

THE NINE ATTRIBUTES
OF THE

Buddha



Sayalay Susilā



The Nine Attributes of the Buddha

SAYALAY SUSĪLĀ



“BOTH FORMERLY AND NOW,
I TEACH ABOUT SUFFERING
AND THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING.”

(SN 22.86)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Venerable Sayalay Susilā is the founder and current Abbess of the Appāmada Vihari Meditation Center (AVMC), in Penang, Malaysia, since 2014.

Sayalay was born in 1963 in Pahang, Malaysia. Sayalay began developing her keen interest in insight meditation while at the University of Science Malaysia, where she obtained a degree in mass communications in 1987. After graduation, Sayalay worked as a high school teacher for a

year and a half. Being increasingly disenchanted with worldly matters and desiring to be dedicated to the practice more than ever, she resigned her post to take up meditation full time for three years.

In 1991, Sayalay ordained as a Theravada Buddhist nun in the Burmese tradition at the age of 28, in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, Malaysia. Six months after her ordination in 1991, she went to Panditarama Monastery in Myanmar, where she practiced intensively for nearly three years under the guidance of the famous meditation master Venerable U Pandita Sayadaw.

In 1994, wishing to cultivate concentration meditation, Sayalay moved to Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar. She placed herself under the guidance of the renowned monk Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, and remained in the forest for 14 years. In addition to an assiduous program of meditation, she also learned the *Abhidhamma*, ancient discourses, and the Pāli language from Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Meanwhile, she became his English-to-Chinese interpreter in Myanmar and abroad.

From 2000, Sayalay started teaching the *Abhidhamma* extensively in various renowned centers internationally, including those in Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

In order to deepen her own understanding of the *Dhamma*, Sayalay also practiced different meditation methods during her stay in Myanmar, including those taught by Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and

Goenka. As a result of both her breadth of exposure and depth of practice of various meditation methods, Sayalay has become an unusually accomplished teacher—one who is able to present the subtleties of the Buddha’s teachings in a simple and direct way. In particular, she presents the most profound division of the teaching, the *Abhidhamma*, in a lucid manner grounded not in pedantic philosophy, but in actual meditation experience.

After leaving Myanmar, Sayalay studied and practiced according to the suttas, putting an emphasis on teaching and practicing the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Sayalay has traveled extensively as a meditation and *Abhidhamma* teacher, presenting the *Abhidhamma* and sutta expositions in formal lectures and talks, and has conducted meditation retreats throughout the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, and in her home country of Malaysia. In 2015, Sayalay led the first International Novitiate Program with Venerable Sanghasena held in Ladakh, the region of the Himalayas of northern India.

Sayalay Susīlā has a unique gift to teach and present the Buddha’s teachings with profound depth, vividness, directness, precision, and clarity. Her teaching is very much appreciated by her students globally. As an effectively bilingual speaker in both English and Chinese, Sayalay is uniquely able to expound the Dhamma and teach to a wide global audience. In addition, Sayalay is also fluent in Burmese, Hokkien, and Malay.

Sayalay is the author of many books published in both English and Chinese. Her most well-known English book is *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma* 《揭开身心之奥秘》 (second edition, both Chinese and English).

Other books published in English include:

1. The Path to Happiness
2. Inner Exploration
3. Contemplation of Feeling
4. Dhamma Essence Series

Her Chinese publications include:

1. *From this Shore to Far Shore* 《从此岸到彼岸》
2. *The Practical Manual of Abhidhamma*
《阿毗达摩实用手册-完整版》
3. *Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma* 《正法初现》
4. *The Development of the Faculties* 《根修习经》
5. *The Nine Attributes of the Buddha*
《佛陀的九种德行》
6. *The Path to Happiness* 《朝向快乐之道》
7. *Dhamma Essence Series* 《佛法精粹》
8. *Mettā Bhavana* 《慈爱禅》
9. *Paṭṭhāna* 《二十四缘发趣论》



ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DA	Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā
Dhp	Dhammapada
DhpA	Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Iti	Itivuttaka
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Sutta Nipāta
Ud	Udāna
Vin	Vinaya Piṭaka
Vsm	Visuddhimagga

PREFACE

The *Nine Attributes of the Buddha* was first published in Chinese many years ago and is now in its 7th edition due to its popularity across Asia. Many students have asked if this book could be translated into English, and thanks to Rosalina Lin from Indonesia who offered to do this inspired but challenging task, the first English edition was brought into being.

My objective of having this book written and translated is to help Buddhist practitioners have a better understanding of the virtues of the Buddha. A clear understanding of the virtues of the Buddha increases our faith and conviction, which are essential while walking the path of awakening.

I am deeply grateful to my editor Alice Chang from the U.S. who spent months to edit and re-edit this book and help make it more readable. After adding some elements to the English text, I then had the benefit of proof-reading from Olivia Vaz from Canada, Maureen Bodenbach from the U.S., Yan Yi Wei from Malaysia, and Feronica Laksana from Indonesia. Special thanks are due to my final editor Joanne Wagner from the U.S. for standardizing the format of the book and for further editorial assistance.

The result is this current rendering of the deeper meanings

behind the words chanted daily by devout Buddhists all over the world in praise of the Buddha, from one of the most recited and beloved chants in Theravada Buddhism.

Blessed is the birth of the Buddhas;

blessed is the enunciation of the sacred Teaching;

blessed is harmony in the Order;

and blessed is the spiritual pursuit of the united truth-seekers.

May all beings share in any merit we may have acquired in preparing this book for the benefits of the followers of the Buddha.

May all beings be well and happy.

Sayalay Susīlā

2019, Canada.



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PART I
REVERENTIAL RECOLLECTION
OF THE BUDDHA

Every faithful disciple of the Buddha is encouraged to recollect the virtues of the Buddha daily by reciting the chant below. This chanting should be based upon a foundation of faith, confidence, and gratitude, and with a clear aspiration to walk the path walked by the Buddha—a path comprising compassion, wisdom, and liberation. Furthermore, the recollection should be rendered with reverence and sincere acknowledgment of each of the special attributes so as to fully understand and emulate the depth of the Buddha’s virtues.

To assist with daily practice, this book describes, explains, and elaborates on each of the recollections of the Buddha in great detail. The Buddha had countless virtues; however, we generally recollect nine of the principal ones.

Below is the chant in Pāli along with an English translation. It is extremely beneficial to memorize and recite it each day or whenever inwardly prompted. The remainder of the book focuses on the in-depth meaning of each attribute, together with examples, stories, and quotes from the suttas. These narratives help drive home the significance and value of recalling the Buddha’s attributes with the goal of living life based on the principles and virtues he embodied.

Chant: Recollecting the Nine Attributes of the Buddha

<i>Iti'pi so Bhagavā</i>	For this reason, He is the exalted one
<i>Arahāṃ</i>	Worthy/accomplished one
<i>Sammāsambuddho</i>	Rightly self-awakened /Enlightened one
<i>Vijjā Caraṇa-sampanno</i>	Endowed with knowledge and conduct
<i>Sugato</i>	Well-gone
<i>Lokavidū</i>	Knower of the worlds
<i>Anuttaro Purisadammasārathi</i>	Incomparable trainer of those who can be trained
<i>Satthā Deva Manussānaṃ</i>	Teacher of gods and humans
<i>Buddho</i>	The awakened/enlightened one
<i>Bhagavā'ti</i>	The blessed/exalted one

To echo what has already been mentioned, the Buddha had countless virtues, but, as we proceed, the emphasis will be on the **above nine** principal attributes, each explained in turn.

PART II

THE ATTRIBUTES

1.

Araham

– The Worthy (Accomplished) One

According to the *Path of Purification*, there are five meanings of the word *arahant*.

(1) The Destroyer of Enemies (*Kilesas*)

The Buddha is *Araham*. *Araham* is related to the Pāli word *arahanta*. *Ari* means “enemy,” *hata* means to kill or to destroy. Therefore, the meaning of *Araham* is killer or destroyer of the enemies.

Based on compassion for all sentient beings and a tacit understanding of the Law of *Kamma*, it is a Buddhist training rule to abstain from killing. With this in mind, “the enemy” here does not refer to an external force, but to the enemy within—greed, aversion, ignorance, jealousy, misery, regret,

conceit, wrong view, confusion, delusion, shamelessness, and fearlessness of wrongdoing, etc. These dishonorable and unwholesome qualities are mental defilements because they afflict the mind and cause the mind to become contaminated and depraved. Therefore, mental defilements are our real enemies.

When the Buddha attained arahantship, he simultaneously destroyed all his mental defilements—defilements that are harmful to oneself and to others. An *arahant* is thus completely pure in mind. Conversely, worldlings who are untaught in the *Dhamma* constantly produce mental defilements. In *Pāli*, the untaught worldling is called *puthujanna*, as in “*puthu kilesejanati’ti, puthujanno*,” which means “the producer of mental defilements.”

What does “the producer of mental defilements” mean? It points to those who have not yet eradicated mental defilements that arise when the six sense objects (color, sound, odor, flavor, touch, and mind objects) make contact with the six sense faculties (the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). An ordinary worldling does not have the required appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) to see things as they really are, i.e., as impermanent, stressful, and not-self. Consequently, passion, desire, and craving invade his or her mind when the sense objects are agreeable and pleasant. Unable to subdue the craving by way of mindfulness and wisdom, he or she has to act to satiate the craving. This action, most probably unwholesome, is called *kamma* in the teaching of the Buddha.

On the other hand, a worldling may feel repelled, disgusted, and dissatisfied when the sense objects are disagreeable and unpleasant. Unable to observe the negative emotion objectively by way of mindfulness or unable to do away with the negative emotion with skillful means, he or she has to act physically or verbally to extinguish that fire of anger. Such unwholesome action or *kamma* will then bring harm to oneself and others.

Since our senses are open to impingements all the time—except when we fall asleep—our senses constantly come into contact with sense objects, causing the untaught worldling to instinctively produce or renew defilements. The list of mental defilements that are possible is long:

- the wrong view that there is an abiding self who sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks;
- rejection or aversion;
- greed or craving for things seen, heard, sensed, and cognized;
- jealousy;
- lack of shame or fearlessness regarding unwholesome states of mind or actions, such as greed, anger, conceit, and aversion;
- lack of fear regarding the consequences of unwholesome *kamma* done fraudulently;
- arrogance, thinking highly of oneself, or despising others;
- obstinacy, inability to take in others' admonishments;
- doubt about the working of *kamma*;
- domineering attitude;

- restless, scattered state of mind;
- cruelty, wishing to torture others;
- covetousness, wishing others' property become one's, etc.

Mental defilements not only bring us suffering in the present and in lives to come when the unwholesome *kamma* bears its result, but they also hurt others. Under the influence of mental defilements, people fight with one another, and, as happens during wartime, even kill and slaughter each other mercilessly. According to the law of *kamma*, these actions have repercussions. When all the necessary conditions for the unwholesome or unskillful *kamma* done by body, speech, and mind ripen, the doer will reap its fruit, earning an unpleasant rebirth into one of the four lower realms—hell, animal, hungry ghosts, or asuras—where there is no happiness at all. Coming back up from those unhappy realms to become human again is extremely difficult. The Buddha said, the number of people reborn in the human world is like a pinch of dust taken on the tip of one's fingernail as compared with the dust of the great earth:

One day, the Blessed One, picking up a little bit of dust with the tip of his fingernail, said to the monks, "What do you think, monks? Which is greater: the little bit of dust I have picked up with the tip of my fingernail, or the great earth?" (SN 20.2)

"The great earth is far greater, lord. The little bit of dust the Blessed One has picked up with the tip of his fingernail is next to nothing. It doesn't even count."

“In the same way, monks, few are the beings reborn among human beings. Far more are those reborn elsewhere. Thus you should train yourselves: ‘We will live heedfully.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.”

When we understand that our mental defilements are the enemies that cause our and others’ suffering, and that they may cast us into unhappy realms of existence in lives to come, we have no other recourse but to work hard to eradicate them—to destroy these enemies within ourselves, as the *arahant* has done. When working with defilements, we should keep ourselves motivated with these words from the *Dhammapada*:

Irrigators regulate the rivers; fletchers straighten the arrow shaft; carpenters shape wood; and the wise control themselves. (Dhp 80)

In Bodhi Gayā, on the night of his awakening, the Buddha sat in meditation under the Bodhi tree, ardent and alert, having completely destroyed all harmful mental defilements. With the sword of a *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), *sakadāgāmin* (once-returner), and *anāgāmi* (non-returner), and the *arahant* path knowledge well established, he was referred to as “the killer of the enemies” or an “*arahant*.”

Mental defilements are also the root cause of rebirth. When mental defilements are totally eradicated, then the link in the chain of birth and death is cut off, permanently disabling any re-linking to new birth. An *arahant* is one who has totally eradicated all mental defilements and is liberated from the cycle of rebirth—completely liberated—with no possibility

of any kammic potential in actions that follow. In other words, an *arahant's* actions do not have kammic results.

The faculties of an *arahant* are pure and tranquil. An *arahant* possesses right view, is fearless, worry-free, and equanimous, with a mind no longer agitated by the eight worldly conditions of gain and loss, fame and dishonor, praise and blame, suffering and happiness. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha extolled the *arahant* in the following verse:

The fever of passion exists not for him who has completed the journey, who is sorrowless, wholly set free, and who has broken all ties. Inspiring, indeed, is that place where arahants dwell, be it a village, a forest, a vale, or a hill.
(Dhp 90 & 98)

Hence, *arahants* are wise, worthy, and fit for reverence and offerings!

Many of the Buddha's disciples, such as Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahākassapa, were *arahants* free from the cycle of repeated existence. But, how can we distinguish between the Buddha's awakening and the awakening attained by his disciples? A short answer is: although the eradication of the mental defilements is the same in both cases, behavioral tendencies in the present life and from past lives (*vāsanā*) may remain in *arahant* disciples.

A story about an *arahant* named Pilindavaccha clarifies this distinction. Because Pilindavaccha had been born a brahmin in his past five hundred lives, he had a habit of addressing

others in an offensive or derogatory way, calling them “outcasts” (*vasala*). This habit of his, however, did not carry aversion or conceit within it, because as an *arahant*, he had totally eradicated aversion and conceit. But overtly in social interactions, his behavior often came across as distasteful.

It’s just like with a bottle of wine. When we pour out the wine, the smell of the wine remains in the bottle. The arahantship of the Buddha, however, is like a bottle of water—when the water is poured out, no smell remains in the bottle. This is the difference between the quality of the Buddha’s awakening and that of his *arahant* disciples, i.e., even though both have eradicated the mental defilements, the residue is different.

Furthermore, when the *Bodhisatta* attained arahantship, he became fully enlightened and simultaneously attained Omniscient Knowledge or All-Knowing-Knowledge (*sabbaññutāñāṇa*) and Incomparable Compassion (*maha karuna*). His *arahant* disciples did not possess the two latter qualities.

The Buddha explained the difference between his arahantship and that of his disciples in the following excerpt from the suttas:

The Tathāgata, bhikkhus, the arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One, is the originator of the path unarisen before, the producer of the path unproduced before, the declarer of the path undeclared before. He is the knower of the path, the discoverer of the path, the one skilled in the path. And his disciples now dwell following that path and

become possessed of it afterward. This, bhikkhus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the Tathāgata, the arahant, the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One, and a bhikkhu liberated by wisdom. (SN 22.58)

(2) Worthy of Offerings from Gods and Humans

In addition to what has been explained above, there are still four additional qualities of an *arahant*. The second definition is “worthy of offerings.” The Buddha is worthy of the offerings from all beings, including Brahma and the gods of the thirty-one planes of existence¹. The offerings referred to here are those of food, robes, a dwelling place, lights, medicine, service, and reverence.

When the Buddha was about to enter *parinibbāna*, the flowers of the sal trees in the area were blooming (even though it was not their flowering season), and the blossoms rained down upon the body of the Buddha. The celestial beings scattered sandalwood powder on the Buddha’s body to honor the *Tathāgata*.

After the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha, the devoted King Ajātasattu of Rājagaha sent messengers to claim his share of the Buddha’s relics, and when he obtained them, he prolonged the rites held in their honor until the *arahants* had to seek Sakka’s aid to make the king take the relics away to Rājagaha. King Ajātasattu, in due respect, erected a stone stupa for the relics. Two months afterwards, when the First

1 See Appendix 1: Chart of the Four Worlds and Thirty-one Planes of Existence.

Council was held, King Ajātasattu generously gave the undertaking his royal patronage with all his power (DA).

During the Buddha's life, renowned kings and leaders made many offerings to him. For example, King Bimbisāra of Magadha offered the Bamboo Grove Monastery for the Buddha's use. The wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika spent much of his fortune in gold coins to purchase Jetavana Park for the Buddha and his disciples. Migāra's mother (Visākhā) offered the Pubbārāma Monastery to the Buddha. They did this to honor the Buddha, as the Buddha is worthy of reverence by beings in the three realms.

Even though the Buddha has already passed on, in our practice we can recollect his incomparable attributes or virtues while we offer flowers, water, lit candles, and other items at a worship ceremony.

From history, we learn that about 200 years after the death of the Buddha, there ruled a king by the name of Ashoka. He was the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty and one of the most exemplary rulers in world history. Having seen the bloodshed, massacre, and suffering of people during the Kalinga War (circa 265 BC), King Ashoka converted to Buddhism, along with the citizens of his kingdom.

King Ashoka was the first king to accept Buddhism as a way of life rather than a religion, and he established a reign of virtue. He built many *stupas*, *viharas*, *chaityas*, pillars, and capital cities, and he strongly supported and expanded the process of inscription (writing) of rock edicts. He helped

develop *viharas* (intellectual hubs), such as the two located in the cities of Nalanda and Taxila. The Third Council (held in Pataliputra), which was held under King Ashoka's patronage, is where the Buddhist *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* was compiled.

King Ashoka sent his own son and daughter, the *arahants* Venerable Mahinda and Saṅghamittā, to the island of Ceylon (known as Sri Lanka today), and, shortly thereafter, the entire population of the island became Buddhist. He also sent missionaries to countries as far away as Greece, Egypt, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. Even today, Buddhism is still the primary religion of many of these countries. Without King Ashoka's effort to spread Buddhism to neighboring countries, the teachings of the Buddha would likely not have remained intact to this day. This was King Ashoka's greatest offering and gift to the Buddha!

(3) The Destroyer of the Spokes of the Wheel of Rebirth

The third meaning of *arahant* is "one who cuts off or severs the spokes of the wheel of rebirth." The wheel of rebirth is explained by way of dependent origination, that is to say: rebirth and suffering come with certain causes and conditions, not without causes and conditions. There are twelve factors of dependent origination that form the wheel of rebirth:

1. with ignorance as condition, kammic volitions come to be;
2. with kammic volitions as condition, consciousness;

3. with consciousness as condition, mind, and matter;
4. with mind and matter as condition, the six sense bases;
5. with the six sense bases as condition, contact;
6. with contact as condition, feeling;
7. with feeling as condition, craving;
8. with craving as condition, clinging;
9. with clinging as condition, becoming;
10. with becoming as condition, birth;
11. with birth as condition, come aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair—thus producing an endless cycle of suffering.

