

## 4

## Levels of Learning

Theme: On the nature and progress of spiritual maturation  
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## 1 Readying the mind for Dharma

**1.1 THE TWO PERIODS AND THE BUDDHA'S METHODS.** During the Buddha's 45 years of public ministry, he teaches the Dharma to various kinds of persons of different levels of spiritual maturity. The Buddha generally teaches the Dharma depending on the readiness of the audience[2], making use of two levels of language [3] and two levels of truth [4]. Often, the Buddha would apply both levels of teaching, speaking on *the story level*, using figures, parables and stories, and on *the Dharma level*, using concepts and Dharma language. Individually, however, each of us progresses on three levels, namely, those of knowledge, understanding and transformation [5].

We can roughly divide the Buddha's ministry into two unequal periods: the first period, lasting between 10 to 20 years, and the second period, taking up the rest of his ministry. During **the first period**, the Buddha focuses on teaching the most ready of listeners, the spiritually mature, who would awaken on hearing the Dharma, and become saints, even arhats. Even these early saints and arhats are not all of the same spiritual level when they first encounter the Buddha Dharma. The levels and nature of their individual spiritual progress are varied [6+7]. Understandably, the Buddha first approaches those who are "intuitive (or quick) learners" (*ugghaṭitaññū*) [2.1], as they are the best field for Dharma growth.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 STAGES OF EFFECTIVE DISCOURSE

**1.2.1** A wise and compassionate teacher, it is often said in the suttas, will "instruct, inspire, rouse and gladden" his audience with the Dharma.<sup>2</sup> This action sequence reflects the basic structure of the Buddha's method of **the gradual teaching**.<sup>3</sup>

<u>sequence</u>		<u>activity</u>	<u>the audience's minds</u>
(1) he instructs	<i>sandasseti</i>	the Dharma is shown	pliant and prepared
(2) he inspires	<i>samādapeti</i>	the audience is filled with enthusiasm	free from obstacles
(3) he rouses	<i>samuttejeti</i>	they are fired with conviction and commitment	uplifted
(4) he gladdens	<i>sampahamseti</i>	they are filled with joy	lucid

The Commentaries<sup>4</sup> explain that by **instructing**, the Buddha removes the listeners' delusion, that is, on account of joy, their minds become pliant and prepared. By **inspiring** them, heedlessness is dispelled, that is, their minds are free from obstacles. By **rousing** them, indolence is expelled, that is, by uplifting them with inspiration; and by **gladdening**, brings the practice to a conclusion, that is, their minds become lucid, ready for deeper Dharma. In short, when we teach the Dharma to benefit others, we should do our best to bring instruction, inspiration, motivation and joy to the audience.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Further see **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (1.3).

<sup>2</sup> *Dhammiyā kathāya sandasseti samādapeti samuttejeti sampahamseti*: M 1:176×2, 177×2, 2:123×4, 139×2, 140, 3:189; S 1:112×2, 113×3, 114, 189, 190, 192×2, 210, 2:280×3; A 3.90/1:236, 237, 4.48/2:51×3, 9.4/4:358; U 74×2, 80×3, 81. These 4 qualities are, in fact, the sixth or last of the ideal skills of a Dharma speaker: see (**Dhamma Desaka**) **Udāyi S** (A 5.159/3:184), SD 46.1; **Kathāvatthu S** (A 3.67/1:197-199), SD 46.11; & on the Buddha's treatment of visitors, see **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), SD 11.4 (4).

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see **Candūpama S** (S 16.3/2:197-199), SD 38.2 (4.2.3); (**Dhamma Desaka**) **Udāyi S** (A 5.159/3:184), SD 46.1; Nett §28/5; UA:M 2:911 n103. See also SID: desanā 4.

<sup>4</sup> Eg DA 1:293; UA 242; cf VA 1:65; MA 2:35.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis, see L S Cousins, review of Ñāṇamoli/Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 1995: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/04/cous1.pdf> 1997: 260-280.

When the Buddha first teaches his audience who are very new to the Dharma, only after “having instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened them with a Dharma talk,”<sup>6</sup> or, in this case, with a “gradual talk” (*ānupubbī,kathā*), to settle and prepare their minds before he goes on to advanced teachings, such as the 4 noble truths. The “gradual talk” stock-passage runs as follows:

Then, the Blessed One gave him a gradual teaching—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), on moral virtue (*sīla*) and on the heavens (*sagga*); he explained the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures (*kām’ādīnava*); and the advantages of renunciation (*nek-khamm’ānisamsa*).

When the Blessed One perceived that the listener’s mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsikaṃ desanā*),<sup>7</sup> that is to say: suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.

(V 1:15; D 1:148; A 3:184, etc.)

**1.2.2** This progressive Dharma instruction leading up to gladness should be called “**the dhamma,-kathā sequence**” or “the Dharma-talk formula.” On a practical level, this is also the basic progress in a Dharma talk, a Dharma study and Buddhist counselling.

When presenting the Dharma for instruction, admonition or healing, we start off to instruct our audience by simply stating the passage or teaching (a suitable Dharma). The passage origins and context are explained; difficult words, phrases and passages are clarified. In other words, it is explained on the *word* level.

Then, we inspire the audience by explaining its significance, such as why the Buddha or the teacher in a certain sutta has given the teaching. We could relate the teaching or sutta to other teachings or suttas for a bigger picture. In doing so, we begin to show the significance of the sutta as a tool for personal development or awakening.

Next, we rouse the audience by reminding them that the sutta or teaching is addressing them in some way. The teaching is not a dead letter, but an instruction manual, as it were, for our personal effort towards mental cultivation and personal happiness. Indeed, the sutta is a call to personal initiative in Dharma practice.

Finally, we gladden the audience with the Dharma by declaring that the spiritual effort has already begun in a small way. The very fact that we are gathered in the Dharma, listening to it, shows how fortunate we are to be still in touch with the Buddha himself, as it were. When we gather in the Dharma, we are in the Buddha’s presence.

“He who sees the Dharma, sees me; he who sees me, sees the Dharma.” (S 22.87.13/3:120)<sup>8</sup>

## 2 The 4 types of learners<sup>9</sup>

**2.1 LEARNING RATES.** Not all those who meet the Buddha or an arhat are able to awaken at once. It is like sick people seeing a doctor: some heal faster than others; some need more intensive care. There are those, like the wanderer **Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya**, who, upon listening to the Buddha’s teaching gain arhat-hood even as laymen.<sup>10</sup> Then, there are those like the monk **Māluṅkyā,putta** who spend much of their

<sup>6</sup> *Dhammiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādapetvā samuṭṭejetvā sampahamsetvā*: D 1:126, 149, 2:86, 98, 109, 110, 127, 3:27, 209; M 1:209, 354, 2:139, 3:155; S 2:215, 4:183, 5:155; A 6.56/3:380, 7.50/4:67, 8.12/4:188, 4:307, 308, 10.67/5:122, 10.68/5:125; U 4.3/39,2, 8.5/82,21, 8.6/87,26; V 1:18, 39, 105, 213, 218, 223, 228, 233, 238, 243, 244, 249, 350, 352, 2:129, 158, 200, 201, 3:11×2, 4:56, 79.

<sup>7</sup> On *sāmukkaṃsika*, see (Dasaka) Uttiya S (A 10.93,3.1) n, SD 44.13.

<sup>8</sup> What is meant here is not some kind of pantheistic immanence of the Buddha, but our vision into the true nature of reality (*yathā,bhūta*) where “seeing is not by the eye but by insight” (DhsA 350). In this connection, see **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119 -124) & **Vakkali-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 25.11/4:118 f), both in SD 8.8.

<sup>9</sup> A similar write-up, but slightly shorter, is found at SD 10.7 (3).

<sup>10</sup> (**Arahatta**) **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10/6-9) & SD 33.7 (3).

life discussing philosophical questions,<sup>11</sup> and then go into solitary retreat and attain arhathood only late in their life.<sup>12</sup> Someone like the elder **Ānanda**, the Buddha's personal attendant, remains only a streamwinner while the Buddha lives, but receiving constant guidance from the Buddha.<sup>13</sup> However, the Buddha also patiently instructs the slowest of the monastics, such as the elder **Cūḷa Panthaka**, as long as they are willing to learn and practise.<sup>14</sup>

The first 4 kinds of saints (that is, the streamwinner, the once-returned, the non-returned and the arhat) are the classic examples of the 4 types of practitioners or "learners,"<sup>15</sup> that is, according to the time that they have taken to understand the teachings and awaken to any of these levels of sainthood. That is to say, they may start off as any of these kinds of learners:<sup>16</sup>

- (1) The intuitive learner (*ugghaṭitaññū*), a genius, one who fully understands from only a brief instruction.
  - (2) The diffuse learner (*vipañcitaññū*), the intellectual, one who understands after some detailed explanation.
  - (3) The tractable learner (*neyya*), one who needs some guidance or is capable of being trained.
  - (4) The word learner (*pada.pārama*), one who only knows a teaching at the word or literal level.
- (A 4.133/2:135; Pug 4.5/41; Nett 41/7, 743/125; MA 3:178, 5:60)<sup>17</sup>

**2.2 SPIRITUAL FACULTIES.** The suttas often speak of applying **the 5 spiritual faculties** (*pañc'indriya*)—the faculty of faith, of effort, of mindfulness, of concentration, and of wisdom—in terms of Dharma training.<sup>18</sup> When the five spiritual faculties work for these 4 types of persons, we can, for example, see the two levels of faith (*saddhā*): as a spiritual faculty (*indriya*) and as a spiritual power (*bala*). "The faculty of faith" (*saddh'indriya*) is "ordinary faith" (*pakati saddhā*), while "the power of faith" (*saddhā,bala*) or "wise faith" (*avecca-p,pasāda*) is "faith through cultivation" (*bhāvanā saddhā*).<sup>19</sup> While a spiritual faculty (*indriya*) is a fledgling quality, not always present or only in a weak form, a spiritual power (*bala*) is a saint's inherent quality, always present and potent. Let us see how the spiritual faculties work for each of the 4 kinds of persons.

