



A chapter from upcoming book
Towards the Light

LEARNING | SUTA

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Sylvia Bay

A Scholar and Practitioner

LEARNING (SUTA)

by Sylvia Bay

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“The man of little learning grows
old like the ox. His muscles grow;
his wisdom does not.”

- The Buddha¹ -

The Author

*"The realisation of Dhamma is like sunrise. You start out
in pitch darkness. You see nothing. You are clueless.
Your ignorance makes you blind."*

Abstract from Dawning of Dhamma

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Sylvia published her first book in May 2014, "Between The Lines: An Analytical Appreciation of Buddha's Life" and the Combined Book Edition comprising Volume 1 and Volume 2 was published in 2017. She is now in the midst of writing her second book, "Towards the Light".

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[I] LEARNING

It is unusual for 'learning' to be given such a prominent and significant place in a spiritual pursuit. Buddha had named it one of five essential mental states for a heavenly rebirth, alongside the more obvious faith, morality, generosity and wisdom.² Why is that so? Surely Buddha could not be saying that only the learned would be happy and have a heavenly rebirth while the vast majority of people in his time who would be illiterate must make do with less.

Learning, in the context of Buddha's teaching, does not mean being well-educated or well accomplished in formal education as we understand it today. The *Pāli* word for 'learning', *suta*, literally means that which is heard. In Buddha's time, knowledge was transmitted orally therefore, *suta* would mean having heard Dhamma, and thus having some knowledge or understanding of Dhamma.

There was little, if any, reading and writing then so the ancient audience must depend entirely on their memory and good listening skills to hear Dhamma. Whatever that they could gather, understand and remember from hearing was all that they had of Dhamma for personal reflection and practice. That is why Buddha had encouraged much *suta*. As he had put it, "Here, a noble disciple has learned much, remembers what he has learned, and accumulates what he has learned... retained in mind, recited verbally, mentally investigated, and penetrated well by view."³ The more his disciples heard Dhamma, the better they could remember; and the more material they had for contemplation, the more they could reinforce knowledge for their spiritual practice.

[II] IMPORTANCE OF *SUTA*

For those of us caught up with our busy lives, we tend to say that we have no time for Dhamma. We may have ambitious aspirations about spiritual practice yet we say we would focus on that 'later', when we have 'more time'. We might say we would do it after we are retired, or when the children are grown up, or when my career is more settled, and so on. Basically, we put Dhamma learning on hold because we see it as a lower priority in contrast to life's responsibilities and delights. We assume that we would have time to deal with Dhamma at some point later in our life. When we think we are finally ready, we might already be too old, in poor health or near death.

Why do we give Dhamma a lower priority? The simple answer is: we do not realise its true value. We have wrong views and assumptions about Dhamma. We may think that it is for people who are depressed, otherworldly, devout, fanatical or gullible, and not for 'regular people' like us, who are worldly, progressive, practical, sensible and responsible. If we were to hold that view, we would be caught in a vicious cycle of ignorance and indifference. Without some understanding of Dhamma, its true value would not be obvious; not seeing its true value, then why would we bother to learn it?

The truth of the matter is Dhamma is universally relevant. Dhamma is fundamentally a guide on how to cultivate mental well-being leading to happiness and fulfilment in life. How much joy and mental relief the individual experiences would depend on the depth of his Dhamma understanding, his effort to uphold the prescribed practice to stay wholesome, and his willingness to accept life's conditions.

For the wisest and spiritually most mature amongst us, what we get out of Dhamma is knowledge of how to realise *Nibbāna*.⁴ When we have completely understood Dhamma, there will be no more arising of craving and suffering for us.⁵ Our minds would be in a state of unconditioned bliss.⁶ The path to enlightenment and *Nibbāna* may require some profound recalibrating of mental conditions.⁷ But a dedicated and conscientious practitioner with a correct understanding of the practice, conviction, resolve and discipline to stay on course and change his mind state and conduct will succeed in his endeavour. It is just a matter of time and practice to set the right mental conditions in place.⁸

For the rest of us who are more mundane and worldly, Dhamma has useful and practical lessons on how to lead happy, successful, and meaningful secular lives. If we seriously accept and embrace Buddha's teaching, we will learn moderation and contentment. Learn to be grateful for our blessings⁹ and to ride adversities with patience and resilience. Learn to manage relationships with consideration and empathy so that there is love, harmony and happiness in our lives.¹⁰ Learn to cultivate important wholesome qualities with the understanding that without them we will suffer and cause suffering for others. Learn to give and not expect. Buddha even taught us how to live a rewarding and materially comfortable lay life without sacrificing our morality.¹¹ In the *Dīghajāṇu sutta*, he advised a lay disciple to be hardworking and strive for excellence in his professional skill.¹² He spoke of enjoying one's earnings while saving some and setting aside others for investment.¹³ He also advised that one should live within means and not get into debts,¹⁴ and so much more.

And finally, for everybody without exception, a day will come when we must die. If we have Dhamma knowledge and confidence in the Buddha and his teaching, we will not be worried, afraid, remorseful and confused when that day comes. We will be at peace and our hearts will be light. We will have confidence that the next birth will not be bad because we had lived life virtuously, bringing comfort, support and happiness for others and never causing harm or pain.¹⁵

So really, how can Dhamma not be universally relevant?

[III] LEARNING AT YOUR OWN PACE

It is commonly believed that Buddha's Dhamma is deeply profound and very difficult to understand. You might look at the voluminous number of discourses and the many seemingly complex concepts, and inevitably feel discouraged and give up trying to learn Dhamma before you even begin. Be aware that such thoughts are obstacles to learning. It would be a terrible waste to let your own unfounded disheartening view stop you from learning an incredibly precious teaching that could bring you such profound peace and happiness, the like of which you had never tasted.

In his time, Buddha might have encountered lay people with such self-doubt. In all probability, in order to encourage his listeners to give themselves a chance to practise, Buddha had said that it was rare to have a human birth with "unimpaired sense faculties" and even rarer to be able to live in the time of a Buddha and when Dhamma was still available.¹⁶ Therefore, do not squander this blessed chance of a human birth and not learn some Dhamma. You will never know if you could have similar auspicious conditions again.

While it is true that Buddha's Dhamma is profound, it does not mean that it is beyond the comprehension of the regular average person. In the Buddha's time, amongst those who had realised Dhamma were children as young as seven,¹⁷ simple uneducated rural folks, one with learning difficulties,¹⁸ a deranged psychopath responsible for multiple killings,¹⁹ and many others whose minds had been shattered by grief at the death of loved ones.²⁰ Albeit they had the benefit of the personal guidance of a living Buddha, many of them were also fighting overwhelming mental handicaps that most of us, fortunately, are not. Moreover, Buddha himself had said that as long as there is The Noble Eightfold Path, i.e., knowledge of Dhamma cultivation, there would be enlightened people.²¹ Who are we to disagree with him?

Furthermore, one advantage we have today over our ancient compatriots is easy access to the full spectrum of Buddha's teachings. Modern technology and inventions such as smart devices, the internet, online videos and social media have allowed us to have access to Dhamma at the touch of a finger: the discourses, practical advice from skilled practitioners, their notes on their experiences and so on. We really have no reason not to be able to learn Dhamma properly.

[IV] QUICK OVERVIEW OF DHAMMA SOURCES

So, where do we find Buddha's Dhamma? Tradition claims that there are 84,000 *suttas* (discourses).²² Although that number is probably an exaggeration, still the teaching is voluminous. That is not surprising, considering that Buddha had taught Dhamma for an estimated 45 years, almost on a daily basis, except when he was on a personal retreat or resting. Buddha taught Dhamma literally to his deathbed. On the evening that he passed away, the 80-year-old Buddha converted a last disciple, an ascetic by the name Subhadda.²³

According to Canonical records, within months of Buddha's *Parinibbāna*,²⁴ several hundreds of his closest and spiritually most accomplished disciples (called *arahants*²⁵) got together to compile and to consolidate as much as possible what they could remember of his teaching.²⁶ They were worried that the Dhamma could be diluted, corrupted or lost as time passes.²⁷ The compilation mission was sponsored by the most powerful king of the day, King Ajatasattu of the kingdom of Magadha. It took several months to complete that initial monumental mission.

The early Dhamma compilers were quite organised in assembling the teachings, with careful "categorisation" of the discourses for ease of memorising, "learning and research".²⁸ They had a simple template which they applied to every *sutta*. They would record the venue where Buddha (or his leading disciples) had given the discourse, the occasion, the background of the listeners and their responses, and the key learning points.

Today, the *Pāli*²⁹ Canon is recognised as the oldest complete canonical collection of the Buddha's teachings. The collection is also known by another name *Tipitaka* (*ti* means three and *pitaka*, baskets). The three 'baskets', differentiated by the subject matter, are:

1. *Vinaya Pitaka* (Basket of Discipline)

The *Vinaya Pitaka* is a collection of texts concerning the rules of conduct governing the daily affairs of the monk and nun communities. It includes the stories behind the origins of each rule and a detailed account of how Buddha was able to maintain communal harmony amongst the monastic practitioners.³⁰

2. *Sutta Pitaka* (Basket of Discourse)

The *Sutta Pitaka* is a collection of more than 10,000 discourses or sermons which were delivered by Buddha and a few of his closest disciples. It covers a range of themes concerning core Dhamma, namely, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, dependent conditionality, *kamma*, three universal characteristics, and *Nibbāna*, as well as practical advice on how to lead a successful lay life. This basket is further sub-divided into five *Nikāyas* (collections):³¹

- i. *Dīgha Nikāya* or Collection of Long Discourses – 34 lengthy suttas
- ii. *Majjhima Nikāya* or Collection of Middle-Length Discourses – 152 suttas
- iii. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* or Collection of Connected Discourses – 2889 relatively short suttas
- iv. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* – Collection of Numerical Discourses
- v. *Khuddaka Nikāya* – Minor Collection of little texts in 15 books³²

3. *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (Basket of Further Doctrines)

Abhidhamma is the third and final *Pitaka* in the canon of the early Buddhist schools.³³ It takes the terms and ideas found in the discourses and organises and analyses them systematically.³⁴ The most commonly known of the *Abhidhamma* is the collection of the Theravada school, which has seven texts as follows:³⁵

- i. *Dhammasangani* (Enumeration of Phenomena)
- ii. *Vibhanga* (The Book of Treatises)
- iii. *Dhatukatha* (Discussion with Reference to the Elements)
- iv. *Puggalapaññatti* (Description of Individuals)
- v. *Kathavatthu* (Points of Controversy)
- vi. *Yamaka* (The Book of Pairs)
- vii. *Patthana* (The Book of Relations)

According to *Theravāda* tradition, Buddha had taught *Abhidhamma* in *Tavatimsa* heaven to devas, amongst whom his late mother.³⁶ But scholars now generally accept that the *Abhidhamma* texts were compiled in the centuries after Buddha.³⁷

[V] KEY DHAMMA CONCEPTS TO LEARN

In this chapter, only a basic overview of the key Dhamma concepts³⁸ that make up Buddha's core teachings will be explained. There are two approaches for Dhamma learning for lay person that encapsulate the key Dhamma concepts: Buddha's own approach to teaching Dhamma then and today's typical way of imparting Dhamma. Comparing the two, it would appear that Dhamma learning, 2500 years after Buddha's time, had morphed in complexity and became lengthier and intellectually more demanding.