These twelve factors of dependent origination from the wheel of rebirth. This cycle of birth and death is without beginning, although ignorance is mentioned first. Ignorance is the root cause, but not the beginning of the cycle of birth and death. Sustained by causes and conditions, which are ignorance and craving, the cycle of birth and death goes round and round, trapping all beings and thwarting them from becoming liberated. The Buddha once said:

This law of Dependent Origination is indeed profound and appears profound. It is through not knowing, not understanding, not penetrating this truth, that this generation has become entangled like a knotted string, covered with blight, like grass and reeds, and cannot pass over the downfall, the woeful way, the sorrowful state, the cycle of birth-and-death. (SN 12.60)

Conscious existence arises through wholesome and unwholesome kammic volitions, performed based on three causes in the past:

- ignorance—not knowing the Four Noble Truths,
- craving—for sensual pleasures and renewed existence, and
- clinging—to the wrong view of self.

Under the influence of ignorance, craving, and clinging in this life, kammic actions—or “becomings”—that are performed pave the way to the next rebirth. With birth as condition, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair—and thus the whole mass of suffering—arises.

Under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha, by his own effort, stood firm on the base of striving, and holding the axe of knowledge in his hand of faith, discovered the causes of rebirth and cut them off at their very root, thus ending the previously endless turning of the wheel of birth and death. With the destruction of these three fetters of ignorance, craving, and clinging, the other spokes of the wheel became unlinked, and the wheel was unable to turn anymore. Thus, *the destroyer of the spokes* is called the accomplished one, an *arahant*.

(4) Inaccessible by Evil

The fourth meaning of *arahant* is “inaccessible by any evil.” One is accessible by evil only when the defilements remain intact in the mental stream. An *arahant* has completely

destroyed the mental defilements, and, once destroyed, they cannot arise again, just as a shriveled seed will no longer germinate. This means that defilements will never again have a foothold in an *arahant's* mind. Such a harmless person provides security and protection to the world.

(5) Devoid or Empty of Evil Deeds, Even in Secret

The fifth meaning of an *arahant* is “an absence of evil undertakings in secret.” Fools in the world flaunt their cleverness, yet do evil in secret, concealing their actions for fear of getting a bad reputation. The Buddha, having no attachment to his own being, nor to women for sex, nor to anything in the world, had no capacity to commit an evil deed in open or in secret. Where there is no reason to establish a worldly reputation, there are no secrets to be kept.

In summary, **we pay reverence to the Buddha as an *arahant*** for the five reasons listed below. The Buddha is:

- The Destroyer of the Enemies,
- Worthy of Offerings from Gods and Humans,
- The Destroyer of the Spokes of the Wheel of Rebirth,
- Inaccessible by Evil, and
- Devoid or Empty of Evil Deeds, Even in Secret.



2.

Sammāsambuddho

– The Rightly Self-Awakened One

S*ammā* means “rightly”; *sam* (*sāmam*) means “by himself”; *buddho* means “awakened.” *Sammāsambuddho* is one who, without a teacher and through self-effort, attains full enlightenment, to become a Buddha (one who is fully awake).

The Prince’s Journey to Becoming the Buddha

The first time Prince Siddhattha traveled outside the palace and saw signs of old age, sickness, and death, he was very shocked. After seeing the misery inherent in humanity, he pondered the impermanence of the world, the origin of suffering, and the mystery of existence. When he saw an ascetic who was tranquil and peaceful, he thought:

Why, being myself subject to birth, aging, ailment, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek after what is also subject to

these things? Suppose, being myself subject to these things, seeing the danger in them, I sought after the unborn, unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme surcease of bondage, nibbāna?

Then the prince became determined to leave the royal throne, his beautiful wife, and his newborn son—who had not yet met his father—and search for the true meaning of life, to learn about becoming free from birth, old age, sickness, and death, to attain the state of *nibbāna*.

This does not mean Prince Siddhattha did not love his wife and son, but his decision to leave on a quest for the truth was founded upon incomparable compassion towards all beings—compassion that surpasses the mundane love between a man and a woman.

Having left the palace, the prince learned concentration meditation (*samatha*) from the ascetic Ālāra Kālāma, and later from the ascetic Uddaka Rāmaputta. Even though he had attained the most advanced states of concentration with these teachers—the immaterial *jhānas*² known as the Sphere of Nothingness and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception—Prince Siddhattha was unsatisfied. He thought:

This teaching does not lead to dispassion, to fading of lust, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment,

2 Four Material *Jhānas*: First, Second, Third, and Fourth *Jhāna*; Four Immaterial *Jhānas*: The base of Infinite Space, The base of Infinite Consciousness, The base of Nothingness, The base of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

to nibbāna, but only to the Sphere of Nothingness and the Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. (MN 26)

Therefore, dissatisfied, he left these teachers and began a practice of extreme austerities.

At that time, many ascetics in India believed that the body was the cause of mental defilements. For this reason, they practiced austere restraint and control of their bodies. Their practice involved severe self-mortification while eating and drinking very, very little. The expectation was that these practices would free them from mental defilements and lead to enlightenment.

Prince Siddhattha followed these ascetic practices for six years. His practice began by stopping his breath at the nose, mouth, and ears. However, because the breath was trapped in his body, extreme pressure built within the body, causing him to feel pain similar to a sharp sword slicing the whole body into pieces and feeling as if the body was being burned by fire. The pain was extreme and unbearable. He then reduced his food and drink, eating only a single grain of rice each day. Because of this severe fasting, his golden skin became dry and dull.

In the following quote, the Buddha described his physical appearance at that time to his disciples:

Because of eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of eating so little, my backside became like a camel's hoof. Because of eating so little, the projections on my spine stood forth like

corded beads. Because of eating so little, my ribs juttled out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little, the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like the gleam of water that has sunk far down in a deep well. Because of eating so little, my scalp shriveled and withered as a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little, my belly skin adhered to my backbone; thus, if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin. Because of eating so little, if I defecated or urinated, I fell over on my face there. Because of eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed. (MN 36)

Such extreme austere practices brought him to the brink of death, and yet he still could not reach the liberation he sought. When at last he realized that this was not the way to liberation, he abandoned the practice of austerities and accepted an offering of milk porridge. Seeing this, the five ascetics who had earlier practiced together with the prince thought that he had given up his search for liberation and left him in disappointment.

Finally, Prince Siddhattha arrived in BodhGayā, where he sat under a Bodhi tree facing east. Though he had no teacher, he was determined to succeed, and he vowed:

Even though my blood may dry up, my flesh may decay, and my bones may be scattered, I will not stand up from this seat until I am fully awakened.

Under the Bodhi tree, Prince Siddhattha focused on breathing in and breathing out (*ānāpānasati*), practicing concentration meditation. In a short time, he entered the first *jhāna*, second *jhāna*, third *jhāna*, and fourth *jhāna*. Māra knew that the prince, with his great effort, would be fully enlightened on that day, so he angrily jumped up on the elephant Girimekhalā and changed his form to a being with a thousand arms, each with a weapon, to attack the prince. However, this did not move Prince Siddhattha. Māra then created rainstorms, dust storms, fire storms, poisonous winds, and on and on, until the whole world appeared totally shattered.

Prince Siddhattha sat under the tree with calm and steady poise. To display his strength over Māra and defeat him, Prince Siddhattha touched the earth with his finger, requesting the earth to be witness to the completion of his spiritual perfections (*pāramīs*) developed over four incalculable aeons (*asankheyya kappas*) and 100,000 great aeons (*mahā-kappas*). His request was so powerful and so irresistible that the whole earth shook in answer, in support, and in reverence to the prince. Māra and his army became frightened by the response and ran away, and Prince Siddhattha successfully defeated Māra.

Prince Siddhattha continued to remain in the concentrated state of the fourth *jhāna* after the conclusion of his encounter with Māra. During this time and in the first watch of the night, he developed the “knowledge of recollecting past lives.” This knowledge enabled him to recollect many aeons of past lives, both his own as well as those of others. During

the middle watch of the night, he developed the “divine eye” (clairvoyance), a special knowledge that enabled him to see the passing away and reappearance of beings from one life to another life according to their kamma. At this time, ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who is diligent, ardent, and self-controlled. But Prince Siddhattha did not allow such a pleasant feeling as arose in him to gain power over his mind. He continued to meditate.

During the last watch of the night, as recorded in MN 36:

When my concentrated mind was thus purified ... I directed, I inclined my mind to the knowledge of exhaustion of taints. I had direct knowledge, as it actually is, that ‘This is suffering,’ that ‘This is the origin of suffering,’ that ‘This is the cessation of suffering,’ and that ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering; I had direct knowledge, as it actually is, that ‘These are taints,’ that ‘This is the origin of taints,’ that ‘This is the cessation of taints,’ and that ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of taints.’ Knowing thus and seeing thus, my heart was liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When liberated, there came the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ I had direct knowledge: ‘Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived out, what was to be done is done, there is no more of this to come.’ This was the third true knowledge attained by me in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who is diligent, ardent, and self-controlled.

Prince Siddhattha finally attained full enlightenment, the full awakening that he had sought for many lifetimes, the complete eradication of old age, illness, and death—i.e., suffering. “*A Dhamma which was unheard before, the Four Noble Truths*” was fully understood by the prince, who was now fully self-enlightened and awakened.

That night, Prince Siddhattha attained “the path knowledge of arahantship that destroyed all mental defilements” (*āsavakkhaya ñāṇa*) together with “Omniscient Knowledge.”

Attaining Full Enlightenment by His Own Efforts, Without a Teacher

By his own effort and wisdom, without the guidance of any teacher, the prince became The Fully Self-Enlightened One. He attained “an incomparable supreme awakening” (*anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhi*), endowed with “omniscient knowledge,” which enabled him to acquire clear comprehension of all phenomena.

The world shook, and flowers bloomed to pay homage to The Fully Enlightened One. The emergence of a *Sammāsambuddha* in the world brings boundless hope to all who are lost in the darkness of ignorance and have been searching for relief through limitless rounds of birth and death.

All of the Buddha’s *arahant* disciples learned the path to enlightenment from a teacher. Even the top disciples like Venerable Sāriputta—foremost in wisdom—and the Venerable Moggallāna—foremost in psychic powers—

attained arahantship by learning from the Blessed One. Therefore, their enlightenment is called “a disciple’s enlightenment” or “enlightenment from hearing” (*sāvaka bodhī*), which is different from the Buddha’s “supreme self-enlightenment” (*sammā sambodhī*). Further, the knowledge of his disciples did not equal or compare with the omniscient knowledge of the fully self-enlightened one.

As we recite the chant, we are urged to recall that Prince Siddhattha, without any teacher, with his own supra-mundane wisdom and determined effort, attained full enlightenment, and, therefore, the Buddha is called *Sammāsambuddha*.



3.

Vijjā-Caraṇa-Sampanno

– Endowed with Knowledge and Conduct

V*ijjā* means “clear vision,” and refers to “higher knowledge.” *Caraṇa* is “conduct” and denotes “the practice of virtuous conduct.”

As we chant, know that *vijjā* means knowledge that is consummate or perfect and *caraṇa* means a totally virtuous practice of conduct.

The Buddha possessed both “knowledge” and “conduct” to perfection. There are three knowledges that the Buddha gained on the night of his awakening, plus an additional five knowledges for a total of eight knowledges. Conduct is described in terms of fifteen kinds of good deeds. These eight knowledges and fifteen kinds of virtuous conduct are the qualities possessed by all Buddhas.

Three Knowledges

The “Three Knowledges” (*tevijjā*) are:

1. Knowledge of recollecting previous existences (*pubbenivāsānussatiññāṇa*). The Buddha can recall aeons of his previous existences in all their facets and details. This includes the place of birth, the given name, the appearance, and the realm of rebirth.
2. Divine eye (*dibbacakkhuññāṇa*). With the divine eye, purified and surpassing that of humans, Buddha can see beings passing away and arising according to the law of kamma: base and noble, well-favored and ill-favored, to happy and unhappy destinations as kamma directs them, and he knows:

These beings, on account of misconduct of body, speech, or thought, or disparaging the Noble Ones, have wrong view and will suffer the kammic fate of wrong view. At the breaking-up of the body after death they are reborn in a lower world, a bad destination, a state of suffering, hell. But these beings, on account of good conduct of body, speech, or thought, of praising the Noble Ones, have right view and will reap the kammic reward of right view. At the breaking-up of the body after death, they are reborn in a good destination, a heavenly world. (DN 2)

3. Knowledge of the destruction of all taints (*āsavaṅkhaṇāṇa*). By means of the path consciousness of an *arahant*, a Buddha destroys all

taints by fully understanding the Four Noble Truths. He knows as it really is:

This is suffering; This is the origin of suffering; This is the cessation of suffering; This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. And through his knowing and seeing his mind is delivered from the taints of sense-desire, from the taint of becoming, from the taint of ignorance. (DN 2)

Eight Knowledges³

In addition to the above-mentioned three knowledges, there are five further knowledges:

4. Insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*). A Buddha is able to clearly comprehend the characteristics of the body and mind (the five aggregates of clinging) as impermanent, suffering, and not-self, and this is the default dwelling place of *arahants* (*satata vihāri*).
5. Knowledge of creating a mind-made body, including multiple bodies (*manomayā iddhi*). Creating thousands of replicas of himself at will is something a Buddha can do with ease, as can certain disciples of the Buddha who attain this knowledge, such as the monk Cūḷapanthaka.

3 Of the eight knowledges, six are considered higher or supernormal knowledges (*abhiññā*) and are termed *chalābhiññā*: knowledge of recollecting previous existences, the divine eye, knowledge of the destruction of all mental defilements, knowledge of various kinds of psychic powers, the divine ear, and knowledge of the thoughts of others.

One day the Buddha and his resident community of bhikkhus were invited by the householder Jīvaka for a meal. Mahāpanthaka, who was in charge of assigning the bhikkhus to meal invitations, left out his brother Cūḷapanthaka from the list. At the house of Jīvaka, when they were about to pour a libation of water as a mark of donation, Buddha covered the bowl with his hand and said that there was one monk left uninvited. Buddha asked them to fetch Cūḷapanthaka from the monastery. When the messenger from the house of Jīvaka arrived at the monastery, he found not only one bhikkhu but a thousand identical bhikkhus. They had all been created by Cūḷapanthaka through his supernormal powers. The messenger was baffled and he turned back and reported the matter to Jīvaka. The messenger was sent to the monastery for the second time and was instructed to say that the Buddha summoned the bhikkhu by the name of Cūḷapanthaka. But when he delivered the message, a thousand voices responded, "I am Cūḷapanthaka." Again baffled, he turned back. The third time he was sent back, he was instructed to get hold of the bhikkhu who first said that he was Cūḷapanthaka. As soon as he got hold of that bhikkhu, all the rest disappeared, and Cūḷapanthaka accompanied the messenger to the house of Jīvaka.

6. Knowledge of various kinds of psychic powers (*iddhividhā*). A Buddha possesses various psychic powers, such as flying cross-legged through the sky like a bird with wings; walking on the water; passing through solid things, such as a wall; penetrating solid ground as if it were water; touching sun and moon with his hand; becoming invisible; traveling to a heaven and re-appearing back on earth in a second.

Here is an account of the Buddha's psychic powers: One year after the Buddha attained full enlightenment, his father, the king, invited him to return to his hometown. The Buddha's clan, the Sākyaans, were a proud clan. The elders of the clan and the royal family members were reluctant to pay homage to the returning Buddha due to his relative youth. To discourage their conceit, the Buddha performed various kinds of supernormal powers. The Buddha flew to the air, built a bridge with seven colors, and walked up and down the bridge. He performed the "twin miracles" (*yamaka-pāṭihāriya*) by first entering into the fourth *jhāna*, alternating between the fire and water kasinas very quickly at will, and then, fully concentrated, he issued water from the upper half of his body and fire from the lower half of his body. As a result of this feat, the Sākyaans were impressed by the powerful miracles performed by the Buddha, their conceit was subdued, and all of them paid reverential respect to the Buddha.

Even though the Buddha had various kinds of supra-mundane psychic powers, he only performed them with good intention—with the intention to help others, to develop faith, and never for his own status or welfare. When the Buddha was about to enter *parinibbāna*, although he was in very frail health (he described his body as an old creaking chariot), he remained determined to walk for months to Kusinārā—the chosen place to enter *parinibbāna*. This was also done for the benefit of his last disciple, Subhadda. Buddha knew that by listening to his sermon, Subhadda would ordain and become an *arahant*. Despite his frail health and sickness, the Buddha made this last trip, stopping at twenty-five places to rest. From this, we can see the incomparable compassion and determination of the Buddha.

7. Divine ear (*dibba sota*). A Buddha is able to hear sounds both divine and human, whether far or near, soft or loud. (DN 2)
8. Knowledge of the thoughts of others (*cetopariyañāṇa*). A Buddha is able to read the minds of others so that he knows another's mind as being with passion or without passion, liberated or unliberated, etc. This includes discerning the stages of insight or awakening of any being. (DN 2)

These are the eight knowledges possessed by the Buddha.

Fifteen Kinds of Virtuous Conduct

Virtuous conduct (*carāṇa*) consists of fifteen kinds, namely:

1. Restraint by the Rules of the Community (*Pāṭimokkhasaṃvara sīla*)

The Path of Purification explains the Patimokkha with these words: “The ‘*Pāṭimokkha*’ (Rule of the Community) is the virtue of the training precepts; for it frees him who protects it, guards it, and it sets him free from the pains of the states of loss. That is why it is called ‘*Pāṭimokkha*.’”

All the rules of restraint (*sīla*) were enacted by the Buddha, who is the only one able to instate a rule.

2. Restraint of the Six Sense Faculties (*Indriya-saṃvara sīla*)

The Buddha can easily restrain the eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and mind-faculties with perfect mindfulness; thus the defilements (*kilesas*) cannot enter the mind through the six sense doors. Generally, worldlings lose control of their mind when the six sense faculties make contact with the six pleasant objects, because lust and greed arise from this contact. On the other hand, when the six sense faculties come in contact with the six unpleasant objects, aversion arises. Switching between lust/greed and aversion is the habitual pattern of an unrestrained mind and results in suffering due to lack of mindfulness and mental stability.

3. Moderation in eating (*Bhojane mattaññutā*)

Moderation in eating means to know the right amount of food required to preserve a healthy body, and then while serving oneself and eating, reflecting as follows:

I partake of this food not for play, not for pride, not for beautification, not for splendor, but only for the maintenance and continuance of this body (which consists of four primary elements),⁴ to ease the discomfort of hunger, and to support the practice of the holy life (brahma-cariya). Reflecting wisely, I will destroy the old feeling of discomfort due to hunger without creating new feelings by overeating. Thus, I will maintain myself, be healthy, blameless, and live in comfort and at ease.

Overeating has become a common problem nowadays. We eat not only to ease hunger, but for pleasure and enjoyment. Controlling the right amount of food ingested is very important for health and meditation. If we cannot restrain ourselves from greediness and are obsessed with eating too much, we will end up feeling discomfort both in mind and body. This results in inefficiency at work and in meditation.

4. Devotion to Wakefulness or Mindfulness (*Jāgariyānuyoga*)

This means that one makes a determined effort sitting and walking back and forth, holding the mind in check. During the first watch of the night (dusk to 10 p.m.), a meditator practices in the same way as in the daytime—by using

4 Earth, water, fire, and wind.

walking and sitting meditation, holding the mind in check, cleansing the mind of any unwholesome qualities. During the second watch of the night (10 p.m. to 2 a.m.), one takes the “lion posture” by reclining on the right side of the body, left leg on the top of right leg, and mindfully noting the time to wake up. During the last watch of the night (2 a.m. to dawn), one again uses walking and sitting meditation to purify the mind of any disturbing qualities. In other words, one makes an effort to maintain continuity of mindfulness in four postures as taught by the Buddha—sitting, walking, standing, and lying down.

