

# 1

## Gavampati Sutta

The Discourse to Gavampati | S 56.30

Theme: Penetrating any of the 4 truths, penetrate all of them

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2018

### 1 Sutta summary and highlights

#### 1.1 SUMMARY

**1.1.1 The Gavampati Discourse** (S 56.30) is a short discourse where the elder Gavampati presents a teaching of the Buddha on the 4 noble truths, that is, one who penetrates any of the 4 truths penetrates all of them. This teaching—we shall call it **the “Gavampati teaching”**—however, is not recorded anywhere else in the suttas or the Vinaya.

**1.1.2** Although **the Gavampati teaching** on the 4 noble truths is not found in the suttas and the Vinaya, it is quoted in **the Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm 568) [2.1.1], the 12<sup>th</sup> book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the 5<sup>th</sup> collection of suttas. Interestingly, the Paṭisambhidā,magga is actually an Abhidhamma work that seems to have found a place amongst the suttas.

#### 1.2 THE MONK GAVAMPATI

**1.2.1** The arhat **Gavam,pati**<sup>1</sup> was a son of a merchant banker (*seṭṭhi*) in Benares, and one of the 4 lay companions of the elder *Yasa*, who, having heard of Yasa’s renunciation, followed him and became an arhat, too.<sup>2</sup> Later, Gavampati lived in the *Añjana forest (añjana,vana)* outside *Sāketa*, one of the 6 cities of Kosala.

One day, when the Buddha visits the Añjana forest, some of the monks accompanying him slept on the sandbanks of the *Sarabhū* river. The river rises in the night and there is great dismay. The Buddha sends Gavampati to stop the flood, which he does by his psychic-power. The water stops in the distance, looking like a mountain-peak.

**1.2.2** In the time of *Sikhī Buddha*, Gavampati was a huntsman who, meeting the Buddha, gave him some flowers. Later, he made a parasol and built a railing for the stupa of *Koṇāgamana Buddha*. In the time of *Kassapa Buddha*, he was a rich householder who owned many heads of cattle.

One day, seeing an arhat eating his meal in the sun without any shade, he built for him a shelter and planted before it a *sirīsa*-tree. As a result, he was born in the heaven of the 4 great kings and his palace was known as *Serissaka*.<sup>3</sup>

**1.2.3** Gavampati was the teacher of *Mahā,nāga*, son of *Madhuvā,seṭṭha* or *Madhu,vāseṭṭha* (ThaA 2:166). It is said that the Serissaka mansion, occupied by Gavampati, remained in the heaven of the 4

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the only Gavampati amongst the monks capable of teaching Dharma, so that we may rightly assume that he is one of the early monks, belonging to Yasa’s group of friends, as related in **Catu Gihī,sahāyaka Pabbajjā** (Mv 1.9.1.4 @ V 1:18 f), SD 11.2.

<sup>2</sup> V 1:19. See SD 11.2.

<sup>3</sup> V 1:18; Tha 38; ThaA 2:166,5; VvA 341; DA 3:814,21 gives a slightly different version of mansion origin, calling it Serīsaka.

great kings even after he had left it. The Commentaries say that he went there because he found the climate (*utu*) more agreeable.<sup>4</sup> Like [Pindola Bhāradvāja](#), Gavampati, too, loved his old haunts.<sup>5</sup>

Gavampati often spent his siesta there, and also held conversations with [Pāyāsi](#), who asked him to pass a message to the inhabitants of earth that they should profit by Pāyāsi's example, and should be wise and respectful when making offerings. (VvA 331 f)

**1.2.4 The Dulvā** (Tibetan Vinaya) mentions that after the Buddha's death, when Mahā Kassapa wished to hold a council of the elders, Puṇṇa was sent as a special messenger to summon Gavampati, who was then in the Serissaka mansion. (Rockhill, 1883:149 f)

However, Gavampati did not attend as his death was imminent. Instead he sent his bowl and three robes as a gift to the sangha. Immediately afterwards, he died, and Puṇṇa carried out his funeral rites. Gavampati is evidently identical with Giri,nela,pūjaka of the [Apadāna](#) (Ap 2:457).

### 1.3 CETĪ COUNTRY

**1.3.1 Cetī** or **Cetiya** was one of the 16 great states (*mahā, janapada*) (A 1:213, etc), probably identical with Ceḍī of the ancient Indian texts (eg Rg 8.5, 37-39). The Cetī nation probably had two separate settlements: one, perhaps the older, was in the mountains, probably the present Nepal (T W Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, 1903:26).

Evidently, the older settlement is the one in the [Vessantara Jātaka](#), which **Vessantara** passes by on his way into exile in the Himavā. It was 30 yojanas (337.5 km = 210 mi)<sup>6</sup> from Jet'uttara (J 6:514, 518).

