related contexts in the Pali Canon, firstly, as pride or arrogance (S.I,177f;187f; A.III,445), and secondly as self-reference, as in the three conceits or discriminations of being superior, inferior, or equal to others (S.III,48-9; V,56; cf. CDB.355 n.37), which occur through clinging to, or adhering to the six internal sense bases (S.IV,88). The third and most important context is the conceit 'I am' (*asmimāna*).

The underlying disposition to conceit (*mānānusaya*) means that we have an inherent predisposition to conceive in terms of 'I am', which, if not acknowledged and dealt with, continues to feed the process of 'I-making'. In concise terms, we are predisposed to self-reference everything we experience.

Most of the time, this self-referencing predisposition occurs automatically and unconsciously in the background of virtually all of our perceptions and conceptions. Now that the Buddha has pointed this out to us, it is possible to bring awareness to the process itself and release its influence.

2 Quoted by Bhikkhu Bodhi at MLDB. n.651.

.....  
exercise

Although it is not possible to be directly aware of the underlying disposition to conceit, since it is 'underlying', it is possible to be aware of its effects as self-referencing. As an exercise, see if you can observe this self-referencing occurring. This exercise is quite subtle and generally requires the ability to quiet the mind. It is a very valuable practice so I include it here for those who are interested.

Self-referencing, or subjectivity, occurs in reference to sense objects – sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental phenomena. Sense objects which are familiar to us rarely elicit strong self-referencing, since the self-referencing has been cocooned within familiar habits that require no special attention. Self-referencing is more prominently displayed by new, unfamiliar sense objects, as they need a special degree of attention and thus give rise to a new sense of self. Sense objects which appear threatening give rise to the strongest self-referencing, however often attention is so focused on that powerful experience that there is little attention available for self observation.

Self-referencing is an experience of some sense object, feeling or impression by a perceiver or knower of the sense object. At its most rudimentary it is non-conceptual, merely a vague sense of something. This can perhaps be most easily experienced in regard to the body.

- *In a quiet place stand comfortably in your most familiar posture. This will usually be with arms loosely at the sides and your head up. Place your feet about shoulder width apart and relax the knees. Gently close the eyes and observe the sensation of standing. As you are aware of the body standing can you also observe a sense of self present? Sense this presence of 'self'. How does it manifest?*
- *Once you have contacted this self-referencing, slowly raise your arms (either to the sides or in front), keeping awareness on the sensations of the movement, and how they affect the sense of your self. Do you notice differences in your sense of self as the arms move?*
- *When suitable slowly lower your arms observing the changing sensations and any associated change in your sense of self.*
- *Can you also notice associated feeling tones of pleasant and unpleasant related to the changing sensations?*
- *Return the arms to your sides, resume your familiar posture and relax.*

You can, of course, follow the same principle with any change in posture. Especially interesting is moving the body into unusual postures or through uncomfortable postures – just be careful not to overexert the body.

.....

## meditation

- Sitting in a comfortable posture, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind is reasonably calm, bring up the thought 'I', or 'me', or think your name, observing any associations that arise.
- Bring up the thought 'I am' and observe what the response is.
- Is this sense of 'I am' primarily physical sensation, or feeling, or a mental/emotional state?
- See if you can bring attention to each of the six senses as they contact their objects – sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought.
- As you bring awareness to each of the sense contacts, observe if and when the sense of 'I am' arises.
- Is the thought 'I' or 'me' or 'I am' always present, or is it sometimes not present?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

## SIX

# The Conceit 'I Am'

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Initially, the conceit 'I am' is a latent or underlying disposition which has the potential to arise at any time. However, there needs to be some 'trigger' for it to manifest. One of the sources is the perceptual process.

The Discourse on the Root of All Things (MN 1) presents various scenarios relating to the perceptual processes of four types of people: the ordinary person; the person in training; an arahant; and the Buddha.

All four types perceive similar things but in significantly different ways.

When an ordinary person perceives (*sañña*), they then conceive (*maññati*) the object of perception and delight in it (*abhinandati*), because 'they have not fully understood it (*apariññāta*)'<sup>(M.I,1f)</sup>.

**'Having perceived earth as earth, he conceives as earth, conceives in earth, conceives from earth, he conceives earth to be 'mine', he delights in earth'** M.I,1.

The person in training perceives, but is instructed not to conceive or delight in the object of perception; while neither the arahant nor the Buddha conceive or delight in, because the arahant **'has fully understood it'**, and the Buddha **'has fully understood it to the end'**.

This process of four-fold conceiving is explained as including the Four Elements, beings, various grades of celestial beings, the four immaterial

absorptions, what is seen, heard, sensed or cognized, unity, diversity, ‘all’ and Nibbāna. In other discourses, the four-fold conceiving is similarly applied to the six internal and external sense bases, to sense-knowing, to contact, to feeling (S.IV,22ff); and to the Five Groups of Grasping and the elements (S.IV,24). In effect, this covers all of human experience.

Bhikkhu Bodhi notes<sup>1</sup> that the Pali phrases used in the four-fold conceiving suggest that conceiving covers a wide range of ‘subjectively tinged cognition’ from before identity coalesces to complex intellectual exercises.

Grasping or adhering to any of the six internal sense bases, or ‘**not seeing things as they really are**’ (S.III,48) are causes of the three forms of comparison as ‘**I am superior**’, ‘**I am equal**’ or ‘**I am inferior**’ (S.IV,88).

### Conceiving (*maññati*)

*Maññati*, from the root ‘to think’, is a form of ‘thinking’, ‘imagining’, ‘conceiving’. In the discourses, it refers to distorted thinking dominated by self reference.<sup>2</sup>

‘I am’ is merely a thought, concept, or mental construct, which then seeks for verification and affirmation. This initially occurs as various perceptual ‘conceivings’, which can lead to ‘delight’ (*nandi*), and then to further elaborations of what ‘I am’ actually is:

**“I am’ is a conceiving; ‘I am this’ is a conceiving; ‘I will be’ ... ‘I will not be’ ... ‘I will be physical’ ... ‘I will be without physical processes’ ... ‘I will be percipient’ ... ‘I will be non-percipient’ ... ‘I shall be neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient’ is a conceiving.”** M.III,246.

1 MLDB, p.1163

2 MLDB. n.6; CDB. 1401,n.15-16; 1431 n.224

Since the idea 'I am' is merely an unsubstantiated thought, once it gains momentum it leads to further ideas about the nature of what 'I am' is. The Pali Canon outlines the eighteen ideas about the nature of 'I' concerning the internal, and the external, which extend over the past, the future and the present, amounting to 108 'wanderings of craving' (A.II,212f). Or there are the sixteen forms of self-doubt caused by inappropriate attention, which are similar speculations of what 'I' is: 'Was I in the past?', etc. (M.I,8). As will be explained in the next chapter, this can then lead on to grasping at aspects of experience to provide confirmation of its existence.

.....  
exercise

Since the arising of the thought 'I am' is so habitual and automatic, it can be a very useful exercise to try to be more aware of it in the course of everyday life.

In this exercise we will investigate the activity of conceiving from the emerging self-reference of the thought 'I am'. This does not require the mind to be so quiet as in the previous chapter's exercise, just quiet enough that you can observe any thoughts that arise.

- *Sitting comfortably in a quiet place, bring attention to the act of seeing. Do you notice any reference to 'I' – 'I am seeing', 'I am looking' ...?*
- *As you look at various objects, observe if there are any references to 'I' – 'I see a book', etc.*
- *Do you notice any further references to 'I' associated with what you see – 'I see that same book about meditation'?*
- *Can you observe the feeling about those references – 'Seeing that is pleasant'?*

- *Are there any related emotions or trains of thought – ‘I am interested ... uninterested ... irritated ... bored with what I see’, ‘What I see reminds me of ...’?*
- *Does the thought ‘I am’ bring up other thoughts such as – ‘what am I?’, ‘what will I be?’ and so on ...?*
- *If suitable, observe self-referencing arising with any of the other sense objects – sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental phenomena. With a quiet mind, slowly go through the various objects of each of the senses.*
- *With eyes closed, bring attention to sounds. Do you have a sense of something or someone hearing? Is this familiar?*
- *Now bring attention to smelling. Any obvious odours and someone smelling?*
- *How about tastes? Who or what is tasting?  
[Maybe better to try this when eating to observe tastes more clearly.]*
- *How is the sensation of your body at this time? Can you observe a self-reference?*
- *As your attention moves from sense to sense, do you notice a corresponding change in the sense of self-reference?*
- *Does some sense trigger a stronger sense of self-reference than others?*
- *When suitable, you can open the eyes and resume your normal activity.*

As a follow up, see if you can be more attentive to thoughts of ‘I am’ in the course of normal activity. Perhaps you can detect some common patterns? Are these patterns skilful and beneficial or not so skilful?



From the various forms of conceiving 'I am', the next stage of the 'I-making' process is the 'I am' identifying with some object. Since conceiving takes place in reference to three particular 'objects' – the Five Groups of Grasping, the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases (with associated bare knowing, contact, and feeling (S.IV,22ff)), and the Elements (S.IV,24) – these are what 'I am' identifies with.

In order to understand the further development of the I-making process, it is necessary to become familiar with several other significant themes in the Buddha's teachings, that is, the Five Groups of Grasping, the Perceptual Process and Dependent Origination, which explains the interrelationship of 'grasping' with other factors. Therefore, before we continue explaining the next two stages of I-making, we will make a slight digression into these themes.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes lightly and bring attention to the sensation of breathing.
- When suitable, try to be aware of any sensation in the body – the sensation of sitting, the sensation of the hands touching, the sensation of the feet touching the floor, or any other sensation.
- Do you observe any feeling associated with what you are sensing?
- Do you recognise what you are sensing: 'The body seems tense ... relaxed ... tired ...'?
- Do related thoughts or memories arise, or is the mind able to abide with just sensing the body?
- At the present moment, what are you conscious of?
- When suitable, bring attention back to the sensation of breathing, open your eyes and return to normal activity.

## SEVEN

# The Five Groups

.....

## The Five Groups of Grasping (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*)

The Buddha recognized that there are five primary life functions which people identify as their self (S.III,44). These five functions are the body, and the four mental functions of feeling, recognizing, willing and habiting, and bare knowing. The Buddha called these the Five Groups of Grasping, that is, the five groups or collections (*khandhā*)<sup>1</sup> of life functions which are grasped as self. They are called ‘groups’ because each factor includes a number of different aspects and includes their whole range: ‘whatever kind: past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near.’ (S.III,47).

Since these Five Groups of Grasping are fundamental life functions, and thus ever-present, it is very easy to be drawn into self-referencing them as some aspect of self, especially under the dominance of the underlying dispositions of ignorance and conceit. However, if we increase our awareness of these Five Groups of Grasping through studying the Buddha’s teaching on them, we could short-circuit insidious self-referencing and, through understanding the processes involved, realize liberation.

1 *Khandha*, lit. ‘mass, body of, collection of’. Bhikkhu Bodhi uses ‘aggregate’, i.e., CDB. p.871; p.2011.

Interestingly, even though these Five Groups of Grasping are mentioned quite often in the Pali Canon, they are not elaborated on at any great length, possibly because they were commonly recognized categories of experience in the Buddha's time. However, in the present time these Five Groups of Grasping are not commonly recognized or referenced, and have taken on the aura of Buddhist technical jargon. Also, over the years, the various translations of the Five Groups of Grasping have often not contributed to making them easily understood. This is unfortunate, since the Five Groups of Grasping have a very significant role in the Buddha's outline of the path to liberation. True knowledge (*vijjā*), the opposite of ignorance, is defined as clearly knowing (*pajānāti*) the Five Groups of Grasping, their origin, their cessation and the path to their cessation (S.III,163).

It is very important to understand these Five Groups of Grasping as dynamic, impersonal processes, rather than concrete entities. They are actually how a human being experiences reality and not what a human being is. The Buddha frequently stated that these Five Groups of Grasping are all impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to wasting, to waning, to fading away, to cessation (S.III,24f); and that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not a permanent self (S.III,45).

## Explanation of the Five Groups of Grasping

The Pali Canon does not give a detailed explanation of the Five Groups of Grasping. Two discourses (SN 22:56 & 57) give a definition of ‘body’ and then merely list the six types of each of the mental groups based upon the six senses, i.e., feeling born of eye-contact, etc. One discourse (SN 22:79) gives an explanation of why they are called by their particular name (see below for details).

Several of the Five Groups of Grasping have not been well translated into English. This is partly due to the ambiguity of some English terms (i.e., feeling, perception, consciousness), and partly due to an attempt to maintain technical rigour and consistency of the translations. Therefore, I give my own renderings which I hope may help some people understand them more clearly.

As mentioned above, due to the insidious nature of self-referencing, it is exceptionally easy to lapse into identifying any of the Five Groups of Grasping as some form of self. Since these Five Groups of Grasping are dynamic processes and not ‘things’, I will define them in verb form (even though this may be forcing the English language). Thus we don’t ‘have a body’, but rather there is the experiencing of the four elemental qualities of earth, fire, water and air temporarily ‘embodying’. Similarly, we don’t really ‘have a mind’, but there is experiencing of a flow of mental processes as feeling, recognizing, mental activities and knowing.

In Pali, the Five Groups of Grasping are: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā*, *viññāṇa*. My new translation of the Five Groups of Grasping is:

**Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, and Bare Knowing**, explained in detail below.

## The Five Groups of Grasping in Detail

I have put alternative translations in square brackets [ ].

**Rūpa: Embodying**, [Physical Processes, Form]

*Rūpa* is defined as the four ‘great elemental qualities’ (*mahābhūtā*), of earth (solidity), fire (heat), water (fluidity) and air (motion), and the physicality derived from them (S.III,59).

It should be noted that this is not solid ‘materiality’ as is commonly understood, but rather the way in which *physicality* is experienced, or embodied, through the functioning of these ‘elemental qualities’. For all intents and purposes, as one of the Five Groups of Grasping, we can say that this is the physical body embodying the four elements. In the discourse giving an explanation of the individual terms (SN.22:79) the examples given apply to the body: embodying is called *rūpa* because it is *ruppati*, literally ‘oppressed, hurt, molested’ by **‘cold, heat, hunger, thirst, by contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun and reptiles’**.

At M.III,240f the internal four elements are explained in terms of the various parts or aspects of the body. Its root cause is food (*āhāra*) (S.III,62)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See stock definition of body at S.IV,83;194;292.

.....  
experiencing body

- *Sit in a comfortable posture and bring attention to breathing.*
- *Can you sense the touch of the breath on the nostrils as it goes in and out?*
- *Is that touch of the breath strong or weak? Does it last long or short?*
- *To expand your experience of body, try to slowly move the attention to different parts of the body, for example, from the nostrils to the area around the eyes. Do you observe any particular sensation there? Observe the sensation when you move your eyelids.*
- *Moving attention to the centre of the forehead, is there any obvious sensation there? Is it cool or warm? Anything else?*
- *Moving attention to the top of the head, observe if there is any kind of sensation. If no sensation is observed, observe that.*
- *If you are able to continue moving attention to different parts of the body without getting too distracted, you can continue to move attention down the back of the body, stopping briefly at particular places to try to observe directly the type of sensation there. Then from the bottom of the feet you can similarly move attention up the front of the body back to the nostrils. If this seems like a useful exercise, you can continue either moving slowly or more quickly to different parts, or you can focus more on the parts of the body which have stronger sensations. If at any time you get distracted from the exercise, return to the familiar sensation of breathing at the nostrils, and begin again.*
- *When suitable, bring attention back to the sensation of breathing, open your eyes and return to normal activity.*

The main point of the exercise is not the movement of attention but awareness of the various types of sensation which comprise our direct experience of body.

## Vedanā: Feeling

*Vedanā* is ‘feeling’, with connotations of ‘knowing, experiencing’. I usually translate *vedanā* as ‘feeling tone’ to distinguish it from emotion, which is often seen as synonymous with the word ‘feeling’. However, *vedanā* is only the affective or hedonic ‘tone’ of our emotion or mood. In keeping with the verb form in this context, I will refer to ‘feeling tone’ simply as ‘feeling’, leaving it to the reader to keep the specific definition in mind.

*Vedanā* is mostly defined as either *dukkha* (unpleasant), *sukha* (pleasant), or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant (i.e., neutral) feeling (S.III,86–7; IV,204ff).<sup>3</sup> In the Discourse on Mindfulness (MN.10; DN.22), six kinds of feelings are mentioned: pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, either of a ‘worldly’ (*sāmisā*, lit. carnal) or ‘spiritual’ (*nirāmisā*, lit. non-carnal) nature (M.I,59). As one of the Five Groups of Grasping, feeling is distinguished into six types, born of: eye-contact; ear-contact; nose-contact; tongue-contact; body-contact; and mind-contact.

Feeling is the second most important constituent of the Five Groups because feeling is present whenever there is Knowing (see the discussion in Chapter 8 on the perceptual process). Feeling is so important because it is the condition for craving (the root cause of *dukkha*) and is thus the link wherein liberation (from craving) can be realized. Feeling also activates the three Underlying Dispositions of aversion, passion and ignorance:

<sup>3</sup> However, depending upon the context, feelings can also be distinguished as: a) bodily or mental (S.IV,208; 231); b) pleasant or unpleasant (S.IV,223f); c) the five feelings (‘faculties’) of bodily pleasant, bodily unpleasant, mental well-being (*somanassa*), mental ill-being (*domanassa*) and bodily and mental neither-comfortable-nor-uncomfortable (*upekkhā*, lit. ‘equanimity’) (S.V,209); d) six kinds of feeling from contact with the six senses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body (*kāya*) and mind (*mano*). These can be further distinguished into feelings from the six sense-objects giving rise to either well-being, ill-being or equanimity (eighteen kinds); the eighteen kinds of feeling for either the household life or renunciation (thirty-six kinds); and the thirty-six kinds of feelings in the past, the future or the present (108 kinds) (S.IV,231f).

‘When the uninstructed average person experiences a painful feeling they become distraught and thus experience two kinds of feelings – a bodily one and a mental one; just as a man struck by an arrow would experience a painful feeling and then, when struck a second time, would experience a second painful feeling. Experiencing a painful feeling they have aversion/repugnance (*paṭigha*) towards it, which is based upon the underlying disposition to aversion to painful feeling. Experiencing a painful feeling they then seek enjoyment in sensuality, since that is their only escape from painful feeling. Seeking enjoyment in sensuality is based on the underlying disposition to lust for pleasant feeling. Not clearly understanding the origin and passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape from these feelings is based upon the underlying disposition to ignorance of neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling’. S.IV,207f (summarized).

The Pali Canon states that all phenomena (A.IV,339; V,107), aspirations (*saṅkappa*) and thoughts (*vitakka*), (A.IV,385) ‘converge upon feeling’. Feeling was one of the themes of the Buddha’s Awakening (S.IV,233f), and is one of the four principle themes for developing Mindfulness.

Feeling is **‘born of contact (*phassa*), rooted (*mūlaka*) in contact, has contact as its cause (*nidāna*) and condition (*paccaya*)’** (S.IV,215).

.....

## experiencing feeling

- *Sit in a comfortable posture and bring attention to breathing.*
- *As you sense the touch of breath at the nostrils, can you observe the feeling of it? Is it pleasant? Is it unpleasant? Or is it neutral – neither pleasant nor unpleasant?*
- *Bring attention to the body sitting. What is the general feeling of the body – pleasant, unpleasant or neutral?*
- *Bring attention to the state of mind at present. Can you observe the general feeling related to that state?*
- *Do you notice any reaction when you know the feeling of body or mind?*
- *When suitable, bring attention back to breathing, open your eyes and resume your activity.*

**Saññā: Recognizing**, [Associative Knowing, Apperceiving, Perception]

*Saññā* is from the root *saṃ* = ‘together’ + *ñā* = ‘knowing’<sup>4</sup>. Thus, it is associative knowing, which involves memory to provide a reference for knowledge to associate or recognize the sense contact, of which there are six kinds: visible objects; sounds; smells; tastes; touches and mental phenomena; all arising from contact (*phassa*). In the Thai language, *saññā* is usually translated as ‘memory’. In English, *saññā* is more correctly translated as ‘apperceiving’, the labelling of that which we have become conscious of. Unfortunately, it has commonly been translated as ‘perception’, which is too much like the meaning of *viññāṇa*. If ‘apperceiving’ is too unfamiliar a word, then one could define *saññā* simply as ‘recognizing’ a sense contact.

*Saññā* is associated with memory, which provides an encyclopedia of past knowledge to reference, although limited to our own narrow range of experience. On the negative side, memory is old history, which, while there may be similarities, is not the same as the present. If we identify with memory then we are shackled to old and limited perceptions. Thus, for the unawakened person, *saññā* is subject to distortion, most specifically the four perversions of perception (*saññā-vipallāsa*), which also affect the mind (*citta*) and views. These are taking: the impermanent to be permanent; unsatisfactoriness to be satisfactory; not a permanent self to be self; and the unattractive to be attractive (A.II,52).

*Saññā* is used in other contexts in the Pali Canon. The second most common use is in the context of an ‘idea’, ‘concept’, ‘reflection’ or ‘perception’, most particularly in the lists of various ‘perceptions’ to contemplate which ‘merge in the deathless’. A.V,105–6 has two lists of these perceptions which overlap. They consist of the perceptions of: unattractiveness (*asubha*); death; repulsiveness of food; non-delight in

4 The two Vedic roots for knowing, *jān* and *jñā* become *jān* and *ñā* in Pali.

the whole world; impermanence; unsatisfactoriness in impermanence; not a permanent self in unsatisfactoriness; giving up; dispassion; cessation; a skeleton and four kinds of decaying corpses. A somewhat similar set of ‘perceptions’ was given to the sick bhikkhu Girimananda in the hope that they might arouse enough sense of urgency for him to recover<sup>5</sup>.

The point of developing these contemplations is to change one’s unawakened and distorted *saññā* to that in conformity with the ‘way things really are’.

**‘... from the arising of recognition comes the arising of knowledge (*ñāṇa*).’** D.I,185.

.....  
 experiencing recognizing

- *Sit in a comfortable posture and bring attention to breathing.*
- *When the mind seems calm, open your eyes and slowly look around. As you see various objects can you observe a sense of recognizing happening?*
- *Sometimes this may be with a mental label, sometimes maybe just an acknowledgement that it is familiar.*
- *Are there some things you see and are not able to recognize?*
- *Can you observe when memories arise?*
- *Are they mostly pleasant or unpleasant?*
- *How do you respond to memories?*
- *When suitable, bring attention back to the sensation of breathing, open your eyes and return to normal activity.*

5 A.V,108f; he did recover. See Bhante Gunaratana 2014 for a detailed explanation of these perceptions.

***Saṅkhārā*: Willing and Habiting, [Mental Processes (dominated by volition), Volitional Formations]**

The Pali word *saṅkhārā*, from the root *saṃ* = ‘together’ + the verb *kr* = ‘to make’, is difficult to translate, primarily because it has different meanings in different contexts<sup>6</sup>. It is both that which puts together, constructs or compounds, and what is put together, constructed or compounded. As one of the Five Groups of Grasping, *saṅkhārā* is all mental activity except Feeling, Recognizing and Bare Knowing. While many mental activities contribute to ‘putting together’, the most dominant one is will, volition or intention. What is ‘put together’ is similarly many-faceted, but can be generalized as mental habit patterns, which are also expressed physically. When we volitionally act in a particular way, it is energetically easier to keep acting the same way, and thus habit patterns or character traits are formed<sup>7</sup>. I use the awkward verb form ‘habiting’ (Yes, I do hear the squeals of anguish from the literalists!), to emphasize that even habits are impermanent.

**‘*Saṅkhārā* are so called because they (volitionally) construct conditioned phenomena. What conditioned phenomena do they (volitionally) construct? They (volitionally) construct the conditioned phenomena of Embodying as Embodying ... Feeling as Feeling ... Recognizing as Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting as Willing and Habiting. They (volitionally) construct the conditioned phenomena of Bare Knowing as Bare Knowing.’** S.III, 87 (cf. CDB p.1071, n.112).

*Saṅkhārā* as the active mental process of ‘willing’ takes numerous forms, most prominently craving and grasping, and the volitions of greed, aversion and delusion. *Saṅkhārā* as the mental processes which have been previously constructed are ignorance, predisposed mental

6 Bhikkhu Bodhi distinguishes five meanings for *saṅkhārā* at CDB. pp.44–47.

7 A relevant saying, of which I have not found the author is: ‘Sow a thought, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a personality; sow a personality, reap a destiny.’

functions (i.e., name-and-form), and other processes of ‘habiting’, such as behavioural patterns, personality traits, etc.

*Saṅkhārā* shares the same root as *kamma*, which the Buddha defined as intention. *Saṅkhārā* as one of the Five Groups of Grasping is defined as the six types of intention (*sañcetanā*) regarding: sights; sounds; smells; tastes; touches; and mental phenomena. It arises from contact (*phassa*) (S.III,60). In the formula for Dependent Origination (see Chapter 9), *saṅkhārā* is represented by the mental functions of ‘willing (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*) and attention (*manasikāra*)’.<sup>8</sup>

Gombrich (2013, pp.11; 140–1) suggests that *saṅkhārā* may be the closest term the Buddha had for ‘process’. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *saṅkhārā* as ‘volitional formations’<sup>9</sup>. My ‘willing’ corresponds to ‘volitional’ and my ‘habiting’ (is an attempt to) correspond to ‘formations’.

.....  
 experiencing *saṅkhārā*

- Sit in a comfortable posture and bring attention to breathing.
- When you are reasonably settled, try to observe the condition of the mind.
- What kind of mental activity do you observe? Is it fantasy or day dream, conceptual thinking over some issue, or perhaps, planning the future?
- Can you observe what is driving those activities, what is the intention behind them?
- Can you observe what patterns those activities follow? Are they familiar?
- When suitable, bring attention back to the sensation of breathing, open your eyes and return to normal activity.

8 In the third ‘basket’ of the Pali Canon, the later-compiled Abhidhamma Piṭaka, *saṅkhārā* designates a collection of fifty of the fifty-two mental processes (*cetasika*). Some of these are skilful such as collectedness, mindfulness, energy, etc., and some are unskilful such as greed, aversion, delusion, lethargy and sleepiness, etc. See the fold-out sheet at the back of the *Buddhist Dictionary* for specifics.

9 CDB. pp.44–5.

### **Viññāṇa: Bare Knowing, [Consciousness]**

*Viññāṇa* is from the root ‘*vi* + *ñā*. The word ‘*ñā*’ means ‘knowing’ and ‘*vi*’ denotes duality, separation, differentiation. Thus *viññāṇa* is a separating, differentiating or distinguishing knowing. It is the bare knowing that a sense contact exists, that is, distinguishing a particular sense contact from the chaotic flood of sense impressions.

At its elemental level *viññāṇa* is the first and foremost form of knowing. First, because without *viññāṇa* there could be no differentiating of something from nothing. It is foremost because *viññāṇa* is the primal element of human existence – without *viññāṇa* we would not know subjective life.

Unfortunately, *viññāṇa* is commonly translated as ‘consciousness’. This translation, however, while general enough for most purposes, fails to capture the precise meaning of *viññāṇa*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines consciousness as: ‘a person’s awareness or perception of something’. *Viññāṇa*, however, is simply the ‘bare knowing’ that a sense contact has occurred, without knowing about that contact, that is, it is without any discriminatory capacity. In the perceptual process, *saññā* is the initial discriminatory knowledge. However, there is then the bare knowing of *saññā*, thus making it difficult to separate *viññāṇa* and *saññā*.

A second difference between *viññāṇa* and consciousness is that *viññāṇa* is the primal element in a human life. Therefore, as long as life exists, there is *viññāṇa*, even when we are asleep or ‘unconscious’ by normal standards. In Buddhist psychology *viññāṇa* is what initiates life<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> At D.II,63 there is mention of *viññāṇa* ‘entering’ the mother’s womb for *nāma-rūpa* (i.e., body-mind) to develop. In later works this is referred to as *paṭisandhi*. Since this event is hard to determine, Buddhists generally accept that life begins at conception.

This should not be taken to imply that *viññāṇa* is the ‘soul’ of human life, rather, it is the inherent mental function which carries the imprint of whatever it knows. Thus, when self-preserving habits (*saṅkhārā*) are grasped, they are known by *viññāṇa* which then ‘enlivens’ the other four Groups of Grasping to create a new self existence (see Chapter 9 for details).

**‘Bhikkhus, what one intends (*ceteti*), arranges (*pakkapeti*) and has a disposition towards becomes the foundation for the persistence of Knowing.’** S.II,65.

The other four groups are the ‘home’ (*oka*) of *viññāṇa* (S.III,9f), and apart from them there can be no knowing of the ‘coming and going, passing away and birth, growth, increase and abundance’ of *viññāṇa* (S.III,53) – since *viññāṇa* is how we know the other four groups. While each of the other four of the Five Groups have their own ‘domain’ (i.e., their sense object) (M.I,295), *viññāṇa* is present with all of them. The other four groups are referred to as the ‘four stations of *viññāṇa*’ (*catasso viññāṇaṭṭhitiyo*) (S.III,54f).

*Viññāṇa* has a number of unique aspects and is thus hard to translate in a single word. It is the most basic form of knowing – before awareness, perception or discrimination – thus a ‘primal’ knowing or a ‘bare’ knowing. I will translate it as ‘Bare Knowing’ (or Knowing) and hope the reader will keep its specific meaning in mind. It is very important to remember this because Bare Knowing and (basic) Feeling are the two mental functions that remain uncorrupted by self-referencing. Remaining focused on Bare Knowing prevents ‘I-making’ and is instrumental in developing the more refined forms of *viññāṇa* mentioned below.

## Impermanence of *Viññāṇa*

In the Buddha's time, the brahmanical tradition and other religious groups regarded *viññāṇa* as permanent, a view also taken up by some of the Buddha's own disciples (M.I,258). Although the process of knowing appears to be continuous, it is actually constantly arising and passing, dependent upon what it is knowing. The Buddha reminds us that what we take as 'mind' (*mano*), 'mentality' (*citta*) or 'Bare Knowing' **'arises as one thing and ceases as another, by day and by night'**, just as a monkey moving through the forest grabs first one branch, lets it go, and grabs another branch (S.II,95). Of course, this often happens so quickly that there is the appearance of constancy of Bare Knowing, where in fact it is just a consistency of Bare Knowing.

The Buddha frequently reminded his students that Bare Knowing is an impermanent, causally-conditioned process of mind, which arises dependent upon an object.

**'In various ways, bhikkhus, have I stated that Bare Knowing is dependently arisen, for without condition, Knowing does not originate. ...**

**Upon whatsoever condition Bare Knowing arises dependent upon, thus it is defined. When Bare Knowing arises dependent upon eye and visible object, it is defined as eye-Knowing ... ear-Knowing ... nose-Knowing ... tongue-Knowing ... body-Knowing ... mind-Knowing.**

**Just as whatsoever condition a fire burns dependent upon it is thus defined. When a fire burns dependent upon wood, it is defined as a wood fire; when it burns dependent upon kindling, it is defined as a kindling fire ... a grass fire ... a cow-dung fire ... a chaff fire ... a rubbish fire.'** M.I,259f.

The most common types of *viññāṇa* are distinguished by the sense base: sight (lit.: eye-Knowing); sounds (ear-Knowing); smell (nose-Knowing); taste (tongue-Knowing); touch (body-Knowing) and mentation (mind-Knowing). Mind-Knowing is diverse since it knows whatever 'enters' the mind, which includes the typical mental sense contacts such as thoughts, ideas and plans, and it also knows what the other senses sense, plus the feelings, perceptions and thoughts they trigger.

In the Dependent Origination formula (Chapter 9) Bare Knowing is (mainly) conditioned by *saṅkhārā*, which are the ignorance-conditioned, I-making habits. The second conditioning source is Name-and-form, which is the other four Groups of Grasping.

'When Bare Knowing stands attached (*upaya*), founded upon (*ārammaṇa*), supported by (*patitṭhā*) the Five Groups of Grasping, **'with a sprinkling of delight it might come to increase, growth and abundance.'** S.III,53f.



**'... when one abides contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, there is arising of Bare Knowing.'** S.II,91.



**'If there is passion, delight, craving, for the nutriment of edible food ... nutriment of contact ... nutriment of intention ... nutriment of Bare Knowing, Bare Knowing becomes established and comes to growth ...'** S.II,101.

There are sense objects **'which are pleasing, lovely, charming, pleasant, sensually enticing, arousing. If a bhikkhu seeks delight,**

welcomes and remains holding to them, Bare Knowing becomes dependent upon and grasps them.’ S.IV,101f.



*Viññāṇa* can also be highly developed. For example, there is reference to ‘infinite Knowing’ (*viññanañcāyatana*), ‘unlimited or unmanifested Knowing’ (*anidassana ...*) (D.I,223;M,I,329), ‘unestablished Knowing’ (*appatiṭṭhita ...*) (S.II,66), and Knowing which is ‘not growing, ungenerative’ (*avirūlhaṃ anabhisaṅkhacca*) (S.III,53f). Bare Knowing is one of the six elements<sup>11</sup> (S.III,227), and the most important factor at the beginning of a new life (D.II,63).

.....

## experiencing bare knowing

- *Sit in a comfortable posture and bring attention to the breathing.*
- *Do you know you are breathing?*
- *Do you know the sensation of breath entering and leaving the nostrils?*
- *Do you know that you know the sensation of breathing?*
- *Know the present feeling – pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.*
- *Can you observe the quality of this knowing?*
- *How clearly can you know the condition of the mind?*
- *Can you increase the quality of knowing?*
- *When suitable, bring attention back to the sensation of breathing, open your eyes and return to normal activity.*

<sup>11</sup> The four elements of earth, fire, water and air, plus space and Bare Knowing (M.III,240ff).

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a reasonably comfortable position, close your eyes lightly and settle attention on the breathing.
- Can you sense the sensation of breathing in and breathing out?
- Are any other bodily sensations obvious?
- When suitable, bring attention to the most obvious sound at this moment. Is there one prominent sound, or a mixture of sounds, or perhaps you can 'hear' the silence?
- Bring attention to the sense of smell. Are you able to detect any particular smell?
- Bring attention to the sense of taste. Can you observe any particular taste at present?
- See if you can observe what the content of the mind is right now – thoughts, memories, sense impressions ....
- Try to be non-judgementally aware of what is occurring in the mind.
- Open your eyes for a moment and notice the act of seeing.
- Do you notice any associated mental activity – feelings, recognition, thinking ...?
- When suitable, bring attention back to the breathing. Then open the eyes and resume your activity.

## EIGHT

# The Perceptual Process

.....

In the Buddha's teaching, the Six Internal Sense Bases are called 'the world', because it is through them that we are able to perceive and conceive of a (subjective) 'world' (S.IV,95), how we experience, interpret and create our life. Developing an awareness of the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases (see definitions below) and understanding the dynamics of sense perception is one of the themes in the development of mindfulness (D.II,302f; M.I,61), which can lead to the experience of liberation, primarily through not identifying with the senses as self.

There are three main explanations of the perceptual process (for the unawakened person) in the Pali Canon. The most common, though less detailed, is the Conditional Causality formula (see next chapter) where Name and Form conditions the Six Sense Bases, which conditions Contact, which conditions Feeling, etc. The second main explanation of the perceptual process is given in The Discourse on the Root of All Things (MN 1) where it describes perception as giving rise to conceiving (*maññati*, from the root 'to think'), which is thinking distorted by self-referencing (see Chapter 6 on the arising of 'I am').

A more detailed explanation, relating to the arising of elaboration (*papañca*), is:

**‘Friends, in dependence upon the eye and visible objects, there is the arising of eye-Knowing (sight), the meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling; what one feels, that one perceives; what one perceives, that one thinks about; what one thinks about, that one elaborates (*papañceti*). With what one elaborates about as source, perceptions and concepts from elaborations<sup>1</sup> assail a person with regard to past, present and future objects made known through the eye ... [and the other senses].’** M.I,111f.

From this passage we can distinguish the various stages in the perceptual process: 1) sense organ and sense object, 2) sense-Knowing, 3) contact, 4) feeling, 5) recognizing, 6) thinking, 7) elaboration, 8) perceptions and concepts from elaboration.

At S.II,146 another perceptual causal sequence proceeds from the six external sense elements (*dhātu*) to perceptions, thoughts (*sañkappa*), desires (*chanda*), fever (of passions) (*pariḷāha*), and search (*pariyesanā*)<sup>2</sup>. A similar passage at D.III,289 ends with ‘acquisition’ (*lābha*).

1 *‘papañcasaññāsankhā’*; Bhikkhu Bodhi (MLDB n.229) translates as: ‘perceptions and notions (born of) mental proliferation.’ For more on the perceptual and conceptual processes, see Bhikkhu Bodhi’s brilliant introduction to the Discourse on the Root of Existence.

2 A Discourse following this (S.II,146) gives an unusual sequence by inserting ‘contacts’ and ‘feelings’ between ‘intentions’ and ‘desires’. For a plausible explanation see Bhikkhu Bodhi’s note 230 on page 791 of CDB.

## The Sense Bases

The Buddha makes reference to the Six Internal Sense Bases of: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind, and the Six External Sense Bases, or Sense Objects of: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations or ‘touches’ (through the skin and also within the body) and mental phenomena (thoughts, ideas, images, etc.).

The Six Internal Sense Bases are not referred to as sense ‘organs’ as we understand them but rather as ‘*āyatana*’ (base), ‘*indriya*’ (faculty), or ‘*dhātu*’ (element), which, as Hamilton (p.14f) points out, ‘might refer to something other than the physical organs themselves’.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, it is through the Six Internal Sense Bases that cognition of the external world takes place, beginning with sense knowing.

The Sense Bases occupy a primary position in the functioning of the Five Groups of Grasping and in the explanation of Conditional Causality. The four mental factors of the Five Groups of Grasping and five of the twelve links of Conditional Causality are all classified according to either the Internal or External Sense Bases.