1. Buddha's 'Gradual Instruction'³⁹ Approach

Buddha's introductory lesson to the uninitiated comprised essentially six topics in the following order: giving (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), heaven (*sagga*), danger of sensual pleasure (*kāmāṇam ādīnava*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*) and The Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariya-saccāni*).⁴⁰ That Buddha had called the method 'gradual instruction' suggests that its purpose was to ease the listener into the Dhamma. Buddha's approach made sense because those ancient first timers were not yet his followers: they were at best curious inquirers. They were also lay people leading mundane, worldly life and had little if any background in meditation and spiritual reflection. Core Dhamma i.e., the Four Noble Truths, would not have resonated with them until they had formed an affinity with him and faith developed.

The six 'gradual instruction' topics could be understood as follows:⁴¹

i. Be Giving (*Dāna*)

That this was the first mental state that Buddha had highlighted in his gradual instruction reflects its foremost importance to happiness in life and a critical first step in any spiritual quest. Cultivating *dāna* is to help us overcome our natural instinct to be selfish and greedy, territorial and possessive. Most of us don't realise that any mental state underpinned by greed will lead to agitation, distress and all shades of unhappiness. *Dāna* in its purest sense means giving freely and joyously, without conditions, prejudice and judgement. Such a mind is joyous, peaceful, soft and light.⁴² (More will be said about this in the upcoming chapter on "Generosity".)

ii. Be Moral⁴³ (*Sīla*)

Given our proclivity to be selfish and greedy, there is always a possibility that we may cause grief, pain or harm to another for personal gains or interests. Upholding *sīla* means reining in anger or greed and not hurt others. Even better is cultivating empathy and proactively rendering help, comfort and support to others. The purer our minds, the more peaceful, calmer, lighter and happier we will be.⁴⁴

iii. 'Heavens'⁴⁵ (*Sagga*)

The literal translation for *sagga* is heaven. Buddha had taught that life does not end with the death of a physical body. As Buddha had put it, a good man, "with the breakup of the body, after death," would be reborn "in the company of the devas".⁴⁶ Likewise, the immoral and selfish may end up in a worse state of existence.⁴⁷

However, in the context of "gradual instruction", it is possible that Buddha had not meant for *sagga* to be a literal heaven, but a feature of the mind. This would be consistent with the other five "gradual instruction" themes which were either mental states or mental outlook. *Sagga* as a mental state could mean a mind like that of the heaven: elevated, all-embracing, bright, light and happy.⁴⁸

Up until this point, Buddha was focused on calming the minds of his listeners, and helping them feel positive towards him and his teaching. When he felt that they were suitably upbeat and receptive, Buddha introduced the next two themes as follows:

iv. Danger of Sensual Pleasures (*Kāmānam Ādīnava*)

After helping his listeners experience great joy from an uplifting talk on *dāna*, *sīla* and *sagga*, Buddha changed tack and spoke about the "dangers, the vanity and the defilement in sensual pleasures."⁴⁹

The merit of this advice may not be obvious to the regular person, then or now. The average worldling would much prefer endless pleasure and ever more delights. While he can appreciate restraint for practical reasons (e.g., costs, time and energy), he probably does not see how or why there is "danger" in enjoying sensual delight.

The main problem about sensual gratification is not the pleasure per se, but the addiction to the pleasure. Addiction by any measure will be painful because it is never enough and one feels compelled to seek higher doses of stimulation for the same effect. Addiction causes one to lose perspective about life's priorities and to waste time and resources. We often equate addiction with vices such as gambling, drinking, drug-taking and prostitution and we smugly assume we do not have a problem. But actually, any kind of activity that delivers sensual pleasures is potentially addictive; just think of video gaming, internet surfing or binge shopping.

v. Renunciation (*Nekkhamma*)

Next, Buddha pointed out that there were "blessings in renunciation".⁵⁰ By this, Buddha did not mean that we should all become monks or we should stop enjoying ourselves. He was merely advising us to be moderate and balanced when we enjoy sense pleasures. We should manage craving and not mindlessly indulge. Moderation will bring mental peace. This was practical advice and a sobering reminder.

vi. The Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariya-Saccāni*)

Only after Buddha had discerned that the listener's mind was "ready, receptive, free from hindrance, eager and trustful," did he expound the Four Noble Truths.⁵¹

This is important to bear in mind. It is not that Dhamma is difficult to understand. The question is are we ready to hear Dhamma? If the above mental conditions mentioned by Buddha are not in place, we will not hear the Dhamma even if it is the Buddha himself expounding. Buddha mentioned being "ready and receptive": that means there is some open-mindedness as opposed to being sceptical and argumentative. Being "free from hindrances" implies not having any form of negative mental states clouding the mind. That could vary from person to person. If we are distracted, restless, worried, fatigued, or even just hungry, our minds will not be on the Dhamma. Buddha also mentioned "eager" i.e., we must be enthusiastic or at least curious to know more. And finally, we have some trust in the teacher and the teaching. (The Four Noble Truths are core to Dhamma. They are explained in detail below.)

Concluding Note on 'Gradual Instruction'

Buddha's careful attention to the mental readiness of his listeners and skilful calibration of the teaching paid off beautifully. According to Canonical records, many of them quickly gained deep spiritual insight and 'entered the stream' from that one session with him.⁵² That means, they had understood and realised the Dhamma so deeply that their entire life's perspective and worldview had changed. Their character was also completely transformed. Even though they still had the periodic arising of unwholesome mental states such as anger and wanting, they would never morally transgress to the degree that would damage their minds. And they lived the rest of their lives with unwavering faith in the Buddha and Dhamma, better able to ride the vicissitudes of life and became happier and more content individuals.

2. Today's Dhamma Curriculum

Most Dhamma books or formal Dhamma courses today are likely to include the following:

- (A) The Four Noble Truths
- (B) The Noble Eightfold Path
- (C) Three Universal Characteristics: impermanence, *dukkha*, non-Self
- (D) *Kamma*
- (E) Dependent Origination
- (F) *Nibbāna*

(A) The Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariya-Saccāni*)

Topping the list of key Dhamma concepts to be taught today is usually the Four Noble Truths. Spiritual enlightenment in Buddhism is literally about awakening to the essence of the Four Noble Truths. Buddha himself had proclaimed that he was enlightened only after he had fully understood the nature of suffering, abandoned craving, realised cessation of suffering and cultivated the Noble Eightfold Path which led to the cessation of suffering. The newly-enlightened Buddha's first lesson to the world was the Four Noble Truths.⁵³ For the next 45 years, it was the focus of his teaching. The Four Noble Truths as cast in the *Pāli* canon are:

- i. The Noble Truth of *dukkha**;
 - ii. The Noble Truth of the origin of *dukkha*;
 - iii. The Noble Truth of the cessation of *dukkha*; and
 - iv. The Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.⁵⁴
- *suffering

i. The First Noble Truth of *Dukkha*

Traditionally translated as 'suffering', *dukkha* actually means a spectrum of unpleasant mental experiences ranging from a mild annoyance to severe excruciating pain. From henceforth in this chapter, I shall use the term '*dukkha*' rather than the English translation 'suffering' because it is more precise and complete.

At the first glance, the First Noble Truth would seem rather straightforward. Anybody who had suffered losses and experienced physical and/or mental pain would readily acknowledge the reality of *dukkha*. Even then, he may argue that the above statement is a little simplistic and sweeping, for surely life is not all suffering as there are many pleasures to enjoy.

Yet, there must be more to this statement because Buddha had said that only one who was fully enlightened would really understand *dukkha* properly. So, what is it about *dukkha* that is so sublime and profound that the regular worldling has to really work at understanding it? For one, there is a difference between experiencing *dukkha* and understanding *dukkha*. The regular worldling feels the bite of *dukkha* but that does not mean that he knows what makes *dukkha* unpleasant and painful. In the same way that the regular worldling knows that things burn up in a fire but yet does not know what is it about the fire's nature that causes that burning.

Why is it important that *dukkha* must be fully understood? Because if we want to eradicate *dukkha*, we must know its properties that cause pain. Just as, in order to put out fire, we must understand its inflammable properties. If fire is approached with ignorance or worse still, with faulty knowledge, we could end up with an uncontrollable inferno.

The next puzzling question is why can't we understand *dukkha* if we already have so much experience with it? This has to do with the nature of the average regular mind. It has instincts and habits that make it almost impossible to stay objective about *dukkha*. Without some clinical objectivity, the mind cannot meaningfully and accurately examine *dukkha* and form wise conclusions.

Buddha called those intrinsic mental shortcomings ignorance and delusion. He said the “untrained worldling” (i.e., average regular man) is fixated with pleasure, blind to mortality, caught up with himself and partial towards beauty.⁵⁵ In other words, the regular man could not see painful reality of living for what it is because he is distracted, biased and ignorant.