The other, probably a later colony, was located along the south bank of the [Yamunā](#) (modern Jumna) river, right next to Kuru country. It stretched from the river Chambal on the northwest to Karwi on the southeast, roughly corresponding to modern Bundelkhand and a part of Madhya Pradesh today.<sup>7</sup>

**1.3.2** It is said that the country was called **Cetī** because it was ruled by kings bearing the name of Cetī or Cetiya (SnA 1:135,29). The capital of the older Ceti was probably **Sotthivatī**, where once ruled king [Aparāra](#), who spoke the first lie in the world (J 3:454-460). Sotthivati is probably identical with Sukti,mati or Sukti,sāhvaya of the Mahābhārata (3:20,50; 14:83,2).<sup>8</sup>

The journey from Benares to Cetī ran through a forest infested by robbers (J 1:253, 256). The settlement of Cetī, however, was an important centre of Buddhism, even in the Buddha's time. The [Aṅguttara Nikāya](#) mentions several suttas taught to the Cetīs, while the Buddha was staying outside their town of **Sahajāti**—such as **the (Catukka) Mahā Cunda Sutta** (A 6.46); **the (Dasaka) Cunda Sutta** (A 10.24) and **the Kaṭṭhī Sutta** (A 10.85).<sup>9</sup>

**1.3.3** While dwelling in the **Pācīna,vaṃsa,dāya** in the Cetī country, [Anuruddha](#) became an arhat after the Buddha's visit (A 4:228; V 1:300f). **The Jana,vasabha Sutta** (D 2:200 and *passim*) suggests that the Buddha visits Cetī country several times. **The Gavampati Sutta** records Gavampati as dwelling at **Sahajāti** (also called Sahañcanika).

We are told that the Buddha, having dwelt in Cetī country, went to Bhadda,vatikā, where, at the Amba,tittha river crossing, the elder **Sāgata** tamed a naga (serpent being), and from there he went to

<sup>4</sup> D 2:356 f; DA 3:814,34.

<sup>5</sup> SnA 1:347.

<sup>6</sup> SD 4.17 (1.2.2); SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1).

<sup>7</sup> Pargiter 1904:359; Cunningham 1924:725; Dey 1927:48.

<sup>8</sup> See also Chaudhuri 1923:65 f, 1927:81.

<sup>9</sup> Respectively, A 6.45/3:355 f (SD 4.6), A 10.24/5:41 f (SD 72.12), A 10.85/5:157-161 (SD 68.8).

**Kosambī** (V 4:108 f; J 1:360 f). This part of the country corresponds roughly to the modern Bundelkhand and the adjoining region (Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism*, 1932:16).

## 2 The 4 noble truths

### 2.1 MASTERING THE 4 TRUTHS

#### 2.1.1 Seeing the truths

**2.1.1.1** The teaching on **the 4 noble truths**<sup>10</sup>—that one who sees (*passati*) any of the 4 truths sees all of them—which the elder Gavampati attributes to the Buddha is not found elsewhere in the suttas or the Vinaya. The Gavampati teaching is, however, quoted in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga**, as follows:

*Magga, samaṅgissa ñāṇaṃ  
dukkha p’etaṃ ñāṇaṃ  
dukkha, samudayo p’etaṃ ñāṇaṃ  
dukkha, nirodho p’eta m ñāṇaṃ  
dukkha, nirodha, gaminiyā  
paṭipadāya p’etaṃ ñāṇaṃ*

The knowledge in one who is accomplished in the path is the knowledge that is suffering, and it is this knowledge that is the arising of suffering, too, and it is this knowledge that is the ending is suffering, too, and it is this knowledge that is the path leading to the ending of suffering. (Pm 568/1:119; quoted at Vism 22.93)

**2.1.1.2** **Buddhaghosa** quotes the Gavampati teaching in his Visuddhi, magga to prove that path-knowledge performs four functions at a single mind-moment.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the moment of penetration into **streamwinning** is not in stages but immediate. It should be understood that this does not mean that awakening is immediate or sudden but progressive, as taught throughout the suttas. It is merely that the moment of breakthrough, like a ripe fruit falling from a tree, is immediate. [2.2]

#### 2.1.2 Working with the 4 truths

**2.1.2.1** Here is a diagram listing the truths, their functions and how understanding one brings us understanding of the other three truths:

<u>The truths</u>	<u>Functions</u>	<u>Nature of the 4 truths</u>	
(1) Suffering	true reality	nothing in this world is ours; hence, <u>unsatisfactory</u>	} meaning of life
(2) Its arising	craving	<u>desiring</u> what is not ours brings suffering	
(3) The path	streamwinning etc	we need to learn <u>how</u> to let go of what is not ours	} purpose of life
(4) Its ending	nirvana	without desire, we are <u>free</u> from suffering	

**Table 2.1.2.** The nature of the 4 truths

We should note here that the 4 noble truths have been listed in its old practice sequence as 1-2-4-3 in contrast to the more familiar “teaching” sequence of 1-2-3-4.<sup>12</sup> This older sequence fits in naturally with our reflection on the truths in terms of the 4 divine abodes.