The mind as a Sense Base (*manas* or *manodhātu*) is unique. It is defined in terms of sensing ‘mental phenomena’, much as the other five senses contact their own particular sense objects. Thus it also ‘senses’ the sense contact, feeling, recognizing and thinking which are stimulated by the other five sense objects, since these are mental phenomena ‘sensed’ by the mind<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> ‘From all these meanings of *āyatana*, *indriya* and *dhātu*, as well as from the position of *āyatana* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, one might suggest that what is referred to by the terms *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna* and so on is not primarily the sense organs eye, ear, nose, etc., but that the terms are to be interpreted figuratively as the faculties of vision, hearing, smell and so on. ... Each sense faculty is a sphere or locus (in an abstract sense) for a potentiality: the potential to see or hear.’ Hamilton, p.18

<sup>4</sup> cf. Hamilton, p.34

### Contact (*phassa*)

The third element in the perceptual process (after Internal and External Sense Base) is Contact (*phassa*). In formal Buddhist terminology, Contact is defined as the coming together of sense base, sense object and sense-Knowing. That is, when an Internal Sense Base contacts an External Sense Base, there is sense-Knowing. When there is sense-Knowing, Contact has occurred.

While this may seem like a subtle distinction, in fact it is very significant both psychologically and for the practice of mental development or meditation. Psychologically, whatever sense objects are contacted affect our feelings of well-being or ill-being, which nourish our outlook on life. In a similar way, in meditation, different sense contacts condition skilful or unskilful states of mind. Knowing the conditioning influence of various sense contacts is fundamental to mental development.

Contact is necessary for the perceptual process because, without Contact, there is no perception. The importance of Contact is outlined in the following passages from the Pali Canon:

**‘There is no other means of experiencing (*paṭisaṃvedī*) other than through contact.’** S.II,35f (at S.II,37f a similar discussion involves the feelings of pleasure and pain (*sukha-dukka*)).

*Dukkha* (S.II,35) and views (D.I,43) are dependent upon contact. Contact is the ‘source (*nidāna*) and origin (*sambhava*)’ of sense pleasures (*kāmā*), feelings, perceptions and kamma (A.III,411f), and the cessation of Contact is their cessation. In the wider context, the Internal Sense Bases are referred to as ‘the six bases of contact’.

## Viññāṇa (Bare Knowing)

Bare Knowing is explained in detail in the chapter on the Five Groups of Grasping, but it is useful to summarize its key aspects here. In the Buddha's teaching, *viññāṇa* is just the bare knowing that there is a sense contact. This on-going process of Bare Knowing arises uniquely and distinctly, and is dependent upon the particular sense contact occurring at any moment. Because it happens so quickly, the process of Bare Knowing appears to be continuous, but it is constantly arising and passing away with just a consistency of Bare Knowing.

## Feeling (*vedanā*)

Bare Knowing triggers feeling, which registers as either approachable (pleasant), threatening (unpleasant), or okay (neutral). And, of course, there is Bare Knowing of that feeling.

In many explanations of the Sense Bases, the perceptual process extends only as far as Feeling – **'whether pleasant (*sukha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*) or neither unpleasant-nor-pleasant (*adukkha-m-asukha*)'**, (i.e., S.IV,204ff). The perceptual process up to this stage is merely functional or instinctual, with little subjective influence. It is at the next stage, that of recognizing, where subjectivity begins to gain influence and importance.<sup>5</sup>

5 Bhikkhu Nyanananda (1986, pp.5-6) remarks on this change in the quoted passage: "The impersonal note is sustained only up to the point of '*vedana*'. The formula now takes a personal ending suggestive of deliberate activity..."

The deliberate activity implied by the third person verb is seen to stop at '*papañceti*'. Now comes the most interesting stage of the process of cognition. ... At this final stage of sense-perception, he who has hitherto been the subject now becomes the hapless object..."

Like the legendary resurrected tiger which devours the magician who restores it to life out of skeletal bones, the concepts and linguistic conventions overwhelm the worldling who evolved them. ... The vicious proliferating tendency of the worldling's consciousness weaves for him a labyrinthine network of concepts connecting the three periods of time through processes of recognition, retrospection and speculation. The tangled maze with its apparent objectivity entices the worldling and ultimately obsesses and overwhelm him."

### Apperceiving, Recognizing (*saññā*)

*Saññā* is also explained in detail in the chapter of the Five Groups of Grasping. It is the associative knowledge of ‘apperceiving’ or ‘recognizing’ which involves memory to provide the associations to recognize what the Sense Base has contacted. Since memory for the average person is an unreliable and ignorance-based subjective record, it is the cause of recognition being distorted. The four dominant ‘distortions of *saññā*’ (*saññā-vipallāsa*) are: recognizing in terms of permanence, happiness, self and attractiveness, rather than the way of Dhamma which is recognizing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, impersonality and unattractiveness. Since recognition leads on to ideation, these distortions pervade two other areas of experience besides recognition, that is thought or cogitation (*citta*); and, views (*ditṭhi*) (A.II,52).

As mentioned in the first quotation above: ‘... **what one feels, that one perceives/recognizes ...**’. This implies that feeling is the ‘trigger’ or initiator of recognizing. Venerable Sariputta is quoted (M.I,293) as saying that Knowing, feeling and recognizing are all conjoined.

## Thinking (*vitakka*)

*Saññā* can lead on to *vitakka*, or thinking about what we have perceived, which can lead to uncontrolled continuity of thinking, and set off an avalanche of conceptual elaborations. While the Buddha-to-be was struggling towards awakening, he designated his thoughts into two classes: thoughts of sensuality, ill-will and cruelty into one class; and, thoughts of renunciation, benevolence and harmlessness into another. He understood that thoughts of sensuality, ill-will and cruelty **'lead to one's own affliction, others' affliction and the affliction of both. They obstruct wisdom, cause vexation and lead away from Nibbāna.'** The second class of thoughts have the opposite effect (M.I,114f). The person in training is thus encouraged to **'not tolerate, to eliminate, remove, eradicate, abolish'** the first class of thoughts (M.I,11). After awakening, the Buddha designated the second class of thoughts as Right Aspiration (*sammāsaṅkappa*), which is one of the factors of the Eightfold Path. The psychological principle here is **'whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks about and ponders, that will become the inclination of his mind'** (M.I,115).

Excessive thinking and pondering can tire the body and disturb the mind. Therefore, the Buddha **'internally steadied the mind, settled it, brought it to singleness and concentrated it'** (M.I,116). One discourse (MN.20) gives five guidelines for dealing with distracting thoughts in order to experience collectedness.

*Vitakka*, in its positive sense as initial thought on the meditation subject, is one of the factors of the first absorption, together with *vicāra*, 'sustained thought' or continued thinking around the topic, examining.

### Elaboration (*papañca*)

*Papañca* in Sanskrit means ‘expansion, diffuseness, manifoldness’. It implies an ‘expansion of thinking’ or an ‘elaboration of thinking’, which can lead to an flood of thinking or being assailed by ‘perceptions and concepts from elaboration’.

It is due to the grasping of the sense bases as a self that elaboration arises. Therefore, elaboration only ends with the ending of the ‘I am’ conceit.

**‘One should end all thoughts of ‘I am’, the root of all elaborating concepts (*papañca-saṅkhā*).’** Sn 916.



**‘Friend, with the remainderless fading away and cessation of the six bases for contact there is the cessation and allaying of elaboration.’**

A.II,162

The ‘cessation of the six bases for contact’ means, of course, the cessation of the ignorant view of grasping the six sense bases as self, not the ending of the sense bases themselves.

## The Emotional Side of the Perceptual Process

The above is one explanation of the perceptual process. In another context, that of Conditional Causality (see next chapter), feeling is followed by craving, which we might refer to as the emotional side of perception. Combining the previous explanation with that of Conditional Causality, we can say that, for the unawakened person, the perception, thinking and elaboration which follows from feeling is infused with some form of craving, which further generates grasping, and the other factors of Conditional Causality.

## Inappropriate Attention

One of the practices for dealing with sense contact is to ‘guard the doors of the senses’ (*indriya guttadvāra*) so that one does not take up the ‘signs and attributes’ of sense contacts. Elsewhere (A.I,3) the Buddha is quoted as saying that ‘inappropriate attention’ to the ‘sign of the beautiful’ (*subhanimitta*) causes the arising and increase of sensual desire, and ‘inappropriate attention’ to the ‘sign of the repulsive’ (*paṭighanimitta*) causes the arising and increase of aversion.

As explained above, feeling comes before perception/recognition. Thus, generally speaking, whatever gives us pleasant feeling we perceive as attractive, and whatever produces unpleasant feeling we perceive as unattractive. In fact, reality is neither attractive nor unattractive, but we subjectively divide it into what we conceive as beautiful/attractive and repulsive/unattractive, with various gradations in between. This is one of the subjective distortions of recognition.

Since the mind functions very quickly, the simple version of perception is not easy to observe directly. The intensity of the sense stimulation is most significant, as well as the importance it represents to us, that is, the mind is selective in what it attends to depending upon our previous experiences, intention, interests, etc.

Moreover, the process is complex, so while you may become aware of a feeling conditioned by a particular sense impression, before perception occurs, there is a feeling about the feeling. For example, you may be conscious of being unhappy about a loud noise, and then be unhappy about being unhappy. Then, if you perceive that the noise was caused by someone dropping something, because you are doubly unhappy, there may be a surprisingly strong reaction. These are just some of the functional reactions. Add to this the various complications the brain can contribute, and we have quite a volatile combination of factors, which perhaps only the development of Calm and Insight meditation can help us to understand.

Hence, while we depend on the process of sense perception to perceive reality, we should be cautious of the veracity of that perception. Not only are the Six Internal and External Sense Bases impermanent and subject to distortion, the Internal Sense Bases are also extremely limited in the range of data they can receive. Sight is limited to a small fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum. Normal human hearing is confined to a narrow range of vibrational frequencies, and likewise with the other Sense Bases. Of particular concern is the effectiveness of the mind as a Sense Base.

“You might think that, if there is one thing in the world you can trust, it’s your own brain. But the truth of the matter ... is that your unscrupulous brain is entirely undeserving of your confidence. It has some shifty habits that leave the truth distorted and disguised. Your brain is vainglorious. It’s emotional and immoral. It deludes you. It is pig-headed, secretive and weak-willed. Oh, and it’s also a bigot. This is more than a minor inconvenience. That fleshy walnut inside your skull is all you have in order to know yourself and to know the world. Yet, thanks to the masquerading of an untrustworthy brain with a mind of its own, much of what you think you know is not quite as it seems.” Fine, p.1-2.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes and settle attention on the breathing.
- As you become aware of the breathing process, notice its characteristics. Is the breathing relaxed or constrained, long or short, deep or shallow, or something else?
- Can you observe any particular cause of this specific type of breathing, or is it unclear or uncertain?
- Can you observe any feeling associated with what you are aware of?
- Is that feeling directly linked to the object of awareness, or is it more loosely associated?
- Now bring your awareness to the condition of the mind. Do you notice any obvious mental condition – dullness, clarity, quietness, busyness?
- Try to expand your awareness to include the possible causes of this condition. Can you discern some distinctive cause, or is it unclear or uncertain?
- When suitable bring attention back to the breathing. Then open the eyes and resume your activity.

## NINE

# Conditional Causality

.....

The principle of Conditional Causality is that all conditioned things arise from a cause (or causes) and, with the cessation of that cause (or causes), they also cease.

The Buddha's profound insight into this principle, as expressed in the arising and ceasing of unsatisfactoriness, was instrumental in his awakening, and therefore claims a pre-eminent position within the Buddha's dispensation. With a few significant exceptions<sup>1</sup>, the arising and ceasing of unsatisfactoriness is given in a standardized twelve-link formula which is referred to as Dependent Origination. The general principle of conditional causality also occurs in a number of the Buddha's other teachings, as the causally-conditional nature of phenomena was a key element in the Buddha's unique insight into the nature of reality.

At its simplest, the principle of conditional causality is:

**'When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.'** S.II,28;78;95.

This principle of Conditional Causality is an eternal and universal principle. The Buddha awakens to the highest knowledge and realization of it, and then **'explains it, teaches it, declares it, establishes it, reveals**

<sup>1</sup> Most notable is the Great Discourse on Causality (DN 15) which has only nine factors leaving out Ignorance, *saṅkhārā* and Six Sense Bases, with Bare Knowing and mentality-materiality mutually conditioning each other. Another notable exception is the Upanisā Sutta (SN 12:23) where suffering becomes the 'proximate cause' of faith, leading on to liberation.

it, analyses it, makes it clear.’ (S.II,25). Understanding the principle of Conditional Causality enabled the Buddha to penetrate to the process-oriented nature of reality, and once the process of conditioned suffering was understood, the path to liberation became clear.

The significance of Conditional Causality is that it shows that everything (except Nibbāna) is essentially the product of an interdependent matrix of dependently-arisen phenomena without any unique or autonomous ‘thing-ness’. While our ignorance-conditioned, object-oriented knowing focusses upon the ‘things’ of reality, in truth, this is a false perspective, which gives rise to distorted perceptions and deluded views of reality. Thus, we are unable to ‘see things as they really are’. To free us from this delusion, the Buddha explains a ‘process-oriented view’ of reality in contrast to our usual ‘object-oriented view’ of reality. When we see things as they really are, there are no ‘solid objects’ (only flowing processes), and thus, ultimately, no longer any stable ground for subjective self-affirmation.

Most importantly, from a practical point of view, Dependent Origination specifically describes the processes of how the suffering of human existence is conditionally created, how it persists and how it can cease. In its essence, it is the second and third of the Four Noble Truths – the arising of *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*.

The Buddha stated that the teaching on Dependent Origination is profound and not easily understood (S.II,92), and likens the comprehending of it to the realization of the Dhamma, which is equivalent to realizing full awakening:

**‘He who sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma; he who sees the Dhamma sees dependent arising.’<sup>2</sup>**

2 M.I,191: This statement is quoted by Venerable Sariputta as being said by the Buddha, however, it is not found in the Pali Canon as a direct statement by the Buddha himself.

## Dependent Origination

The formal twelve-link presentation of Conditional Causality is called Dependent Origination or Dependent Arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), from '*paṭicca*', which literally means 'grounded on, on account of, because of, dependent on', and '*samuppāda*', 'origin, arising, coming to be'. The Buddha traced the fundamental cause of 'this whole mass of *dukkha*' to ignorance. He therefore had the key to resolving *dukkha* through eliminating its cause – with the 'remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance', through the development of true knowledge, *dukkha* ceases.

**“Cessation, cessation”;** thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, higher knowledge and light.’ S.II,11.

The twelve-link, linear formula for Dependent Origination is a mere skeleton compared to the full experience of it, similar to a line drawing used to illustrate a multidimensional universe. We know that human existence cannot be narrowed down to a simple formula. Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests that “the [dependent origination] selection of factors and their sequential arrangement are made from the instructional point of view” and that, “by resorting to abstraction, each phrase in the formula treats as a one-to-one bond what is in actuality a situation of immense complexity involving a multitude of conditions arousing and sustaining a multitude of dependent phenomena.”<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, most of us are still bound to linear, object-oriented modes of thinking and so find it hard to penetrate the interdependent, process-oriented reality of Dependent Origination. Nonetheless, as with other aspects of the Buddha’s teaching, the usefulness of Dependent Origination is for reflective meditative enquiry. Looked at in this way,

3 GDC p.10

the twelve-linked skeleton provides an immensely rich field of enquiry with multiple themes that branch off, intertwine and feed back into one another. It then becomes possible to fill out this skeleton with the healthy tissue of wisdom, relevant to immediate human existence.

This being so, it is more useful to study the various themes and their interrelationships within the context of our own experience. For example, we have the Buddha's definition of 'ignorance' as not knowing the Four Noble Truths. How do we ourselves experience 'ignorance'? What are the effects of 'not knowing' on our life, on our view of life, on our understanding of what life is? We can take our example from the Buddha, who was an earnest spiritual seeker trying to find the solution to human suffering. His explorations proceeded along the lines of a profound existential inquiry:

**'Indeed, this world has fallen into difficulty, in that it is born, ages, dies, passes on and re-arises, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering of ageing-and-death. When, for sure, will an escape from this suffering of ageing-and-death be evident?**

Then, bhikkhus, it occurred to me: "When what exists does ageing-and-death come to be? By what is ageing-and-death conditioned?" Then, bhikkhus, through appropriate attention, in me there was a realization by wisdom: "When there is birth, ageing-and-death comes to be; ageing-and-death has birth as its condition ... birth has becoming as its condition ... grasping ... craving ... feeling ... contact ... six sense bases ... mentality-materiality ... *viññāṇa* ... *sankhārā* ... ignorance as its condition.'" S.II,5-11.

**'But with the complete, dispassionate cessation of ignorance comes cessation of *saṅkhārā*; with the cessation of *saṅkhārā*, cessation of *viññāṇa* ... cessation of mentality-materiality ... six sense bases ... contact ... feeling ... craving ... grasping ... becoming ... birth ... ageing-and-death. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.'** S.II,1-2.

The Dependent Origination formula, at its fullest, gives the following sequence:

**Ignorance conditions *saṅkhārā*;  
*saṅkhārā* conditions *viññāṇa*;  
*viññāṇa* conditions mentality-materiality;  
 mentality-materiality conditions the six sense bases;  
 the six sense bases condition contact;  
 contact conditions feeling;  
 feeling conditions craving;  
 craving conditions grasping;  
 grasping conditions becoming;  
 becoming conditions birth;  
 birth conditions ageing-and-death, this whole mass of suffering.**

## Explanation of the Process of Dependent Origination

As stated by the Buddha, Dependent Origination is incredibly profound. However, a simplified version may be: Conditioned by Ignorance, that is, not knowing about *dukkha* and how it is caused, a wilful action is generated, through body, speech or mind, and of a meritorious, demeritorious or imperturbable ethical quality (*saṅkhārā*). This ignorance-conditioned, wilful action is habitually self-referencing, which conditions an associated self-referencing *viññāṇa*. *Viññāṇa* then ‘enlivens’ a psycho-physical foundation in mentality-materiality to fulfill the will to selfhood. Materiality contains the Six Sense Spheres which are the condition for Contact. With Contact as condition there is Feeling which (still primarily conditioned by Ignorance) leads to Craving, Grasping, Becoming and Birth, that is, birth of a self-identity, or the compounding of ‘I-making’. Birth ends in Ageing-and-death, since this ‘making - I’ is, in actuality, a constructed phenomenon that decays and dies, with the attendant sorrow, lamentation, pain, etc. Sometimes the formula ends with ‘this whole mass of *dukkha*/suffering.’

Although the origination sequence ends on this negative note, the important point is that once the process is understood, we then have the knowledge to uproot it through the arising of wisdom in place of ignorance, or to release it through seeing the danger in craving and grasping. Therefore the entire sequence can come to cessation, the ending of the ‘whole mass of suffering’, which is the cessation of ‘I-making’.

While presented as a twelve-link, linear sequence it is in effect cyclical. There is no ‘first cause’ to the process, as the ignorance that accompanies death is a condition for further ignorance-conditioned wilful actions, which further impel the process (until final awakening).<sup>4</sup>

4 For an interesting perspective see Gombrich (WBT, 134f) on The Bramanical Creation Myth.

## Overview of the Factors of Dependent Origination

The terms, *saṅkhārā*, *viññāṇa*, Form (Embodying), Six Sense Bases, and Feeling, are explained in previous chapters, and other terms, such as Ignorance and Craving, are elaborated on in the next chapter as sources of identification.

### **Avijjā: Ignorance**

*Avijjā* is Ignorance, specifically defined as not knowing (*aññāṇa*) the Four Noble Truths: *dukkha*; origin; cessation; and the path of practice to realise cessation (S.II,4)<sup>5</sup>. This amounts to saying that *avijjā* is not knowing Dependent Origination, since Dependent Origination gives details of the second and third Noble Truths. Elsewhere in the Pali Canon, Ignorance is defined as not clearly knowing the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,162–174). More details on Ignorance are in the next chapter.

### **Saṅkhārā**

*Saṅkhārā* has different connotations depending upon the context. In the context of Dependent Origination, no specific definition of *saṅkhārā* is given in the Pali Canon other than mentioning its three modes of expression as bodily, verbal, and mental (S.II,4), and its three ethical expressions as meritorious (*puñña*), demeritorious (*apuñña*), and imperturbable (*āneñja*) (S.II,82), which are all types of kamma.

In the context of the Five Groups of Grasping, *saṅkhārā* is translated as ‘Willing and Habiting’. In the context of Dependent Origination, the ‘habiting’ aspect is more predominant, and thus *saṅkhārā* becomes ‘habitual willing’, as it is conditioned by the ‘habit’ of ignorance,

5 In one explanation of the Four Noble Truths (A.I,177) ignorance is mentioned as the cause of unsatisfactoriness (rather than craving), leading then into the Conditional Causality formula.

and (volitionally) conditions an associated habitual *viññāṇa*. Due to being ‘hindered by ignorance’, these wilful actions are enacted unknowingly and are pre-conscious. That is, ignorance-conditioned *saṅkhārā* conditions an ignorance-conditioned (type of) *viññāṇa* or Bare Knowing.

**‘Bhikkhus, what one intends (*ceteti*), arranges (*pakkapeti*) and has a disposition towards becomes the foundation for the persistence of *viññāṇa*.’ S.II,65.**

### ***Viññāṇa*: (Bare) Knowing**

See definition in the chapter on The Five Groups of Grasping.

### ***Nāma-Rūpa*: Mentality-Materiality**

The term *nāma-rūpa* is from the Brahmanical tradition where it meant the differentiation of the world into names or concepts, and appearances or forms<sup>6</sup>. The Buddha redefined the term *nāma* to mean feeling (*vedanā*), recognizing (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), contact (*phassa*), and attention (*manasikāra*), that is, various types of ‘mentality’ (S.II,3). He redefined *rūpa* to mean the same as in the Five Groups of Grasping, that is: the four great element qualities and the form derived therefrom. In this context, it can refer to various kinds of materiality other than simply the physical body. I therefore translate *nāma-rūpa* as mentality-materiality.

*Vedanā*: see the definition in Chapter 7;

*Saññā*: see the definition in Chapter 7;

*Cetanā*: Intention, purpose, will, volition;

*Phassa*: see definition below;

6 See Hamilton, p.135.

*Manasikāra*: literally means ‘fixed mind’ or ‘attention’, and is one of the primary functional aspects of mental activity. A special mention is made of *yoniso-manasikāra*, literally ‘attention to the source’ or ‘appropriate attention’ as an extremely important function to cultivate for the increase of wisdom.

*Rūpa*: see the definition in Chapter 7.

In the important discourse ‘The Great Discourse on Causation’, the Mahānidāna Sutta, the fifteenth discourse of the DN, *nāma-rūpa* is given special emphasis. In this presentation, just nine of the usual twelve links are given, with an extensive digression outlining the causal conditions arising from craving, as well as various self views. The main difference between this discourse and the usual twelve-link formulation is that it presents the mutual conditionality of *viññāṇa* and mentality-materiality – rather than *viññāṇa* being conditioned by *sankhārā* – with the Six Sense Bases being omitted (perhaps since they could be included under *rūpa*).

**‘It is to this extent, Ananda, that one can be born, age and die, pass away and re-arise, to this extent that there is a pathway for designation, to this extent that there is a pathway for language, to this extent that there is a pathway for description, to this extent that there is a sphere for wisdom, to this extent that the round turns for describing this state of being, that is, when there is mentality-materiality together with *viññāṇa*.’** D.II,63–4.

In this presentation, mentality–materiality is what provides *viññāṇa* (Bare Knowing) with ‘a pathway for designation, for language, for description, and a sphere for wisdom’. As mentioned in Chapter 7, *viññāṇa* is ‘knowing distinction’. Thus mentality–materiality allows Bare Knowing to be extended into the realm of reference, expression and presentation, which then allows the development of abstract thought, communication and representation of subjective reality.

This emphasis upon the mutual conditioning of mentality–materiality and Bare Knowing also explains an important psychological insight. That is, Bare Knowing is dependently conditioned by what we feel, cognize, intend, contact and give attention to, the factors of *nāma*. This insight then provides an opening for the ‘sphere of wisdom’ – if we can skilfully guide what we feel, cognize, intend, contact and give attention to, Bare Knowing is likewise skilfully developed. Also note that Bare Knowing together with mentality–materiality is equivalent to the Five Groups of Grasping.

### ***Saḷ-āyatana*: Six Sense Bases**

This is the six sense bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Their cause is mentality–materiality.

See more detail in Chapter 8 on The Perceptual Process.

### ***Phassa*: Contact**

Contact is defined as the coming together of sense, sense object and Bare Knowing (M.1,111f). See Chapter 8 on The Perceptual Process for detail.

The Mahānidāna Discourse contains another interesting point in regard to mentality–materiality conditioning contact:

**‘If, Ananda, those qualities, attributes, signs and indicators through which there is a description of the name–body and the form–body were absent, would either designation–contact (*adhivacanasamphassa*) or impingement–contact (*paṭighasamphassa*) be evident?’** D.II,62.

The two types of contact are interdependent in that the name–body needs the form–body for impingement–contact, and the form–body needs the name–body to be validated through designation–contact.

### ***Vedanā*: Feeling**

See Chapter 7 on The Five Groups of Grasping.

### ***Taṇhā*: Craving**

*Taṇhā*, literally ‘thirst’, is often translated as ‘craving’, the PED adding ‘hunger for, excitement, the fever of unsatisfied longing’. *Taṇhā* has three forms: sense pleasures; existence; and non–existence. *Taṇhā* is a deeply motivated, exceptionally strong form of desire, close to what we call an instinct. (More details on Craving are given in the next chapter.)

### ***Upādāna*: Grasping**

*Upādāna* generally means ‘grasping, clinging, holding, or attachment’ and it is also that ‘fuel’ which keeps the process of grasping going. The PED defines *upādāna* as ‘that (material) substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going, fuel, supply, provision’. When references are made to fire, the usual translation would be ‘fuel’.

There are four kinds of Grasping: sensual pleasures (*kāma*); views (*diṭṭhi*); rules and observances (*silabbata*); and doctrine of self (*attavāda*) (M.I,51;I,66; S.II,3).

### ***Bhava*: Becoming, Existence**

*Bhava* is from the root ‘*bhū*’, meaning ‘to become, to be, to exist’. In some contexts it means ‘becoming’ or ‘coming-into-existence’, while in other contexts it refers to some form of ‘existence’. Three kinds of Existence are identified: existence in the sense realm (*kāma*), in the fine-material realm (*rūpa*) and in the immaterial realm (*arūpa*) (A.I,223f). These relate to Buddhist cosmology. The Sense Realm is the lower realms of hell (*niraya*), animals (*tiracchāna*), hungry ghosts (*pettivisaya*), the human realm and the six lower celestial realms. The Fine-material Realm is the ‘heavenly’ realms experienced through the four material absorptions and the Immaterial Realm is the ‘higher heavenly’ realms experienced through the immaterial absorptions<sup>7</sup>.

*Bhava* is the drive to live, become or exist, and is thus a key factor in a number of the categories of the Buddha’s teaching. We have already come across it as one of the kinds of Craving, and it is also one of the Outflows, one of the Underlying Dispositions, one of the Floods (*ogha*), and one of the Bonds (*yoga*). It is considered to be Right View to understand existence, its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation (M.I,50).

**‘For beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, renewed existence (*puna-bhava*) in the future is established through delight in this and that.’** M.I,294.

<sup>7</sup> See LDB p.38f for information on the thirty-one realms of existence.



‘Thus, Ananda, for beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, intentional action (kamma) is the field, Bare Knowing is the seed, and craving the moisture for Bare Knowing ... volition and wish (*paṭthanā*) to be established in an inferior ... middling ... superior realm<sup>8</sup>; thus there is renewed existence in the future.’ A.I,223.

#### *Jāti*: Birth

‘... the birth of the various beings into the various groups of beings, their being born, coming to be, birth, becoming, the manifestation of the groups, the acquisition of the sense bases.’ S.II,3.

#### *Jarā*: Ageing

‘... the ageing of the various beings in the various groups of beings, their decrepitude, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, dwindling of vitality, collapse of the faculties.’ S.II,2.

#### *Maraṇa*: Death

‘... the passing away of various beings from the various groups of beings, their removal, breakup, disappearance, mortality, death, fulfilment of time, the breakup of the groups, the casting off of the body.’ S.II,3.

8 Inferior, middling, superior correspond to the three types of existence: sensual realm, form realm and formless realm A.I,223f.

## The Two Facets of Dependent Origination

The Dependent Origination formula has two facets: the ‘origination’ formula shows how suffering originates, and the ‘cessation’ formula shows how suffering ceases. The Pali term translated as ‘cessation’, ‘*nirodha*’, has two meanings. Most commonly it means the ending of something which already exists, for example, with regard to the impermanence of conditioned phenomena. Its second meaning, which is particularly relevant for understanding Dependent Origination and the Third Noble Truth, is ‘non-arising’. Phra Payutto (2021, p.371) defines ‘*nirodha*’ as ‘something does not arise because no causes exist for it to arise.’

What this means, in terms of Dependent Origination, is that the formula, usually translated as: ‘With cessation of ignorance, there is cessation of *saṅkhārā*, ...’, is more correctly translated as: ‘With the non-arising of ignorance, there is non-arising of *saṅkhārā*, ...’. Phra Payutto (p.372) also points out limitations in the translation of the ‘origination’ formula as well because: ‘The Pali terms cover a wider range of meaning than can be captured by single English counterparts.’ He translates the formula as: ‘Because ignorance exists in this way, *saṅkhārā* exists in this way, ...’. This point is especially helpful in understanding Dependent Origination as relating to specific aspects of the factors. For example, it is only ignorance-conditioned feeling which conditions craving. Not all feeling conditions craving, since the fully-awakened arahant still has feeling, just not ignorance-conditioned feeling.

## Conditional Causality in Other Contexts

This insight into Conditional Causality was a profoundly significant experience for the Buddha, and is expressed in various forms throughout his teachings, from the core teaching on the Four Noble Truths – *dukkha*, cause, cessation and path – to the more sophisticated aspects of his teachings about the path to liberation. An important addition to the standard twelve-link formula of Dependent Origination is one which demonstrates directly the causally-conditioned way out of suffering. It begins with the Dependent Origination formula, then, following ‘birth’, is ‘suffering’. This leads on to the sequence of suffering conditioning faith ... gladness (*pāmojja*) ... joy (*pīti*) ... tranquillity ... well-being (*sukha*) ... collectedness ... knowledge and vision of the way things are ... disillusionment (*nibbidā*) ... dispassion (*virāga*) ... liberation ... knowledge of the wasting of the outflows (S.II,29f). This explains how suffering can be the cause of faith to pursue a spiritual solution.

A similar sequence begins with skilful conduct conditioning freedom from remorse, conditioning gladness ... as above ... dispassion conditioning knowledge and vision of liberation (A.V,311ff; cf. A.V,1-2), while another sequence begins with appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) conditioning gladness ... as above ... dispassion conditions liberation (D.III,288).

There is also a shortened version, with virtuous conduct being the cause (*upanisā*) of collectedness, collectedness being the cause of knowledge and vision of the way things are ... disillusionment and dispassion ... knowledge and vision of liberation. This sequence is compared to a tree with branches and foliage where its shoots, bark, softwood and heartwood all grow to fullness (A.III,20).

A causal sequence is given for Ignorance, which is caused by the Five Hindrances, which are caused by the three ways of wrong conduct, which are caused by lack of sense restraint, ... lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension ... inappropriate attention ... lack of faith ... not listening to the true teachings ... associating with unworthy people (A.V,113f).

There are also several causal sequences dealing with the evolution of social situations. The main one follows the sequence from Dependent Origination to craving, then proceeds to seeking ... acquisition ... distinction (*vinicchaya*) ... desire and passion (*chandarāga*) ... attachment (*ajjhosāna*) ... appropriation (*pariggaha*) ... avarice/stinginess (*macchhariya*) ... protectiveness (*ārakkha*) ... the taking up of stick and sword, quarrels, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying and other evil, unskilful states (D.II,59).

Another causal sequence is mentioned regarding the 'elements'. Thus from 'various elements' there arises 'various contacts', from 'various contacts' arise various feelings ... perceptions ... thoughts (*sankappa*)... desires (*chanda*) ... fever (of passions) (*pariḷāha*) ... search (*pariyesanā*) ... acquisition (*lābha*) (D.III,289).<sup>9</sup>

9 There are a number of different sequences. At S.II,143f the sequence is elements, perceptions, intentions, desires, fevers, search; at S.II,146 the sequence is elements, perceptions, intentions, contacts, feelings, desires, fevers, search, acquisition.

## The Four Nutriment

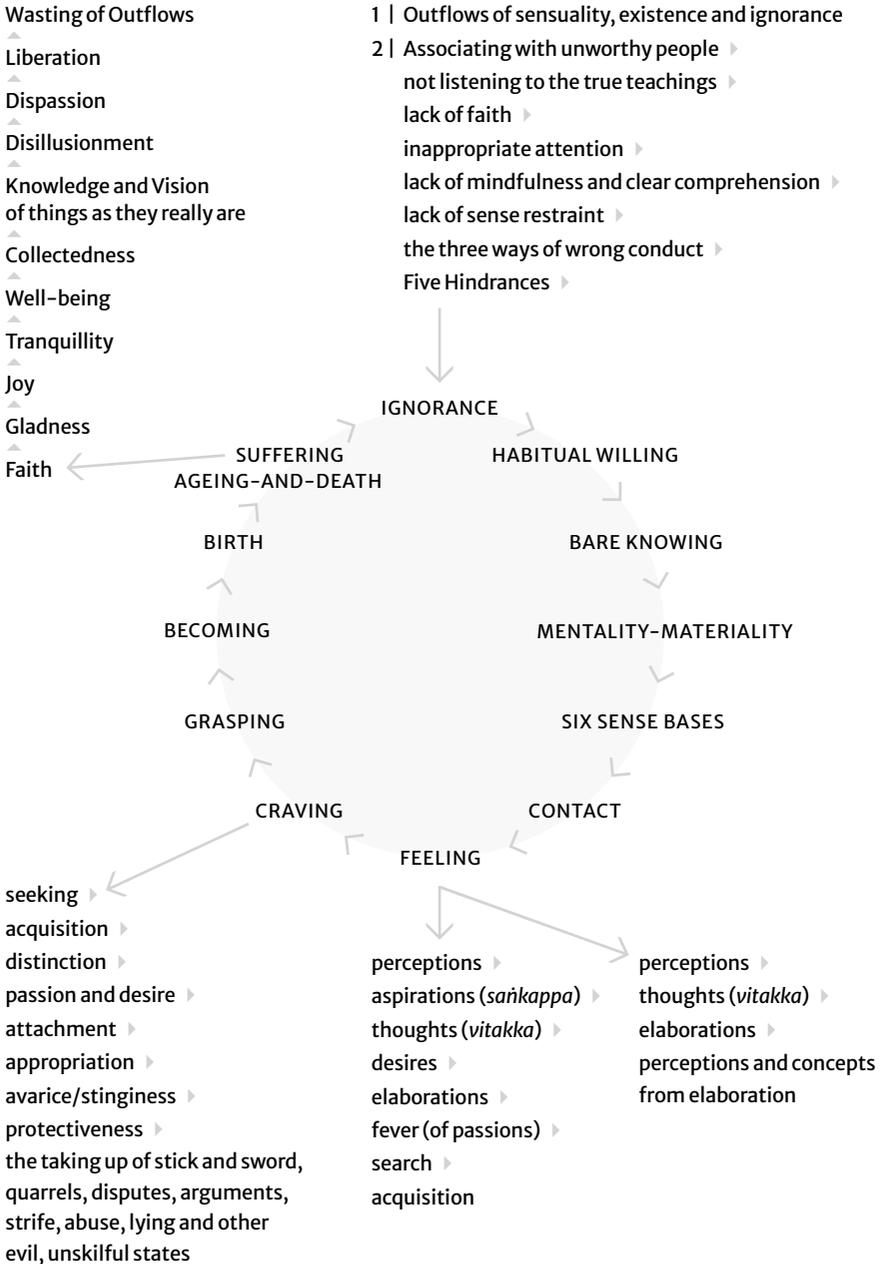
The Conditional Causality chapter of the Samyutta Nikaya (S.II,11f; 98f) includes a special category of factors called the Four Nutriment (*āhāra*). These are: material food; contact; mental volition (*mano-sañcetanā*); and Bare Knowing. They are caused by craving.

These four nutriment are especially significant for (unawakened) human existence and are central to many aspects of the teaching. Material food nourishes Embodying, Contact nourishes Feeling, mental volition (Willing or kamma) nourishes the three types of Craving and Bare Knowing nourishes mentality-materiality.

When these are used for contemplation on the path to liberation, then, when material food is fully understood (*parijānāti*), passion for the five strands of sensual pleasure is fully understood. When that is fully understood then **‘there is no fetter bound by which a noble disciple would come again to this world.’** When contact is fully understood, the three feelings are fully understood; when mental volition is fully understood, then the three kinds of craving are fully understood; when Bare Knowing is fully understood, then mentality-materiality is fully understood. When any of these are fully understood, then **‘there is nothing further that a noble disciple needs to do’** (S.II,98f).<sup>10</sup> A series of vivid similes is given at S.II,98f on how to skilfully regard these Nutriment.

<sup>10</sup> The results of fully understanding material food only reach as far as the third level of Awakening, while the results of fully understanding the other three nutriment reaches to the fourth stage of arahantship.

## Dependent Origination Sequence and Associated Causal Processes





.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind seems reasonably calm, bring up the enquiry: 'How do I acknowledge my own identity?'
- Do you identify mostly with physicality, with feelings, or with emotional/mental activity? Or maybe a combination of these?
- How do you express identification, for example, 'I sense ...' or, 'I feel ...' or, 'I think ...'?
- What is the predominant quality of identification? Is it heavy, light, compacted, or diffuse, etc.?
- Observe if there is an obvious emotion associated with this identification – happiness, comfort, security, or anxiety, uncertainty, confusion?
- See if you can sustain the awareness of this experience.
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the body sitting, then to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

## TEN

# Identification

.....

## Identification

Identification is the stage of the I-making process where the conceiving of a subjective 'I' (from Chapter 6) reaches out for an 'object' to give itself reference, affirmation, support, as well as substantiality. It is the stage where I-making is most active and complex as it seeks out ways and means of establishing and consolidating an identity.

The process of identification involves two factors; the objects of identity and the activities engendering identity. The most important of these are the activities engendering identity, as they are the root cause of unsatisfactoriness. Most specifically, these are ignorance and craving, which manifest in various forms and have various associated factors. The three main objects which 'I' identifies with are the Five Groups of Grasping; the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases; and, the Elements (S.IV,24). While the objects of identity are still present in the awakened being, they no longer harbour the activities engendering identity, and thus are liberated from grasping any form of identity.