So, how did Buddha explain the nature of *dukkha* that had eluded the worldling? In a celebrated stanza captured in *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, Buddha said: “Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of *dukkha*: birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are *dukkha*; association with the unbeloved is *dukkha*; separation from the loved is *dukkha*; not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*. In short, the five clinging-aggregates (*pañcakkhandas*) are *dukkha*.”⁵⁶ *Dukkha* is thus embedded in life’s organic nature, in feelings, attachments and in desires.

(a) Dukkha of Life’s Organic Nature

Conceptually we all know that we will grow old, fall sick and die. But almost subconsciously, most of us are in denial with no awareness of that. Hardly anyone would live life assuming that death could be just around the corner. Instead it is more common to assume we have years on our side and we can happily plan our life with certainty. We decide when to get married, have kids, buy a house, go for vacation, retire and so on. Even something as obvious as physical aging, we don’t always see it. And when we do, we try to mask it. We spend copious amount of money keeping the body youthful and attractive: colouring the hair, applying anti-aging cream, going for facial and plastic surgery, and so on. We have perfected the art of living in a delusional bubble of eternal youth and immortality.

The reality is that the body goes by its own biological pace of wear and tear. Sickness, old age and death is imminent, however much you pump the body with supplements, exercises and major repair works. Because we live like the proverbial ostrich, when death occurs as it invariably must, we are stunned and crushed. Time and again, we grieve at yet another death, because we have not and cannot accept its reality. We are ignorant about death not because we have not encountered it but because we choose to ignore its imminence; we don’t want to live life in constant cognizance of old age, sickness and death, because otherwise life will be too painful. How do we enjoy life when the scythe of the grim reaper is perpetually over our heads? We are delusional about death because there is always a part of us that assumes that it is not yet time to die. Even an ancient 90-year-old assumes that he will live another day. But really, who knows when is it time to go? So as Buddha had put it: death is really the only valid and irrefutable reality.⁵⁷

(b) Dukkha of Feelings and Sensations

We are probably more familiar with the *dukkha* that comes with “association with the unbeloved” and “separation from the loved”, i.e., feelings and sensory experiences. We know that it is painful to be stuck with something or someone we dislike or be separated from something or someone we love. These emotional angsts may well be daily occurrences. Even then, we lack the right understanding of the nature of such *dukkha* and typically handle it wrongly.

How do we typically handle *dukkha* of feelings? For one thing, we almost never observe feelings objectively. If sensations are pleasant, we simply, mindlessly indulge. If they are painful, we scramble

to 'fix' the pain by getting rid of the perceived source of pain or turn away in avoidance. In straightforward cases of *dukkha*, we just do as our feelings dictate. If separation is painful, then get back together. If being stuck together is painful, then part ways. We may bury *dukkha* under a mountain of distractions or external stimulation: chat, eat, exercise, read, watch TV, listen to music, play with smart devices and so on. We may supplant *dukkha* with plans for future pleasures. In other words, just the planning itself is pleasurable enough to mask *dukkha*.

In more complex situations, we weave stories to explain feelings and *dukkha* and store memories of those stories. By so doing, we give what is pure biological sensations meaning. We literally construct 'reality' from stories and cling onto them as 'truths'. So instead of seeing pain or pleasure as transient sensations, waxing and waning according to conditions, we see them as real and permanent with meaning and purpose. Think back to a time when you had experienced strong negative emotions from an innocuous event: such as when someone jumped the queue in front of you or when another driver honked at you or when a loved one texting while you were talking. How did you react? The odds are you had some internal dialogue as you struggled with irritation. If you had weaved a story of understanding and consideration, annoyance would fade and good mood restored. Conversely, you can also talk yourself into a rage if you go on the line of being victimised, exploited or taken for a ride and so on.

All those mental habits of ignoring, masking or spinning narratives and deluding the mind are not "wrong" per se and they can make *dukkha* bearable. But they also prevent us from observing *dukkha* of feelings correctly and seeing their true nature: that they are only biological sensations, conditionally arisen and transient. If we do not rightly internalise the impermanence of feelings, we will continue to cling to pleasant feelings and be averse to painful ones. Only when we see and accept feeling's transient and deceptive nature will we be able to ride out the unpleasant and not get carried away by the pleasant. Life will then be that much easier.

(c) Dukkha of Unfulfilled Desire

Finally, Buddha said, "Not to get what one wants" is *dukkha*. In other words, as long as there are unfulfilled desires, there will be *dukkha*. And the *dukkha* intensity is directly proportional to the strength of your desire. The more you want something, the more intense the *dukkha* you will feel. The more things that you want, the more frequently you will experience *dukkha*. Some of us might think back to our childhood with nostalgia and say life was simpler and happier when we were kids. Perhaps there is some truth to that. The baby is happy if his diaper is dry and he has no physical discomfort. As he grows older, he is aware of increasingly more options for pleasure and competing demands for his limited time and resources. *Dukkha* increases as he ponders the options. As he grows into adulthood, life may feel even more burdensome as he juggles between wants, demands and responsibilities, imposed by himself, his family, his friends, his bosses, society and so on. If this sounds familiar, life would seem like one endless *dukkha* journey.

ii. On Second Noble Truth of Origin of *Dukkha*

Buddha next explained why *dukkha* is always present. This is because we have craving (*taṇhā*), "...which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and

there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.”⁵⁸ In other words, there is an innate constant thirst in us for each living moment to be pleasurable. That pleasure could be found in the external environment or mind-made from within.

(a) Craving for Sensual Pleasures (Kāma Taṇhā)

This is self-explanatory. When our mind goes out into the external environment in search of pleasure and gratification, we are experiencing *kāma taṇhā*: a beautiful sight, a lovely sound, a pleasant smell, a sumptuous taste or a soothing touch. We thoroughly delight in what we experience as pleasure through our sensory organs. And we want to keep on repeating those experiences.

(b) Craving for Becoming (Bhava Taṇhā)

This is trickier to explain. ‘*Bhava*’ has two meanings: to exist or to be.

To Exist – Craving to exist or to be alive seems straightforward enough. No one wants to die. Even the suicidal would choose life if there is hope that he can be happy. It is the natural survival instinct to live. But for the most part, we are not caught up with existential issues. Thus, *bhava* is more than just craving to live.

To Be – Craving ‘to be’ is a craving that turns inwards in search of mind-made pleasure. It could be about revisiting memories of past pleasures or planning for future gratification. Another form of ‘craving to be’ is the desire for a positive self-image. We delight in the idea of having a ‘good name’, being respected, being known for qualities we admire, being seen to be successful, and so on. We ‘crave to be’ some desirable idea of self.

(c) Craving for Non-Becoming (Vibhava Taṇhā)

This is the opposite of *bhava taṇhā*. It is about craving to die or for non-existence. It is also craving to forget a painful memory or craving to stop a negative mind-made image of ourselves.

Most of us do not see the direct correlation between *dukkha* and craving. It is not obvious that craving is what leads to *dukkha*, and as long as there is craving, however subtle, there will be *dukkha*. Instead, our conventional assumption about *dukkha* is it is there because we did not get what we want (i.e., satisfy craving), and *dukkha* ceases when we do. It is hard not to believe that this assumption is true and correct because for the longest time, that is how we have experienced the relationship between *dukkha* and gratification: we feel pleasure, happiness, satisfaction and meaning when we satisfy desires and anguish and pain when we don’t. The more intense the desire, the greater the sense of fulfilment and pleasure. That is why we pour so much effort into fulfilling our wants.

Unfortunately, this conventional belief is wrong and inconsistent with the reality about *dukkha*. Craving is insatiable. When we feed craving or desires, we buy only temporary reprieve. The pleasure we get from gratification is fleeting and depending on how intense the pleasure, often highly addictive. Before long, we will feel the compulsion to feed craving again, so that we can revive

pleasure. The cycle of craving, feeding and gratifying continues relentlessly. We are like the incurable drug addict always feeding craving for pleasurable feeling. Craving is incredibly *dukkha*.

iii. On Third Noble Truth of Cessation of *Dukkha*

For one gripped by *dukkha*, that *dukkha* can cease is inconceivable. The more intense the *dukkha*, the more endless it feels. Yet, Buddha had said, “Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of the cessation of *dukkha*: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it”.⁵⁹ In other words, *dukkha* ceases when the mental energy of craving ceases.

Note the deliberate use of every word that the Buddha used to describe the process whereby craving ceases. The first two: “fading away” and “cessation” suggest that it is a gradual and subtle process. There is no forceful pushing away of craving, for if that were so, that wanting not is another craving. Craving fades naturally. Overtime as one trains, every gripping feeling and compulsion to gratify will feel less intense by the passing second if one observes detachedly.

“Giving up” and “relinquishing” imply a conscious and intentional decision to let go of craving. Craving actually arises and fades like all mental experiences. But we don’t see the change and impermanence of craving because when it arises, we go on semi-auto pilot and compulsively act to fulfil craving. It feels like we will never be happy again if we don’t gratify that craving. Then our thoughts run wild, obsessing about the object of craving, which can be a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought. And the more we think about that object, the more we feel compelled to act on craving behind it.

A wise practitioner with Dhamma understanding reacts to craving differently. It is not that he is immune to the pressure to satisfy craving, but instead of leaping into obsessing about how to gratify craving, he takes a step back and makes a distinction between the mental energy of craving and the object of craving. He does not pay attention to the object of craving. Instead he observes the changing sensation of craving. He notes that the craving impulse is impermanent and changes in intensity. Observing the ebbing and flowing craving energy and understanding its impermanence helps him to stay detached and ride out the compulsion.

If one is able to “give up” and “relinquish” craving, naturally one is freed from craving’s grip. He can act freely according to his rational judgement instead of being compelled to act according to his feelings. The noun “non-reliance” is most intriguing. Why would anyone be reliant on craving? When craving is satisfied, the compulsion to feed will lift. This gives rise to relief, a false sense of release and even delight and pleasure. These are the conventional rewards for feeding craving. The reminder here is not to be dependent on those rewards because that dependence will trigger fresh rounds of craving and the vicious cycle to feed craving will start all over again.