<sup>10</sup> For details on the 4 noble truths, see SD 1.1 (6.2).

<sup>11</sup> Vism 22.93/690,10-13.

<sup>12</sup> See **Mahā Saḷ-āyatanika S** (M 149,11 etc) + SD 41.9 (2.4).

**2.1.2.2** In simple terms, we can see these as 4 approaches to happiness in terms of **the 4 divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*), thus:

**(1) Love** (*mettā*). By *love* here is meant lovingkindness, unconditional love, that is, true respect for self and others. When there is no *love*, there is a separation, a false distance: its falsity makes it look unbridgeable; from such a distance, we fail to see others and things as they really are. This is when we look at the world (external reality) without understanding that it is really our own self projecting what it feels lacking, and so the self desires to complete itself, as it were.

We see such “things” as being tangible and measurable—hence, worth having, worth collecting. The want to have means that we are wanting. The sad reality is that we can never *have* what is out there. The world is not ours: we get it only by letting it go. This is the **philosophical** essence of suffering.

So, we think about life and ask questions that matter—free thinking seekers will conclude that “nothing in this world is ours.” We may use whatever there is before us, but we cannot really *have* them. Since we have no control we cannot really have them in exactly the ways that we want them to be. Nothing in this world really brings the exact results or benefits as we desire them. When we understand this, we understand the nature of craving, that we need to let go of attachment to the world—to what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think<sup>13</sup>—only then we are really happy.<sup>14</sup>

Love (*mettā*) bridges this gap between the self and the not-self out there which we desire to *have* to feed the very hungry self. It is nothing but **craving** or lust. When we really *see* craving, we are on the way to end it—for, we now know what it really is. Love respects and see people and things just as they are; lust [craving] wants and see people and things as objects to feed the self, or just another button on our cloak of many colours, the dyes of craving.

We need to wash this dirty dyed cloak in the clean running waters of the fresh spring, and dry it in the sun of warm and bright health. Then, the cloak regains its fresh, sweet radiance, glowing white like the mind in deep meditation. This is the coat that keeps us warm and safe in inclement weather. When we reach home, that safe place where we don’t even need a cloak, we take it off and just be our simple self, just as we are, at the journey’s end, deserving of blissful rest and spacious peace.

**(2) Ruth** (*karuṇā*) is love in action; it is another name for compassion. Ruth is the discerning eye from on high surveying the world below. It sees beings running around loveless, looking for love but never giving; looking for things to love out of the love for things. It is an endless inhuman quest that keeps us going in circles seemingly purposeful because of its tedium. We are Sisyphus<sup>15</sup> pushing our boulder up the steep hills of daily life, reaching the peak, it rolls down again. We are so used to this that even as we run after the running boulder, we see it as an achievement.

We glow with a sense of accomplishment, even pride, as we see others still pushing their boulder up the steep hill. Not once do we want to stop, which would mean that the boulder-pusher behind us would run ahead of us. We are driven by the vision of the boulder poised on the peak, ready for its downhill run, so that we can chase it again, as we have always done. We know nothing else worthwhile. That is, until someone—not a boulder-pusher—but a seer (who sees through our meaningless pushing and purposeless running) comes along.

True reality is all around us, deep in our inner peace. Yet we seek it in famous teachers and great gurus. Perhaps their greatness reminds us of how small we really are. Burdened by our past, we have become small. So we run after the big with smiling selfies: what shall we say when the wisdom of time

<sup>13</sup> See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

<sup>14</sup> On “Nothing is worth clinging to ... ,” see **Pacalā S** (A 7.58,11), SD 4.11. On letting go of the 5 aggregates, see **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,40), SD 3.13.

<sup>15</sup> On Sisyphus, see SD 23.3 (1); SD 48.3 (1.2.2.2); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.1); SD 50.8 (1.2.1.7; 2.3.2.6); SD 50.12 (2.4.5.2).

catches up? Compassion is when we accept how little we are, how less we know. We are then ready to learn from what is right before us. We don't need to push a big rock up to the heights just because the hill is bigger and steeper.

The seer speaks to us of the **ethical** dimension of life. Our body is not merely for pushing boulders and running after them. There is no end to such vain samsaric activity—this is suffering. The body should serve and nurture the mind to free us from such suffering, to seek better things. We begin by disciplin-ing our body by living on what we need (the supports of life), by living with respect for life, enjoying the fruits of our life and the freedom our body, seeing beauty in truth, and keeping a clear bright mind to understand all this.

Such a cultivated body prepares us for cultivating the mind to see the good of stopping our running, and the joy of just standing happily with our task all done. Then, we live in harmony with the world, not seeing it as something we want to have—pushing and running—but as a living and natural part of us. We understand that everything changes, and that we are constantly growing in understanding the world. Hence, we are free from suffering because we are free from conflict with the world. We have stopped pushing and running.