The Buddha preserved his mindfulness by only sleeping for one hour and twenty minutes each day.

The remainder of the conducts are the “seven good practices” (*saddhamma*), namely:

5. Faith (Saddhā)

Faith means absolute confidence, unshakeable persistence, and having regard for the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha* without harboring any doubt. Here, “Buddha” means every Buddha, including past and future Buddhas. Faith in the Buddha denotes unshakeable confidence, trust, and refuge in him as fully awake or enlightened and as embodying the path to liberation from suffering.

Dhamma means the Path, the Fruition, *Nibbāna*, and the *Tipiṭaka*⁵. This includes *Dhamma* teachings, such as the Noble Truth of Suffering revealed in our life experiences. For

5 *Vinaya piṭaka*, *Sutta piṭaka*, and *Abhidhamma piṭaka*.

example, when the Buddha to be saw the four signs of an old person, sick person, dead person, and a monk, he grew determined to find a way to understand the reasons for the signs and go beyond them.

Sanḡha refers to the Community of the Noble Ones: the four pairs and the eight individual types of people who have entered the Paths and the Fruits of *sotāpanna*, *sakādagāmi*, *anāgāmi*, and *arahant*.

6. Sense of Shame (*Hiri*)

Hiri means having a sense of shame when performing or intending to perform any unwholesome/unskillful deeds of body, speech, or mind. This includes the violation of the five or eight lay precepts or monastic precepts. Since the Buddha had already eradicated all mental defilements, he would not violate any rules of training. A deep sense of shame is always in him.

7. Fear of the Consequences of Wrongdoing (*Ottappa*)

Ottappa refers to having a sense of fear of the consequences resulting from bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, and mental misconduct. In this case, fear of consequences is a way of protecting virtue (*sila*), avoiding harming self and others, and also understanding the law of *kamma*. This quality is always with the Noble One.

8. Having Great Knowledge (*Bahussuta*)

Great knowledge includes knowing the ancient discourses and the monastic code (*Suttas*, *Abhidhamma*, *Vinaya*), as well

as the insight knowledges. When the Buddha attains Buddhahood, the Omniscient Knowledge that knows everything that he wanted to know is there.

9. Right Effort (*Viriya*)

Right effort means applying persistent effort to abandon unskillful mental qualities and to instead undertake skillful mental qualities. Like the Buddha, we are encouraged to be steadfast and solid in our efforts, and not shirk from duties relating to skillful mental qualities. Right effort includes the four skillful efforts: avoiding and abandoning unwholesome qualities and cultivating and nourishing wholesome qualities.

10. Mindfulness and Full Awareness (*Sati Sampajañña*)

The Buddha is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering and recollecting even things that were done and said long ago. The Buddha also perfected the four foundations of mindfulness: of body, feelings, mind, and *dhammas* (mental objects/phenomena).

11. Wisdom (*Paññā*)

The Buddha's wisdom was able to penetrate the arising and passing away of phenomena, leading to the right and complete ending of suffering.

The twelfth to fifteenth factors of virtuous conduct are:

12. The First *Jhāna*
13. The Second *Jhāna*
14. The Third *Jhāna*
15. The Fourth *Jhāna*

The Buddha's Omniscient Knowledge is perfected by the fulfillment of the knowledges. Because of that, he knows what is good or harmful for all beings. His possession of virtuous conduct fulfills his Great Compassion. Through compassion, he warns beings against harm and exhorts them to do good. That is why his disciples have entered the middle way, instead of entering the two extreme ways of self-mortification and indulgence in sensual pleasures.

The Importance of Both Knowledge and Conduct

Knowledge and conduct are both equally important to a practitioner. For example, we develop our conduct by practicing generosity, morality, humble service, persistent effort, wakefulness, and concentration, with the hope of meeting up with good spiritual friends (*kalyāṇa mitta*) who can show the path to liberation. The Buddha is our best spiritual friend. But since the Buddha has gone, any monastic who can show us the way to end the suffering of birth and death is our good spiritual friend.

We develop “knowledge”—i.e., knowledge to gain penetrative insight into impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and the not-self (*anattā*) nature of the mind and body. In doing so, when we encounter a wise teacher, and by listening to the *Dhamma* taught, we will—with due

diligence and mature wisdom on our part—reach the final goal of realizing *nibbāna*.

If, in the present life, a person perfects conduct, and this is not accompanied with the seed of “knowledge,” then, even though he or she is reborn at the time of a future Buddha and is able to hear the *Dhamma* directly from the Buddha in that life, it may not be easy to realize the Four Noble Truths. An example of this is King Pasenadi of Kosala. Even though he had visited the Buddha several times and the Buddha had also expounded the *Dhamma* to him directly, given that he did not accumulate the seed of knowledge in his past life, he could not realize the Truth offered to him by the Buddha.

On the other hand, if a person has knowledge but is lacking in good conduct, even though he or she is capable of absorbing the *Dhamma* in the next life and becoming awakened after hearing it, the chances of meeting a Buddha or good spiritual teacher and hearing the *Dhamma* will be extremely slim, due to previous imperfections of conduct.

We are lucky to be reborn at a time when the *Dhamma* still flourishes, and so should make every effort to develop both our knowledge and conduct together right now!



4.

Sugato

– Well-Gone

S*u* in Pāli means “right,” *gato* means “has gone, has come.” *Sugato* means “has gone rightly” or “gone the good way.”

Before discussing “has gone rightly,” let’s talk about the phrase “has come rightly.” It is good to understand that even the *bodhisatta* was reborn repeatedly into the suffering of *saṃsāra* in order to fulfill the Ten Perfections (*pāramīs*), with the goal of attaining Full Enlightenment and Omniscient Knowledge so as to help all beings become free from suffering from the ocean of *saṃsāra*. Gradual and disciplined purification is important to walking the path.

The Buddha's Journey of Practice to Perfect the Ten Pāramīs

Before the four incalculable aeons and 100,000 great aeons, the Buddha-to-be was reborn as a young man whose name was Sumedha. When Sumedha was very young, his parents passed away, leaving their sizable fortune to him, an inheritance that was amassed over seven generations of ancestors. Rather than just assume the inheritance, Sumedha pondered:

Birth, aging, sickness, and death are suffering. If there is a cycle of rebirth, which is the root cause of suffering, there must be the bliss of freedom from suffering. I will search for the path to the cessation of suffering. My parents and seven generations of my ancestors were quite skillful in accumulating their fortune, but when they died, they could not take anything with them — not even a single penny. So what benefit will this money bring to me?

Having considered the pros and cons of accumulating and inheriting wealth, Sumedha opened his treasury and joyfully and equanimously donated all of his acquired treasure. He then left for the Himalayas to begin a life as an ascetic. After practicing for seven days, he had attained all the eight *jhānas* and the five mundane psychic powers⁶.

On one occasion, Sumedha used his psychic power to fly in the sky. He noticed that the people in Ramanagara were happily repairing the roads. Returning to the ground he

6 Divine eye, divine ear, recollecting past lives, reading other people's mind, *iddhividdha* (various psychic powers).

asked them, “Why are you so happy repairing the roads? And for whom you are doing so?”

They answered, “The Lamp Bearer Buddha (*Dīpaṅkara Buddha*), who is respected by the three worlds⁷, is coming, and we are preparing the roads to welcome him.”

Hearing the name of the Buddha, Sumedha became joyful. He at once asked to be allowed to repair one part of the road. Even though Sumedha could have used his psychic powers to do the work, he did not resort to this approach. Instead, with his own two hands, he repaired the road so that his meritorious deeds would be perfect.

Before Sumedha could finish his work, *Dīpaṅkara Buddha* and his many *arahant* disciples arrived. The body of the Buddha radiated rays of six colors, and his body was shining like pure gold.

Sumedha gazed at *Dīpaṅkara Buddha*, who possessed the 32 marks of a great man, and he thought happily, “Today, I shall offer my own life to the Buddha by allowing the Buddha and his *arahant* disciples to tread on my body. Using my body as a bridge for the Buddha and his disciples will certainly result in limitless happiness and merits for me.” Then he lay down on the muddy ground with full salutation.

At that time, an aspiration to be a Buddha arose in ascetic Sumedha’s mind,

7 Sensual World, Fine Material World, Immaterial World.

Actually, today I can reach the state of arahantship, to set myself free from all suffering, but I am an extraordinary person. If I do it selfishly, only thinking of my own liberation, is there any benefit for all beings? I will, with all my effort, attain full enlightenment, and then I will set all beings free from the cycles of rebirth.

Out of his incomparable compassion to all beings, the ascetic Sumedha gave up his chance of becoming an *arahant* at that very moment, and instead chose to postpone it, making an aspiration to tread the path of the *bodhisatta*, which was a very difficult journey to take. He vowed:

Buddho bodheyyaṃ, Tiṇṇo tāreyyaṃ, Mutto moceyya:

Once I understand the Four Noble Truths, I will teach others to understand them. Once I succeed in crossing the swirling ocean of samsara, I will also help them cross it. Once I am free from the bondage of life, I will also set others free from it.

When the ascetic Sumedha made such an aspiration, a girl, whose name was Sumittā, was beside him. Attracted by him instantly, she handed him five of the eight lotus flowers she was holding. She offered the remaining three to the Buddha. Sumittā also made an aspiration, “Noble ascetic, at the time when you journey to perfect the *parāmīs*, may I be your companion?”

Seeing Sumedha and Sumittā, Dīpaṅkara Buddha used his psychic power to see their future lives, and made a prediction: After passing four incalculable aeons and 100,000

great aeons, Sumedha would become fully enlightened, with the name Gotama. Sumittā would accompany him throughout many lifetimes; she would fully support him to attain enlightenment. In his last birth, Sumittā would be the *bodhisatta's* wife Yasodhara, would be one of his great female disciples, and would attain arahantship.

Then, Dipaṅkara Buddha left, without stepping on the body of Sumedha. After Dipaṅkara Buddha was gone, Sumedha stood up joyfully and thought, “*If I have aspired to be a Buddha, where should I start?*”

After contemplating the matter, Sumedha realized that, to be fully enlightened, an aspiring *bodhisatta* should practice and fulfill the Ten Perfections (*parāmīs*).

Following in the Buddha’s footsteps, let us look at the Ten Perfections (*pāramīs*) and how we can understand and put them into practice.

The Ten Perfections (*Pāramīs*)

(1) The Perfection of Giving (*Dāna-pāramī*)

The perfection of generosity is mentioned first among the ten perfections. As we read in the definition of *dāna* given by the Commentary on the Vinaya Pitaka (Basket of Conduct):

- **Characteristic:** relinquishing
- **Function:** to dispel greed for things that can be given away

- **Manifestation:** non-attachment, or the achievement of prosperity and a favorable state of existence
- **Proximate cause:** an object that can be relinquished

The Perfection of Giving practiced by the *bodhisatta* is not the same as ordinary giving, which is commonly done through giving away material things, such as alms food, robes, and so on. What a *bodhisatta* practice is “supreme giving,” which is also called “great renunciation” (*mahāparicāga*).

There are five kinds of great renunciations:

- Giving away all of one’s belongings;
- Giving away one’s royal throne;
- Giving away parts of one’s body, such as hands, legs, eyes, and so on;
- Giving away one’s children and wife; and
- Giving away one’s life.

Such giving is practiced to loosen the grip of greed and to develop non-attachment of every kind. There are no strings attached and no expectations of thanks or hope of reciprocation, but acts are performed simply to fulfill the perfection leading to full enlightenment. Such giving also develops virtue and leads naturally to the perfection of virtue.

(2) The Perfection of Virtue (*Sīla-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** composing, coordinating, and establishing
- **Function:** to dispel moral depravity, to achieve blameless conduct

- **Manifestation:** moral purity
- **Proximate cause:** shame and moral dread⁸

The *bodhisatta* strictly adhered to performing virtuous acts by body, speech, and mind. He performed wholesome and virtuous deeds, avoiding unwholesome deeds, speech, and thoughts, and would have rather sacrificed his life than compromise his morality.

In one life, the *bodhisatta* was born as a powerful naga king, but was disgusted with his body. Therefore, the naga king went to the human world with the determination to observe the eight precepts⁹, hoping the merit acquired by undertaking morality training would pave the way to heavenly rebirth in future life.

One day, as the naga king saw a snake catcher walking toward him, he made a vow, *"Today, even if the snake catcher crushes my body, I will not allow anger and hatred to arise in me; I will not allow my morality to be broken."* Then the naga king coiled on the mountain hill motionlessly, observing the Eight Precepts.

The snake catcher approached the naga, caught its tail, dangled him upside down, shook him until he vomited, and then, pinning his body to the ground, used a stone to crush

⁸ Commentary of Vin.

⁹ Eight Precepts: To abstain 1) from killing, 2) from taking what is not given, 3) from unchaste conduct, 4) from telling lies, 5) from distilled and fermented intoxicants which cause heedlessness, 6) from eating at the inappropriate time (from taking food after noon), 7) from dancing, singing, music, entertainment, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying with cosmetics, 8) from lying on a high or large sleeping place.

his head. Even under such torture and suffering, no hatred arose in the naga king. The naga king thought, “*My breath is so poisonous; if, because of pain, I blow out my breath, this snake catcher will be burned to ashes, and I will break my precepts.*”

The *bodhisatta* endured the torment quietly and observed *sīla-pāramī* with great determination, even though he had to sacrifice his life.

(3) The Perfection of Renunciation (*Nekkhamma-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** departing from sense pleasures and existence
- **Function:** to verify the unsatisfactoriness they involve
- **Manifestation:** withdrawal from them
- **Proximate cause:** a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*)¹⁰

“Renunciation” means leaving behind mundane, sensual pleasures that bind us to the world, and instead electing to live the holy life. It also refers to suppressing the five hindrances through meditative concentration. In many of the Buddha’s past lives, he was born as a king who enjoyed mundane sensual pleasures. However, he clearly understood that mundane sensual pleasures were temporary and impermanent, and bound those who got attached to them. Therefore, he was not in any way hesitant to leave behind his royal kingdom, to leave the luxurious life he had, and to live the life of a homeless ascetic.

¹⁰ Commentary of Vin.

In the story of King Nimi (*Nimi Jātaka*), we learn that the king told his barber, “If you happen to see a single strand of grey hair on my head, let me know.”

Once, when cutting the king’s hair, the barber saw a strand of grey hair. He plucked it and put it in the king’s hand. Looking at the grey hair, the king was shocked and became very frightened, feeling as if the god of death was approaching him. He hurriedly abdicated his throne and went instead to live a life of renunciation.

Ordinary people will think in a different way. When we see a grey hair on our head, our first thought is to color it to make ourselves look younger. But running away from the reality of aging will only cause more clinging. The *bodhisatta* had a different point of view about this. He contemplated impermanence, seeing things as they really were, courageously abandoned the home life, and chose instead to walk the path of an ascetic.

(4) The Perfection of Wisdom (*Paññā-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** penetrating the real specific nature (of dhammas) or sure penetration, like the penetration of an arrow shot by a skillful archer
- **Function:** to illuminate the objective field, like a lamp
- **Manifestation:** non-confusion, like a guide in a forest
- **Proximate cause:** concentration or the Four Noble Truths¹¹

11 Commentary of Vin.

The Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw describes the Perfection of Wisdom in “*Bodhi Sambhāra—the Requisite of Virtues to Attain Full Enlightenment*” as below:

Without wisdom, a donation and other virtuous deeds cannot be purified, and they cannot function as they have to. It is just like the body which, when deprived of life, does not shine anymore. Without the mind, the sense faculties cannot do their work. In the same way, if there is no wisdom, faith and the other spiritual faculties cannot function as they should—wisdom is the major cause for the practice of the *pāramīs*. Just like the supreme *bodhisatta*—when wisdom was aroused, he offered his limbs and other body parts, and yet did so without judging that he was superior and the receiver inferior. The *bodhisatta* is compared with medicinal herbs that give health but have no expectation to receive anything in return. The *bodhisatta* gave joyfully in the three periods (before, during, and after giving). A wise person, owing to his or her wisdom and skill, gives away his or her own pleasures for the benefit of others. This kind of deed is called *pāramīs*. But if one gives with the intention of seeking some sort of profit, then it is comparable to a commercial transaction.

Further, without wisdom, virtues cannot cut off sensual craving and other mental defilements, and the mind cannot be purified, let alone achieve the purity of a *Sammāsambuddha*.

Only the wise can see clearly the suffering of home life, the suffering of sensual pleasures, and the suffering of the cycles of rebirth. At the same time, the wise one can see clearly the benefits of renunciation, the benefits of developing *jhāna*, and of developing the path. Therefore, he leaves home, develops *jhāna*, develops the path to *nibbāna*, and also helps others to achieve it.

Without wisdom, because of improper motivation, self-development cannot reach the ultimate goal. However, if self-development is accompanied with wisdom and skillful effort, nothing is impossible.

Moreover, only the wise can subdue anger. An unwise person reacts aggressively when not treated well. But, the wise makes use of the power of patience to skillfully face such situations; and consistent practice in this way strengthens patience.”

Over countless cycles of rebirth, the *bodhisatta* was not only reborn as a wise businessman, a wise king, a wise man, and an animal king, but in many lives he was also born as an ascetic who purified himself by practicing virtues (morality), and was diligent in concentration meditation: the four *jhānas*, four immaterial attainments, and five supernormal powers. When he had the good *kamma* to be born in the time and in the presence of a Buddha, he was diligent and determined to cultivate and develop himself. With the support of concentration, he developed insight meditation and was able to clearly

see the characteristics of the five aggregates of clinging¹²—impermanence, suffering, and not-self—and reached the stage of insight known as “the knowledge of equanimity about conditioned formations.

(5) The Perfection of Great Effort (*Viriya-pāramī*)

- Characteristic: striving
- Function: to fortify
- Manifestation: indefatigability, an occasion for the arousing of energy
- Proximate cause: a sense of spiritual urgency¹³

The *bodhisatta* considered the *virīya-pāramī* as follows: “Only a person who, with great effort, reaches full enlightenment is then able to help others to be free from the endless swirling of *samsāra*.”

The effort of the *bodhisatta* is like a lion king hunting for a rabbit or an elephant. He will not use less effort because a rabbit is a small animal, nor will he use maximum effort because an elephant is large. Whatever task the *bodhisatta* undertakes, he undertakes each and all of them in the same way.

In *Mahājanaka Jātaka* (the story of Mahājanaka), the *bodhisatta* was once in a boat with 700 passengers. On the voyage, they experienced high winds and pouring rain. When the boat was about to wreck, the passengers all cried desperately.

12 Five aggregates of clinging: form aggregate, feeling aggregate, perception aggregate, formations aggregate, and consciousness aggregate

13 Commentary of Vin.

Only the *bodhisatta* was calm, thinking, “I am a wise and courageous man; it is not my habit to give up and cry when facing difficulties. I have to be brave and courageous, use my two hands to swim, and save myself.” Though it was extremely difficult, the *bodhisatta* swam with full effort for seven days and seven nights, with energy not slackening even for a moment, until finally, touched by his great effort, a Sea God saved him.

(6) The Perfection of Patience (*Khanti-pāramī*)

- Characteristic: acceptance
- Function: to endure the desirable and undesirable
- Manifestation: tolerance or non-opposition
- Proximate cause: seeing things as they really are¹⁴

Patience (*khanti*) is self-control, enduring the suffering caused by others without giving in to anger.