(B) On the Fourth Noble Truth: Path Leading to Cessation of *Dukkha*, the Noble Eightfold Path

It is not easy for craving energy to dissipate. For that to happen, the mind must as a start, see and understand its own impermanent nature and its conditional arising. However, the average regular mind cannot achieve this because it is too restless and distracted chasing after numerous sense desires and engaging in internal mental conversations. The Noble Eightfold Path is a system of mental training designed to help the mind gain steadiness, clarity and alertness so that wisdom can grow and it can penetrate ignorance and realise its own true and basic nature. Embracing the Noble Eightfold Path means subscribing to transform our minds and its habits in fundamental ways as follows:⁶⁰

i. Right Understanding (*Sammā Dīṭṭhi*)

A powerful conventional assumption about life is that happiness (*sukha*) is right and normal and by extension, unhappiness, pain or any dis-ease is abnormal and must be corrected. Much of what we do in life, the major and minor choices we make, the priorities we set all spring from this baseline assumption about life's positive entitlement.

Buddha had pointed out that a critical start point of the Dhamma practice is recognising that this conventional worldview is flawed and has to be reshaped.⁶¹ At the highest level of spiritual maturity, right understanding is realising and understanding that all constructed life experiences are impermanent, conditionally arisen and therefore *dukkha*.⁶² When that insight of impermanence and *dukkha* is truly and properly internalised, one will also realise that the effort to chase after pleasure and happiness is meaningless because the positive experiences are fleeting and the chase itself is *dukkha*. Perhaps only then one is truly motivated to cultivate the practice to tame craving and realise *Nibbāna* and experience cessation of *dukkha*.

ii. Right Thought (*Sammā Sankappa*)

Because the typical worldling is fixated about his pleasure and happiness, he cannot help being caught up in greed and anger. In contrast, a Dhamma practitioner with right understanding will see the direct and immediate correlation between craving and *dukkha*.⁶³ Accordingly, he has to change the way he thinks and reacts. Instead of instinctively seeking pleasure, he must learn moderation and contentment, i.e., embrace renunciation (*nekkhamma*). The more easily content he is, the more easy-going he will be. Without strong preferences, views and expectations, ill-will or anger will not surface much. In the absence of ill-will, he will not be cruel. One is never cruel in a good mood. That's just how the mind works.

iii. Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*)

The average regular person typically does not closely guard his speech. What comes out of his mouth would generally reflect his mood and state of mind. His speech is pleasant, gentle and pleasing when he is happy, and rude, rough and hurtful when he is upset. A Dhamma practitioner must be committed to wholesome expressions that do not hurt him or another, regardless of his frame of mind. He should abstain from lying, slandering, speaking harshly and engaging in frivolous talk.⁶⁴

Instead, he must try to speak words that are true, beneficial and pleasant. He speaks with kindness and friendliness in the heart and speaks only when it is appropriate and timely.⁶⁵

iv. Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*)

In his action, a Dhamma practitioner must not harm or cause pain to another. Not killing, stealing and engaging in sexual misconduct is the minimum that he must uphold. Even better, he undertakes wholesome actions which include rejoicing for others, being generous, moral, humble, helpful and so on.

v. Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*)

Traditionally this has been explained as not earning a living from a list of five trades, namely, trading in intoxicants, living beings, meat, weapons and poison.⁶⁶ This is a narrow and inadequate explanation. Actually, Buddha did not elaborate on what he had meant by right livelihood in the context of The Noble Eightfold Path. All he had said was that right livelihood means 'no wrong livelihood'.⁶⁷ It is unsurprising that Buddha had taught it like this because his discourse on The Noble Eightfold Path was typically to monks who would not be earning a living, let alone be engaging in trades. In essence, right livelihood for monks would mean living with their conscience clear and their motivation and practice pure.

For the lay person, we should go by the principle of not earning a living from the pain, grief, suffering and death of another living being.⁶⁸ Not unlike the monks, our conscience must also be clear and our hands clean. If we are in business, we must run an honest enterprise and charge fair prices. Don't cheat anyone: not partners, suppliers or customers. If we are in management, don't take advantage of our staff. Treat them fairly and with empathy, i.e., in a way we want to be treated. In the *Sigalovada Sutta*, Buddha spoke of paying fair wages on time, looking after employees when they are sick, giving them days off to rest, sharing treats with them, assigning work fairly, in accordance with their abilities.⁶⁹ If we are a salaryman, put in an honest day's work and give our best. If we do personal tasks during office hours, commandeer office property for private use, and so on, then we are guilty of dishonesty.

vi. Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*)

Going beyond just speech and action, Buddha had also taught that a practitioner must guard even his default state of mind. In contrast to the regular worldling whose mind is typically unguarded and unrestrained and will intuitively veer merrily towards maximising delight and throwing tantrums when denied, a practitioner must exert right effort as follows:

- prevent the arising of un-arisen unwholesome states;
- abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen;
- arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and
- maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.⁷⁰

What this means is that he must ensure that his mind at any one time is virtuous and wholesome.⁷¹ Note that the first exhortation on the list is preventing unwholesome states from even arising. This suggests that if one is practising well, unwholesome states should not even be present. But if they should arise, then effort must be made to abandon them. The choice of the verb 'abandon' is interesting. It implies 'not to hold on' to unwholesome mental states. That is brilliantly spot on. There is something incredibly sticky about unwholesome mental states such that when one is caught in their grip, there is almost a perverse reluctance to drop them, even though the feeling accompanying them is unpleasant and heavy. For instance, anger: can you see how an aggrieved mind just simply refuses to let go of the anger, forgive and move on? Instead, it will pick at any perceived scab of past hurt until the wound reopens and festers again.

But right effort does not stop at just abandoning unwholesome mental states. It goes on to advise that if wholesome states are not there, then arouse them. And if they are present, to maintain and perfect them. That means, as much as possible, a practitioner should abide in wholesome mental states at all times. Amongst the wholesome mental states that Buddha had advised his disciples to cultivate, he included the *brahmavihara* (noble abiding i.e., goodwill friendliness, compassion, rejoicing with others and equanimity), and humility, patience, contentment and so on. If one cultivates right effort with faith, discipline and vigour, at some point wholesomeness will become a default resting state of mind.

vii. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*)

A typical untrained mind continuously flits and darts all over chasing after external stimuli and being caught up in internal mental conversations. It is mindlessly immersed in sensory experiences and a delusory mind-made reality. Buddha described that heedless mind as "like the dead."⁷² That's an odd yet apt expression. If you ask yourself at the end of the day what you have done today, the odds are you don't remember much, other than broad impressions. You were alive yet life had passed you by in a hazy blur. It is almost as if you were not there, while living your life. In right mindfulness, the mind is acutely aware of the present and what is happening now. It is attentive, clear, detached and non-judgemental with regards every arising and falling away of mental and physical phenomenon. It is able to note and remember broad mental sweeps or considerable details of the moment.⁷³ Right mindfulness is essential for the mind being able to see reality of itself as is.

viii. Right Concentration (*Sammā Samādhi*)

This is when the mind has sustained focus in the present and does not drift. Done skilfully, various mental states will arise associated with ever deeper level of concentration. With the presence of certain mental states, mind experiences stillness called *jhana* (deep concentration) and enters into altered states of consciousness.⁷⁴ Both mindfulness and concentration skills are equally critical to the spiritual practice. Mindfulness is required to see changing mental states in considerable detail and to examine Dhamma for insights to arise, while concentration is necessary to sustain that mindfulness.

(C) Three Universal Characteristics (*Tilakkhana*):

The next set of key Dhamma concepts covered in today's Dhamma courses are collectively known as the three universal characteristics (*tilakkhana*):

- *impermanence (aniccā)*,
- *dukkha and*
- *non-Self (anattā)*.

They are not esoteric concepts but factual and observable realities of the mind. Understanding them is a critical and necessary milestone to spiritual awakening and a step towards realisation of *Nibbāna*. But they must be observed in real time and properly seen and understood before one is truly convinced of the wisdom to tame craving.⁷⁵ Otherwise, despite our higher spiritual aspirations, we can't help lapsing into old habits and behaviour which could mean lashing out whenever we are angry and mindlessly indulging when we feel like it.

The first time that Buddha explained the three universal characteristics was to a group of five spiritually accomplished monks who were minimally stream-enterers.⁷⁶ That meant they were already firmly anchored on the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path and have the requisite wisdom, morality and mental steadiness to see the true nature of the mind as it is. Also, they had already understood critical key aspects of the Dhamma pertaining to the Four Noble Truths. They were literally at the threshold of realising *Nibbāna* and merely needed a nudge from Buddha to complete their journey. So that maiden discourse on the three universal characteristics, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*,⁷⁷ was not about explaining *aniccā* or *dukkha*: those two concepts would have been obvious to them already. The discourse was really to explain *anattā*, by tapping on their deep understanding of *aniccā* and *dukkha*.

But first, a quick recap of key points about *aniccā* and *dukkha* before explaining *anattā*; it is important to understand the concepts of *aniccā* and *dukkha* correctly.

i. Impermanence (*Aniccā*)

Of the three characteristics, *aniccā* is probably the most straightforward and easiest to understand, at least conceptually. Even the regular person with no background in meditation or direct seeing of *aniccā* can appreciate it because the concept makes sense. He can extrapolate impermanence just from observing the transient nature of life and events around him. But at this level, it is at best only an intellectual exercise. Sometimes the mind may achieve a certain degree of calm, quiet and alertness either through meditation or simply because it has minimal sensory stimulation. That quiet mind may notice that mental experience is no more than a constant succession of mental states: sense impressions, emotions, perceptions, thoughts and so on and conclude correctly that impermanence is indeed a reality of the mind. This is better than just an intellectual appreciation: it is at least an experiential seeing of impermanence: that all phenomena that arises, ceases. Even then, this may not be enough. Because for most people that state of steady calm does not last and the mind will lose perspective of impermanence as it reverts to its regular habit of flitting all over the place and be lost in the narratives.