While some degree of identification is necessary for us to establish a point of reference with which to relate to reality, most people take this too far, believing that identity is the only true purpose of life:

‘The unlearned person regards any of the Five Groups of Grasping as self in any of the four modes (see below). Such a person becomes obsessed (*pariyuṭṭhaṭṭhāyino*) with ideas of “I am the body, the body is mine, etc.”. Then, when one or more of the Five Groups of Grasping change, they suffer sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (S.III,3), or their consciousness becomes occupied with the change. Excitement (*paritassana*) and other mental states then take hold of the mind. With an overpowered mind the person is **‘frightened, vexed, full of longing and excited due to grasping’** (S.III,16f; M.III,227).

### Identity (*sakkāya*)

Identity (*sakkāya*) is defined as the Five Groups of Grasping (M.I,299; S.III,158–9; S.IV,259–60). The origin of identity, or the process of identification, is explained in three different ways:

- 1 | regarding (*samanupassati*) any of the Five Groups of Grasping as self in any of four modes: a) any of the Five Groups of Grasping as self; b) self as possessing any of the Five Groups of Grasping; c) any of the Five Groups of Grasping as in self; d) self as in any of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,46);
- 2 | regarding the senses, sense-objects, sense-knowing, sense-contact, and the feeling and craving that arise therefrom as **‘This is mine, this I am, this is myself’** (M.III,284);
- 3 | as due to craving, presented in a form similar to the Noble Truths, with ‘identity’ in place of ‘*dukkha*’, as in:

1 Although it is not explicitly stated in the Pali Canon, a similar way of regarding applies to the Five Groups of Grasping since it is frequently explicitly stated that one should not regard them in that way (see Ch.22). This series of factors includes four of the Five Groups of Grasping – the Six Internal and External Sense Bases are included under Embodying, and contact and craving are included in Willing and Habiting.

**‘What, bhikkhus, is the origin (*samudaya*) of identity? It is this craving which brings renewed existence, is connected with delight and passion (*nandi-rāga*), ever seeking fresh delight, now here, now there; namely: craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence, craving for non-existence.’ S.III,159; M.I,299.**

Identity is therefore caused by either regarding the Five Groups of Grasping or the Six Sense Bases the wrong way, which is ignorance, or through the action of craving and its associated supports. This succinct expression of the cause of identity is reinforced by the often repeated refrain that, because human beings are **‘hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving’**, they continue to experience *dukkha* and ‘wander on’ through countless ‘renewed existences’ (*punabbhava*) (S.II,178ff).

It is therefore helpful to make a thorough investigation of both the activities and the objects of identification, in order to clearly understand how identification comes about. This is a very important theme to understand and involves a fair amount of information. Thus, I have divided this theme of Identification into three chapters. This chapter will cover the objects of identification which have already been introduced in chapters 7 and 8. The following two chapters, Chapter 11 and Chapter 12, will elaborate on the two principal activities of identification, Ignorance and Craving.

## The 'Objects' of Identification

At various places in the Pali Canon, identification is expressed with regard to three different themes. These are the Five Groups of Grasping, the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases, and the Elements.

The Buddha stated that there are five aspects of body-mind which people identify with as a self. These are called the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,46) (see Chapter 7 for details). It is these Five Groups which anyone grasps (S.III,94), anyone who remembers their past abidings recollects (S.III,86), and any unawakened person produces or brings into existence (*abhinibbatteti*) (S.III,152).

Elsewhere (S.IV,15) in the Pali Canon, the Buddha defines 'the All' (*sabbe*), the whole, entirety of reality, as the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases, that is, the six sense 'organs' and their six 'objects'. These twelve sense bases are contained within the Five Groups of Grasping in that the physical sense organs and their objects are aspects of body, and the mind and mind objects are one of the mental factors. One discourse (SN.35:93 = S.IV,67f) connects the Five Groups to the Sense Bases, because it is through contact of the sense organ and sense object that Bare Knowing (*viññāṇa*) comes to be; and from that contact arises the other three mental Groups: Feeling, Recognizing and Willing and Habiting (*vedanā, saññā* and *saṅkhārā*).

The third 'object' of identification is the Elements. These are defined as either the four elemental qualities of body (*rūpa*), or the Eighteen Elements, which are the Six Internal and Six External Sense Spheres, together with the six associated types of Bare Knowing (S.II,140). Thus the Elements are included in either the Sense Bases or the Five Groups of Grasping, and therefore do not need to be explained separately. In summary, the main objects of identification are either the Five Groups of Grasping or the Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases.

## Identifying with the Five Groups of Grasping

There are various ways in which identification with the Five Groups of Grasping happens. Sometimes it is as simple as ‘regarding things as “This is mine, this I am, this is my self.”’<sup>2</sup> However, a most comprehensive form of identification is: **‘An uneducated person, who disregards the noble ones, and is ignorant and untrained in their noble teaching, who disregards righteous persons and is ignorant and untrained in their righteous teaching’** regards, sees or perceives (*samanupassati*) any of the Five Groups of Grasping in one of four modes:

- a. any of the Five Groups of Grasping as a permanent self,
- b. the self as possessing any of the Five Groups of Grasping,
- c. any of the Five Groups of Grasping as in self, or
- d. a permanent self as in any of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,1ff).

The process of self-making begins very early, at the pre-conceptual stage of life, with the Underlying Dispositions. As such, the process usually lies hidden beneath our unconscious habit patterns and our fundamental assumptions. However, it can be beneficial to engage the conceptual mind to initiate an inquiry into the different types of identification processes described by the Buddha.

<sup>2</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi’s note at CBD,1050, n.34 mentions the three ‘grips’ (*gāha*): ‘this is mine’ is the grip of craving; ‘this I am’ is the grip of conceit; ‘this is my self’ is the grip of views.

## Contemplating the Four Modes of Identification

It can be a useful exercise to contemplate these four modes of identification in order to better understand just how we imagine our permanent self to be, most of the time quite unconsciously. Below I will give my own interpretation.

### a. Perceiving Any of the Five Groups of Grasping as a Permanent Self:

In this mode, your self is one of the Five Groups of Grasping, 'just as the flame of an oil lamp and its colour are indistinguishable'<sup>3</sup>.

This is the most basic mode of identification, the most primal mode in the development of a sense of self. Since the Five Groups of Grasping are the fundamental way in which we function in the world, it is easy to identify with them as our everyday self, and maybe even take one or more of them as our essential self. For example, many people identify with feelings as their essential self and then organize their entire life around satisfying feelings. Others identify with Bare Knowing or consciousness, since they observe that whenever there is a sense of self, there is (some form of) knowing.

### b. The Self as Possessing Any of the Five Groups of Grasping:

In this mode, your self possesses one of the Five Groups of Grasping as its primary mode of being, 'in the way a tree possesses a shadow'.

<sup>3</sup> The quotations in this section are from Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the Commentary to the Saṃyutta Nikāya, CDB, p. 1044, n.5.

A common form of identification in this mode is that of an ‘abstract or greater self’ – we are not one of the Five Groups of Grasping, but we are what possesses the Five Groups of Grasping, or has them as its means of expression or its shadow. For example, you know that you are not the body, since it keeps ageing, but you possess a body in order to interact with the world with your ‘real’ self as something greater. This mode is most evident when people talk about their ‘higher self’, ‘big self’, ‘ultimate self’, etc.

**c. Any of the Five Groups of Grasping as in Self:**

In this mode, any one of the Five Groups of Grasping are within the self, ‘as the scent is in a flower’.

This mode of identification, while similar to the second mode, is more subtle. This is expressed by belief in an amorphous cosmic self in which the Five Groups of Grasping operate as an adjunct. For example, your fragile body is only a coarse expression of a more ethereal presence.

**d. Self as in Any of the Five Groups of Grasping:**

In the fourth mode, your self is contained within any of the Five Groups of Grasping, ‘as a jewel is in a casket’.

In this mode, identification is with a hidden self, buried in one of the Five Groups of Grasping. Presumably, the identification is of an exceptional nature, for example, ecstatic feelings. This mode of identification is common to many religions, where a subtle soul or intrinsic essence dwells deep within a person and continues on after death.

Any of these conceptions, assumptions or presumptions of self are a mental activity (*saṅkhārā*: Willing and Habiting) (S.III,96), which is also one of the Five Groups of Grasping. These Five Groups of Grasping are thus all-encompassing and self-supporting. Just as an artist produces a detailed image of a person, so to, if an uninstructed person produces anything, it is only the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,152).<sup>4</sup>

## The Six Internal Sense Bases and the Six External Sense Bases

Unlike the Five Groups of Grasping, the process of identification with the Six Internal and the Six External Sense Bases is not in terms of regarding them as self in any of the four modes (referred to as ‘identity view’ at M.I,300), but by way of the four-fold ‘conceiving’, or self-referencing, resulting in the Sense Bases being conceived as ‘mine’<sup>5</sup> (S.IV,22f).

However, as with the Five Groups of Grasping, there are similar activities of identification: craving (S.IV,36f), grasping (S.IV,32f), delight (S.IV,13f; 35f), desire and passion (S.IV, 89), gratification (S.IV,7f), conceiving (S.IV,21ff; 64ff), *Māra* (S.IV,38f; 91).

In fact, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, some of the discourses in the chapter on the Sense Bases (Chapter 35) parallel those in the chapter on the

4 It is interesting that there is no mention in the Pali Canon of a permanent self which identifies with a combination of, or all of, the Five Groups. For example, some people may identify themselves with the mind in general, that is, all four mental factors of the Five Groups. Others could identify with the body and the mind since they recognize that they need both to function in life.

Two of the Five Groups are given special mention in the Pali Canon: the Four Elements, (as a group in themselves (S.II,169ff) or as the main constituents of *rūpa* (S.III,59)), and Feelings. In the Discourse on Establishing of Mindfulness (MN 10; DN 22), contemplation of the Four Elements is one of the exercises, while Feelings are one of the four main themes for developing mindfulness. Discourses on Feelings comprise one chapter in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN.36), while discourses on the Four Elements are included in their own sub-chapter (SN.14:30–39).

5 That is, conceiving in terms of the Sense Bases, conceiving in the Sense Bases, conceiving from the Sense Bases, conceiving the Sense Bases to be ‘mine’. This pattern also includes bare knowing, contact and feeling for each of the Sense Bases.

Five Groups of Grasping (Chapter 22)<sup>6</sup>. The emphasis, in regard to the Sense Bases, is their role in the perceptual process, which is the basis for the functioning of the Five Groups of Grasping. As the reader may recall from previous chapters, the Six Internal Sense Bases are called ‘the world’ in the Buddha’s Teaching, since it is through them that we are able to perceive and ‘conceive’ of ‘a world’ (S.IV,95). That is, the ‘world’ to the Buddha is what human beings experience. This ‘world’ exists through the internal and external sense bases, the associated Bare Knowing, and the things to be cognized by Bare Knowing (the other three mental Groups) (S.IV,39f), and is equated with a living being (*satta*), *dukkha* and *Māra* (S.IV,38).

In the presentation of the Sense Bases, the corresponding sense-knowing, sense-contact and feelings arising from sense contact are also often mentioned.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, the Six Internal Sense Bases are called the six bases for contact (*cha phassāyatanā* S.IV,70). This, of course, leads to the complications that can arise from the Sense Bases – the mental disturbances (S.IV,78), the ‘evil, unwholesome states’ (S.IV,76) and defilements of passion, aversion and delusion (S.IV,139). These are triggered by sense contact, and are the source of self-reinforcing activities.

**‘Bhikkhus, these six bases for contact, if untamed, unguarded, unprotected, unrestrained, are bringers of *dukkha*.’ S.IV,70.**

6 For details see the Template Parallels, re: 22 and 35, pp. 1986–88 in CDB.

7 The expansion from Bare Knowing to Contact and to Feeling is similar to the presentation of the perceptual process, unlike that of Dependent Origination, where mentality-materiality and the Six Sense Bases occur between Bare Knowing and Contact.

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meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind seems reasonably calm, observe the degree of clarity of mind.
- Is the mind very clear, moderately clear, dull, or what?
- Do you know what the cause is of this condition? Exhaustion? Physical discomfort? Distractedness? Something else?
- Is it possible to change this mental condition?
- Bring attention back to the breathing.
- When suitable, see if you can recall basic meditation instructions.
- Can you recollect them clearly or partially? Do you struggle with recollecting them or are they immediately recollected.
- Bring your attention back to the body sitting, then to the breathing.
- When suitable, open your eyes and resume your activity.

## TEN

# Ignorance

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## The Activities of Identification: Ignorance and Craving

The most important factors in the process of identification are the activities of identifying, primarily Ignorance and Craving, which manifest in diverse and multifaceted ways. They are, of course, interrelated. Ignorance is the root of Craving and, when Craving is functioning, Ignorance is compounded. We could say that Ignorance represents the rational or cognitive supports for identification and Craving represents the emotional aspects. While Ignorance can be very enervating and darkening, Craving can be very energizing and brightening.

### Ignorance

You may recall from the chapter on Conditional Causality that Ignorance (*avijjā*) is the primal condition for the causal sequence resulting in Existence, Birth and culminating in ‘this whole mass of suffering’. Ignorance is said to be the nutriment of craving for existence (A.V,116).

Ignorance is specifically defined as not knowing the Four Noble Truths of: *dukkha*; origin; cessation; and the path of practice to realize cessation (S.II,4), which is all we really need to know for liberation (S.V,438). Elsewhere in the Pali Canon, Ignorance is defined as:

- 1 | not understanding (*pajānāti*) the Five Groups of Grasping, their origin, their cessation, and the path to realise their cessation (S.III,162);
- 2 | not understanding as it really is the Five Groups of Grasping as subject to arising and vanishing (S.III,171);
- 3 | not understanding as it really is the gratification, disadvantage and escape from the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,173);
- 4 | not understanding as it really is the origin and passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape from the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,174).

The well-being and ease (*sukha somanassa*) that arise in dependence on the Five Groups of Grasping is the gratification (*assāda*) in them; that the Five Groups of Grasping are impermanent, *dukkha* and subject to change is the disadvantage (*ādīnava*) in them; and the removal and giving up of desire and passion (*chandarāga*) for the Five Groups of Grasping is the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them (S.III,102f).

Ignorance is the forerunner of entering upon unwholesome states (S.V,1f; A.V,214), for **'affected by ignorance, wrong view originates'**. Wrong view then conditions the wrong factors of the Eightfold Path, that is Wrong View, Wrong Aspiration, etc. Ignorance is the source of the Outflows (*āsava*), and 'affected by ignorance one produces a "self existence" (*attabhāva*)'<sup>1</sup> (A.III,414).

1 A 'self existence' is also produced by 'whatever sense pleasures drive one', and whatever feelings one experiences (A.III,411f).

There is no first point of ignorance, it is simply part-and-parcel of being born with Underlying Dispositions, ignorance being one of them. In another passage of the Pali Canon (M.I,54f), ignorance is mentioned as caused by the three Outflows of sensuality, existence and ignorance, the Outflows being contained within the Underlying Dispositions.<sup>2</sup> In another passage (A.V,116), ignorance is mentioned as nourished by the Five Hindrances. The Five Hindrances are nourished by the causal sequence of unawakened living, which is: the three ways of wrong conduct<sup>3</sup>; lack of sense restraint; lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension; inappropriate attention; lack of faith; not listening to the true teachings; and associating with unworthy people (A.V,113f).

One of the nourishments of ignorance given particular emphasis is inappropriate attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*). Bhikkhu Analayo (2012: pp 193–205) has made a thorough study of the term ‘*yoniso manasikāra*’ as it is used in the Pali Canon. He has distinguished three aspects of the qualifying term ‘*yoniso*’: thorough, appropriate and wise. Thus it has a range of nuances in different contexts. Although any of the three nuances may apply, I have chosen to use ‘appropriate’ to translate ‘*yoniso*’, and ‘inappropriate’ to translate ‘*ayoniso*’.

2 The Outflow of ignorance (*avijjāsava*) is the cause of ignorance; ignorance is the cause of the Outflow of ignorance (*avijjāsava*) – therefore, without wisdom, ignorance is self-perpetuating!

3 Wrong conduct through body, speech and mind. In detail these are the Tenfold Ways of Unwholesome Action (*akusala kamma patha*): bodily – killing, stealing, inappropriate sexual behavior; speech – lying, slander, harsh, frivolous; mind – covetousness, ill-will, wrong view. The nutriment for individual hindrances are given at S.V,64f; 103. At S.V,84 special mention is giving to wrong attention.

Attention (*manasikāra*) is a mental function which is present in any act of knowing, since all phenomena come into being from attention (A.IV,339; V,107), originate from attention (S.V,184). The Commentaries to the Pali Canon describe inappropriate attention as similar to the ‘distortions’ (*vipallāsa*), that is, seeing the impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) as pleasant, non-self (*anattā*) as self and the unattractive (*asubha*) as attractive.<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, the usual way in which unawakened beings view reality.

Inappropriate attention is the nutriment for the Five Hindrances (S.V,102f). For example, sensual desire is nourished through frequently giving inappropriate attention to the attractive aspect of an object (*subha nimitta*: literally, the ‘image of the attractive’); ill-will is nourished through frequently giving inappropriate attention to the repulsive aspect (*paṭigha nimitta*); lethargy and drowsiness is nourished through frequently giving inappropriate attention to ‘discontent (*arati*), weariness (*tandī*), laziness (*vijambhitā*), drowsiness after meals (*bhattasammada*) and sluggishness of mind (*cetaso ca līnattam*)’; restlessness and remorse is nourished through frequently giving inappropriate attention to unsettledness of mind; and doubt is nourished through frequently giving inappropriate attention to whatever is the basis of doubt.

**‘Bhikkhus, when one gives attention inappropriately, unarisen Outflows arise and arisen Outflows increase.’ M.I,7.**

<sup>4</sup> CDB, p. 1900, note 54; NDB, p. 1593, note 23.

As well as giving inappropriate attention to things which give rise to the three Outflows of sensuality, existence and ignorance, there are other themes that are inappropriate to give attention to, including speculations about oneself in the present, past or future which give rise to self views (M.I,8).

The 'yoke of ignorance' (*avijjā-yoga*) is due to **'not understanding as it really is (*yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti*) the origin, passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape regarding the six bases for contact'** (A.II,11).

As mentioned above, the most common form of Ignorance and one of the key factors in identification is the wrong way of **'regarding, seeing or perceiving'** (*samanupassati*). In particular, this is regarding any of the Five Groups of Grasping as a permanent self in any of the four modes (S.III,16) or any of the Five Groups of Grasping as 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self' (S.III,18).

The kind of Ignorance the Buddha is most concerned with is **'not fully understanding as it really is' (*yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti*)** (S.III,81) or **'not knowing and seeing as it really is' (*ajānaṃ apassaṃ yathābhūtaṃ*)** (M.III,287).

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## personal story

One of my earliest encounters with ignorance was in the form of confusion, or the hindrance of doubt. In the year prior to my trip to Thailand, I was at university, and one of the elective courses I chose was Comparative Religion. I had previously visited many countries that had different religious traditions, but having only seen the cultural trappings of these religions, I thought it would be useful to study the tenets of these religions. One religion I studied was Buddhism, through which I was introduced to the basic concepts of The Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path. When I then travelled to the Buddhist country of Thailand, I thought I knew quite a bit about Buddhism. However, when I began meditating I soon realized that I really didn't know much at all about the Buddha's teaching – what really is '*Dukkha*'? What really is Right Effort?

The result was that I became very confused about Buddhism, about meditation and especially about myself. After weeks of struggle however, it finally dawned on me that the reason I was confused was because I was measuring my experience through fixed concepts! In this journey, I learnt that *Dukkha* is not merely a six-letter word, but a painfully poignant, personal and multifarious experience (if one dares to look at it). I also learnt that Right Effort is not just one thing, but manifests in various intensities and variations. Basically, I saw that the reason I was confused was because I thought I had to know my experience according to some fixed theoretical concepts, whereas my experiential knowing rarely fit these nice, neat categories, and therefore was not 'correct'.

A major insight into the nature of this confusion, was that confusion, a form of ignorance, was not 'wrong' or 'bad', but merely another state of mind to know. I could then more readily accept the experience of not knowing, which in turn, became the motivation for trying to know, which included knowing confusion.

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exercise

### Experiencing Ignorance

It can be a useful exercise to try to experientially investigate Ignorance, or not knowing, in order to gain some first hand understanding of it, rather than merely conceptual knowledge.

Ignorance is, of course, an extremely deep and diverse condition and can therefore appear quite intimidating, perhaps to the point of giving rise to feelings of helplessness or fear. However, the very act of acknowledging ignorance is the seed of wisdom, since we are becoming wise about ignorance, rather than being ignorant of ignorance.

In order to function in life, we need to know, to some degree. However, most of the time, this knowing is just arrogant pretension – do we really know what is going to happen the next moment? Are we really certain that we fully understand what is going on? At most we can say that our knowing is limited and temporary. And then we can observe just how limited and situational that knowing is, rather than ignorantly presuming we know it all.

The most common characteristic of ignorance is simply ‘not knowing’. However, this can be so blinding that we do not even know that we do not know – we are ignorant of the full extent of our ignorance. An image which encapsulates this for me is staring into a fully darkened room unable to make out any of the forms inside.

A second, and more insidious, aspect of ignorance is incomplete knowing, that is, not knowing the full story or not fully knowing. This aspect of Ignorance is more dangerous and deluding because we only partially know, but believe we have the complete picture. This gives us a pretence of knowing, although we still do not ‘see things as they really are’ or ‘fully understand’. An image for me is staring into a partially darkened room where we can see a few indistinct forms, then presuming we know what they are, when, in fact, we really don’t know what they are.

Incomplete knowing, and its legions of distortions, is unlimited, and the mind has developed many clever ways to continue its distortions.<sup>5</sup> In a Buddhist context, distortions (*vipallāsa*) are inherent in unawakened beings who perceive, think and hold views in terms of permanence, happiness, self and attractiveness (A.II,52). (In contrast, the way of Dhamma is perceiving impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, impersonality and unattractiveness.) In a more immediate sense, ignorance is conditioned by the Five Hindrances and their conditions (see above), which conduce to the corruption of clearly knowing.

5 For a well-written overview see Gilovich and Ross 2016. For more dramatic detail see Fine, 2007.

.....  
contemplations

A contemplation which may help to give an impression of the blindness of ignorance is to contemplate the theme of ‘Don’t know’.

- *When the mind is somewhat calm, bring up the theme of ‘Don’t know’ or ‘I don’t know’, and observe what response this generates – Relief? Fear? Confusion?*

If it seems appropriate, during a period of meditation it can be helpful to occasionally include a contemplation to assist in obtaining more understanding of the effects of the various forms of ignorance.

A few suggestions are:

- *Can you observe what happens to a calm, clear understanding when the mind is under the influence of any of the Five Hindrances – sensual desire, ill-will, sleepiness and lethargy, restlessness and remorse, or doubt?*
- *Can you observe what happens to a calm, clear understanding when the mind is engaged in:*
  - a. the three ways of wrong conduct;*
  - b. lack of sense restraint;*
  - c. lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension;*
  - d. inappropriate attention?*
- *Can you observe what happens to a calm, clear understanding when the mind is lacking faith or trust; has not heard any edifying teachings; or is influenced by uninspiring people?*
- *Can you observe any changes in your clarity of mind, your mood or your outlook on life through any of the above influences?*

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meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind seems reasonably calm, observe the principal feeling at this time.
- Is it mainly pleasant, unpleasant or neutral?
- As you observe the feeling, can you also observe some response to that feeling?
- Is there liking or disliking, attraction or rejection, or nothing observable?
- Where does that liking or disliking express itself; in the body or is it more mental/emotional?
- Can you clearly observe this response? Is it strong or weak?
- Bring your attention back to the body sitting, then to the breathing.
- When suitable, open your eyes and resume your activity.

## TWELVE

## Craving

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**Craving (*taṇhā*)**

Craving is the usual translation of *taṇhā* (literally ‘thirst’). This is an extreme form of desire bordering on a drive or instinct, as implied by its literal translation. Craving is considered the active origin of identity (S.III,159; M.I,299), which is the taking up of an existence (*bhava*). It is also the cause of *dukkha*, therefore, having an identity is equivalent to *dukkha*.

**The All-Encompassing Nature of Craving**

Craving is fundamental to and encompasses all aspects of human experience, and occurs in many different contexts in the scriptures. As well as being the cause of identity, craving’s most prominent position is as the cause of *dukkha* and rebirth:

**‘What, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of *Dukkha*?**

**It is craving which gives rise to renewed existences, connected with delight and passion, finding delight here and there, that is, craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence and craving for non-existence.’** D.II,308f.

Craving is also the origin of the ‘supports’ (for existence) [*upadhi*] (S.II,108), produces a person (*purisa*), (S.I,37f) and is the ‘seamstress’ which **‘sews one to production of existence’** (A.III,400f). It is so fundamental to human life that one can regard craving as self (M.III,283). Craving is ‘taking up the burden’ of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,26), and is said to be bondage (S.I,8), with associated images of a frightened, trapped hare (Dhp. 342) or a fish in a trap (Ud. 7.4).

A number of similes express the insidious, persistent and powerful influence of craving. One of the four ‘expositions of Dhamma’ which the Buddha pointed out is:

**‘[Life in] the world is deficient, dissatisfied, a slave to craving.’** (M.II,68).



**‘Craving has been called a dart by the ascetic (Buddha). The poisonous blight of ignorance is inflicted by desire, passion and ill-will.’** M.II,256ff.

In contrast, the Buddha is called **‘the destroyer of the dart of craving.’** (S.I,192).



**‘... there is no river like craving.’** Dh. 251 (cf. A.II,6).

This simile is elaborated at It. 4.10 describing a man carried along a pleasant stream (craving) who is warned by a ‘keen-sighted man’ on the bank (the Buddha) about the dangers lurking downstream where he will **‘incur death, or suffering close to death’**.



**‘For the person of negligent living, craving grows like a creeper.’** Dhṛp. 334.



**‘Just as a cut down tree, with roots undamaged and firm, continues to grow, even so, if underlying craving is not rooted out, *dukkha* arises again and again.’** Dhṛp. 338.



When the Buddha refutes the view of Sati, the fisherman’s son, that it is the same consciousness that is reborn, he concludes by saying that Sati is **‘caught in the great net of craving, the tangle of craving’** (M.I,271). From the idea ‘I am’ there arises the 108 ‘haunts’ of craving **‘the ensnarer, flowing, diffused and adhering’** by which the world has become **‘smothered and enveloped’** (A.II,212f). In the Mahānidāna Discourse (D.II,58ff), craving is not only the cause of individual suffering, but also gives rise to a sequence of nine causal factors leading to social disruption.<sup>1</sup>

## Forms of Craving

*Taṇhā* has three forms: craving for sense pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*); craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*); and craving for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*). These three forms represent the fundamental human drives for stimulation through the senses, for continuity of (any type of) existence, and for the cessation of (any type of) existence.

<sup>1</sup> Also at A.IV,400; cf. GDC p.17f.

## Craving for Sense Pleasures

Sense pleasure (*kāma*) is mentioned in many different contexts in the Buddha's teaching.<sup>2</sup> The five physical sense objects are called the five 'strands of sensuality' (*kāma-guṇā*), and the well-being and ease (*sukha somanassa*) that arises dependent upon these five strands is called the 'pleasure of sensuality' (*kāma-sukha*) (S.IV,225). While sense pleasure refers to any form of pleasure, pleasure from sexual intercourse is always implied. For example, the third of the Five Precepts is translated as refraining from sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācāra*<sup>3</sup>), which is usually explained as refraining from inappropriate sexual intercourse (e.g. at M.I,286; III,46).

It is also possible to experience sensual pleasure through the mind sense. At several places in the Pali Canon (e.g., M.I,181;274;347), covetousness (*abhijjhā*) is used in place of sensual desire in reference to the Five Hindrances. Covetousness, synonymous with greed (*lobha*), implies a broadening of the term to include mental phenomena. This encompasses greed for ideas, concepts, and self-images (fame, wealth, health, etc.), which gives rise to views and opinions about self ('ego pleasure'), which are a serious hindrance for some people (cf. S.IV,21; 64f).

The key element of sensual pleasure is the pleasant feeling, the 'well-being and ease' (*sukha somanassa*), it induces. Pleasant feeling allows a relaxing and even the melting away of self-reference with its associated stress and anxiety – people 'lose themselves' in pleasant feelings. In contrast to this, unpleasant feeling puts pressure on the self to find relief from the perceived threat to its own existence

2 It is one of the four objects of grasping (*upādāna*), the three 'cravings' (*taṇhā*), the four 'floods' (*ogha*), the four 'outflows' (*āsava*), the four 'bonds' (*yoga*), and the three 'longings' (*esaṇā*). It is one of the three wrong thoughts (*micchā vitakka*), and as a practice it is one of the extremes to be avoided in following the Middle Way.

3 *kāmesu micchācāra* literally means 'wrong (*micchā*) behaviour (*cāra*) regarding sensuality' which technically applies to all sense pleasures.

– just listen how loudly the self screams when it is in pain. Craving is conditioned by Feeling. A general tendency for many of us is that when we experience a painful feeling we seek delight in sensuality as our only escape. Seeking delight in sensuality is based on the Underlying Disposition to passion for pleasant feeling (S.IV,208).

**‘The beautiful things of the world are not sensual pleasure, A person’s sensual pleasure is passionate intention; Beautiful things remain just so in the world, Here the wise remove desire for them.’** A.III,411.

Passionate intention is craving. Craving for sensual pleasure through any of the senses is the one most often mentioned because it is the most obvious disturbance of the mind and creates a ‘bond’ to the sensory world. However, at a more subtle level, there is a craving for any form of sense stimulation, since, when there is reference to a sense object, there is reference to a subject. This is in effect craving for existence.

At its most subtle, craving for sense pleasure is a means to reassert subjectivity through relationship to objectivity – when we have a strong object to relate to, we have a strong sense of a self experiencing it. An extreme example of this is someone who self-mutilates in order to feel that they are alive.

‘Because the Five Groups of Grasping are **‘pleasurable (*sukha*), affected with pleasure, overwhelmed with pleasure’**, beings become impassioned (*sārajjati*) with them, captivated by them, and are therefore defiled (*saṃkilissanti*). This is a cause and condition for the defilement of beings; thus are beings defiled by cause and condition.’ S.III,69f.

## Craving for Existence

While craving for sense pleasures is the most obvious form of craving, the most basic form of craving is actually craving for existence. The other two forms can be subsumed into it: craving for sense pleasures is craving for a particular type of existence, and craving for non-existence (see below) is craving for the existence of non-existence. Craving for existence is thus presented in many contexts in the Buddha's teaching: passion for existence (*bhava-rāga*) is one of the Underlying Dispositions, two of its forms – passion for fine-material existence (*rūparāga*), and passion for immaterial existence (*arūparāga*) – are included in the Ten Fetters (*saṃyojana*), and existence is one of the 'Outflows' (*āsava*).

Since Craving is considered the primary origin of identity (S.III,159; M.I,299), which is the taking up of an existence (*bhava*), it is included in the 'supports for existence' (*bhavanetti*, lit. 'what leads to existence'), these are: **'desire, passion, delight, craving, taking up and grasping (*upay-upādānā*), resolutions, adherences and underlying dispositions (*adhiṭṭhān-ābhinives-ānusayā*)'** (S.III,190f). This description is comprehensive because it includes emotional aspects (the first six factors), intellectual aspects (the next two factors), and the underlying dispositions, which is the closest the Buddha comes to what we would call instincts.

Craving for existence is a fundamental human drive, our drive to continue to exist, or drive to survive. In the wider sense, craving for existence is the craving for the continuity of any (usually positive) state of being or experience. It is specifically mentioned that 'craving for existence' has no 'first point' and has ignorance as its nutriment (A.V,116).

Craving for existence and ignorance are the two specific factors to be abandoned by direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) (S.V,52f). In the Pali Canon, craving for existence is mentioned in the context of the eternalist view because some celestials and humans **‘find pleasure in existence, are devoted to existence, delight in existence’**. (It. 2.22)

### Craving for Non-Existence

Craving for non-existence is associated with the annihilationist view, because some celestials and humans are **‘troubled by, depressed and disgusted by existence, they rejoice at (the idea of) non-existence.’** (It. 2.22) This is the attitude of wanting to get rid of or reject any form of existence, state of being or experience, in the present and the future. However, the irony is that this reinforces a someone trying to non-exist!

### Objects of Craving

In addition to these three forms of craving, the specific types of craving most often mentioned are the six classes (or objects) of craving: for sights, sounds, odours, flavours, tangibles, and mental-phenomena (S.II,3; 248; III,227; 230f; 234). In essence, the three kinds of craving are enacted through these six objects of the senses. It is these ‘objects’ which provide the support for grasping, leading to birth, etc.. Therefore, at a root level, craving for existence is craving for the existence of sense objects and craving for non-existence is craving for the annihilation of sense objects.

## Sources of Craving

While craving is mentioned as one of the fundamental causes of identification together with Ignorance, it is also supported by a number of other factors. First and foremost is feeling. In the Conditional Causality formula, feeling is the pre-condition for craving.

**‘Therefore, Ananda, just this is the reason (*hetu*), the cause (*nidāna*), the origin (*samudaya*), the condition (*paccaya*) for craving, that is, feeling.’**

D.II.58.



All sentient beings experience feeling to the extent that we can say that the fundamental motivating influence of life is to sustain pleasant feeling and avoid unpleasant feeling.

**‘And where does this craving arise and establish itself? Wherever in the world there is an endearing (*piya*) or agreeable (*sāta*) object, there this craving arises and establishes itself.**

And what in the world is endearing and agreeable? The eye in the world is endearing and agreeable, there this craving arises and establishes itself. The ear ... the nose ... the tongue ... the body ... the mind in the world is endearing and agreeable, there this craving arises and establishes itself. Sights in the world ... sounds ... smells ... tastes ... tangibles ... mental-phenomena in the world are endearing and agreeable, there this craving arises and establishes itself.

Eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... feeling born of eye-contact ... the perception of sights ... volition in regard to sights ... the craving for sights ... thinking (*vitakka*) of sights ... reflection (*vicāra*) on sights ... sounds ... smells ... tastes ... tangibles ... mental-phenomena in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, there this craving arises and establishes itself.' D.II,308f.



'... contemplating gratification in things that can be grasped, craving increases ... with craving as condition, grasping comes to be; with grasping as condition, existence comes to be...' S.II,84;87;92f.



'Bhikkhus, when one does not know and see as it really is the ... six internal sense spheres, six external sense spheres, sense-knowing, sense-contact, feeling ... then one is impassioned (*sārajjati*) by them. When one abides impassioned with, enamoured, bound, infatuated, observing gratification, then the Five Groups of Grasping go to accumulation in the future; and one's craving ... increases. One's bodily and mental distress, torments and fevers increase, and one experiences bodily and mental suffering' M.III,287.



## Craving as Kamma

It may be worth noting at this point that, from the Conditional Causality formula, the creation of Kamma begins with craving. Feeling is one of the primal mental functions arising with Bare Knowing. It is our reaction to Feeling through craving that constitutes Kamma. Thus, we can say that all Kamma is based upon craving and, since craving is the cause of Identity, our Kamma is fundamentally directed towards I-making.

## Supports of Craving

One of the most influential of the associated supports of craving is Grasping (*upādāna*), as in ‘the Five Groups of Grasping’. You may recall from Chapter 9 on Conditional Causality that craving conditions Grasping. While craving is the active factor in identification, Grasping is the follow-through – craving is the reaching out towards something and Grasping is the taking hold of it. When this taking hold occurs, identity comes into existence (*bhava*). There are four kinds of Grasping: sensual pleasures (*kāma*); views (*diṭṭhi*); rules and observances (*śilabbata*); and doctrine of self (*attavāda*) (M.I,51;I,66; S.II,3).

The quotation on the cause of *dukkha* mentions that craving is ‘connected to delight (*nandi*) and passion (*rāga*)’ (D.II,308). *Nandi* is defined in PED as ‘joy, enjoyment, pleasure, delight in’, and is often translated as ‘delight’, meaning ‘a cause or source of great pleasure’<sup>4</sup>. The term is rather unusual in that, while it recurs often in the scriptures, sometimes prominently, it is not mentioned in any of the formal categories of the Buddhist teachings. In some contexts in the scriptures it is associated with ‘craving’, as in the definition of craving, or as the cause of *dukkha*: ‘... delight is the root of *dukkha* ...’ (M.I,6).

4 Oxford Dictionary of English.

At M.I,270 it is used in place of craving. In other contexts it relates to grasping: **'delight in [any of the] Five Groups of Grasping is grasping'** (S.III,14); **'... delight in feelings is grasping ...'** (M.I.266).

*Rāga* is a particularly strong form of desire and is sometimes used in place of greed (*loba*) as one of the three primary defilements (A.I,216). When applied to sensual pleasures, it is best translated as lust. It features prominently in a number of the 'negative' categories.

Craving is also grouped with other similar or associated factors such as **'passion, desire (*chanda*), affection (*sneha*), thirst (*pipāsā*), and fever (*pariāha*)'** (M.I,101f) or **'passion, delight, affection, infatuation (*mucchā*), thirst, fever, attachment (*ajjhosāna*)'** (A.II,10). Since craving is considered the primary origin of identity (S.III,159; M.I,299), which is the taking up of an existence (*bhava*), it is included in a list of factors called the 'supports for existence' (*bhavanetti*): **'desire, passion, delight, craving, taking up and grasping (*upay-upādānā*)<sup>5</sup>, resolutions (*adhittāna*), adherences (*abhinivesa*)<sup>6</sup> and underlying dispositions'** regarding the Five Groups of

5 These factors are explained in detail below except for '*upaya*', which means 'approach, taking up, attachment', so is closely associated with Grasping. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *upaya* as 'engaged' (CDB. p.890 = S.III,53).

'Bhikkhus, one who is attached (*upaya*) is unliberated (*avimutta*), one who is unattached is liberated. Attached to Embodying, bhikkhus, Bare Knowing, while abiding, may abide attached to Embodying, based (*ārammaṇa*) upon Embodying, supported by Embodying, with a sprinkling of delight may come to growth, increase and abundance. Attached to Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting, bhikkhus, Bare Knowing, while abiding, may abide attached to Willing and Habiting, based upon Willing and Habiting, supported by Willing and Habiting, with a sprinkling of delight may come to growth, increase and abundance.' S.III,53.

6 *Adhittāna* means 'resolutions' but can also mean 'decision, determination', which implies having a certain direction of mind. Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB. p.985) translates *adhittāna* as 'mental standpoints'.