In a previous life, the *bodhisatta* was named Khantivādī, a practitioner of supreme patience.¹⁵ At the invitation of the commander-in-chief of the kingdom of Kāsī, the *bodhisatta* lived in the minister’s royal garden. One day, when the *bodhisatta* was meditating peacefully, the drunken King Kalābu, accompanied by his harem, arrived at the park. Soon the king fell asleep. The women of the harem, who had taken the opportunity to wander around the garden, saw the ascetic sitting peacefully under a tree. They approached and asked him to teach them.

¹⁴ Commentary of Vin.

¹⁵ Khantivādī-Jātaka.

When the king woke up and found that the women were with the ascetic, ill will arose in him and he flew into a rage. He was tempted to kill the ascetic. The king then asked, "Ascetic, what doctrine are you preaching?"

The *bodhisatta* answered, "*The doctrine of patience, Your Highness.*"

The king asked a second question, "What is patience?"

The ascetic answered, "*Patience is not to be angry even when others insult, abuse, and strike you.*"

The king then said, "If that is so, then I want to see how patient you really are."

The king then instructed his executioner to lash the *bodhisatta* 100 times. The *bodhisatta's* skin was frayed and bled excessively. The king asked again, "Ascetic, what doctrine are you preaching?"

"*Your Highness, it is the doctrine of patience. My patience is not skin-deep and is not on the outside of this body, but is deep in my heart. That's why you cannot see it.*"

The king then ordered the executioner to cut off the limbs of the *bodhisatta*; blood flowed continuously from his wounds. The king again asked what doctrine the ascetic was preaching, and the ascetic answered, "*Your Highness! You suppose that the doctrine of patience is in my legs and hands, but it is not there; it is deep in my heart.*"

The king was furious to hear the answer, and he ordered the executioner to cut off the *bodhisatta's* nose and ears, and the whole body of the *bodhisatta* was covered in blood. The king asked again, "What doctrine are you preaching?"

The ascetic answered, "*The doctrine of patience. Please do not imagine that my patience is in my nose and ears; it is deep down in my heart.*"

The ruthless king then kicked the *bodhisatta* exactly on the heart, and left the *bodhisatta* there.

After the king left, the king's commander-in-chief cleaned the blood from the *bodhisatta's* body and carefully bandaged his wounds. Knowing the *bodhisatta* was a great man, he then saluted the *bodhisatta* and said, "Venerable Sir! If you are angry and have hatred in your heart, please do not be angry with the others, but be angry only with the foolish king who hurt you badly!"

The *bodhisatta* answered, "*Long live the king! Even though he damaged my body badly, in my heart there is no place for anger and hatred.*"

When the king was leaving the garden and was out of the *bodhisatta's* sight, the mighty earth, unable to bear the greatness of the *bodhisatta's* virtue, split open and flames of fire from Avici hell engulfed the king, and he sank into hell as a result of his evil deed. On the same day, the *bodhisatta* passed away and the people of the kingdom held a great funeral ceremony in his honor.

The *bodhisatta's* path was definitely a difficult one. Out of great compassion to help others end the suffering inherent in existence, he had to endure all kinds of pain and torture inflicted on him by ignorant beings until he perfected the perfection of patience.

(7) The Perfection of Truthfulness (*Sacca-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** non-deceptiveness in speech
- **Function:** to verify in accordance with fact
- **Manifestation:** excellence
- **Proximate cause:** honesty¹⁶

The perfection of truthfulness is a lifelong practice of being open to truth for the benefit of others.

Without truthfulness, virtue, etc., is impossible, and there can be no practice in accordance with one's vows.

All evil states converge upon the transgression of truth.

One who is not devoted to truth is unreliable, and his word cannot be accepted in the future.

On the other hand, one devoted to truth secures the foundation of all noble qualities.

¹⁶ Commentary of Vin.

With truthfulness as the foundation, he is capable of purifying and fulfilling all the requisites of enlightenment.

Not deceived about the true nature of phenomena,

He performs the functions of all the requisites of enlightenment, and completes the practice of the *bodhisatta* path.¹⁷

The *bodhisatta* only speaks true and honest words, and to him a promise is a promise. He was ready to sacrifice his life to fulfill his promise.

Once, a man-eating king caught the *bodhisatta*. The *bodhisatta* asked the king to free him temporarily so that he could keep his promise to preach to a brahmin. Once his task was done, he promised that he would come back. The man-eating king doubted that a man would keep his promise and disregard his life, but he let him go. The *bodhisatta* did keep his promise and returned to the king once he had preached to the brahmin. The king was very impressed by the *bodhisatta's* courage and fearlessness of death. The *bodhisatta* took this opportunity to preach the *Dhamma* to the king and convinced him of the evil consequences of eating human flesh. The king turned over a new leaf by renouncing his bad habit of eating human flesh.

17 Commentary of Vin.

(8) The Perfection of Loving-kindness (*Mettā-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** promoting the welfare (of living beings)
- **Function:** to provide for their welfare or to remove resentment
- **Manifestation:** kindness
- **Proximate cause:** seeing the agreeable side of beings¹⁸

Loving-kindness is the strong wish for others to be happy. It is the attitude with which a *bodhisatta* works to bring about the welfare and happiness of others, even when doing so requires self-sacrifice. *Bodhisattas* never discriminate among beings, whether they are far or near, high or low, enemies or friends, humans or non-humans. They have the same, equal loving-kindness towards all.

In one life, the *bodhisatta* was born as a prince named Dhammapāla (Guardian of the *Dhamma*). His mother, the queen, loved him very much. One day when the queen was playing with the little prince, she was so attentive to her son that she did not notice the arrival of the king and neglected to stand up to welcome him. Because of this, the king became jealous and ill-will arose, along with the desire to hurt his son.

The queen, being a mother who was ready to protect her only child with her life, quickly asked for forgiveness and said, “Your Highness, I am willing to have both my hands cut off, but please do not hurt our son.”

¹⁸ Commentary of Vin.

The king did not grant her request, and instead instructed the executioner to cut off the prince's hands and feet. The prince resolved, "*I have to be impartial and give the same and equal love to the king, who instructs his man to cut off my limbs, as to the queen, who loves me, as to the executioner, who executes the king's order, and as to myself.*"

The king did not stop there, but became more furious and instructed the executioner to cut off the prince's head. He then threw the body into the air and used a spear to skewer and spin the body, scattering blood and flesh everywhere. Witnessing this scene, the queen died of a broken heart on the spot.

Even though the prince was ill-treated by his own father, this young *bodhisatta* could still practice his *mettā-pāramī* with equanimity.

(9) The Perfection of Resolution (*Adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** determining upon the requisites of enlightenment
- **Function:** to overcome their opposites
- **Manifestation:** unshakeableness in that task
- **Proximate cause:** the requisites of enlightenment¹⁹

Adhiṭṭhāna means resolution, being unshakeable in doing good deeds for others. It can also denote the accumulation of good deeds for one's own enlightenment. Both need unshakeable resolution. When the *bodhisatta* is determined to

¹⁹ Commentary of Vin.

do something, he is not fearful and never gives up when faced with obstacles.

In one of his previous lives, the *bodhisatta* was born as an ape. One day a brahmin who was lost in the forest fell down into a deep gorge and could not climb out. The ape decided to rescue him. He jumped into the gorge and held the brahmin up. When they arrived at the top of the gorge safe and sound, the ape felt so tired that he lay down and slept.

Seeing that the ape was sleeping, the shameless and ungrateful brahmin thought of killing and eating the ape. Taking a big stone, he smashed the ape's head. Terribly hurt, the ape woke up and escaped into a tree. He was not upset with the evil act of the brahmin and still held the wholesome intention of helping the lost man find his way out of the forest. So, with blood dripping from his head wound, by jumping from one tree to another tree he showed the brahmin the way out of the forest.

Due to the unbreakable and unshakeable determination of the *bodhisatta*, he was able to walk this difficult path and accomplish his goal of supreme knowledge and full enlightenment, for the benefit of all beings.

(10) The Perfection of Equanimity (*Upekkhā-pāramī*)

- **Characteristic:** promoting the aspect of neutrality
- **Function:** to see things impartially
- **Manifestation:** subsiding of attraction and repulsion

- **Proximate cause:** reflection upon the fact that all beings inherit the results of their own *kamma*²⁰

“Equanimity” is evenness of mind towards all beings and all phenomena, remaining calm and unruffled toward both the pleasant and the unpleasant. Out of all the *pāramīs*, equanimity is last in the sequence because it is the most difficult to perfect. The eight worldly conditions²¹ (*aṭṭha loka-dhammā*) always influence the emotions of ordinary people; their emotions go up and down as conditions change. If the situation is agreeable, one will get butterflies in one’s stomach and feels as if floating on air. On the other hand, if one meets difficulty, one is distressed and resorts to weeping and wailing.

A person will not be his own master if external conditions can easily influence him; he will only be a slave to the external conditions. When the *bodhisatta* meets with any condition, whether it is good or bad, praise or blame, he meets it in a state of equanimity. He fully understands that the eight worldly conditions are inconstant, stressful, and subject to change, because they are conditionally produced.

The *bodhisatta* developed the perfection of equanimity to the highest degree during his life as the wise Lomahamsa. At that time, the *bodhisatta* was born into a wealthy family. After his parents died, he became disenchanted with worldly conditions. Spiritually moved by the impermanence of life, he reflected on the foulness of the body, both internally and

20 Commentary of Vin.

21 Loss and gain, fame and defamation, suffering and happiness, censure and praise.

externally, after which he decided to give away all his wealth and starts to live as an ascetic. He told himself, *"I am a person with a good reputation. If I live as a monk, then people will honor me even more than before."*

Monks easily receive praise because of the excellence and purity of monkhood. However, the *bodhisatta* rejected the gain and honor he would have received as a monk. He lived as a wandering ascetic without shaving his head, let his hair grow long, begged for food everywhere, and was patient with scornful people. He did so to perfect his equanimity.

The *bodhisatta* wandered through small towns and big cities. If he arrived in a place and was scorned by the people, he would stay longer. Once, he wandered to a small town where there was a group of boys who played mean tricks on people for their amusement; so the *bodhisatta* decided to stay there to perfect his practice of equanimity. He went to the graveyard where he slept, using a bone as a pillow. The naughty boys followed him to the graveyard and played tricks on him, spitting on him, urinating on him, and so on. However, there was no aversion at all in the *bodhisatta's* mind. He remained steady and equanimous.

There were also some learned men who knew that the *bodhisatta* was a great practitioner. They thought he was a man with supernormal powers and they offered him the highest honors. But the *bodhisatta* did not feel elated because of this; he received these honors with even-mindedness. His mind was balanced and even, both toward the naughty boys and toward the wise men. He was not pleased because of gaining high honor, nor was he displeased because of being

badly treated by the naughty boys. The *bodhisatta* faced the two conditions with a mind of equanimity.

That is how the *bodhisatta* practiced to accomplish his Ten Perfections in order to become a Buddha.

Come and Gone Rightly

The *bodhisatta* struggled hard on this long path of perfection and endured much suffering that was beyond the tolerance of ordinary people. He gave away or sacrificed what could not be sacrificed by ordinary people, practiced what could not be practiced by ordinary people, and, finally, after four incalculable aeons and 100,000 great aeons, the *bodhisatta* attained his sublime goal—full enlightenment, the completion of all knowledge.

The *bodhisatta's* sacrifices and perseverance were not for his own grandeur and benefit. It was for the sake of all beings, to help guide them across the dangerous, swirling oceans of *saṃsāra*, so that they may reach the farther shore safe and sound. The *bodhisatta* brought this noble aim and hope to this suffering world. Therefore, he has “come rightly,” that is, for the sake of the joy and happiness of all beings.

Sugato—“Gone Rightly”—indicates that, treading the right path, the Buddha has gone to an excellent destination—*nibbāna*. “The Right Path” is the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the only path leading to *nibbāna*.

“The Right Path” also means to cut off the *kilesas* (mental defilements)—or fetters—and never again give rise to those

defilements or fetters that have been abandoned. As is recorded in the “Great Commentary” (*Mahā-aṭṭhakathā*):

Sotāpatti-magga (the Path of the Stream Enterer) cuts off the coarsest three fetters of identity view, doubt, and adherence to rules and rituals, and they never arise again; thus it is ‘Gone Rightly;’

Sakadāgāmi-magga (the Path of Once Returner) has attenuated the grosser forms of lust, hate, and delusion; thus it is ‘Gone Rightly;’

Anāgāmi-magga (the Path of Non-Returner) cuts off the two fetters of sensual lust and ill-will, and they never arise again; thus it is ‘Gone Rightly;’

Arahatta-magga (the Path of arahantship), cuts off the remaining five fetters of desire for fine-material existence, desire for immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance, and they never arise again; thus it is ‘Gone Rightly.’

The Buddha has rightly gone without returning to the defilements that were abandoned by each path, thus it is “Gone Rightly.”

Sugato also means “speaking rightly.” The Buddha is a Well-Spoken One. He only speaks true words, connected with good, at the right place and at the right time. Thus, speaking rightly is *sugato*. It is said:

- “Such speech as the Perfect One knows to be **untrue and not factual, unbeneficial, and displeasing and disagreeable** to others, that he does not speak.” (Vsm)

Examples of this are telling lies, slandering, using harsh words, gossiping, and so on.

- “In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be **untrue and not factual, and unbeneficial**, yet are **pleasing and agreeable** to others, he does not say them.”

This includes what was stated in the first point about the four unwholesome forms of speech—that is, lying, slandering, using harsh words, and gossiping.

- “In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be **true and factual**, yet are **unbeneficial, displeasing, and disagreeable** to others, he does not say them.”

An example of this is the talk to King Ajātasattu. Tempted by Devadatta, King Ajātasattu killed his father. Later he was filled with great remorse. It was said that from the day of his father's death, he could not sleep on account of terrifying dreams. But due to shame, he refrained from visiting the Buddha until he was persuaded by his physician Jīvaka. When he did go to see the Buddha, it was with great fear and trembling. The Blessed One greeted the king cordially on his arrival and did not say anything about the bad deed of killing his father, because it wasn't

beneficial to the king; it would only have made him more regretful. Instead, the Blessed One expounded the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* to him, in order to encourage him. Henceforth the king became a loyal follower of the Buddha.

- *"In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be **true** and **factual**, **unbeneficial**, yet are **pleasing** and **agreeable** to others, he does not say them"*

An example of this is celebrity fashion news coverage, which, even though it is accurately covered, is unbeneficial for anyone's spiritual development. However, such news is so pleasing and agreeable to others that fashionable items will completely sell out when famous celebrity style-setters are seen wearing them.

- *"In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be **true**, **factual**, and **beneficial**, yet are **displeasing** and **disagreeable** to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them."*

An example of this is the case of the daughter of Māgandiya. Māgandiya had a very beautiful daughter. Many men of high station sought her hand, but were rejected, as the brahmin did not consider them worthy. The Buddha, one day, became aware that both Māgandiya and his wife were ready for *Dhamma*. All that was needed was one statement from him to open their eyes to the truth, so he visited their village. Māgandiya saw

him, and was impressed by the auspicious marks on Buddha's body. He told him of his intention to offer him his daughter and begged him to wait until she could be brought. The Buddha said nothing, and Māgandiya went home and returned with his wife and daughter arrayed in all splendors. On arriving, they found the Buddha had gone, but left behind his footprint. Māgandiya's wife, skilled in reading signs, said that the owner of such a footprint was free from all passion. He would not be interested in women. But Māgandiya paid no attention, and, going a little way, saw the Buddha and offered him his daughter. The Buddha turned down the offer, explaining how he had given up his beautiful wife and household life with all its enjoyments, and how he could not be tempted by even the beautiful daughters of Māra. He said that however beautiful the body may be, it is still full of impurities. At the end of the discourse, Māgandiya and his wife became non-returners.²² What the Buddha said was true and beneficial to Māgandiya, nevertheless, the daughter of Māgandiya found it displeasing. She thought the Buddha was insulting her beauty, and she vowed to take revenge.

22 DhpA.

- *"In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be **true**, **factual**, **beneficial**, and are **pleasing** and **agreeable** to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them."*

Examples would be the talk on the Four Noble Truths, the law of kamma, and the bliss of freedom from saṃsāra. Such talk is highly agreeable to those who suffer from the loss of family members, and who are afflicted by severe illness.

Once, in Rajagaha, a young *bhikkhu* fell in love with a beautiful courtesan named Sirimā. When Sirimā died, the Buddha asked the king to keep her dead body in the cemetery and protect it from wild animals. After four days, the corpse of Sirimā started rotting and bloating, and many worms and maggots crawled on it. The next day, the Buddha and his disciples went to the cemetery and asked the king to announce an auction, starting at 1,000 gold coins. Whoever won the auction was entitled to stay one night with Sirimā. Even though the auction price was reduced lower and lower, until it was free of charge, no one was eager to stay with her. The Buddha then said:

Behold this beautiful body! It is nothing but a heap of rotten flesh, which is supported by the skeleton, fragile and full of disease, the subject of desire. The body is indeed infirm, easily decayed, and impermanent! (Dhp. 147)

After listening to the preaching of the Buddha, the *bhikkhu* who was in love with the beautiful Sirimā was awakened, his knowledge of the absolute meaning of life arose, and he reached the fruition of stream-entry.

The Buddha only speaks true words, connected with good, at the right place and at the right time. Thus, he is “well-spoken” or *sugato*. When recollecting the supreme qualities of the Buddha, we should bear the meanings clearly in our minds.



5.

Lokaṇidū

– Knower of Worlds

In Pāli, *loka* means “world” and *ṇidū* means “knowing” or “skilled in.”

The Buddha understands every aspect of the world, both mental and material. By means of wisdom and knowledge, the Buddha found that the Truth (*Dhamma*) was to be found within this fathom-long body, within the perception and mind of each being. He explains:

O Deva! It is not possible by travelling to the end of the world where there is no birth, no death, neither is it possible to reach the cessation of suffering without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is within this fathom-long body, with its perception and mind, that I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world. (SN 2.26)

The above is the Buddha's answer to a deva named Rohitassa. The son of a deva, Rohitassa went to the Blessed One and asked: "Is it possible, lord, by travelling, to know or see or reach a far end of the world, where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away or reappear?" In a previous life, Rohitassa was very powerful and could fly at a very high speed. He had the wish to reach the end of the world by flying there. In a life span of 100 years, he flew without stopping except when eating, drinking, and sleeping. He died while still on his journey and yet was not successful in reaching the far end of the world.

The Buddha, the Knower of Worlds, uttered as recorded in SN 2.26, *Rohitassa Sutta*:

It's not to be reached by traveling, the end of the world – regardless. And it's not without reaching the end of the world that there is release from suffering and stress. So, truly, the wise one, an expert with regard to the world, a knower of the end of the world, having fulfilled the holy life, calmed, knowing the world's end, doesn't long for this world or for any other.

To reach the end of the world where there is release from suffering, we have to walk the path ourselves. The Buddha said, "You yourself must strive diligently, The Blessed One only indicates the path."

Three Worlds

The Buddha knows there are three worlds:

1. The World of Formations/the Conditioned (*saṅkhāra-loka*)

This consists of mind and body, the five aggregates, and the twelve bases and eighteen elements. Because all formations arise from conditions, which can be shattered and destroyed, it is called *saṅkhāra-loka*. When the conditions are adequate, the formations will exist; when the chain of causality is broken, the formations will be shattered, destroyed, and will never arise again. The characteristics of *saṅkhāra-loka* are impermanence (*anicca*—they arise and cease immediately, again and again), suffering (*dukkha*—being oppressed repeatedly by birth and death is suffering), and not-self (*anatta*—cannot be controlled). The Blessed One had fully understood and had clear knowledge of these conditions.