As long as *aniccā* is only an intellectual exercise or superficially observed, the knowledge has no real bearing on how we lead our lives. For the knowledge to make a deeper and lasting impact, *aniccā* has to be seen in all aspects of living: from fleeting fortune and changing conditions of the external world, to the transient nature of pleasure and pain in our internal world, from the impermanence of minute physical and mental experiences to the broad strokes of mortality and death. Mind must constantly observe impermanence and conditional arising in daily life to the point that the cognitive baseline of perception starts with the assumption that death is impending and life is expiring even as we breathe. Only then will we feel the deep sense of urgency to tame our unwholesome instincts and to abandon the defilements when they arise.

ii. Suffering (*Dukkha*)

Much has been said about *dukkha* under the earlier section on the Four Noble Truths. Bear in mind this key point: it is only when the mind truly appreciates the impermanence of existence, that *dukkha* becomes obvious. That is why when one is diagnosed with an incurable disease and given only months to live, one will feel unbearable *dukkha*. Stripped of the usual delusional bubble of immortality, one is confronted with the stark reality that death is indeed certain. Then one will no longer find that much pleasure and there is no meaning in the indulgence of the five senses. Even mental stimulation loses its appeal as the mind keeps drifting back to its impending death.

iii. Non-Self (*Anattā*)

The third characteristic, *anattā* or non-self, is one of the most difficult concepts taught by Buddha because it seems to run against our instincts about who we are and how we experience life. We experience everything in our life as real and substantial: our relationships, careers, ideas, identities and memories; indeed, everything that we value. Our minds instinctively regard every mental-physical experience (namely, body, feelings, perception, thoughts and consciousness) as 'mine', 'I' or 'Self'. The teaching of *anattā* disavows that impression and instinct. So, for most people, there is almost an instinctive resistance to this part of the teaching because deep down, they feel Self as very real and irrefutable.

In Buddha's exposition to the five monks on *anattā*, he taught that the regular person is in essence only the sum of five grasping aggregates, i.e., form, feelings, perception, volitional thought formation and consciousness. He pointed out that because each of those aggregates was impermanent and conditionally arisen, it was also *dukkha*. On the basis of the aggregates being "impermanent, *dukkha*, and subject to change", Buddha asked if it was still "fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my Self?'" The monks replied, "No, venerable sir."⁷⁸

Most of us probably cannot appreciate the essence of what was apparent to the spiritually awakening monks: that, because the aggregates were impermanent and *dukkha*, they must be non-Self. This is because for us, impermanence and *dukkha* are mere concepts and not an instinctive and integral part of our understanding about the reality of the world. In our deluded reality, pleasure and delight are real and lasting and therefore worth seeking. In contrast, the monks had already clearly seen and understood the conditional arising of each of the aggregates in fundamental ways and *dukkha* is the reality, and not an episodic occurrence that needs managing.

What is even more obscure to us is: implied in this notion of Self is an instinctive assumption that we have control over the conditions of our happiness. This inherent link between Self and control was made by Buddha when he said, "*Bhikkhus*, form (or any of the aggregates) is non-Self. For if... form was Self, this form would not lead to affliction and it would be possible to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.' But because form is non-Self, form leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'"⁷⁹ In other words, underpinning 'Self' is the delusional assumption of having control to determine the state of the aggregates and therefore happiness.

Before you dispute the above, take a moment to look at your own mind. Isn't there a voice that says 'I am responsible for my comfort and happiness'? If you are feeling pain or discomfort, wouldn't you try to do something about fixing the unpleasantness? Implicit in your effort is the assumption that you can make a difference, and that you have control. An unenlightened mind instinctively assumes so: that it can do something about pain and ensure pleasure. Even when it logically knows some things are beyond its ability, yet it feels the compulsion to do something and make a difference.

Because the average person is delusional about Self having control, he will be caught off guard and will suffer when the aggregates change as is their nature to. Buddha said, "...the uninstructed worldling ...regards form as Self, or Self as possessing form, or form as in Self, or Self as in form. That form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair."⁸⁰

This 'Self' delusion is so pervasive that even if you have absolute faith in the Buddha, you would still need to de-condition the mind's habits of claiming reality of the 'I' and 'Self'. Buddha taught the monks that they must keep telling themselves that everything that they experience, i.e., the five grasping aggregates, were 'not mine, not I and not Self'.⁸¹ Initially, they might not believe it. But after a while of repeating 'not mine, no I and not Self', the grip of the Self premise would start to loosen. When that happens, it is the beginning of accepting the ever-changing conditions of the mind and accepting the external environment as they are, without judgement and preferences.

Seeing the mind displaying all three (universal) characteristics and comprehending that is a necessary step to reducing craving and the resultant cessation of *dukkha*. As Buddha had said, "...when one has understood the impermanence of form, its change, fading away and cessation and when one sees as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'In the past and also now, all form is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, then sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair are abandoned. With their abandonment, one does not become agitated. Being unagitated, one dwells happily. A bhikkhu who dwells happily is said to be quenched in that respect.'"⁸²

(D) Dependent Origination⁸³ (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*)

Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a profound concept that only a fully realised disciple of the Buddha i.e., *Arahant*, can wholly understand. As the Buddha had said, "One who sees dependent origination (arising) sees the Dhamma and one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination."⁸⁴ This means that if you can understand dependent origination, you would be able to

understand the Dhamma in its entirety. For this reason, it is assumed that the concept must be very complex and over the centuries, Dhamma scholars had introduced various ways of interpreting it.⁸⁵

This chapter will make only *two* observations about dependent origination.

First, dependent origination explains that all mental states are conditionally arisen.⁸⁶ Hence the expression: "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."⁸⁷ For instance, we can see things because we have functioning eyes, there is an external object and we have the consciousness to register sight. When all three (sense organ, object, consciousness) come together, there is seeing. In the absence of any of the three, there will be no visual experience. Vision will spark off feelings that which are either pleasant, painful or neutral. Because of feelings, we have preferences, i.e., craving arises. When we feel pleasure, we want more. When we feel pain, we want to get away from it. All mental and physical experiences are thus conditional.

Secondly, it was used by Buddha to show how the experience of *dukkha* is almost unavoidable for the regular untrained mind.⁸⁸ That untrained mind is ignorant about the Four Noble Truths i.e., the direct correlation between craving and *dukkha*. It cannot help reacting instinctively to pleasure or pain with either a want or a want not respectively. It will also "dwell (in) contemplating gratification" which would lead to increasing craving and more *dukkha*.⁸⁹ Craving is particularly painful when an I or a Self is embedded in an otherwise mechanical cognitive process. As Buddha had put it in the oft-quoted stanza, "With ignorance as condition, formations [come to be]; with formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, the six-fold base; with the six-fold base as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of the whole mass of suffering."⁹⁰

For those who find dependent origination daunting, you may take comfort knowing that knowledge of it is not a pre-requisite for spiritual awakening at the first level, i.e., stream-entry. In the early days of Buddha's proselytising work, there was no mention in the canonical texts that Buddha had taught dependent origination to guide the early converts into the stream or to full enlightenment.⁹¹

(E) *Kamma*

Unlike most of the other Dhamma concepts, everybody (even non-Buddhists) seems to think that they know *kamma* or at least they think they do. *Kamma* is often wrongly thought of as 'cause-and-effect' or 'fate' or some kind of cosmic justice, where the good is blessed and rewarded and the evil punished.

Buddha's explanation of *kamma* was not so mysterious and deterministic. Buddha had said volition is *kamma*. When we consciously decide and then act accordingly, that volitional act is *kamma*.⁹² The operative word is volition.⁹³ Before you arrive at a decision, your mind would have gone

through a series of thought processes: assessing the facts, weighing pros and cons, considering likes and dislikes, checking out feelings. As you do so, the brain is constantly wiring and rewiring. Chemicals are produced which affect your moods and feelings. Volition thus impact and shape the structural, organic and chemical conditions of the mind. The chemicals and the neuronic infrastructure, that affect moods, emotions, thoughts quality, etc., form your world and how you experience the world. In other words, *kamma* is what is happening to your mind right now⁹⁴ because of the cognitive and mechanical processes and conscious decisions involved.

Buddha had said, "Beings are owners of their *kamma*, heirs of their *kamma*, originate from their *kamma*, bond to their *kamma*, have their *kamma* as refuge."⁹⁵ This is a brilliant summing up of what *kamma* does to the mind.

i. Why Owner?

Because you do have executive control over what you want to do and how you want to do it. In every situation, you have choices and you can decide. You can choose to react to an angry word with kindness and understanding or with anger and cruelty. You can choose to ignore or to engage.

ii. Why Heir?

Because every conscious decision or choice you make, leaves an imprint on the brain, for good or for bad. Every thought, word or action, major or minor, leaves a mark.⁹⁶ If you choose to be angry, the cortisol and stress hormones will rage through your system.⁹⁷ If you choose to smile and stay calm, the endorphins and serotonin will cruise along. The more you think about something and agonise over it, the greater the impact on the neuro eco-system. Do it often enough, and you are and will be stuck with a habit because your brain has developed a neural pathway that you will find increasingly harder to override.

iii. Why Originate?

Because we don't make decisions in a vacuum. We have a lifetime of experiences that our mind can refer to, whenever it needs to understand or assess a situation. Our upbringing, social-economic, cultural and religious environment, our education, the books we read, our life's experiences, etc., all shape our mind and condition our biases. Those biases form the baseline on how we see the world which then affect how we react to the world.

iv. And Bond?

Because you can't just walk away from your mind, its habits and its structural, organic and chemical conditions. If anger surges easily for you, it will be tough to stay calm. If you are of a trusting nature, you can't become cynical and suspicious overnight. If you regularly give in to craving, the addiction to delight is something that binds you tight.

v. Refuge?

Fortunately, if you understand how the mind works, if you trust in the Buddha and gain an understanding of the Dhamma and the practice as it was laid down, you can overcome the binding habits of the mind. The nature of the brain and its capacity to change⁹⁸ is ironically a refuge and a sanctuary. If there is no way the brain can change, then you are stuck 'forever'. But because the brain can change, you can create the right sets of mental conditions for the mind to change for the better and be at peace. It's scientific and the science of Dhamma is the refuge.

Kamma is thus not a boomerang or a gift from the past. *Kamma* is very much a work-in-progress mind of this life. Buddha did not teach *kamma* so that we are constantly looking over our shoulder in fear of repercussions of past transgressions. Buddha taught *kamma* so that we can make wise choices here and now to improve our minds and improve the conditions of tomorrow.