This would indicate holding a particular resolve regarding identity, for example, how I am, how I should be, how I shouldn't be. Of course, this 'identity resolve' simply serves to reinforce identity along certain lines. A resolve common to religious persons, but criticised by the Buddha (i.e, M.I,102), is to be reborn in some particular place, similar to making 'New Years resolutions' with the hope of being 'born into' that resolved state. In its positive sense *adhittāna* is one of ten Pāramis.

Adherences, (*abhinivesa*, lit. 'settling in'), is mentioned alongside Grasping in a number of discourses (S.III,181ff). Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB. p.1092, n.231) offers the helpful interpretation that it 'suggests the imposition of a cognitive interpretation on the aggregates [Five Groups]'. This is a further extension of the volitional action of grasping.

Grasping (S.III,191).

Desire (*chanda*), in general, is an ethically neutral term meaning 'intention, resolve, desire, or wish'. However, it is coloured by the object it is focussed upon. When its focus is on an unskilful object it has the meaning of desire, as in the phrase *kāma-chanda*, (desire for sensual pleasure). The object can also be skilful as in the Four Right Strivings where a person is instructed to **'generate resolve (*chanda*) for the non-arising of unarisen bad, unskilful states'** (A.II,15). In this context it is one of the 'bases of spiritual power' (*iddhipāda*, S.V,254ff).

**'... when a bhikkhu is not free from passion, desire, affection (*pema*), thirst, fever and craving for sense pleasures ... for the body ... for form (*rūpa*), and thus his mind does not incline to exertion (*ātappa*), application (*anuyoga*), perseverance (*sātacca*), effort (*padhāna*) ... that is the first ... second ... third bondage (*vinibandha*) of the heart which is not severed.'** M.I,101f.

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exercise

### **Experiencing Craving**

Since craving is fundamental to identification, it can be helpful to investigate the three forms of craving more thoroughly.

Craving can be quite energizing and volatile, therefore it is important to maintain a basis of calm through keeping a close connection to your main object of meditation, such as awareness of breathing. When the mind seems to be suitably calm, it may be appropriate to engage in the investigation of craving. However, if you notice an inordinate amount of energy arising, it is best to return attention to the breath.

If trying to experience craving directly is too difficult or too energizing, then it may be helpful to try experiencing the sources of craving, such as: feeling, what is endearing and agreeable, or seeking gratification (i.e., well-being and ease).

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close the eyes gently and settle attention on the breathing.
- Two of the most primal forms of craving are thirst and hunger. See if you can experience either of these.
- Can you sense the energy behind that experience?  
How does it manifest?
- Can you observe a feeling associated with that experience?

### **Craving for sense pleasure**

- As you experience thirst or hunger, do you crave the pleasure of the taste of drink or food?
- How do you experience that? What sort of energy is it?

### **Craving for existence**

- Bring attention to the body. Do you sense the body simply persisting, or do you sense some desire to keep it going, keep it comfortable, keep it well?
- Bring up a feeling of well-being. Do you notice any response to this?
- If it seems suitable, bring up an image of the body being sick. What is your response to this thought?

### **Craving for non-existence**

- Bring attention to the body. Do you notice any discomfort?
- What is your response to this discomfort?
- Do you observe any unpleasant feeling in the mind?  
How do you respond to it?



.....  
meditation

- Close your eyes gently and settle your attention on the breath.
- When suitable, see if you can observe a view you have about the nature of yourself.
- Is this view quite personal – ‘I am a friendly person ....’? Or is it more abstract – ‘This body-mind is impermanent’?
- How do you hold that view – rigidly, relaxed, anxiously ... ?
- Can you recognize the basis of this view? Were you taught it, or did you come to it yourself?
- Bring your attention back to the breath.
- When suitable, open your eyes and relax your posture.

## THIRTEEN

## Self Views

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**Views**

In Pali, the word for ‘view’, *dittḥi*, is the same as the word for ‘seeing’, as it is in English – our view of reality is how we see reality. For example, if we have a distorted or wrong view, we see reality distortedly or incorrectly. Understanding this point is a foundation for spiritual practice because by changing our view through the wisdom that arises from spiritual development, we change how we see reality. Eventually, we let go of views and learn to see the way things really are through realizing liberation.

Our five physical senses and the mind contact and interpret stimuli to arrive at a particular view or opinion of reality, which we tend to believe is correct and true. Little do we realize that this is just our view (and maybe ours alone) at a particular moment in time, and that it is filtered through our education, beliefs, prejudices, and so forth. That is, our view and the way we see reality are subjective and limited. How many of us realize that how we see the world and our view of life are interdependent? A common saying is, ‘I’ll believe it when I see it’, but studies of human behaviour show that it is more often the case that, ‘I’ll see it when I believe it’. Generally, our views about ourselves are so intrinsic that we do not realize that we harbour views at all, until, perhaps, our views of ourselves clash with the views others hold of us. Therefore, it can be very helpful to have this theme pointed out to us.

## Identity View

Once a self identity becomes consolidated through grasping any of the Five Groups of Grasping or the Sense Bases as a self, we usually believe it to be a permanent, fixed entity, and hold this as our identity-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*). Without realizing it, we then only see a reality which supports this view. And then the stage is set for a wide range of speculations about the nature of this self identity, which tend to re-cycle back into affirming identity view.

In the Pali Canon, most reference is made to 'identity view' (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), although occasionally 'view of self' (*attānudiṭṭhi*) is mentioned (S.III,185f). There is also the 'doctrine of self' (*attavāda*), which is defined in the Dhammasaṅgaṇi text of the Abhidhamma as the twenty types of identity view<sup>1</sup>. Identity view is the first of the Ten Fetters (A.V,17), while doctrine of self is one of the four types of Grasping (S.II,3).

Identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) and 'view of self' (*attānudiṭṭhi*) arise from grasping or adhering to any of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,185f). This also leads to the arising of the eternalist view; the annihilationist view; wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*); the fetters (*saṃyojana*), adherences (*abhinivesa*), and shackles (*vinibandha*); and, attachment (*ajjhosaṇa*) (S.III,182f; cf. S.III,258f; S.IV,287), as well a range of deluded views of self (S.III,203ff).

Identity view, once established, tends to proliferate, without realizing that it is actually a work of fiction. And, since in a work of fiction anything is possible, there is plenty of room for speculations about the nature of this presumed self.

1 CDB p.726-7, n.5. The twenty types of identity view are the four modes applied to each of the Five Groups.

## Views About the Nature of Self

In the Buddha's time, just as today, there were many and varied views and opinions about the nature of self, the world, of ultimate reality, what happens after death, and so forth. There are various references throughout the Pali Canon on the views of the Six Leaders of the 'heretical sects'<sup>2</sup>. One of the most detailed of these is the *Sāmaññaphala sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* where the views of the Six Leaders are presented (D.I,47ff). These views range from the materialist/annihilationist view, to the determinist view, and the agnostic or 'eel-wrigglers' view (D.I,24). The Buddha's harshest criticism was of Makkhali Gosala, the Ajivaka, because of his especially pernicious view denying the effectiveness of action (A.I,33f; 286f).

The two most common views about the nature of self, and which the Buddha most often criticised, were 'eternalism' (*sassatavāda*): **'The self and the world are the same; after death I shall be permanent, stable (*dhuva*), eternal (*sassata*), not subject to change; I shall endure for ever and ever'**, and 'annihilationism' (*ucchedavāda*): **'... the annihilation (*uccheda*), destruction (*vināsa*), extermination (*vibhava*) of an existing being (*satta*)'**. Most religions promote the former – our soul or ultimate essence persists in either heaven or hell, or in endless reincarnations.

The Buddha was accused of being an annihilationist, and some of his teachings (S.III,55f) do resemble the annihilationist view given at S.III,99<sup>3</sup>. However, the fundamental difference between the annihilationist view and the Buddha's is that the Buddha speaks

2 There is no record that the Buddha ever met any of these famous leaders, but he is recorded to have engaged in discussion with some of their followers, and their views are discussed or referred to in many places in the Pali Canon. One of the leaders mentioned, Nigantha Nataputta, is generally held to be Vardhamana Mahavira, the twenty-fourth 'ford-maker' of Jainism.

3 The fundamental difference is that the Buddha substituted the first person verbs of the annihilationists for third person verbs, thereby shifting emphasis from the view of a permanent self of annihilationism to the impersonal perspective of Buddhist processes. See CDB. p.1060f. n.75 for detailed explanation.

only of the annihilation of passion, aversion and delusion, and of different kinds of bad and unskillful qualities (A.IV,174;183).

The Buddha's insight into Conditional Causality caused him to reject both of these views, since he understood that any identity is actually an impermanent, causally-conditioned process – there is no ultimate self or existing being to eternally persist or be annihilated.

### Other Speculative Views

Views about the nature of self may proliferate into a range of speculative views, either about what form that self takes or its relationship with the external world.

A set of views which the Buddha was often confronted with is the Ten Undeclared Views (M.I,483ff; SN.44), a standard set of views which spiritual seekers used to judge someone's philosophy:

1. is the world eternal,
2. is the world not eternal,
3. is the world finite,
4. is the world infinite,
5. are the life force (*jīva*) and the body (*sarīra*) the same,
6. is the life force one thing and the body another,
7. after death does a Tathāgata (Awakened Being) exist,
8. after death does a Tathāgata not exist,
9. after death does a Tathāgata both exist and not exist,
10. after death does a Tathāgata neither exist nor not exist.

Two discourses in the Pali Canon (DN.1; MN.102) specifically deal with various types of self views. The most well-known, the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN.1), reviews sixty-two speculative views regarding the nature of the self as material or infinite, percipient or non-percipient, etc.

The diverse views that arise – the Ten Undeclared Views as well as the sixty-two speculative views – all arise from identity view (S.IV,287). How often do we find ourselves engaging in speculation about the nature of our self rather than investigating what this self is which we speculate about?

While the Buddha had to respond to a great variety of views (i.e., DN.1; MN.102), his immediate concern was with the view of self, because this view is the source of all the various views that arise (S.IV,287).

**'I too do not see any doctrine of self that would not give rise to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and distress in one who grasps it.'** M.1,137.



PART THREE

# The Cessation of I-Making

## The Cessation of I-Making, Mine-Making, and the Underlying Disposition to Conceit

The cessation of I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit is the culmination of the Buddha's path to liberation. It is a shifting of our mind state from self-centredness to reality-centredness. This is accomplished through dis-engaging from actions which nourish self-centredness while increasingly engaging with the reality of the way things really are. For this to be truly effective at the deepest levels of our being, a considerable degree of spiritual development is usually required to be able to penetrate through the diverse levels of the I-making processes.

As you can probably appreciate from your reading so far, I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit is deeply rooted within our being. For example, the underlying disposition to conceit is the basis of our psyche, so much so that even spiritual practice can be co-opted by conceit. It is all too easy to be proud of our generosity, conceited by our strict morality or inflated by our accomplishments in developing meditation techniques.

While intellectual study may well reveal some level of understanding of the processes of I-making, thinking is also an I-making-process, so can penetrate only so far. To go deeper, the Buddha outlined a wide range of spiritual practices to suit people of various temperaments and degrees of spiritual maturity.

In deciding amongst these spiritual practices, ideally one would approach a teacher for personal advice and guidance. In the present time, more often than not, an aspirant tries out teachings, successfully or not, as they come across them. A major danger of this is frequenting the 'spiritual supermarket' and merely 'snacking' on the spiritual 'flavour of the month' rather than sticking with fundamental practices when the

going gets difficult. This is where a teacher, spiritual friends or a humble guide can be helpful.

My usual advice to spiritual aspirants is to suggest practising with the most basic and easily available teachings for a reasonable time, and then re-evaluate their effect. It can then be helpful to supplement practice with further study, investigation, and experimenting with other approaches. Most of the benefit of spiritual practice comes from the steady continuity of practice, much as it is with regular physical exercise and healthy eating habits.

Unlike the development of I-making, which is an evolving maturity of ego, the cessation of 'I-making' is not always so sequential, as some individuals are able to penetrate several levels simultaneously. The heart of spiritual practices for the cessation of I-making is concerned with the cessation of identification. Most of the practices require refinement, persistence and increasing maturity for insight to be actualized for the complete realization of liberation.

In explaining the processes for the cessation of I-making, for the sake of symmetry, I will proceed in reverse order through the four stages of the I-making process, starting with the coarsest level of Self Views, proceeding through to the most subtle level of the Underlying Dispositions. In so doing, I will explore sequentially the various means that the Buddha taught to guide beings to the experience of liberation, each of which has an effect at different stages of the 'I-making' process. The Buddha offered a vast range of spiritual practices, however, in this presentation I limit the discussion to the most commonly referred to methods.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with the Progressive Path of Practice, which is the foundation for a deeper level of investigation.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps a second volume will expand on more specialized methods.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently, and bring attention to breathing.
- At the present moment, is your attention pervaded by an obvious sense of self? What form does this take? Some 'object', physical or mental, that reminds you of self; a view (e.g., I am breathing); your environment; or something else?
- Or, has your sense of self mostly ceased?
- If so, where does your attention abide?
- Have you noticed times when your sense of self is not so prominent?
- Do you notice the cause(s) of this?
- When suitable, you can open your eyes and relax your posture.

## FOURTEEN

# The Progressive Path

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In three of the four contexts in which the Buddha responded to the query of how 'I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit' reach cessation, he was responding to his senior disciples, or to the Wanderer Vacchagotta; thus his answers are succinct and somewhat 'technical'. However, on one occasion the Buddha gave a more detailed response, describing comprehensively the progressive path of practice (M.III,32ff).

## The Progressive Path

On a number of occasions, the Buddha described the Path of Spiritual Practise as a spiritual progression or evolution<sup>2</sup>. On one such occasion, in answer to the query about how to realize the cessation of I-making, he elaborated as follows:

<sup>2</sup> This general outline is presented in many places in the Pali Canon, sometimes with alterations (MN.27, MN.38, MN.39, MN.51, MN.53, MN.107, MN.125). The version in DN. 2ff also includes many similes.

In a different context, another form of 'spiritual evolution' is outlined; that is, associating with worthy people nourishes listening to the true teachings, this nourishes faith ... appropriate attention ... mindfulness and clear comprehension ... sense restraint ... practising the three ways of right conduct ... the four attendings with mindfulness ... the seven factors of awakening, arriving at true knowledge and liberation (A.V,115).

‘A person hears the Dhamma taught by the Buddha or one of his disciples. They gain faith and, recognizing that it is not easy to practise the teaching as a layperson, eventually go forth into the monastic life and undertake to follow the detailed moral guidelines. They become content with robes to protect the body and almsfood to maintain bodily strength. They develop restraint of the six senses and maintain mindfulness and full awareness regarding all bodily and verbal actions. They retire to a solitary place and cleanse the mind of the Five Hindrances. With a mind free of the hindrances, they proceed to develop the four fine-material absorptions, and then direct the mind to the waning of the Outflows (of selfhood). Through the direct knowing of the Four Noble Truths and the cessation of the Outflows, the mind is liberated.’ M.III,33f summarised

This is the ideal path of practice as envisioned by the Buddha. He went on to say that it is by knowing and seeing thus that I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit are uprooted, which is equivalent to directly knowing the Four Noble Truths and liberation from the three Outflows.

Since the Buddha was addressing monastics, the path of practice is modelled on that life style. However, there are common principles applicable to anyone interested in spiritual practice. These begin with faith in the teaching, which leads to earnestness in undertaking refined moral training, and proceeds to the principles of contentment with simple living, restraint of the senses, and the training in mindfulness and full awareness. This is then the basis for training the mind in collectedness and contemplation of the Four Noble Truths and the three Outflows, resulting in liberation.

In the present time, most spiritual aspirants are ‘self-taught’ or ‘do-it-yourself’ practitioners. The self-taught student needs to be particularly vigilant and astute, especially due to the insidious power of self-referencing and self-deception. We can easily find ourselves choosing the easy, self-supporting option of spiritual practice, rather than developing a more comprehensive approach, one that involves practices that are challenging and difficult for our self. A helpful reminder at this juncture is that anything our self finds challenging (within reason) is very likely ‘good practice’, because it is our self-satisfaction that is being challenged.

This Buddhist Path of Spiritual Practice is a very practical, step-by-step approach to spiritual development, providing a stable and comprehensive foundation, leading to a direct realization of liberation. It can therefore be beneficial to investigate this path in more detail.

## The Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha’s Path of Spiritual Practice, in its most succinct form, is presented as the development of The Noble Eightfold Path, comprising the following eight factors:

1. **Right View/Understanding:** understanding the Four Noble Truths;
2. **Right Aspiration:** aspiration to renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness;
3. **Right Speech:** speech free of falsehood, slander, harshness and frivolity;
4. **Right Action:** behaviour free from killing, stealing and inappropriate sexual conduct;
5. **Right Livelihood:** livelihood free from trading in weapons, human beings, flesh, intoxicants and poisons;

6. **Right Effort:** avoiding and giving up unwholesome states, developing and maintaining wholesome states;
7. **Right Mindfulness:** cultivating mindfulness of body, feelings, conditions of mind and specific phenomena – The Four Noble Truths, The Five Hindrances, The Five Groups of Grasping, The Six Sense Bases and The Seven Factors of Awakening;
8. **Right Collectedness:** developing the four fine-material absorptions.

These eight factors are sometimes grouped in three categories: Morality (factors 3 to 5), Meditation (factors 6 to 8) and Wisdom (factors 1 and 2) (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*)<sup>3</sup>. This comprehensive path of spiritual development is a way of life encompassing all aspects of human nature – physical, mental and spiritual; all physical actions, speech and mental activities.

It can be assumed that anyone wishing to pursue the Buddhist Path of Spiritual Practice is familiar with Right View and Right Aspiration. Specifically, Right View is the basic understanding of the Four Noble Truths – human life is imperfect and subject to suffering; there are causes for this inherent unsatisfactoriness; when those causes are removed, unsatisfactoriness ceases; and, there is a clear path of spiritual practice to arrive at this cessation. This is the basic dynamic of Buddhist spiritual development – recognizing unsatisfactoriness, understanding its cause, experiencing its cessation through the practice of the Eightfold Path. Right View also includes understanding the principles of kamma, that skilful intentional actions result in beneficial effects and unskilful intentional actions result in harmful results. The path is properly channelled and nourished with the Right Aspiration of renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness.

3 Occasionally, there is mention of two more factors, Right Knowledge and Right Liberation. These are unique to the arahant who has completed the training of the Eightfold Path (D.II,217; III,271; M.I,42; A.II,89; S.V,20).

## Generosity

A spiritual practice not specifically mentioned in this context, but which the Buddha greatly encouraged, is the practice of generosity (*cāga*) or giving (*dāna*). Generosity is a way of practising renunciation, the fundamental basis of spiritual practice, through learning to give up, let go or surrender our grasping of selfhood in a practical, everyday context. Everyone can participate in the joy of selfless giving.

Our usual approach to life is based on ‘mine-making’ or possessiveness, adding more supports to our self. Generosity, ideally, is the opposite – turning away from ‘mine-making’, relinquishing possessiveness, and thus reducing the supports for self-centredness. Without generosity as a guiding attitude, we may pursue spiritual practice with a ‘gaining mind’, which adds to our sense of self, rather than releasing it.

Unfortunately, even generosity can be turned into a way of feeding selfhood, such as ‘Look how generous I am’, or trading generosity for some heavenly pay off. Our motivation is then to try and gain spiritual progress for ourselves – the proverbial ‘spiritual materialism’ syndrome – rather than practise the giving up of selfhood through everyday acts of joyful generosity.

**‘Bhikkhus, if beings knew the result of giving and sharing, as I know, they would not eat without having given, nor allow the stain of avarice to obsess or abide in the mind. Even if it was their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there is a recipient.’** It. 26<sup>4</sup>

4 In the translated text by John D. Ireland, it is Sutta 22, since Sutta 9 is five suttas combined.

## Skilful Living

Skilful living, or morality, is intimately linked to the principle of kamma, or ethical causality. Put simply, living skilfully provides an efficacious base for well-being and for the refinement of spiritual practice. While following a set of moral precepts is in itself beneficial, what is especially important is how applying these precepts can increase self-knowledge. Thus, in order to speak and act within the bounds of the precepts, one needs to be vigilant to know what one is saying and doing at any time of the day or night. We also need to be mindful, honest and humble enough to clearly know whether our intentions and actions are indeed skilful or unskilful.

Living a skilful life provides a groundedness and viability for spiritual practice throughout one's day-to-day activities, where the sense of self is ever present. The emotional stability and confidence this practice engenders imbues the mind with an inherent calm which supports the development of ever-deepening degrees of calm and clarity. Though all kinds of unskilful thoughts may cascade through the mind, our hearts are settled in harmless and beneficial intentions. This also provides the possibility to just watch and get to know the entire range of selfish expressions, without needing to follow or react to them, nor blindly deny, repress or ignore them.

Training one's bodily actions and speech in skilful behaviour is a means of attenuating the over-riding sense of self. Firstly, one learns to step away from following personal likes and dislikes, and instead is guided by a universal standard of skilful behaviour. What is called 'skilful action' in Buddhism is the qualities that tend to lighten, attenuate, or relinquish self-referencing; whereas 'unskilful action' tends to increase or strengthen self-referencing.

**'Ananda, skilful conduct gives freedom from remorse (*avippaṭisāra*) as its gain and advantage; freedom from remorse gives gladness (*pāmojja*) as its gain and advantage; gladness gives joy (*pīti*) ... ; joy gives tranquillity ... ; tranquillity gives well-being ... ; well-being gives collectedness ... ; collectedness gives knowledge and vision of things as they really are ... ; knowledge and vision of things as they really are gives disillusionment and dispassion ... ; disillusionment and dispassion gives knowledge and vision of liberation as their gain and advantage. So indeed, Ananda, skilful conduct gradually leads on to the highest.'** A.V,2.

## **Precepts – Moral and Renunciant**

Precepts are the Buddhist guidelines for skilful living which we voluntarily undertake to train ourselves in, ideally because we know the benefits of skilful living. The precepts have different levels of refinement and subtlety. Thus, the basic five moral precepts can be practised at a coarse, moderate or refined level. They can also be extended to the eight renunciant precepts, and further to the ten precepts of a male or female novice, the 227 precepts of a Buddhist monk or the 311 precepts of a Buddhist nun.

The initial stage of working with precepts is that we honestly need to know at what level we are able to consistently follow and stabilize them in our life. To develop our spiritual practice further we can then make an effort to 'stretch ourselves' out of old behaviour patterns and establish a more refined, skilful mode of being. The refinement of skilful conduct provides a foundation for the causal arising of the successive stages of spiritual development. Maintaining precepts is not merely an end in itself, although some people may see the freedom from remorse or purity of being which morality engenders as

a state of high spiritual attainment. With such a view there is often an attachment to the purity, rather than using this causally-conditioned state as a stepping stone to further realize the qualities of collectedness, knowledge and vision of things as they really are, disillusionment and dispassion, culminating in liberation.

We develop more refined skilful conduct by bringing mindfulness and clear knowing to our speech, actions and livelihood. Just to have these particular means of skilful living pointed out to us can be helpful, but a considerable degree of self-awareness, honesty and wisdom is required to transform these principles into ways of being. The Pali word for morality, *sīla*, literally means ‘character’; that is, skilful conduct becomes integrated into our character and, with its refinement, becomes a means of ‘character building’. Only through directly experiencing the beneficial results do we gain the wisdom and confidence to further develop skilful living for the increasing refinement of spiritual practice.

Major supports for morality are the ‘two bright qualities which protect the world’ which are: moral shame and moral dread (*hiri-ottappa*), or personal and social conscience (A.I,51).

## Contentment

**‘And how is a bhikkhu contented? Here a bhikkhu is contented with a robe to protect his body, with alms food to satisfy his stomach. Having accepted (sufficient), he goes on his way, just as a bird flies about taking nothing but its wings. Even so is a bhikkhu contented.’** D.I,71.

Contentment and simplicity of life-style are universal aids to peace of mind, for monastic and lay person alike. The four basic supports for

human life are food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Their purpose is to support our spiritual aspiration rather than to be self-satisfying ends in themselves. To have few possessions to worry about and to be content with what we have means our life is uncluttered and unencumbered, so our heart/mind can rise above the mundane concerns of the world, just as a bird flies aloft however it wishes. We also have more time and energy available for sustained spiritual practice. While we all need some basic material comforts, how much do we need to provide us with the fundamental support for seeking the ultimate ‘comfort’ of spiritual liberation?

### **Guarding the Doors of the Senses**

Two methods of guarding the doors of the senses and one method of practising sense restraint are outlined in the Pali Canon. The most common method of guarding the sense doors is in the context of developing the path of practice:

**‘On seeing an object with the eye they do not take hold of its signs or characteristics. Since, if they left the eye faculty unguarded, the evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would attack them; thus they practise restraint, guard the eye faculty, undertake restraint of the eye faculty. On hearing a sound with the ear ... on smelling an odour with the nose ... on tasting a flavour with the tongue ... on contacting a touch with the body ... on knowing a mental phenomenon with the mind they do not take hold of its signs or characteristics. Since, if they left the mind faculty unguarded, the evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure would attack them.’** M.I,346.

The second method of guarding the sense doors is that when one receives a sense contact:

**'... they are not drawn to an enticing image or repelled by a disagreeable image. They abide having established mindfulness of body, with measureless mind, and they clearly know as it really is that liberation of mind, that liberation of wisdom where those evil, unwholesome states cease completely.'** S.IV,120.

Practising in this way one is 'unruined' amidst sense contacts, Māra does not gain access or a support, one overpowers the sense objects rather than be overpowered by them, and one overpowers the **'evil unwholesome states which defile, lead to renewed existence, are troublesome, result in suffering and birth, ageing and death in the future'** (S.IV,186f). When mindfulness of body is established then the six senses do not pull towards agreeable or disagreeable contacts (S.IV,200).

The method of practising sense restraint (*saṃvara*) is explained as, **'... not seeking delight, welcoming or holding to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations and mental phenomena which are agreeable, enjoyable, pleasing, endearing, accompanied by sensuality, enticing.'** S.IV,79f.

In some contexts, guarding the doors of the senses is followed by 'moderation in eating' and the practice of 'wakefulness' (M.I,273f; 355f; S.IV,103f). Moderation in eating, in common parlance, is 'eat to live and not live to eat'. In the monastic training it is one of the themes for frequent reflection recited daily in many Forest Monasteries<sup>5</sup>. In shortened form this reflection is: 'Wisely reflecting I use almsfood: ... only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, for keeping it healthy, for helping with the religious life ...'.

5 See Chanting Book, vol.1, p.53f. Available for free download from [www.forestsanghapublications.org](http://www.forestsanghapublications.org).

The practice of ‘wakefulness’ (*jāgariyā*) is diligence in developing the meditation exercises or, specifically, to spending the day and night, except for sleeping four hours between 10pm and 2am, developing walking and sitting meditation, while ‘purifying the mind of obstructive states’.

### **Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension (*sati-sampajañña*)**

The development of mindfulness proceeds from the direct, non-judgemental awareness of experience (rather than thinking about, analyzing or interpreting it) to a meditative contemplation of the arising and passing away of each of four main themes:

**‘Herein, bhikkhus, one abides contemplating the body as body... contemplating feeling as feeling, ... contemplating states of mind as states of mind, ... contemplating phenomena as phenomena, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world.’** M.I,55.

**‘In this way, one abides contemplating the body as body internally, or one abides contemplating the body as body externally, or one abides contemplating the body as body both internally and externally. One abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body, or one abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Or mindfulness that ‘there is body’ is established for the purpose of knowledge and mindfulness. One abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.’** M.I,56.

[The instructions continue similarly contemplating feelings, states of mind and phenomena.<sup>6</sup>]

We can say that these four areas of experience (body, feeling, states of mind and phenomena) are what we usually take as our sense of self. It is only through mindfulness, developed to the level of being objective and non-judgemental, that we can be freed of self-interest. Any interpretation of experience is usually tainted with some degree of self-interest. In the last paragraph of the instructions on mindfulness this mindful awareness is developed in a comprehensive and balanced way to become all-encompassing.

Clear Comprehension is formally explained as being aware of all bodily activities:

**'... acts with clear comprehension when going forward and backward; who acts with clear comprehension when looking ahead and behind; who acts with clear comprehension when bending and stretching; who acts with clear comprehension when wearing robes and carrying the bowl; who acts with clear comprehension when eating, drinking, chewing and tasting; who acts with clear comprehension when defecating and urinating; who acts with clear comprehension when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, talking and being silent.'**

M.I,346.

6 'Phenomena' are the particular categories of The Four Noble Truths, The Five Hindrances, The Five Groups of Grasping, The Six Sense Bases and The Seven Factors of Awakening. For details of the practice see MN.10 and DN.22; also S.V,311-341, for in- and out-breathing and A.I,43-46 for benefits of mindfulness of body.

## Collectedness (Calm Meditation)

The development of collectedness<sup>7</sup> (*samādhi*) is usually explained as the development of the four fine-material absorptions, which require the suspension of the Five Hindrances and cultivation of the absorption factors (*jhānanga*).

In developing collectedness, we first focus attention or concentrate on a meditation object, such as breathing. Through continuous focused attention, and through not giving attention to distractions, the mind gradually becomes more settled, centred and unified with the meditation object and, as a consequence, calmer. With some degree of perseverance (how long depends upon one's individual character and degree of earnestness), most people can experience a quietening down of the usual incessant internal dialogue and increase in collectedness. For a few people, strong collectedness induces an inhibiting of distractions, formally called the Five Hindrances.

## Suspension of the Five Hindrances

Through the development of collectedness common mental disturbances are temporarily suspended, as concentrated attention is absorbed by the meditation object:

<sup>7</sup> *Samādhi* is usually translated as 'concentration', however, concentration (or one-pointedness) is only one of the 'absorption factors' of *samādhi*, as mentioned in the quotation. I thus use 'collectedness' as a more comprehensive term for *samādhi*.

'Giving up worldly desires, he abides with a mind freed from worldly desires, his mind is cleansed of them. Giving up ill-will and hatred ... friendly and compassionate to all living beings, his mind is cleansed of ill-will and hatred. Giving up mental sluggishness and lethargy ... perceiving light, mindful and clearly knowing, his mind is cleansed of mental sluggishness and lethargy. Giving up restlessness and worry ... with an inwardly calm heart, his mind is cleansed of restlessness and worry. Giving up doubt, he abides having overcome doubt, without uncertainty as to wholesome things, his mind is cleansed of doubt.' D.I,71.

## Developing the Four Fine-Material Absorptions

Supported by the suspension of the hindrances, strong collectedness can then result in a state of deep focused absorption called *jhāna*, which can be refined through four successive degrees. As focussed attention or concentration increases, it is supported and strengthened by a number of associated mental qualities, formally referred to as the absorption factors (*jhānanga*).

'When he sees that these Five Hindrances have been given up, gladness arises, greatly gladdened, joy arises, joyful, his body is calmed, with a calm body, he feels well-being, with well-being, his mind is collected.

Being thus aloof from sensuality, aloof from unskilful conditions, he enters and abides in the first absorption, which is accompanied by initial and sustained thought, and with joy and well-being born of seclusion. And with this joy and well-being born of seclusion, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is untouched by this joy and well-being born of seclusion ...

Again, with the cessation of initial and sustained thought, he enters and abides in the second absorption, inwardly tranquilized, one-pointed, without initial and sustained thought, and with joy and well-being born of collectedness. And with this joy and well-being born of collectedness, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is untouched by this joy and well-being born of collectedness ...

Again, with the fading out of joy, he abides with equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, experiencing bodily pleasure; he enters and abides in the third absorption, of which the noble ones say, "Being equanimous and mindful is a pleasurable abiding." And with this [bodily] pleasure without joy, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is untouched by this [bodily] pleasure without joy ...

Again, with the giving up of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of ease and dis-ease, he enters and abides in the fourth absorption, which is neither painful nor pleasant, with mindfulness purified by equanimity. And he sits suffusing his body with the mind purified and cleansed, so that there is no part which is untouched by this purified and cleansed mind.' D.I,73f.

Five more absorptions are sometimes mentioned in the texts; the four immaterial absorptions – infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness and neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and the cessation-of-perception-and-feeling. The Buddha refers to the four fine-material absorptions as 'pleasant abidings here and now', and the four immaterial absorptions as 'peaceful abidings' (M.I,40f).

## Contemplation (Insight Meditation)

The development of advanced states of collectedness is not the end of the Path of Spiritual Practice. It is only through the penetrative insight produced by contemplation that liberation can be realized. Therefore, when the collected mind is **'composed, purified, cleansed, passionless, without defilements, supple, workable, steady, imperturbable'**, it is directed to the destruction of the outflows (*āsava*) and directly knows: **'This is *dukkha*'**; **'this is the cause of *dukkha*'**; **'this is the cessation of *dukkha*'**; and, **'this is the path to the cessation of *dukkha*'**. It directly knows: **'These are the outflows'**; **'this is the cause of the outflows'**; **'this is the cessation of the outflows'**; and, **'this is the path to the cessation of the outflows'**.

## The Knowledge of *Dukkha*

A bhikkhu is encouraged to **'make a thorough investigation'** (*parivīmaṃsati*) (S.II,80f), or **'engage in an inner exploration'** (*antara sammāsana*) (S.II,107f) of **'the diverse kinds of *dukkha* that arise in the world [headed by] ageing and death'**, to discover its cause (*nidāna*) and origin (*samudaya*), what it is born from (*jātika*) and produced from (*pabhava*); and, with what existing does it come to be, and, with what not existing does it not come to be. The Buddha realised that the only way to completely resolve *dukkha* is to uproot the fundamental cause of *dukkha*, which is craving.

The Pali term '*dukkha*' is not easily summarised in one word of English. However, although somewhat weak, the most expressive word might be 'unsatisfactoriness'. In the chapter on Nibbāna, the word '*dukkha*' is described as unpleasant feeling (*dukkha vedanā*), and in the theme of

the Four Noble Truths with the wider connotation of unsatisfactoriness, imperfection or incompleteness. A comprehensive definition of *dukkha* given by the Buddha covers not just the ordinary sufferings of life, such as sorrow and distress, but also includes some of the fundamental frustrations of living, such as ‘not getting what one wants’, and three of the great existential dilemmas of human existence – birth, ageing and death.

**‘And what, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of *dukkha*? Birth is *dukkha*, ageing is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and distress are *dukkha*; association with the disliked is *dukkha*; separation from the liked is *dukkha*; not getting what one wants is *dukkha*; in short, the five groups of grasping are *dukkha*.’** D.II,305.



The Buddha discovered that the basic cause of *dukkha* is the three forms of craving, which are connected with delight and passion, and are nourished by whatever is endearing and agreeable. An initial thought would probably be that we just need to simply get rid of craving, however, this is nothing other than further craving, the craving for non-existence (of craving). We therefore need to be careful how we handle craving.

**‘And what, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the origin of *dukkha*? It is that craving which gives rise to again-becoming, connected with delight and passion (*nandirāga*), finding delight in this here and that there; that is, craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence and craving for non-existence. And where, bhikkhus, does this craving arise and settle? Wherever in the world there is anything which is endearing (*piya*) and agreeable (*sāta*), there this craving arises and settles.’** D.II,308.



The cessation of *dukkha* does indeed result from the cessation of craving, however the cessation of craving occurs through ‘**relinquishing, giving up, release and renouncing**’, which arises through fully knowing the disadvantage and ultimate impermanence of this craving.

**‘And what, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of *dukkha*? It is that complete fading away and cessation of this craving, its relinquishing (*cāgo*), giving up (*paṭinissagga*), release (*mutti*) and renouncing (*anālaya*).’** D.II,310.



**‘And what, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path, that is: right understanding, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right collectedness.’** D.II,311f.



Some people interpret the teaching on *dukkha* as pessimistic, since who wants to be reminded of their unhappiness. For others, the teaching brings great relief, since acknowledging *dukkha* can suddenly open up vast areas of life which had previously been ignored or denied. The Buddha has given us the tools to realistically relate to life’s difficulties and to work through them.

The teaching on *dukkha* is actually a very realistic assessment of the human condition – a simple and honest acknowledgement of the inherent imperfection and unsatisfactoriness of human life. It shows that unsatisfactoriness is self-created through our own cravings, and can therefore be resolved. If we are blind to this fundamental reality of life's imperfection, how can we understand what life is really about in all its dimensions?

An acknowledgement of *dukkha* can be a powerful stimulus for spiritual practice, because it shakes us out of our complacency. Whether we realize it or not, we spend most of our time and effort trying to avoid *dukkha*. Due to the nature of habit, and what I call 'existential inertia', most of us simply drift along in life until we meet some crisis. Such a crisis could be a deterioration in health, passing of a loved one, or a loss of livelihood. When *dukkha* crashes into our life, we either flee from it using avoidance strategies – mood-altering substances, entertainment or psychological disturbances like depression, numbness, etc., or we come to terms with it. For discerning people, the only real solution is a spiritual one. Thus, at such a time of crisis, trust in a spiritual teaching can arise, which, if pursued, can give rise to many more positive qualities such as gladness, joy, tranquillity and well-being. These become a basis for Calm and Insight Meditation, which bear the fruit of letting go and liberation. Therefore, surprisingly, the seed of *dukkha* can bear the fruit of liberation.

**'Just as, when rain pours down upon a hilltop, the water runs with the slope filling the clefts, the gullies and the creeks; these, being filled, fill the streams ... the rivers ... the great ocean. In the same way ignorance is a condition for Willing and Habiting, Willing and Habiting**

are a condition for Bare Knowing ... *dukkha* is a condition for trust, trust is a condition for gladness, gladness is a condition for joy, joy is a condition for tranquillity, tranquillity is a condition for well-being ... for collectedness ... for knowledge and vision of things as they really are ... disillusionment ... dispassion ... liberation, and liberation is a condition for knowledge of the ending of the outflows.' S.II,32.

## Cessation of the Outflows

You may recall from the chapter on Nibbāna that the Outflows are one of the basic categories of fuel for maintaining the 'I-making' process. They are often identified as three basic outflows: sensuality, existence, and ignorance (S.IV,256; A.III,414), but sometimes a fourth, views, is included (D.II,81). You might also recognize that the basic three Outflows are the roots of human wanderings in renewed existences – fettered by ignorance and hindered by craving – since sensuality and existence are two kinds of craving.