2. The World of Beings (*satta-loka*)

The Blessed One knows the beings in all thirty-one realms of existence. His knowledge includes: the beings that live in realms of deprivation—the hell-beings, animals, hungry ghosts, and asuras; those beings who live in sensuous realms—human beings, Devas of the Four Great Kings (*Cātummahārājika*), Devas of the Thirty-three (*Tāvātimsa*), the Yāma Devas, Contented Devas (*Tusita*), Devas Delighting in Creation (*Nimmānarati*), and the Devas Wielding Power over the Creation of Others (*Paranimmitavasavatti*); those beings living in the fine material realms (sixteen realms²³); and those beings living in the immaterial realms²⁴.

23 Refer to Appendix 1.

24 Refer to Appendix 1.

The thirty-one planes of existence form the cosmos; the Buddha fully understands all inhabitants in the cosmos, including their dwelling places, appearances, and life span.

3. The World of Space (*okāsa-loka*)

The Buddha has complete knowledge of the universe and each world system, which includes the circumference of the mountains that circle the earth, and the five-hundred small islands that circle each continent. The Blessed One has knowledge of the eight great hells under the earth and the one-hundred and twenty-eight small hells that circle them, the six sensuous pleasure realms (the dwelling places of Brahmas), the sixteen fine material worlds, the four immaterial worlds, and so on. With his unsurpassable wisdom and knowledge, the Buddha knows these worlds completely, whether they are worlds with borders or are borderless.

“Knower of Worlds” also means that the Buddha knows that all worlds comprise only stressful phenomena, because whatever is conditioned will cease. The Blessed One said:

Bhikkhus, both formerly and now, what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering. (MN 22)

Just as, monks, the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so, monks, this Dhamma and Discipline has one taste, the taste of freedom. (Ud 5.5, AN 8.19)

Because the Buddha fully knows all the worlds, he is “The Knower of Worlds (*Lokavidū*).”



6.

Anuttaro Purisa Damma Sārathi

– Incomparable Leader of Men to be Trained

In Pāli, *anuttaro* means “unexcelled, incomparable”; *purisa* means “men”; *damma* means “to be trained or to be tamed”; *sārathi* means “a leader” or “a charioteer.”

The Buddha is the foremost amongst all beings. In the special qualities of virtue, concentration, wisdom, and the knowledge of deliverance, he is without equal, or is the equal only of the other Fully Enlightened Ones. Since there is no one to compare with him, he is incomparable (*Anuttaro*). The Buddha said:

In this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahma, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans, I do not see another ascetic or brahmin more perfect

*in virtue... concentration... wisdom... liberation ...
knowledge and vision of liberation than I, whom I could
honor and respect and dwell in dependence on. (SN 6.2)*

“Leader of men to be trained (*Purisa Damma Sārathi*)” means the Buddha has the ability to train or tame beings that could or should be trained or tamed.

The Buddha clearly understood beings both with “little dust in their eyes,” such as the Venerable Sāriputta and the Venerable Moggallāna, and those with “much dust in their eyes,” such as the King of Kosala.

The Buddha understands who has keen intelligence to hear profound expositions, such as on the not-self characteristic of the five aggregates, and who has dull intelligence. Therefore, the Buddha expounded the “Discourse on the Characteristic of Not-Self” (*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*) to the first group of five *bhikkhus* (who had sharp faculties), and all of them became *arahants*. For those with dull intelligence, the Buddha exhorted them to develop generosity, morality, and restraint of the sense faculties, and then gradually train in meditation.

There are people who are easily trained, and there are some who are difficult to train. An easy-to-train individual is exemplified by the Venerable Khemā, who was named “the female disciple foremost in wisdom,” and Venerable Bāhiya Dārucīriya. The most difficult individual to be trained is exemplified by the Venerable Uruvela Kassapa, who the Buddha had to tame by displaying various kinds of psychic powers.

Khemā was the chief consort of King Bimbisāra. She was extremely beautiful and very conscious of her exquisite beauty. As such, she did not want to see the Buddha or hear the *Dhamma*, as the Buddha had made it quite clear that external beauty was impermanent and of no value to enlightenment.

King Bimbisāra, who was a devoted follower of the Buddha, wanted his queen to listen to the Buddha's teachings. King Bimbisāra had his musicians describe in song the natural beauty of the grove in which the Buddha was residing. Khemā, who was extremely fond of beauty, was attracted by the song and visited the monastery to experience the beauty of the grove.

The Buddha was giving a discourse to a large gathering when he saw Khemā in the distance, approaching the monastery. With his psychic powers he created a vision of an exquisitely beautiful maiden by his side, fanning him. Khemā, enchanted by the beauty of the grove, walked closer and closer to the gathering until her attention was drawn to the beautiful maiden who was fanning the Buddha. When seeing that maiden, whose beauty far surpassed her own, her pride was subdued and her mind became soft.

The Buddha then made the beautiful maiden age slowly before her eyes. Khemā saw the maiden's beautiful skin wrinkle, her hair change to grey and her body age. She then saw the body collapse with age and die, leaving behind just a rotten corpse infested with maggots, which in turn changed to a heap of bones. Khemā was deeply stirred by

the drastic change of life. Understanding that one's beauty and life are impermanent, Khemā realized that the same would happen to her. How could she retain her beauty when this exquisite vision aged and decomposed right before her very eyes?

Khemā was ready to listen to the Buddha, who then dispensed to her the dangers of lust and sense pleasures and requested her to give up transient sense pleasures. Directing her spiritually advanced mind to the teachings, Khemā attained arahantship on the spot while still a laywoman. She then received permission from King Bimbisāra to enter the Noble Order of Nuns.

Khemā was able to penetrate the truth so quickly because of her virtuous practices and wisdom many aeons ago. Because of her strong attraction to the truth and wisdom, Khemā had attained birth in the proximity of Buddhas, *Pacceka* Buddhas, and *bodhisattas* in many previous lives.

The Ability to Subdue Those Who Are Difficult to Train

The Buddha fully understood the habits and tendencies of all beings. Thus, his teaching is adaptable to various situations and conditions, fit and proper for each being.

For those who are difficult to train, the Buddha had unique and extraordinary training methods. For example, he used his psychic power to subdue Aṅgulimāla, the killer; he used wisdom and wit to subdue Saccaka; and he used patience and wisdom to subdue the man-eater Āḷavaka.

Subjugating Ālavaka with Loving-kindness, Wisdom, and Patience

Ālavaka was a *yakkha*—a fierce demon—who was the protector of the Ālavī Kingdom. Ālavaka asked the people to offer him human flesh for his daily food. Even the prince, the only son of the king, had to be sacrificed. The people of Ālavī were distressed and frightened; no one was brave enough to stand up against Ālavaka.

One morning, as usual, the Buddha was seated in meditation. When his mind was concentrated, the Buddha surveyed the three worlds with his divine eye, looking for beings whose faculties were ripened, and who could be guided to liberation from the bondage of *saṃsāra*. During that time, Ālavaka and the little prince came into his sight. The Buddha decided to guide Ālavaka and save the little prince at the same time. After finishing his meal, the Buddha walked to the Kingdom of Ālavī. Arriving in the evening, the Buddha went to Ālavaka's cave, but Ālavaka was away.

The Buddha went into the cave, sat on Ālavaka's seat, and expounded the *Dhamma* to the *yakkhini* (female *yakkha*) there. Upon returning home and hearing this, Ālavaka was very angry. He called for all of his troops and created nine kinds of terrifying thunderstorms, wind, and rain to attack the Buddha. The Blessed One faced it in a manner that was friendly, calm, and full of compassion, patience, and tolerance. The thunderstorm did not hurt the Buddha at all, but instead changed into scented sandalwood powder to honor the Buddha. The unlimited loving-kindness of the Buddha weakened the windstorm.

Seething with anger, Ālavaka decided to use his most lethal weapons to attack the Buddha. It was said that these extraordinarily powerful weapons could destroy the world. However, before the weapons could touch the Buddha, they all fell as pieces of cloth at his feet.

The defeated Ālavaka was very ashamed and distressed. He knew the power of the Buddha came from his great loving-kindness—loving-kindness that can dissolve hatred and anger and can bring peace to the hostile. The thought came to Ālavaka's mind that if he could make the Buddha become angry, he had a chance to win.

So Ālavaka stepped into his cave and instructed the Buddha very arrogantly, "Get out, samaṇa!" The Buddha obeyed his instruction, because he knew that by not resisting, Ālavaka's heart could be softened. Then Ālavaka said again, "Get in, samaṇa!" Ālavaka told the Buddha to get in and get out of the cave three times. The fourth time, the Buddha said, "*Friend, I will not get out anymore. Do as you see fit.*"

Ālavaka then said, "Okay, samaṇa! I will ask you some questions. If you cannot answer them, I will overthrow your mind, split your heart, seize your two feet, and throw you to the other side of the Ganges River."

The Blessed One answered,

Friend, in this world with its devas, Māras, and Brahmas, I do not see any being, neither a human, nor a deva, nor a Māra, nor a Brahma who can overthrow my mind, split my heart, seize my two feet, and throw me to the other side of

the Ganges River. But if you would like to ask anything, you may do so!

Then Ālavaka asked the Buddha in verse,

*What here is the best wealth?
What practiced well brings happiness?
What is surely the sweetest taste?
How lives the one who they say lives best?*

The Buddha answered:

*Faith here is a person's best wealth.
The Dhamma practiced well brings happiness.
Truth (sacca) surely is the sweetest taste.
Living one's life wisely is best.*

Ālavaka asked his questions all at once, and the Buddha answered the questions one by one, sequentially. Upon hearing the Buddha's answers, Ālavaka attained the stage of *sotāpanna* (stream enterer). (SN 10.12)

This is how the Blessed One, with loving-kindness, patience, and great wisdom, subdued Ālavaka, the fierce human-eating demon, and transformed him into a good disciple with strong faith in the Triple Gem.

Because of the Blessed One's ability to use various and exact methods to subdue beings to be tamed, the Buddha is called the incomparable leader of men to be tamed — *anuttaro purisa damma sārathi*.

Subduing Saccaka by Means of Unexcelled Debating Skills

Using his excellent skill in debating, the Buddha straightens the wrong views of others and guides them to the right view, leading them to take refuge in the Triple Gem, as in the tale of Saccaka.

Once, there was a man of wrong view named Saccaka, who held strongly to the view of a permanent self or soul (*atta*). He strongly believed that the five aggregates were “he” and his “self.” Saccaka was also quite boastful about his debating skills. He proclaimed in public: “I do not see any *bhikkhu*, the head of any community, the head of any religious group, or even one who claims to be a *sammāsambuddha*, rightly self-awakened, who, engaging in debate with me, would not shiver, quiver, shake, and break out in sweat in their armpits.”

Although hearing about the Buddha’s teaching that the five aggregates were impermanent, suffering, and not-self, Saccaka adhered to his view that the aggregates were permanent, pleasant, and connected with a permanent self or soul—and he was confident that this view was right. Then, with his five-hundred disciples, Saccaka went to dispute the Buddha’s teaching, with the intention of defeating the Buddha in debate.

The Buddha skillfully asked Saccaka, “*So you are saying that the body is you and your self. Are you able to control your body by saying ‘Let the body be like this, and let the body not be like that?’*”

Saccaka was in deep water. If his answer was no, then it violated his doctrine; but if he said yes, he could not prove it. So he kept silent, not giving any answer. Saccaka continued to keep silent even though the Buddha repeated his question again. The Buddha said, *“One who doesn’t answer when he is asked a legitimate question by the Tathāgata up to three times, his head splits into seven pieces right there.”*

After saying so, the Buddha and Saccaka saw a thunderbolt deva with a flaming thunderbolt in his hand aimed at Saccaka, ready to execute his task. Saccaka was afraid and his hair stood on end. He immediately answered the Buddha, “Master Gotama! I am not able to control my body, to let it be like this, to let it not be like that.”

The Blessed One answered, *“Pay attention to your answer! What you said after is not consistent with what you said before.”*

The Buddha continued to ask, *“If feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are ‘myself,’ are you able to control feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness by saying, ‘Let my feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness be like this, and let my feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness not be like that?’”*

Saccaka answered; “I am not able to do this, Master Gotama!”

The Buddha asked again, *“What do you think? Are body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness constant or inconstant?”*

“Inconstant, Master Gotama.”

"Is what is inconstant pleasant or unpleasant?"

"Unpleasant, Master Gotama."

"If they are all impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, is it right to regard them as 'This is mine, this I am, this is myself'?"

"It is not right, Master Gotama."

"What do you think? If a person clings to suffering, holds to suffering, regards suffering (the five aggregates) to be 'mine,' 'I,' and 'myself,' would he fully understand suffering or cease suffering totally?"

"It is impossible, Master Gotama. Impossible."

"As to what you have said, thus do you not cling to suffering, hold to suffering, and see suffering (the five aggregates) as 'mine,' 'I,' and 'myself'?"

"That is so, Master Gotama."

Saccaka was helpless after the Buddha questioned him repeatedly. His doctrine that the "five aggregates are 'mine,' 'I,' and 'myself,'" could not be defended anymore. Sweat sprang from his forehead and began to soak his whole body; his whole robe was wet as well.

At that time, Saccaka had no choice but to admit the unexcelled wisdom and the incomparable debating skill of the Buddha. Faith in the Buddha arose and he offered a meal to the Buddha and the community of monks (*Saṅgha*) the next day. (MN 35)

Subduing the Robber Aṅgulimāla by Supernatural Power

Every day, the Buddha observed the whole world with the divine eye to see if there was anyone who was ripe for enlightenment. He would speak to them gently, guiding them away from the wrong path and toward the right path.

For example, the Buddha helped Aṅgulimāla (whose name means “necklace of fingers”), a ferocious murderer in Kosala, the kingdom ruled by King Pasenadi. A ruthless serial killer who killed countless men, Aṅgulimāla cut off the fingers of his victims and wore them as a necklace. He was so fierce that even the king and his warriors were frightened merely at hearing his name.

However, our great teacher, the Buddha, had no fear at all. Out of compassion, he went to Aṅgulimāla, like a father full of love would seek out his lost child. With his supreme wisdom and loving-kindness, the Buddha subdued and tamed him. He made Aṅgulimāla abandon violence, leave his bad habits, and become a good man.

How did the Blessed One subdue Aṅgulimāla?

One morning, in Sāvatthi, the Blessed One perceived with the divine eye that if he did not go to Aṅgulimāla that day, then Aṅgulimāla would commit one of the “five unwholesome weighty *kammās*.” After the Blessed One had gone into the city of Sāvatthi for alms food, he went in the direction where Aṅgulimāla was known to operate.

Aṅgulimāla saw the Blessed One passing by and thought, “Amazing! This monk is not afraid to walk alone in this place; why don’t I kill him?”

Unsheathing his sword, he ran after the Blessed One with the intention to kill him. The Blessed One used his psychic power to make it so that no matter how fast Aṅgulimāla ran, he could not catch up with the Blessed One, who continued walking calmly.

Aṅgulimāla thought, “Amazing! In the past, I have even chased and seized a swiftly running elephant, but now, even though I am running at full speed, I cannot catch this *samana* who is walking calmly.”

Then he stopped chasing the Blessed One and shouted, “Hey, you! Stop! *Samaṇa*, stop!”

The Blessed One answered, “*Aṅgulimāla, I have stopped already; it is you who should stop.*”

Aṅgulimāla said to himself, “This *samana* is walking, but he said: ‘I have stopped already; it is you who should stop.’”

Aṅgulimāla then asked the Blessed One, “What do you mean?”

The Buddha said, “*Aṅgulimāla! I have totally stopped harming and killing. But in this respect, you are not restrained at all. Thus, I said, ‘I have stopped already; it is you who should stop.’*”

Hearing these words, a sudden change of heart came over Aṅgulimāla. All the suppressed noble qualities that were

lying in the corner of his heart were awakened. He realized the monk was not an ordinary monk but the Blessed One himself, who came to guide him back to the right path. He immediately threw away his sword, bowed his head, saluted the Buddha, and asked to be ordained. He practiced diligently and at last became an *arahant*. (MN 86)

By totally destroying his ignorance and craving, Aṅgulimāla became free from the suffering of the cycles of death and rebirth. When he realized *parinibbāna*, all his unskillful *kammās* of killing he committed previously became lapsed *kamma* (or ineffective *kamma*) and did not produce any results (*ahosi kamma*). The result will take place only when the five aggregates are manifesting. *Parinibbāna* is like a flame going out; there is no more arising of five aggregates to which the results of unwholesome *kamma* could attach.

Guiding by Conforming to the Tendencies—The Story of Venerable Bāhiya

Alternatively, the words *Anuttaro purisa damma sārathi*—incomparable leader of men to be trained—can be taken together as one clause. It implies that when the Buddha preaches the *Dhamma*—even just one time to those with high intelligence—they can attain the path and fruition on the spot. An example is the tale of the Venerable Bāhiya Dārucīriya.

Bāhiya Dārucīriya wore bark-cloth as his clothes, which made him appear to people as a very noble and serious ascetic. Thus, he was honored by many people, which led to

him wondering whether he was an *arahant*. A deva, who had been a close friend and had practiced together with him in previous lives, came and informed him that he was not an *arahant*. But, the deva continued, there was a real *arahant*—a Buddha had come into the world.

Upon hearing this, Bāhiya was moved; he walked day and night to reach the city of Savatthi to meet the Buddha. When Bāhiya arrived, the Blessed One was on his alms round. Bāhiya saw the tranquility, peace, and equanimity of the Blessed One. Completely mesmerized, he approached the Buddha hurriedly, rendered a salute, and asked the Blessed One to teach him the sublime *Dhamma* at once.

The Blessed One knew that in a previous life, at the time of Padumuttara Buddha, Bāhiya had made an aspiration to become the quickest to attain arahantship (*khīppābhiññā*)—one who, by only hearing a few words from the Buddha, could reach arahantship. However, because of his exhausting journey, together with his excited emotional state, it was not a proper time to listen to the *Dhamma*. After Bāhiya pleaded three times and became more emotionally settled, the Buddha expounded the *Dhamma* that was fit for him:

Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognized will be merely what is cognized.

When, Bāhiya, for you in the seen is merely what is seen... in the cognized is merely what is cognized, then, Bāhiya, you will not be 'with that.' When, Bāhiya, you are not 'with

that,' then, Bāhiya, you will not be 'in that.' When, Bāhiya, you are not 'in that,' then, Bāhiya, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of suffering. (Ud 1.10)

As the spiritual faculties of Venerable Bāhiya Dārucīriya were matured, at that very moment all of his blemishes were eradicated; free from all taints, he attained the fruit of arahantship (*arahattaphala*).

The Buddha, being an incomparable leader of men to be trained, has his own way of training others. As he said:

I train a tamable person sometimes with gentleness, sometimes with harshness, sometimes with both gentleness and harshness. (AN 4:111)



7.

Satthā Deva Manussānaṃ

– Teacher of Gods and Humans

In Pāli, *satthā* means “teacher,” *deva* means “gods,” and *manussā* means “human beings or men.”

The Buddha is “the teacher of gods and men.” “Of gods and men” denotes all people who are capable of progress. The Buddha is one who teaches about the present life, future lives, absolute truth, suffering and the end of suffering, and other themes in order to guide humans, gods, and Brahmas. After hearing his teaching, most people are willing to give up their attachment to sensual pleasures, which causes moral decline, and instead find encouragement to walk the path until the final goal—*nibbāna*—is reached. Thus, the Buddha is the “teacher of gods and humans.”