(F) *Nibbāna*⁹⁹

Any discussion on Dhamma learning is incomplete without touching on *Nibbāna*. But words, however skilfully-articulated, can never quite meaningfully explain *Nibbāna* because words are the product of the conventional world while *Nibbāna* is the ultimate of all sublime and supramundane experiences. Where our world is essentially mind-made and constructed, *Nibbāna* is, as Buddha had described it, "unborn, unbecome, unmade and unconditioned".¹⁰⁰ Our regular mind can't help forming concepts. It looks at Buddha's description of *Nibbāna* and concludes that it means annihilation. But Buddha had maintained that it is not.¹⁰¹ Where our reality is delusional, *Nibbāna* is about seeing reality as is. While our predominant mental states are greed and anger, *Nibbāna* had been explained as the extinguishing of those exact states. As Buddha put it, "A bhikkhu who is without clinging attains *Nibbāna*."¹⁰² Our mundane mind cannot even wrap itself around such an experience.

Although we can say something to explain *Nibbāna*, we must note that whatever is said will only scratch the surface of what it really is. What is clear from the early discourses is that *Nibbāna* is not a place but a state of mind where there is no more experience of *dukkha*.¹⁰³ Buddha explained it as follows, "Having thus discarded attraction and repulsion, he is freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and anguish; he is freed from suffering, I say." This is the state of mind explained in the Third Noble Truth where craving ceases completely and the feeling of relief from *dukkha* is absolute.¹⁰⁴

Nibbāna is experienced while the *Arahant* is still alive. As Buddha had said, "... (with) the destruction of the taints, they realise for themselves with direct knowledge, in this very life, the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, dwell in it."¹⁰⁵ And when the *Arahant* dies, there will be no more rebirth: "Destroyed is birth, the spiritual life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming back to any state of being."¹⁰⁶

Nibbāna is so precious that Buddha had declared that *Nibbāna* should be the ultimate goal of any practitioner. In his lifetime, Buddha used to exhort his disciples not to be content with anything less than *Nibbāna*. "Therefore, *bhikkhus*, arouse your energy for the attainment of the as-yet-unattained,

for the achievement of the as-yet unachieved, for the realization of the as-yet-unrealized, [with the thought]: 'In such a way this going forth of ours will not be barren, but fruitful and fertile; and when we use the robes, alms food, lodgings, and medicinal requisites [offered to us by others], these services they provide for us will be of great fruit and benefit to them."¹⁰⁷

[VI] WAYS TO CULTIVATE EFFECTIVE LEARNING

- **Adopt Right Attitude**

In your approach to learning Dhamma, you should adopt a middle path. On the one hand, be humble, respectful and keep an open mind. As Buddha had put it, “give ear and hear Dhamma”. If you are too critical of either the calibre of the teacher or the substance of the teaching, the mind is closed and disapproving and it learns nothing.

On the other hand, avoid being too self-effacing. If you belittle your learning capacity, you are already discouraged and intimidated. How to learn? Instead be kind and encouraging to yourself. Learn at your own pace and enjoy the learning process. Buddha had said that the path to spiritual enlightenment and inner peace was very gradual, i.e., it takes time. So have patience and faith.

- **Be Disciplined and Energetic**

Learning takes work, regardless of one’s age. Buddha had offered useful advice on how to learn effectively, “Here, a noble disciple has learned much, remembers what he has learned, and accumulates what he has learned... retained in mind, recited verbally, mentally investigated, and penetrated well by view.”¹⁰⁸

- **“Learn Much”**

You can start by collecting materials on Dhamma. Today there are many sources for them: books, magazines and numerous online websites carrying readings and video recordings. You can attend ad hoc talks. If you prefer structured learning, there are formal classes that lead to either a diploma or a degree.¹⁰⁹ There is also an online distance learning course.¹¹⁰

- **“Remember What He Has Learned”**

You must make effort to commit the information you have gathered to memory and this requires discipline and effort. Make notes as you read. From time to time, review your notes. The constant refreshing of memory can help to deepen your understanding. Every time you take another look at your notes, you might find some fresh insights.

- **“Accumulate What He Has Learned”**

There are two parts to this advice. First, don’t stop learning. As much as possible continue building and expanding on your Dhamma knowledge. Second, try and retain what you have learnt. That means don’t just memorise because this will result in superficial storage in your memory banks and in time, you will forget what you have memorised. Learn with clarity of understanding. That would help you to retain and consolidate the knowledge.

- **“Recited Verbally”**

During Buddha’s time, it was common for the monks ‘to recite’ together. They had no written texts. Reciting was their way of systematically memorising Buddha’s instructions. Today, we still have access to those recitations or chanting which we know as sutta. But we should not chant blindly. The ancient monks had recited in their own language so they understood what they were chanting. If you chant in a language that you do not understand, there is no Dhamma learning. Instead, read the sutta in whatever language you are comfortable in and try and understand the meaning. You need not even recite aloud. But revisit your reading frequently.

- **“Mentally Investigated”**

To be able to internalise the knowledge properly would require active contemplation of the Dhamma, which is what is meant by “mentally investigated”. You should mull over the teachings and examine how they compare and correlate with your own mind which you must learn to observe in daily life.

- **“Penetrated Well by View”**

By “view” it means understanding forged from careful investigation and reflection. It will take time but eventually, whatever conclusions that arise from investigation and contemplation will sink into your mind to shape how you will come to see the world.

- **Clarify Understanding**

An important part of effective learning is be ready to proactively seek out Dhamma practitioners and teachers and ask questions to clarify your understanding. Buddha had said that it was important to approach a teacher you respect.¹¹¹ That is just being practical: you are likely to be most receptive to and best able to learn from someone you respect.

- **Learning by Sharing**

Buddha had taught that realisation of Dhamma can happen when you are teaching Dhamma.¹¹² Now, if you do not feel confident ‘teaching’, then just share what you know or understand. When you verbalise your understanding, your brain is forced to reorganise and re-structure your knowledge bank. You may see the information from different angles. You may have to think creatively on how to be clearer in explaining Dhamma. The result of your effort may be greater clarity of the Dhamma.

[VI] A GOOD STATE OF *SUTA*

If *suta* is consolidated properly and correctly, the learner should grow in confidence in his understanding of the teaching. At some point, he will no longer be dependent on another to guide him on understanding the Buddha's words. He should be able to read the original texts and to discern the more complex concepts that used to puzzle him. He can continue to learn and develop deeper insights on his own. He can discern for himself what is or is not Dhamma and not worry about being misled by another or barking up the wrong tree. At some point, he can even share his Dhamma understanding with some confidence because his knowledge is based on what he has personally experienced and not just conceptually understood.

More importantly, Dhamma will come alive for him. Dhamma is no longer mere words. Dhamma teaching corresponds to what he can see and understand of his mind and of the reality of living. He will literally grow in the Dhamma because in his daily life, he is constantly aware of Dhamma. For instance, how mental states and physical phenomena are constantly changing and conditionally arisen. He is able to sit in quiet contentment and finds that he does not experience *dukkha* when craving is absent. The more he contemplates the teachings, the more he understands what he must do to continue progressing spiritually, and how he must practice in the direction of *Nibbāna*.

He is a better person for the Dhamma knowledge that he possesses, both in terms of conduct and in mental state. With understanding, he will want to help, serve, and do good. When he sees defilements arising, he knows to act with restraint and change bad habits, gradually but firmly. Because he leads his life with knowledge and understanding, he will be at peace for the most part. And when his life ends, his wholesome conduct and light, peaceful mind will take him to a heavenly rebirth. Buddha once said even if a being dies muddled, but if he had learnt the Dhamma well, he will have a heavenly rebirth. And at some distant point in his new life, his memory of the Dhamma will be rekindled and he will ultimately find spiritual success.¹¹³

- End of Chapter 3

FOOTNOTES

¹ Narada, Thera. "Dhp 152" in *The Dhammapada: Pāli Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*. 4th ed. Taipei: Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993. pp. 139.

² Bodhi, Bhikkhu. "Mahānāma (1)" S 55:21 (1) in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000, pp. 1808.

³ Bodhi, Bhikkhu. "Wealth" A 5:47 (7) in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012, pp. 673.

⁴ Nibbāna is the state of being when the mind experiences liberation. The term literally means the unbinding of the mind from cankers and defilements that keep it shackled to rounds of rebirths. The term also connotes the extinguishing of fire: cooling, stilling, calming and peace. See "Nibbāna: nibbāna", edited by Access to Insight, Access to Insight (Legacy Edition, version ati-legacy-2013.12.21.11), 30 Nov 13, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca3/nibbana.html> See also "Nibbāna as Living Experience / The Buddha and The Arahant: Two Studies from the Pāli Canon", by Lily de Silva. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 Nov 13, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/desilva/wheel407.html>.

⁵ "Let go the past. Let go the future. Let go the present (front, back and middle). Crossing to the farther shore of existence, with mind released from everything, do not again undergo birth and decay." See Narada, "Dhp 348", *The Dhammapada: Pāli Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*, op. cit., pp. 266-267.

⁶ Ibid., "Dhp 203" and "Dhp 204", pp. 176-177.

⁷ In *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, the Buddha said it was difficult for the mundane persons to realise Nibbāna due to much 'dust in their eyes'. "... This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, takes delight in attachment, rejoices in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, dependent origination. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna." Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu translated. "Ariyapariyesanā Sutta: The Noble Search" M 26 in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*. 4th ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009, pp. 260.

⁸ Buddha once compared the enlightenment process to hens hatching eggs. If the conditions were right, the eggs would hatch whether or not the hens willed it. Similarly, if the mental conditions were right, the practitioners would realise Nibbāna, whether or not they desired it. Bodhi, "The Adze handle (or The ship)" S22:101 (9), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 959-960.

⁹ Bodhi, Bhikkhu translated. "Blessings (Mangala sutta)" Snp 2.4 in *The Suttanipāṭa: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with its Commentaries: Translated from the Pāli*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2017, pp. 198-200.

¹⁰ Walshe, Maurice translated. "Sigālaka Sutta: To Sigālaka Advice to Lay People" D 31 in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. London: Wisdom Publications, 1987, pp. 466-467.

¹¹ See Bodhi, "Worthy deeds" in A 4:61 (1), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 449-452 and "Freedom from Debt" in A 4:62 (2), pp. 452-453.