**'And what kind of collectedness meditation, bhikkhus, if developed and made abundant, conduces to the destruction of the outflows?**

**Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides observing the rise and fall of the Five Groups of Grasping, 'This is Embodying, this is the arising of Embodying, this is the passing away of Embodying; this is Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... ; this is Bare Knowing, this is the arising of Bare Knowing, this is the passing away of Bare Knowing.'**

**This, bhikkhus, is collectedness meditation, developed and made abundant, which conduces to the destruction of the outflows.'** A.II,45.



.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently, and bring attention to breathing.
- When suitable, see if you can observe a view you have about the nature of yourself.
- As you observe that view, see if you can imagine letting it go.
- Are you able to release it?
- Do you notice any emotional response to that release, or inability to release?
- Do you notice any change in how you view your self?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breath. Then open your eyes and relax your posture.

FIFTEEN

# Self Views

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Views are a major theme of the Buddha's teaching. Right View is the first factor of the Eightfold Path which culminates in Right Knowledge and Right Liberation (A.v,212). Wrong view is one of the Underlying Dispositions, one of the Outflows, one of the Graspings and one of the three types of perversion (*vipallāsa*) (A.II,52).

Self views have two aspects; firstly, the identity view that there is some kind of permanent, stable self and secondly, views about the nature of that self, which serve to reinforce the first view.

The Buddha generally dismissed views about the nature of the self, since they were mostly based on the wrong view that there is a permanent self. Self views cease when the true nature of self is realized at the first stage of awakening.

## Views

Whether we are aware of it or not, most of us hold certain views which can be obstacles to spiritual practice. The Buddha's approach to spiritual practice is aimed at direct realization rather than having a particular view or belief. Liberation is realized not through changing one's view (to a more enlightened one!) but through a comprehensive

path of spiritual practice which undermines reliance on any view at all, so that we can directly see things as they really are. To help counter the tendency to hold on to obstructive views, the Buddha resorted to various approaches.

The Buddha was astute enough to recognize that most views are based on incomplete understanding or wrong understanding, and that holding on to views invariably leads to disputes. His analogy to explain this is a story of a king who had all the people in his realm who were born blind assembled together and introduced to an elephant. The king then asked them what an elephant was like:

**'Those blind people who had been shown the head of the elephant replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a water jar." Those blind people who had been shown the ear of the elephant replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing basket." Those blind people who had been shown the tusk of the elephant replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a ploughshare." Those blind people who had been shown the trunk replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a plough-pole." Those blind people who had been shown the body replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a storeroom." Those blind people who had been shown the foot replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a post." Those blind people who had been shown the hindquarters replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar." Those blind people who had been shown the tail replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle." Those blind people who had been shown the tuft at the end of the tail replied, "An elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom." Saying "An elephant is like this, an elephant is not like that! An elephant is not like this, an elephant is like that!", they fought each other with their fists. And the king was delighted [with the spectacle].'**

The Buddha noted that ‘wanderers of other sects’ who held to different views quarrelled amongst themselves. He then spoke the following verse:

**‘Some recluses and Brahmins, so called,  
Are deeply attached to their own views;  
People who only see one side of things  
Engage in quarrels and disputes.’** Udāna 6.4, (John D. Ireland translation)



On several occasions the Buddha directed his listeners away from dependence upon the views of others, and encouraged people to enquire for themselves:

**‘Now look, Kalamas, do not be led by oral sayings or tradition or hearsay; nor by the authority of scriptures; nor by reasoning or inference; nor by reasoned reflection; nor by accepting a view after pondering; nor by possible conformity; nor because we respect this teacher.**

**When, Kalamas, you know yourselves, ‘These things are unskillful, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if undertaken, lead to harm and suffering’; then abandon them.’** A.I,188f; cf. A.II,191.

## **Right View**

On the other hand, the Buddha saw the benefit for people of attending to Right View in order to appreciate the value of initiative and effort. He therefore established Right View as the first factor of the Eightfold

Path (M.I,288; III,72; A.I,269; cf. M.I,401ff). Right View is explained as being of two kinds – mundane or conventional Right View and supermundane or ultimate Right View, the Right View of one who has attained to the path.<sup>1</sup>

Mundane Right View is expressed as:

1. there is what is offered, what is bestowed, what is sacrificed;
2. there is fruit and result of good and bad actions;
3. there is this world and the other world;
4. there is mother and father (to be respected);
5. there are beings born spontaneously;
6. there are in this world *samana-brahmana* who follow the right path and right practice, who have realized by direct knowledge this world and the other world and make it known.<sup>2</sup> M.I,288; III,72.

Other references to what is Right View in the Pali Canon refer to that of the ‘noble disciple’, one who is at one of the stages of awakening. The most comprehensive of these is spoken by Venerable Sariputta and covers understanding the object, its origin, cessation and the path to its cessation of what is wholesome and unwholesome, and their roots; the four nutriments, the Four Noble Truths; the twelve links of Dependent Origination; and the Outflows (M.I,46f.).<sup>3</sup> The Right View of the noble disciple is elsewhere explained as knowing what are the wrong and right factors of the Eightfold Path (M.III,71ff); as understanding the Four Noble Truths (M.III,251); as fully understanding that the Five Groups of Grasping are impermanent, which then leads to disillusionment (*nibbidā*) and the wasting away of delight and passion resulting in liberation (S.III,51-2); or, seeing the six-fold sense sphere, contact, Bare Knowing and feeling as they really are, one is no longer

1 MN.9; MN.117. Also see Bhikkhu Bodhi’s notes, MLDB. n.114.

2 For an explanation of some of these views see MLDB. n.425

3 These are listed in detail in Chapter 20.

inflamed by passion, craving is abandoned and one experiences bodily and mental pleasure (M.III,288ff.).

Several other principles the Buddha confirmed as true are: there is (effectiveness) of doing (*kiriya*), there is causality (*hetu-paccaya*) (for defilement and purification) (M.I,406f). He stated that he taught the doctrine of kamma, of deeds (*kiriya*), of energy (A.I,287).

Right View arises from either of two conditions: the words of another or appropriate attention. When it is supported by the five factors of virtue, learning, discussion, calm and insight, Right View results in liberation of mind (M.I,294).

The Buddha was pragmatic in his teaching of Dhamma principles. For example, in his explanation of the ‘incontrovertable teaching’, he outlines various wrong and right views, and, through reasoned discussion, he concludes that, although we do not yet know if the right view is truly right, there are better results in this life and the next life if one follows Right View (M.I,400f)<sup>4</sup>. In contrast to teachings which depend upon **‘faith, approval, tradition, careful consideration and acceptance of a view’**, which may be either true or false (M.II,170f), the Buddha claims to be one teacher who has directly and uniquely experienced Dhamma for himself (M.II,211).

Although Right View is the first factor of the Eightfold Path, the Buddha also emphasized that right views are merely a means to an end, and not an end in themselves.

**‘Bhikkhus, as clear and pure as this view is, if you adhere to it, take pride in it, treasure it, cherish it, would you then understand that the Dhamma has been taught as being like a raft, for the sake of crossing over, not for the sake of acquiring?’**

**‘No, Venerable.’** M.I,260

4 M.60 cf. MLDB. n.620-1.



**‘Bhikkhus, when you understand that the Dhamma has been taught as being like a raft [for the sake of crossing over, not for the sake of acquiring], you should give up the Dhamma, how much more so what is not Dhamma.’** M.I,135.

## Views on the Nature of Self

As the Buddha recognized, views on the nature of self abound, so he also mentioned ways in which they can be undermined.

The most comprehensive description of sixty-two views is in the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN.1). The Buddha dismisses these various views by saying that they are all conditioned by contact. He goes on to say that when one:

**‘... understands as they really are the arising and passing away of the six bases of contact, their gratification, disadvantage and escape, he knows what goes beyond all these views.’** D.I,45; cf. M.II,238.



## The Ten Undeclared Views

Another set of views, which are indirectly about the nature of self, is the Ten Undeclared Views (listed in Chapter 13). When the Wanderer Vacchagotta asked the Buddha which of the Ten Undeclared Views he held, the Buddha responded by saying that he does not hold any of these views, because all these views are:

**‘... the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the agitation of views, the writhing of views, the fetter of views. It is connected with suffering, with vexation, turmoil and distress. It does not lead to disillusionment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calming, to direct knowledge, to awakening or to Nibbāna.’**

Vacchagotta then enquires if the Buddha holds any views. The Buddha replies that he has relinquished views because he has ‘seen’ directly the arising and cessation of the Five Groups:

**‘Speculative views, Vaccha, have been put away by the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata, Vaccha, has seen this: thus is Embodying, thus is Embodying’s arising, thus is Embodying’s disappearance; thus is Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, thus is Bare Knowing’s arising, thus is Bare Knowing’s disappearance.**

**‘Therefore, I say with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, relinquishing of all conceivings, all mental disturbances, all I-making, mine-making and underlying dispositions to conceit, the Tathāgata is liberated without grasping.’** M.I,485-6 abridged.



The two views about the nature of self which the Buddha most criticised were the views of ‘eternalism’ (*sassatavāda*), that a permanent self persists after death, and ‘annihilationism’ (*ucchedavāda*), that there is the destruction of an existing self at death.

## Eternalist View

His main criticism of the eternalist view was the mistaken belief that there is a permanent self which persists after death. His point is clearly summed up in this passage:

**‘There being a permanent self, bhikkhus, would there be for me what belongs to a permanent self?’**

Yes, Venerable.

**Or, there being what belongs to a permanent self, would there be for me a permanent self?’**

Yes, Venerable.

Bhikkhus, since a permanent self and what belongs to a permanent self are not truly and reliably found, this standpoint for views, “The self and the world are the same; after death I shall be permanent, stable (*dhuva*), eternal (*sassata*), not subject to change; I shall endure for ever and ever.” Would it not be a wholly and completely foolish teaching?

What could it be, Venerable, but a wholly and completely foolish teaching?’ M.I,138.

## Annihilationist View

Similarly, the main criticism the Buddha had for the annihilationist view is that it is based upon the mistaken belief that there is a permanent self which is annihilated after death. The main point is that in order to annihilate a self one must believe in a self to annihilate, and are thus back to self again!

**‘Those *samana-brahmana* who declare the annihilation (*uccheda*), destruction (*vināsa*), extermination (*vibhava*) of an existing being (*satta*), through fear of identity and disgust with identity, keep running around and circling around that very identity.’** M.II,232f.



Another view which the Buddha refuted is that of ‘*Nibbāna* here and now’.

**‘When he regards himself thus, “I am at peace, I have attained *Nibbāna*, I am without grasping,” that too is declared to be grasping.’** M.II,237.

Although this view arises from *bona fide* meditative experience, the Buddha pointed out such a conclusion is incomplete, since there are usually more refined meditative experiences. Also, the statement makes clear that the meditator has identified with the experience, and thus has not realized the cessation of self identity.

## Identity View

Grasping any of the Five Groups of Grasping is the cause of identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), ‘view of self’ (*attānudiṭṭhi*) (S.III,185f), and a range of other views about self (S.III,182f; 203ff). These all cease through realization of the first stage of awakening, that of the stream-enterer, which occurs with the arising of the ‘vision of Dhamma’ (*dhamma-cakkhu*, lit. ‘eye of Dhamma’).

‘Then the Revered One gave Siha, the general, a graduated discourse on generosity, morality and heaven; he explained the disadvantage, degradation and defilement of sensual pleasures and the profit of renunciation. When the Revered One knew that the mind of Siha, the general, was receptive, pliable, free of hindrances, uplifted and trusting, he explained that Dhamma teaching praised by the Buddhas: dukkha, its origin, its cessation and the path. Then, just as a clean cloth free from stain would readily receive dye, so too, as Siha, the general, sat on that seat there arose the undefiled, stainless vision of the Dhamma: “Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease.”

Then Siha, the general, became one who has seen Dhamma, reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, penetrated the Dhamma, over-come doubt, gone beyond uncertainty, attained self-confidence and become independent of others in the teacher’s dispensation.’ A.IV,186.



The ‘vision of Dhamma’ is essentially a profound understanding of the truth of impermanence, which undermines any belief in a permanently-abiding self. The cessation of identity view is also the cessation of all the various views that arise (S.IV,287). Identity View (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), as well as View of self (*attānudiṭṭhi*) and Wrong View, are abandoned when one knows and sees (*jānāti passati*) the internal senses, the external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact and the feeling arising from sense contact as impermanent (S.IV,147).

**'Bhikkhus, Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing are impermanent. What is impermanent is unsatisfactory. What is unsatisfactory is not a permanent self. What is not a permanent self should be seen as it really is with right wisdom: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self."**

**When one sees this as it really is with right wisdom, one has no more views about the past ... about the future ... no more vigorous holding. With no more vigorous holding the mind detaches itself and is liberated from the Outflows without grasping.' S.III,45f.**



Upon reflection, it seems logical that all the views we have about our self and the nature of that self depend upon the identity view that there is actually some permanent self which we can hang our views upon. Thus, the cessation of all views results from the cessation of identity-view, which comes about through the cessation of identification – the theme of the next three chapters.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently, and bring attention to breathing.
- When the mind seems to be reasonably calm, bring up the enquiry: How do I acknowledge my own identity – physically, or with feelings, or with emotional/mental activity? Or maybe a combination of these?
- How do you feel about that sense of identity – comfortable, not so comfortable or fairly neutral?
- Can you imagine letting go of that sense of identity – physically, or feelings,
- or emotional/mental activity?
- Does one form of identification seem easier to let go of than others?
- Is there some prominent emotion/mental state that arises?
- Can you sustain awareness of this?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

## SIXTEEN

# Identification | Ignorance: Theory

.....

It is through identification that beings continue to ‘wander on’ through countless renewed existences. This is because they are ‘hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving’. Therefore, the short version of the cessation of identification is:

**‘With the fading away of ignorance, friend, with the arising of true knowledge (*vijjā*), and the cessation of craving, renewal of being in future is not generated.’** M.I,294.



In theory, the cessation of identification is simple – developing true knowledge and relinquishing of craving – which means no longer regarding the objects of identification, the Five Groups of Grasping or the Sense Bases, as a permanent self in any way. In practice, however, the situation is somewhat more complex, since identification is extensive, multifaceted and deeply-rooted. Therefore the Buddha recommended wide-ranging and comprehensive means to assist in the realization of the cessation of the ‘I-making’ processes at all levels of identification. They necessarily involve a number of carefully-crafted methods and various modes of contemplation to relinquish the

active processes of ignorance and craving. Fortunately, there are many discourses in the Pali Canon which explain how this is accomplished, usually contrasting an unawakened person, experiencing the disturbing results of identification, with the experience of the noble disciple who does not engage in identification and is at peace.

### **Dimensions of Spiritual Practice Leading to the Cessation of Identification**

Some people may have an initial insight into the reality of no permanent self, but the deeply-penetrating experience of the complete cessation of 'I-making' generally proceeds in stages, as spiritual practice deepens and matures.

The main focus of practices which lead to the cessation of 'I-making' is on the cessation of identification. As a means of explanation, I designate three dimensions of this spiritual practice: de-identification; non-identification; and dis-identification. Ideally, these should be developed in a well-integrated way so that they support the cessation of the I-making process at its various levels. Otherwise, there is the danger of a disconnect at some level. For example, in the present time people have access to a variety of spiritual exercises. Some of these are specifically aimed at the dis-identification level. However, if someone developing these exercises has not established a way of life supporting de-identification, then their everyday life can be at odds with their spiritual exercises. One result of this is 'spiritual bypassing'<sup>1</sup>.

1 See for example: *Spiritual Bypassing* by Robert Augustus Masters, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley.

## De-Identification

The process of ‘de-identification’ is facilitated by living a life which helps to de-emphasize self-affirmation and self-referencing, in contrast to our usual mode of living based upon self-centredness. People committed to religious principles usually follow this way of life, even though they may not know that the ultimate purpose is selflessness.

For Buddhists, ‘de-identification’ occurs through a lifestyle modelled on the three ‘bases of meritorious activity (*puñña-kiriya-vatthu*)’ consisting of generosity, morality and meditation (A.IV,241). An extension of this is the development of the Eightfold Path, a refinement of which is outlined in the chapter on the Progressive Path.

Another model is the Ten Pārami, the ten ‘perfections’ which the Buddha is said to have developed over many lifetimes.<sup>2</sup> In the Buddhist tradition, these have become the ideal model of selfless virtues which eventually leads to Buddhahood. The ten virtues are: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, friendliness and equanimity.

## Non-Identification

While de-identification occurs subtly and often unconsciously<sup>3</sup>, non-identification is making a conscious effort to change our habitual self-referencing in order to stop nurturing or fuelling identification. The first stage of developing non-identification is clearly knowing the real purpose of spiritual practice and how identification is created. The second stage is learning to ‘starve’ our habitual I-making responses of nourishment by no longer feeding them.

2 Mentioned in two later works of the Pali Canon, the *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka*.

3 That is, many people do not know the ‘de-identifying’ effect of skilful actions, believing only that they will lead to a heavenly rebirth. That is, they do not understand that ‘a heavenly rebirth’ is attained because one is more dis-identified with the ‘earthly self’!

.....  
 personal story

One example from my own experience along these lines was when I was Abbot of Bodhinyanarama Monastery in New Zealand. At one stage, while dealing with administrative issues with the monastery committee, I would often receive baffling emails from one of the members. My speculations about these emails inclined along the lines that there were some emotional issues involved but, being an intelligent and well-educated person, the member was attempting to present business in what was perceived as a reasonable way. One day in particular, I was so confused by the communication that my mind was spinning. In such turmoil I decided to go for a walk, to get grounded in the body and clear my head.

As I trekked up the steep pathway through the monastery forest, I recognized that my problem was twofold – an inability to perceive what the committee member was trying to communicate and not knowing how to respond. In Buddhist terms, these two issues, i.e., perceiving and thinking of a response, are *saññā* and *saṅkhārā*. I then recalled one of the reflections we chant every morning which says: ‘perceiving is impermanent, perceiving is not a permanent self; thinking is impermanent, thinking is not a permanent self’. Reflecting upon these truths – that perceiving and thinking are constantly-changing and uncontrollable – my mind settled and relaxed in the realization of my ‘self’ limitations: I realized that the faculties of perceiving and thinking are not ultimately under my control; and at some later date they will change, and perhaps function more efficiently. I was then able to let go and stopped identifying the situation as my personal problem.

For example, when we notice thoughts of 'I' or 'me' arise, we can step back and observe the process of thought, and maybe disengage from personalization. More formally, when we understand that identification is the grasping of any of the Five Groups as self, we can try to relate to any of the Five Groups more objectively and less subjectively – it is just Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, and Bare Knowing impersonally functioning – rather than allow our relationship to the Five Groups to continue feeding I-making.

### Dis-Identification

For the unawakened person, much identification continues unconsciously through the activity of ignorant habits. To uproot these deeper levels of identification, it is usually necessary to actively engage in contemplations that support dis-identification.

What is required for dis-identification to really take effect is a thorough investigation of one's own experience in order to **'see as it really is with right wisdom'** (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati*) (S.III,80), or **'fully understand as it really is'** (*yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*) (S.III,13). This, of course, requires more than intellectual or conceptual understanding, since conceptualizing is also an aspect of identification and is therefore compromised and limited. Conceptualizing is only an abstract perception of experience, whereas identification inhabits the very core of our immediate experience.

Therefore, what is most beneficial is the development of meditation exercises: firstly, exercises in Calm Meditation to quieten the conceptualizing activity; and secondly, exercises in Insight Meditation that hone in from various angles and directions to help clarify, undermine and ultimately uproot the identification process. In effect,

we apply the meditative exercises to deeply contemplate our immediate experience beneath conceptualizing to know and see the forces at work creating the 'I', which we then can release for liberation.



This section on the cessation of identification is the longest and most extensive in this book, as it gives a very detailed explanation of the specific form of meditation practice which the Buddha outlined. Thus, in order to manage the material in a satisfactory way, I have divided it into three chapters. In these chapters I have presented the means of dealing with the cessation of the active processes, firstly, of Ignorance, and then Craving, in direct relation to the objects of identity, the Five Groups of Grasping and the Six Sense Bases. This is in contrast to dealing with processes and objects separately, as used in Chapters 10 to 12 on the arising of identification.

Also, since the first section of the cessation of ignorance is so long, I have divided it into two chapters. This chapter, Chapter 16, will focus on the theory underpinning the meditation exercises the Buddha gave, while Chapter 17 will focus on the practice of the meditation exercises themselves. In this way, if the theory becomes too convoluted for you, it is possible to skip to Chapter 17 for the meditation exercises proper, with a short summary of the theory. Chapter 18 will continue the theme of the cessation of identification with the focus on the cessation of craving.

In approaching the subject of the cessation of identification in this way, I hope the explanation is easier to understand.

## SECTION 1: The Cessation of Ignorance

### Part 1: The Theory

As we saw in Chapter 11, ignorance is extremely deep, all-encompassing and self-perpetuating. However, it can be resolved through ‘the arising of true knowledge (*vijjā*)’. True knowledge is the knowledge (*ñāṇa*) of the Four Noble Truths (S.V,429f). Ironically, this is equivalent to saying that true knowledge is knowing ignorance, since the Second and Third Noble Truths are expressed through the Conditional Causality formula, which is headed by ignorance.

Our usual dualistic, conceptual thinking assumes that the cessation of ignorance comes about through countering it with its opposite. However, the Buddha’s approach – following the principle of the Four Noble Truths – is that, if you wish to resolve something, you have to thoroughly study that issue in order to discover its cause. Only when the cause is completely removed will the issue be ultimately resolved. Thus, the cessation of ignorance is accomplished through the careful investigation of ignorance itself (which results in true knowledge).

Elsewhere in the Pali Canon true knowledge (*vijjā*) is variously defined as, or arises from:

1. clearly knowing (*pajānāti*) the Five Groups of Grasping, their origin, their cessation and the path to their cessation (S.III,163);
2. clearly knowing as it really is the Five Groups of Grasping subject to arising, subject to decay (*vaya*) and subject to arising and decay as they really are (S.III,171);
3. clearly knowing as it really is the gratification, disadvantage and escape from the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,174);

4. clearly knowing as it really is the origin and passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape from the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,174);
5. knowing and seeing the internal and external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact and feeling as impermanent (S.IV,31;50).

A number of different forms of knowing or understanding, from the root *jān* or *ñā*, are used throughout the Pali Canon in various contexts. As explained in the chapter on the Five Groups of Grasping, they include two functional forms of knowing: *viññāṇa* (bare knowing) and *saññā* (associative knowing).

There is ‘knowing’ (*jānaṃ, jānati*) or ‘clear knowing’ (*pajānāti*), and there is ‘knowledge’ (*ñāṇa*), mostly used in the phrase ‘knowledge and vision’ (*ñāṇa-dassana*). There is also a possible progressive development of knowing and understanding such that it becomes ‘thoroughly knowing’ and ‘full understanding’. In regard to the cessation of identification, the two forms most often mentioned are ‘thoroughly knowing’ (*abhijāna*) and ‘higher knowledge’ for *abhiññā* (*abhi + ñā*), and ‘fully understand’ (*parijāna*) and ‘full understanding’ for *pariññā* (*pari + ñā*).<sup>4</sup>

**‘The wasting of passion, the wasting of aversion, the wasting of delusion; this is called full understanding (*pariññā*).’ S.III,27.**

4 At CDB. p.1052, n.42 Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that in the Pali suttas the forms of *abhijāna* are used for both the disciple at the first three levels of awakening (*sekha*) and the arahant, while the forms of *parijāna* are only used for the arahant. (cf. MLDB. p.1200, n.200).

The form of developed knowledge most often mentioned in the Pali Canon is *paññā* (*pa + ñā*) meaning ‘knowing to a marked degree’ or ‘wisdom’, as in the phrase ‘see as it really is with right wisdom’ (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati*) (S.III,80). One is wise when they **‘possess wisdom regarding the arising and passing away which is noble and insightful, leading to the wasting away of *dukkha*. They clearly know as it really is [the Four Noble Truths].’** (S.V.199; cf. M.I,356). Three kinds of *paññā* are distinguished: wisdom based upon thinking (*cintā-mayā-paññā*); wisdom based upon learning (*suta-mayā-paññā*); and, wisdom based upon meditation (*bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*) (D.III,219). Wisdom is one of the three summaries of the Eightfold Path as Right View and Right Aspiration. It is also one of the Five Powers and one of the Ten Perfections. Also significant is the perfect knowledge (*aññā*) of the Arahant.

### Knowing and Understanding as ‘Seeing’

In the Pali Canon, seeing (*passaṃ* or *dassana*) is often used in place of knowing and understanding. There are numerous discourses where the Buddha directly states the facts of reality, for example that the Five Groups of Grasping are impermanent (S.III,19), concluding with the phrase: **‘Thus seeing (*evaṃ passaṃ*), bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple ...’**. The phrase: ‘regarding, seeing or perceiving as it really is’ (*yathābhūtaṃ samanupassati*) [i.e., the impermanence of Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,52)] is used often, and there are also the phrases: **‘seeing rightly’ (*sammā passaṃ*)** [i.e., the Five Groups of Grasping as impermanent (S.III,51)] and **‘seeing things as they really are’ (*yathābhūtaṃ dassana*)** (S.III,49).

In a similar vein, there is also **'looking at, observing, contemplating'** (*anupassati*), which is used in the development of mindfulness, and of course there is the most exceptional form of seeing, which is *vipassanā*, clear seeing or insight.

Both references to understanding are combined in the frequently used phrase: **'knowing and seeing as it really is'** (*jānaṃ passaṃ yathābhūtaṃ*) (M.III,288) and **'knowledge and vision'** (*ñāṇa-dassana*). The most comprehensive use of 'knowledge and vision' is in the Buddha's first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (S.V,420f) where three 'phases' of knowledge are distinguished.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, 'knowing and seeing' and 'knowledge and vision' are a comprehensive type of knowing – comprehensive in depth rather than extent. It is not merely intellectual knowledge, but a realization knowledge to be fully understood, as well as a retrospective knowledge, that has been fully understood. It was this type of knowing that allowed the arising of **'vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge and light'** (S.V,422) during the Buddha's awakening. Knowledge and vision, as well as 'knowing and seeing', express a complete form of understanding, 'knowing' providing the cognitive side and 'seeing' the experiential side.

### **As it Really is (*yathābhūtaṃ*)**

The Pali word *yathābhūtaṃ*, comes from *yathā*, meaning 'as, like, in relation to, according to, just as', and *bhūtaṃ*, meaning either what has 'become' or what is 'real' or 'true'. The word has been researched by Bhikkhu Analayo (2012, p.176–8) distinguishing three designations: 'as it has come to be'; 'according to reality' or 'truthfully'; and, 'as it really is'.

<sup>5</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB, p.1962, n.382) summarizes them as: '(i) the knowledge of each truth (*saccañāṇa*), e.g., "This is the noble truth of suffering"; (ii) the knowledge of the task to be accomplished regarding each truth (*kiccañāṇa*), e.g., "This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood [*pariññeyya*]"; and (iii) the knowledge of accomplishment regarding each truth (*katañāṇa*), e.g., "This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood."

## Supports for True Knowledge, Knowing and Understanding

True Knowledge, knowing and understanding do not, of course, simply arise by themselves, but function within the principles of cause and effect. At a number of places in the Pali Canon a sequence of causal conditions is outlined leading to knowledge and vision of the way things are, and liberation. The short version begins with virtuous conduct being the cause (*upanisā*) of collectedness, collectedness being the cause of knowledge and vision of the way things are, knowledge and vision of the way things are being the cause of disillusionment and dispassion, and disillusionment and dispassion being the cause of knowledge and vision of liberation. This sequence is compared to a tree with branches and foliage where its shoots, bark, softwood and heartwood all grow to fullness (A.III,20). The expanded version proceeds from virtuous conduct conditioning freedom from remorse, freedom from remorse conditioning gladness (*pāmojja*) ... joy (*pīti*) ... tranquillity ... well-being (*sukha*) ... collectedness ... knowledge and vision of the way things are ... disillusionment (*nibbidā*) ... dispassion (*virāga*) ... conditioning knowledge and vision of liberation (A.V,311ff; cf. A.V,1-2). Another sequence begins with appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) conditioning gladness ... as above ... dispassion conditioning liberation (D.III,288).

These causal conditions amount to a comprehensive path of spiritual development, as outlined in Chapter 14. There are, however, a number of ways spiritual development is presented in the Pali Canon with certain factors specially mentioned as supporting knowledge and understanding:

## 1 | Collectedness (*samādhī*)

**‘Bhikkhus, develop collectedness (*samādhī*). A bhikkhu who is collected clearly knows things as they really are (*yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*). And what do they know as it really is? The origin and passing away of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... the origin and passing away of Bare Knowing.’<sup>6</sup> S.III,13f.**

A similar statement is made regarding seclusion (*paṭisallāna*) (S.III,15), which is the basis for developing meditation.

## 2 | Appropriate Attention

**‘Bhikkhus, attend appropriately (*yoniso manasikarotha*) to Embodying. See as it really is (*yathābhūtaṃ samanupassatha*) the impermanence of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing ....’ S.III,52.**

One skilful mental quality the Buddha described as significant in the mental training of meditation and fundamental to the path to liberation is wise or appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). Attention (*manasikāra*) is a mental function present in every act of knowing, but what we attend to and how we attend have a strong effect upon the mind. Focussed attention can lead to ‘one-pointedness of mind’, one of the factors of absorption, while directing attention to the four subjects of mindfulness can give rise to contemplating (*anupassati*).

It is extremely useful to transform functional attention into ‘wise or appropriate (*yoniso*) attention’. In general, appropriate attention is giving attention to whatever is skilful (*kusala*) or supports skilful mental factors, while inappropriate attention gives rise to what is unskilful. It is through knowing and seeing appropriate attention and inappropriate

<sup>6</sup> At S.V,414 the things as they really are which are known are the four Noble Truths; at S.IV,143f the six internal sense bases, six external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact, feeling as impermanent ‘become manifest’ as they really are.

attention that there is wasting away of the Outflows:

**‘Bhikkhus, when one gives attention appropriately, unarisen Outflows do not arise and arisen Outflows pass away.’** M.I,7.

Thus it is appropriate to give attention to whatever does not give rise to the Outflows of sensuality, ill-will and ignorance, and whatever causes them to pass away. For example, rather than give attention to speculations about yourself (i.e., ignorance), it is appropriate to give attention to the Four Noble Truths (M.I,8f).

Appropriate attention is instrumental in **‘seeing as it really is (*yathābhūtaṃ samanupassatha*)’** the impermanence of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,52) and the Sense Bases (S.IV,142). Appropriate attention was key to the Buddha’s (and the previous six Buddhas’) **‘realization by wisdom (*paññāya abhisamayo*)’** of the process of Dependent Origination (S.II,6f). It is an important factor in de-nourishing the Five Hindrances (S.V,85;105) and developing the Seven Factors of Awakening (S.V,65f;79;84;101;104), in developing the Eightfold Path (S.V,31;35f), and in the arising of Right View (M.I,294). It is also a chief factor of skilful (*kusala*) states (S.V,91; A.I,13) and doing good kamma (A.V,87).

### 3 | Aids to Awakening (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*)<sup>7</sup>

Several of the Aids to Awakening are specifically mentioned as supporting knowledge and vision:

<sup>7</sup> Aids to Awakening (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*) are the collection of the 37 spiritual qualities under seven categories which are mentioned at various places in the Pali Canon. These include the Four Attendings with Mindfulness, the Four Right Strivings, the Four Bases for Spiritual Power, the Five Spiritual Faculties, the Five Spiritual Powers, the Seven Factors of Awakening and the Eightfold Path. For a detailed analysis see CDB, p.1485f.

### The Seven Factors of Awakening

'Here, Prince, a bhikkhu develops the awakening factor of mindfulness, based upon seclusion, dispassion and cessation, maturing in letting go (*vossagga*). With a mind that has developed the awakening factor of mindfulness, he knows and sees things as they really are. This indeed, Prince, is the cause, this the condition for knowledge and vision. In this way, knowledge and vision have cause and condition.

And further, Prince, a bhikkhu develops the awakening factor of investigation of dhammas ... energy ... joy ... tranquillity ... collectedness ... equanimity, based upon seclusion, dispassion and cessation, maturing in letting go. With a mind that has developed the awakening factor of equanimity, he knows and sees things as they really are. This indeed, Prince, is the cause, this the condition for knowledge and vision. In this way knowledge and vision have cause and condition.'

S.V,128.

On the contrary, the mind obsessed with any of the Five Hindrances is the cause and condition for the lack of knowledge and vision (S.V,127).

### The Four Attendings With Mindfulness<sup>8</sup>

'Here, bhikkhus, one abides contemplating (*anupassati*) the body as body, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world. As one abides contemplating the body as body, the body is fully understood. Since the body is fully understood, the Deathless (*amata*) is realized.

<sup>8</sup> For this rendering see Analayo (2000), p.29.

Here, bhikkhus, one abides contemplating feeling as feeling, ... states of mind as states of mind, ... phenomena as phenomena, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world. As one abides contemplating phenomena as phenomena, phenomena are fully understood. Since phenomena are fully understood, the Deathless is realized.<sup>1</sup> S.V,182.



### The Eightfold Path

‘When a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path, he fully understands by direct knowledge (*abhiññā pariññeyyā*) those things which are to be fully understood by direct knowledge; he abandons by direct knowledge those things which are to be abandoned by direct knowledge; he realizes by direct knowledge those things which are to be realized by direct knowledge; he develops by direct knowledge those things which are to be developed by direct knowledge.

And what, bhikkhus, are those things to be fully understood by direct knowledge? It is to be answered: the Five Groups of Grasping ....

And what, bhikkhus, are those things to be abandoned by direct knowledge? Ignorance and craving for existence. ...

And what, bhikkhus, are those things to be realized by direct knowledge? True knowledge (*vijjā*) and liberation. ...

And what, bhikkhus, are those things to be developed by direct knowledge? Calm and Insight. ...<sup>1</sup> S.V,52f; cf. A.II,246f.



Developing the Eightfold Path leads to Nibbāna and the realization of Arahantship. It facilitates the abandoning of passion, hatred and delusion; the Outflows; ignorance; craving; the Floods; and grasping (S.IV,252f). It also leads to full understanding of feeling; existence; *dukkha*; and identity (S.IV,255f).

## Developing True Knowledge to Fruition

In order for true knowledge, knowing, understanding and seeing as it really is to reach fruition, it is important for contemplative meditation to be applied:

- a. with a particular method,
- b. in a specific mode, and
- c. towards particular objects.

Fortunately, we do not need to investigate all aspects of reality.

**Once the Buddha was staying in a forest and took up a handful of leaves. He asked the bhikkhus which they thought were more numerous, the leaves in his hand or those in the forest. When they replied that the leaves in the forest were more numerous, the Buddha responded:**

**‘Even so, bhikkhus, those things I have known directly are numerous, while those I have taught are few. And why, bhikkhus, have I not taught them? Because they are not beneficial, not relevant to the basis of the spiritual life, and do not lead to disillusionment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to Nibbāna. Therefore I have not taught them.**

And what, bhikkhus, have I taught? I have taught, ‘This is *dukkha*’; I have taught, ‘This is the origin of *dukkha*’; I have taught, ‘This is the cessation of *dukkha*’; I have taught, ‘This is the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*’. And why, bhikkhus, have I taught this? Because this is beneficial, relevant to the basis of the spiritual life, and leads to disillusionment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to Nibbāna. Therefore I have taught this.’  
S.V,438.

### a. Methods of Contemplation

In many discourses of the Pali Canon, it is simply stated that one ‘clearly knows (*pajānāti*)’, (for example, the unskilful (*akusala*) and the skilful, plus their root (M.I,46f)), or that one ‘fully understands (*parijānāti*)’.

Elsewhere, specific ways to contemplate are described. Thus, a bhikkhu is encouraged to ‘make a thorough investigation (*parivīmaṃsati*)’ (S.II,80f), or ‘engage in an inner exploration (*antara sammāsana*)’ (S.II,107f) of ‘the diverse kinds of *dukkha* that arise in the world [headed by] ageing and death’, to discover its cause (*nidāna*) and origin (*samudaya*), what it is born from (*jātika*) and produced from (*pabhava*); and, with what existing does it come to be, and, with what not existing does it not come to be.

The instructions for the development of mindfulness encourage the student to ‘look at, observe, or contemplate (*anupassati*)’ the four objects of body, feelings, states of mind and phenomena in order to clearly see (*vipassanā*). One abides contemplating these four themes ‘earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world’, as well as abiding ‘independent, not clinging to anything in the world’ (M.I,55–6).

One of the Seven Factors of Awakening is investigation of phenomena (*dhamma-vicaya*), which is defined as: **'he examines it with wisdom (*pavicinati*), investigates it thoroughly (*pavicarati*), tests it all around (*parivīmaṃsati*)'** (S.V,68).

When the Seven Factors of Awakening are developed **'based upon seclusion, dispassion and cessation, ripening in letting go (*vivekanissitaṃ viragānissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggaparīṇāmiṃ*)'** they **'complete true knowledge and deliverance (*vijjā vimutti*)'** (M.III,88). When the Seven Factors of Awakening, the Five Spiritual Faculties, the Five Spiritual Powers or the Eightfold Path are likewise developed, they lead to the Unconditioned (S.IV,365ff).

From a peaceful state of mind, if one attends to the **'cessation of identity (*sakkāya-nirodha*)'** or to the **'breaking up of ignorance (*avijjāppabheda*)'**, success is only attained when the mind **'springs forward to it, finds satisfaction in it, settles upon it and is drawn to it'** (A.II,166).

## **b. Modes, or Ways of Contemplating**

Following the Buddha's direction as noted above, we find throughout the Pali Canon a number of modes of application as to how to develop true knowledge<sup>9</sup>. These are beneficial ways to contemplate specific themes, usually sequentially. Completing this progression is most important, since liberation results only through developing the mode of application to its end. For example, many people – religious, philosophers, artists – have made impressive studies of unsatisfactoriness, but few have investigated the cause of unsatisfactoriness, not to mention investigating the last two stages of cessation and developing a path of practice to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness.

<sup>9</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB, p.36f) provides an extensive explanation of what he calls 'template parallels' which follow 'the same formal pattern but which differ in the content to which this pattern is applied'.

Leaving aside various permutations, the three main modes of contemplation to develop true knowledge are:

1. That based upon the Noble Truths:<sup>10</sup>

In its simplest form, this is clearly knowing (*pajānāti*) the subject, its cause, its cessation and the path to cessation. In its most developed form this becomes: knowing the subject, giving up its cause, realizing its cessation, and developing the path to cessation.