**2.2.1 The intuitive or quick learner** (*ugghaṭitaññū*), one who, like Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya [2.1], is able to understand the teaching even from a brief statement. He has great wisdom (*paññā*) and concentration (*samādhi*), and as long as he is unawakened, needs to balance his wisdom with faith (*saddhā*) (that is, wise faith). His thinking has to be harmonized with wholesome feeling.

The quick learner, for example, might be impatient with slow learners: as such, he has to cultivate lovingkindness and patience. Such a person, for example, might be drawn to breath meditation, but he would need to balance his practice with the cultivation of lovingkindness.

<sup>11</sup> **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63/1:426-432), SD 5.8 & **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64/1:432-437), SD 21.10; (**Ṭaṇhā**) **Māluṅkyā,putta S** (A 4.254/2:248 f), SD 84.10; **Tha** 399-404; 794-817 = S 35.95 (SD 5.9).

<sup>12</sup> **Māluṅkyā,putta S** (S 35.95/4:72-75), SD 5.9.

<sup>13</sup> **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) records Ānanda as lamenting, "Alas! I am still a learner [here, a streamwinner] with much more to do! And the Teacher is attaining parinirvana—he who is so kind to me!" (D 16.5.13/2:142), SD 9. His attaining arhathood is reported at Cv 11.1.6 @ V 2:286.

<sup>14</sup> DhA 2.3/1:243-247; AA 1:209-220; J 4 = 1:114-123; also Divy 35.483-515.

<sup>15</sup> "Learner" (*sekha*) is a tt meaning that these saints still have "something" to learn or cultivate before attaining arhathood. The typology here describes *how* they learn. This typology also includes ordinary (worldling) learners, both monastic and lay.

<sup>16</sup> Here, "learner" simply means one who able to understand the Dharma, and has no technical sense of *sekha*, which refers to the first 3 kinds of saints, and the arhat-to-be. See \*\*\*.

<sup>17</sup> Also listed in **Ugghaṭitaññū S** (A 4.143), SD 3.13(3.3). On the psychological context of the 4 kinds of persons & the 5 spiritual faculties, see **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44), SD 10.7 (2+3).

<sup>18</sup> Eg **Sarakāṇi S**, S 55.24/5:377 = SD 3.6.

<sup>19</sup> "Ordinary faith" and "faith through cultivation" are Ledi Sayadaw's terms: see *The Manuals of Buddhism*, Rangoon: Union Buddha Sāsana Council, 1965:340 f.

Another example of the intuitive learner is the elder **Sāriputta**, who on hearing just the first two lines of a quatrain from Assaji, attains the fruit of streamwinning (V 1:40; J 1:85).<sup>20</sup> The intuitive learner’s mind is very well developed, and in this connection, the elder **Sambhūta** is one who attained liberation through having cultivated his mind (*cittaṃ dhuraṃ katvā*).<sup>21</sup>

**2.2.2 The intellectual** (*vipañcitaññū*) or a diffuse learner or “scholar” who is able to understand a teaching from some involved talk, discussion, reading or study, too, needs to balance this ability with wise faith. However, as he is only an intellectual, but not as adept as the intuitive learner, the intellectual has to cultivate mindfulness, too. In fact, mindfulness is necessary to all types of learners, as it acts as the “moderator” of the spiritual faculties—harmonizing faith and wisdom, and harmonizing concentration and effort.

Like the quick learner, the intellectual might be impatient with slower learners. As such, he has to cultivate lovingkindness and patience. The intellectual would find it easy to do breath meditation, but he would need to balance his practice with the cultivation of lovingkindness. The intellectual has an investigative mind and learns best through detailed instructions. An example of one who gains liberation through mental investigation (*vīmaṃsaṃ dhuraṃ katvā*) is the elder **Mogha,rāja**.<sup>22</sup>

When these two kinds of individuals—the quick learner and the intellectual—are spiritually developed and liberated, they are called Dharma-followers (*dhammānussarī*):

**The Dharma-follower.**<sup>23</sup> Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess wise confidence in *the Three Jewels*. He is not one of joyous wisdom,<sup>24</sup> nor of quick wisdom,<sup>25</sup> and he has not attained liberation. However, he has these five things [the five spiritual faculties]—the faculty of faith, the faculty of effort, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of wisdom. And he accepts the teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata only after some pondering over it with wisdom.<sup>26</sup>

This person, too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal kingdom, the preta realm and the suffering states. (Sarakāṇi Sutta, S 55.24/5:377)

<sup>20</sup> According to the Pali tradition, the verse and story run as follows:

Of all things that arise from a cause,	<i>Ye dhammā hetu-p,pabhavā</i>
Their cause the Tathāgata has told.	<i>tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha</i>

As soon as Upatissa (Sāriputta) heard these first two lines, he was established in the fruit of streamwinning. Then Assaji completed the stanza:

And also how these cease to be—	<i>tesaṃ ca yo nirodho</i>
This too the great sage has told.	<i>evaṃ vādī mahā,samaṇo</i> (V 1:40; J 1:85)

<sup>21</sup> Tha 291-294; Ap 1:204 f; DA 2:642; SA 3:256; VbhA 306; cf DhsA 69.

<sup>22</sup> Sn 1116-1119; DA 2:642; SA 3:256; VbhA 306; cf DhsA 69.

<sup>23</sup> “Dharma-follower,” *dhammānussarī*. Although not mentioned here, this section describes the Dharma-follower, while the next section describes the faith-follower (*saddhā’nussarī*). See **Sarakāṇi S** (55.24/5:377); they are defined in **Kiṭṭāgiri S** (M 70.20-21/1:479). According to **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), these two types of persons have reached the plane of the noble ones but have not yet realized the fruit of stream-winning, but will do so before they die. See S:B 1098 nn268-269

<sup>24</sup> “Of joyous wisdom,” *hāsa,pañña*, alt tr “of laughing wisdom” (from *hasa*, “laughter, mirth, joy”). “Here one with much joy [laughter], mirth, contentment and gladness perfects the virtues: this is joyous wisdom” (Pm 21.17/2:199 f). Comys mention *hasa,paññā* (joyous wisdom), *javana,paññā* (quick wisdom) [see foll n], *tikkha,paññā* (sharp wisdom, which cuts off all defilements) and *nibbedhika,paññā* (penetrating wisdom, by which one maintains dispassion toward all formations) (DA 3:391-393, 4:84-86; MA 4:84; SA 1:120-123, 2:85 f; AA 2:85; ThaA 3:106 f; NmA 1:231 f; cf PmA 3:640 on *hasa,paññā*).

<sup>25</sup> “Of quick wisdom,” *javana,pañña*. This refers to one who quickly understands that the five aggregates are all impermanent, suffering and non-self (Pm 21.18/2:200). See prev n.

<sup>26</sup> *C’assa dhammā paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*. I render *mattaso* here as “only...some”. See S:B 1099 n269.

**2.2.3 The one who needs guidance** (*neyya*) tends to rely on faith (*saddhā*), which the wise teacher uses to lead him to wisdom. It is often easier for such a person to cultivate lovingkindness, which means that he would benefit from a balanced practice with breath meditation. Breath meditation helps to focus and clear his mind so that he is able to understand the teaching better. The guided learner has to put forth effort (*virīya*) to cultivate wisdom, since he is likely to be dependent on others for his understanding or seek their approval, rather than think for himself.

An example of one who needs guidance through faith is the elder **Ratṭha,pāla**, who is declared to be foremost of the monks who renounced through faith (*saddhā,pabbajitānam*, A 1:24). Like those of this level of learning, Ratṭhapāla also has a strong resolution (*chanda*), cultivating the will to act (*chandam dhuram katvā*), to find liberation through spiritual cultivation.<sup>27</sup> **The Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta** (M 90/2:-125-133)<sup>28</sup> is cited as an example of a discourse given to those who need guidance (MA 3:361).

**2.2.4 The rote learner** (*pada,parama*), that is, one who only knows the *word* of the teaching at best, and tends to accept them literally. He is totally dependent on the guidance of others, and as such is likely to be faith-inclined. Hence, he may easily fall into cognitive faith (often a characteristic of the academically inclined), and who tends to regard those who appear to know better than him, or who are charismatic to be right and respectable, and, as such, it is proper to believe and follow such people.

The rote-learner has to be inspired to put forth much effort to build his mindfulness, and is often emotionally dependent on an authority figure. He should practise both breath meditation and lovingkindness meditation in a balanced and harmonious manner to build wise faith.

The most famous example of the rote learner is the elder **Cūla Panthaka**, who, when newly ordained, cannot remember even a single stanza of teaching in the course of four months. His brother asks him to leave the order, and he contemplates on doing so. Learning of this, the Buddha teaches him a special but simple meditation, as a result of which he becomes a full-fledged arhat.<sup>29</sup>

The elder **Soṇa Koḷivisa**, after receiving a meditation subject from the Buddha, goes into retreat but his progress is severely impaired because he has too many visitors. He struggles in his meditation, especially the walking meditation until his feet bleeds. The Buddha then admonishes him on the middle way. The elder Soṇa is an example of one who exerts great effort (*viriyam dhuram katvā*)<sup>30</sup> and is declared as the foremost of those monks who put forth effort (*aggam āraddha, viriyānam*, A 1:24).