**(3) Joy (*mudita*)** arises from the knowledge and understanding that we can change for the better, that others can be better and happier, too. That is why we bow to one another with the lotus-palms (*añjali*), not as a status-marker or class-correctness, but as a joyful reminder of our potential for good and joy. Suffering is when we, for some reason, do not see this truth of change.

This “reason” that prevents the natural and necessary change in us is invariably craving. This is the lust that compels us to seek what is pleasurable, to reject what we see as denying us that pleasure or as being unpleasant, or simply feeling bored. The real reason for this is that we are unable to feel any joy. We are not enjoying life because we are so focused on the pushing and running that we do not realize we can just stop running, and the rock will stop rolling, too.

Having stopped running, we mindfully walk, gazing at the beautiful scenery and enjoying the fresh air and sunshine. Then, we realize we do not even have to walk, we can just sit, close our eyes and see more of what is within us. And at the right time, we mindfully lie on our right side to rest majestically like a lion. Giving up an awkward posture, we settle for an easy one. In the same way, we still our formation of bad unwholesome thoughts, the source of our sufferings.<sup>16</sup>

When we take up this **purposeful** approach—working towards the goal of ever less suffering and more happiness—we will grow to understand that the world is neither good nor bad: it is how we think and act that shape us. With unwholesome intentions—rooted in lust, hate and delusion—we become how we act: lustful, hateful, deluded. With wholesome intentions of non-lust, non-hate, non-delusion, we live happily with charity, love and wisdom.

**(4) Peace (*upekkhā*)** naturally arises in us when we have understood the true nature of suffering. We may not be able to change the world—the world itself is change, anyway. We may not be able to change others. We can and must change ourself.

Not to see change means we are stuck with the past, stuck with the view that “we are what we were”—an emotional dissonance. Rather, the reality is that “as we think, so we are,” but our thoughts grow, our views change. That is how we evolve and mature. What prevents growth are craving and ignorance. We cling on to the past and hope for the future, but ignore the present, which is really before us, and what we truly are.

When we know what craving really is, it loses its sting and control over us. Then, we are truly free to act and live as we wish, content in the present moment, the only true reality there is.

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<sup>16</sup> See **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20,6) SD 1.6.

True peace can only arise here and now: the past is dead, a shadow behind us; the future never comes. When this moment moves on, we reach a new now, a new opportunity to see and to change with what we see, to grow and mature with that change—seeing things, not as they appear or how we want them to be, but as they truly are, in all their truth and beauty.

In short, living in the present is about learning from our living moments, the only lesson there is in life. We see only change, there is nothing that changes not. For, that which changes can never be a “thing.” There is no “thing”; only change. Our body is change, feeling is change, perception is change, karma is change, consciousness is change. We are change.

If we take this learning or **didactic** approach—driven by a purposeful life of learning and growing—we see that everything in this world is impermanent; hence, unsatisfactory, suffering. We work to free ourselves from identifying with the things we desire; we live compassionately respecting the nature of the moment; and we joyfully seek to understand the nature of impermanence, the basic and universal hallmark of all life and existence. Then, we will be truly happy, moving against the current in the stream to awakening.<sup>17</sup>

**2.1.2.3** When we penetrate any one truth, we penetrate all the 4 truths because they are not separate truths, but interlinked with one another like a network of 4 jewels. Each truth reflects the other three, so that each is, as it were, complete in itself. When we examine such a truth, we are looking at one of the facets of a single jewel.

In fact, each of the 4 “truth” jewels has 12 facets—each of the 4 truths comprises the theory (*pariyatī*), the practice (*paṭipattī*) and realization (*paṭivedha*) aspects. It’s like a jewel with 4 curved sides, each curved side with three facets. Examining any facet on any side reveals within the jewel all the 12 facets intermingled in the same jewel—like a kaleidoscope. We see truth and beauty at play for our enduring joy and space.

**2.2 SUDDEN PENETRATION.** The Gavampati teaching on the 4 noble truths is quoted by **the Kathā,vatthu** that discusses the question whether “breakthrough is gradual” (*anupubbābhisamaya*). Here, “breakthrough” or realization (*abhisamaya*)—which usually refers to streamwinning—also applies to the 4 paths of sainthood, each in its own turn (not all at once), including attaining nirvana. The conclusion is that the “breakthrough” or realization itself is immediate, just as one realizes the 4 noble truths all at once—penetrating any of the truths means that one realizes all the 4 truths.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 Gradual progress, sudden penetration

#### **3.1 THE GRADUAL QUEST AND TEACHINGS**

##### **3.1.1 The gradual talk**

**3.1.1.1** This does not mean that “**awakening**” (*bodhi*)—the destruction of all the mental fetters—is immediate or sudden. In fact, mental progress and evolution are common processes in the Buddha’s teaching. A basic teaching by the Buddha is that of **the gradual talk** (*ānupubbī,kathā*), where, to the beginner, the Buddha speaks first of giving, moral virtue, the heavens and the advantages of renunciation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>18</sup> Kvū 2.9.19/220,3-14.