**‘The noble truth of unsatisfactoriness is to be fully understood, the noble truth of the origin of unsatisfactoriness is to be given up; the noble truth of the cessation of unsatisfactoriness is to be realized (*sacchikātabba*); the noble truth of the path to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness is to be developed.’** S.V,436.

2. The Three Characteristics (or one of them) – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not a permanent self.<sup>11</sup>

Venerable Sariputta: **‘Friend Kotthita, a virtuous bhikkhu should appropriately attend to the Five Groups of Grasping as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, a boil, a dart, as misfortune, as an affliction, as alien, as breaking up, as empty, as not a permanent self. ... he may realize for himself the fruit of stream-entry.’** S.III,167f.

10 This mode is used regarding: unsatisfactoriness (S.V,429f); the Three Outflows (M.I,55); the three Feelings (S.IV,204f); the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,13f); twelve factors of Dependent Origination (M.I,49ff) and eleven factors of Dependent Origination (S.II,57f); and the four nutriments (M.I,47f).

11 This mode is used regarding: the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,19–25) & (S.III,43–46); the six internal and external sense bases (S.IV,1–6); feelings (S.IV,211f); six internal sense bases, six external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact, feeling, perception, volition, craving, (six) elements, Five Groups of Grasping (S.II,244–253); six bases of contact (S.IV,167); and all states of suffering (S.IV,188).

### 3. Gratification, Disadvantage and Escape<sup>12</sup>

**‘When beings have directly known as it really is gratification as gratification, the disadvantage as disadvantage, the escape as escape ... [regarding the Five Groups of Grasping], they have escaped from the world ... have become detached from it, released from it, and they abide with a mind unrestricted.’** S.III,31.

The well-being and ease (*sukha somanassa*) that arise in dependence on the Five Groups of Grasping is the gratification (*assāda*) in them; that they are impermanent, *dukkha* and subject to change is the disadvantage (*ādīnava*) in them; and the removal and giving up of desire and passion (*chandarāga*) is the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them (S.III,102f).

Sometimes the formula is extended to include **‘the origin (*samudaya*) and passing away (*atthaṅgama*)’** (i.e., at S.III,82). This mode and the Four Noble Truths mode are combined at S.III,61f.



Throughout the Pali Canon, the most frequently used mode of contemplation for developing true knowledge is the Four Noble Truths mode, beginning with the Buddha’s first teaching. The Three Characteristics mode is also frequently used, mostly as a ‘fast-track’ teaching for devoted disciples, for example, as the second teaching to the Buddha’s first five disciples. The Gratification, Disadvantage and Escape mode occurs less frequently, but features prominently in various teachings.

<sup>12</sup> This mode is used regarding: three feelings (S.IV,220); five feelings/faculties (S.V,207f); the four elemental qualities of earth, fire, water, and air (S.II,173); the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,27f); the six internal and six external sense bases (S.IV,10f); the six bases of contact (S.IV,254); and the world (A.I, 260).

### c. The Objects to Know

The basic principle of practice is to apply either of the first two modes of application to any of the Five Groups of Grasping (or specific aspects of them, such as the four elemental qualities of earth, fire, water, and air), or the Six Sense Bases (or the six bases of contact), and follow the contemplative process to its cessation or escape. Contemplating any of these objects by way of any one of the Three Characteristics, if contemplated resolutely, is sufficient to realize liberation.

### Summary for Developing the Practice

We now have the various pieces ready to assemble into an effective means of practising dis-identification – there are the active processes of identification to be engaged with, primarily ignorance and craving; there are specific methods of contemplation; there are the three principle modes of contemplation to developing true knowledge; and, there are the objects of investigation, primarily the Five Groups of Grasping and the Sense Bases.

The following chapter outlines various reflections and meditations which, if developed sufficiently, can lead to liberation.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- How is the connection to breathing – is it steady or wavering; clear or faint; strong or weak?
- When the mind seems to be reasonably calm, bring up the theme which is most relevant to you at this time, following one of the three main modes, either regarding the Five Groups of Grasping or the Sense Bases.
- Can you still maintain a connection to the breathing?
- Settle the mind on the most relevant theme first, seeing how deep and long you can sustain it.
- If investigation does not go very deep or it is hard to sustain, either re-settle the mind on breathing for some time or try another theme.
- It may require some practice to find the right balance of Calm and Insight.
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

## SEVENTEEN

# Identification | Ignorance: Practice

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## SECTION 1: The Cessation of Ignorance

### Part 2: The Practice

We now have the various pieces ready to assemble into an effective means of practising dis-identification. In the last chapter we learned about the four following themes:

1. the active processes of identification to be engaged with are primarily ignorance and craving. The cessation of ignorance is facilitated through the development of true knowledge, other forms of developed knowledge, understanding and seeing, as it really is;
2. the specific methods of contemplation, for example, the investigation of phenomena (*dhamma-vicaya*) factor of the Seven Factors of Awakening is defined as: **'he examines it with wisdom, investigates it thoroughly, tests it all around'** (S.V,68), while being **'based upon seclusion, dispassion and cessation, ripening in letting go'** (M.III,88);
3. the three main modes of contemplation to develop true knowledge – the Four Noble Truths mode, the Three Characteristics mode and the Gratification, Disadvantage, Escape mode;
4. the objects of investigation, primarily the Five Groups of Grasping and the Sense Bases.

Below are various reflections and meditations which, if developed sufficiently, can lead to liberation. These meditations cover a wide range of themes, since different approaches affect different people in different ways. It may be helpful initially to review the different themes to see which ones appear to interest you at this time. Of course, only with significant development of any particular theme may benefits be realized.

### **A. Contemplation of The Five Groups of Grasping**

In order to arrive at true knowledge, a thorough investigation of the Five Groups of Grasping is necessary. Thus, from a reasonably calm mind, one carefully contemplates these five groups. A helpful template is provided in the instructions for developing mindfulness:

**'... one abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world.**

**In this way, one abides contemplating the body as body internally, or one abides contemplating the body as body externally, or one abides contemplating the body as body both internally and externally. One abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body, or one abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Or mindfulness that "there is body" is established for the purpose of knowledge and mindfulness. One abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.'** M.I,55f.



## The Four Noble Truths Mode

**'Here, bhikkhu, the instructed noble disciple clearly knows (*pajānāti*) Embodying, clearly knows the origin of Embodying, clearly knows the cessation of Embodying, and clearly knows the path to the cessation of Embodying. [He clearly knows] Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, ... clearly knows the path to the cessation of Bare Knowing. This is called true knowledge, and to that extent one has arrived at true knowledge.'** S.III,163.



The origin of Embodying is nutriment (*āhāra*)<sup>1</sup> and the cessation of Embodying is the cessation of nutriment. The origin of Feeling, Recognizing and Willing and Habiting is contact, and their cessation is the cessation of contact. The origin of Bare Knowing is mentality-materiality, and its cessation is the cessation of mentality-materiality. The path to the cessation of all five groups is the Eightfold Path (S.III,59ff).

From the perspective of Dependent Origination, Bare Knowing is the origin of mentality (Feeling, Recognizing and Willing and Habiting) and materiality (Embodying), their cessation is the cessation of Bare Knowing<sup>2</sup>.

## The Gratification, Disadvantage and Escape Mode

In this mode, as with the Four Noble Truths mode, one thoroughly investigates the Five Groups of Grasping but from the perspective

1 In effect, nutriment for Embodying is threefold: material food, liquids and breath. Thus, any of these could be used as a contemplation for the origin of body, the breath being the most directly obvious.

2 Technically, the cessation of Embodying requires not only the cessation of Bare Knowing, but also the cessation of life force (*āyusañkhārā*) and heat (*usmā*) (M.I,296).

of the gratification, the disadvantage and the escape from them:

Venerable Sariputta: ‘Here, friend, the instructed noble disciple fully understands (*parijānāti*) as it really is the origin and passing away, the gratification, the disadvantage and the escape regarding Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. This is called, friend, true knowledge, and to that extent one has arrived at true knowledge.’ S.III,174.



‘The perception of impermanence is to be developed for abandoning the view of gratification.’ A.III,447.

### The Three Characteristics (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) Mode

The most comprehensive mode for the contemplation of any of the Five Groups of Grasping is through the Three Characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not a permanent self, either separately, or together.

A thorough contemplation of any of the Five Groups of Grasping reveals their impermanence. What is impermanent and subject to change is then seen as unsatisfactory, since it is uncertain and unreliable, which often causes anxiety and irritation, and possibly disappointment, frustration and resentment.

The conclusion is that whatever is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot be regarded as a self, which by definition should be permanent and satisfying. Therefore, despite our attempts to confirm a permanent self, when considered in this way, we realize that each of the Five Groups of Grasping is ultimately not a permanent self.

The intrinsic purpose of this contemplation is that once we see as it really is that there are no ‘solid objects’, because everything is changing, there is no longer any stable ground for subjective self-affirmation – there is nothing reliable to grasp onto as a permanent self. We still have a ‘sense of a self’ because the Five Groups of Grasping are still functioning, but we can now flow with the natural changing processes of reality rather than trying to grasp or hold them to a particular deluded, self-imposed form.

When we are able to see this truth **‘as it really is with right wisdom’**, then we become **‘disillusioned (*nibbidā*)’** with our previous relationship to the Five Groups of Grasping, which has fooled us for so long. If this insight is profound enough, this disillusionment results in dispassion (*virāga*) and liberation from identifying any of the Five Groups of Grasping as a self.

The contemplation of the Five Groups of Grasping in terms of the three characteristics is often presented in the form of a dialogue:

**‘What do you think, bhikkhus, is Embodying permanent or impermanent?’**

Impermanent, Venerable sir.

**Is what is impermanent unpleasant (*dukkha*) or pleasant (*sukha*)?**

Unpleasant, Venerable sir.

**Is what is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change suitable to be regarded as: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?**

No, Venerable sir.

**Are Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing permanent or impermanent?**

Impermanent, Venerable sir.

**Is what is impermanent unpleasant or pleasant?**

Unpleasant, Venerable sir.

Is what is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change suitable to be regarded as: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self”?

No, Venerable sir.

Therefore, bhikkhus, any Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, coarse or subtle, base or excellent, distant or near, all should be seen as it really is with right wisdom (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya*) as: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”.

Thus seeing, the learned noble disciple is disillusioned (*nibbidā*) with Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Disillusioned, he is dispassionate (*virajjati*); dispassionate (*virāga*), he is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge (*ñāṇa*): “It is liberated”. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.” S.III,67f.



## The Three Characteristics Contemplated Individually

Quite a number of the discourses mention only one of these ‘Three Characteristics’, often using the same general formula. It is thus acknowledged that a thorough realization of any one of these ‘Three Characteristics’ is sufficient for the ‘breakthrough to Dhamma’.

## Impermanence

The contemplation on the impermanence of the Five Groups is presented in a number of ways: the twofold contemplation of the origin (*samudaya*) and passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,13f), the threefold contemplation of the Five Groups of Grasping, their origin and their passing away (S.III,85;156f), the threefold contemplation of understanding the Five Groups of Grasping subject to arising, subject to decay (*vaya*) and subject to arising and decay as they really are (S.III,171), or in the fourfold Noble Truth formula of understanding (*pajānāti*) the Five Groups of Grasping, their origin, their cessation (*nirodha*) and the path to their cessation (S.III,59f).



**‘Bhikkhus, when the perception of impermanence is developed and increased it exhausts all passion for sense pleasures, exhausts all passion for existence, exhausts all ignorance, and uproots all “I am” conceit.**

...

**‘Just as, bhikkhus, in autumn when the sky is clear and without cloud, the sun, ascending into the heavens, expels all darkness and shines forth bright and brilliant, even so the awareness of impermanence, if developed and increased, exhausts all passion for sense pleasures, exhausts all passion for existence, exhausts all ignorance, and uproots all “I am” conceit.**

**And how, bhikkhus, is the perception of impermanence developed and increased so it exhausts all passion for sense pleasures, exhausts all passion for existence, exhausts all ignorance, and uproots all “I am” conceit? Thus is Embodying, thus its arising, thus its passing away; thus is Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ...; thus is Bare Knowing, thus its arising, thus its passing away.**

That is how the perception of impermanence is developed and increased so it exhausts all passion for sense pleasures, exhausts all passion for existence, exhausts all ignorance, and uproots all “I am” conceit.’

S.III,155f.



‘Embodying, Ananda, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to wasting away, to loss, to fading away, to cessation. Due to its cessation, cessation is so called.

Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to wasting away, to loss, to fading away, to cessation. Due to its cessation, cessation is so called.’ S.III,24f.



‘When one has understood the impermanence of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, their change, fading away and cessation, and sees as it really is with right wisdom: “In the past and in the present, all Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing are impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change,” then sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and distress are given up.’ S.III,43.



‘There are no Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing that are permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change or will remain for all eternity.’ S.III,144f.



**‘Impermanent, indeed, bhikkhus are conditions; thus, indeed, unstable; thus, indeed, not comforting. So far that it is enough to experience disillusionment towards all conditions, enough to be detached from them, enough to be liberated from them.’ S.III,146f.**

## **Unsatisfactoriness**

The Five Groups of Grasping are said to be unsatisfactory (S.III,19f;158), a burden (S.III,25), a misfortune (S.III,32). Probably the most poignant expression of unsatisfactoriness is given in the Buddha’s third discourse, The Discourse on Fire (SN. 35:28).

**‘Bhikkhus, all is burning. What, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, visible objects are burning, eye-knowing is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant – that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of anger, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and tribulation, I say.**

**The ear is burning ... the nose ... tongue ... body ... mind is burning ... Burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of anger, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and tribulation, I say.’ S.IV,19f.**



‘Therein, bhikkhus, the learned noble disciple reflects thus:

“I am now being consumed by Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. In the past I was also consumed by Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing in the same way that I am presently being consumed. If I were in future to enjoy Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, then in future I would be consumed by Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing.” S.III,87f.

## No Permanent Self

For most people, an ideal or ‘pristine’ self is assumed to have certain essential qualities. First and foremost is some degree of permanence and stability, continuity and coherence, at least over a lifetime (and maybe beyond). The second quality is complete autonomy (that is, I am a unique, free self) and therefore able to assert control over my body and mind. A third quality is well-being or comfort – if your self did not give some comfort you probably would not tolerate it.

The Buddha approached the theme of not a permanent self from a variety of angles.

### **a. Impermanence**

The Buddha's most common method of teaching about no permanent self was by way of impermanence:

**'The perception of impermanence should be developed to uproot the conceit "I am". When one perceives impermanence the perception of no permanent self is established. One who perceives no permanent self uproots the conceit "I am" – Nibbāna here and now.'** A.IV,353.

### **b. Lack of Control**

In the Discourse on the Characteristic of No Permanent Self (Anatta-lakkhana Sutta), the Buddha's second teaching, he pointed out a major inconsistency in the belief in a permanent self, which is that we do not have complete control over it.

**'Bhikkhus, Embodying is not a permanent self. If, bhikkhus, Embodying were self, it would not lead to affliction, and it could be obtained of Embodying that "my Embodying may be like this; my Embodying may not be like this". But because Embodying is not a permanent self, it leads to affliction, and one cannot obtain of Embodying that "my Embodying may be like this; my Embodying may not be like this".**

**Feelings are not a permanent self ... Recognizing is not a permanent self ... Willing and Habiting are not a permanent self ... Bare Knowing is not a permanent self. If Bare Knowing were self, it would not lead to affliction, and it could be obtained of Bare Knowing that "my Bare Knowing may be like this; my Bare Knowing may not be like this". But because Bare Knowing is not a permanent self, it leads to affliction, and one cannot obtain of Bare Knowing that "my Bare Knowing may be like this; my Bare Knowing may not be like this".' S.III,66f (Anatta-lakkhana Sutta).**



‘Bhikkhus, give up (*pajahatha*) what is not yours. When you have given it up that will be for your welfare and happiness. What is it that is not yours? Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing are not yours, give them up. When you have given them up that will be for your welfare and happiness.

Suppose, bhikkhus, people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jeta’s Grove, or to burn them or do with them whatever they wish. Would you consider: “People are carrying us off, burning us or doing whatever they wish with us?”

“No, venerable.”

What is the reason?’

“Because, venerable, that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self.”

Likewise, bhikkhus, Embodying is not yours ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing are not yours, give them up. When you have given them up that will be for your welfare and happiness.’ S.III,33f.



### c. Causally-Arisen

Closely related to the reflection on the impermanent nature of what we take to be a self is the causally-arisen nature of the factors of selfhood, the Five Groups of Grasping, which are impermanent because of their causally-arisen nature, that is, they depend upon other factors for their existence.

Sometimes this causally-arisen nature is mentioned together with impermanence, for example, when ‘the regarding’ of the Five Groups of Grasping as a self in any of the four modes is called a ‘condition (*saṅkhāra*)’ which, together with the craving, feeling, contact and ignorance, which cause it, are all ‘**impermanent, conditioned (*saṅkhata*), and dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppanna*)**’ (S.III,96f; cf. S.IV,211f). Elsewhere it is mentioned that the conditioned Five Groups of Grasping are to be understood as they really are as conditioned (S.III,56f).

All the factors of the Dependent Origination formula are said to be ‘**impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to wasting away, to decay, to waning, to cessation.**’ S.II,26.



‘Does not eye-knowing arise on account of eye and sights?’

Yes, friend.

If the cause and condition for the arising of eye-knowing were to cease altogether and in every way without remainder, would eye-knowing be evident?

No, friend.

Thus is the reason that the Revered One has announced, made clear and explained, “Thus, bare knowing is not a permanent self.” S.IV,166f.

#### d. Composite Nature

Another aspect of no permanent self is that what we usually take to be the self is actually a composite of various factors. For example, at S.IV,196f the Buddha tells the story of a king or royal minister who hears the ‘entrancing’ sound of a lute. He asks someone to bring him the lute, but is disappointed by it and requests them to just bring him the sound. He is told that the sound comes from the lute, which is composed of numerous components, and the effort of the musician. The king, however, has the lute split up into many pieces. The Buddha then says that likewise a bhikkhu searches the Five Groups of Grasping to their limit and finds that there is no longer any ‘I’, ‘mine’ or ‘I am’.

**‘What now, you take for granted “a being”;**

**Is that, Māra, your view?**

**This is a simple heap of conditions,**

**Here is found no “being”.**

**Just as with a combination of parts,**

**The word “chariot” is used,**

**Thus when the Groups exist,**

**The convention “a being” is used.**

**Only unsatisfactoriness arises,**

**Unsatisfactoriness that stands and falls,**

**Nought but unsatisfactoriness arises,**

**Nought but unsatisfactoriness ceases.’**

Bhikkhuni Vajirā, S.I,135.

### e. Emptiness

In the Buddha's teaching, the concept of 'emptiness' (*suñña*) is usually applied in the sense of empty of something.

**'In what respect, Venerable, is it said, "Empty world?"**

**It is, Ananda, because it is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self that it is said, "Empty world".**

**What is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self? The eye, Ananda, is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self. Visible objects are empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self. Eye-knowing is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self. Eye-contact is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self. Whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition ... with mind-contact as condition, whether pleasant or unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, that also is empty of a permanent self and of what belongs to a permanent self.'** S.IV,54.



**'Look upon the world as empty, Mogharaja, always being mindful. Remove any view of a permanent-abiding self, and you may pass beyond death. If you view the world like this, the King of Death sees you not.'** Sn. 1119.



In one of the exercises in the development of the meditation on the base of nothingness, (*ākiñcañña-āyatana*) the meditator considers: **‘This is empty of a permanent self or what belongs to a permanent self.’** (M.II,263). At M.I,297f this is called, **‘deliverance of mind through emptiness’**.



**‘Suppose, bhikkhus, that this river Ganges was carrying along a large lump of foam. A man with good sight would see it, reflect on it and carefully examine it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in a lump of foam?’**

Even so, bhikkhus, whatever kind of Embodying, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – a bhikkhu sees it, reflects on it and carefully examines it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in Embodying?

Suppose, bhikkhus, in the autumn, when it is raining large drops, a bubble arises and bursts. A man with good sight would see it, reflect on it and carefully examine it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in a water bubble?

Even so, bhikkhus, whatever kind of Feeling, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – a bhikkhu sees it, reflects on it and carefully examines it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in Feeling?

Suppose, bhikkhus, in the last month of the hot season, at midday, a shimmering mirage appears. A man with good sight would see it, reflect on it and carefully examine it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in a mirage?

Even so, bhikkhus, whatever kind of Recognizing, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – a bhikkhu sees it, reflects on it and carefully examines it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in Recognizing?

Suppose, bhikkhus, a man desiring heartwood, seeking heartwood, roaming in search for heartwood, would take a sharp axe and enter into the forest. There he would see the trunk of a large plantain tree, straight, fresh, growing to a great height. He would cut it down at the root, sever off the top and remove the outer layer. As he removes the outer layers he would not even find soft wood, whence heartwood. A man with good sight would see it, reflect on it and carefully examine it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in a plantain trunk?

Even so, bhikkhus, whatever kind of Willing and Habiting, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – a bhikkhu sees it, reflects on it and carefully examines it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in Willing and Habiting?

Suppose, bhikkhus, a conjurer or a conjurer's apprentice would show a conjurer's illusion at a crossroads. A man with good sight would see it, reflect on it and carefully examine it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in a conjurer's illusion?

Even so, bhikkhus, whatever kind of Bare Knowing, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – a bhikkhu sees it, reflects on it and carefully examines it. It would appear to him to be void, vacuous, insubstantial. What substance could there be in Bare Knowing?

Thus seeing, the learned noble disciple is disillusioned (*nibbidā*) with Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Disillusioned, he is dispassionate; dispassionate, he is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”

Embodying is like a lump of foam;  
 Feeling is like a water bubble;  
 Recognizing is like a mirage;  
 Willing and Habiting is like a plantain trunk;  
 Bare Knowing is like an illusion;  
 So expounded the Kinsman of the Sun [the Buddha].

However one may reflect,  
 Or thoroughly examine,  
 It is but void and vacuous,  
 When one thoroughly understands ....’ S.III,140f.

## Contemplation of Embodying (or the Elements) and Feelings

In the Pali Canon, special emphasis is given to the contemplation of two specific factors of the Five Groups of Grasping, as deep contemplation of either of them can lead directly to liberation. These two are Embodying (or its Elements) and Feelings.

## Embodying

You may recall from Chapter 7 that rūpa (Embodying) is defined as the four ‘great elemental qualities’ (*mahābhūtā*), of earth (solidity), fire (heat), water (fluidity) and air (motion), and the physicality derived from them. That is, the physical body is the embodying of the four elements.

The Pali Canon states that mindfulness directed to the body (*kāyagatāsati*) results in many beneficial things, including: ignorance passing away, true knowledge arising, the conceit ‘I am’ passing away, the underlying dispositions uprooted, the fetters passing away, realization of Nibbāna without grasping, and the realization of the fruit of arahantship (A.1,43f). The *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* at MN.119 gives a thorough explanation of the practices involved<sup>3</sup> and the results to be gained.

The contemplation of Embodying follows the instructions for developing mindfulness of the body as outlined in the Discourse of Attending with Mindfulness (DN.22 and MN.10) and the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* at MN.119.

Included in these instructions are the contemplation of the Four Elements, which (as well as the six elements<sup>4</sup>) are sometimes referred to as separate contemplations which give significant results.



**‘... this body is subject to impermanence, to be worn and rubbed away, to breaking and destruction. It should be seen as impermanent, unsatisfactory, a disease, an abscess, a dart, a misfortune, an affliction, as other, as decaying, as empty, as not a permanent self. Seeing the body thus, one abandons desire for the body, affection for the body, subservience to the body.’** M.1,500.

3 These are equivalent to the exercises on body contemplation in the discourses on developing mindfulness: DN.22 and MN.10, without the section on absorptions.

4 The six elements are the four material elements plus space and bare knowing/consciousness.

## The Elemental Qualities

An associated contemplation is that regarding the four elements or six elements. See Appendix 1 for how the internal elements relate to the thirty-one parts of the body.

**‘Rahula, the internal earth element and the external earth element are just the earth element. This should be seen as it really is with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”. Having seen this as it really is with right wisdom, one becomes disillusioned with the earth element, one frees the mind from the earth element.**

**Rahula, the internal water ... fire ... air element and the external water ... fire ... air element are just the water ... fire ... air element. This should be seen as it really is with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”. Having seen this as it really is with right wisdom, one becomes disillusioned with the water ... fire ... air element, one frees the mind from the water ... fire ... air element.**

**When, Rahula, a bhikkhu does not regard these four elements as self or what belongs to self, he is called a bhikkhu who has cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering.’ A.II,164f.**



**‘Friends, I have arrived at no permanent self in the earth element, with no permanent self dependent upon the earth element. And with the wasting, waning, cessation, giving up, relinquishing of taking up and grasping, of resolution, adherence and underlying disposition in dependence upon the earth element, I have clearly known that my mind is liberated.**

Friends, I have arrived at no permanent self in the water element ... fire element ... air element ... space element ... bare knowing element. And with the wasting, waning, cessation, giving up, relinquishing of taking up and grasping, of resolution, adherence and underlying disposition in dependence upon the bare knowing element, I have clearly known that my mind is liberated.

Friends, it is by thus knowing, thus seeing these six elements that without grasping my mind is liberated from the Outflows.’ M.III,31.



## Feeling

As mentioned in previous chapters, Feeling is one of the two most prominent of the Five Groups of Grasping, together with Bare Knowing, as it factors so significantly in most people’s life. Therefore, a clear understanding of it can powerfully assist progress on the path to liberation.

‘He abides contemplating impermanence in the body and in pleasant feeling, abides contemplating decay, abides contemplating fading away, abides contemplating cessation, abides contemplating relinquishment. As he abides thus contemplating, the underlying disposition to passion regarding the body and pleasant feeling passes away.

He abides contemplating impermanence in the body and in unpleasant feeling, abides contemplating decay, abides contemplating fading away, abides contemplating cessation, abides contemplating relinquishment. As he abides thus contemplating, the underlying disposition to aversion regarding the body and unpleasant feeling passes away.

He abides contemplating impermanence in the body and in neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, abides contemplating decay, abides contemplating fading away, abides contemplating cessation, abides contemplating relinquishment. As he abides thus contemplating, the underlying disposition to ignorance regarding the body and neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling passes away.

If he feels a pleasant feeling, he clearly knows: “It is impermanent”; he clearly knows: “It is not held to”; he clearly knows: “It is not enjoyed”. If he feels an unpleasant feeling, he clearly knows: “It is impermanent”; he clearly knows: “It is not held to”; he clearly knows: “It is not enjoyed”. If he feels a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he clearly knows: “It is impermanent”; he clearly knows: “It is not held to”; he clearly knows: “It is not enjoyed”.<sup>1</sup> S.IV,211f.



‘Aggivessana, pleasant feeling ... unpleasant feeling ... neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to decay, vanishing, waning, ceasing. Seeing thus, the well-taught noble disciple becomes disillusioned ... Disillusioned, he is dispassionate. Through dispassion one is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. One knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”’ M.I,500.



‘When the nutriment contact is thoroughly understood, the three feelings are thoroughly understood. When the three feelings are thoroughly understood, I say there is nothing further that the noble disciple needs to do.’ S.II,99.



‘When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu has seen (*ditṭha*) pleasant feeling as unsatisfactory, unpleasant feeling as a dart, neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling as impermanent, he is called “a bhikkhu who sees rightly, has cut off craving, severed the fetters, and by thoroughly penetrating conceit, has made an end to *dukkha*.”’ S.IV,207.

## B. Contemplation of The Sense Bases

The cessation of identification with the Six Sense Bases is outlined in much the same way as cessation of identification with the Five Groups of Grasping. In line with the special emphasis given to the Sense Bases in the perceptual process and the ‘enlivening’ of the Five Groups of Grasping, we are presented with an auxiliary set of instructions: to guard the doors of the senses, practise sense restraint and ‘master’ the states that arise due to sense contact. Two different methods of guarding the doors of the senses and one method of practising sense restraint are presented in Chapter 14 on The Path.

If desire, passion, aversion, delusion or repugnance should arise in regard to a sense impression, then one should ‘rein in the mind’ (*cittam nivāreti*) by considering: ‘**This is a way fearful and frightening, thorny, dangerous, deviant, wrong and difficult**’ (S.IV,195). When the mind has been ‘subdued, well subdued’ in regard to the six bases of contact, it then becomes inwardly settled, quieted, unified and collected (S.IV,196).

The second phase of dealing skilfully with the Sense Bases is to learn to be free of the unwholesome, negative and defiling states which may be aroused through sense contact. Thus one can be free of the ‘**evil, unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the**

fetters<sup>5</sup> by ‘not consenting to them, but giving them up, dispelling them, putting an end to them and sending them to utter cessation’. Thus one can become the ‘master of the sense bases’ (S.IV,77). Through sense restraint the mind is not disturbed and thus gladness (*pāmojja*) arises, followed by a series of positive states – joy, bodily tranquillity, well-being, collectedness – resulting in ‘things becoming manifest’ (S.IV,78f), that is, one sees with wisdom the arising or not arising of the defilements of passion, aversion and delusion (S.IV,139).

‘Bhikkhus, if in any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, desire, lust, hatred, delusion, aversion should arise in the mind regarding eye-knowing from visible objects, the mind should be thus restrained: “This path is fearful and frightening, thorny, a thicket, is off-track, the wrong path and beset with danger. This is a path for unworthy people, not a path for worthy people. It is not worthy of you.” Thus the mind should be restrained regarding eye-knowing from visible objects. So too regarding ear-knowing ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind-knowing.

Just as, bhikkhus, if the corn is ripe and the watcher of the cornfield is negligent, a corn-eating bull will enter the cornfield and exhibits intoxication and carelessness as much as he wants. Even so, bhikkhus, the unlearned ordinary person who is unrestrained in the six bases for contact exhibits intoxication and carelessness as much as he wants in the five kinds of sensuality.

Just as, bhikkhus, if the corn is ripe and the watcher of the cornfield is vigilant, if a corn-eating bull enters the corn-field, the watcher would catch hold of the bull, give him a sound beating and drive the bull away. That corn-eating-bull, whether having gone to the village or forest, standing or sitting, remembering that beating, would not enter that cornfield again.

5 Following Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation: cf. CDB, p.1411, n.79.

Even so, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu's mind, in regard to the six bases for contact, has become subdued, thoroughly subdued, it then becomes internally steadied, quieted, unified and collected.' S.IV,195f.



### Contemplation By Way of the Three Characteristics

Once the mind has been calmed and collected, the Sense Bases are to be seen clearly as impermanent, *dukkha* and not a permanent self (S.IV,1-6).

'Bhikkhu, when one knows and sees the eye as impermanent, ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge arises. When one knows and sees visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... whatever feeling ... as impermanent, ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge arises. When one knows and sees the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mind objects ... mind-knowing ... mind contact ... whatever feeling ... as impermanent, ignorance is abandoned and true knowledge arises.' S.IV,31.



'If someone says "The eye is self", that is not acceptable. The appearance and decay of the eye is evident, and as its appearance and decay is evident, it is concluded: "My self appears and decays." Therefore it is not acceptable for someone to say, "The eye is self". Thus the eye is not a permanent self.

If someone says "Visible objects are self ... eye-knowing ... eye contact ... feeling ... craving is self", that is not acceptable. The appearance

and decay of craving is evident, and as its appearance and decay is evident, it is concluded: “My self appears and decays.” Therefore it is not acceptable for someone to say, “Craving is self”. Thus the eye is not a permanent self, sights are not a permanent self ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... feeling ... craving is not a permanent self.

If someone says, “The ear is self ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... Thus the mind is not a permanent self, mental phenomena are not a permanent self ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling ... craving is not a permanent self.’ M.III,282f.



‘Bhikkhus, that is the incomparable state of excellent peace and highest wisdom realized by the Tathagata, that is, liberation through not grasping, through fully understanding as they really are the origination, passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape regarding the six bases of contact.’ M.II,238.



One of the most direct and succinct teachings on the Sense Bases which lead to liberation was given by the Buddha to the elderly bhikkhu Bahiya. When he came to request a ‘teaching in brief’, the Buddha offered him a very profound teaching:

‘Therefore, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: in the seen there will be merely what is seen; in the heard there will be merely what is heard; in the sensed there will be merely what is sensed; in the known there will be merely what is known.

**In this way, Bahiya, you should train yourself. Since, in the seen is merely what is seen ... in the known is merely what is known, then, Bahiya, you will not be “by that”. When, Bahiya, you are not “by that”, then, Bahiya, you will not be “in that”. When, Bahiya, you are not “in that”, then Bahiya, you will be neither here nor beyond, nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering.**<sup>6</sup> Udana, 1.10.

This succinct and very profound teaching explains a way of relating to reality in which a self-subject does not arise. To appreciate this teaching it may be helpful to review the chapter on the Perceptual Process. The gist of the teaching is that if one is able to simply abide with the bare knowing and feeling of sense contact then there is no self-subject that arises — no sense of ‘you’ and ‘that (sense object)’, no involvement ‘in that’, etc. With no self-subject there is no one who suffers.

## **Contemplation of the Four Nutriments**

The contemplation of the Four Nutriments, although mentioned only rarely in the Pali Canon, is considered to be an especially beneficial contemplation giving rise to the possibility of deep spiritual realization.

**‘When the nutriment material food is fully understood, passion for the five strands of sense pleasure is fully understood. When passion for the five strands of sense pleasure is fully understood, there is no fetter bound by which a noble disciple might come again to this world ....**

**When the nutriment contact is fully understood, the three feelings are fully understood. When the three feelings are fully understood, there is nothing further that a noble disciple needs to do ....**

<sup>6</sup> A similar teaching is given to Mālunkyaputta at S.IV,73. There it is elaborated that the process is accomplished through the presence of mindfulness so that the mind is not inflamed by lust for sense objects.

When the nutriment mental volition is fully understood, the three kinds of craving are fully understood. When the three kinds of craving are fully understood, there is nothing further that a noble disciple needs to do ....

When the nutriment bare knowing is fully understood, mentality-materiality are fully understood. When mentality-materiality are fully understood, there is nothing further that a noble disciple needs to do' S.II,98f.<sup>7</sup>



## A Variety of Methods to Liberation

Having reviewed the above methods of meditation practice, one becomes aware that there are various approaches to meditation which may be successful for any individual:

'A certain bhikkhu approached another bhikkhu and asked him: "In what respect, friend, is a bhikkhu's vision (*dassana*) thoroughly purified (*suvisuddha*)?"'

When, friend, a bhikkhu knows as it really is the origin and passing away of the six bases of contact, to that extent a bhikkhu's vision is thoroughly purified.

Then the (first) bhikkhu, not pleased with that bhikkhu's explanation, approached another bhikkhu and asked him: "In what respect, friend, is a bhikkhu's vision thoroughly purified?"'

7 The results of fully understanding material food only reach as far as the third level of Awakening, while the results of fully understanding the other three nutriments reach to the fourth stage of arahantship.

When, friend, a bhikkhu knows as it really is the origin and passing away of the Five Groups of Grasping, to that extent a bhikkhu's vision is thoroughly purified.

Then the (first) bhikkhu, not pleased with that bhikkhu's explanation, approached another bhikkhu and asked him: "In what respect, friend, is a bhikkhu's vision thoroughly purified?"

When, friend, a bhikkhu knows as it really is the origin and passing away of the four elements, to that extent a bhikkhu's vision is thoroughly purified.

Then the (first) bhikkhu, not pleased with that bhikkhu's explanation, approached another bhikkhu and asked him: "In what respect, friend, is a bhikkhu's vision thoroughly purified?"

When, friend, a bhikkhu knows as it really is that whatever is of a nature to arise, is all of a nature to cease, to that extent a bhikkhu's vision is thoroughly purified.' S.IV,191f.



## The Fulfilment of Contemplation and its Benefits

When the contemplation of the Three Characteristics is developed to a sufficient degree, then a new, wiser way of seeing reality arises. Depending upon the depth of this insight, the different levels of Liberation manifest.

**'Embodying, bhikkhus, is impermanent ... unsatisfactory ... not a permanent self, both of the past and future, to say nothing of the present. Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple is**

indifferent (*anapekkha*) towards Embodying of the past, does not seek delight in Embodying of the future and is practising disillusionment, dispassion and cessation towards Embodying of the present. Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting .... Bare Knowing, bhikkhus, is impermanent ... unsatisfactory ... not a permanent self, both of the past and future, to say nothing of the present. Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple is indifferent towards Bare Knowing of the past, does not seek delight in Bare Knowing of the future and is practising disillusionment, dispassion and cessation towards Bare Knowing of the present.’ S.III,19-20.



‘Bhikkhus, I say that the wasting of the Outflows occurs dependent upon the first absorption ... second absorption ... cessation of perception and feeling.

Whatever there is of Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, and Bare Knowing, he regards as impermanent, *dukkha*, an illness, an abscess, misery, an affliction, foreign, breaking up, empty and not a permanent self. He turns his mind away from these phenomena and focuses on the Deathless element: “This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities (*saṅkhārā*), the relinquishing of all supports (*upadhi*), the wasting away of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.” If he is steadfast in this he reaches the wasting of the Outflows.’ A.IV,422f.



‘Embodying, bhikkhus, is impermanent; Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing is impermanent ... unsatisfactory ... not a permanent self. Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences disillusionment towards Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Experiencing disillusionment, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is liberated. With liberation comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. He clearly knows: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.” S.III,21.

.....

## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently, and bring attention to breathing.
- When the mind seems to be reasonably calm, bring up the theme of Craving – for sense pleasure, for existence, for non-existence.
- Can you contact some direct experience of one, or all of them?
- What is that experience like – pleasant or unpleasant; heavy or light; spacious or cramped?
- Can you still maintain a connection to the breathing?
- See if you can bring up the image of letting go of that craving; not pushing it away, but gently releasing it, relinquishing it, putting it down.
- What is that like?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

EIGHTEEN

# Identification | Craving

.....

## SECTION 2: The Cessation of Craving

**‘What, sister, is called the cessation of identity by the Revered One?**

**Friend Visakha, it is the complete waning (*virāga*) and ceasing (*nirodha*), the giving up (*cāga*), forsaking (*paṭinissagga*), releasing (*mutti*), and relinquishing (*anālaya*) of that same craving.’** M.I, 299; cf. S.III,158.