When these two kinds of individuals—the one who needs guidance and the rote learner—are spiritually developed and liberated, they are called faith-followers (*saddhānussarī*):

**The faith-follower.**<sup>31</sup> Here, Mahānāma, some person does not possess wise confidence in the Buddha, in the Dharma and in the Sangha. He is not one of joyous wisdom, nor of quick wisdom, and he has not attained liberation. However, he has the 5 spiritual faculties. And he holds just a bit of faith in the Tathāgata, just a bit of love for him.<sup>32</sup>

This person, too, Mahānāma, is freed from hell, the animal kingdom, the preta realm and the suffering states.

<sup>27</sup> M 82; DA 2:642; SA 3:256; DhA 4:95; VbhA 306; cf DhsA 69.

<sup>28</sup> See **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90), SD 10.8 (5).

<sup>29</sup> See SD 43.4 (3.3); esp **Cūla Panthaka Thera Vatthu**, SD 92.3. Tha 557-566; AA 1:215-220; DhA 1:239-255, 4:180; J 1:114-123; ThaA 2:236-242; ApA 317-321; Vism 388 f.

<sup>30</sup> V 1:179-185; A 3:374-379; Tha 632-644; DA 2:642; SA 3:256; VbhA 306; cf DhsA 69.

<sup>31</sup> “Faith-follower,” *saddhā’nussarī*. See n1 on Dharma-follower.

<sup>32</sup> “Just a bit of faith...just a bit of love,” *saddhā,matam hoti pema,mattam*. The “just a bit” here emphasizes the quality it qualifies. A similar statement is found in **Alagaddūpamā S** (M 22.4/1:141) & **Bhaddāli S** (M 1:444/65.27): “Those who have just a bit of faith in me and just a bit of love for me,” (*yesam mayi saddhā,mattam pema,mattam*). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even streamwinning, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has “just a bit of faith, just a bit of love” in the Buddha are reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

Even these great sal trees,<sup>33</sup> Mahānāma, if they could understand what is well spoken and what is ill spoken, I would declare them to be streamwinners, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of going over to self-awakening!

(Paṭhama Sarakāṇi Sutta, S 55.24,12.6/5:377) + SD 3.6 (4)

### 3 The two methods of teaching

**3.1 EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT TEACHINGS.** The Buddha, when teaching others, addresses them according to their level of intelligence and spiritual maturity, their strength of their minds and the openness of their hearts. For each individual, too, if there is a need, he would answer his queries or present the Dharma on two levels: the explicit and the implicit. The *explicit* teaching is generally self-explanatory and addresses our intellectual capacity, while the *implicit* teaching addresses our hearts. It remains implicit until our hearts open to its truth and beauty.

Even in our daily mundane communications, often enough, we would speak explicitly or directly in terms of ideas and concepts (such as “I like this book,” or “Let’s have some food,”), or, we speak implicitly or figuratively to clarify or stress a point (such as “This book is a rare gem,” or “The meditation retreat is heavenly”).

In the suttas or any authentic record we have of the Buddha Word, too, we need to distinguish between these two modes of speaking: the explicit and the implicit. This admonition is clearly preserved in **the Neyy’attha Nī’tattha Sutta** (A 2.3.4+5) (the Discourse on the Explicit and the Implicit), a short Sutta that says:

Bhikshus, there are these two who misrepresent the Tathagata. What are the two?

(1) Those who explain the sutta teaching whose sense is explicit [has been drawn out] (*nīta*) to be implicit [to be drawn out] (*neyya*).

(2) Those who explain the sutta teaching whose sense is implicit [to be drawn out] (*neyya*) to be explicit [has been drawn out] (*nīta*).

These, bhikshus, are the two who misrepresent the Tathagata.

Bhikshus, there are these two who do not misrepresent the Tathagata. What are the two?

(1) Those who explain the sutta teaching whose sense is *explicit* as explicit [whose sense has been drawn out].

(2) Those who explain the sutta teaching whose sense is *implicit* as implicit [whose sense is to be drawn out].

These, bhikshus, are the two who do *not* misrepresent the Tathagata.

(A 2.3.4+5/1:60), SD 2.6b [4.3]

While “normal” language makes *explicit* use of ideas and concepts, which, as a rule, points directly to what we are expressing, figurative speech resorts to familiar words and images that help us visualize or *draw out* the intended meaning. Figurative language in the suttas most often consists of similes [3.3.1], metaphors [3.3.2] and parables [3.3.0].<sup>34</sup>

In this connection, **Franklin Edgerton** remarks that “In Pali neither is *ipso facto* preferred to the other; one errs only in interpreting one as if it were the other,” but he adds that “in BHS [Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit], a *nītārtha* text...is recommended as a guide in preference to one that is *neyārtha*” (BHSD, sv *nītārtha*-).

The Sanskrit counterpart of “conventional truth” is *saṃvṛti satya*, that is, “covered or hidden truth,” meaning, it needs to be uncovered, explained, made explicit. Take this interesting statement from the commentary on the famous Mahāyāna work, **the Bodhi,caryāvatāra**, “Consciousness is declared as

<sup>33</sup> Comy says that the Buddha was pointing to 4 sal trees nearby (Shorea robusta) (AA 3:288).

<sup>34</sup> Further see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11. For a learned paper on *neyy’attha* and *nī’tattha*, see Karuna-dasa 2006. Cf the “dead-word” and “live-word” dichotomy in Chan: SD 40b (5.1.3.6).



Dharma, is able to see the deeper significance of the teaching, and so attains arhathood. Sāriputta directly sees the Dharma in the Buddha's *explicit* teaching on feelings.

### 3.3 TEACHING TO BE DRAWN OUT

#### 3.3.0 What the Buddha teaches

3.3.0.1 QUOTING THE BUDDHA. It should be noted that we do not have a complete record of the actual teachings of the Buddha's 45 years of public ministry. What we have are what we today might call "edited transcripts of talks" by the Buddha, giving us details of venue, audience, attending events, and relevant information that contextualize the Buddha's own words or what are presumed to be his *ipsissima verba* (exact words). As such, the suttas are valuable records of the Buddha's Dharma for the intelligent teacher and diligent student.

One vital fact about studying the suttas is that we should make an effort to understand who the *narrator* is and what *message* (or messages) he is conveying through the sutta. Although the quotes might be the Buddha's own words, often enough we find the narrator (a council elder or reciter) *quoting* the Buddha with an agenda, so that the sutta is admonishing monastics to meditate<sup>42</sup> or behave wholesomely<sup>43</sup> or simply reflecting some exigencies of the times.<sup>44</sup>

3.3.0.2 LOTUS POND AND FERTILE FIELDS. **The Āyācana Sutta** (S 6.1) gives us a good idea of the kind of audience that the Buddha teaches. Almost immediately after his awakening, it is said, the Buddha surveys the world and sees

beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and difficult to teach, and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the next world. (S 6.1.12/1:138), SD 12.2

The Buddha is moved by those "with *little* dust in their eyes..., with *keen* faculties..., with *good* qualities..., *easy* to teach..., and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the next world." For, just as the lotuses on the water-surface would open when touched by sun-light, the "spiritually ready" (*veneyya*) beings would awaken on hearing the Dharma. Otherwise, they "are falling away because they do not hear the Dharma."<sup>45</sup>

3.3.0.3 THE 3 FIELDS. In the famous **parable of the three fields**,<sup>46</sup> this kind of audience, those with little dust in their eyes and easy to teach, are the first field, the best one. They are also those who fully commit themselves to the Dharma and awakening here and now, that is, *the monastics*. Some of this first kind of audience, with little dust in their eyes and easy to teach, are not monastics, but busy *lay followers*, who are committed to the Dharma, too, in their own way—they form the second field.

Then, there are those "with *much* dust in their eyes,...with *dull* faculties,...with *bad* qualities,...and *difficult* to teach, and a few who dwelt seeing blame and fear in the next world," unlike the spiritually ready, are easily swayed towards life's dark side. This is the third field, which the Buddha may or may not tend.

Yet, with the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha and the awakened saints, even such wayward wanderers (they still abound today) have a good chance of turning towards the light.<sup>47</sup> These are the "outsiders," whose religion is often their own self, whom the Buddha still teaches, if they are ready, "because *if it be that they understand but a single sentence of it*, that would be their benefit and happiness for a long time to come."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Eg **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17/2:169-199), SD 36.12.

<sup>43</sup> Eg **Cātumā S** (M 67/1:456-462), SD 34.7.

<sup>44</sup> Eg **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142/3:253-257), SD 1.9.

<sup>45</sup> See **Upaya**, SD 10.8 (2.2): Significance of the Buddha's teaching.

<sup>46</sup> (**Khetta**) **Desanā S** (S 42.7/4:315 f), SD 12.1(3.2) abr, SD 51.6; **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (3.3); **Upaya**, SD 10.8 (2.2.7).

<sup>47</sup> See further **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (3).

<sup>48</sup> S 42.7/4:316 = SD 12.1(3.2).



3.3.0.4 PLANTING THE SEEDS. Those who are able to understand the Buddha’s teaching directly and at once—no matter which of the three fields [3.3.0.2] they come from—become saints. Others still need to keep up with their Dharma diet, or at least let their meal settle and take its wholesome effect. Most of those who listen to the Buddha’s teaching during the second period [1.1] are of the second type, the half-submerged lotuses and the middling field. They listen to the Buddha and the Dharma, but they rarely awaken immediately.