¹² Ibid., "Dīghajāṇu Sutta" A 8:54 (1), pp. 1194.

¹³ Walshe, "Sigālaka Sutta: To Sigālaka Advice to Lay People" D 31, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 466.

¹⁴ Bodhi, "Dīghajāṇu Sutta" A 8:54 (4), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 1195.

¹⁵ *Being a Buddhist is not just a declaration of religious identity. One is a Buddhist only when one incorporates Buddha's teaching into daily life. Minimally, that means avoiding evil, doing good and learning to purify the mind. See also ibid., "Worthy deeds" in A 4:61 (1), pp. 449-452.*

¹⁶ Buddha had said that the manifestation of six things was rare in the world. "What six? (1) The manifestation of a Tathāgata, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One is rare in the world. (2) One who can teach the Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by a Tathāgata... (3) Rebirth in the sphere of the noble ones... (4) Endowment with unimpaired [sense] faculties... (5) Being intelligent and astute... (6) The desire for the wholesome Dhamma is rare in the world." Ibid., "Manifestation" A 6:96 (1), pp. 981.

¹⁷ Sujato, Bhikkhu & Walton, Jessica. "Sopāka" Thag 7.4 in *A New Translation of the Theragāthā, First edition: 2014*, SuttaCentral. <http://ftp.budaedu.org/ebooks/pdf/EN385.pdf>. Also see story of Potthilātthera seeking a seven-year-old arahant samanera as his meditation teacher in Mya Tin translated, "Potthilātthera Vatthu" Dhp 282 in *The Dhammapada: Verses and Stories*. <https://www.tipitaka.net/tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=282>

¹⁸ Department of Pali University of Rangoon translated, "Culapanthaka Vatthu" Dhp 25 in *The Dhammapada Commentary*, <https://www.tipitaka.net/tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=025a>.

¹⁹ Angulimāla was known to be "murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings. Villages, towns, and districts were laid waste by him." He had murdered scores of people and wore their fingers like a garland. See Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Angulimāla Sutta: On Angulimāla" M 86, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 710-717.

²⁰ For details on Patacara's life, see Murcott, Susan. "Patacara and her Disciples" Chapter 2 in *First Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening*. California: Parallax Press, 2006 pp. 44-45.

²¹ Walshe, "Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing, the Buddha's Last Days" D 16, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 231-277.

²² Hecker, Hellmuth & Khema, Sister. Translated from the Pali, "Ananda" (Thag 17.3), *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/thag/thag.17.03.hekh.html>, 4 Aug 10.

²³ Walshe, "Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing, The Buddha's Last Days" D 16, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 267–269.

²⁴ *Buddha's death is traditionally called Parinibbāna.*

²⁵ *Arahants are individuals who have realised Nibbāna for themselves.*

²⁶ Horner, I. B. translated with supplementary translation by Brahmali, Bhikkhu. "Pañcasatikakkhandhaka: The Chapter on the assembly of five hundred" Kd 21.1 in *The Book of the Discipline Vinayapitakam*. Pali Text Society. pp. 2383–2397.

²⁷ For details on the Sangha's concerns after Buddha's Parinibbāna, see Bay, Sylvia. "After Parinibbāna – Safeguarding Dhamma" Chapter 18 in *Between the Lines: An Analytical Appreciation of the Buddha's Life: The Combined Book Edition*. Singapore, 2017.

²⁸ For details, see Payutto, P. A. "Sangāyana: the rehearsal of the word of the Buddha" in *The Pāli Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know*. Translated into English by Dr Somseen Chanawangsa. 2nd Edition, 2004. pp. 17–19.
http://www.watnyanaves.net/uploads/File/books/pdf/the_pali_canon_what_a_buddhist_must_know.pdf.

²⁹ Pāli actually means text and is not the name of a language. Buddhist scholars are still debating the name of the ancient language of the scripture. For more details about its history, see Sujato, Bhikkhu & Brahmali, Bhikkhu. *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*, especially pp. 55–56, <http://ocbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/authenticity.pdf>.

³⁰ For further details and an excellent introduction to the Vinaya Pitaka, see Brahmali, Bhikkhu. "The Monastic Laws", <https://suttacentral.net/vinaya>. Also see "Vinaya Pitaka: The Basket of the Discipline", edited by Access to Insight. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 17 Dec 13, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/vin/index.html>.

³¹ See Sujato, Bhikkhu. "Discourses", <https://suttacentral.net/discourses> for a thorough and insightful write-up on the Sutta Pitaka. Also see "Sutta Pitaka: The Basket of Suttas", edited by Access to Insight. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 Nov 13, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sutta.html>.

³² The exact number of texts under Khuddaka Nikaya varies between the Myanmar and Sri Lankan collection. Generally, the following are included: Dhammapada ("Path of Dhamma"), Udāna ("Exclamations"), Itivuttaka ("This Was Said"), Sutta Nipata ("Group of Discourses"), Theragāthā (Verses of the Elder Monks), Therīgāthā (Verses of the Elder Nuns) and Jātaka ("Birth stories of the Buddha"). See "Khuddaka Nikaya: The Collection of Little Texts", edited by Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 21 Dec 13, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/index.html>.

³³ Other early Buddhist schools that left behind Abhidhamma texts include Sarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka, preserved in Chinese translation. See Sujato, Bhikkhu. "Abhidhamma", <https://suttacentral.net/abhidhamma#item2>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, for a broad sweep summary of the seven texts of Therāvada Abhidhamma pitaka. Also see "Abhidhamma Pitaka: The Basket of Abhidhamma", edited by Access to Insight. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 Nov 13, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/abhi/index.html>.

³⁶ Pe Maung Tin translated. "Introductory Discourse" in *The Expositor (Atthasālinī) Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dhammasaṅgani The First Book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka*, Vol. 1, edited and revised by Mrs Rhys Davids. London: Pāli Text Society, 1976, pp.16-35.

³⁷ Sujato, "Abhidhamma", *op. cit.*, <https://suttacentral.net/abhidhamma#item2>

³⁸ *Until you have understood how to apply Dhamma teaching in daily life and successfully reduce your agitation, Dhamma comprises just concepts. You may even be familiar with the theoretical details but without insights about application and the effects on the mind, there is no real understanding of Dhamma.*

³⁹ *The Pāli word for Buddha's gradual method of training for lay people is anupubbikathā. It has been variously translated as 'gradual discourse' (Maurice Walshe), 'gradual instruction' (Bhikkhu Nyanatiloka), 'progressive instruction' (Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi) and 'step-by-step talk' (Bhikkhu Thanissaro).*

⁴⁰ *"The Blessed One then gave me a progressive discourse, that is, a talk on giving, virtuous behaviour, and heaven; he revealed the danger, degradation, and defilement of sensual pleasures and the benefit of renunciation." See Bodhi, "Ugga" A 8:21 (1), The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 1148.*

⁴¹ *The Pali canon did not specify details on the six tenets. This segment is written based on teachings found in other suttas.*

⁴² *More details in Bay, Sylvia, "Buddhist Code of Moral Conduct" Do Good and Purify the Mind in Morality (Sīla) Chapter from upcoming book 'Towards the Light'. pp. 20.*
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cb164a_034c5584d6fo4e9e9cc3e361408367ba.pdf

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.

⁴⁴ *For a fuller write up on sīla, see Bay, Sylvia, Morality (Sīla) Chapter from upcoming book 'Towards the Light'. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cb164a_034c5584d6fo4e9e9cc3e361408367ba.pdf*

⁴⁵ *For details on Buddhist cosmology, see "The Thirty-one Planes of Existence", edited by Access to Insight. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 Nov 13, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sagga/loka.html>.*

⁴⁶ *Bodhi, "Giver" S 31:3 (1), The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 1026.*

⁴⁷ *See Bodhi, "Mahānāma (1)" A 11:11(1), The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 1567. See also Ireland, John D translated. "Right View" Iti 71 in *Udana and the Itivuttaka: Two Classics from the Pāli Canon*. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997. pp. 165-166.*

⁴⁸ *The Buddha taught the qualities that one must possess such that "one is deposited in heaven as if brought there."* Ibid., A 10:211 (1) – 236 (16), pp. 1528-1547.

⁴⁹ Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu translated, selected and arranged materials. *The Life of the Buddha*. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2001, pp. 49.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 49.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 49.

⁵² *There are four levels of Buddhist sainthood: stream-enterer (Sotāpanna), once-returner (Sakadāgāmi), never-returner (Anāgāmi) and the Arahant. The four levels are differentiated by depth of seeing and understanding about reality of existence and degree of purity of mind. See Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, Introduction to the Majjhima Nikaya, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 41-45.*

⁵³ See Bodhi, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma" S 56:11 (1), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 1843-1847.*

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 1843–1847.

⁵⁵ *Buddha called it the four pervasions of the mind: seeing what is impermanent as permanent, what is painful as pleasurable, what is non-Self to be Self and what is unattractive as attractive. See Bodhi, "Inversions" A 4:49(9), The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 437-438.*

⁵⁶ Bodhi, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma" S 56:11 (1), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 1844.*

⁵⁷ *Buddha taught five themes that should often be reflected upon by everyone: 1) 'I am subject to old age; I am not exempt from old age.' 2) 'I am subject to illness; I am not exempt from illness.' 3) 'I am subject to death; I am not exempt from death.' 4) 'I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.' 5) 'I am the owner of my kamma, heir of my kamma, I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad that I do.'* Bodhi, "Themes" A 5:57 (7), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 686-689.*

⁵⁸ Bodhi, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma" S 56:11 (1), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 1844.*

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 1844.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 1844.

⁶¹ Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, "Mahācattārīsaka Sutta: The Great Forty" M 117, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 934-935. See also Bodhi, "Inversions" A 4:49 (9), The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 437-438.*

⁶² Bodhi, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma" S 56:11 (1), op. cit., pp. 1844. Also see Bodhi, "The Characteristic of non-Self" S 22:59 (7), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 901-903.

⁶³ See Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, "Dvedhāvitakka Sutta: Two Kinds of Thoughts" M 19, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 207-210.