<sup>19</sup> See **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.15), SD 49.8a. For the pericope, see SD 49.8b (7.3 esp 7.3.2).

These are basic teachings to calm and clear the listener's mind—to free it from mental hindrances—to ready it for the special teaching unique to the Buddha—that of the 4 noble truths.<sup>20</sup>

As a rule, the listener or audience of this gradual talk, would, at the end of it, at least go for refuge, even go forth to renounce the world and become a monk or a nun. Following this, the renunciant will often request a “teaching in brief” from the Buddha to reflect on while he is in solitary retreat. During such a retreat, usually lasting a week or so, the renunciant will attain arhathood. Then, he returns to the Buddha to report his awakening to him.<sup>21</sup>

In other cases, where the listener is spiritually ready, the Buddha would simply address a powerful or difficult experience of his. This marks the turning-point in the listener's mind so that he at once goes for refuge and then renounces the world. Then, he goes into solitary retreat, emerges as an arhat, and reports to the Buddha.<sup>22</sup>

**3.1.1.2** Then, there is the spiritual progress of the recluse, or the stages of **the fruits of recluship** (*sāmañña,phala*),<sup>23</sup> which is an elaboration of the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t,taya*) in cultivation of moral virtue, mental development and wisdom.<sup>24</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Dīgha Nikāya—the chapter on the morality aggregate (*sīla-k,khandha vagga*)—comprises the 1<sup>st</sup> 13 of the sutta collection (*sutta piṭaka*), all of them having, as their major feature, the most detailed expositions of the “fruits of recluship” treatment of the 3 trainings.

These are also cases of the gradual training on a deeper level, which converts most of the Buddha's listeners. In other cases, this serves as “past good karma” (*pubbe ca kata,puññatā*) which will bear spiritual fruit in the future.

### **3.1.2 Gotama's quest and progress**

**3.1.2.1** In the case of **the Buddha** himself, we see his quest for awakening as a gradual process of moving beyond whatever does not work for spiritual progress. There are **3 key features** of the Buddha's life and quest that we should note that act as vital foils for him as the fully awakened Buddha, as follows:

- (1) he has lived a full young life of **sensual pleasures** in the 3 palaces;<sup>25</sup>
- (2) he has learned and gained the best **meditation** teachings of his time: those of Ājāra Kālāma and of the late Uddaka through Rāma,putta;<sup>26</sup> and
- (3) he has spent some 6 years of **self-mortification** practising the methods of the best ascetics of his time.<sup>27</sup>

Through dhyanic meditation, the Buddha awakens to the liberating wisdom, transcending both human and divine salvation, to attain the unconditioned, nirvana. Only after effectively giving up the extremes of self-indulgence of sense-pleasures (abandoning oneself to our body) and of self-mortification (the willingness to even destroy that body and life), he becomes the Buddha. In short, as far as spiritual experiences

<sup>20</sup> For suttas where the Buddha teaches the 4 noble truths directly to the laity, see SD 49.8b (7.4.3).

<sup>21</sup> For a list of suttas on the Buddha giving a progressive talk, see SD 49.8b (7.3.2.2).

<sup>22</sup> **The Arahanta Vagga** (S 7/1:160-171) records 10 cases of brahmins all of whom become arhats in this manner: see eg **S 7.5** (SD 50.21), **S 7.6** (SD 50.22b), **SD 7.7** (SD 50.23), **S 7.10** (SD 50.2.4).

<sup>23</sup> See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,39-100), SD 8.10; SD 21.6 (2).

<sup>24</sup> On the 3 trainings, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

<sup>25</sup> See SD 52.1 (6.1).

<sup>26</sup> See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,15-16) + SD 1.11 (4.2); SD 52.1 (12); on his own early dhyanic experience, see SD 52.1 (5.2).

<sup>27</sup> See SD 52.1 (13.2).

and salvations go, the Buddha has tried them all, and risen above and beyond them all. In this sense, early Buddhism is based on personal verification and personal effort.

**3.1.2.2** The Buddha’s teaching frees us all from the yoke of priestcraft and superstition, from magic and religion. He declares, for the first time, in religious history, that we can and must work out our own salvation—if we do not master ourself, then, who else can our master be? (Dh 160).<sup>28</sup> We can and must have no other master except ourself. When someone else is our master, we would then be a mere creature or slave to that master. The point is to know and understand that we have a choice for self-mastery, or we fall into slavery, the worst kind of which a mental slavery.

We are born free, but we are chained in sin and salvation promised by priests and gurus. We are systematically deprived of our natural franchise for curiosity and learning. We are herded and hunted, domesticated into our tribes that think and speak for us. We are only liberated by a free and wholesome education, and early Buddhism celebrates that learning and growing with an even higher freedom—that of the heart.