A good example of this category is the naked ascetic (*ājīvika*) **Upaka**, whom the Buddha meets en route to the deer park at Isipatana soon after the great awakening. He is the first person to whom the Buddha declares his awakening, but Upaka is oblivious of its significance. He goes into the forest only to fall in love with a huntsman’s daughter and marries her. Later, however, both he and his wife renounce before the Buddha.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the Buddha’s teaching does not always take immediate effect on the listener. Indeed, for many listeners, it is like the Buddha is planting Dharma seeds in them. The seeds take time to grow, flower and fruit. This growth occurs in tandem with the listeners’ drawing out the Dharma for themselves. Two common ways in which the Buddha presents the Dharma *implicitly* here is through use of similes and metaphors alongside the *explicit* or “drawn-out” teachings.

**3.3.1 Simile.** This is a figure of speech where an original idea is *explicitly* compared to another to express or enhance the former’s meaning. Here is a set of 7 similes from **the Udakūpama Sutta** (A 7.15), illustrating different levels of spiritual maturity:

<u>Simile</u>	<u>Reference</u>
(1) One who once submerges, remains submerged	the one of habitual wrong view.
(2) One, having emerged, then submerges	the spiritually uncommitted.
(3) One, having emerged, then remains so	the good worldling.
(4) One, having emerged, observes, looks around	the mindful Buddhist (streamwinner). <sup>50</sup>
(5) One, having emerged, swims on	the assertive Buddhist (once-returner).
(6) One, having emerged, gains some firm ground	the accomplished Buddhist (non-returner).
(7) One, having emerged, is one who has crossed over and stands on dry ground	the consummate saint (arhat). (A 7.15/4:11-13) = (Pug 7.1/71 f), SD 28.6

The similes are unified by the figure of **water**, here used in a negative sense to represent defilements, or more specifically, the ten fetters.<sup>51</sup>

- (1) One who habitually holds wrong views is *drowned* in “dark and unwholesome states,” rooted in ignorance and craving.
- (2) One who pays only lip-service to wholesome qualities (faith, moral shame, moral fear, effort, and wisdom), is like one *struggling in the water*.
- (3) A good worldling (who keeps to the 5 precepts) is like someone *floating in the water*.
- (4) A streamwinner is like one who *emerges* from the water and *looks around* for safety or dry land.

<sup>49</sup> V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f; cf Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326. See **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (4+5).

<sup>50</sup> On the streamwinner, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

<sup>51</sup> The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), which are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma,rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). The breaking of the first 3 fetters makes one a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*) (D 6,13/1:156, 18,1/2:200; M 11,12/3:81; S 22.109/3:161, 48.2+3/5:193, 55.24+25/5:377, 378; A 3.85.2/1:231 f, 4.88.2/2:88 f). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmī*): see **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118.10 = 7.13). The overcoming of all the 10 fetters makes one an arhat.

- (5) A once-returner is like one who *swims on* (towards dry ground).  
 (6) A non-returner is like one who has found some dry land (like a sandbank).  
 (7) The arhat has *crossed over* and is safely on the far shore.

The simile of **swimming** here refers to spiritual effort, especially in terms of keeping to the precepts and mental cultivation. However, *the teaching* has priority over the figures, so that we should not read into the figures more than what the teaching conveys. For example, (6) the non-returner is said to have gained some firm ground (like a sandbank), but he is effectively safe, and needs only to walk across the safe shallow waters to the mainland. Since this is such a unified set of similes, this can also be called a *parable*.<sup>52</sup>

**3.3.2 Metaphor.** This is a figure of speech when the original idea is described in terms of another, usually in an implicit manner (unlike a simile). The best known Buddhist metaphor is surely that of “the middle way” (for the eightfold path, avoidance of extremes, etc). We have whole discourses based on metaphors, such as **the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28), which has this stock passage:

- (A) All is burning... (B) with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;  
 (C) burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain  
 and despair, I say! (S 35.28.2-3/4:19), SD 1.3

(A) contains **the metaphor of fire**, and where the word “all”<sup>53</sup> unites the whole parable. This is the key element with which the intended audience, the fire-worshipping (*jaṭila*) matted-hair ascetics, the Kassapa brothers, are familiar. The Sutta starts off with something familiar (fire), but which they regard as external and sacred, and worshipped ritually. It then “transfers” (*metapherein*) their attention to a new sense, that is, (B) fire as the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion), and what “fire” does (C): it burns, changes, decays, destroys.

While a **simile** [2.1.1] compares one element *with* another (A is *like* B: an arhat is like someone who has reached the far shore), a metaphor attributes the qualities of B *to* A (A *is* B), greed is a fire that burns us with birth, decay, death and so on. Generally, similes are used for profiling *people*, while metaphors are applied for highlighting *qualities*. When a metaphor is applied to a person, such as the three daughters of Māra—Tanhā (Craving), Aratī (Discontent) and Rāga (Lust)—it becomes an **allegory**, a figure in which the character or event symbolizes an idea about human life or situation.<sup>54</sup>

## 4 The two levels of teaching

**4.1 TRUTH AND TRADITION.** While the Buddha lives, the Dharma is taught, as a rule, in the local languages. After the Buddha’s time, especially as Buddhism spreads beyond India, it continues to use the local languages<sup>55</sup> and, in this way, enriching the indigenous culture. Buddhism then famously becomes a religion of translations.<sup>56</sup>

The early Indian Buddhist schools must have transmitted their canonical texts in Prakrit (any of the Indic vernacular language). Some of them, like the Theravāda, retained their scriptures in a Middle Indian language to this day, while others turned to the so-called Sanskrit renaissance and Sanskritized their received scriptural tradition. The later schools, spread over diverse regions of Asia, Sanskritized gradually, bringing with it other significant, even radical, changes.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Another famous parable is that of the water-snake, found in **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.10/1:133 f), SD 3.13, which also has two other well known parables: those of the raft (§13) and of Jetavana (§41); and alludes to 10 other parables contra sensual indulgence (§3). For a list of parables, see H Hecker, *Similes of the Buddha*, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> On the meaning of “all” (*sabba*), see **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

<sup>54</sup> See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (3.3).

<sup>55</sup> See **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11 (3.2)

<sup>56</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.2 (2.7)+(7.3.2).

<sup>57</sup> See Macmillan Ency Bsm, 2004: sv Languages; also **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11 (3.2)

Such developments inevitably gave rise to new Buddhisms, the best known of which are Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. These heavily cultural forms indigenized Buddhism, effectively rejecting their early Indian forms. Much of such transformations occurred on a high political level where Buddhism was used to legitimize an individual or a group's power over the region and control of worldly resources.<sup>58</sup>

The ultimate source of all Buddhist legitimization must surely be the Buddhist canon itself. As such, it was paramount that the various interested parties that spawned the cultural forms of Buddhism, to promote, even create, their own text or tradition, proclaiming it to be the only true heir to the "outmoded" or "inferior" (*hīna, yāna*) Indian prototype. These innovated texts are, as a rule, either in Sanskrit or a local language (such as Chinese). Often such interested parties see it necessary to degrade the early Indian texts for the simple reason that these ancient texts propagate contrary ideas, that is, a world-renouncing and self-emptying Dharma.

## 4.2 TRUTH AND TRANSLATION

**4.2.1 Text and meaning.** In our own times, Buddhism is available in a growing number of contemporary languages, especially English. The 4 Nikāyas are available in reliable translations, along with helpful annotations, by capable practising Buddhists. Such reliable annotated translations in the languages of our own times are a very recent development, which means that it would take at least another generation before the spirituality of the early teachings significantly sinks into our lives, so as to bring about a Dharma renaissance.

A translation is necessarily a *new* presentation of the early texts. In place of Pali, a language familiar to us, such as English, is used. Every language has its idiom or expressive bias, which makes it what it is. As such, for us to really benefit from a textual translation, the meaning should not only be transferred into our *language*, but into the idiom of our language. In other words, not only we must translate and transfer the meaning (*attha*) of the text (*vyañjana*) to the reader or listener, but it should be done as beautifully as possible.

However, as we know, the Dharma has both "meaning and text" (*sāttam sa, vyañjanam*).<sup>59</sup> We may, on occasions, give the Pali texts, that is, insofar as they have been anglicized or their translations and explanations are provided, too. Even then, not many are likely to be at once familiar with such textual language. The fact remains that a good translation, insofar as we wish to transmit the message of the teaching, must be *idiomatic*.

**4.2.2 Internalizing the teaching.** This means that there is some significance of the letter of the teaching. While it is true that the *spirit* of the text should take precedence over the *letter*, it is the letter that usually transmits the spirit. The letter of the text, as such, is not merely the kernel that protects the living seed, but it also authenticates its own spirit. This is done not by itself but through our practice of the Dharma, which internalizes the spirit of the text.

The Pali tradition, as such, should be appreciated both in the letter and the spirit. Ideally, we should know Pali and understand the Pali texts as they are. Yet, **Pali** is only one of the many ancient languages in which early Buddhism was transmitted, but the Pali canon is the only one to have survived intact to be of service to us today. What makes the Pali canon invaluable is that its teachings can be put into practice, and the results of such practice personally *verified* by our practise, especially through mental cultivation.

The texts, as such, are like teaching manuals or instructions for personal transformation: they are not merely to be read or even believed, but to be *practised*. After all, early Buddhism is a path (*magga*) to be walked, a method to be practised, with liberation or awakening as the goal. In fact, such teachings ultimately point to mental cultivation, through which the spirit of the Dharma is fully and effectively realized.<sup>60</sup>

## 4.3 TWO LEVELS OF TRUTH

<sup>58</sup>Three classics are: (ed) B L Smith, *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, 1978; Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*, tr P Hawkes, 1986; E M Mendelson, (ed) J P Ferguson, *Sangha and state in Burma*, 1975. For Buddhism in China, see **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.2.