The Buddha is also one with an all-knowing mind. He can see the characteristics and tendencies of all beings clearly. He skillfully employs various meditation subjects, selecting the appropriate one for each being, and helps guide them towards enlightenment. Such special abilities help his disciples to reach the path of enlightenment in a very short time, such as in the cases of Kisāgotamī and Tissa Thera.

The Enlightenment of Kisāgotamī

The way Buddha guided Kisāgotamī out of her sorrow is amazingly skillful.

Kisāgotamī was very depressed after her beloved son died. Because she could not accept his death, she took his dead body everywhere to search for medicine to revive him. A good and wise man told her to go see the Buddha.

The Buddha told her, *“If you can get a handful of mustard seeds, I will make your son alive again, but they must come from a home where there has been no death.”*

Kisāgotamī was overjoyed to hear the advice of the Buddha. She walked from one house to the next, asking for mustard seeds. Even though mustard seeds were an ordinary cooking spice used in India and though everyone was willing to give her a handful of them, no matter how many houses she visited, she could not find one in which no one had died.

Kisāgotamī at last realized that death was something that everyone encounters. As a human, one must experience death, and there was no exception for her beloved son. She

then buried her son's corpse and went back to see the Buddha. The Buddha spoke the following verses to her:

*When a person's mind is deeply attached,
Infatuated with sons and cattle,
Death grabs him and carries him away,
As a flood does a sleeping village. (Dhp 287)*

On hearing this one verse, insight into things as they really are arose in her, and she became a stream-enterer.

The Liberation of Tissa Thera

The loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha towards all beings was incomparable, boundless, and impartial. Even though he was a great and widely respected teacher, he still humbled himself to give services to others, as in the time he personally washed and tended a seriously ill disciple.

Once there was a seriously ill *bhikkhu* named Pūtigatta Tissa. His illness caused boils that appeared all over his body and that grew bigger and bigger until they burst and oozed.

That morning, the Buddha observed with the divine eye that Tissa had the potential to attain arahantship; but in his current condition, he was like a piece of pure gold in mud — the gold could not shine as it should. The Buddha thought, “All of Tissa's friends cannot bear it anymore, and they have all left him; I am the only one who can help him. But before curing his mental suffering, I have to first cure his physical suffering.”

Then the Buddha boiled water and went to the room where Tissa was lying. Other *bhikkhus*, seeing this, came hurriedly to the Buddha and offered to help. The Buddha asked them to carry Tissa out of the room, where they washed and cleaned him as well as his robes. The Buddha did not feel loathing or disgust due to the pus, nor the rotten smell coming from Tissa's body. He gently bathed Tissa, dried his body, cleansed his sores, and helped him to put on clean robes.

The Blessed One knew that if Tissa's body was cleaned, his mind would be relieved and happy, and that would be an appropriate moment to listen to the *Dhamma*. Thereafter, the Blessed One expounded the *Dhamma* that was suitable to his temperament:

*All too soon this body will lie on the earth, cast aside, lifeless,
like a useless log. (Dhp 41)*

After hearing this teaching by the Buddha, Tissa became an *arahant*.

The Buddha used this opportunity to teach his disciples to help each other, and especially those who are ill. The Blessed One said, "*Monks, you have no mother, you have no father, who might tend to you. If you don't tend to one another, who then will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me should tend to the sick.*"

We can see the noble qualities of the Buddha in this example. The Buddha did not discriminate against beings because they were good or bad, poor or rich, clever or foolish—because the Buddha fully understood that the different

qualities of beings are only the result of their own *kamma*. Thus the Buddha treated everyone equally, without discriminating against any being—not even those who opposed the *Dhamma* or tried to harm him. The Buddha often advised his lay disciples who had left the wrong doctrines of other teachers to continue financially supporting and respecting their previous teachers.

The Buddha extended his loving-kindness and compassion to all beings. The love he gave to Devadatta, who tried to harm him several times, is the same as the love he gave to his own son, Rāhula. The Buddha and his disciples travelled from one town to another, from one city to another, on their compassionate and loving mission to help all beings.

The Teaching of Doing No Evil, and Performing Good Deeds

The Buddha understood the suffering of all beings, especially the beings dwelling in the lower woeful states of hell, hungry ghosts, asuras, and animal realms. The opportunity to become freed from these deprived states and attain rebirth in a fortunate state is extremely rare, as the Buddha illustrated with a simile in which he compared the amount of soil under his fingernail (the relatively small number of beings in fortunate destinations) with the amount of soil in the entire earth (the number of beings in the lower realms).

Further, in the states of deprivation, there is no chance to make good *kamma*. Hell-beings endure great torment; their

suffering seems endless. In the animal kingdom, the law of the jungle reigns; there is mutual killing, and morality is unknown.

The Buddha, out of compassion, untiringly exhorted people to refrain from unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind, such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, being a fraud, or taking intoxicating drinks or drugs. These unwholesome actions lead to carelessness, covetousness, hatred, denying the effects of *kamma*, and more. By abandoning unwholesome actions, people live free from self-blame and societal blame and live happily without remorse. When faced with death, they do not grieve, nor are they tormented or grow delirious. What awaits them in the future is a blissful destination!

When a person has been established in avoiding unwholesome (*akusala*) actions, the Blessed One would further encourage the person to perform wholesome (*kusala*) actions, such as generosity, morality, respecting elders who are worthy of respect, giving service to the *saṅgha* and the poor, and listening to good *Dhamma* in order to deepen right view. These good deeds gladden the heart of the doer and ensure peace in the society. When such good people come down with a serious disease, they neither grieve nor grow delirious. They are not afraid of death, as they know they are destined to a pleasant existence hereafter. It is taught:

There is the case of the person who has done what is good, has done what is skillful, has given protection to those in fear, and has not done what is evil, savage, or cruel. Then he comes down with a serious disease. As he comes down with

a serious disease, the thought occurs to him, 'I have done what is good, have done what is skillful, have given protection to those in fear, and I have not done what is evil, savage, or cruel. To the extent that there is a destination for those who have done what is good, what is skillful, have given protection to those in fear, and have not done what is evil, savage, or cruel, that's where I'm headed after death.' He does not grieve, is not tormented; does not weep, beat his breast, or grow delirious. This, too, is a person who, subject to death, is not afraid or in terror of death. (AN 4.184)

Purifying One's Mind through Concentration and Insight Meditation

In addition, the Blessed One taught us how to use concentration meditation to control the restless mind—a mind that likes to wander about or indulge in mental proliferation (*papañca*). Concentration meditation (*samatha*) is a practice developed through consistency and right resolve, and entails focusing the mind on a single object, thus training the mind to be undistracted and bringing it to a tranquil state. Without mindfulness to restrain it and bind it to a meditation subject such as the breath (*ānāpānasati*), the untrained mind—which is accustomed to wandering about over countless rebirths—tends to commit evil. As the *Dhammapada* states,

He who is slow in doing good, his mind delights in evil.
(Dhp 116)

The Buddha expounded many meditation subjects—such as mindfulness of breathing, the skeleton, the four elements, the impurity of the thirty-two body parts, the four divine abodes of loving kindness, appreciative joy, compassion and equanimity, and various color kasinas—that practitioners can use to tame the initial restless mind, and further develop the mind to total tranquility.

The Buddha taught these various meditation subjects to suit the different temperaments (*carita*) of beings. According to the *Abhidhamma*, there are six types of temperaments of beings: (1) the lustful, (2) the hateful, (3) the deluded, (4) the faithful, (5) the intellectual, and (6) the discursive.

For example, the Buddha taught a person with a lustful temperament to contemplate the stages of decomposition of a corpse or the impurity of the thirty-two parts of the body—head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, etc. Recall the story of how the Buddha redirected the *bhikkhu* who was lovesick for Sirima in just this way. These methods are used to help people with a lustful temperament to develop detachment toward their own body and the bodies of others.

The Buddha taught a person of hateful temperament to contemplate the “four divine abodes” (*brahmavihāras*), which are loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. “Loving-kindness” is a universal love that wishes all beings to be happy. When loving-kindness meditation is developed, ill-will will be abandoned. “Compassion” means to feel sympathy when seeing a helpless and suffering person and to wish to ease the

suffering of that person. When compassion meditation is developed, cruelty will be abandoned. “Appreciative joy” is having joy when others are successful. When appreciative joy meditation is developed, discontent will be abandoned. “Equanimity” means to understand wisely that all beings are the owners of their actions (*kamma*) and the heirs of their actions, and that their successes and failures, their happiness and suffering, are related to or dependent upon their own actions. When equanimity meditation is developed, aversion will be abandoned. (MN 620)

For a person of deluded temperament and for one of restless mind, “mindfulness of breathing” (*ānāpānasati*) is the most suitable subject. One takes in-breathing and out-breathing as the object of mindfulness and gradually develops concentration until the mind fully absorbs on the breath.

For those of a faithful temperament, to recollect the qualities of the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha* and to recollect their own generosity is the best way to meditate. How do you recollect your own generosity? You reflect thus: ‘It is a gain, a great gain for me, that—among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness—I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, openhanded, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms.’ The Buddha said that any time a disciple is recollecting generosity, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on generosity. (AN 11.13)

By learning to savor one's generosity and feel gladness at the merit that results, joy arises. Joy leads to tranquility, and tranquility leads to concentration.

For those who are of intelligent temperament, the most suitable object is contemplation of the four elements, that is, contemplating that one's body is composed of the four primary elements: earth, water, fire, and air (wind) elements. Sometimes the space and mind elements are added, making it six elements. This was how the Buddha taught Pakkusāti, as described in the Majhima Nikāya (MN 140).

When the restless mind is calmed and brought to unification by focusing it on a single object (*ekaggata*), it becomes focused, light, soft, easy to direct, clear, and still. The concentrated mind can clearly see the nature of the five aggregates or the characteristics of the mind and body as they really are. In the *Samādhi Sutta* the Blessed One said:

Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as it really is? The origin and passing away of the five aggregates. (SN 22.5)

Based on concentration, the Blessed One taught us to comprehend the five aggregates (mind and body) and to see clearly what they really are—not a permanent “self” or “person.” The “person” or “self” is composed of nothing but the five aggregates, which exist only due to causes and conditions. There is nothing but the interplay of physical form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and

consciousness. There is no “self” or “I” as a controller or omnipotent master.

The Blessed One would guide a meditator further to observe the cause of the arising of the five aggregates. The current five aggregates do not just accidentally arise, nor is there a supernatural being who creates them, but it is the ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and *kamma* of former lives that are the root cause of their existence. As long as the taints (*āsava*s) are not destroyed, present ignorance, craving, clinging, formations, and *kamma* will continue to cause the arising of five aggregates in the next life.²⁵

The twelve links of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) indicate that with ignorance as condition, formations arise; with formations as condition, consciousness arises; with consciousness as condition, mentality and materiality arise; with mentality and materiality as condition, six sense bases arise; with six sense bases as condition, contact arises; with contact as condition, feeling arises; with feeling as condition, craving arises; with craving as condition, clinging arises; with clinging as condition, becoming arises; with becoming as condition, birth arises; with birth as condition, aging, sickness and death arise; thus arises the whole mass of suffering.

Ignorance, craving, and clinging in the previous life are the round of defilement (*kilesa-vaṭṭa*). Formations and *kamma* comprise the round of *kamma* (*kamma-vaṭṭa*). The present consciousness, mind and body, the six sense bases, contact,

25 Please see “Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma.”

and feeling are the round of result (*vipāka-vatṭa*). In this present life, due to ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, untaught worldlings crave for sensual pleasures and further cling to the continuity of life (round of defilement). Therefore, they continue to commit good and bad actions (*kamma*) that leave behind *kammic* energy or potential (round of *kamma*). When this *kammic* energy meets with favorable conditions to produce results, a new life consisting of mind and body springs up as a new existence, which is resultant *kamma* (round of result). Thus, because of the round of defilements, a round of *kamma* is caused; this round of *kamma* further leads to the round of result. The three rounds of dependent origination will continue to revolve so long as the round of defilement is not extinguished.

Understanding that all worldly phenomena are dependently originated—i.e., with the arising of this, that arises; with the cessation of this, that ceases—it is apparent that: with the cessation of ignorance, formations cease; with the cessation of formations, consciousness ceases; with the cessation of consciousness, mentality and materiality cease; with the cessation of mentality and materiality, the six sense bases cease; with the cessation of the six sense bases, contact ceases...feeling ceases, craving ceases, clinging ceases, and becoming ceases; with the cessation of becoming, there will be no birth. When there is no birth, then aging, sickness and death will not occur. Thus, the whole mass of suffering ceases. Understanding how, with the cessation of ignorance and craving, the whole cycle of dependent origination comes to the end, an ardent meditator works to eliminate the root cause—ignorance.

This can be achieved by viewing the five aggregates with right resolve: “This is not mine,”²⁶ “This I am not,”²⁷ “This is not my self.”²⁸ The endless arising and ceasing of the aggregates, or mentality and materiality, is “impermanence”; being continually oppressed by arising and ceasing is “suffering”; and the quality of experience being uncontrollable, conditioned, and inconstant is “not self.” Below is the common line of questioning the Buddha posed to his followers that would lead them to awakening:

What do you think, monk? Are form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness constant or inconstant?

Inconstant, Master Gotama.

Is what is inconstant stressful or easeful?

Stressful, Master Gotama.

Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is myself?’ (MN 147)

When a meditator continuously contemplates that mentality and materiality are impermanent, that suffering is a fact of existence, and that the sense of a permanent self is a myth, his or her insight knowledge becomes sharper. The arising of the mind and body are no longer apparent, but what is apparent is their disappearance or deterioration. A

26 It is associated with craving.

27 It is associated with conceit.

28 It is associated with wrong view.

meditator may find it fearful to see the deterioration of whatever phenomenon is observed, but with the understanding that all conditioned phenomena are imperfect and full of dissatisfaction, disenchantment sets in.

It is just like a fisherman who uses a bamboo basket for fishing. As he checks the basket to see whether he has caught a fish, his hand touches a fish; he is very happy and he takes the fish out of the basket. He continues to fish, and when he checks the basket again, he again feels something slippery, like a fish. But when he pulls it out, he sees the three marks on the neck of what is a poisonous water snake. If he does not handle it properly, the snake will bite him and possibly kill him. The fisherman is no longer happy, but is now terrified. He feels revulsion towards the snake and wishes to be free of it. Therefore, he grabs the snake, swings it around its head three times, flings it away as far as possible, and then runs to dry land, where he feels safe and secure.²⁹

The same thing happens to a meditator. When knowledge arises, he sees that the mind and body, which he was once attached to and loved very much, are actually impermanent, suffering, and not-self. He will feel disenchanting and wish to be delivered from the mind and body, just as the fisherman wished to be delivered from the poisonous snake. There is nothing a meditator can do to be free from the entanglement of the mind and body but to continue to contemplate the three characteristics—impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

29 Vsm.

The fisherman, who wished to be free from the danger of the poisonous snake, would be very careful in handling it; otherwise, the snake might bite him. Thus, he had to weaken the poisonous snake until it was unable to hurt anyone and then fling it away as far as possible. In the same way, when a meditator continues to contemplate the characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and not-self of phenomena, the delusion of permanence, happiness, and a sense of self will weaken. As the meditator continues to contemplate the three characteristics, he gradually detaches from these three perceptions and feels equanimity towards all conditioned phenomena. This is “the knowledge of equanimity towards conditioned formations” (*saṅkhārupekkhāñāṇa*).

When the knowledge of equanimity towards conditioned formations is steady, the meditator will see *nibbāna*. There arises in him or her for the first time the “path consciousness of the stream-enterer,” an experience that has never before arisen in the long cycle of births, with *nibbāna* as its final goal. Arising at the same time is the knowledge of **comprehending** the truth of suffering, **abandoning** of the origin of suffering, **developing** the path leading to the cessation of suffering, and **directly realizing** the cessation of suffering. In short, the Four Noble Truths become clear to him. If a meditator has sufficient *parāmi* and continues to develop the practice, he or she will attain arahantship and will be free from all mental defilements, thus attaining permanent liberation.

This is how the Buddha guides beings to fully understand that materiality and mentality actually cannot be relied upon

at all, until at last they will let go of attachment to them completely.

Guiding the Celestial Beings

The Blessed One is also the teacher of gods. He did not only guide human beings, but at times also preached in the heavenly realms, helping to release celestial beings from their stress or lead them to *nibbāna*.

Celestial beings are born into heavenly realms due to their good *kamma*. However, residence in heaven is not permanent. Once the good *kamma* that caused rebirth in heaven has been exhausted in that life, heavenly beings will be reborn into other realms in accordance with their *kamma*. If good *kamma* meets with all the necessary conditions to ripen during their dying moment, they will be reborn into a heavenly world or human world, and conversely, if bad *kamma* ripens, they will be reborn into one of the four woeful states.

Human beings are blinded by ignorance and fettered by sensual desire. So are celestial beings—they also need the Buddha's guidance to be free from mental defilements that block the path to *nibbāna*.

Generally, celestial beings only came to the Buddha in the middle of the night. Among them, some came to pay homage to the Buddha, some came to seek advice from the Buddha, and some came to ask for guidance on how to practice. In *Devaputta Samyutta*, it is recorded that a young god named

Subrahmā appears before the Blessed One and explains the problem weighing on his heart:

Always anxious is this mind,
The mind is always agitated,
About problems present and future;
Please tell me the release from fear.

The Buddha answered:

*“Not apart from awakening and austerity,
Not apart from sense restraint,
Not apart from relinquishing all,
Do I see any safety for living beings.” (SN 1)*

The root of fear is clinging. Covered by the darkness of ignorance, we cling to our possessions, our family, our achievement and status, our name and fame; and most tenaciously of all, we cling to our mind and body, or in other words, the ‘five aggregates’ of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness, taking them to be permanent, pleasurable, and an enduring self.

Not seeing the five aggregates correctly, we cling to them, cherish them, and fear giving up what we cherish. We try to preserve what we cling to, and forget that whatever comes to be must pass away. The Buddha did not see any safety apart from awakening to the truth. He advised the deva Subrahmā to practice austerity and restraint of the senses, until the wisdom arose to see directly how *“whatever arises is subject to cessation,”* and then, Subrahmā could finally

relinquish not only the objects of clinging but clinging to his sense of “self.”

There are many discourses that the Buddha preached to celestial beings. One of them is the famous “Great Blessing Sutta” (*Mahāmaṅgala sutta*) (Sn 2.4). At that time, many men had their own views about blessings—some said that hearing the chirping of birds in the early morning is a kind of blessing; others said that seeing a certain color is a kind of blessing, too. For twelve years, men and deities in the heavens pondered and discussed blessings, but never came to a satisfactory conclusion. At last, the deities concluded that only the Buddha would have a solution to their doubts. Thus, they came to the human world to seek advice from the Buddha.

The Buddha taught them the famous discourse *Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*. This sutta is a guide to ethics and morality for life’s journey, starting with:

Not to associate with fools, but to associate with the wise,

and ending with the verse:

A mind unruffled by worldly vicissitudes, free from sorrow, free from defilements, liberated from fear.

The sutta describes how a person begins by disassociating from fools and associating with the wise, gradually shapes his or her good character by fulfilling the duties of a good person in everyday life, and then trains further, step-by-step, to reach the final goal—the bliss of *nibbāna*. After hearing the discourse, countless heavenly beings were freed from the

bonds of craving and realized the path and fruit of noble ones.

Similarly, when the Buddha expounded his first discourse, “Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma” (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*), many devas from different realms came and listened to him and attained the noble path and fruition.

