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The Gradual Way

Spiritual discourse, training and freedom in early Buddhism
A survey by Piya Tan ©2008, 2020

Na āyataken'eva aññā,paṭivedho

There is no sudden penetration of true knowledge (of full awakening).¹

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¹ Cv 9.1.4 (V 1:238,30) (SD 59.2c) = A 8.19/4:201,5 + SD 45.18 (2); A 8.20/4:207,19 f (SD 59.2a); A 8.22,10 + SD 45.15 (3.2.2); M 70,2/1:479 (SD 11.1); U 5.5/54,30 (SD 59.2b); qu at Kvu 219,22; AA 4:111,17 ≈ UA 303,16. [1.1.1]

1 The gradual way pericope

1.1 EARLY BUDDHIST GRADUALISM

1.1.1 The 8 remarkable qualities

The Vinaya records a very instructive story about how one observance day the Buddha refuses to conduct a Pāṭimokkha recital by simply remaining silent. When Ānanda asks the Buddha for the reason of his silence, the Buddha replies that “the congregation is not entirely pure,” that is, there is a monk in their midst who has broken a Vinaya rule (he has not confessed an offence he has committed).

After Moggallāna has removed the offending monk from the congregation, the Buddha goes on to discourse on the parable of the great ocean. He begins by stating that the Buddha-Dharma has **8 remarkable and wonderful qualities** (*aṭṭha acchariyā abbhūtā dhammā*), seeing which, monks (true practitioners) delight in this Dharma-Vinaya (*ye disvā disvā bhikkhū imasmim̐ dhamma,vinaye abhiramanti*).

The very first of these 8 qualities is especially relevant here:

“Bhikshus, just as **the great ocean deepens gradually, slopes gradually, inclines gradually**, not abruptly, like a cliff, even so, too, bhikshus, in **this Dharma-Vinaya** there is a gradual training, a gradual task, a gradual path, not a sudden realization of final knowledge.”²

Seyyathāpi bhikkhave mahā,samuddo anupubba,ninno anupubba,poṇo anupubba,pabbhāro na āyataken’eva papāto. Evam eva kho bhikkhave imasmim̐ dhamma,vinaye anupubba,sikkhā anupubba,kiriyā anupubba,paṭipadā na āyataken’eva aññā.paṭivedho. (Cv 9.1.4 @ V 2:238 f)³

1.1.2 Terms for early Buddhist gradualism. Underlying early Buddhism is **the gradual way**, as attested by these various terms relating to the whole gamut of Dharma training, that is to say, it is:

a gradual teaching	<i>ānupubbī,kathā</i>	V 1:15; D 1:110; A 4:186; U 49; J 1:8, 50 ⁴
a gradual training	<i>anupubba,sikkhā</i>	} V 2:238; M 1:479, 3:1; A 4:201, 207; U 54 ⁵
a gradual task	<i>anupubba,kiriyā</i>	
a gradual path	<i>anupubba,paṭipadā</i>	
a gradual act	<i>anupubba,karaṇa</i>	
a gradual meditation	<i>anupubba,vihāra</i> ⁶	D 3:265; M 1:479; A 4:201, 207, 410; VbhA 423
a gradual practitioner	<i>anupubba,vihārī</i>	U 78

1.2 THE 3 TRAININGS

We will look at the sutta definition of “the gradual way” by quoting the key passage on the common nature of these terms in the light of **the 3 trainings** (*sikkha-t,taya*). One of the key expressions of the gradual progress of Dharma training is found in the formula of **graduated talk** (*ānupubbī,kathā*) or progressive teaching, here given in full:

² See n 1 (opening quote). See also (**Hatthi,gāmika**) **Ugga S** (A 8.22,10) + SD 45.15 (3.2.2) & foll n.

³ See **Paharada S** (A 8.19,14) + SD 45.18 (2); (**Samudda**) **Uposatha S 1** (A 8.20/4:204-208), SD 59.2a; (**Samudda**) **Uposatha S 2** (U 5.5/53,6-56,31), SD 59.2b; **Pātimokkha Ṭhapana Khandhaka** (Cv 9.1.2-4 @ V 2:237-240), SD 59.2c.

⁴ Also at Miln 228; Vism 249; DA 258; UA 173; VvA 208. See CPD: ānupubbi-kathā.

⁵ Also MA 3:193.

⁶ There is also the comy term, “progressive attainment” (*anupubba,samāpatti*, MA 2:30).

Then, the Blessed One gave ... **a graduated talk**—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*), and the heavens (*sagga*).

He explained

the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures (*kām'ādīnava*), and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm'ānisaṃsa*).

When the Blessed One perceived that the listener's mind was *prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, uplifted and lucid*, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsikā desanā*), that is to say, suffering (*dukkha*), its arising, its ending, and the path. (V 1:15; D 1:110, 148; A 3:184, 4:186; U 49; J 1:8, 50; VbhA 423; etc)

2 Key suttas on the gradual way

2.0 EARLY BUDDHIST TEXTS ON THE GRADUAL WAY. Besides the well known 1st remarkable quality of the great ocean—that it deepens gradually [1.1.1]—other key discussions in the early Buddhist texts on **the gradual path of awakening** or “final knowledge” (*aññā*) occur in 3 suttas. The Buddha is recorded in M 65, 70 and 101 as describing the nature of the gradual path of awakening, employing the parable of the training of a thoroughbred colt.

Here are the suttas followed by some explanations:

Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta	M 107,2/3:2 f	(Migāra's mother's mansion) ⁷	SD 56.3	[2.1]
		(religious learning) ⁸		
		(mastering the skill of archery)	SD 56.3	[2.1]
		(mastering the skill of counting)	SD 56.3	{2.1}
	M 107,3/3:3	the training of a thoroughbred colt ⁹	SD 56.3	{2.1}
Bhaddāli Sutta	M 65,33/1:446	the training of a thoroughbred colt ¹⁰	SD 56.2	[2.2]
Kiṭṭhagiri Sutta	M 70,22-23/1:480 f	the 12-step discipleship	SD 11.1	{2.3}

2.1 THE GAṆAKA MOGGALLĀNA SUTTA (M 107), SD 56.3

2.1.1 The 3 parables: Archery, accountancy, thoroughbred-training

2.1.1.1 The first half of **the Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 107) significantly deals with “the gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress” (*anupubba, sikkhā anupubba, kiriyā anupubba, paṭipadā*) (M 107,1-11). M 107 opens with the brahmin Gaṇaka Moggallāna (the accountant) remarking to the Buddha that both Buddha and the brahmins seem to follow the gradual training—as in study, mantra learning,

⁷ Comy: It is not possible to build a 7-storey mansion in a single day. Once the site is cleared, from the time the foundation is laid until the painting is finished, there is gradual progress (MA 4:69,5-9). This example of gradual training, and the following 3, are given by Gaṇaka Moggallāna himself.

⁸ *Ajjhena = ajjjhayana* (Skt *adhyayana*), “reading, learning (by heart), studying (the Vedas by reciting them).” This is an analogy given by Gaṇaka Moggallāna himself.

⁹ Here, the Buddha only mentions the first step in horse-training, but explains it in full in **Bhaddāli S** (M 65,33/1:-446), SD 56.2 [foll].

¹⁰ In this parable (M 65,32), the Buddha refers back to his earlier exposition briefly mentioned in **Gaṇaka Moggallāna S** (M 107,3) [prec]. The monk Bhaddāli says he does not know about it, and the Buddha explains it fully for his benefit (M 65,33).

archery and counting. He asks the Buddha about the gradual training in the Buddha's teaching. The rest of the Sutta records the Buddha's reply. [2.1.1.2]

2.1.1.2 In the **Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta**, the Buddha only briefly mentions the parable of a thoroughbred colt (explained in full in **the Bhaddāli Sutta**, M 65,3) [2.2], after which he elaborates, in sequential terms, on how he trains a person, in cultivating these qualities and practices:

- (1) moral virtue (the precepts) (to refine his bodily actions and speech);
- (2) sense-restraint (directing the senses away from unwholesome mental objects to wholesome ones);¹¹
- (3) moderation in food (eating mindfully and just enough for health and Dharma practice);¹²
- (4) wakefulness (including walking meditation alternating with restful sleep);¹³
- (5) mindfulness and clear knowing (wholesomely keeping the mind fully in the present and wisely examining our thoughts and emotions);
- (6) sitting meditation (to clear the mind of the mental hindrances [4.2.1.7] for the attainment of dhyana);
- (7) the trainee then goes on to attain final knowledge (*aññā*), that is, arhathood.