### **3.1.3 Our quest: The 12-step discipleship**

**3.1.3.1** In the *Kiṭṭā,giṇi Sutta* (M 70) and the *Caṅkī Sutta* (M 95),<sup>29</sup> the Buddha teaches another set of “gradual training” (*anupubba,sikkhā*), which we can call, in modern term, **the “12-step discipleship,”** thus:

Bhikshus, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. On the contrary, **final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress.**<sup>30</sup>

And how, bhikshus, is final knowledge achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress?

Here, bhikshus,

- (1) he who has faith (in a teacher) approaches him.
- (2) Approaching him, he respectfully draws near to him.
- (3) Respectfully drawing near to him, he lends his ear to him.<sup>31</sup>
- (4) He who lends his ear, listens to the Dharma.
- (5) Having listened to the Dharma, he remembers [memorizes] it.<sup>32</sup>
- (6) Having remembered the teachings, he investigates their meaning.
- (7) Having investigated their meaning, he reflectively accepts<sup>33</sup> the teachings.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See SD 52.1 (17.2.2).

<sup>29</sup> This 12-stage learning progress is given in *Caṅkī S* (M 95), SD 21.15, first in normal sequence (M 95,20/2:173) and then in reverse (M 95,21b/2:174). Cf A 4:336, 5:154.

<sup>30</sup> This whole para: *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave ādiken’eva aññ’ārādhanaṃ vadāmi, api na bhikkhave anupubba,sikkhā anupubba,kiriya anupubba,paṭipadā aññ’ārādhanaṃ hoti.*

<sup>31</sup> Alt tr: “Respectfully sitting close, he listens attentively.”

<sup>32</sup> This and next line: *Sutvā dhammaṃ dhāreti | dhātānaṃ dhammānaṃ atthaṃ upaparikkhati*: here we *dhammaṃ* (sg) in the first line becomes *dhammānaṃ* (pl) in the second line. In the first line, *dhammaṃ* refers to the teaching as a whole; in the second line, individual aspects or topics are meant.

<sup>33</sup> *Nijjhānaṃ khamanti*, lit, “insights are endured,” ie “capable of bearing insights”; idiomatic meaning “he is pleased with, approves of, finds pleasure in” (M 1:133 f; 479 f, 2:173, 175; S 3:225, 228, 5:377, 379; Vv 84.17). *Khanti* usually means “patience” but here it means “choice, receptivity, preference, acceptance.” The BHSD defines *kṣānti* as “intellectual receptivity; the being ready in advance to accept knowledge.” *Khanti* is often used in the Canon in this latter sense (see SD 12.13(2a) for refs). The phrase can also be freely rendered as “a receptivity in

- (8) Having reflectively accepted the teachings, desire [will-power] arises in him.  
 (9) When (wholesome) desire has arisen in him, he exerts himself.<sup>35</sup>  
 (10) Having exerted himself, he weighs.<sup>36</sup>  
 (11) Having weighed, he is resolute.<sup>37</sup>  
 (12) Being resolute, he realizes through his own body the supreme truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom.<sup>38</sup> (M 70,22-23), SD11.1, = (M 95,21.2-23), SD 21.15

**3.1.3.2** This gradual training of the 12-step discipleship is based on the teaching of **the 5 qualities that conduce to intrepidity** (*vesārajja, karaṇa, dhamma*), thus:

<u>qualities conducing to intrepidity</u>		<u>factors of the gradual training</u>	
(1) faith	<i>saddhā</i>	1-2	faith; approaches and draws near
(2) moral virtue	<i>sīla</i>	3-4	respectful nearness; full attention to the teacher
(3) great learning	<i>bahu-s, suta</i>	5-8	listens; remembers; investigates; accepts Dharma
(4) exerting effort	<i>viriy'ārambha</i>	9-11	shows desire; exertion; weighing; resoluteness <sup>39</sup>
(5) wisdom	<i>paññā</i>	12	gains wisdom (including awakening).

These 5 qualities that conduce to intrepidity are extended in practice into the 12 steps of discipleship. As the disciple progresses through the training, he grows in **intrepidity** or moral courage (*vesārajja*),<sup>40</sup> that is, unshakable faith in the 3 jewels, in spreading and preserving the Dharma, and bringing good and joy to others. These are the qualities of a true Dhamma missionary (*\*dhamma, carika*).<sup>41</sup>

## 3.2 FOLLOWING THE PATH

### 3.2.1 Progressively higher distinction

**3.2.1.1** The urgent message of the whole Tipiṭaka—indeed of the Buddha himself—is that we should strive for “**progressively higher distinction**” (*ulāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ visesaṃ*), that is, to work to attain the 4 stages of sainthood—streamwinning, once-returning, non-returning and arhathood. The true training in noble discipleship starts with streamwinning. Hence, when Sāriputta listens to the first 2

harmony with true reality.” On *dhamma, nijjhāna, khanti*, see *Kesa, puttiya S* (A 3.65), SD 35.4 Comy 3a(8). On *khan-ti* as “mental receptivity,” see *Aniccā S* (A 6.98), SD 12.13(3).