Teaching with an Open Hand

Being a great teacher, the Buddha never kept the truth he knew a secret. In ancient India, prominent teachers often kept some of their knowledge secret for self-protection. However, the honorable esteemed Buddha never kept secret any of what he knew. The Buddha told Ānanda:

There is nothing, Ānanda, with regard to the teachings, that the Tathāgata holds with the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back. (DN 16)

The Buddha as a teacher was also like a “caravan leader.” A caravan leader leads a caravan home safely—getting everyone across a burning hot desert, across a bandit-infested wilderness, across a wild-beast-infested wilderness, through famine, and through miseries, to reach a land of safety. Thus, the Buddha is “teacher of gods and humans” (*Satthā Devamanussām*).



8.

Buddho

– The Enlightened / Awakened One

B*uddho* means “awakened.” The Buddha was awakened with the knowledge of the fruit of liberation. He awakened to everything—the past, present, and future.

What does awakening involve? Under the Bodhi tree, the Blessed One was awakened through his own efforts by directly realizing the truth, specifically the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Buddha said:

What must be known is directly known (the truth of suffering), what must be abandoned has been abandoned (the truth of the origin of suffering), what must be realized has been realized (the truth of the cessation of suffering), what

must be developed has been developed (the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering); therefore, brahmin, I am a Buddha. (MN 92)

The Four Noble Truths

In the Great Discourse on Establishing Mindfulness (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta*) (DN 22), the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths as follows:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering

Bhikkhus, what is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; death is suffering; grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair are suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not to get what one longs for is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.

Bhikkhus, what is birth? Whatever beings, in whatever group of beings, there is birth, existence, emergence, appearance of aggregates, and obtaining of sense spheres — this, bhikkhus, is called birth.

Bhikkhus, what is aging? Whatever beings, in whatever group of beings, there is aging, decrepitude, broken teeth, gray hair, wrinkled skin, decline of lifespan, weakening of the sense faculties — this, bhikkhus, is called aging.

Bhikkhus, what is death? Whatever beings, in whatever group of beings, there is death, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, breaking up of the aggregates, casting

off of the body, destruction of the life faculty — this, bhikkhus, is called death.

Bhikkhus, what is grief? For one who has, bhikkhus, some sort of misfortune or other, who is touched by some sort of painful thing or another, there is grief, grieving, the state of grieving, inner grief, great inner grief — this, bhikkhus, is called grief.

Bhikkhus, what is lamentation? For one who has, bhikkhus, some sort of misfortune or other, who is touched by some sort of painful thing or another, there are laments, great laments, lamenting, great lamenting, the state of lamenting, the state of great lamentation — this, bhikkhus, is called lamentation.

Bhikkhus, what is pain? Any physical pain, physical disagreeableness, painful and disagreeable feelings caused of contact with the body — this, bhikkhus, is called pain.

Bhikkhus, what is sorrow? Any mental pain, mental disagreeableness, painful and disagreeable feelings caused of contact with the mind — this, bhikkhus, is called sorrow.

Bhikkhus, what is despair? For one who has, bhikkhus, some sort of misfortune or other, who is touched by some sort of painful thing or another, there is desponding, despairing, the state of despondency, the state of despair — this, bhikkhus, is called despair.

Bhikkhus, what is suffering of association with the disliked? Here, for that one who has unwanted, unlovely, unpleasant forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and thoughts; or, for that one who meets, contacts, has connection, and has

interaction with those who have ill- will, who wish one's harm, who wish one's discomfort, and who wish one's insecurity—this, bhikkhus, is called suffering of association with the disliked.

Bhikkhus, what is suffering of separation from the liked? Here, for that one who has wanted lovely, pleasant forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and thoughts; or, for that one who meets, contacts, has connection, and has interaction with those who have good will, who wish for one's good, who wish for one's comfort, and who wish for one's security—mother, or father, or brothers, or sisters, or friends, or companions, or blood relatives—and then not having meetings, assembly, connection, and interaction with them. This, bhikkhus, is called suffering of separation from the liked.

Bhikkhus, what is suffering of not getting what one longs for? Bhikkhus, to those beings subject to birth, a longing like this arises: "May I not be subject to birth, may birth not come to me!" However, that cannot be obtained merely by longing for it—this is the suffering of not getting what one longs for.

Bhikkhus, to those beings subject to old age, a longing like this arises: "May I not be subject to old age, may old age not come to me!" However, that cannot be obtained merely by longing for it—this is the suffering of not getting what one longs for.

Bhikkhus, to those beings subject to illness, a longing like this arises: "May I not be subject to illness, may illness not

come to me!" But that cannot be obtained merely by longing for it — this is the suffering of not getting what one longs for.

Bhikkhus, to those subject to grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair, a longing like this arises: "May I not be subject to grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair; may grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair not come to me!" But that cannot be obtained merely by longing for it — this is the suffering of not getting what one longs for.

Bhikkhus, what are the five aggregates of clinging which are suffering? They are: material (form), feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.

*Bhikkhus, this is called the noble truth of suffering.
(DN 12)*

The Five Aggregates of Clinging

We cling to the five aggregates of material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness as "mine," "I," or "myself" by way of craving, conceit, and wrong views. Thus, these five aggregates are the objects of clinging; they are called the "five aggregates of clinging."

Whether it is past, present, or future; internal or external; blatant or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near, any material whatsoever is the material aggregate, any feeling is the feeling aggregate, any perception is the perception aggregate, any formation is the formation aggregate, any consciousness is the consciousness aggregate.

The Similes of the Five Aggregates

(i) Material (Form) Aggregate (*rūpa khandha*)

Materiality comprises the four primary elements that constitute the physical body of all beings—earth element, water element, fire element, and air (wind) element—and the twenty-four types of matter derived from the four primary elements, called “derived matter” (*upādāya rūpa*).

The four primary elements are also called “primary properties” (*dhātu*), because each of them bears their own characteristics. The earth element is called such because its characteristics are solid and rough; examples would be the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, bones, and so on. The water element has the characteristic of flowing or spilling over, exemplified by phlegm, sweat, blood, tears, saliva, urine, and so on. The fire element has the characteristics of cold and hot, and is experienced in the temperature of the body and the heat of the digestive system. The air (wind) element has the characteristics of pushing or motion as occurs in breathing, belching, or flatulence caused by moving air through the intestines, and so on.

The Buddha compares materiality to foam, which indicates that it is empty, void, and without essence:

Bhikkhus, suppose that this river Ganges was carrying along a great lump of foam. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a lump of foam? So too, bhikkhus,

whatever kind of material form there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in material form? (SN 22.95)

(ii) Feeling Aggregate (*vedanā khandha*)

“Feeling” is the unpleasant, pleasant, or neutral impression that arises when one experiences an object.

There are six kinds of feeling: the feeling that occurs when the eye faculty contacts color; the feeling that occurs when the ear faculty contacts sound; the feeling that occurs when the nose faculty contacts odor; the feeling that occurs when the tongue faculty contacts taste; the feeling that occurs when the body contacts tactile objects; and the feeling that occurs when the mind contacts mental objects.

When the six sense faculties contact the six objects—color, sound, smell, taste, physical sensations, and mental objects—based on these unpleasant, pleasant, and neutral objects, unpleasant feeling, pleasant feeling, and neutral feeling occur.

When a pleasant feeling arises, we feel delighted and satisfied, wanting more; attachment then arises. When these pleasant feelings to which we grasp and attach disappear, we feel miserable, depressed, and disappointed; unpleasant feeling then takes over. When neutral objects contact the six

sense faculties, neutral feeling arises, and, because of ignorance, we may think that there is no feeling there at all.

Whatever feelings arise, they all arise dependent on causes and conditions. And they arise and cease, changing from pleasant feeling to unpleasant, and from unpleasant to pleasant. This is the nature of conditioned phenomena. The Buddha said: “*Whatever is felt is included in suffering*” (SN 36.11), simply because of its changing nature.

The Buddha compared the feeling aggregate to a water bubble, because it is fragile, and the moment it arises, it immediately ceases—it is empty, without essence.

Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the autumn, when it is raining and big rain drops are falling, a water bubble arises and bursts on the surface of the water. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a water bubble? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of feeling there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in feeling? (SN 22.95)

(iii) Perception Aggregate (*saññā khandha*)

The function of perception is to mark the object when it is first contacted. When the same object reappears in the future, perception identifies and recognizes it to be the same object.

Take, for example, one's first time seeing the color red. Perception marks the red color, and, in the future, when the color red appears again, perception recognizes it to be "red" instead of "white." It is like a "signature."

There are six kinds of perception: perception of form, perception of sound, perception of odor, perception of taste, perception of touch, and perception of mental objects.

We are frequently fooled by perception, which often perceives the impermanent as permanent, the unpleasant as pleasant, and the impure as pure. Such distorted perception (*sañña-vipallāsa*) is caused by ignorance—not seeing things as they really are.

It is just like the tale of the farmer who, to scare deer away from his farm, sets up a scarecrow holding a bow and arrow. When a deer comes to the farm—because it has made a previous mark of "hunter"—it sees the scarecrow, misinterprets it to be a real hunter, and runs away in panic. Similarly, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, suffering, and not-self, but beings, under the influence of distorted perception, regard them as permanent, pleasant, and with-self. Therefore, various kinds of attachment arise, and suffering ensues.

The Buddha compared the perception aggregate to a mirage, because it is tricky, empty, void, and without essence:

Suppose, bhikkhus, that in the last month of the hot season, at high noon, a shimmering mirage appears. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully

investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a mirage? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of perception there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in perception? (SN 22.95)

(iv) Mental Formations Aggregate (*saṅkhāra khandha*)

There are fifty-two mental factors described in the *Abhidhamma*. Aside from feeling and perception (separated out as the feeling aggregate and perception aggregate), the remaining fifty mental states are referred to as the mental formations aggregate. Greed, aversion, delusion, doubt, conceit, envy, sloth, faith, mindfulness, shame, fear of evil deeds, and wisdom are all included under the mental formations aggregate. Among the mental formations aggregate, volition or will is the spark that is responsible for any *kamma* performed. The Buddha said:

It is volition I call kamma, for having willed, one performs an action through body, speech, or mind.

The Buddha compared the mental formations aggregate to the trunk of a plantain tree— the trunk is composed of layers of peel and each layer has its own unique characteristics. The mental formations aggregate is also formed by various mental states, and each mental state has its own unique characteristics and function. For example, greed's function is to hold on or attach to an object, while the function of

mindfulness (*sati*) is to remember the object, and so on. When a mental state arises, after performing its function, it ceases immediately. Therefore, mental states are also empty, void, and without essence, like the trunk of plantain tree.

The Buddha said:

Suppose, bhikkhus, that a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, would take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There he would see the trunk of a large plantain tree, straight, fresh, without a fruit-bud core. He would cut it down at the root, cut off the crown, and unroll the coil. As he unrolls the coil, he would not find even softwood, let alone heartwood. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in the trunk of a plantain tree? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of mental formations there are, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects them, ponders them, and carefully investigates them. As he investigates them, they appear to him to be void, hollow, and insubstantial. For what substance could there be in mental formations? (SN 22.95)

(v) Consciousness Aggregate (*viññāṇa khandha*)

Consciousness can be described as being aware of or knowing the object. It merely knows an object. People often identify this knowing of an object, this consciousness, as a “self.” They consider this function of consciousness, this awareness of an object, as who they are.

There are six types of consciousness:

- eye-consciousness,
- ear-consciousness,
- nose-consciousness,
- tongue-consciousness,
- body-consciousness,
- mind-consciousness.

Generally, people believe that these six types of consciousness are immortal and constant—actually, they are not! When a visible object contacts the eye faculty, eye-consciousness arises, seeing the object and immediately passes away. Eye-consciousness cannot discern whether the object is good or bad. When eye-consciousness arises, it ceases immediately, followed by another type of consciousness—one after another.

Actually, the whole process of “seeing” is a series of different consciousnesses, each with its associated mental states.³⁰ Unable to break down the “compactness of continuity” of consciousness and the “compactness of composite”—that each moment of seeing is made of one consciousness and a group of mental factors—people consider eye-consciousness to be the immortal and constant “I.” They consider that it is “I” who sees, and the same “I” is listening, smelling, tasting, and touching. They do not consider consciousness to be just the “self,” but even consider it to be the immortal “soul” that migrates from one life to another life.

30 For better understanding, please read *“Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma.”*

During the days of the Buddha, there was a *bhikkhu* named Sati who claimed that the Blessed One taught him: *“It is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another.”*

The Blessed One cross-questioned him, asking what he meant by “consciousness”?

Sati answered: *“Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions.”*

The Buddha reprimanded him:

Misguided man, to whom have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma in that way? Misguided man, have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness?

Then the Buddha explained consciousness in detail to him:

Bhikkhus, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the nose and odors, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavors, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

Further, the Tathāgata used fire as a simile to explain it:

Just as fire is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it burns—when fire burns dependent on logs, it is reckoned as a log fire; when fire burns dependent on grass, it is reckoned as a grass fire.... So too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness...when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness. (MN 38)

The Blessed One compared the “consciousness aggregate” to a magician:

Suppose, bhikkhus, that a magician or a magician’s apprentice would display a magical illusion at a crossroads. A man with good sight would inspect it, ponder it, and carefully investigate it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in a magical illusion? So too, bhikkhus, whatever kind of consciousness there is, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near: a bhikkhu inspects it, ponders it, and carefully investigates it, and it would appear to him to be void, hollow, insubstantial. For what substance could there be in consciousness? (SN 22.95)

A magician, by means of magic tricks, creates various kinds of illusions to deceive spectators. In the same way, we are fooled by consciousness, considering the consciousness that sees and hears to be the same “self” that wanders through

the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Due to being unable to see the rapid arising and ceasing of consciousness in succession as it really is, or to see the function each consciousness plays, people mistakenly attach to the idea that consciousness is an immortal self. This is the way that consciousness deceives people.

Of the five aggregates, the form aggregate is materiality (*rūpa*) and the remaining four aggregates are mentality (*nāma*), thus the five aggregates are called *nāma rūpa*—mentality and materiality. The five aggregates of clinging, or *nāma rūpa*, are mutually dependent. From their mutual cooperation, the illusion of self arises and leads to the wrong view of “self-identification” or “personality view” (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*).

A certain bhikkhu once asked the Buddha:

Venerable sir, how does identity view come to be?

The Buddha explained it to him:

Here, bhikkhu, an untaught ordinary person...regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self...perception as self...formations as self...consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be. (MN 109)

To disentangle the net of identity view, Buddha urged practitioners to regard the five aggregates as: This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.

Bhikkhu, any kind of material form whatever, whether past or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—one sees all material form as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.’ Any kind of feeling whatever...Any kind of perception whatever...Any kind of formations whatever...Any kind of consciousness whatever...one sees all consciousness as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.’

Why are the five aggregates to be regarded as ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself?’ Simply because they are inconstant, suffering, and subject to change.

What do you think, bhikkhus? Are form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness constant or inconstant?

Inconstant, Venerable Sir.

Is what is inconstant suffering or happiness?

Suffering, Venerable Sir.

Is what is inconstant, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’?

No, Venerable Sir.

People tend to be ignorant of the teaching of the enlightened ones. They do not have a good understanding of the teachings of the wise and thus are not well trained in these teachings. They misunderstand the five aggregates to be “mine” (which corresponds to craving), “I” (which corresponds to conceit), and “myself” (which corresponds to wrong view), thus, clinging arises. The five aggregates are “conditioned phenomena” (*saṅkhāra dhamma*). They arise dependent upon other *dhammas*, or conditions. This implies that the five aggregates have no control of their own (*anatta*). They are impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and inconstant (*vipariṇāma*). If even a vast ocean can dry up, what can be said about the inconstant, changeable, temporary five aggregates? (MN 28) When the five aggregates change due to arising and ceasing or because of degeneration, immediately sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise. Thus, it is said, “The five aggregates of clinging are the noble truth of suffering.”

The noble truth of suffering should be fully understood. (SN 56.11)

The Buddha thoroughly understood it.

2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering

“The truth of the origin of suffering” (*samudayasacca*) is the second noble truth.

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving 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.

The Buddha said craving was the origin of suffering; it was the “origination” of the continuation of the cycle of birth and death.

When the Buddha attained supreme enlightenment, he said to himself:

Through many a birth in saṃsāra have I wandered in vain, seeking the builder of this house.³¹ Repeated birth is indeed suffering!

O house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again, for your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered.

My mind has reached the unconditioned; I have attained the destruction of craving.” (Dhp 153-154)

There are three kinds of craving:

1. Craving for sensual pleasures (kāmatanhā), namely the craving for form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects through the six sense doors. Are not our greedy eyes always seeking forms to see, especially agreeable and beautiful forms? When an agreeable form comes into contact with the eyes, we feel pleasant and gratified. This is how we enjoy sensual pleasures

³¹ The builder of the house is craving.

through the eyes. Same as with the other five sense objects.

2. Craving for becoming (*bhavatanhā*) is the craving for continued existence, associated with the view of eternalism. Such view believes that there is an eternal soul that transmigrates from one life to another life. It is a powerful craving that drives the incessant rounds of rebirth.

It is like a person who is drowning and suddenly sees some floating material. He will use all his strength to grasp it, even if it is a foul-smelling dead body, just to save his life.

Craving for becoming is driven by ignorance. That is, the ignorance of not understanding the Four Noble Truths.

3. Craving for Non-Becoming (*vibhavatanhā*) is the craving to not exist. It corresponds to the wrong view of annihilationism—the view that, when a person dies, nothing remains anymore and there is no effect of *kamma*.

Craving, expressing itself in various ways, is the cause of the arising of all suffering, and the root cause of incessant birth and death. Craving is just like honey: when ants find honey, they are very happy and immediately swarm into it, sipping it greedily. To the ants, this sweet thing can be a deadly poison, and, because they are not able to identify it as such, all of them eventually drown. Similarly, beings are deceived by ignorance and craving. Even though there is great danger

in sensual desires, they continue to cling and hold on to them tenaciously. Trapped in craving, we are bound in the whirlpool of repeated birth, unable to free ourselves.

Even though the numbers of Buddhas who have come into this world are as countless as the sands of the Ganges River, we are still drifting in stressful *saṃsāra*. The Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, I do not perceive any single fetter other than the fetter of craving by which beings are so tied and for so long a time run on and wander in saṃsāra. It is indeed through the fetter of craving that beings are tied and for a long time run on and wander in saṃsāra. (Iti 15)

It is interesting to investigate the question, “Where does craving arise, and where does it settle?”

Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. (SN 12:66)

We can investigate how delightful things cause craving in human history—relationships, power, sex, possessions, status, alcohol, identification with one’s career as a professor, scientist, etc., entertainment, and ideology, among others.

Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past, present, and future regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure; they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving, they nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition, they nurture suffering. (SN 12:66)

“The origin of suffering,” which is craving (*taṇhā*), should be totally cut off. The Buddha said, *“What should be cut off, I have cut off.”* By means of the path consciousness of arahantship, he cut off the craving that causes beings to drift in stressful *saṃsāra*.

3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

“The noble truth of the cessation of suffering” (*nirodhasacca*) is the third noble truth. As craving causes suffering, suffering can only be terminated when the craving is ended. The Buddha explained the Third Noble Truth as follows:

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: 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. (DN 22)

The cessation of suffering, or in other words, *nibbāna*, should be realized. The Blessed One said, *“What should be realized, I have realized.”*

How can we abandon craving and realize the cessation of suffering? By walking the Noble Eightfold Path.