The training sequence is clearly based on **the 3 trainings**: those of moral virtue (*sīla*), followed by mental concentration (*samādhi*) (that is, meditation), and finally the practitioner gains wisdom leading to "right final knowledge" (*samma-d-aññā*), that is, arhathood.¹⁴ [4]

2.2 THE BHADDĀLI SUTTA (M 65), SD 56.2

2.2.1 The parable: The taming of a thoroughbred colt

2.2.1.1 In the **Bhaddāli Sutta** (M 65), the Buddha uses the parable of a thoroughbred colt (*ājānīya-susu*). A wise horse-trainer would progressively discipline the colt in **the 10 stages of training**, as follows.

(1) First, he fits the bit that contacts and controls the horse's mouth,¹⁵ which it nervously rejects at first, but soon gets used to it. (2) Then, he trains the colt to wear the harness in the same manner; (3) to walk in step; (4) to run in a circle; (5) to prance; (6) to gallop; (7) to charge; (8) to execute the royal gait; (9) to race with speed and gentleness. Finally, (10) the trainer rewards the colt with a good rub-down and grooming.¹⁶

2.2.1.2 The Buddha then describes the stages in which **an arhat** develops the tenfold "**rightness**" (*sammattā*), that is, the eightfold path—right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—and right knowledge and right freedom.¹⁷ These last two are the special qualities of the arhat.

Implicitly, this means that **a learner** (*sekha*) (a saint on the path short of the arhat) begins with having some level of right view (which according to **the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117) underlies all the

¹¹ For practical teaching on sense-restraint, see **Nimitta and anuvyañjana** (SD 19.14).

¹² *Bhojane mattaññutā*, see **Nanda S** (A 8.9/4:166-168).

¹³ On this, and most of the other trainings listed here (in this sentence), see also **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,4-9/1:56 f), SD 13.3.

¹⁴ M 107,1-11/3:1-4 (SD 56.3).

¹⁵ The bit is part of a horse's tack or equipment, and includes the shanks, rings, cheekpads and mullen (the piece that fits into its mouth): [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Bit_\(horse\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Bit_(horse)).

¹⁶ M 65,32-34/1:445-447 (SD 56.2).

¹⁷ Explained in some detail in SD 10.16.

other 7 path-factors).¹⁸ Guided by right view, he progressively cultivates each of the 8 path-factors. It should be noted that the sequence of the path-factors (*magg'aṅga*) is followed *only* in the instruction of the learner.¹⁹ In practice, all the factors must work *together* in “the stages of discipleship” [2.3.2] or to bring about “the fruits of recluseship” [5]. The significance of this point becomes clear when we examine the same parable in the context of the Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta (M 107) [2.1.1.2].

2.2.2 The elder Bhaddāli. While staying in Jeta,vana, the Buddha declares that he takes only one meal a day, and finds that it keeps him healthy and comfortable. Hence, he encourages the monks to do the same.²⁰ The monk Bhaddāli protests that he is unable to do so. The Buddha then advises him to eat one part of what he gets where he is invited and bring away one part to be eaten later. Bhaddāli insists that he would not be able to do so, and is troubled by this.

They advise him not to worsen his situation and to see the Buddha for instruction. He accordingly sees the Buddha and seeks the Buddha’s forgiveness. The Buddha praises him for doing the right thing, and patiently answers his questions and instructs him in the nature of the holy life. The Buddha ends his instructions to Bhaddāli by giving him **the parable of training a thoroughbred colt** [2.2.1], and Bhaddāli rejoices in the Buddha’s teaching.²¹

2.3 THE KĪṬĀ,GIRI SUTTA (M 70), SD 11.1

2.3.1 The teaching. One of the key teachings of **the Kīṭā,giri Sutta** (M 70) is the very practical and immediate steps of training that anyone serious about spiritual growth should take up to reach the path: “And how, bhikkhus, is final knowledge achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress?” For our immediate practice, this gradual practice leads to the path of **streamwinning**.

2.3.2 The 12-step discipleship

The Kīṭā,giri Sutta (M 70) records the Buddha as declaring:

“Bhikkhus, I do not say that final knowledge (full awakening) is achieved all at once. On the contrary, **final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress.**²² And how, bhikkhus, is final knowledge achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress?” The Buddha instructs us that, to attain that path, we must take up these **12 steps of discipleship** “with diligence”:²³

¹⁸ M 117/3:71-78 (SD 6.10).

¹⁹ There is also another teaching or theoretical (*pariyatti*) sequence, namely, that of the 8 factors as aggregates of the 3 trainings, the sequence of moral virtue (right speech, right action, right livelihood), mental concentration (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration), and wisdom (right view, right intention).

²⁰ The single daily meal is an optional ascetic practice. See foll n.

²¹ See SD 56.2 (2).

²² *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave ādiken’eva aññ’ārādhanaṃ vadāmi, api na bhikkhave anupubba,sikkhā anupubba,kiriya anupubba,paṭipadā aññ’ārādhanā hoti.* (M 70,22 f), SD 11.1.

²³ M 70,21.5 (SD 11.1). This 12-stage learning progress is listed in M 70,23 (SD 11.1). It recurs in **Caṅkī S** (M 95), first in normal sequence (M 95,20/2:173) and then in reverse (M 95,21b/2:174), SD 21.15. Cf A 4:336, 5:154.

(1) We have faith (in a teacher) and approach him.

We should approach a teacher not because he is famous, popular or learned, certainly not because we find him attractive, but because he teaches the Dhamma or the suttas clearly, so that we can easily verify his teachings in the suttas themselves, and they help us in our practice.²⁴

(2) Approaching him, we respectfully draw near to him.

A true follower is one who sits up close (*upāsaka*) to the teacher while he is teaching, so that we can hear him clearly without distraction, and feel the Dharma as he teaches it.

(3) Respectfully drawing near [attending] to him, we lend our ear [listen attentively] to him.

Even when we may not be able to sit up close to the teacher, we should make every effort in fully attending to him as he teaches. In our times, electronic gadgets (phones, etc) should be switched off so that we are not distracted while learning.

(4) Lending our ear, we listen to the Dharma.

As we listen, we should discern what is “explicit in sense” (*nīt’attha*), what is implicit (*neyy’attha*). The explicit should be understood so; the implicit should be further investigated or questioned.²⁵

(5) Having listened to the Dharma, we remember [memorize] it.²⁶

The best way to remember the teaching is by paying full and wise attention. Recording the talk may help—when we listen to it again as necessary. Another way is to summarize the talk as soon as we can while our memory is still fresh.

(6) Having remembered the teachings, we investigate their meaning.

After the talk or lesson, we should survey what we have noted or remembered for any aspects that we are uncertain about or do not understand. We should note down points to raise and questions to ask the teacher or someone who can help as soon as we can.

(7) Having investigated their meaning, we reflectively accept the teachings.

To reflectively accept a teaching is to fully understand it in relation to other teachings so that we have a clearer, bigger perspective of things. Often it helps to ask oneself how this teaching relates to impermanence. We also remind oneself that whatever we understand now is only provisional and our views will change as our understanding grows.

(8) Having reflectively accepted the teachings, desire [will-power] arises in us.

As our understanding grows, we feel a sense of confidence: now that we understand this, we are ready for more. We feel a great wholesome desire to learn and understand more teachings.

(9) When desire [will-power] has arisen in us, we exert ourself [we assert our will].

When we feel this wish to know the Dharma further, we face the Dharma by ourself, alone in our solitude in searching the suttas or reflecting on them. We may not at once feel how the Dharma guides us, but we will surely know this in retrospect as we reflect over our experiences.

²⁴ On how famous teachers can have wrong views, see **(Pañcaka) Thera S** (A 5.88), SD 40a.16.

²⁵ For details, see *Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta* (A 2.3.5+6), SD 2.6b.

²⁶ In the first line, *dhammam* refers to the Teaching as a whole; in the second line, individual aspects or topics are meant. For details, see **Kīṭāgiri S** (M 70,23(6) n), SD 11.1.

(10) Having exerted oneself [Having asserted our will], we weigh [harmonize²⁷ our practice].

As our strength in the Dharma deepens and widens, we will notice one of the spiritual faculties—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration or wisdom—manifesting itself. Recognize this faculty; notice how it feels, grows and connects with other faculties. Notice how they should harmonize; rejoice in this.