<sup>59</sup> For the full formula and explanation, see *Dhammānussati*, SD 15.9 (2.1).

<sup>60</sup> Further see SD 8.4 (1.1.1.2) Translating *jhāna*.

**4.3.1 Language: relative and ultimate.** The Dharma, as we have discussed [4.2] is transmitted both in the letter and in the spirit. The “letter” (*vyañjana*) here refers to the Dharma being presented to us in a language and manner that are generally understandable to us—that is, in the conventional way—so that we are moved to work to realize its *spirit* for ourselves. In a sense, the teaching can only be transmitted by conventional means, that is, a kind of bridge that links those unawakened to the awakened. On a simple level, this is *language*, that is, words and figures, explicitly and implicitly, the letter and the spirit [3].

The word and the letter of the Dharma, *explicit* as they may be, are our initial opening to the Dharma. However, if we take the Dharma only on this level, we might only see our own ideas and biases superimposed onto them: a heavily edited, even bowdlerized version, that only reinforces our views and ego, and is as such not helpful at all in self-liberation, even a hindrance to it.

Having read or heard the letter of the Dharma, we need to let it go, as it were. If we are learning to drive a vehicle, we might start off by reading all the required readings and guides on it. Having read them, we must then have a coach to teach us how to drive correctly and safely. In due course, we would be able to drive a vehicle on our own. To be able to drive properly comes with personal practice and experience: so, too, the Dharma must be self-realized so that we attain some level of liberation, at least from wrong views.<sup>61</sup>

In the **Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9.53), the Buddha reminds us of the priority of the spirit of the Dharma over its letter:

*Loka, samaññā loka, niruttiyo loka, vohārā loka, paññattiyo yāhi Tathāgato voharati aparāmasan ti.*

For, Citta, these are merely common names, common expressions, common usages, common designations in the world that the Tathāgata [Thus Come] uses without attachment to them.

(D 9,53/1:202)

These two levels of language are described in **the Sumaṅgala, vilāsinī**, the Dīgha Commentary, as “conventional speech” (*sammuti, kathā*) and “speech of ultimate meaning” (*param’attha, kathā*)<sup>62</sup> [5.2]. They are clearly a version of the teaching “to be drawn out” and “that which has been drawn out,” as we have noted, in **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5) [3.1], the Buddha declares:

There are these two who misrepresent the Tathāgata. Which two?

One who represents a sutta of indirect meaning (*neyy’attha*) as a sutta of direct meaning (*nīt’attha*), and one who represents a sutta of direct meaning as a sutta of indirect meaning.

(A 2.3,5/1:60) [3.1]

As long as we take the two kinds of speeches as explaining or elaborating on the two methods of teaching, they are acceptable means of clarifying the sutta teachings. The explicit teachings basically employ “ultimate speech,” appealing to the immediate senses of words, as it were, while the implicit teachings resort to “conventional speech.” Here, “ultimate” or more fully, “ultimate meaning” (*param’attha*) means that the words explain themselves, at least as far as words go. The “conventional speech” is only provisional, and acts as a skillful means to hone the listener’s spirituality, so that he is able to look deeper and directly into the Dharma.

### **4.3.2 The Dharma in our language**

4.3.2.1 *PARAM’ATTHA, SACCA & SAMMUTI, SACCA.* Although the Canon (as we have it) does not give examples of the two types of suttas mentioned in **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5), its commentary provides a very useful explanation. When the Buddha says that “There is an individual, bhikshus,” “There are two individuals, bhikshus,” and so on, these are teachings of an *indirect* nature since in reality there are no individuals. Where the Buddha declares “This is impermanent, suffering and without a self,” this is a *direct* teaching. (AA 2:118, cf 1:94)<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See **The notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1.

<sup>62</sup> DA 2:382; also AA 1:95; KvuA 34.

<sup>63</sup> See Walshe D:RD 31-33; Jayatilleke 1963:361-368; Collins 1982:153-156.

Where his audience is capable of higher understanding, the Buddha would speak in terms of the ultimate truth (*param'attha,sacca*), according to which “existence is a mere process of physical and mental phenomena within which, or beyond which, no real ego-entity nor any abiding substance can ever be found.”<sup>64</sup> The Abhidhamma texts employ only the language of ultimate truth. In modern times, the language of ultimate truth might be compared to the technical lingo of science, medicine and technology, where the terms have specific meanings and usage within a particular field.

The Kathāvatthu (Kvu 311,2+5), a late Abhidhamma work, and the Commentaries have the term “conventional truth” (*sammuti,sacca*). Although this term is not found in the suttas or Vinaya, we can take it as a synonym of *neyy'attha* (whose meaning is to be drawn out), as referring to teaching or truths on the level of the idiom and worldly wisdom, employing analogies, figures of speech, stories, object lessons and other literary devices.

The commentary on **the Anaṅgana Sutta** (M 5), quotes this untraced verse,<sup>65</sup> containing the twin terms of *sammuti,sacca* and *param'attha,sacca* in its second line:

The self-awakened Buddha, best of all speakers, spoke two truths,  
the conventional and the ultimate, no third is found.  
A conventional statement is true because of the world's common usage;  
an ultimate statement is true by (the characteristic of) the nature of things.<sup>66</sup>  
Thus the Blessed One, the Teacher, skilled in this world's speech,  
uses the common convention and yet is not one who speaks falsehood.  
(MA 1:138; cf DA 2:383 = SA 2:77; AA 1:95 = ItA 1:82; KvuA 34)

4.3.2.2 HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL APPLICATIONS. Nowhere in the Canon do we have the Dharma presented in an “absolute” (*param'attha*) sense, as in the Abhidhamma, the Commentaries or later Buddhism. At best, where they do exist, these are philosophical statements, and not practical teachings on the Dharma.<sup>67</sup> In other words, such terms no more refer to early Buddhist teachings, but were used by the writers of the later sutras and works in their own contexts.

However, where the *param'attha,sacca* (ultimate truth) refers to the knowledge of the saints of the path, such a usage in their proper context, are generally acceptable. We could, in other words, speak of the attainments of the path as being “ultimate knowledge,” but generally in a broad generic sense. However, in special cases, it may refer to nirvana itself [5.2]. In other words, the usage of the twin truths of *sammuti,sacca* and *param'attha,sacca* has very limited use in the early texts.

So far, we have examined the Buddha's teachings as being presented “horizontally” in two ways, that is, as explicit and implicit teachings [3], and “vertically” as conventional or relative truth and as natural or ultimate truth [4]. In later Buddhism, an attempt is made to re-define the last pair of the Buddha's teaching method—the vertical approach—as “relative” truth and “ultimate” truth. It is this new approach that we will now go on to examine. But first, we will examine a simpler twofold notion of the teaching, that is, expressed in terms of persons and of ideas.

## 5 The 2 kinds of truth

**5.1 TRUTH AS PERSONS AND AS IDEAS.** On a personal level, the Buddha uses another teaching method as a bridge for the listener to directly cross over to the Dharma. Post-canonical works and the

<sup>64</sup> BDict: paramattha.

<sup>65</sup> Also found in Aṅguttara Comy and other Comys, with slight variations in the fourth line in each case.

<sup>66</sup> “By [the characteristic of] the nature of things,” *dhammānaṃ bhūta,lakkhaṇaṃ* (MA 1:138 = AA 1:95 = ItA 1:82); *bhūta,lakkhaṇaṃ* (DA 2:383); *tatha,lakkhaṇaṃ* (KvuA 34). Only MA reading has lines ef, omitted in the others.

<sup>67</sup> **Samādhi,rāja Sūtra**, notes **Florin Deleanu**, gives hundreds of long impressive names for *samādhi*, none of which are really meditative states, but are names related to deep philosophical states (2000:73): see **Mahā Sudassana S**, SD 36.12 (6.4.4).

Commentaries, such as **the Nett-p,pakarāṇa** (a classic on hermeneutics),<sup>68</sup> speak of them by way of the person-based (*puggal'ādhiṭṭhāna*) and idea-based (*dhamm'ādhiṭṭhāna*) approaches.<sup>69</sup> An example of a teaching in terms of persons is given in this **Udāna** verse:

I searched all over the quarters with my mind  
but found none dearer than self;  
even so, is the self dear to everyone else—  
therefore one who loves himself should not harm another.      (U 47)

Traditional examples of the direct use of **ideas or concepts** (ultimate or Dharma language) are found, for example, in the exposition of the 4 noble truths and the noble eightfold path in the first discourse,<sup>70</sup> or in the verse spoken by Assaji to Sāriputta the first time they met. Often enough, the Buddha would follow up with analogies and illustrations for what he has expressed in the Dharma language (eg **the Assu Sutta**, S 2:180).

Whether we are drawn to person-based teachings or to idea-based teachings very much depends on our psychological inclination or emotional need. Basically, if we are **faith-inclined**, we are more likely to unquestioningly be drawn to and accept fabulous stories of the Buddha, the saints and teachers. To be “person-centred” also means that we easily accept a teacher’s or person’s word as truth, whether or not it harmonizes with the teaching. We are likely to obey his every instruction, and be devoted to a particular teacher, even feeling an affinity, a natural attraction, to such a person (as in the case of Vakkali).<sup>71</sup>

If we are **wisdom-inclined**, we are likely to shop around groups and test-drive teachers, seeking teaching and opinions that agree with our own pet ideas, or something we could use for boosting our own self-esteem. Most often, we are attracted to Abhidhamma, for example, when it is presented as the “ultimate teaching,” and take it to be even “superior” to the Dharma.<sup>72</sup>

We must take care not to fall into the “Abhidhamma complex,” which might be suggestive of an inferiority complex (in the Adler’s sense): since we feel *small* (on account of some childhood difficulties or emotional need); or a superiority conceit (*seyyo'ham asmīti māna*), since we have perceived a learning tool as a power-tool.<sup>73</sup> Either way, we might see Abidhamma as a wish-fulfilling gem to attract followers or command respect and wealth. The reality is that we do not really have any true faith in the Dharma. In due course, we might turn to some more lucrative or more “powerful” New Age philosophy or fengshui, even championing some galactic faith.