<sup>34</sup> This and the next line: *Atthaṃ upaparikkhatto dhammā nijjhānaṃ khamanti; dhamma, nijjhāna, khantiyā sati chando jāyato*. M:ÑB: “when he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings.”

<sup>35</sup> From here to end of para: *Chanda, jāto ussahati; ussahitvā tuletī; tulayitvā padahati; pahit'atto samāno kāyena c'eva paramaṃ saccaṃ sacchikaroti paññāya ca naṃ atvivijha passati*. Alt tr: “With his desire, he applies his will.” On *ussahati*, see CPD: I have conflated both the normal (“he is able”) and conative (“he strives”) senses in the English tr.

<sup>36</sup> Alt tr: “Having applied effort, he harmonizes his practice.”

<sup>37</sup> Alt tr: “Harmonizing his practice, he strives on.”

<sup>38</sup> Be Ee: *Pahitatto samāno kāyena c'eva paramaṃ saccaṃ sacchikaroti, paññāya ca naṃ atvivijha passati*.

<sup>39</sup> This set of effort expressions, meaning, “How are your practices progressing?” as used by the Buddha to ask after Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila on retreat [2.2.5.2].

<sup>40</sup> On moral courage, see SD 28.9a (3); “morally courageous”: *Sobhana S* (A 4.7) + SD 51.17 (1.1.2.4).

<sup>41</sup> On the Buddha’s great commission to us, see SD 11.2.

lines of Assaji’s quatrain and becomes a streamwinner, he realizes it is only the start of the path, and that he needs to meet the Buddha (the teacher) and cultivate further.<sup>42</sup>

**3.2.1.2** At the start of **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118), the Buddha points out to the assembly how some of the great elders who are arhats, including Ānanda, yet a streamwinner, are “advising and instructing (*ovadanti anusāsanti*) 10 monks ... 20 monks ... 30 monks ... 40 monks” at a time. “And the new monks, having been advised and instructed by the elder monks, had attained progressively higher distinction (*ulāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ visesaṃ*).”

Here, in **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118) and in **the Mahāli Sutta** (D 6), for example, the phrase refers to the attainment of the 4 types of sainthood [2.2.5.1].<sup>43</sup> More often, however, the phrase simply refers to the attaining of the 4 dhyanas, of course, in connection with the reaching of the path of awakening, such as in **the Dhamma,cetiya Sutta** (M 89) and **the Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka Sutta** (S 47.10).<sup>44</sup>

**3.2.1.3** Sometimes, the Buddha asks about both attaining dhyana and making a breakthrough into the path. **The (Anuruddhā) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128) records how the Buddha himself visits the monks, Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila, on retreat in the eastern bamboo park (*pācīna,vaṃsa,dāya*),<sup>45</sup> and asks them, “... have you attained the superhuman state, *dwelling in the comfort* that is the distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones?”<sup>46</sup>

“**The distinction in knowledge and vision of the noble ones**” (*alam-ariya,ñāṇa,dassana,visesa*) is often used in the suttas to refer to the higher degrees of spiritual knowledge characteristic of the saints, that is, their various powers or special abilities.<sup>47</sup> The phrase, “**dwelling in the comfort**” (*phasu,vihāra*) refers to the attaining of dhyanas for attaining the paths and fruitions, that is, “the distinction ... .”

While the highest of ordinary human virtues are the 5 precepts, the 10 precepts, the 10 wholesome courses of actions (*kusala.kamma,patha*),<sup>48</sup> the virtues of the renunciants who become saints are called **the superhuman states** (*uttari,manussa,dhamma*), which include the dhyanas (*jhāna*), the superknowledges (*abhiññā*), and the paths (*magga*) and fruits (*phala*).<sup>49</sup>

**3.2.1.4 The Vinaya**, in its definition of *uttari,manussa,dhamma*—which is the essence of the 4<sup>th</sup> “defeat” (pārājika) rule—includes false claims to achieving dhyanas and attaining the path (V 3:91, 4:24). A monastic who makes such a claim at once automatically “defeated,” that is, falls from the state of being a monk or a nun.

**The 4<sup>th</sup> pārājika rule** reads: “Whatever monk (or nun) should, while not knowing, boast of a superhuman state, knowledge and insight deserving the name ‘noble,’ as referring to himself, thus: ‘I know thus, I see thus.’ Then, afterwards on another occasion, he should, whether being examined or not, having committed the offence and looking for purification, say thus: ‘Avuso, not knowing, I said, “I know”;

<sup>42</sup> V 1:39 f; DhA 1:94; see SD 42.8 (1.2); SD 51.5 (5.2.3.8); also Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2002, 2013 5.11.