(11) Having weighed [harmonized our practice], we are resolute [strive on].

As our faculties harmonize and develop, we feel a clearer sense of direction in our life: what gives meaning to it, and what our real purpose is. We begin to understand what “the path” means and how we relate to it.

(12) Being resolute, we realize through our own body the supreme truth and see it by penetrating it with wisdom.

We begin to clearly feel a need to attain the path of awakening. We now know that we get closer to the path through our understanding of the Dharma. We have a peaceful but powerful sense of directing oneself to the path of awakening without a thought of falling back.

3 The progressive teaching

3.1 ĀNUPUBBĪ, KATHĀ

3.1.1 The Pāli term, *ānupubbī, kathā* (*anu*, “after”; *pubbī*, “before”; *kathā*, “talk”), means “progressive teaching,” “graduated talk,” “gradual discourse” or “step-by-step teaching.” This is based on a systematic outline of spiritual benefits that the Buddha uses to mould the understanding of new lay-followers and to guide them toward the 1st stage of the path of awakening. In this elementary discourse, the Buddha outlines the most basic of human virtues and acts that bring joy to oneself and others in tandem.

The stock passage for “**the progressive teaching**” (*ānupubbī, kathā*) is as follows:²⁸

*bhagavā ... ānupubbī, katham kathesi seyyath’idam dāna, katham sīla, katham sagga, katham kāmānaṃ ādīnaṃ ... nekkhamme ānisaṃsaṃ pakāsesi.*²⁹

The Blessed One ... gave ... **a progressive teaching**—that is to say, he spoke on giving, on moral virtue, on the heavens; he proclaimed the danger, vanity and disadvantage of sensual pleasures, and the advantage of renunciation.

3.1.2 Hence, the Buddha speaks of the benefits of **giving** (*dāna, kathā*) and **moral virtue** (*sīla, kathā*) before finally holding out for the laity the prospect of rebirth in **the heavens** (*sagga, kathā*). Interestingly, these qualities have a **consequentialist** significance: sow a mango seed, get a mango plant and mangoes, that is, “good begets good, bad begets bad.” This is, of course, only a simple start for greater good.³⁰

²⁷ Or, “balances” (the 5 spiritual faculties).

²⁸ Variants: *anupubbī, kathā*, *anupubim katham*, *anupubba, kathā*: see DP: *ānupubbī*. It should be noted that there is a distinct later term, *anupubba, kathā* (“a progressive exposition, an account of previous events,” J 1:50; Vism 249; DA 258; MA 2:19).

²⁹ Mv 1.7.5 (V 1:15,35), **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.15/2:41), SD 49.8a, **Upāli (Gaha,pati) S** (M 56,18/1:379), SD 27.1; **(Aṭṭhaka) Sīha S** (A 8.12/4:186), SD 71.5, J 1:8, 50. See also SD 21.6 esp (1); SD 46.1 (4.1); SD 30.8 (3.4.2): Skillful means of speech.

³⁰ On consequentialist karma, see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10), SD 39.2; SD 3.5 (1.1).

3.1.3 Once his audience's minds are pliant and impressionable, the Buddha would then instruct them in the disadvantage or danger (*ādīnava*) inherent in **sensuality** (*kāma*) in order to turn them away from the world toward the advantage of renunciation (*nekkhamme ānisaṃsa*). This is no more about being rewarded for one's good: it is about doing and being good to better oneself spiritually, that is, **virtue ethics**.³¹

Broadly, **renunciation** refers to letting go of old wrong and bad ways by learning right and good or better ways of living. For those who are really unhappy or disillusioned with the world, there is always the alternative life of monastic renunciation.

3.2 THE GRADUAL TALK

3.2.1 Texts on the gradual talk

3.2.1.1 In the **Udāyi Sutta**, the Buddha advises Ānanda that when teaching the laity, the Dharma teacher should give a graduated discourse (A 5.159).³² However, **the gradual talk** (*ānupubbīkathā*) is a stock formula for teaching the laity that appears only in summary form in the Nikāyas (and also in their Chinese translations, the Agamas).

3.2.1.2 The only detailed treatment of the gradual talk or graduated discourse, it seems, is in **the Tuṇḍil'ovāda**, also called the Tuṇḍil'ovāda Sutta (the discourse on the advice to layman Tuṇḍila), a late Pāli apocryphon,³³ probably composed in Sri Lanka in the 18th century. This late text provides a systematic outline of the specifics of the practice of generosity, moral conduct, the heavens, the dangers in sensual desires, and the benefits of renunciation, leading up to the "perfect peace" of nirvana.³⁴

3.2.2 Sutta related to the gradual talk

3.2.2.1 There are, however, numerous Pali suttas dealing with giving and moral virtue taught to the laity. Those suttas that show the importance of giving include the following suttas:

Apaṇṇaka Sutta	M 60,5-6/1:401 f + 10/1:403	SD 35.5
Udaya Sutta	S 7.12/1:173 f	SD 16.13(1)
Devahita Sutta	S 7.13/1:174 f	SD 44.17
Aputtaka Sutta 1	S 3.19/1:89-91	SD 22.4
(Tamo,joti) Puggala Sutta	S 3.21/1:93-96 = Pug 4.19	SD 18.6
Aṅguttara Nikāya , eg A 4.60/2:65 , 5.34/3:39 , 5.44/3:49 , 6.37/3:336 , 6.59/3:391 , 7.52/4:62 .		

3.2.2.2 Those suttas where the Buddha speaks on **moral virtue** include the following:

Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta	D 4/1:111-126
Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta	D 16/2:72-168
Apaṇṇaka Sutta	M 60/1:400-412

³¹ See **Virtue ethics**, SD 18.11; (**Vitthāra**) **Kamma S** (A 4.232), SD 4.13.

³² Also D 1:148, 2:41, 43, 44; M 1:379 f, 2:145; A 4:186, 209. This is the first of **the 5 conditions for a Dharma teacher**, viz: (1) he should teach Dharma by giving a graduated discourse; (2) he should give a well-reasoned discourse; (3) he should teach out of compassion; (4) he should not teach for the sake of worldly profit; (5) he should teach Dharma without harming (*anupahacca*) himself or others (ie, without exalting himself and belittling others) (A 5.159/3:184), SD 46.1.

³³ "Apocryphon" is sg of "apocrypha": a work of unknown or doubtful origin; hence, non-canonical.

³⁴ See C Hallisey. "Tuṇḍilovāda: An allegedly non-canonical sutta," JPTS 15 1990:155-195 (with Pali text).

Pacchā,bhūmaka Sutta = Asibandhaka,putta Sutta	S 42.6/4:311-314
Veļudvāreyya Sutta	S 55.7/5:352-356
Puggala Sutta	S 3.21/1:93-96
Pañca,vera,bhaya Sutta	S 12.41/2:68-70

Aṅguttara Nikāya, eg **A 2.17/1:56 f**, **2.33/1:62**, **5.171/3:203**, **5.172/3:203 f**.

Besides discussing the 5 precepts, the Buddha also exhorts his lay audience to cultivate the 10 wholesome courses of action (*dasa kusala kamma,patha*),³⁵ as recorded, for example, in **the Mahā Vacchagotta Sutta** (M 73,5/1:489 f) and **the Esukāri Sutta** (M 96,8/2:179 f).

3.2.2.3 The benefits arising from **giving and moral virtue** not only include a favourable rebirth in the heavens but are also conducive to the attaining of the path itself. In fact, with the teaching of the 4 noble truths, even lay followers will be able to attain **streamwinning** or **once-returning**, even **non-returning**. **The Vimāna Vatthu**, the 6th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, contains a number of stories where the Buddha's gradual talks brought lay followers such fruits.³⁶

Such full benefits of the gradual teaching are clearly evident in **the (Vesālika) Ugga Sutta** (A 8.21),³⁷ where it forms the 2nd of the Vesālī layman Ugga's 8 wonderful and marvellous qualities,³⁸ of which he himself declares before the Buddha in this lion-roar:

³⁵ **The 10 wholesome courses of action** (*kusala kamma,patha*):

- (1) having given up killing, he shows compassion to all living beings;
- (2) having given up taking the not-given, he does not take the not-given by way of theft;
- (3) having given up sexual misconduct, he does not transgress proper moral conduct;
- (4) having given up false speech, he does not tell a conscious lie;
- (5) having given up slander, he speaks words conducive to concord;
- (6) having given up harsh speech, he speaks words appropriate and pleasant to the masses;
- (7) having given up frivolous chatter, he speaks at the right time, what is true, connected to the spiritual goal, on the Dharma, on the Vinaya, words worth treasuring;
- (8) he is without covetousness;
- (9) his mind is free from ill will, thinking, "May all beings be happy at heart!"
- (10) he is one of right view, and realizes super-knowledge for himself.