Both the person-based teachings and the idea-based teachings are like portals or entrances to the spacious and peaceful Dharma-garden. If we are stuck with such teachings, without putting them into practice, then we are like tourists admiring the portals and entrances, but never entering the garden. Or, some of us might end up trying to sell tickets and guide-books at cut-throat prices to unwary tourists, when the entry into the Dharma-garden is free and garden-guides are freely available within.

**5.2 TRUTH: CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE.** We have already noted that the Buddha, the saints and Dharma-based teachers speak on two levels, namely, the worldly or layman level, using stories, images (comparisons, metaphors, etc), dealing with causes and effects, and with conventional reality, and the Dharma or spiritual level, using technical terms (impermanence, suffering, non-self, conditionality), directly dealing with the path and liberation or ultimate reality [4.3].

<sup>68</sup> Attr to Mahā Kaccāna. See O von Hinuber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, 1996: §III.2 (pp77-80); K R Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1985:111 f.

<sup>69</sup> MA 1:24; Nett 164 f; PmA 449 (where 4 types are given).

<sup>70</sup> **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11.9-12/5:422 f; V 1:10-12), SD 1.1.

<sup>71</sup> A 1:24; Sn 1146; also Divy 49; VbhA 276; Vism 1:129; see **Vakkali S** (S 22.87), SD 8.8. On the problems of such an attitude, when taken to extremes, see **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

<sup>72</sup> The ancient meaning of *abhi,dhamma* is simply “about the Dharma”: see **Dhamma and Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1.

<sup>73</sup> See **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

The Abhidhamma tradition and the Commentaries, however, developed a more scholastic notion of the Buddha's teaching: it is said that he employs **two levels of truth or meanings**, the conventional (*sammutti, sacca*) and the ultimate level (*param'attha, sacca*).<sup>74</sup> The difficulty here is where their proponents interpret the "ultimate truth" teachings as being *final* in themselves—the word *is* the thing. In this sense, it is helpful to use the term "**absolute truth**" (instead of "ultimate truth") for *param'attha, sacca*.

In *conventional (or worldly) terms*, we say that someone is born of a mother. But in *Dharma (or ultimate) language*, birth is really the arising of the notion of the ego, the "I" resulting from ignorance, craving, clinging, etc. This is clearly explained by the Buddha in the doctrine of dependent arising.<sup>75</sup> As far as words go, we can take this latter teaching as "ultimate truth." However, it is not *the* "absolute truth" (it is meaningless to speak of "an" absolute truth). The absolute truth, in a manner of speaking, is nirvana itself, which is beyond words and concepts.

In fact, we do find the term *param'attha* ("ultimate truth") in the Canon, as a rule, where it means "the highest goal," that is, nirvana, as in **the Candā Therī, gāthā**:

And Paṭācārā, out of pity, let me go forth,	<i>Sā ca maṃ anukampāya pabbājesi paṭācārā</i>
Then exhorting, urged me to the highest goal	<i>tato maṃ ovaditvāna paramatthe niyojayi</i>
	(Thī 125)

Even then, the term *param'attha* is not found anywhere else in the Canon, but is, however, a common term in the Commentaries.

The Mahāyāna gives greater importance to the two levels of religious language, for the simple reason that it employs far more imagery and mythical language than early Buddhism. Without going too much into philosophy and scholastics, suffice it to say that both early Buddhism and the Mahāyāna give a high priority to ensuring that language would work as an effective bridge for worldlings to cross over into spiritual liberation.

**5.3 THE EMPTINESS OF THE DHARMA.** At this point (and occasionally), it is wise to remind ourselves that whenever we discuss Buddhism with anyone, or even read an essay such as this, we should not be too excited about who is really "right" and who is really "wrong." All our discussions and knowledge are provisional, for the moment at least, and this is what makes discussing Buddhism helpful and fun. We should try our best to suspend our final judgements until we are awakened (by then we surely would see things very differently from now). This caveat is a sort of mental health insurance, as we are now in the thin-air atmosphere of philosophy, where holding our breaths about anything is not very helpful.

Whether the Buddha's teaching is presented in terms of a person or an idea, whether it addresses reality in a conventional or the ultimate sense, the truth is that the Dharma is "emptiness," that is, *empty* of all attributes. Although we usually think of the south Indian Buddhist philosopher **Nāgārjuna** (late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent), the father of philosophical Mahāyāna, in connection with the term "emptiness" (P *suññatā*; Skt *sūnyatā*), it is already in use in the Nikāyas, the Āgamas (Chinese translations of the early texts) and early Abhidhamma to describe the experiences of meditation, and the five aggregates and dharmas (mental states).<sup>76</sup>

Nāgārjuna's philosophical school is called **Madhyamaka**, after his key work, *Mūla Madhyamaka Kārika* or "Root Verses on the Middle."<sup>77</sup> The "middle" here is of course Nāgārjuna's word for *emptiness*, which is equivalent to dependent arising, as taught by the Buddha as the "means" that avoids the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism.

Nāgārjuna, like most informed Buddhists who have the highest respect for the suttas, the Buddha's early teachings, asks the fundamental question: If all things arise in interdependence with something else,

<sup>74</sup> DA 2:382; AA 1:95; KvuA 34.

<sup>75</sup> See **Tiṭṭh'āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173-177), SD 6.8; also *The Buddha's Teaching*, ch 22; also Bucknell & Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language*, London: Curzon, 1986: 82 f.

<sup>76</sup> See E Lamotte 1993; **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121/3:104-108), SD 11.3; **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122/3:109-118), SD 11.4; Dhs 25 f; Pm 1.177-184.

<sup>77</sup> See eg Jay L Garfield (tr), *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, NY & Oxford, Oxford Univ Press 1995.

like any dharma or state does, then how can it be defined in the way that certain Abhidharma theorists do, that a dharma has its inherent qualities, or possesses its “own being” (P *sabhāva*; Skt *svabhāva*)?

For, if something is sufficient<sup>78</sup> to exist in itself, then it would go on existing forever. It could never be affected by anything else. For, if it is, then it becomes something else, ceasing to be itself. On the other hand, if things do not change, do not become something else, then the Buddhist teaching is undermined. After all, Buddhism teaches that all formations are impermanent (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*);<sup>79</sup> what is impermanent is unsatisfactory; and what is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot have an abiding entity.<sup>80</sup> Isn’t talking about an “own being,” referring to an “abiding entity”?

The Buddha teaches that suffering arises from causes and conditions. By removing unwholesome conditions and cultivating wholesome ones, we free ourselves from the occasions of suffering. As our understanding of conditionality grows, so do our sufferings lessen, or rather our perception of them disappears, and so we awaken to true reality. We then truly understand what is famously stated here as the “**one-factor dependent arising**,” mentioned in the Buddha’s first discourse in connection with Koṇḍañña’s attainment of streamwinning:

*Yaṃ kiñ ci samudaya.dhammaṃ,  
sabbaṃ taṃ nirodha.dhammaṃ.*

Whatever is of the nature to arise,  
all that is of the nature to cease.

(V 1:11; D 1:110, M 3:280; S 4:47, 214, 330, 5:423; A 4:143 f)<sup>81</sup>

Thus, if we claim that dharmas or “things” *ultimately exist in themselves*, we must either be caught up with eternalism—denying the possibility of real change—or if we here insist that *change is still possible*, then we fall into annihilationism—since, in changing, what had existed is now no more. As such, concludes Nāgārjuna, the Buddha’s teaching is that everything is empty of its own-being, its inherent existence.<sup>82</sup>

## 6 The 3 kinds of learning and wisdom

### 6.1 THREE LEVELS OF WISDOM

#### 6.1.0 Useful learning

6.1.0.1 Individually, how do we learn anything, especially the Dharma? More specifically, how do we learn that something is of use to us, namely, that the Dharma that liberates us? **The Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) and **the Vibhaṅga** answer this question by way of the 3 kinds of wisdom, that is, the wisdom through thinking (*cintā,maya paññā*), the wisdom through listening (*suta,maya paññā*), and the wisdom through cultivation (*bhāvanā,maya paññā*) (D 3:219; Vbh 324).

These **3 wisdoms** or 3 levels of knowing are as follows:

- (1) philosophical knowledge (*cintā,mayā paññā*), “wisdom through thinking,” that is, knowledge arising through thought and reflection, which might be called “second-hand knowledge”;<sup>83</sup>
- (2) academic knowledge (*suta,mayā paññā*), “wisdom through listening,” that is, knowledge arising through receiving teachings, reading and other external sources like the mass media (in our mod-

<sup>78</sup> See **Necessity & sufficiency**, SD 35.1.

<sup>79</sup> Meaning, everything in this world is impermanent, changing, becoming other. See **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.-134/1:285), SD 26.8.

<sup>80</sup> See eg **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59/3:66-68 ≠ Mv 1.6.38-47 @ V 1:13 f), SD 1.2.

<sup>81</sup> For other formulas, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.15 (2).

<sup>82</sup> For a helpful summary, see Gethin 1998: 237-244.