4. The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering

“The path leading to the cessation of suffering” is the Noble Eightfold Path.

What, bhikkhus, is the path leading to the cessation of suffering? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right view,

right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

And what, bhikkhus, is right view? Knowledge of suffering, knowledge of the origin of suffering, knowledge of the cessation of suffering, knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: this is called right view.

Bhikkhus! What is right intention? Intention of renunciation, intention of good will, the intention of harmlessness: this is called right intention.

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.

And what, bhikkhus, is right action? Abstinence from the destruction of life, abstinence from taking what is not given, abstinence from sexual misconduct: this is called right action.

And what, bhikkhus, is right livelihood? Here a noble disciple, having abandoned a wrong mode of livelihood³², earns his living by a right livelihood: this is called right livelihood.

And what, bhikkhus, is right effort? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu generates desire for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy,

32 Abstaining from selling weapons, abstaining from selling animals for slaughtering, abstaining from human trafficking, abstaining from selling poisons, abstaining from selling intoxicants.

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.

And what, bhikkhus is right mindfulness? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body as a body³³, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells contemplating mind as mind, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells contemplating phenomena as phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. This is called right mindfulness.

And what, bhikkhus, is right concentration? Here, bhikkhus, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. With the

33 Body as a body means that the body should be contemplated simply as a body, not as a man, a woman, a self, or a living being. Similar contemplations apply to the feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and phenomena as phenomena.

subsiding of thought and examination, he enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which has internal confidence and unification of mind, is without thought and examination, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration. With the fading away as well of rapture, he dwells equanimous and, mindful and clearly comprehending, he experiences happiness with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the noble ones declare: 'He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.' With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither painful nor pleasant and includes the purification of mindfulness by equanimity. This is called right concentration.

This is the noble path leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Noble Eightfold Path can be divided into the threefold training: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*):

- Morality (*sīla*): right speech, right action, right livelihood
- Concentration (*samādhi*): right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration
- Wisdom (*paññā*): right view, right intention

“The Noble Eightfold Path” is also called the “Middle Way,” because it avoids two extremes:

1. Indulgence in sensual pleasure: *“This is low, vulgar, the way of ordinary people, unprofitable, harmful”* (SN

56.11). The *Bodhisatta* lived his royal, luxurious life for 28 years, but deep in his heart, he felt spiritual poverty. He understood that it was not the true path to liberation, but leads to mental degeneration and more lust.

2. Self-Mortification: *“This is painful, ignoble, and unprofitable”* (SN 56.11). The *Bodhisatta* himself practiced six painful years of self-mortification, thinking he could be liberated by it. After six years of painful struggling, he gained no insight. He finally realized such practice causes pain and weakens mental and physical health.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Buddha walked the middle path—The Noble Eightfold Path—to full development. Thus, the Buddha said, *“What should be developed, I have developed.”*

The Buddha completely awakened to The Four Noble Truths. He said to the brahmin Sela:

*What must be known is directly known,
What must be developed has been developed,
What must be abandoned has been abandoned,
Therefore, brahmin, I am a Buddha. (MN 92)*

Rare Is the Arising of the Buddha in This World

The most admirable point is that not only did the Buddha comprehend the Four Noble Truths for himself, but he was

also able to expound them so that all beings could benefit, awaken from ignorance, and reach the cessation of suffering.

Paccekabuddhas have also awakened to the Four Noble Truths, but they are unable to proclaim this profound teaching to others, to help others to be free from the suffering of the cycle of birth and death.

To become a *Sammāsambuddha*, it takes a *bodhisatta* a minimum of four incalculable aeons and 100,000 great aeons to accomplish the Ten Perfections. Hundreds of *paccekabuddhas* may appear in the same period, but there will never be two Buddhas at the same time. It is therefore very precious and extraordinary for a Buddha to appear in the world. As the Buddha said:

*It is difficult to be born a human;
Difficult is the life of mortals;
It is difficult to hear the true Dhamma
Difficult is the arising of Buddhas. (Dhp 182)*

The First Messengers of Truth (Dhammadūta)

Two months after the Buddha's enlightenment, sixty disciples from distinguished families had become his *arahant* disciples. Out of compassion for many, the Buddha decided to send them as messengers of truth to propagate the *Dhamma*. Before dispatching them in various directions, he exhorted them as follows:

Freed am I, O Bhikkhus, from all bonds, whether divine or human.

You, too, O Bhikkhus, are freed from all bonds, whether divine or human.

Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men.

Let not two go by one way: Preach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Bhikkhus, proclaim the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure, because there are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will fall away. There will be those who understand the Dhamma.

I too, O Bhikkhus, will wander elsewhere to preach the Dhamma.

The Buddha and his disciples, with no permanent abode, alone and penniless, with only robes and alms-bowl, like the bird only carries its wings, wandered from place to place to bring hope to people.



9.

Bhagavā

– The Blessed One

Every Buddha is called “The Blessed One – *Bhagavā*.” Blessed (*bhagavant*) is a term signifying the respect and veneration accorded to him as the highest of all beings, and also because of his special qualities.

Venerable Sāriputta said,

The Blessed One is not a name given by a mother, it is a name obtained after accomplishing final liberation, a name obtained by all Buddhas. The Blessed Ones realized omniscient knowledge and wisdom under the tree of enlightenment.

The Buddha realized omniscient knowledge, which brought blessings and benefit to all beings; thus, he is “The Blessed One.” What blessings does the Buddha have?

The Buddha is blessed with many “auspicious” qualities: he has uprooted all mental defilements; he has crossed the ocean of *saṃsāra*, and landed on the shore of liberation; he has made an end of any kind of becoming; he has developed fully virtue, concentration and wisdom; and he has obtained mundane and supra-mundane bliss. Thus, he is blessed.

Because the Buddha is blessed with these “auspicious” qualities, laypeople can rely upon him; and because he is blessed with the quality of “destroying evil,” *samaṇa* (seekers of the truth) can rely on him. By taking refuge in the Buddha, and following his teaching, beings are protected and freed from fear, and there is also the possibility of obtaining mundane and supra-mundane bliss.

The Buddha is called “The Blessed One” because he is skilled in analyzing and classifying *dharmas* into wholesome or unwholesome, five aggregates (*khandha*), six sense bases (*āyatana*), eighteen elements (*dhātu*), four noble truths (*sacca*), five sense faculties (*indriya*), and dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

He is also called “The Blessed One” because he is a partaker of ten powers of a *Tathāgata*. What are the ten? The Buddha asked venerable Sāriputta:

Sāriputta, the Tathāgata has these ten Tathāgata’s powers, possessing which he claims the herd-leader’s place, roars his lion’s roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma. What are the ten?

The Ten Powers of the Buddha

1. *Here, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible.*
2. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the results of actions undertaken, past, future, and present, with possibilities and with causes.*
3. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the ways leading to all destinations.*
4. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the world with its many and different elements.”³⁴*
5. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is how beings have different inclinations.*
6. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the disposition of the faculties of other beings, other persons.*
7. *Again, the Tathāgata understands as it actually is the defilement, the cleansing, and the emergence in regard to the jhānas, liberations, concentrations, and attainments.*
8. *Again, the Tathāgata recollects his manifold past lives, that is, one birth, five births, ten births, twenty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: ‘There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment,*

34 See MN 115.

such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared here.'

9. *Again, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, the Tathāgata sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and he understands how beings pass on according to their actions thus: 'These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of noble ones, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell; but these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.'*
10. *Again, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, the Tathāgata here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints. (MN 12)*

Further, we respectfully address the Buddha as “The Blessed One” because he possessed six mundane *dharmas*, namely: lordship, doctrine, fame, glory, wish, and effort.

1. Lordship: The Buddha has unsurpassable lordship over his mind. His wisdom clearly sees all how phenomena—both internal and external—are governed by the law of causality and are mere empty illusions.
2. Doctrine: The Buddha knew the nine supra-mundane *dhammas*, namely the Four Paths (*sotāpatti-magga*, *sakadāgāmī-magga*, *anāgāmī-magga*, and *arahatta-magga*), the Four Fruits (*sotāpatti-phala*, *sakadāgāmī-phala*, *anāgāmī-phala*, and *arahatta-phala*), and *nibbāna*.
3. Fame: The fame of the Buddha is spread throughout the sensual realm, the fine material realm, and the immaterial realm.
4. Glory: The Buddha has glory in physical form—perfect in all limbs and an extraordinarily dignified appearance, giving gladness and comforting all who see him. The merits accumulated from eons of practicing *pāramī* resulted in the Buddha having the Thirty-two Marks of a Great Man.

At the time of the Buddha, there was a leading *brahmin* whose name was Sela, an expert in the marks of a great man. When he saw the thirty-two marks in the physical body of the Buddha, he immediately extolled the perfect physical body of the Buddha in this way:

*O perfect in body, well-favored,
Well-fashioned and lovely to behold;
O Blessed One, golden is your color,
And white your teeth; you are strong.*

*The features are seen one and all
That distinguish a man as well born;
They are all to be found on your body,
These marks that reveal a great man.*

He then led his three-hundred disciples to receive the going forth under the Blessed One. Dwelling alone, diligent, and resolute, they soon became *arahants*. (MN 92)

Besides being possessed of a perfect physical body, the Buddha also possessed purified speech, and a pleasant and comforting voice that soothed the heart of others, like in the story of Yasa.

Yasa, a millionaire's son, led a luxurious life. One morning he rose early and, to his utter disgust, saw his female attendants and musicians asleep in a repulsive manner. The whole spectacle was so disgusting that the palace presented the gloomy appearance of a charnel house. Realizing the vanities of worldly life, he stole away from home, saying, "Distressed am I, oppressed am I," and went in the direction of Isipatana, where the Buddha was residing temporarily.

Seeing the distressed man coming from afar, the Buddha with his comforting voice, said, "*Here, there is no distress, O Yasa! Here, there is no oppression, O Yasa! Come hither, Yasa! Take a seat. I shall expound the Dhamma to you.*" The distressed Yasa was pleased to hear the comforting voice of the Buddha. He

approached the Buddha, respectfully saluted him, and sat on one side. The Buddha expounded the doctrine to him, and Yasa was established in stream-entry.

5. Wish: When helping others to abstain from evil, to do good, and to purify the mind for one's own benefit and for the benefit of others, the Buddha could successfully accomplish his task as he wished.
6. Effort: The Buddha never felt weary of guiding others to enlightenment. From the first time the Buddha expounded his teaching to the five ascetics with the “*Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma*” sutta (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, SN 56.11), to the conversion of his last disciple, Subhadda, in Kusinara, the Buddha showed the same relentless effort and compassion. Even in his last moments, when the Buddha was about to enter *parinibbāna*, he still gave advice to his disciples:

*Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena
sampādetthā.*

*All conditioned phenomena are subject to decay;
strive on with heedfulness. (DN 16)*

The teacher who deserves veneration—Blessed is the name.



PART III

RECOLLECTING THE BUDDHA'S VIRTUES

Inspirations from Recollecting the Buddha's Virtues

In his lifetime, the Buddha searched for the Truth, realized the Truth, and expounded the Truth. We may recollect the Buddha's boundless compassion towards all beings, his relentless endeavor guiding himself and others across the ocean of rebirths, his perfect equanimity towards praise and blame, his patience and forgiveness towards misguided people, his restraint of body, speech, and mind through mindfulness, and his freedom from defilements through wisdom deliverance. When we recollect these virtues of the Buddha, we will be inspired to do good.

We will become more patient and tolerant, and more mindful of our body, speech, and mind. Conscience and moral fear will always be with us. We are eager to improve ourselves for the better. Using the flawless, perfect virtues of the Buddha as our guide can lend an invisible strength on the path of purification; it urges us to be heedful and not be heedless.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha spent most of his time teaching the *Dhamma* to benefit others. Our task as disciples of the Buddha is only to purify our own defilements. Shouldn't we strive to keep from being negligent, sluggish, and heedless, and work towards our own liberation?

A Shoulder to Rely On

When the Buddha's virtues arouse our faith through frequent and devoted contemplation, they can protect us and keep us from danger. The Buddha said,

If there is anyone who frequently recollects the Buddha's virtues and has unshakeable faith in the Buddha, he can avoid evil and danger, and be protected.

Becoming the Object of Concentration Meditation

Recollecting the Buddha's virtues can also be an object of concentration meditation. When the mind long dwells on the Buddha's virtues, the mind becomes purified and joyful. Such joy not only helps us dispel sloth and torpor in meditation practice, but leads to concentration. Joy calms the restless mind, and the mind becomes tranquil. Tranquility causes happiness, and happiness causes concentration. The yogi can reach access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) by recollecting the virtues of the Buddha.

At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Tathāgata, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His

mind heads straight, based on the Tathāgata. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated. (AN 11.13)

By means of *upacāra-samādhi*, the yogi can practice insight to penetrate the three common characteristics of the five aggregates: impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

For example, Phussadeva Thera took “recollection of the Buddha” as his daily practice and when he reached access concentration, he proceeded to insight. This was his usual practice.

Māra, the evil one, frequently changed himself into a fierce animal to disturb Phussadeva Thera. Once, the Thera said to the demon, “Since you are so mighty, are you also able to change yourself into a Buddha?” Māra at once changed his form into a Buddha. When looking at Māra, who had changed his form into a Buddha, Phussadeva Thera was amazed and thought: “Even him the Evil One, with the form of Buddha—looks so dignified. But doesn’t the real Buddha, who is free from greed, aversion, and delusion, look more dignified and shine more brightly?”

Thus, using the Buddha’s virtues as his meditation object, joy arose in the Thera, and he immediately achieved access concentration and then continued to insight meditation.

With mature insight, he cut off the shackles of ignorance and craving that bind every being, and attained release.



How to Practice Recollection of the Virtues of the Buddha (*Buddhanussati*)

As mentioned before, a person with a faithful temperament is suitable to take the specific meditation subject of recollecting Buddha's virtues. In this practice, one recollects one or more virtues of the Buddha. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the nine virtues of the Buddha with all their meanings first. The systematic way is as follows:

(1) Verbal recitation

Sitting straight, preferably in front of an altar where the Buddha's serene statue is placed, one begins with the verbal recitation as:

Iti'pi so Bhagavā:

- (1) *Arahaṃ,*
- (2) *Sammāsambuddho,*
- (3) *Vijjā Caraṇa Sampanno,*
- (4) *Sugato,*
- (5) *Lokaṇidū,*
- (6) *Anuttaro Purisadammasārathi,*
- (7) *Satthā Deva Manussānaṃ,*
- (8) *Buddho,*
- (9) *Bhagavā.*

Most Asian Buddhists are able to recite Buddha's virtues in Pāli, though they may not fully understand the meanings well. If you have difficulty reciting the nine virtues of the Buddha in Pāli, you can try to recite them in English. Verbal recitation is very helpful for beginners to stop their “monkey mind,” so that the mind stays with the object. As you continue reciting in this way, you will find your mind settling down gradually.

(2) Mental recitation

Next, move on to mental recitation—silently recite the nine virtues of the Buddha in the mind again and again. Then, gradually drop some of the virtues that are not so clear in your mind, but focus on one, two, or three virtues that inspire you. For example, if you take the virtue of *Arahaṃ* to contemplate, you should recollect the definition of it with the mental recitation of ‘*Arahaṃ Arahaṃ Arahaṃ...*’ It is good if you can also have the Buddha’s image in your mind. Choose one of the images that gladden your heart.

(3) Dropping the words

When concentration develops, the mind will stay with the virtue of the Buddha rather than with the words. Then let the mind settle on the chosen virtue of the Buddha! Joy and rapture will arise as concentration develops further.

(4) Attaining access concentration

When one overcomes the five hindrances of sensual desire, ill-will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt, the mind firmly establishes on the virtue of the Buddha. Happiness arises within. With the mind happy, bodily and mental disturbances are tranquilized. When the bodily and mental disturbances are tranquilized, taking the special quality of the Buddha as object, one reaches access concentration.



Frequently Recollect the Virtues of the Buddha

The Buddha exhorted Mahānāma, the Sākyan:

Mahānāma, you should develop this recollection of the Buddha while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children. (AN 11.13)

As you recollect the supreme virtues of the Buddha in your daily practice, it will gradually lead to self-awakening.

One thing—when developed and pursued—leads solely to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding. Which one thing? Recollection of the Buddha. This is one thing that—when developed and pursued—leads solely to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding. (AN 1:296)

May all beings be liberated and realize *nibbāna* soon!

*Those disciples of Gotama ever awaken,
Who constantly practice happily by day and by night,
The recollection of the qualities of the Buddha. (Dhp 296)*



*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti,
Sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso jināti,
Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti,
Taṇhakkhayo sabbadukkhāṃ jināti.*

*The gift of Dhamma surpasses all gifts, the taste of
Dhamma surpasses all tastes, the joy of Dhamma
surpasses all joys, the destruction of craving conquers all
sufferings. (Dhp 354)*

Ciraṃ Tiṭṭhatu Saddhammo!

May the true *Dhamma* last for a long time!
Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

—Sayalay Susilā, 13-1-2019



APPENDIX 1: FOUR WORLDS, THIRTY-ONE PLANES OF EXISTENCE

Destination	Four Worlds		Thirty-one Planes of Existence
Pleasant	Immaterial World (4)	(4)	31. Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception
			30. Sphere of Nothingness
			29. Sphere of Infinite Consciousness
			28. Sphere of Infinite Space
	Fine Material World (16)	Fourth Jhāna (7)	27. World of Peerless Devas
			26. World of Clear-sighted Devas
			25. World of Beautiful Devas
			24. World of Untroubled Devas
			23. World of Not Falling Away Devas
			22. World of Unconscious Beings
			21. World of Very Fruitful Devas
		Third Jhāna (3)	20. World of Devas of Refulgent Glory
			19. World of Devas of Unbounded Glory
			18. World of Devas of Limited Glory
		Second Jhāna (3)	17. World of Devas of Streaming Radiance
			16. World of Devas of Unbounded Radiance
		First Jhāna (3)	15. World of Devas of Limited Radiance
			14. World of Great Brahma
			13. World of Ministers of Brahma
			12. World of Retinue of Brahma
	Sensual World (7)	(7)	11. World of Devas Wielding Power over the Creation of Others
			10. World of Devas Delighting in Creation
			9. World of Contented Devas
			8. World of Yama Devas
			7. World of Thirty-three Gods
			6. World of the Four Great Kings
Unpleasant	Woeful States (4)	(4)	5. World of Human Beings
			4. <i>Asura</i>
			3. Hungry Ghost
			2. Animal
			1. Hell Realms

Note: the number in parentheses indicates the total numbers of worlds and planes in each destiny, in each world

*Happy is the birth of the Buddhas,
Happy is the exposition of the Dhamma,
Happy is the harmony of the community of the Sangha,
Happy are the harmonious practitioners of Truth.*
(Dhp 194)

Every faithful disciple of the Buddha is encouraged to recollect the attributes and virtues of the Buddha daily by reciting the chant, which should be based upon a foundation of faith, confidence, and gratitude, and with a clear aspiration to walk the path walked by the Buddha—a path comprising compassion, wisdom, and liberation. Furthermore, the recollection should be rendered with reverence and sincere acknowledgment of each of the special attributes to fully understand and emulate the depth of the Buddha's virtues. This book provides the in-depth meaning of each attribute, together with examples, stories, and quotes from the suttas. These narratives help drive home the significance and value of recalling the Buddha's attributes with the goal of living life based on the principles and virtues he embodied.



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