(1)-(3) are bodily actions (*kāya,kamma*); (4)-(7) are verbal actions (*vacī,kamma*); (8)-(10) are mental actions (*mano,kamma*). For details, see **(Kusalākusala) Sañcetanika Sutta 1** (A 10.206/5:292-297), SD 3.9.

³⁶ **Nava Vv 3** (Vv 1.8/50), **Dīpa Vv** (Vv 1.9/53), **Uttarā Vv** (Vv 1.15/66), **Catu-r-itth8i Vv** (Vv 4.7/197), **Chatta Māṇava Vv** (Vv 5.3/242), **Maṭṭa,kuṇḍalī Vv** (Vv 7.9/330).

³⁷ On Ugga of Vesālī (A 8.21) and Ugga of Hatthi,gāma (A 8.22), see **The Layman and Dhyana**, SD 8.5(11).

³⁸ **Ugga's 8 remarkable qualities**, in brief, are:

- (1) on his first seeing the Buddha, faith arose in him;
- (2) he faithfully served the Buddha, and listening to the graduated discourse, gained non-returning, whereupon he undertook celibacy rule;
- (3) he released his 4 wives from their marital obligations;
- (4) he distributed his wealth impartially amongst the virtuous;
- (5) he always attended upon a monk with respect;
- (6) he listened with respect to a monk teaching the Dharma;
- (7) devas would visit him proclaiming the virtue of the Dharma, and in response to them he shows no arrogance;
- (8) he had abandoned the 5 lower fetters, ie he is a non-returner (A 8.21/4:208-212): cf Uttarā Nanda,mātā at [9] below.

The 10 fetters are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*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 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*).

With a faithful heart, bhante, I then waited upon the Blessed One.

The Blessed One then gave me **a gradual teaching**, namely, a talk on generosity [giving], on moral virtue, on the heavens, on the danger, degradation and impurity in sensual pleasures and the benefits of renunciation.

When he knew that my mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, uplifted and clear [radiant with faith], he expounded to me the Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas,³⁹ namely, suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.

Just as **a clean cloth**, free from any stain, would take dye truly well, even so, while I sat there, the spotless eye of the Dharma arose in me, thus: ‘All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.’⁴⁰

Then, bhante, having thus seen the Dharma, attained to the Dharma, understood the Dharma, fathomed the Dharma, I crossed beyond doubt, cast off uncertainty, gained fearless confidence, independent of others, dwelling in the Teacher’s Teaching.⁴¹

On that very occasion, I went for refuge to the Buddha, to the Dharma and to the sangha, and I took upon myself the rules of training with celibacy as the fifth.⁴²

(A 8.21,5-6/4:209 f), SD 70.3

3.2.2.4 This same conversion process is recorded of the following lay disciples:

Pokkhara,sāti	Ambaṭṭha Sutta	D 3,2.21/1:110	SD 21.3
Kūṭadanta	Kūṭa,danta Sutta	D 5,29/1:148	SD 22.8
Upāli	Upāli Sutta	M 56,18/1: 379 f	SD 27.1
Brahmāyu	Brahm’āyu Sutta	M 91,36/2:145	SD 63.8
General Sīha	(Aṭṭhaka) Sīha Sutta	A 8.12,9/4:186	SD 71.5

In the **Mahāpadāna Sutta** (D 14), the past buddha, Vipassī, giving the gradual teaching, similarly converts the laymen, prince Khaṇḍa and Tissa the chaplain’s son (D 14.3.11/2:41), and a congregation of 84,000.⁴³

The Yakkha Saṃyutta (S 10) has an interesting sutta that relates how even non-humans can become streamwinners. **The Punabbasu Sutta** (S 10.7) is about how a yakshini (or ogress) Punabbasu,mātā⁴⁴ and her son Punabbasu both became streamwinners merely by listening to the Buddha expounding on the 4 noble truths. She declares: “The noble truths are seen!” (*diṭṭhāni ariya,saccāni*).⁴⁵

3.2.2.5 In summary then, inspired by the buddha’s progressive talk, the listener may either go for refuge as a lay follower (m *upāsaka*, f *upāsikā*), or go for refuge and renounce as a monk or nun and train for the fruit of recluseship (*sāmañña,phala*) [5] which comprise **the 3 trainings** [4], which should also be taken by the laity, since it leads to the path of awakening in this life.

³⁹ “The Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas” (*sāmuḍḍhārikā dhamma,desanā*). *Sāmuḍḍhārikā*, lit “originally discovered (by the Buddha).”

⁴⁰ This is stock passage usually referring to the attainment of streamwinning (DA 1:278; MA 3:92; AA 4:102; UA 283; ThaA 1:235). Here, it refers to non-returning.

⁴¹ Up to this point, as at D 1:148, 2:41, 43, 44; M 1:379 f, 2:145; A 4:186, 209. See foll para.

⁴² *Brahma,cariya,pañcamāni sikkhā,padāni*. In the usual formula of the 5 precepts, the 3rd precept is the abstinence from sexual misconduct. Here Uggā takes upon himself the rule of **celibacy** (*brahma,cariyā*) as he has become a non-returner and has uprooted sensual desire.

⁴³ D 14,3.14-15/2:43 (SD 49.8a).

⁴⁴ The Dīgha Comy, however, says that she was a preta “with a celestial mansion” (*vemānika,peta*) (DA 509).

⁴⁵ S 10.7/1:210; SA 1:311.

4 The 3 trainings

4.1 THE 3 TRAININGS IN CONTEXT⁴⁶

4.1.1 We have noted how when we attend to the Buddha’s teachings at whatever level of understanding, we are led, in due course, to reaching the path of awakening, or, at least, to being a better, happier person. When we properly listen to the Buddha’s **gradual teachings** [3], it is possible for the Dharma-eye to arise in us, that is, for us to become streamwinners or once-returners, even non-returners [3.2.2.3].

4.1.2 Even when we do not yet attain the path, we will be inspired to **go for refuge** to the 3 jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha),⁴⁷ that is, to dedicate our lives to learning *what* really the historical Buddha is; *why* the Dharma brings us true happiness; *how* we can gain the path of awakening in this life itself and know the real meaning of sangha.

If the conditions are right for us, we may even renounce the world as renunciants to taste the fruits of recluseship [4]. Whether we become lay followers or go forth as renunciants, we should then study what **the 3 trainings** are and cultivate them at our level. We will here examine in some detail how we do this.

4.2 THE 3 TRAININGS AS STAGES OF TRUE RENUNCIATION

4.2.1 The 3 stages of spiritual growth

4.2.1.1 In practical terms, whether we are monastic or lay, our one and only immediate goal is that of **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*). This is the noun of the verb *nikkhamati*, “to go forth (from), to come out (of), to get out, depart.” Its better-known figurative sense is “to leave the household life” in the noble quest for awakening in this life itself—the verb *abhinikkhamati* specifically applies here. The immediate renunciation—the literal sense of the word—is that we “give up bad or evil desire”: we have renounced the moment since it is not meant to remain more than that.

4.2.1.2 The monastic (money-free sex-free) life of **renunciants**, properly practised deeply inspired by the Dharma-Vinaya, is the ideal way of life for reaching the path in this life itself. In the spirit of early Buddhism, renunciation, too, is a progressive path: it is **a gradual renunciation**. The essence of this self-empowering teaching and practice of renunciation is beautifully captured in this Dhammapada verse:

<i>sabba,pāpassâkaraṇaṃ</i>	Not doing any bad [evil],	[4.2.1.3]
<i>kusalass’upasampadā</i>	attaining the good [the wholesome],	[4.2.1.4]
<i>sacitta,pariyodapanam</i>	purifying one’s own mind—	[4.2.1.5]
<i>tam buddhāna sāsanaṃ</i>	(Dh 183) ⁴⁸ this is the teaching of the buddhas.	

4.2.1.3 “**Not doing any bad**” (*sabba,pāpassâkaraṇaṃ*) broadly speaking means giving up of all unwholesome karma (*akusala,kamma*), from the time of renunciation to the time of attaining arhathood—

⁴⁶ See (Ti) **Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 10.16 (1.6, 1.7); SD 1.11 (5).