<sup>43</sup> See **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 112,9-12/3:80), SD 7.13, & **Mahāli S** (D 6,13/1:156), SD 53.4.

<sup>44</sup> See **Dhamma,cetiya S** (M 89,12+18), SD 64.10 & **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10,3), SD 24.2. The expression occurs as *ulāraṃ visesaṃ* only in **Lohicca S** (D 12 passim), SD 34.8. Def SD 53.1 (2.2.4.1).

<sup>45</sup> **(Anuruddhā) Upakkilesa S** (M 128,13.2/3:157), SD 5.18.

<sup>46</sup> *Uttari,manussa,dhammā alam,ariya,ñāṇa,dassana,viseso adhigato phāsu,vihāro’ti* (M 128,15/3:158), SD 5.18.

<sup>47</sup> In **Mahā Sihanāda S** (M 12,2/1:68), Comy ad loc says that it means specifically the supramundane path that Sunakkhatta is denying the Buddha (MA 2:21 f). From here on, V 1:352 takes a different turn from **Cūḷa Go,siṅga S** (M 31,10.1): see §7.2 above where the parallel starts.

<sup>48</sup> See eg **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,6/1:47), SD 11.14; **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,12-14/1:288), SD 5.7. However, on **Acela Kassa & Citta the houselord**, see SD 45.14 (3.2).

<sup>49</sup> DA 2:388, 3:817; MA 2:21; AA 1:3:412

not seeing, I said, “I see”; I spoke falsely, lying.’ Other than from an overestimation (of self), he, too, becomes defeated, not in communion.”

The spirit of this rule is that the Dharma-training is not about attaining this or that state, but rather the ridding of defilements and hindrances to spiritual development. The purpose of the spiritual training, especially the holy life of renunciation, is that of attaining the path, that is, at least streamwinning, in this life itself.

### 3.2.2 “More to be done” (*uttariṃ karaṇīyaṃ*)

**3.2.2.1** A number of suttas—given to monastics or to the laity—record how at various stages in a lengthy teaching on the 3 trainings, the teacher (usually the Buddha)—would punctuate the teaching to highlight the fact that the training *is still not over*. In the **(Ānanda) Subha Sutta** (D 10), for example, while Ānanda explains the various aspects of moral conduct, he pauses after each section (say, on “moral shame and moral fear”) to tell the brahmin Subha, “but there is here something more to be done (*atthi c’ev’ettha uttariṃ karaṇīyaṃ*).” He repeats the reminder for the various aspects of training in mindfulness and meditation.

Then, he goes right through the sections on overcoming the 5 hindrances and the 4 dhyanas without any interruption. The reason for this is clear—we do not really have to master *all* the dhyanas. And at the end of the series, with the attaining of arhathood, he finally declares: “**There is nothing further beyond this**” (*nāparam itthattāyāti*). In fact, this is what the arhat realizes for himself—he has awakened just like the Buddha: there is no more awakening to be done.<sup>50</sup>

**3.2.2.2** Although **arhathood** is the highest goal in the Buddhist training—this is as good as buddhahood itself for us [3.2.2.1]—a lot of proper preparations are needed to attain this supreme goal, just as the Buddha himself has done. Our first hindrance is the worldly life of acquiring things and pleasures, procreation and family, profession and profit. All this keeps us so busy and distracted that we hardly find any effective time for wholesome practice.

Secondly, our minds are not ready as long as we do not master at least **the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana**. Without a regular taste of dhyana, we will easily fall into sensual pleasures, or we will find it almost impossible to free ourself from our body to enjoy the full bliss of the liberated mind. We may chance on some good meditation and taste the momentary bliss of inner stillness, but that is insufficient for us to completely renounce the world of sense-pleasures.

**3.2.2.3** However, even before the gate to arhathood, there are lay-bys, resting-places as it were, for us to take as we progress on the path. In fact, if we have any difficulty in meditation, we should aspire to at least take the first step on the path of awakening, that is, attain streamwinning. We are constantly reminded of the urgency, necessity and relative ease of starting our journey on the path of awakening—as taught in all the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).<sup>51</sup>

Basically, we should constantly reflect on the impermanence of all things, beginning with ourself (our body, what we have, what we are, our mind, our youth, our health, our life) are all constantly changing, becoming other, rising and falling away. So, too, other people, whether they are near and dear to us or

<sup>50</sup> See **Ānanda) Subha S** (D 10,1.31+passim), SD 40a.13; **Assa,pura S** (M 39,3.5/1:271), SD 10.13; **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); **(Gaha,pati) Potaliya S** (M 54,14), SD 43.8; also SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5). The sameness of the awakening of the Buddha and that of the arhat is affirmed by **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10. Later sectarian Buddhism rejected this, to innovate other forms of “enlightenment,” which, as such, should be rejected, as they are clearly wrong views.

<sup>51</sup> See eg **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