<sup>83</sup> Most modern teachers would present *suta,maya paññā* as the first, ie most common level of knowing, as most of what we know (as unawakened worldlings) come from external sources, from others (*parato,ghosa*) and from the mass media (3<sup>rd</sup>-hand knowledge). When we reflect on such information, we have a better understanding, or we might even come up with original notions (rightly or wrongly). As such, this is 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand knowledge, when compared to *bhāvanā,maya paññā*, which is a direct 1<sup>st</sup>-hand experience of reality.



ern lingo, we would say such a person as being “well-read,” that is, steeped in book learning); this might be called “third-hand knowledge”;

- (3) **spiritual knowledge** (*bhāvanā, mayā paññā*), “wisdom through mental cultivation,” that is, the understanding arising through a direct experience of reality, which might be called “first-hand knowledge.” (D 3:219; Vbh 324)

6.1.0.2 The 3 wisdoms or levels of knowing are listed in this sequence, that is, the wisdom (1) through thinking, (2) through listening, and (3) through cultivation. “Knowledge through thinking” is placed first because our thoughts influence and determines much, if not all, of our knowing, including “knowledge through listening.” How we listen is often filtered and fabricated by how we think.

As such, “knowledge through listening” is a subspecies of knowledge through thinking, only that this second kind of knowledge is derived externally or from the past. Even our “knowledge” of the future depends on our past. The reality is that we can never really know the future, except from present conditions. In other words, the future never happens. Whatever happens is now, and that is what we have to deal with. When we truly understand the present, then we will also understand the past and the future.<sup>84</sup>

**6.1.1 Philosophical knowledge.** Learning is best when our minds are open and our hearts happy. Then, we easily learn in three ways, as mentioned. The most common way we “learn,” that is, form ideas, is through **thinking** (*cinta, mayā paññā*), when we try to make sense of our sense-experiences. Sense-data input through our sense-faculties are processed by our minds, and we give them meaning and purpose.<sup>85</sup> If this is wholesomely done, we become more mature on account of such experiences over time. We do not merely grow *old*, we also grow *up*.

However, if this knowledge remains purely on a mental level, lacking any real-life encounters or direct experiences of true reality, then it is merely “philosophical knowledge,” the worldly wisdom of a thinking person, untempered by compassion. However, such knowledge grows in usefulness when we use it to look deeper into the patterns of human conduct and the nature of things around us. Then, as we perceive the fleeting nature of things, we become wiser, not on account of thinking alone, but also through *seeing* deeper into life.

**6.1.2 Academic knowledge.** The second way we gather knowledge is through **listening** (*suta, mayā paññā*). Traditionally, this is the most common way of teaching in ancient India, so that the learned is said to be “well-heard” (*bahu-s, suta*). This way of learning is based on a direct teacher-pupil interaction without any book-learning, since writing in the Buddha’s time was regarded as mundane, used almost exclusively by royalty (to issue decrees and commands), the army (to issue instructions) and the mercantile class (to keep records and accounts).<sup>86</sup>

Contemporary Buddhist studies, whether of the suttas, or the Abhidharma, or the Vinaya, or Buddhism in general, would fall into this category, that is, as “academic knowledge.” The wise teacher would not only instill wisdom in his students, but also inspire character and vision in them. Sutta study, along with mental cultivation, is unlike any other kind of human learning. Not only are they the study of man, but are also the way of freeing the human spirit, awakening us to true reality.

**6.1.3 Spiritual knowledge.** The third level of knowledge is the most important: it is that of **mental cultivation** (*bhāvanā, mayā paññā*). This is actually first-hand wisdom since it arises from the calm depth and joyful space of our own mindfulness. Wisdom through listening is at best *second-hand* knowledge, for we have received it from another. Wisdom through thinking hovers *between second-hand and first-*

<sup>84</sup> See Reflection, “Wise up,” R353 2014.

<sup>85</sup> On meaning and purpose, see **Notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (13) Truth and value.

<sup>86</sup> The first Indian script arose in the Indus valley c2600 BCE, but is still indeciphered. By Asoka’s times, Brahmi and Kharoṣṭhī were used officially as well as locally. Understandably, writing was known and used in the Buddha’s time, too, but not by the Buddha in his ministry. See A L Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 1954:394-300 & Subhas Kak, “The evolution of early writing in India.” *Indian Journal of History of Science* 28 1994:375-388: <http://www.ece.lsu.edu/kak/writ.pdf>.

*hand* wisdom. Our thinking is usually rooted in latent tendencies<sup>87</sup> and various external influences. There is every chance that we could be wrong in our views. As long as we are still unawakened, this knowledge, no matter how perfect, is still put together as mental constructs (*sankhāra*).<sup>88</sup>

The wood, saw, plane, hammer, and nails may make furniture, but they are not the furniture. Every piece of furniture, too, has been put together by a carpenter and his assistant with materials supplied by others. If we think of this whole process, it might seem never to end! They are all inter-related conditions.<sup>89</sup>

The wisdom through mental cultivation is wholesome knowledge insofar as it is a direct experience of true reality. We see and understand the true nature of existence, that it is impermanent, and as such, not satisfactory. In due course, as our wisdom deepens, we realize the emptiness (*suññatā*) and selflessness (*anattā*) of all things, that they are all without an abiding essence. This is the wisdom that liberates us from suffering.<sup>90</sup>

## 6.2 THE 3 GOOD TRUTHS

**6.2.1 Three levels of spiritual learning.** The Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta gives a unique presentation of the 4 noble truths in terms of **3 phases** (*ti,parivaṭṭa*)<sup>91</sup> and 12 aspects (*dvādas'ākāra*), which seems to be a later teaching model, probably post-Buddha.<sup>92</sup> The 3 phases (*ti,parivaṭṭa*) are:

- (1) knowledge of each truth (*sacca,ñāṇa*),
- (2) knowledge of the task to be done regarding each truth (*kicca,ñāṇa*), and
- (3) knowledge of the accomplishment of these tasks (*kata,ñāṇa*).

These 3 phases of each of the 4 truths total up as their 12 aspects (*dvādas'ākāra*). The Commentarial version of these 3 phases are called the 3 “good truths” (*saddhamma*), namely,

<i>sacca,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>theory</u> (textual learning)	( <i>pariyatti saddhamma</i> ),
<i>kicca,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>practice</u>	( <i>paṭipatti saddhamma</i> ), and
	(moral virtue and mental training/meditation)	
<i>kata,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>realization</u> (wisdom)	( <i>paṭivedha saddhamma</i> ).
	(VA 225; AA 5.33; cf Nm 143 where the first two are listed)	

In simple terms, the 3 “good truths” refer to the 3 levels of full learning, that is, the stages of theory, practice and realization. First, we generally master a subject or topic *theoretically* by listening to a teacher or informant, by reading or other means. This is at best a second-hand learning, but forms a useful starting-pointing to open up our minds to a bigger picture of things.

**6.2.2 Theoretical learning.** Many of us have some **theoretical** understanding of the 4 noble truths. We know, or think we know, what suffering is, in its various aspects, and we know that we have sufferings of our own. We accept that craving is something negative and even try to avoid it when we could. We have heard of nirvana, and have some hazy idea, such as that it is what suffering is not. And we are aware that Buddhist practice comprises the noble eightfold path.

**6.2.3 Practical learning.** On a **practical** level, we make sensible efforts to avoid suffering or heal it in a morally appropriate manner. We make some meaningful efforts to avoid craving, such as by keeping to the precepts and doing some kind of meditation or mindfulness practice. Although we see nirvana as a distant goal, we do hope we could perhaps attain at least streamwinning in this life. And we understand the eightfold path as consisting of moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom, and so we put some effort into moral restraint, meditation and learning about the Dharma.

<sup>87</sup> See *Saññā*, SD 17.4 (7.3).

<sup>88</sup> See **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1.

<sup>89</sup> See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

<sup>90</sup> For a “horizontal” or integrated application of the threefold wisdom, see **Vimutt'āyatana S** (A 5.26), SD 21.5.

<sup>91</sup> On their ancient source in the 3 “good truths” (*saddhamma*), see SD 46.18 (1.2).

<sup>92</sup> **Dhammacakka Pavattana** (S 56.11,9-12/5:422), SD 1.1. See A Wayman, “The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths and their opposites,” *Journal of the International Assoc of Buddhist Studies* 3,2 1980:67-76. On the lateness of the Sutta, see **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (2.2).

**6.2.4 Realized learning.** The third and final level—that of **realization**—is the most difficult of the three good truths. It is very likely that most of us are not really sure if we are leading morally consistent lives, but we know that as long as we are engaged in some wholesome activity like attending a Dharma talk, a sutta study or meditation session, we are to that extent at least keeping the precepts. Many of us do know some meditation, have attended some kind of meditation retreat, and do some kind of personal practice, if not sitting meditation, at least some kind of mindfulness practice, such as the perception of impermanence.

Not many of us who are not monastics feel that we would ever attain nirvana in this life itself. However, more of us today feel confident enough to aspire to attain streamwinning in this life itself.<sup>93</sup> Above all, we know that we have to keep up our personal practice in some way, so we do set aside a significant part of our lives, even our daily lives for some kind of quiet time for personal meditation or reflection. To that extent, the Dharma has touched our lives, so that we are heading for the path to awakening.

## 7 The 4 modes of progress

**7.0 PROGRESS AND DIRECT KNOWLEDGE.** On account of our respective spiritual capacities, emotional inclinations, and present circumstances, we each progress in our spiritual training at different rates and in different ways. In **the Kosala Sutta 1** (A 10.29), the Buddha gives a list of these 4 “modes of progress” (*paṭipadā*), thus:

Bhikshus, there are these 4 modes of progress (*paṭipadā*). What are the four?