Craving is an extremely pernicious and pervasive factor in life, so not easily put to rest. While it may appear logical to simply get rid of craving that is the cause of identity, trying to get rid of craving is either craving for non-existence (of craving) or craving for existence free from craving. Thus we are still caught in the net of craving.

Craving manifests in three forms: craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence and craving for non-existence. Once we are familiar with these various manifestations, we can work to relinquish whatever form predominates at any particular time. When one understands craving, one realizes that craving is actually a false, insatiable attempt of self to verify its existence. We crave sense pleasures as an object to confirm a subject, but sense pleasures are impermanent and unreliable. We crave

existence for self, yet any existence is impermanent. We crave non-existence but realize that it is based upon the false belief that there is something that can be extinguished.

The means to the cessation of Craving which the Buddha discovered is through the **'complete waning (*virāga*) and ceasing (*nirodha*), giving up (*cāga*), forsaking (*paṭinissagga*), releasing (*mutti*), and relinquishing (*anālaya*)'** of Craving. We can realize this through the Way of Relinquishment, of craving directly, or the conditions which support it. Or we can use the Way of Development, by developing particular reflections or by the development of suitable spiritual faculties, such as the Seven Factors of Awakening.

### The Way of Relinquishment

The Way of Relinquishment requires a thorough knowledge of Craving and its negative effects. Endowed with this knowledge, we are then inclined to forsake, release or relinquish craving as soon as it arises, rather than be swept along or reinforce this pervasive force. At the very least, a clear awareness of the deleterious effects of Craving can heighten our resolve to relinquish it.

### Cessation of Craving for Sense Pleasures

In brief, the Buddha teaches that the way to experience the complete escape from sensual desires is to understand 'as they really are' (*yathābūta*) the origin and passing away, and the gratification, disadvantage and escape, regarding sensual pleasures. This is called **'the severance of the bond of sensuality'** (A.II,11). Thus, when one truly understands how unreliable and ultimately unsatisfying sense pleasures really are, desire and passion for them completely cease.

The Buddha's view regarding sensual pleasures is that, while acknowledging that they do give the gratification of well-being and ease (*sukha somanassa*), he warned of their limitations and the dangers of following them:

**'The Revered One has said that sense pleasure has little delight, much suffering and tribulation, and the disadvantage is much more.'** M.I,130.

The disadvantages are explained at M.I,85f, while some striking similes are elaborated at M.I,364f where the Buddha compares sensual pleasures to a fleshless skeleton unable to allay the hunger and weakness of a suffering dog; to a piece of meat seized by a vulture, heron or hawk that is pursued by another vulture, heron or hawk which strikes at it maliciously; to a blazing grass torch held by someone against the wind; to a glowing charcoal pit to which someone is forcefully being dragged; to a dream of pleasant scenery from which someone awakes; to borrowed possessions which are retrieved by the owner; and to the fruits on a tree that is eventually cut down.

As you review these striking similes, I'm sure you can recall an experience where you were thwarted from some pleasure in a way reflected in these images; for example, expecting more from some pleasure and then being unsatisfied like the hungry dog.

The Buddha emphasized the disadvantages of sensual pleasures because whatever one **'frequently ponders on or thinks over, that becomes the inclination of the mind'** (M.I,116) and also because it is not possible to engage in sensual pleasures without having **'sensual delight, perceptions of sensual pleasure and thoughts of sensual pleasure.'** That is, indulging in sensual pleasure tends to habituate the mind to sensual thinking, and the possibility of being overwhelmed by it (M.I,133).

On the other hand, the Buddha encouraged and praised spiritual pleasure. For example, two of the exercises for developing meditation on breathing advise training the mind to follow the breath while experiencing joy and well-being (*pīti sukha*; M.III,82-3). The refined states of collectedness (*jhāna*) the Buddha experienced led to a happiness far superior to sensual pleasure (S.IV,226f). He referred to this as **‘the well-being of renunciation, the well-being of seclusion, the well-being of calming, the well-being of awakening’** (M.III,233; I,454), which should be pursued and is not to be feared. The experience of the joy and well-being from states of *jhāna* breaks the infatuation with worldly sensual pleasures (M.I,91), while the pleasant and neutral (equanimity) spiritual feelings that arise do not have the Underlying Dispositions to passion and ignorance underlying them (M.I,303).

However, the refined states of collectedness are only a temporary respite from the attraction of sensual pleasures. The Buddha discovered a complete ‘escape’ from sensual pleasures. This is the **‘putting away and giving up of desire and passion for sensual pleasures’** (M.I,87), which occurs at the third of the four levels of awakening.

### Cessation of Craving for Existence

Although craving for sense pleasures is the most obvious form of craving, craving for existence is the most basic form, in that, craving for sense pleasures is simply another form of craving for existence, that is, craving for a pleasurable existence.

Craving for existence is conditioned by ignorance (A.V.116). Thus people under the sway of ignorance are obsessed with striving for the most pleasant form of existence attainable. However, the Buddha realized that all forms of existence, no matter how exalted or refined, are impermanent.

One of the 'brahmin truths' is:

**“All states of existence are impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change.” ... having directly known that truth, he is practising for the disillusionment (*nibbidā*), fading away and cessation of just those states of existence.’ A.II,177.**



It is thus only through higher knowledge (*abhiññā*) of the way things really are that ignorance and craving for existence are given up (M.III,289; S.V,52; A.II,247). This realization of the Buddha was a result of his awakening to Conditional Causality, which focusses upon the processes creating existence:

**‘*Kaccāna*, the world usually depends upon the duality of “existence” and “non-existence”. But for those who see the truth of the arising of the world as it really is with right wisdom, there is not for them any “non-existence” in the world. And for those who see the truth of the passing away of the world as it really is with right wisdom, there is not for them any “existence” in the world.**

**“All exists” is one extreme; “All does not exist” is the second extreme. Not going to either extreme, the Tathāgata expounds a teaching in the middle: With ignorance as condition, willing and habiting come to be; with willing and habiting as condition, consciousness ... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.’ S.II,17 abridged.**



Understanding Conditional Causality results in the realization that all states of existence are merely continuously conditioned processes, and not permanent abidings. Existence is like the flame of a candle which only continues to exist as long as the melting wax and oxygen keep feeding it, even though the flame appears as its own unique entity.

### Cessation of Craving for Non-existence

As we read in the chapter on Identification, craving for non-existence is based upon the (wrong) view that there is some permanent self which can be annihilated. However, with the realization that there is ultimately no permanent self to be annihilated, the craving for non-existence ceases.

### Cessation of Supports for Craving

We read in the chapter on Identity that craving has a number of causes and supports. The cessation of craving can thus be assisted through relinquishing its causes and/or supports.

The primary cause of craving is feeling, as presented in Conditional Causality. Craving arises for the ordinary person, still regarding any of the Five Groups of Grasping as self, when **'contacted by a feeling born of ignorance-contact'** (S.III,99). However, when feeling is fully understood as **'impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to decay, vanishing, waning, ceasing'** (S.IV,211), then that feeling-conditioned-craving ceases:

**'With the cessation of feeling there is cessation of craving.'** M.I,51.



**‘But, Phaggunā, with the complete waning away and cessation of the six bases of contact comes cessation of contact; with cessation of contact comes cessation of feeling; with cessation of feeling comes cessation of craving ... grasping ... becoming ... cessation of this entire heap of unsatisfactoriness.’ S.II,14.**



Craving is also **‘connected to delight (*nandi*) and passion (*rāga*)’** (D.II,308), is grouped with other similar or associated factors such as **‘passion, desire (*chanda*), affection (*sneha*), thirst (*pipāsā*), and fever (*pariḷāha*)’** (M.I,101f) or **‘passion, delight, affection, infatuation (*mucchā*), thirst, fever, attachment (*ajjhosāna*)’** (A.II,10), and is included in the ‘supports for existence’ (*bhavanetti*): **‘desire, passion, delight, craving, taking up and grasping (*upayupādānā*), resolutions (*adhittāna*), adherences (*abhinivesa*) and underlying dispositions’** regarding the Five Groups of Grasping (S.III,191).

The main factors in these groups are desire, passion and delight, the cessation of which will be explained below.

### **Cessation of Desire (*chanda*)**

In this context desire is meant in its ‘negative’ meaning as in the phrase ‘desire for sensual pleasure’.

**‘Here, bhikkhus, one abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world. As one abides**

contemplating the body as body, whatever desire (*chanda*) he has for the body passes away. With the wasting away of desire, the Deathless (*amata*) is realized.

Here, bhikkhus, one abides contemplating feeling as feeling, ... states of mind as states of mind, ... phenomena as phenomena, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and distress concerning the world. As one abides contemplating phenomena as phenomena, whatever desire he has for phenomena passes away. With the wasting away of desire for phenomena, the Deathless (*amata*) is realized.' S.V,181f.



'How, bhikkhus, does desire not arise concerning things in the past ... future ... present that are the basis for desire and passion? One clearly knows the future result of things in the past ... future ... present that are the basis for desire and passion. Having understood the future result, one avoids it. Having avoided it, one becomes dispassionate in mind<sup>1</sup>, having seen through with wisdom. In this way, bhikkhus, desire does not arise concerning things in the past ... future ... present that are the basis for desire and passion.' A.I,265.



'The beautiful things remain as is in the world,  
But the wise remove desire for them.' S.I,22.



1 For the last two phrases I have followed Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB, p.345).

### Cessation of Passion (*rāga*)

*Rāga* is sometimes used in place of greed (*loba*) as one of the three primary defilements (A.I,216), and is generally applied to sensuality and existence. The main meditation for dealing with sensual passion is the unattractive perception of the body (*asubha*). In the Pali Canon, this is given as meditation on the thirty-one parts of the body<sup>2</sup>, while in the commentarial traditions this is defined as the ten contemplations of a decaying corpse.

**‘Rahula, develop meditation on the unattractive (*asubha*). When you develop meditation on the unattractive, passion will pass away.’** M.I,424.



‘Here one clearly knows as they really are the origin and passing away, and the gratification, disadvantage and escape, regarding sensual pleasures. When one clearly knows in this way then sensual passion, sensual delight, sensual affection (*sneha*), sensual infatuation (*mucchā*), sensual thirst (*pipāsā*), sensual fever (*pariḷāha*), sensual attachment (*ajjhosāna*) and sensual craving do not lie within (*nānuseti*) regarding sensual pleasures. This is called the severance of the bond of sensuality.

Here one clearly knows as they really are the origin and passing away, and the gratification, disadvantage and escape, regarding states of existence. When one clearly knows in this way, then passion for existence, delight in existence, affection for existence, infatuation with existence, thirst for existence, fever for existence, attachment to existence and craving for existence do not lie within regarding states of existence. This is called the severance of the bond of existence.

<sup>2</sup> See A.V,109f for a list of the thirty-one parts (with the addition of ‘brain’, this was increased to thirty-two parts in later works).

Here one clearly knows as they really are the origin and passing away, and the gratification, disadvantage and escape, regarding views. When one clearly knows in this way, then passion for views, delight in views, affection for views, infatuation with views, thirst for views, fever for views, attachment to views and craving for views do not lie within re-garding views. This is called the severance of the bond of views.’ A.II,11f.



‘Bhikkhus, give up desire and passion for Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Thus this Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing will be given up, destroyed at the root, made like a palm stump, utterly finished so that Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing will not arise in future.’ S.III,27.



‘Bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu has given up passion for the Embodying element, with the giving up of passion the basis (*ārammaṇa*) is cut off, there is no support for bare knowing. If a bhikkhu has given up passion for the Feeling element ... Recognizing element ... Willing and Habiting element ... Bare Knowing element, with the giving up of passion the basis is cut off, there is no support for bare knowing.

When that bare knowing is unsupported, not coming to growth, nongenerative (*anabhisāṅkhacca*), it is liberated. By being liberated, it is steady; steady it is content; content it is untroubled; untroubled he realizes Nibbāna himself ....’ S.III,53.

In a related context<sup>3</sup> the Buddha gave the simile of a house with windows on the east, north and south. When the sun rose the sunbeam settled on the west wall. If there was no west wall it settled on the ground; if there was no ground it settled on water; and if there was no water it would not settle anywhere. Thus, if bare knowing (the sunbeam) has nowhere to settle, it is not established anywhere.

### Cessation of Delight (*nandi*)

Delight, finding pleasure in, is sometimes contrasted with disillusionment.

**'Bhikkhus, attend appropriately (*yoniso manasikarotha*) to Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Perceive the impermanence of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing as it really is. When a bhikkhu attends appropriately and perceives the impermanence of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing as it really is, he is disillusioned (*nibbindati*) with Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. With the wasting of delight is the wasting of passion; with the wasting of passion is the wasting of delight. With the wasting of delight and passion the mind is liberated and is called thoroughly liberated.'** S.III,52.

At S.IV,142-3 the same is repeated for the six internal and six external sense bases.

<sup>3</sup> S.II,103; the context is there being no lust for the Four Nutriments of material food, contact, volition or Bare Knowing/consciousness.



Venerable Punna requests the Buddha to teach him Dhamma in brief.  
The Buddha responds:

**‘Punna, there are physical forms which the eye knows ... sounds ... smells ... tastes ... touches ... mental phenomena which are pleasing, lovely, charming, pleasant, sensually enticing, arousing. If a bhikkhu does not seek delight, welcome and remain holding to them, delight ceases in him. Punna, with the ceasing of delight there is the ceasing of unsatisfactoriness, I say.’ S.IV,60f.**



**‘Here, bhikkhus, one does not seek delight, welcome or remain holding. And what does one not seek delight in, welcome, not remain holding? One does not seek delight in Embodying, welcome it and remain holding to it. Due to not seeking delight in Embodying, not welcoming it and not remaining holding to it, delight ceases. With the cessation of delight is the cessation of grasping; with the cessation of grasping, cessation of becoming ... birth ... ageing-and-death ... this entire heap of unsatisfactoriness.**

**One does not seek delight in Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, does not welcome it, does not remain holding to it ... cessation of this entire heap of unsatisfactoriness.’ S.III,14-15.**



‘On seeing a visible object with the eye, ... sound with the ear ... smell with the nose ... taste with the tongue ... touch with the body ... mental phenomena with the mind, he is not pleased with it if it is enticing; he is not averse to it if it is disagreeable. ... Having given up compliance and opposition, whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, he does not seek delight in that feeling, does not welcome it, does not remain holding to it. As he does not seek delight in that feeling, does not welcome it, does not remain holding to it, delight in feeling ceases. With the cessation of delight, there is cessation of grasping ... cessation of becoming ... cessation of this entire heap of unsatisfactoriness.’ M.I,270.



‘Do not welcome the past, nor long for the future;  
The past has been left behind, and the future not arrived.  
The presently arisen state, see it here with insight,  
Irrefutable, unshakeable – knowing it with surety.

How, bhikkhus, does one not welcome the past? One does not bring up delight thinking, “I had such Embodying in the past.” ... “I had such Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing in the past.” That is how one does not welcome the past.

How, bhikkhus, does one not long for the future? One does not bring up delight thinking, “May I have such Embodying in the future.” ... “May I have such Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing in the future.” That is how one does not long for the future.’ M.III,187ff.

## The Way of Development

As mentioned above, besides the Way of Relinquishment, there is also a Way of Development where the development of certain qualities, reflections or spiritual qualities also leads to the cessation of craving.

In one discourse of the Pali Canon (A.II,145), Venerable Ananda states that craving is overcome through the craving for full awakening which, paradoxically, is only attained when craving ceases. This is similar to replacing worldly pleasure with spiritual pleasure. Of course, this is only effective if one is able to realize full awakening, otherwise one's craving is simply compounded – material craving plus spiritual craving!

While there may be benefit in nourishing this 'spiritual craving', a natural effect of developing skilful reflections or spiritual faculties leads to reduction and elimination of craving.

**'Bhikkhus, when one abides contemplating the danger in things that can be grasped, ... the danger in things connected with the fetters, craving ceases.'** S.II,85-6.



**'When one abides unenamoured, unbound, uninfatuated, contemplating danger, then the Five Groups of Grasping incline to decrease in future, and craving – which gives renewed becoming, is connected with delight and passion, finding its delight in this and that – passes away. One's bodily and mental distresses pass away; one's bodily and mental torments pass away, one's bodily and mental fevers pass away. One experiences bodily and mental well-being.'** M.III,288f.



‘Here, Udayi, a bhikkhu develops the Awakening Factor of mindfulness ... investigation of phenomena ... energy ... joy ... tranquillity ... collectedness ... equanimity, based upon seclusion, dispassion, cessation and maturing in relinquishment – which is abundant, made great, boundless and free of ill-will. As one cultivates the Awakening Factor of mindfulness ... equanimity in this way, craving is given up; with the giving up of craving, intentional actions (*kamma*) are given up; with the giving up of intentional actions, unsatisfactoriness is given up. Thus, Udayi, with the wasting of craving comes the wasting of intentional actions, with the wasting of intentional actions comes the wasting of unsatisfactoriness.’ S.V,86.



‘These four Attendings with Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānā*), when developed and cultivated, lead to the wasting away of craving. Here one abides contemplating the body in the body, ... feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure regarding the world.’ S.V,300 summarised.



‘The Eightfold Path is to be developed, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, cessation, maturing in relinquishment, for the higher knowledge of the three kinds of craving, for the thorough understanding of them, for the complete exhaustion and giving up of them.’ S.V,58 summarised.



**‘... (those) fully understanding craving, without outflows, I say, have crossed the flood.’** Sn 1082.



**““The stream”, Venerable, is a designation for craving ... the bhikkhu who is free of the outflows is called “one with the stream cut”.’** S.IV,292.

## Cessation of Grasping

This chapter has focussed on the cessation of craving, however, on some occasions, work on the cessation of other factors which support the continuity of the cycles of renewed existence can lead to direct realization, and thus undermine the basis of craving. One such factor which is given particular attention is that of grasping.

Craving may be the primary cause of identity, however, in order for identity to manifest, Grasping (*upādāna*) must occur, in any of its four forms: sensual pleasures (*kāma*); views (*ditṭhi*); rules and observances (*sīlabbata*); or doctrine of self (*attavāda*) (M.I,51;I,66; S.II,3). Whenever a sense object is perceived, a presumed subject is also perceived. Therefore, Grasping a pleasurable sense object results in grasping the presumed subject which serves to verify and confirm a stable self subject. Views are created by self so are invariably self-affirming. Grasping them serves to consolidate this process. Rules and observances mainly refer to spiritual practices, however, in general, they imply habitual activities which are affirming self activities. Doctrines of self are, of course, self-reinforcing beliefs.

As we may recall from Chapter 9 on Conditional Causality, Grasping is conditioned by Craving, which is in turn conditioned by Feeling, which is conditioned by Contact. Thus if the factors of the initial conditioning process cease, then Grasping will cease.

**‘Now what, bhikkhus, is the Dhamma for the full understanding of all grasping? In dependence upon the eye and visible objects, eye-knowing arises. The union of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. Thus seeing the learned noble disciple is disillusioned with the eye, with visible objects, with eye-knowing, with eye-contact, with feeling. Disillusioned, he is dispassionate; dispassionate he is liberated; with release he clearly knows: “Grasping has been fully understood by me.”’**

In dependence upon the ear and sounds, ... mind and mental phenomena, mind-knowing arises. The union of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. Thus seeing the learned noble disciple is disillusioned with the ear, with sounds, ... with mind-knowing, with mind-contact, with feeling. Disillusioned, he is dispassionate; dispassionate he is liberated; with release he clearly knows: “Grasping has been fully understood by me.”” S.IV,32f.



**‘Now what, bhikkhus, is the Dhamma for the exhaustion of all grasping?’**

**What do you think, bhikkhus, is the eye permanent or impermanent?**

**Impermanent, Venerable.**

**Whatever is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?**

**Unpleasant, Venerable.**

Whatever is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change, is it fit to be regarded as: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self?”

No, Venerable.

Are visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... permanent or impermanent? ... fit to be regarded as: “This is mine, this I am, this is my self?”

No, Venerable.

‘Realizing thus, a learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned with the eye ... visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant. Disillusioned, he is dispassionate; dispassionate he is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”’

S.IV,34f [same as at S.IV,24f].



**‘Bhikkhus, that is the incomparable state of excellent peace and highest wisdom realised by the Tathagata, that is, liberation through not grasping, through understanding as they really are the origination, passing away, gratification, disadvantage and escape regarding the six bases of contact.’ M.II,238.**



**‘He does not make arrangements nor create any volition regarding either existence or non-existence. Since he does not make arrangements nor create any volition regarding either existence or non-existence, he does not grasp anything in the world. Not grasping, he is not excited. Not being excited, he personally [reaches] Nibbāna. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.’ M.III,244.**

.....

## meditation

- Close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- Bring up the thought 'I am' and notice how you sense your 'I am-ness' – as physical sensation, or feeling, or mental/emotional condition.
- Is 'I am' always present, or is it sometimes not present?
- Can you observe when and how the sense of 'I am' arises?
- Can you observe when 'I am' is not present?
- What is that experience like?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Relax your posture and open your eyes.

NINETEEN

## The Conceit 'I Am'

.....

The conceit 'I am' is one of the last of the fetters to be eliminated before the realization of liberation or arahantship. It is thus quite a subtle aspect of the I-making process. The following excerpt from the Pali Canon illustrates this subtlety:

The gravely ill bhikkhu Khemaka is questioned by some colleagues who conclude that he is an arahant. However, bhikkhu Khemaka responds:

**'I surely, friend, do not regard these Five Groups of Grasping as self or as belonging to self, but I am not an arahant, without outflows. To me, friends, the Five Groups of Grasping are still in possession of "I am", but I do not regard them as "This I am".**

...

However much, friends, the noble disciple has given up the five lower fetters, still, in regard to the Five Groups of Grasping, there remains not uprooted a residue of conceit "I am", of desire "I am", of underlying disposition "I am".

In the course of time, he abides contemplating the rise and fall of the Five Groups of Grasping: "Thus is Embodying, thus its arising, thus its setting; thus is Feeling ... thus is Recognizing ... thus is Willing and Habiting ... thus is Bare Knowing, thus its arising, thus its setting."

**As he thus abides contemplating the rise and fall of the Five Groups of Grasping the residue conceit “I am”, of desire “I am”, of underlying disposition “I am” not uprooted, comes to be uprooted.’ S.III,128f.**

The meaning of this passage is that Bhikkhu Khemaka is at the third stage of awakening, since he has ‘given up the five lower fetters’, one of which is the identity view ‘This I am’. However he has not completely uprooted the conceit ‘I am’, which is a more subtle level of identity, only uprooted at the last stage of awakening, that of arahant.<sup>1</sup>

## Cessation of Conceiving

As we read in Chapter 6, ‘I am’ is a ‘conceiving’ (*maññita*), or self-referencing, which primarily arises in the perceptual process.

The Buddha stated that:

**‘Self-referencing is a disease, self-referencing is an abscess, self-referencing is a dart. By overcoming all self-referencing, one is called a sage at peace. The sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not agitated and does not desire. He has nothing of which to be born. Not being born, how could he age? Not ageing, how could he die? Not dying, how could he be excited? Not being excited, how could he desire?’ M.III,246.**

The way to uproot all ‘I am’ self-referencing (conceivings) is to not allow self-referencing to impinge upon the perceptual process, which includes the six internal sense bases, the six external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact and the feeling arising from sense contact (S.IV,22). This means that one just stays present with the bare knowing of sense

<sup>1</sup> See CDB 1082, n.176 and NDB 1816, n.1822: ‘The conceit “I am” (*asmimāna*) is more subtle than personal-existence view (*sakkāya ditthi*)... It seems that personal-existence view has a stronger conceptual underpinning than the conceit “I am”, which is more closely connected to existential need and therefore can be eliminated only at arahantship.’

contact without the addition of the conceit 'I am' impinging on sense contact – rather than 'I am seeing' there is just 'seeing'.

This requires, of course, that one is fully aware of the entire perceptual process and has clearly seen how self-referencing manifests. This is accomplished through diligent development of mindfulness of the Six Sense Bases as outlined in the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (MN.10; DN.22).

**'And what, bhikkhus, is the way appropriate for uprooting all self-referencing? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu does not self-reference the eye, does not self-reference in the eye, does not self-reference from the eye, does not self-reference that the eye is mine. He does not self-reference visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... and, regarding whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, he does not self-reference that, does not self-reference in that, does not self-reference from that, does not self-reference that is mine.**

He does not self-reference the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling ... he does not self-reference that, does not self-reference in that, does not self-reference from that, does not self-reference that is mine.

He does not self-reference all, does not self-reference in all, does not self-reference from all, does not self-reference all is mine.

He, not conceiving in this way, does not grasp anything in the world. Not grasping, he is not excited<sup>2</sup>. Not being excited, he personally [reaches] Nibbāna. He knows clearly: "Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future."<sup>3</sup>

S.IV,22; 65f.

2 Following Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB 765, n.137).

.....  
exercise

- *Pause your reading and bring your awareness to the body. Be aware of the condition of body at this time, then settle attention on breathing.*
- *When the mind is calm enough, move your eyes around observing the sights that contact the eye.*
- *Can you see without any self-referencing?*
- *Are there certain sights which do elicit self-referencing?*
- *Can you notice a difference in your mental state when there is or isn't self-referencing?*
- *If suitable, try this procedure with sounds, smells, tastes and touch.*
- *Return attention to the body, and resume reading.*

## Perception of Impermanence

The most direct way to not revert to conceiving is to contemplate impermanence in regard to the perceptual process. When impermanence is clearly seen then it is possible to abide with the impersonal sense perceptions without personalizing them with 'I'. Instead of 'I am seeing a particular sight', we understand that there are merely changing images, which are then filtered through Recognizing, and acted upon through Willing and Habiting.

**'And what, bhikkhus, is the way appropriate for uprooting all conceivings?**

**What do you think, bhikkhus, is the eye permanent or impermanent?**

**Impermanent, Venerable.**

**Whatever is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?**

**Unpleasant, Venerable.**

**Whatever is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change, is it fit to be regarded as: "This is mine, this I am, this is my self?"**

**No, Venerable.**

**Are visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... permanent or impermanent ... fit to be regarded as: "This is mine, this I am, this is my self?"**

**No, Venerable.**

Realizing thus, a learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned with the eye ... visible objects ... eye-knowing ... eye-contact ... and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant ... the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind ... mental phenomena ... mind-knowing ... mind-contact ... feeling arises with mind-contact as condition – whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant. Disillusioned, he becomes dispassionate; dispassionate he is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.” S.IV,24f.



**‘The perception of impermanence should be developed for the uprooting of the “I am” conceit. Perceiving impermanence, bhikkhus, the perception of not a permanent self is established. Perceiving not a permanent self one uproots the “I am” conceit and arrives at Nibbāna in this very life.’ A.IV,353.**

Through the insight into impermanence one understands that what we took to be permanent objects (the Five Groups of Grasping) are actually impermanent processes and thus not a permanent self. This insight then uproots the idea that ‘I am’ something – if all I identify with is changing processes, then where ‘am I’?



Two other contemplations specifically mentioned as leading to the uprooting of the 'I am' conceit are mindfulness directed to the body (A.I,44) and the various stages of the decaying corpse (*asubha*) (A.III,323-5). Upon birth, the sensations of body are the first and most immediate experience we have, so conceit regarding the body – 'This is my body' – is deeply ingrained in our being. These two contemplations help to uproot this primal bodily conceit and associated conceits.

### True Knowledge (*vijjā*)

The arising of True Knowledge is equivalent to realizing the stage of arahant and thus the complete cessation of conceit.

**'... the instructed noble disciple abandons ignorance (*avijjā*) and gives rise to true knowledge (*vijjā*). With the waning of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, 'I am' does not come to be ...'. S.III,47.**



A king hears the sound of a lute for the first time and is enthralled with it. He asks to have the lute brought to him and, when it is, he says that he only wants the sound not the lute. The messenger explains that the combined components of the lute make the sound. The king then breaks the lute into pieces and destroys it without finding its sound, bemoaning how people have been deceived by it.

**'Even so, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu searches Embodying as far as the range of Embodying, he searches Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing as far as the range of Bare Knowing.'**

**When he does so, '... whatever of "I" or "mine" or "I am" had occurred before, no longer occurs.'** S.IV,196f.

### **Right Penetration of Conceit (*sammā mānābhisamaya*)**

Realizing the stage of arahant, when all the Outflows have been removed, is sometimes expressed with the phrase **'cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering'** (M.I,12). Right penetration of conceit (*sammā mānābhisamaya*<sup>3</sup>) means that the arahant has completely seen through the illusion of 'I am' conceit and no longer grasps it.

**'Bhikkhus, there are these three feelings. What three? There is pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling. Pleasant feeling should be regarded as suffering, unpleasant feeling should be regarded as a dart, neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling should be regarded as impermanent.'**

Thus regarding, **'he is called a bhikkhu who sees rightly, has cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering.'** S.IV,207.

3 *Mānābhisamaya* refers to the Arahant, while *Dhammābhisamaya*, the penetration of Dhamma, refers to the stream enterer. cf. S.II,133f; CDB.p.787, n.219.



.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to the breathing.
- When the mind is somewhat settled, observe if there is a particular physical sensation, feeling or mental state which you experience as your familiar sense of self.
- How prominent or intense, or light and spacious is that experience of your self?
- Or, can you experience physical sensation, feeling or mental state without the sense of self arising?
- What is that like?
- Bring your attention back to the breathing.
- When it seems suitable, open your eyes and resume your activity.

## TWENTY

# Underlying Disposition

.....

The most comprehensive explanation of the various means leading to the cessation of the underlying dispositions is given by Venerable Sariputta in the Discourse on Right View (MN.9/M.I,46–55). He explains the various ways in which a ‘noble disciple’ is of **‘right view’, whose view is straight, who is possessed of perfect confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at this true Dhamma.** Once any of these various aspects of the teachings have been understood, they **‘entirely forsake the underlying disposition to passion, they dispel the underlying disposition to aversion, uproot the view and conceit “I am”, and by the forsaking of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, in this very life make an end of suffering.’**

The various ways of understanding are enumerated as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- 1 | Understanding the unskilful (*akusala*) and its roots: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*); and the skilful (*kusala*) and its roots: non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion;
- 2 | Understanding any of the following factors, its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation:
  - a. Four nutriments: physical food, contact, volition, bare knowing; craving is their origin, cessation of craving is their cessation; The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;

1 See MN.117/M.III,71f on mundane and supramundane right view.

2 Factors ‘c to n’ are the twelve factors of Dependent Origination.

- b. Four Noble Truths: *dukkha*, origin in craving, cessation of craving is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- c. Ageing-and-death: origin in birth, cessation of birth is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- d. Birth: origin in becoming, cessation of becoming is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- e. Becoming: origin in grasping, cessation of grasping is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- f. Grasping: origin in craving, cessation of craving is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- g. Craving: origin in feeling, cessation of feeling is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- h. Feeling: origin in contact, cessation of contact is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- i. Contact: origin in sixfold sense base, cessation of sixfold sense base is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- j. Sixfold sense base: origin in mentality-materiality, cessation of mentality-materiality is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- k. Mentality-materiality: origin in bare knowing, cessation of bare knowing is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- l. Bare knowing: origin in Willing and Habiting, cessation of Willing and Habiting is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- m. Willing and Habiting: origin in ignorance, cessation of ignorance is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;

- n. Ignorance: origin in Outflows (*āsava*), cessation of Outflows is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation;
- o. Outflows: three Outflows = sensuality, becoming, ignorance; origin in ignorance<sup>3</sup>, cessation of ignorance is cessation, The Eightfold Path is the path to cessation.

Other means to the cessation of the underlying dispositions are also mentioned in the Pali Canon:

**‘From what cause the perceptions and concepts from elaborations<sup>4</sup> assail a man; if there is nothing there to delight in, welcome or hold to, this is the end of the underlying disposition to passion, underlying disposition to aversion, underlying disposition to views, underlying disposition to doubt, underlying disposition to conceit, underlying disposition to passion for existence, underlying disposition to ignorance. This is the end of taking up the stick or sword, of quarrels, disputes, contention, strife, slander and wrong speech; here these evil unskilful states cease without remainder.’<sup>1</sup> M.I,109f.**



**‘Bhikkhus, there are these three feelings. What three? There is pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling. The underlying disposition to passion for pleasant feeling should be given up. The underlying disposition to aversion for unpleasant feeling should be given up. The underlying disposition to ignorance for neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling should be given up.’**

<sup>3</sup> Ignorance is conditioned by the Outflows [which include ignorance] and the Outflows are conditioned by ignorance; with this feedback loop there is thus no ‘first beginning’ to the cycle of Conditional Causality.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 8, note 1.

When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu has given up (*pahīna*) the underlying disposition to passion for pleasant feeling, the underlying disposition to aversion for unpleasant feeling and the underlying disposition to ignorance for neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he is called “a bhikkhu without underlying dispositions, who sees rightly, has cut off craving, severed the fetters, and by thoroughly penetrating conceit, has made an end to *dukkha*.”” S.IV,205.



‘Bhikkhus, when one thing is developed and increased, the underlying dispositions are uprooted. What is that one thing? Mindfulness directed to the body.’ A.I,44.



‘For thorough knowing, full understanding, exhaustion and giving up of the seven underlying dispositions, the Noble Eightfold Path is to be developed.’ S.V,60.



The complete cessation of the underlying dispositions is the equivalent of realizing the stage of arahant – the ending of the seven underlying dispositions corresponding closely to the ending of the ten Fetters. The difference is the addition of adherence to rules and observances and restlessness, and passion for existence divided into passion for material existence and passion for immaterial existence for the Fetters. This means that insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not a permanent self has penetrated to the most basic level of identity and has uprooted all potential for I-making, as there is no longer any underlying disposition to ‘I am’ conceit.

.....  
meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to breathing.
- When the mind seems to be reasonably calm, bring up the perception of impermanence.
- Is this perception primarily a conceptual experience, or can you experience it at a deeper level?
- Are there any associations arising from the deep experience of impermanence?
- Can you touch into the unsatisfactoriness of impermanence, the uncertainty and insecurity of it?
- And, if this impermanence is insecure, what can you do about it, what control do you have over it?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

## TWENTY ONE

## Liberation

.....

**‘Embodying, bhikkhus, is impermanent; Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing is impermanent ... unsatisfactory ... not a permanent self. Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences disillusionment (*nibbidā*) towards Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Experiencing disillusionment, he becomes dispassionate (*virāga*). Through dispassion he is liberated. With liberation (*vimutta*) comes the knowledge: “It is liberated”. He clearly knows: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”’ S.III,21.**

Liberation is the cessation of the ‘I-making’ processes, which is also complete freedom from unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and the fetters which bind one to the cycles of birth and death. Liberation comes about as a result of a penetrating insight following any of the three principle modes of contemplation to develop true knowledge (see Chapter 16). This insight radically alters our understanding of reality and how we relate to it.

Contemplation of impermanence is the most frequently mentioned contemplation in the Pali Canon. If the contemplation of impermanence is followed to a deeper level, there arises the realization that what is impermanent is very unreliable and insecure, and thus unsatisfactory.

We direct our will, we plan, organise and try to manage our life in order to be happy and comfortable, but the universal law of impermanence can suddenly sweep everything away like a merciless tsunami.

When we truly understand the all-pervading unsatisfactoriness of no permanent security, the realization of just how little control we have over our life situation suddenly dawns upon us. We clearly see that what we previously believed to be a permanent, stable and reliable self is, in fact, a complete illusion. This deep realization of no permanent self gives rise to an experience of disillusionment (*nibbidā*). However, since this insight arose from clearly seeing ‘the way things really are’, the only solution is to surrender to this truth with dispassion (*virāga*). One’s grasping at and craving for anything as a permanent self fall away, and a liberating release is realized.

### ***Nibbidā*: Disillusionment**

*Nibbidā* is an experience which is hard to explain to most people. It can be translated as disillusionment, disenchantment, or world weariness.<sup>1</sup> It is an experience of being put off by or fed up with the phenomenal world, much like what happens when you suddenly see someone as they really are after being fooled by their charm for so long.

*Nibbidā* is not simply depression or despair from facing hardship or loss, but rather a deep disappointment that one has been deluded for so long. It arises from a deep insight into the true nature of life.<sup>2</sup>

1 Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *nibbidā* as ‘disenchantment’ in MLDB and NDB, while in CDB he translates it as ‘revulsion’, noting, ‘What is intended by this is not a reaction of emotional disgust, accompanied by horror and aversion, but a calm inward turning away from all conditioned existence ....’ (CDB, p.53).

2 At M.1,511 the Buddha says to the wanderer Magandiya that when he has seen Nibbāna he might think, ‘For a long time, indeed, I have been cheated, deceived and seduced by this mind.’

Even though we know that everything is impermanent on a conceptual level, this insight shakes the very fabric of our view of life, much like the realization that the love affair is really over.

The arising of *nibbidā* is facilitated through:

- contemplating the rising and passing of the six senses (S.IV,140),
- contemplating the impermanence of feelings (M.I,500),
- seeing no permanent self in the six internal and external sense bases, sense knowing, sense contact, and any Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting and Bare Knowing arising from sense contact (M.III,279f),
- seeing no permanent self through the parts of the body representing five of the six elements (M.I,422f; M.III,240f),
- knowing the disadvantage in the four elements (S.II,172f).

*Nibbidā* regarding the Five Groups of Grasping is what ‘accords with Dhamma’ (S.III,40) and is supported by:

- developing The Eightfold Path (M.II,82f),
- developing The Seven Factors of Awakening (S.V,82),
- developing The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (S.V,179) and
- thinking and reflecting upon The Four Noble Truths (S.V,418f).

Its cause is knowledge and vision of the way things really are (*yathābhūta ñāṇadassana*) (S.II,30).

*Nibbidā*, although having a type of fear connected to it, also brings a relief that all the details have fallen into place. There are no longer any doubts or alternatives – this is it, no use fighting against it. Our enthusiasm and passion for the way things used to be is exhausted – we surrender dispassionately.

## Virāga: Dispassion

*Virāga* literally means dispassion. As insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and no permanent self deepens, the passions of anger and greed increasingly fade away. At the first level of awakening, anger and greed are reduced; at the second level they are attenuated; and at the third level they completely fade away. When one truly realizes that there is nothing substantial to be angry at or lust after, what is the point of anger and greed?

**‘As far as conditioned or unconditioned phenomena, dispassion is the foremost, that is, the subduing of pride, the removal of longing (*pipāsa*), the uprooting of attachment (*ālaya*), the termination of the round (of rebirth), the wasting of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.’** A.II,34.