⁴⁷ For reflections on the 3 jewels, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7; **Dhammānussati**, SD 15.9; **Saṅghānussati**, SD 15.10a.

⁴⁸ Dh 183 is significantly part of the Buddha “admonitory code” (*ovāda pāṭimokkha*), given to the early arhats (MA 3:209): SD 16.1 (6.1).

this is the purpose of the monastic life: this is also the meaning of *upasampadā*,⁴⁹ “attainment” or “promoting” [4.2.1.5]. The meaning here is that the purpose of renunciation and ordination is to lead us to arhathood in this life itself (DhA 3:237,14-16).⁵⁰

On the lay level of practice, “not doing any bad” refers to keeping to at least **the 5 precepts**, that is, the respect for life, for the property (and happiness) of others, for the person of another, for the wholesome truth, and for the mind (mental uncloudedness).⁵¹ The purpose of moral conduct (*sīla*) is the restraint and refinement of our bodily actions and speech, so that it conduces to mental development.

In other words, broadly, **moral virtue** defines the personal development that molds us into a “good person” so that a “good society” is not only possible but thrives. Specifically, it makes a person truly good in himself, that is, as one who is willing and able to *do* good (ethics), *be* good (spirituality). Since this morality is apophatic⁵² in nature—we do *not* kill, do *not* steal, do *not* commit sexual misconduct, do *not* lie, do *not* take intoxicants—this is called a “morality of omission.”

4.2.1.4 “Attaining the good [the wholesome]” (*kusalass’upasampadā*) has two aspects: the 1st is to “**do**” the wholesome opposite of the 5 precepts (*sīla*)—that is, practising the values (*dhamma*)⁵³ of *compassion, charity, contentment, truth-telling and mindfulness*. This is known as “**natural morality**” (*pakati sīla*) since breaking any of these precepts entails bad karma. The “**conventional morality**” of the world, such as the country’s legal code, traffic rules and so on, is known as *sammuti, sīla*, and monastics are bound by them, too, but basically in a mundane social manner.⁵⁴

Then, there are **the Vinaya rules** introduced by the Buddha—that is, those of the Pātimokkha and the Vinaya—which mostly constitute “**prescribed morality**” (*paṇṇatti sīla* or *paññatti sīla*). Although most of these prescribed rules may not by themselves entail bad karma, the negative intention behind such actions are still potent. In less serious cases (other than the 4 *pārājika* or defeat rules),⁵⁵ the sangha, properly convened, may admonish or rehabilitate the offender so that he is back “in communion” (*samvāsa*) with the sangha, that is, remains a bona fide monastic.

4.2.1.5 The 2nd aspect in **attaining the good** (*kusalass’upasampadā*) is the taking up of mindfulness and meditation. In other words, moral virtue properly tames and refines our body and speech so that they do not distract the mind from concentrating. In this sense, moral virtue is the basis for good concentration. [4.2.3.1]

⁴⁹ *Upasampadā* has 2 senses: (1) obtaining, attainment (D 2:49,26* = Dh 183; M 1:356,16; Pm 2:189,35); (2) full or higher ordination (the “lesser” going forth is called *pabbajjā*), admission into the monastic sangha as a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni (V 1:12,26, 3:15,2; A 4:276,22; Tha 311; Ap 107,1).

⁵⁰ DhA 3:237,14-16. Comy on this key verse is very brief. Here, we give a more elaborate explanation in terms of proper practice for both the laity and the monastic.

⁵¹ On the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*), see **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54,13), SD 5.10; **Velu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7), SD 1.5 (2); **Sīlā-nussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).

⁵² On apophasis, see SD 40a.1 (6.3).

⁵³ On the 5 precepts (*sīla*) and their respective values (*dhamma*), see SD 1.5 (2.7+2.8); SD 51.11 (2.2.3.4); SD 54.-2e (2.3.2.5).

⁵⁴ On *pakati sīla* and *sammuti sīla*, see SD 30.8 (8.4.2.2); SD 37.8 (2); SD 40a.1 (13.2).

⁵⁵ The 4 *pārājika* are heavy rules entailing “defeat” (*pārājika*)—meaning immediate and automatic loss of the *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni* state—are the very 1st 4 rules of the Pātimokkha, ie, those against (1) sexual intercourse (V 3:23,33-36); (2) stealing (V 3:46,16-20); (3) killing another human (V 3:73,10-16); (4) claiming to have superhuman states (dhyana and psychic powers) (V 3:91,19-25). See SD 52.12 (1.2.1.1).

The various practical aspects of **mindfulness** (*sati*) are fully laid out in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) as the 4 “focuses of mindfulness” (*satipaṭṭhāna*), as follows:⁵⁶

			M 10 (SD 13.3)
(1) contemplation of the body	<i>kāyānupassanā</i>	body-based meditations	§§4-31
(2) contemplation of feelings	<i>vedanā'nupassanā</i>	feeling-based meditations	§§32-33
(3) contemplation of the mind	<i>cittānupassanā</i>	mind-based meditations	§§34-35
(4) contemplation of dharmas	<i>dhammānupassanā</i>	reality-based meditations	§§36-45

Most teachers would train their students in **the breath meditation** (*āṇāpāna,sati*), which is the very 1st meditation of **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10,4-5). This prominence is because this is the method used by the Buddha himself that finally brings him awakening, and that it is relatively easy and safe for even the lay person to practise.

The sutta instructions on beginning the breath meditation is given in §§15-28 of **the Āṇāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118).⁵⁷ If we are new to this, we should learn and practise only the first 4 stages, which, in fact, form the core or basis of what, as a rule, is taught by any teacher teaching Buddhist breath meditation today.⁵⁸ Breath meditation is clearly the most popular of the “sitting” meditations, since it is best done seated down comfortably in meditation posture.

4.2.1.6 Even simpler than the breath meditation is **the perception of impermanence** (*anicca,saññā*). In fact, this is also the most important mindfulness practice for the laity, and for anyone at all who is interested in meditation. Unlike the breath meditation, which is always done *sitting*, the perception of impermanence can and should be done in *any* posture, especially as part of our regular or favourite meditation.

The perception of impermanence is a “perception” (*saññā*), a kind of mindfulness practice which can and should be done by anyone,⁵⁹ young or old.⁶⁰ In **the Mahā Rāhul'ov āda Sutta** (M 62), the Buddha states that this meditation overcomes the “I am” conceit (*asmi,māna*).⁶¹ **The (Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) records the Buddha himself declaring that habitually doing this mindfulness practice will surely bring us to the path as a streamwinner, if not certainly with our last breath.⁶² Hence, this is a mindfulness practice we should learn and do any time, anywhere and regularly.

⁵⁶ The same passages also appear in **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22/2:290-315), SD 13.2. For practice it is best to use **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10) which is meant for meditation practice. On these 2 Suttas, see SD 13.1 (2.2); also SD 7.13 (2.3).

⁵⁷ For teaching details, see **Āṇāpāna,sati S** (M 118,15-28), SD 7.13. In **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62), the Buddha recommends breath meditation to the 18-year-old Rāhula: M 62,23 (SD 3.11).

⁵⁸ For practical details on the breath meditation, see SD 7.13 (4) stages of practice & (7) breath meditation in practice.

⁵⁹ Ie, one without any history of psychological problem or under medication. Even a person, recovering from schizophrenia, who is able to sit calmly and comfortably for say 5 or 10 minutes at a time.

⁶⁰ Our Buddha is said to be only 7 years old when he first meditated, attaining the 1st dhyana, under a jambul tree during the ploughing festival: **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31), SD 49.4; SD 52.1 (5.2).

⁶¹ M 62,22 (SD 3.11). *Asmi,māno* incl narcissism and egotism. Doctrinally, this refers to the breaking of the fetter of self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), and by extension, the fetters of doubt and of attachment to rituals and vows. These are the 3 “lower” fetters of the 10 fetters: see **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1); **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2); also S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

⁶² S 25.1 + SD 16.7 (5). The other 9 suttas of the same chapter (**S 25**, Okkanta Saṃyutta) give the same teaching based on other meditation subjects.

4.2.1.7 “Purifying one’s own mind” (*sacitta,pariyodapanam*) is only very briefly explained by the Commentary as “purifying oneself of the 5 mental hindrances.”⁶³ This is, in fact, the purpose of learning and doing meditation as stated earlier [4.2.1.5 f]. Essentially, there are **2 vital purposes of meditation**: to gain concentration (*samādhi*), even dhyana (*jhāna*) and to gain liberating wisdom (*paññā*).