- |                            |                        |                        |                       |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) Painful progress with  | slow direct knowledge  | <i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i> | <i>dandhābhiññā</i>   |
| (2) Painful progress with  | quick direct knowledge | <i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i> | <i>hippābhiññā</i> .  |
| (3) Pleasant progress with | slow direct knowledge  | <i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>  | <i>dandhābhiññā</i> . |
| (4) Pleasant progress with | quick direct knowledge | <i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>  | <i>hippābhiññā</i> .  |

These, bhikshus, are the 4 modes of practice.

(A 10.29,8/5:62), SD 16.15

A more detailed analysis of the 4 modes have been done elsewhere,<sup>94</sup> so here we shall only briefly examine them in the context of the levels of Dharma training.

**7.1 PAINFUL PROGRESS, SLOW DIRECT KNOWLEDGE.** The first kind of progress is said to be “painful progress with slow direct knowledge,” meaning that the training or meditation is difficult and the result slow, even not apparent at all. This refers to one with strong unwholesome roots (lust, hate, and delusion)<sup>95</sup> and weak spiritual faculties (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom),<sup>96</sup> resulting in difficult and slow progress.

Generally speaking, this would describe most beginners to Buddhism without a good teacher or spiritual friend.<sup>97</sup> Without proper guidance, for example, we might have misconceptions about the precepts and so face guilt and doubt, or be over-zealous about them, making us negatively judgemental. A good teacher is one who helps us to balance up the five spiritual faculties in our meditation.

**Deva,datta**, as envisioned by the Theravadins, especially in his later life (as working against the Buddha) might serve as an example of one whose spiritual progress is painful with slow penetration. Since he is described as having psychic powers, he must have been a dhyana-attainer earlier on, but his meditation apparently slackened in due course.<sup>98</sup>

**7.2 PAINFUL PROGRESS, QUICK DIRECT KNOWLEDGE.** The second kind of progress is said to be “painful progress with quick direct knowledge,” meaning that the training or meditation is difficult but the

<sup>93</sup> See Saṃyutta ch 25, esp (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.

<sup>94</sup> See **Vitthāra Paṭipadā S** (A 4.162/2:149 f), SD 18.3+Intro. See also **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50), SD 10.4.

<sup>95</sup> On the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*), see (**Akusala Mūla**) **Añña Titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201) & SD 16.4.

<sup>96</sup> On the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*), see **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4.

<sup>97</sup> See **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1.

<sup>98</sup> See **Deva,datta**, SD 71.4.

result is fast. This refers to one with strong unwholesome roots but strong spiritual faculties, resulting in difficult but quick progress.

A well known case here is that of the elder **Vakkali**,<sup>99</sup> who it is said joins the order so that he could gaze on the Buddha's physical beauty. In other words, at that time, he is filled with lust (and delusion), not seeing the true nature of the human body. In due course, with the Buddha's compassion and timely teachings, Vakkali is freed from his defilements and attains arhathood, and is declared to be the foremost amongst monks who have faith.<sup>100</sup>

**7.3 PLEASANT PROGRESS, SLOW DIRECT KNOWLEDGE.** The third kind of progress is said to be "pleasant progress with slow direct knowledge," meaning that the training or meditation is easy but the result is slow. This refers to one with weak unwholesome roots and weak spiritual faculties, resulting in pleasant but slow progress, as in the case of **Moggallāna**, as mentioned in **the (Sāriputta) Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.167).<sup>101</sup>

**The Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) records how Moggallāna, in his meditation, struggles with sleepiness or "nodding" (*pacalā*). The Buddha appears before him in a holographic form and instructs him in seven ways on how to overcome his problem. Moggallāna then quickly attains arhathood (*khippābhiññā*), that is, within a week.<sup>102</sup>

**7.4 PLEASANT PROGRESS, QUICK DIRECT KNOWLEDGE.** The fourth kind of progress is said to be "pleasant progress with quick direct knowledge," meaning that the training or meditation is easy and the result is quick, too. This refers to one with weak unwholesome roots but strong spiritual faculties, resulting in both pleasant and quick progress, as in the famous case of **Sāriputta**, as mentioned in **the (Sāriputta) Moggallāna Sutta 2**, A 4.168)<sup>103</sup> and related in detail in **the Dīgha,nakha Sutta** (M 74).

While Moggallāna takes only a week to awaken, Sāriputta takes slightly longer in his progress (two weeks), but his progress, too, is smooth (*sukha,paṭipadā*). He swiftly awakens while listening to the Buddha exhorting Dīgha,nakha, as detailed in **the Dīgha,nakha Sutta** (M 74).<sup>104</sup> While Moggallāna has the Buddha's personal guidance in his progress, his insight is of a lesser range, whereas Sāriputta not only progresses on his own but has a wider range of insight. Hence, Sāriputta's supremacy in wisdom.

## 8 Conclusion

**8.1 CULTIVATED IN BODY, MORAL VIRTUE, MIND AND WISDOM.** Practising the Dharma begins with understanding our body and speech, and restraining them, meaning that we should gently but firmly train ourselves to free them from past conditioning and merely reacting to present stimuli. When we succeed in doing this, we are said to be "bodily cultivated" (*bhāvita,kāya*).<sup>105</sup> With the body and speech thus harmonized, it is easy to keep the precepts, so that we are "morally cultivated" (*sīla,bhavita*).

With the body and speech harmonized, we can easily and fully focus on mental cultivation to the extent of freeing our minds from all our physical senses, so that we become "mentally cultivated" (*bhāvita.-citta*). With all these ideal conditions, we go on to be "cultivated in wisdom" (*bhāvita,paññā*), that is, be able to see directly into true reality. Hence, as stated in **the Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127), we are "cultivated in body, cultivate in moral virtue, cultivate in mind, cultivated in wisdom" (*bhāvita,kāyā bhāvita,sīlā bhāvita,cittā bhāvita,paññā*).<sup>106</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Foremost of those monks with faith (A 1:24; Sn 1146; also Divy 49; VbhA 276; Vism 1:129). His story is found in **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124), SD 8.8, Apadāna (Ap 2:465 f), Aṅguttara Comy (AA 1:248-251), Dhammapada Comy (DhA 25.11/4:118 f), Thera,gāthā Comy (ThaA 2:146-150), and Visuddhi,magga (Vism 4.45/129).

<sup>100</sup> A 1:24; Sn 1146; also Divy 49; VbhA 276; Vism 1:129.

<sup>101</sup> A 4.167/2:154 f @ SD 56.14.

<sup>102</sup> A 7.58/4:85-91 @ SD 4.11.

<sup>103</sup> A 4.168/2:155 @ SD 56.15.

<sup>104</sup> M 74/1:497-501 @ SD 16.1.

<sup>105</sup> **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127.7/4:111), SD 27.6a(2.4). See also M 1:239×2, 240×2;

<sup>106</sup> S 35.127.7/4:111 = SD 27.6a(2.4); see also **A 5.99/1:249, 250, 251×2, 253, 10.24/5:42×2, 43, 44×2, 45; Nm 1:142, 211, 337, 345, 480, 509; Nc:Be 26, 64.**

**8.2 HARMONIZING HEAD AND HEART.** There are two extreme views that prevent us from keeping to the middle way. The first is letting our negative feelings take over our lives—letting our hearts take over mindlessly—so that they motivate our thoughts, speech and actions. Then, we have lost our self-control, meaning that our minds have been taken over by negative emotions. Our lives have become autopiloted by our negative memories and reactivity to the present, seeing in terms of the past; hence, losing touch with the present altogether. In a sense, we have become “all heart but no head.”

The other extreme is that of letting our heads take over us heartlessly, so that we become control freaks, morbidly fearing to be wrong, and critical of everyone. We are completely autopiloted by our intellect. Everything must be “scientific,” “logical” and “rational” (by our definitions, of course) without any margin for error, as if there is no chance whatsoever for a change of heart. There is no heart here, anyway, it’s all head, as it were.

As humans, we are both head and heart, thinking and feeling. We think things out, measuring and connecting them up, seeking the *truth* in them, and we feel, accepting things as they are, embracing them fully in our consciousness, seeing their *beauty*. The reality of it all is that we need to harmonize both head and heart, truth and beauty. This is a stereoscopic way of living reality, of directly and clearly seeing true reality as a truly singular vision.

There are no two ways, no duality, in a spiritual experience. For, it is a taste of *both* truth and beauty, or better, of truth-beauty: *beauty is truth, truth beauty*.<sup>107</sup> However, when we try to convey its meaning, we need to speak in terms of truth *and* beauty. This non-duality of truth and beauty—that the truth must also be beautiful as well as liberating, and what is liberating must also be beautiful and true—is an important thread running throughout the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>108</sup>

Once again, let us remind ourselves why we *are* Buddhists, or what we *do* as Dharma practitioners, in terms of views. Understanding wrong view as wrong, we *stop* ourselves from breaking the precepts, so that our body and speech are harmonious with everything around us. Understanding right view as right, we clear our minds of negative thoughts and unwholesome tendencies, keeping our attention in the reality of the present, fully aware of our mind and the events of our lives. Understanding the true nature of views, we are able to use them to understand ourselves better, communicate with others more effectively and beneficially, and, above all, see our lives and nature as truly beautiful and liberating. In time, we will fully understand that we do not need any views at all, and we do not even need to say it.

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<sup>107</sup> This is of course from the Romantic poet John Keat’s “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” whose closing lines go: “When old age shall this generation waste, | Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe | Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st | ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all | Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’” <http://www.bartleby.com/101/625.htm>.

<sup>108</sup> See **Notion of *dīṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (8.1.2).

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