**‘Bhikkhus, by thoroughly knowing (*abhijāna*) and fully understanding (*parijāna*) ... [the Five Groups], by becoming dispassionate towards them and giving them up, one is able to experience the waning of *dukkha*.’** S.III,27.

## Liberation (*vimutti*)

Liberation is often mentioned in the Pali Canon as consisting of two kinds: liberation of mind (*cetovimutti*) and liberation by wisdom (*paññāvimutti*). They express the two forms of realization of ultimate liberation accomplished through developing Calm and Insight meditation respectively.

'Bhikkhus, these two things are conducive to true knowledge (*vijjā*). What two? Calm (*samatha*) and Insight (*vipassanā*). When Calm is developed, what is the benefit? The mind is developed. When the mind is developed, what is the benefit? Passion is abandoned. When Insight is developed, what is the benefit? Wisdom is developed. When wisdom is developed, what is the benefit? Ignorance is abandoned.

A mind defiled by passion is not liberated and wisdom defiled by ignorance is not developed. Thus, bhikkhus, through the passing away of passion there is liberation of mind (*cetovimutti*), and through the passing away of ignorance there is liberation by wisdom (*paññāvimutti*).<sup>1</sup> A.I,61.

Venerable Ananda states that there are three ways for Calm and Insight to be practised for liberation: developing Calm meditation, then developing Insight Meditation; developing Insight meditation, and then developing Calm meditation, or developing Calm and Insight meditation together (A.II,157).

Five things conducive to liberation of mind are having good friends, virtue, appropriate teaching, energy and wisdom (A.IV,357). Right View, when assisted by virtue, learning, discussion, Calm and Insight, has liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom as its fruit (A.III,21; M.I,294). Five meditation subjects, if developed and increased, are mentioned as specifically leading to liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom: contemplating the unattractiveness of the body, the perception of the repulsiveness of food, the perceiving of not taking delight in all the world, contemplating impermanence in all conditioned things, and having the perception of death internally well established (A.III,84).

## Four Stages of Awakening

For most people, Liberation occurs in stages. The Pali Canon designates four distinct stages: Stream-entry, Once-return, Non-return and Arahant. These are distinguished by the type of Fetter which is attenuated or abandoned.

### Stream-Entry

The first stage of awakening is referred to as stream-entry (*sotāpanna*). This is characterized as a major insight into the impermanent and conditioned nature of phenomena, as exemplified in the teaching on The Four Noble Truths.

The first stage of awakening causes a major shift in one's understanding of reality and results in a radical change in consciousness. The insight into impermanence and causal conditioning reveals impersonality, or the no permanent self characteristic of phenomena, such that the fetter of identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) is relinquished. Having realized the conditioned nature of all phenomena, the fetter of holding to rules and observances (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) is abandoned. And through directly experiencing the truth of the Buddha's teaching, the fetter/hindrance of doubt is abandoned and one gains complete confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This is a very significant and important breakthrough in understanding the Buddha's teaching.

The term 'stream-entry' means that one is now in the stream flowing to Nibbāna, as one's understanding is such that there is no longer any going back to states of serious ignorance which would cause rebirth in the 'states of woe', which are the hell realm, the animal realm, and the hungry ghost realm (A.II,238). Three kinds of stream-enterer are mentioned: one is reborn among humans or celestials (*deva*) up to seven

more times; one is reborn among humans of ‘good family’ two or three times; one is reborn only once more among humans (A.I,233).

The four results of stream-entry are complete confidence in the Buddha, in the Dhamma and in the Sangha, and maintaining the Five Precepts:

**‘Endowed with morality which is agreeable to the noble ones, unbroken, flawless, spotless, freeing, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration.’** A.V,183f.

On several occasions the Buddha substituted generosity for the Precepts. On those occasions he was addressing specific individuals<sup>3</sup> who he perhaps knew could benefit from developing generosity but were already well-established in the Precepts. In the case of Anāthapiṇḍika, the Buddha added an extra factor, the ‘noble method’, which is explained as **‘clearly seeing and thoroughly understanding with wisdom’** Dependent Origination (A.V,184). This may have been a specific teaching for the already devoted, virtuous and generous lay supporter whose progress on the path could benefit from deeper insight into this topic.

The six benefits of realizing stream-entry are: 1) one is certain in true Dhamma, 2) one does not decline, 3) one’s suffering is limited, 4) one possesses uncommon knowledge, 5) one has clearly seen cause, and 6) one has clearly seen things arising from cause (A.III,441).

Sceptical doubt as a hindrance is overcome at stream-entry. With the profound insight of the vision of Dhamma or opening of the Dhamma eye (or sometimes called the ‘breakthrough to Dhamma [*dhammābisamaya*], S.II,133f), the stream-enterer has gone beyond doubt about the teaching (Dhamma), and also gains complete confidence in the Buddha and the Sangha. There is, however, still ignorance until the stage of arahantship, and there may be a residue of other forms of doubt. One passage in fact says that the final escape from the dart of doubt

3 Isidatta and Purana at S.V,348f and Kaligodha at S.V,398f.

and uncertainty is uprooting the conceit ‘I am’ (A.III,292). Since conceit is only fully transcended at arahantship, this would imply that some doubt and uncertainty are still present until final liberation. Elsewhere it is also implied that only the arahant has arrived at complete confidence in the Triple Gem (M.I,184), and thus totally transcended doubt.

### Once-Return

The next stage of the awakening process is called ‘once-return’ (*sakadāgāmi*). While the realization resulting in stream-entry is dramatic, the transition to this next stage is more subtle. It differs from stream-entry only as having diminished passion, aversion and delusion (*rāga-dosa-moha*).

**‘With the exhaustion of the three fetters [same as stream-enterer] and the diminishing of passion, aversion and delusion, they are a once-returner, coming back to this world only once before making an end of suffering.’** A.I,233.

Exactly how this is accomplished is not explained further. As with the stream-enterer, once-returners fulfil morality, but only develop concentration and wisdom to a moderate degree (A.I,233).

### Non-Return

In the third stage, called ‘non-return’ (*anāgāmi*), the ‘five lower fetters’ are exhausted; that is, the same three as for the stream-enterer, plus sensual passion and aversion/repulsion are transcended. Five gradations of non-returner are distinguished (A.IV,70f).<sup>4</sup> They are referred to as being ‘spontaneously reborn’ (in one of the higher heavens) and, without returning (to human birth), attaining final awakening (D.I,156).

4 For further details see Bhikkhu Bodhi’s note in CDB, 1902 n.65.

## Arahant

The last stage of awakening is called the arahant, literally, ‘the worthy one’.

**‘With the destruction of the outflows, he realizes for himself with special knowledge, in this life, the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom which is without the outflows, and thus he abides calmed.’** A.I,234.

With the realization of this state, all ten of the fetters are destroyed and the Hindrances of lethargy and drowsiness, and restlessness eliminated. This realization is mostly described with reference to the ‘destruction of the outflows’ of sensuality<sup>5</sup>, existence, views and ignorance, which have a correlation with the fetters (see Table below). An arahant is also defined as **‘free of the outflows, having completed the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, attained his own welfare, completely exhausted the fetters of existence, having perfectly understood liberation’** (A.IV,369f). At this stage, with all defilements of the mind totally eliminated, arahants are referred to as ‘beyond training’ (*asekha*), as they have completed the training in morality, meditation and wisdom (A.I,234).

**‘Then the Venerable Anuruddha, dwelling alone, withdrawn, vigilant, ardent, resolute, in no long time understood Dhamma for himself with direct knowledge, and knowing for himself, entered on and abode in that unsurpassed culmination of the religious life for which a man of good family rightly goes forth from home life to homelessness. And he knew: ‘Exhausted is birth, fulfilled is the religious life, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.’ And Venerable Anuruddha became one of the arahants.’** A.I,282.

5 While passion for sensuality of the sense realm is exhausted by the non-returner, two of the last five fetters exhausted by the arahant are passion for the fine material realm (*rūpa-rāga*) and passion for the immaterial realm (*arūpa-rāga*).

The arahant is incapable of killing, stealing, sexual intercourse, lying, storing things for enjoyment, disavowing the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the training, and following a wrong course through desire, aversion, delusion or fear (A.IV,370f). At least four types of arahant are designated: those who possess the triple knowledge (*te-vijjā*), those who possess the six kinds of psychic powers (*abhiññā*), those who are ‘liberated–both–ways’ and those who are liberated by wisdom (S.I,191). The one liberated–both–ways is said to be able to **‘attain with the body and abide in those liberations<sup>6</sup> which are peaceful, beyond forms, immaterial, and his outflows are exhausted through seeing with wisdom’** (M.I,477). ‘Liberated by wisdom’ means that they are not able to attain the ‘immaterial liberations’, but the outflows are exhausted. This would include the so-called ‘dry vision’ or ‘dry insight’ (*sukkhā-vipassaka*) arahant, whom the commentarial tradition interprets as not having attained the absorptions.<sup>7</sup> It seems that the majority of arahants were of the ‘liberated by wisdom’ type, as one discourse mentions that of 500 arahants present there were sixty each of the first three types and thus 320 liberated by wisdom (S.I,191).

6 This would imply that they are at least able to access the formless absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*), four absorptions using a ‘formless’ object for concentration: boundless space, boundless consciousness, sphere of nothingness, sphere of neither–perception–nor–non–perception.

7 However, see Bhikkhu Bodhi’s note in CDB, p.785, note 210, and Analayo (2015) pp.252f.

## Comparing the Factors of the Outflows, Grasping, Hindrances, Dispositions and Fetters

OUTFLOWS	GRASPING	HINDRANCES	DISPOSITIONS	FETTERS
Sensuality	Sensuality	Sensual desire	Sensual passion	+ Sensual passion
		Ill-will	Repulsion	+ Ill-will
View	View		View	+Identity view
		Doubt	Doubt	+Doubt
	Rules & Rituals			+Holding to Rites
Existence			Passion for Existence	Passion for Fine-Material Realm
		*Lethargy		Passion for Immaterial Realm
	Self view		Conceit	Conceit
		Restlessness		Restlessness
Ignorance			Ignorance	Ignorance
*No correlation	+Five Lower Fetters			

.....

## meditation

- Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes gently and bring attention to breathing.
- When the mind seems to be reasonably calm, turn your attention to how you experience your self right now.
- Is this experience primarily physical sensation, feeling, mental/emotional mood, or is it primarily conceptual?
- Try to see this experience as temporarily conditioned without self references – just embodying, just feeling, just thinking.
- Do you notice any changes in the experience when seen this way?
- How would you summarize those changes?
- When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.
- Open your eyes and resume your activity.

TWENTY TWO

# Ending I-Making

.....

This contemplative enquiry began as an investigation of the phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ as it is occasionally referenced in the Pali Canon. Most of these references were made in the context of an enquiry as to how ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ could cease, to which the Buddha replies using specialized terms, since he was responding to questions from advanced disciples.

To better understand the meaning of these questions and their answers, it was necessary to study various aspects of the Buddha’s spiritual discoveries and the concepts he used. Now that we have covered a significant amount of background material, we can return to our initial investigation of the phrase ‘I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit’ in order to explain it and the equally cryptic responses about its ceasing.

As explained in the Introduction on the various contexts in which this phrase was used, while there are seven specific types of inquiry, the Buddha directly gave only four unique answers. Several of the dialogues include further details of the process of liberation and other references may help to further elaborate the process of liberation.

## Methods for the Cessation of ‘I-Making, Mine-Making and the Underlying Disposition to Conceit’, Liberation, and the Realization of Nibbāna

A. Seeing as it really is (*yathābhūta*) with right wisdom (*sammappaññāya*) thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self’

The most common types of inquiry regarding the cessation of I-making, mine-making, and the underlying disposition to conceit occur in two particular forms:

a. ‘Venerable, how should one know, how should one see in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, so that I-making, mine-making, and the underlying disposition to conceit no longer occur?’ S.II,252;III,79f;103;135f;169; M.III,18f.

b. ‘Venerable, how should one know, how should one see in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, so that the mind is free of I-making, mine-making, and conceit, has gone beyond all subjective distinctions, and is peaceful and well-liberated?’ S.II,253;III,80f;136f;170.

The Buddha’s responses are similar in both cases:

‘Whatsoever kind of Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, Bare Knowing, whether past, future or present, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – one sees (*passati*) all Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, Bare Knowing as it really is (*yathābhūta*) with right wisdom (*sammappaññāya*) thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.”’ S.II,252;III,80;103;135f;169.

1 Venerable Radha (S.III,80) and Venerable Suradha (S.III,80f) become arahants.

The second response concludes: ‘... – **having seen all Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, Bare Knowing as it really is with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self”, one is liberated by non-grasping.**’ S.II,253;III,80f;136f;170.

The Buddha’s responses epitomize the ultimate realization of the Buddha’s teaching – the truth of no permanent self. Of course, this realization is only complete if it has penetrated into all levels of self-identity, as emphasized by the phrase: ‘**whether past, future or present, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near**’.

As we have seen from the previous material, this insight is usually facilitated through the contemplation and deep realization of impermanence, which may then expose the imperfection (*dukkha*) and impersonality (*anattā*) of reality. Once such insight occurs, further practice serves to deepen and broaden this realization until it permeates our entire being. The result is that we dis-identify from all five of the factors of the Five Groups of Grasping (rather than simply disassociate from them) such that one is completely liberated through no longer grasping any of these unsubstantial processes as a permanent self.

The three phrases in the Buddha’s response, ‘this is not mine (*netam mama*), this I am not (*nesohamasmi*), this is not my self (*na meso attā*)’, directly counter the three forms of identification (in the order) mine-making (*mamañkāra*), I-making (*ahañkāra*) and the underlying disposition to conceit (*mānānusaya*).

In two places in the Pali Canon (S.III,103f; M.III,19f) the discourse with the Buddha’s response continues with ‘a certain bhikkhu’ reflecting, ‘**If the Five Groups of Grasping are all not a permanent self, what manner of self will the kamma done by the no permanent self touch?**’

The Buddha, knowing this thought in that bhikkhu's mind, proceeds to give the familiar question and answer format about whether each of the Five Groups of Grasping is permanent or impermanent, unpleasant or pleasant, and whether what is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change is suitable to be regarded as, 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?

The discourses then finish with the refrain:

**'Realizing thus, a learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned with Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing. Disillusioned, he becomes dispassionate; dispassionate he is liberated; with liberation comes the knowledge: "It is liberated". He knows clearly: "Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future."'** S.III,103f; M.III,19f.



**'What is the purpose, venerable sir, of seeing rightly (*sammā dassanaṃ*)?**

**The purpose of seeing rightly, Radha, is disillusionment (*nibbidā*).**

**What is the purpose, venerable sir, of disillusionment?**

**The purpose of disillusionment is dispassion.**

**What is the purpose, venerable sir, of dispassion?**

**The purpose of dispassion is liberation.**

**What is the purpose, venerable sir, of liberation?**

**The purpose of liberation is Nibbāna.**

**What is the purpose, venerable sir, of Nibbāna?**

**You have come to the end of questioning, Radha. You were not able to know the limit to questioning. The religious life, Radha, is lived immersed in Nibbāna, with Nibbāna as its destination, with Nibbāna as its conclusion.'** S.III,189.

## B. Destruction of the Outflows (*āsava*)

In the Discourse on the Sixfold Purity (MN.112), the Buddha explains that when a bhikkhu declares that he is an Arahant, he should be questioned in regard to various aspects of the teaching with the last question being:

**‘How does the Venerable one know, how does he see in regard to this body with consciousness and in regard to all external signs, so that I-making, mine-making, and the underlying disposition to conceit are uprooted?’**

The bhikkhu’s response is the outline of the Progressive Path to Practice (see Chapter 14 for details), which concludes:

**‘When my collected mind was thus purified, cleansed, passionless, without defilements, supple, workable, steady, imperturbable’, I directed it to the destruction of the outflows (*āsava*). I knew completely (*abbhaññāsi*) as it really is: “This is *dukkha*” ... “This is the cause of *dukkha*” ... “This is the cessation of *dukkha*” ... “This is the path to the cessation of *dukkha*”. I knew completely as it really is: “These are the outflows” ... “This is the cause of the outflows” ... “This is the cessation of the outflows” ... “This is the path to the cessation of the outflows”.**

**When I knew and saw thus, the mind was liberated from the outflow of sensual desire, the outflow of existence, and the outflow of ignorance. With liberation came the knowledge: “It is liberated. Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”** M.III,33ff.

Relevant to our inquiry are the four other responses given by bhikkhus to confirm that they are an Arahant:

a. **'Indeed, friends, with the seen ... the heard ... the sensed ... the cognized (*viññāta*) I abide not attracted, not repelled, not dependent, not bound, released, unyoked, with an unrestricted mind. It is by knowing thus and seeing thus ... through not grasping, my mind is liberated from the Outflows.'** <sup>1</sup> M.III,29f.

The seen, the heard, the sensed and the cognized are, of course, all sense contact (the sensed representing smell, taste and touch). Thus, the bhikkhu is saying that he is completely released from grasping a self in any sense contact.<sup>2</sup>

b. **'Friends, having known Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing to be weak, fading away, without comfort – with the decay, waning, cessation, giving up and relinquishment of taking up and grasping ... of mental resolution, inclination and underlying dispositions regarding Embodying ... Feelings ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, I have clearly known that the mind is liberated.'** <sup>1</sup> M.III,30f.

You may recall from Chapter 12 that **'taking up and grasping ... of mental resolution, inclination and underlying dispositions'** are factors of the 'supports for existence' which are particular aspects of craving. This bhikkhu is thus saying that he has relinquished all craving regarding the Five Groups of Grasping, similarly as the two bhikkhus quoted below regarding the six elements and the Sense Bases respectively.

2 See the teaching to Bahiya towards the end of Chapter 17.



c. 'Friends, I have approached the earth element as not a permanent self and with no permanent self dependent upon the earth element ... water element ... fire element ... air element ... space element ... Bare Knowing element. And with the decay, waning, cessation, giving up and relinquishment of taking up and grasping ... of mental resolution, inclination and underlying dispositions regarding earth element ... water element ... fire element ... air element ... space element ... Bare Knowing element, I have clearly known that the mind is liberated.'

M.III,31.



d. 'Friends, with the decay, waning, cessation, giving up and relinquishment of desire, passion, enjoyment and craving, taking up and grasping, and of mental resolution, inclination and underlying dispositions with the eye, visible objects, eye-knowing and things cognizable through eye-knowing ... ear-knowing ... nose-knowing ... tongue-knowing ... body-knowing ... mind-knowing, I have clearly known that the mind is liberated.'

M.III,32.

C. 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities (*saṅkhārā*), the relinquishing of all supports (*upadhi*), the wasting away of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.'

Venerable Ananda asks the Buddha:

'Venerable, could a bhikkhu obtain such collectedness that he would have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit in regard to this conscious body, that he would have no I-making,

mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit in regard to all external signs; and he would acquire and abide in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, which has no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit for one who acquires and abides therein?’

The Buddha responds:

‘Here, Ananda, a bhikkhu thinks thus: “This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all *saṅkhārā*, the relinquishing of all supports (*upadhi*), the wasting away of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.”<sup>3</sup> A.I,132f; cf. S.V,226.

When a bhikkhu has realized this goal, he is called a bhikkhu who:

‘... has cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering.’ A.I,133ff.

This answer from the Buddha is the most comprehensive description of the experience of liberation, and covers some of the more technical concepts used in the teachings, for example, *saṅkhārā*, and *upadhi* (supports). We learned from Chapter 7 that the term *saṅkhārā* has several different meanings. In regard to human beings, it means Willing and Habiting, as one of the Five Groups of Grasping. Willing is the source of kamma in order to continue the processes of I-making which, over time, become self-preserving Habiting. However, once we have realized the truth of no permanent self, we see through the illusion of making ‘I’, and thus the Willing of kamma is stilled.

3 At A.V,110 (The Gīrīmānanda Discourse) this reflection is called the perception of dispassion (*virāgasaññā*) and perception of cessation (*nirodhasaññā*). At A.IV,423 this reflection is referred to as the Deathless Element (*amata dhātu*).

‘... with the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, they do not generate (*abhisamkharoti*) a meritorious *saṅkhārā*, a demeritorious *saṅkhārā* or an imperturbable *saṅkhārā* ... they do not grasp anything in the world ... not excited ... personally realizes Nibbāna. He knows clearly: “Exhausted is birth, the religious life is fulfilled, what had to be done is done, this life is not to be in future.”’ S.II,82.

Upadhi is defined in PED as ‘putting down or under, foundation, basis, ground, substratum (of rebirth). Bhikkhu Bodhi (CDB 348, n.21) translates it as ‘acquisitions’, and says that it means, literally, ‘that upon which something rests’. He adds, ‘The word has both objective and subjective extensions. Objectively, it refers to the things acquired, i.e., one’s assets and possessions; subjectively, to the act of appropriation rooted in craving. In many instances the two senses merge, and often both are intended.’ In some contexts in the Pali Canon, the term ‘*upadhi*’ is used in place of craving and grasping (S.II,108). It is thus the support for continuity in the rounds of renewed existences.

‘Bhikkhus, whatever *samana-brahmana* in the past ... future ... at present, regard whatever in the world is agreeable and pleasurable as impermanent, as unsatisfactory, as not a permanent self, as a disease, as fearful – they abandon craving. In abandoning craving, they abandon *upadhi*. In abandoning *upadhi* they abandon *dukkha*. In abandoning *dukkha*, they are released from birth, ageing and death, released from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness and distress, I say.’ S.II,110f.

The most familiar explanation of the process of cessation (*nirodha*) is presented in the teaching on Conditional Causality (see Chapter 9) – with cessation of Ignorance, there is the cessation of (ignorance-based) *saṅkhārā*; with cessation of *saṅkhārā*, there is cessation of (ignorance-based) bare knowing; ...

### D. Seeing the Arising and Disappearance of the Five Groups of Grasping

‘Speculative views (*diṭṭhigata*), Vaccha, have been put away by the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata, Vaccha, has seen (*diṭṭha*) this: thus is Embodying, thus is Embodying’s arising, thus is Embodying’s passing away; thus is Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, thus is Bare Knowing’s arising, thus is Bare Knowing’s passing away.

Therefore, I say with the decay, waning, cessation, giving up, relinquishing of all conceivings, all mental disturbances (*mathita*), all I-making, mine-making and underlying dispositions to conceit, the Tathagata is liberated without grasping.’ M.I,486.

Vacchagotta further questions the Buddha where one so liberated arises after death, or do they not arise after death. The Buddha answers that such terms as ‘arise’ or ‘not arise’ do not apply and clarifies this by giving the example of when a fire is extinguished, can you say in which direction it has gone? Vacchagotta responds that such a query would not apply, since the fire burns dependent upon fuel and, when the fuel is used up, it is simply considered extinguished.

‘So too, Vaccha, the Tathagata has given up (*pahīnaṃ*) that Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing by which a Tathagatha may be described, he has destroyed it at the root (*ucchinnaṃ*), made it like a palm stump (*tālāvattukataṃ*), made it to utterly cease so that it does not arise in future (*anabhāvaṅkataṃ*). Vaccha, the Tathagatha is liberated through the ending of Embodying ... Feeling ... Recognizing ... Willing and Habiting ... Bare Knowing, he is deep, immeasurable, fathomless – like the great ocean.’ M.I,487.

The Buddha is saying that he has given up the ‘fuel’ which keeps the Five Groups of Grasping of the ordinary person continuing, therefore, since the ‘fuel’ is gone, he is ‘extinguished’ (*nibbuta*).

### **Some Other References to the Cessation of I-Making, Mine-Making, and Underlying Tendency to Conceit**

#### **E. Cut Off Craving**

The Buddha tells Sariputta to train himself to have no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body, in regard to all external signs and to acquire and abide in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit. Sariputta is then called a bhikkhu:

**‘... who has cut off craving, turned away from the fetters, and, through right penetration of conceit, has made an end of suffering.’** A.I,133f.

The Buddha adds that this experience is what he refers to in his teaching to Udaya:

**‘Abandoning both sensual desire and distress (*domanassa*),  
The dispelling of lethargy and warding off of remorse,  
Equanimity and mindfulness purified, preceded by Dhamma reflection,  
This, I say, is deliverance by final knowledge (*aññā vimokkha*)  
– the breaking up of ignorance.’** Sn 1106–7.

The reader will perhaps recognize that this teaching to Udaya involves the removal of the Hindrances – four of which are mentioned – and the development of the Factors of Awakening – three of which are mentioned.

## F. Liberated

Several other references mention the phrase on the cessation of I-making as a way of indicating that the speaker is liberated and thus: **‘It must be that I-making .... have been uprooted ...’;**

a. Venerable Sariputta states that even if the Buddha were to ‘undergo change and alteration’, sorrow and despair would not arise in him (S.II,275). Venerable Sariputta is thus saying that he has transcended all sorrow and despair (two of the forms of *dukkha*), which can only mean that he is an arahant, with all I-making uprooted.

b. Venerable Sariputta explains that as he enters and abides in each of the nine absorptions he has no thoughts of ‘I’ in doing so (S.III,235-238). Having no thoughts of ‘I’ implies the uprooting of all I-making.

c. When Venerable Upasena is fatally bitten by a poisonous snake he shows no ill effects, yet communicates that he is about to die. When asked why he shows no ill effects he explains that it is because he does not identify with any of the six senses (S.IV,41):

**‘On a certain occasion the Venerable Sāriputta and the Venerable Upasena were staying at Rājagaha in the Cool Grove at the Snake’s Hood Cave. Now a viper had fallen onto Venerable Upasena’s body. Then Venerable Upasena addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Come, friends, place my body on a bed and take it outside, before it is scattered here just like a handful of chaff.”**

Then the Venerable Sāriputta said to the Venerable Upasena, **“But we do not see any alteration in the Venerable Upasena’s body or any deterioration in his senses. How is it that the Venerable Upasena says, “Come, friends, place my body on a bed and take it outside, before it is scattered here just like a handful of chaff?”**

“Indeed, friend Sāriputta, for one who thinks, ‘I am the eye’ or ‘The eye is mine ... ‘I am the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind’ or ‘The ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind is mine’, there might be alteration of the body or deterioration in the senses. But, friend Sāriputta, it exists not for me that ‘I am the eye’ or ‘The eye is mine’ ... ‘I am the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind’ or ‘The ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind is mine’, thus why would there be alteration of the body or deterioration in the senses?”

“Thus it must be for a long time for the Venerable Upasena that I-making, mine-making and the underlying disposition to conceit have been thoroughly uprooted, that it no longer exists for him that ‘I am the eye’ or ‘The eye is mine ... ‘I am the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind’ or ‘The ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind is mine’.”

**Then those bhikkhus placed Venerable Upasena’s body on a bed and took it outside. And then and there the Venerable Upasena’s body was scattered just like a handful of chaff.’ S.IV, 40f.**

Venerable Upasena had relinquished all identification with the senses and the body. Thus his senses and body did not respond in the same way as someone who still identifies with them. And although this is the response of a fully awakened being, each one of us can respond in new ways to the body when we reduce our identification with it. Because of our identification with body and the senses we usually react in habitual ways, which express our self-identity. How often do we and others ramble on about our personal ailment as if we could not exist without it?

.....  
exercise

- *Rather than deliberately directing the body, just observe the various sensations which it receives (rather than react to them).*
- *See if you can allow the body to just receive these sensations.*
- *How does the body respond?*
- *If you notice some noteworthy sensation, see if you can observe what aspect of your self it is expressing.*



The realization of the cessation of I-making, mine-making, and underlying disposition to conceit is the ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teaching. With this realization the nature of our being changes from self-centredness to reality-centredness.<sup>4</sup> This comes about through the realization that what we previously took to be solid objects are in fact constantly-changing processes, including what we thought was an objective self.

Thus, our sense of self (as self-process) does not automatically disappear, rather we let go of the compulsive grasping at anything to support the delusion of having an enduring, permanent self. We are liberated from the oppressive burden of trying to maintain a false view of reality, allowing a peaceful abiding in the way things really are. Our senses and the Five Groups continue to function, but without grasping. We now abide in harmony with reality, free from self-centered greed, aversion and delusion.

<sup>4</sup> Buddhists would perhaps say 'Dhamma-centredness' and theists say 'God-centredness'.

*'If you let go a little, you will have a little peace.*

*If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.*

*If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom.*

*Your struggles with the world will have come to an end.'*<sup>5</sup>

*- Ajahn Chah*

<sup>5</sup> Quoted on page 73 of *Still Forest Pool* by Jack Kornfield and Paul Brieter, The Theosophical Publishing House, 306 West Geneva Road, Wheaton, Illinois 60187.

# Appendix 1

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## The Four Elements and the Thirty-One Parts of the Body

### Internal Earth Element

‘Whatever, internally, one’s own, is solid, hard and grasped, that is:

- hair of the head
- hair of the body
- nails
- teeth
- skin
- flesh
- sinews
- bones
- bone marrow
- kidneys
- heart
- liver
- diaphragm
- spleen
- lungs
- intestines
- mesentery
- contents of the stomach
- feces
- or whatever else, internally, one’s own, is solid, hard and grasped.’

### **Internal Water Element**

‘Whatever, internally, one’s own, is water, liquidy, and grasped, that is:

- bile
- phlegm
- pus
- blood
- sweat
- fat
- tears
- grease
- spittle
- snot
- oil of the joints
- urine
- or whatever else, internally, one’s own, is water, liquidy, and grasped.’

### **Internal Fire Element**

‘Whatever, internally, one’s own, is heat, fiery, and grasped, that is, that by which one is heated, ages and burns; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, consumed and tasted is thoroughly digested, or whatever else internally, one’s own, is heat, fiery, and grasped.’

### **Internal Air Element**

‘Whatever, internally, one’s own, is wind, airy and grasped, that is, upward-going winds, downward-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds through the limbs, inhalation and exhalation, or whatever else internally, one’s own, is wind, airy and grasped.’ (M.III,240f)

## Appendix 2

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### **The Forty Meditation Objects** (from Visuddhimagga Ch.III,104ff)

#### **Ten Kasinas:**

- earth
- water
- fire
- air
- blue
- yellow
- red
- white
- light
- limited-space

#### **Ten Types of Unattractiveness:**

- bloated corpse
- livid (discoloured) corpse
- festering corpse
- cut-up corpse
- gnawed corpse
- scattered corpse
- hacked and scattered corpse
- bleeding corpse
- worm-infested corpse
- skeleton
- (mentioned at S.V,129ff; A.I,42)

**Ten Recollections:**

- Buddha
- Dhamma
- Sangha
- virtue
- generosity
- deities
- mindfulness of death
- mindfulness of body
- mindfulness of breathing
- peace (*upasamānussati*)

**Four Divine Abidings:**

- lovingkindness
- compassion
- empathetic joy
- equanimity

**Four Immaterial States:**

- boundless space
- boundless consciousness
- nothingness
- neither perception nor non-perception

**Other:**

- perception of repulsiveness in nutriment
- defining of the Four Elements

**A Few Other Meditations Are Also Mentioned in the Pali Canon:**

- the Six Elements (M.III,240f)
- perception of non-delight in the whole world  
(*sabbaloke anabhiratasañhā*: A.V,105-6)
- perception of giving up (*pahānasañhā*: A.V.105)
- perception of dispassion (*virāgasañhā*: A.V.105)
- perception of cessation (*nirodhasañhā*: A.V.105)
- perception of disadvantage (*ādinavaśañhā*: A.V,109)
- perception of impermanence in all conditioned things  
(*sabbasaṅkhāresu aniccasañhā*: A.V,109)

**From Sutta on Attending With Mindfulness (M.I,58f):**

- a corpse, bloated, discoloured, oozing
- a corpse, eaten by animals and worms
- a skeleton with flesh, blood and sinews
- a skeleton without flesh, with blood and sinews
- a skeleton without flesh and blood, with sinews
- scattered bones
- bones bleached the colour of shells
- bones heaped up
- bones rotted and crumbling

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## glossary/dictionary

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**Short English–Pali, Pali–English Glossary/Dictionary**

**anusaya** | underlying dispositions – 1. sensual passion, 2. aversion, 3. views, 4. doubt, 5. conceit, 6. passion for existence, 7. ignorance.

**āsava** | outflows – 1. sensuality, 2. existence, 3. ignorance, 4. views.

**avijjā** | Ignorance

**Bare Knowing** | *viññāṇa*

**bhava** | Existence

**bhikkhu** | a male Buddhist monastic. The image presented in the Pali Canon is that of a wandering alms mendicant, similar to the early Christian friars. Over time, with an increasing number of residences offered, the wandering lifestyle gradually became more settled.

**bhikkhuni** | a female Buddhist monastic.

**Collectedness** | *Samādhi*

**Contact** | *Phassa*

**Craving** | *Taṇhā – kāma, bhava, vibhava.*

**Disillusionment** | *Nibbidā*

**Dispassion** | *virāga*

**dukkha** | unpleasant (as a Feeling); unsatisfactoriness or suffering (as a Characteristic). *Dukkha* as one of the three main Feelings has a wide range of variations from discomfort to agony, which is a symptom of its universal Characteristic as the inherent unsatisfactoriness or imperfection of human existence.

**Existence** | *bhava*

**Feeling** | *vedanā – sukha, dukkha, adukkha–m–asukha.*

**Fetters** | *saṃyojana* – 1. *sakkāya diṭṭhi*, 2. *vicikicchā*, 3. *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*, 4. *kāmarāga*, 5. *vyāpāda*, 6. *rūparāga*, 7. *arūparāga*, 8. *māna*, 9. *uddhacca*, 10. *avijjā*.

**Five Groups of Grasping** | *pañcupādānakkhandhā* – *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhārā*, *viññāṇa*.

**Grasping** | *upādāna* – *kāma*, *diṭṭhi*, *sīlabbata*, *attavāda*.

**Identity view** | *sakkāya diṭṭhi*

**Ignorance** | *avijjā*

**mentality-materiality** | *nāma-rūpa*

**mindfulness** | *sati*

***nāma-rūpa*** | *mentality-materiality*

***nibbidā*** | Disillusionment. Often translated as ‘disenchantment’ or ‘revulsion’.

**Outflows** | *āsava* – *kāma*, *bhava*, *avijjā*, (*diṭṭhi*).

***pañcupādānakkhandhā*** | Five Groups of Grasping – Embodying, Feeling, Recognizing, Willing and Habiting, Bare Knowing.

**Passion** | *rāga*

***phassa*** | Contact

***rāga*** | passion

**Recognizing** | *saññā*

***rūpa*** | Embodying (as one of the Five Groups of Grasping); ‘visible objects’ (as a sense object); ‘materiality’ (as in *mentality-materiality*).

***sakkāya diṭṭhi*** | Identity View

***sa| -āyatana*** | Six Sense Bases

***samādhi*** | Collectedness. It is usually translated as ‘concentration’, however concentration (or one-pointedness) is only one of the ‘absorption factors’ of *samādhi*. I thus use ‘collectedness’ as a more comprehensive term for *samādhi*.

***samana-brahmana*** | the term for the whole range of religious practitioners at the Buddha’s time. The *brahmana* were the practitioners of orthodox Brahmanism ranging from worldly priests to scriptural scholars to matted-haired ascetics. The *samana* were the heterodox practitioners outside the brahmanic faith ranging from various forms of ascetics to wandering philosophers espousing a wide range of views. The Buddhists and Jains belonged to the latter group.

**saṃyojana** | Fetters – 1. identity view, 2. doubt, 3. adherence to rules and observances, 4. sensual passion, 5. ill-will, 6. passion for fine-material existence, 7. passion for immaterial existence, 8. conceit, 9. restlessness, 10. ignorance.

**saṅkhārā** | Willing and Habiting

**saññā** | Recognizing

**sati** | mindfulness

**satipaṭṭhāna** | attending with mindfulness

**Six Sense Bases** | *saḷ-āyatana*

**sukha** | pleasant (as a Feeling); well-being. *Sukha*, as the pleasant side of Feeling, has a wide range of variations from comfort to bliss. It is usually translated as 'happiness', but in the context of spiritual practice it most often conveys a well-grounded and all-encompassing well-being.

**taṇhā** | Craving – sensuality, existence, non-existence.

**Underlying Disposition** | *anusaya* – 1. *kāmarāga*, 2. *paṭigha*, 3. *diṭṭhi*, 4. *vicikicchā*, 5. *māna*, 6. *bhavarāga*, 7. *avijjā*.

**upādāna** | Grasping – sensual pleasures, views, rules and observances, and doctrine of self.

**vedanā** | Feeling – pleasant, unpleasant, neither unpleasant nor pleasant.

**viññāṇa** | Bare Knowing

**virāga** | Dispassion

Willing and Habiting | *saṅkhārā*

## about the author

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Ajahn Tiradhammo (correct Pali spelling is Thiradhammo) was born near Vancouver, Canada in 1949. From 1969 to 1971 he travelled to Europe, the Middle East and Asia, eventually staying four months in Sri Lanka studying Buddhism and meditation. Finding it difficult to continue meditation back at university, he decided to travel to Thailand for a month-long intensive meditation retreat. This retreat eventually extended for nine years, during which time he took the novice ordination in 1973, and the monk ordination in 1974 while living at Wat U-mong in Chiang Mai, North Thailand. In 1975, he visited Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho and decided to move to Wat Nanachat (International Monastery) in Ubon Rajathani, NE Thailand.

After numerous travels in the mountains of north Thailand and meeting some of the well-known Thai meditation teachers, he was invited to Britain in 1982 to support the establishing of the Forest Sangha in Europe. He was one of the senior monks at Chithurst Monastery, Harnham Monastery and Amaravati Monastery in Britain before being asked to establish a monastery in Switzerland in 1988. He was the founding Abbot of Dhammapala Monastery in Kandersteg, Switzerland for seventeen years, and then took up the position of senior monk of Bodhinyanarama Monastery in Wellington, New Zealand, before retiring from abbotship in 2012.

He presently resides at Wat Buddha Dhamma, near Sydney, Australia and travels to various countries teaching retreats, giving talks and writing books.

Several of Ajahn Thiradhammo books can be downloaded here:

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Beyond I-Making is a contemplative investigation of the concept of *Anattā* and the path to its realization. The concept of *Anattā*, not a permanent self, is the most profound, yet least understood, of the Buddha's teachings. This contemplative workbook provides a detailed explanation of the processes of making 'I' resulting in the grasping of a self. To clearly understand these processes we revisit the Buddha's Awakening from a new perspective and investigate the important concepts he used to explain his profound experience. Part Three then elaborates the specific methods the Buddha taught for the cessation of I-Making and the realization of liberation from suffering.



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