To gain concentration or samadhi, we must clear our mind, at least temporarily, of the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*): *sensual desire, ill will, restlessness and worry, sloth and torpor, and doubt*.⁶⁴ This usually happens after we have practised meditation properly for some time. When the hindrances are all overcome, we attain **dhyana** (*jhāna*), when we do not perceive any of our physical senses,⁶⁵ and fully experience our mind as radiance, joy and clarity. This is when the mind is fully purified, at least temporarily.⁶⁶

Now, once we have mastered this concentration—the 1st dhyana—we should, as a rule, hold it as long as possible, and only then go on comfortably to master this dhyana so that we can easily, at any time, attain and hold it for as long as we like.⁶⁷ This process of mastering dhyana cannot be rushed so that it is properly attained. However, even outside of samadhi (concentration) or without any samadhi, we can still reflect on the impermanence, for example, of our thoughts and any or all of our daily experiences.

4.2.1.8 Once we have properly mastered even the 1st dhyana, we should then emerge from it (since no thinking or knowing occurs in dhyana),⁶⁸ and then direct our clear bright mind to **the perception of impermanence**, for example, noticing the sensing and sensations returning into our perceptual field, arising and falling away. In fact, we should be doing just this perception of impermanence whenever we are distracted in meditation, or at the end of some good experience, such as a joyful mental state. In simple terms, this is what we call **meditation** (*bhāvanā*) as the 2nd training of the path.

This completes our survey of the 3 stages of spiritual growth as reflected in **Dh 183**. We will now return to our study of **moral virtue**, that is, how the karmic courses of action, the karmic doors and the precepts relate to one another.

4.2.2 The karmic courses of action, the doors and the precepts

4.2.2.1 While the 5 precepts form the most basic moral code for practising Buddhists, this pentad is expressed in fuller form as **the 10 unwholesome courses of action** (*akusala,kammaṭṭhā*), which are to be avoided—the morality of omission aspect—and their positive counterpart as **the 10 wholesome courses of action** (*kusala,kammaṭṭhā*)—the morality of commission. Since they are karmically potent, we can also call them “the 10 unwholesome karmic courses” and “the 10 wholesome karmic courses,” respectively.

The sets of 10 karmic courses are listed in the sequence of the “karmic doors” (*dvāra*) through which they are committed, that is, *the body, speech and mind*. Both these sets of karmic courses are given in some detail in, for example, **the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 136).⁶⁹ The relationships between these

⁶³ *Pañcahi nīvaraṇehi attano cittassa vodāpanam* (DhA 3:237,17 f).

⁶⁴ On the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca,nīvaraṇā*)—*kāma-c,chanda, vyāpdā, uddhacca,kukkucca, thīna,middha, vicikicchā*—see SD 32, esp **The 5 mental hindrances** (SD 32.1).

⁶⁵ On the nature of perception during dhyana, see **(Navaka) Ānanda S** (A 9.37,3), SD 55.18.

⁶⁶ For details, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

⁶⁷ The suttas and Comys inform us that the longest humanly possible is 7 days: SD 48.2 (3.5.2.2)

⁶⁸ On neither thinking nor knowing (as we know them) occurring in dhyana, see SD 33.1b (6.2); SD 55.19 (1.2.2) Percipient but not sensing.

⁶⁹ M 136 (SD 4.16). See also **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-10), SD 5.7; **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,1-7), SD 3.9; **(Vitthāra) Kamma S** (A 4.232) + SD 4.13 (2.2.3).

two sets of karmic courses, the karmic doors and the 5 precepts are reflected in this comparative table, thus:

<u>unwholesome courses of action</u> ⁷⁰	<u>wholesome courses of action</u>	<u>virtues (values) to cultivate</u>	<u>karmic doors of action</u> ⁷¹
(1) killing	non-killing	compassion	} the body (bodily karma) - the 1 st 3 precepts
(2) stealing	non-stealing	generosity	
(3) sexual misconduct	restraint	contentment	
(4) false speech	non-falsehood	truth	} speech (verbal karma) - the 4 th precept
(5) divisive speech	non-divisive speech	concord	
(6) harsh speech	non-harsh speech	pleasant speech	
(7) frivolous chatter	non-frivolous chatter	beneficial talk	} the mind (mental karma) - the 5 th precept
(8) covetousness	non-covetousness	charity	
(9) ill will	non-ill will	lovingkindness	
(10) wrong view	right view	wisdom	

Table 4.2 The 10 courses of action, the doors and the precepts⁷²

4.2.2.2 Table 4.2 gives an overview of **moral conduct** (*sīla*) as comprising:

- (1) the 10 unwholesome courses of action to be **omitted** since each entail *bad* karma (hence, is a stumbling-block to spiritual development);
- (2) the 10 wholesome courses of action to be **committed** since each generate *good* karma (that conduces to spiritual development); and
- (3) the 10 virtues or values to be **cultivated** to keep or enhance each of the wholesome courses of action.

The first 3 courses of actions are committed through **the body** or “body-door” (*kaya, dvāra*), that is, they create bodily karma (*kaya, kamma*).

Courses of action 4-7 are the acts of **speech** or “speech-door” (*vacī, dvāra*), creating verbal karma (*vacī, kamma*). Although the 4th precept is against **lying**, karmically it includes *divisive speech, harsh speech and frivolous chatter*.

The last 3 courses of action arise through **the mind** or “mind-door” (*mano, dvāra*). Now the 5th precept is against **taking intoxicants**, that is, becoming intoxicated, clouding up the mind. Even when sober, we must guard the mind against being *covetous*, showing *ill will* and holding *wrong views*. However, when our mind is clouded up, we are emboldened, even compelled, to commit *any* of the 10 unwholesome courses of action.

4.2.3 Enhanced effort in lay renunciation

4.2.3.1 The cultivation of **moral virtue** is not just about “being good.” Moral virtue, by taming our body and speech, as we have noted, prepares us for mental concentration [4.2.1.5]. For this reason, the Buddha speaks of **the streamwinner** as one who is “possessed of moral virtues that are dear to the noble

⁷⁰ For analyses of each of the 10 unwholesome courses of action, see SD 5.7 (2).

⁷¹ On the 3 doors (*dvāra*) of karma, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,11-14), SD 5.7.

⁷² For a basic diagram of the 2 sets of 10 karmic courses, see SD 52.10a (Table 3.2.1)

ones, unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration. (S 12.41)⁷³

We may think that we are not inclined or not strong enough to keep the precepts. Here are a couple of strategies that can help us when we are determined enough. The first way is *not* to see being moral as having to *do* something, but rather as *not* doing, abstaining from, **5 negative acts**: *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and being intoxicated*.

When we **break a precept**, as a rule, we are likely to be disapproved by those who care for our personal development and spiritual welfare. Moreover, whenever we break a precept, we further add to the heavy load of our karmic burden. Why do this when we have the choice not to? In fact, we should cultivate a heart of lovingkindness or compassion whenever some immoral idea arises in our mind. The thought, being impermanent, will die down so that we remain morally sober.⁷⁴

4.2.3.2 One of the best ways a lay practitioner can cultivate **moral virtue** is to keep the precept-observance (*uposatha*), that is, **the 8 precepts** (*aṭṭh’āṅga sīla*), usually on a full-moon or a new-moon day. **The Tad’āh’uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70) has these passages on the 8 precepts, with their respective “value” [4.2.1.4] counterparts for precepts 1-4 for reflection and practice, thus:⁷⁵

“As long as they live, the arhats dwell:

- (1) giving up harming any living being, abstaining from harming any living being,
**laying aside rod and sword, conscientious [knowing shame], kind,
dwell compassionate towards all living beings;**
- (2) giving up taking the not-given, abstaining from taking the not-given,
**accepting only what is given, expecting only what is given,
dwell not by theft but with a mind of purity;**
- (3) giving up incelibacy, living a celibate life,
dwelling alone, abstain from coupling, the way of the world;
- (4) giving up false speech, abstaining from false speech;
speaking the truth, the truth is their bond, trustworthy, reliable, no deceiver of the world;
- (5) giving up strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness,
abstaining from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness;
- (6) eating only one meal a day, abstaining from eating at night and from untimely meals;
- (7) abstaining from dancing, singing, music, watching unseemly shows,
and from wearing and adorning themselves with garlands, scents and cosmetics;
- (8) giving up high and luxurious beds,
abstain from high and luxurious beds,
using a low bed, that is, a small bed or a straw mat.