⁶⁴ "And what, bhikkhus, is right speech? Abstinence from false speech, abstinence from divisive speech, abstinence from harsh speech, abstinence from idle chatter: this is called right speech." See Bodhi, "Analysis" S 45:8 (8), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 1528.

⁶⁵ "Bhikkhus, possessing five factors, speech is well spoken, not badly spoken; it is blameless and beyond reproach by the wise. What five? It is spoken at the proper time; what is said is true; it is spoken gently; what is said is beneficial; it is spoken with a mind of loving-kindness." See Bodhi, "Speech" A 5:198 (1), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 816.

⁶⁶ The Buddha mentions five specific kinds of livelihood which bring harm to others and are therefore to be avoided. They are dealing with (1) weaponry, (2) living beings (including raising animals for slaughter, slave trade and prostitution), (3) meat production and butchery, (4) poisons and (5) intoxicants. Ibid., "Vanijja" A 5:177, pp. 791.

⁶⁷ "And what is failure in livelihood? Here, someone is of wrong livelihood and earns a living by a wrong type of livelihood. This is called failure in livelihood." Ibid., "Activity" A 3:119 (7), pp. 351.

⁶⁸ Found in several suttas. Ibid., "Freedom from debt" A 4:62 (2), pp. 452-453. Also see "Utilisation" A 5:41 (1), pp. 665-667, and "Dighājānu" A 8:54 (4), pp. 1194-1197.

⁶⁹ Walshe, "Sigālaka Sutta: To Sigālaka Advice to Lay People" D 31, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 468.

⁷⁰ "And what, bhikkhus, is right effort? Here... a bhikkhu generates desire for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. He generates desire for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states... . He generates desire for the arising of unarisen wholesome states... . He generates desire for the maintenance of arisen wholesome states, for their non-decay, increase, expansion, and fulfilment by development; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. This is called right effort." See Bodhi, "Analysis" S 45:8 (8), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 1529.

⁷¹ "For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher's Dispensation, it is natural that he conduct himself thus: 'Willingly, let only my skin, sinews, and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood dry up on my body, but my energy shall not be relaxed so long as I have not attained what can be attained by manly strength, manly energy, and manly persistence.'" See Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, "Kīṭāgiri Sutta: At Kīṭāgiri" M 70, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 583-584.

⁷² "Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death. The heedful do not die; the heedless are like unto the dead." See Narada, "Dhp 21", *The Dhammapada: Pāli Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*, op. cit., pp. 23.

⁷³ For an excellent write-up on mindfulness practice, see Gunaratana, Henepola Bhante. *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002. Also see Gunaratana, Henepola Bhante. *Four Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012.

⁷⁴ See Gunaratana, Henepola Bhante. *Beyond Mindfulness in Plain English*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009. Also see Gunaratana, Henepola Bhante. *Meditation on Perception*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014.

⁷⁵ Bodhi, "What Purpose?" A 11:1 (1), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 1553-1554.

⁷⁶ Bay, *Between the Lines: An Analytical Appreciation of the Buddha's Life: The Combined Book Edition*, op. cit., chapter 5.

⁷⁷ Bodhi, "The Characteristic of Nonsself" S 22:59 (7), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 901-903.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 902.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 901-902.

⁸⁰ Bodhi, "With Yourselves as an Island" S 22:43 (1), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 883.

⁸¹ Buddha had said, "Therefore, bhikkhus, any kind of form whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all form should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my-Self.'" *Ibid.*, "The Characteristic of Nonsself" S 22:59 (7), pp. 902 and "What is Suffering" S 22:16 (5), pp. 869. "What is suffering is nonsself. And what is nonsself should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my-Self.'"

⁸² *Ibid.*, "With Yourselves as an Island" S 22:43 (1), pp. 883.

⁸³ Other terms used in place of this are dependent arising and conditionality.

⁸⁴ See Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta: The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint" M 28, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 284.

⁸⁵ See Walshe, "Mahānidāna Sutta: The Great Discourse on Origination." D 15, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 223. Also see connected discourses on Causation (Nidānasamyutta) section in *Samyutta Nikaya in The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*.

⁸⁶ Bodhi, Bhikkhu. "Transcendental Dependent Arising: A Translation and Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta". Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 1 Dec 13, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel277.html>.

⁸⁷ Bodhi, "Enmity" A 10:92 (2), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 1463.

⁸⁸ An entire sub-section in the Samyutta Nikaya was devoted to explaining this. Bodhi, S 12:52 to S12:60, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 589-594.

⁸⁹ Ibid., "Clinging" S 12:52 (2), pp. 589.

⁹⁰ Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta: The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving" M 38, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 354.

⁹¹ See Bay, *Between the Lines: An Analytical Appreciation of the Buddha's Life: The Combined Book Edition*, op. cit., chapters 5-7.

⁹² "It is volition... that I call kamma. For having willed, one acts by body, speech or mind." Bodhi, "Penetrative" A 6:63 (9), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op cit. pp. 963.

⁹³ See "Volition" in *Psychology Dictionary*. n.d. <https://psychologydictionary.org/volition/>

⁹⁴ In *Devadaha Sutta*, Buddha points to one of the most distinctive features of his own teaching on kamma: that the present experience of pleasure and pain is a combined result of both past and present actions. See Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Devadaha Sutta: At Devadaha" M 101, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli*, op. cit., pp. 827-838.

⁹⁵ Ibid., "Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta: The Shorter Exposition of Action" M 135, pp. 1053.

⁹⁶ Buddha had said that "whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind." Ibid., "Dvedhāvitakka Sutta: Two Kinds of Thought" M 19, pp. 207-210.

⁹⁷ Hanson, Rick & Mendius, Richard, "Chap 3 The First and Second Dart." in *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love & Wisdom*, New Harbinger Publications: Oakland, CA, 2009, pp. 45-63.

⁹⁸ Kang, D-H, Hang Joon Jo, Wi Hoon Jung, Sun Hyung Kim, Ye-Ha Jung, Chi-Hoon Choi, Ul Soon Lee, Seung Chan An, Joon Hwan Jang, & Jun Soo Kwon. "The Effect of Meditation on Brain Structure: Cortical Thickness Mapping and Diffusion Tensor Imaging." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8, no. 1 (2012): 27-33. doi:10.1093/scan/nss056. See also Britta K. Hölzel, James Carmody, Mark Vangel, Christina Congleton, Sita M. Yerramsetti, Tim Gard, and Sara W. Lazar, "Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density". *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191, no. 1 (2011): 36-43. doi:10.1016/j.pscychresns.2010.08.006.

⁹⁹ Refer to <https://suttacentral.net/define/nibb%C4%81na> for a compiled list of definitions of Nibbāna by scholars.

¹⁰⁰ Ānandajoti, Bhikkhu. Translated from the Pāli, *Tatiyanibbānasuttaṃ The Third Discourse about Nibbāna*, Ud 8.3, *Udāna: Exalted Utterances*, <https://suttacentral.net/ud8.3/en/anandajoti>

¹⁰¹ Bodhi, "Yamaka" S 22:85 (7), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 931-936.

¹⁰² Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Āneñjasappāya Sutta: The Way to the Imperturbable" M 106, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 873.

¹⁰³ Bodhi, "World (2)" A 8:6 (6), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 1118.

¹⁰⁴ There is no experience, mundane or spiritual, even remotely like Nibbāna. However, if we had experienced a mind which is content and at peace, we can perhaps imagine how incredibly mind-blowing Nibbāna would be when craving is completely extinguished. Even though our moment of contentment is transient and conditioned, our mind remain quiet, peaceful, alert, effortlessly in the present and equanimous, for as long as craving is at bay.

¹⁰⁵ Bodhi, "No need to hide" A 7:57 (5), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 1057.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., "Dozing" A 7:61, pp. 1062.

¹⁰⁷ Bodhi, "The Ten Powers" S 12:22 (2), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 553.

¹⁰⁸ Bodhi, "Wealth" A 5:47 (7), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, op. cit., pp. 673.

¹⁰⁹ In Singapore, there are Sri Lankan universities offering off-shore degree courses in Buddhism: (1) Buddhist Pali University (based in Mangala Vihara) has a 3-year Bachelor of Arts in Buddhism Studies, and (2) Kelaniya University (based in Buddhist Library) has a 1-year Postgraduate Diploma in Buddhism Studies and a 1-year Master of Arts in Buddhism Studies.

¹¹⁰ Harvard University offers a four-week course on edX allowing its enrolees(enrolees) to learn about the rich and diverse beliefs and practices of Buddhists across time and place and experience Buddhism through its scriptures, both relationally as well as academically. See Hallisey, Charles, and Alexis Bader. "Buddhism Through Its Scriptures." Harvard Online Courses. 19 Mar 19. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/buddhism-through-its-scriptures>. See also Analayo, Bhikkhu, Candasiri, Ajahn, Shaila Catherine, Jake Davis, John Peacock, Joseph Goldstein, and Sharon Salzberg. "Entering The Path An Online Foundations Course in Early Buddhist Study and Practice." Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/online-programs/entering-the-path/>

¹¹¹ Ñānamoli & Bodhi, "Vimamsaka Sutta: The Inquirer" M 47, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya: Translated from the Pāli, op. cit., pp. 415-418.*

¹¹² Buddha had said one could realise the Dhamma in five ways: while listening to Dhamma talk (i.e., learning from another), 'chanting' (for the people of his time this meant they were revising Dhamma but for us it is reading the suttas), meditating (i.e., reflecting on insights while in meditation), reflecting on Dhamma in daily life, and while teaching. See Bodhi, "Liberation" A 5:47 (7), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, op. cit., pp. 644-646.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, "Followed by Ear" A 4:191 (1), pp. 561-563. Buddha had said that when one is learned and understood the Dhamma well ("followed the teachings by ear, recited them verbally, examined them with the mind and penetrated them well by view"), even if he should pass away "muddled in mind" and his memory of that past is "sluggish", if he was somehow reminded of that previous practice, he would recognise the teaching and "quickly reach distinction". It could be when his fellow devas friends recite "passages of the Dhamma to him" or "a bhikkhu with psychic potency... teaches the Dhamma to an assembly of devas" or "a young deva" teaching "an assembly of devas" or when a fellow deva reminded him of their past practice together while they were in the robes.