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.”

4.2.3.3 Ritually, this is the best that we can put together as a practice of the “morality of omission” (the precepts) and the “morality of commission,” cultivating wholesome body and speech. The question now arises if this ritual, wholesome as it is, is a “**mental fetter**” (*saṃyojana*)—specifically, that of

⁷³ S 12.41,10-14 (SD 3.3). On this virtue as one of the 4 limbs of a streamwinner, see SD 10.16 (11.2.2).

⁷⁴ On the rationale for being moral, see SD 54.2e (2.3.2.5). On using lovingkindness to prevent moral lapses, see SD 1.5 (2.9).

⁷⁵ A 3.70,9-16 (SD 4.18).

attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*)—the 3rd of the 10 fetters? The first 3 fetters prevent us from even reaching the path as a streamwinner. [Table 4.4]

The answer is as clear as the question. **Attachment to rituals and vows** is not only an emotional dependence on acting repetitively hoping for some desired benefit, but also misdirect our mental focus and energies outside and away from ourself to some external agency, such as God, a god, a deity, a demon, or even some deified Buddha or cosmic Bodhisattva.

This is certainly not the case with the practice of keeping the precepts or observing the uposatha. Far from directing our mind to something external, we are focusing it on our own **actions, speech and mind**—the 3 karmic doors—that they are free of distractions. The undistracted mind in a calm body that is momentarily speech-free is able to focus on itself and rise above the limits of the body and its sense-activities. This is the way **our mind** truly sees itself—as a joyful radiance of calm and clarity. Moral virtue (*sīla*) has thus become the basis for mental concentration (*samādhi*).

These are the first 2 of the 3 trainings. The question now is what do we do with **mental concentration**? The short answer: we have renounced *the body and speech*, and now we begin working on the renunciation of the mind.

4.3 RENUNCIATION AS PROGRESSIVE MENTAL CULTIVATION

4.3.1 The 3 characteristics and renunciation

4.3.1.1 What is **mental renunciation**? This is a purification of the mind by letting go of what *defiles* it, fettering it to the world of the senses, that is, the body-mind continuum that we call **the 5 aggregates of clinging** (*pañc’upādāna-k, khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.⁷⁶ Form is the conscious *body* with its physical senses; the other 4 aggregates constitute *the mind*. They constitute our whole **being**, physically and mentally. Before we can renounce our mental defilements, we must know what they are, and how they arise.

4.3.1.2 We call ourselves “human beings,” Homo sapiens (“thinking man”), a species among countless other sentient beings or species of **the sense-world** (*kāma, loka*). In Buddhist cosmology, there are also beings of “refined form” inhabiting **the form world** (*rūpa, loka*), composed of fine matter such as pure light; and thirdly, there are the beings of **the formless world** (*arūpa, loka*), composed of pure energy. These are the “3 worlds”:⁷⁷ our existential universe according to early Buddhism.

Each of these 3 worlds may be different in form and structure but all share the same existential and universal characteristics (*sāmañña lakkhaṇa*): they are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anattā*).⁷⁸ However, the beings inhabiting these worlds mostly neither understand nor accept this true nature of their respective realms on account of their ignorance. On account of this fundamental **ignorance**, they are caught in an endless cycle of rebirths and redeaths (*saṃsāra*).

4.3.1.3 To get out of the repetitive cycle of rebirths and redeaths, we need to understand and accept the true nature of the 3 worlds [4.3.1.2]. We need to see the true reality of their **impermanence**

⁷⁶ Respectively, *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhārā, viññāṇa*. See SD 17 beginning with **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48), SD 17.1a.

⁷⁷ On the 3 worlds (*ti, loka*): SD 29.6a (5.2), SD 29.6b (7.2). The 3 worlds comprise **31 planes**: 11 of the sense-world, 16 of the form world, and 4 of the formless world: see SD 1.7 (App). Refs: Vbh 422-426; Vism 7.40-44; Abhs ch 5. For study, see **Viññāṇa-ṭṭhiti**, SD 23.14; SD 29.6a (5.2); SD 29.6b (7.2). For table on the 7 stations of consciousness: SD 23.14 (Table 3).

⁷⁸ SD 1.2 (2); SD 18.2 (2.2).

(*aniccatā*), **unsatisfactoriness** (*dukkhatā*) and **nonselfness** (*anattatā*).⁷⁹ The easiest way to start to see the true reality of this worldly existence is to reflect on its impermanence [4.2.1.6].

With some level of seeing and understanding **the impermanence** of our existence, it is easier to see its **unsatisfactoriness**, that is, the pervasive suffering, our reactive nature when confronted with this unsatisfactoriness in any way. However, underlying all this is the pervasive nature or “principle” of **non-self**—all existence have no abiding essence.⁸⁰ Our existence has neither an immortal “soul” or self nor does it come from or return to any kind of permanent or primordial state, such as Godhead or an eternal heaven.

Existence means being conditioned by rising and falling: strictly speaking there are only these conditioned events, no abiding states. However, these seemingly momentary events seem to repeat themselves so often that we, in our ignorance, accept them as real (they are actually there at the time) and true (that we actually *experience* them).

What we experience daily, even in our sleep and visions, is a virtual reality we have projected for ourself and fallen in love with it—we are each **Pygmalion** driven by our visions of Galatea.⁸¹ Only when we understand this myth, can we renounce what is false and embrace true reality. [4.3.2.1]

4.3.2 Self-identity and self-identity view

4.3.2.1 Our human **experience** consists of seeing forms, hearing sounds, smelling smells, tasting tastes, feeling touches, and thinking. These are all conditioned events: a sense-faculty (such as the eye) meets a sense-object (say, a visible form), and there is its sense-consciousness (such as eye-consciousness), that is, our attention. With the meeting of these 3, there is sense-contact (eg, vision of an object).⁸²

We keep seeing what we think to be similar events, so that we habitually, often unconsciously, conclude they are the *same* events, or arise from the *same* source, some kind of “master” event or “prototype,” some higher fixed and eternal being or state. We thus see these as “permanent” events (“it *always* happens this way”); we also begin to see ourself as the permanent witness to these *permanent* states.

We then wrongly conclude that we are a **self** (some kind of abiding soul). Since there is a soul, we reason, there must be a Soul (God, Godhead, universal essence, etc) of which our “soul” were as if a mere spark. This is a **self-view**. We then identify with it, taking our self-centred cycle of flickering experiences as “I,” “me” and “mine.” We are thus caught up in a rut of views shaped by **identity** (a self that is “I” or “us”), **conceit** (comparing with others) and **craving** (seeking to have and to be that we identify with).⁸³

4.3.2.2 Existentially, we are a **conscious body** (*sa,viññāṇaka kāya*):⁸⁴ a body-mind continuum, comprising the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness) [4.3.1.1]. On account of our *identifying* with our body or our mind, we form **the self-identity view**. This is very deeply rooted sense of **self-identity** (*sakkāya*): *I am this; it is me; that is mine*. This is our meaning of life: *we are that!*

⁷⁹ “Nonselfness” is spelt unhyphenated since we are not referring to merely a state *without* any self, but that all conditioned states *are* without self. Note that it is not “without a self” (which suggests a *conventional* idea, which has its uses), but “without self,” meaning that there is no abiding entity or essence of anything (not just any thing). On the 3 characteristics, see **Atam,mayatā**, SD 19.13 (1); **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16), SD 1.2.

⁸⁰ All conditioned things (*saṅkhārā*) are impermanent and suffering; they all are “by nature” (*dharmā*) non-self (*sabbe dhammā anattā*) (Dh 277-279). See **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134) SD 26.8.

⁸¹ According to the Roman poet Ovid’s (43 BCE-17/18 CE) *Metamorphoses* (a narrative poem), **Pygmalion** was a sculptor who fell in love with the statue of a woman he had carved. It is said that he kissed the statue which (with the help of Venus, the goddess of love), came to life. The statue was later named Galatea after a sea-nymph.

⁸² On this “triangle of experience,” see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16-17), SD 6.14.

⁸³ **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

⁸⁴ SD 17.8a (12.3).

This then infuses us with, not just *a* purpose, but purposes of our life: *I am* this; this is *what* I am! This or that is **me**, or different from it (better, inferior, same as me)! That is **mine**, was *mine* and *will* always be *mine*!

Our self-identity is at the very root of our existence: it *is* our existence. Without self-identity, there is no existence. Hence, as long as we exist, or want to exist, we will never want to uproot ourself of this self-identity. In fact, only **the arhat**, who has seen through the true nature of existence is free from existence, by seeing it as *impermanent, suffering and non-self*. [4.3.1]

4.4 THE 10 FETTERS

The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*)⁸⁵

(1) <i>sakkāya, ditṭhi</i> ⁸⁶	} The 3 fetters: streamwinner + 3 roots ⁸⁷ weakened: once-returner	}
(2) <i>vicikicchā</i>		
(3) <i>sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa</i> ⁸⁸		
(4) <i>kāma, rāga</i>	} The 5 lower fetters: non-returner	}
(5) <i>paṭigha</i> ⁸⁹		
(6) <i>rūpa, rāga</i>		
(7) <i>arūpa, rāga</i>		
(8) <i>māna</i>		
(9) <i>uddhacca</i>	} The 5 higher fetters: arhat	}
(10) <i>avijjā</i>		

The 3 trainings

Moral virtue (*sīla*):
right speech, right action,
right livelihood

Concentration (*samādhi*):
right effort, right mindful-
ness, right concentration

Wisdom (*paññā*):
right view, right intention

Table 4.4. The 10 fetters, the path and the training [SD 49.14 (2)]

4.4.1 The first 3 fetters

4.4.1.1 For those of us who are not yet arhats, not even taken the first step on the path of awakening, we can and must strive to reach it. This we do by *first* working to remove our **self-identity view** (*sakkāya, ditṭhi*). This is the 1st of the 10 fetters that bind us to the existential cycle of habitual lives, rooted in the same themes of ignorance and craving, relayed in glorious colours and exciting effects on the sensurround screen of our cosmic cinema.

4.4.1.2 Self-identity view is the very 1st of the 1st triad of the 10 fetters [4.3.2]. This triad of symptoms weakens us, diverts us away from the path of awakening. When we are infected with self-identity view, we also suffer under the oppression of **doubt** (*vicikicchā*) and **attachment to rituals and vows** (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*). We *doubt*, most of all, in our ability to help ourself, in the power of self-reliance.

4.4.1.3 Religion only aggravates our **spiritual doubt**, this self-doubt, by terrorizing us with threats of our total impotence in the face and fiat of some Almighty God, and that only his priests and pastors can save us or bring us to some imaginary heaven. Or, religion puts us under the spell of a soporific dogma

⁸⁵ For details on the 10 fetters, see SD 10.16 (1.6.6-1.6.8); **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 (5.1.4); (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3 (2). See also SD 40a.1 (15.4.4) n; SD 49.14 Table 2.

⁸⁶ See **Antā S** (S 22.103), SD 14.1.

⁸⁷ "The 3 roots" = the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala mūla*): greed, hate and delusion. See **Mūla S** (A 3.69), SD 18.2; SD 4.14 (1.5); SD 50.20 (3.1.3).

⁸⁸ See **Kukkura, vatika S** (M 57/1:387-392), SD 23.11.

⁸⁹ In some places, *paṭigha* is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*).

that we are *already* liberated, pre-enlightened even before our birth, and similar clever empty quips that leave us indolent and inert right where we are.

4.4.1.4 Those of us unconvinced or unconverted by **the extremes** of the promise of theistic glory and the laissez-faire of ready-made enlightenment may, in the face of not knowing any middle way, be compelled to take things into our own hands. We then handle ritual tools and offerings, and our bodies (often mindlessly) caught in the rhymeless reason of repetitive acts of devotion and daring, of despair and hope, in the belief that by repeating our actions, done with finesse and finery, they will bless us with all the good and goods that we have wished for.

Even our charity is not out of faith in the Dharma, not even in ourself or others, but simply in the ulterior hope that by giving *a little* we will be rewarded by *a lot*, that it is more right to *show* we are doing good or *acting* good than what we sadly are. Or, that by associating with the great and famous, they will fill our hollowness or that we *are* them before others! We proudly stand with the crowd admiring and praising the Emperor in his new clothes; we even try to keep in fashion since *looks* matter more to us than reality.

This is called **attachment to rituals and vows** (*sīla-b.bata,parāmāsa*), the wrong view that our needs can be obtained, our problems solved, by seeking succour from some external agency. But in directing our attention and effort outside of ourself, we only turn away from the real source of our needs and issues. Only by looking within, at our own self, into our own heart and mind, will we see the source of our problems, and understanding that, we will see their solutions.⁹⁰ [4.4.1.5]

4.4.1.5 This is called **self-reliance** (*atta,saraṇa*). In the spirit of the Buddha's teaching, and what is perhaps unique in religious history, we can then say that a key purpose of early Buddhism is to induce us to realize that we can help ourself by way of **self-awakening**. The first real step to self-awakening is to prime our physical being—our body and speech—so that it does not distract the mind from freeing itself.

This is the true purpose of **moral conduct** (*sīla*) [4.2.1.3], that is, a positive habit of sense-restraint: directing the body and its senses away from the unwholesome; directing them to the wholesome—for the sake of purifying the mind [4.2.1]. This is the beginning of **true self-mastery**, of which the Buddha says:

<i>Attā hi attano nātho</i>	One is one's own master,
<i>attā hi attano gati</i>	one is one's own destiny:
<i>tasmā saññamay'attānaṃ</i>	therefore, restrain the self
<i>assaṃ bhadraṃ'va vāṇijo</i>	as a merchant his fine steed.

(Dh 380)

4.4.1.6 The mindfulness (*sati*) that we establish should tame and refine our *body and speech*. Even without deep meditation, with this mindfulness, we will be able to prevent our mind from being caught in the sticky nets of *self-identity view*, *doubt* and *attachment to rituals and vows*, that is, the 3 fetters [4.4.1], so that our mind is truly free, and we become a true individual—**a streamwinner**.⁹¹ We are then truly a master of ourself.⁹² Hence, the Buddha declares:

<i>Attā hi attano nātho</i>	The self is the master of the self;
<i>ko hi nātho paro siyā</i>	for, who else can the master be?

⁹⁰ On overcoming the 3 fetters, further see **Abhabba Tayo,dhamma S** (A 10.76,6) SD 2.4; **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

⁹¹ On the streamwinner and faith, and overcoming the 3 fetters, see SD 3.3 (5).

⁹² See **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1). On the internal locus of control, see SD 47.15 (2.1.3.4).

attanā'va sudantena
nātham labhati dullabham (Dh 160)⁹³ With a self that is well-tamed, indeed,
 one gains a master that is hard to find.

4.4.2 The fetters, the path and the training

4.4.2.1 From any of the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25), we know that we can work to gain **streamwinning** in this life itself simply through faith or with some effort through wisdom—so long as we diligently reflect on *impermanence* [4.2.1.6]. It is also well known that a streamwinner has impeccable moral virtue. He is said to be “possessed of moral virtues that are dear to the noble ones, unbroken, un-torn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.” (S 12.41)⁹⁴ [4.2.3.1]

For this reason, in **Table 4.4**, we can see that in terms of the 3 trainings, **the streamwinner** (*sotāpan-na*) has not only broken the 3 fetters [4.4.1], but he is also grounded in moral virtue.⁹⁵ **The once-returned** (*sakadāgāmi*) has not only broken the 3 fetters (like the streamwinner), but also significantly weakened his 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion).⁹⁶ Like the streamwinner, the once-returned, too, is rooted in moral virtue. In other words, both of them are, by definition, morally virtuous individuals.

4.4.2.2 The non-returned (*anāgāmi*)—like the streamwinner and the once-returned—have overcome the 3 fetters [4.4.1]; but the non-returned has also overcome fetters (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*) and its opposite, (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*): he has uprooted the unwholesome roots of greed and hate, and so overcome **all the 5 “lower fetters”** (*oram,bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [Table 4.4]. To do this, he has to master the dhyanas so that his mind can free itself from the body and its prison of senses any time he wishes, for as long as he wishes.

Since the non-returned habitually experiences the supreme bliss of dhyana, which is well beyond what joy or ecstasy the body can give or we can imagine, he has neither taste nor thought for any sensual pleasure. Having mastered **the 4 form-dhyanas** (*rūpa-j,jhāna*) to some level, the non-returned is free from the sense-world [4.3.1.2]. When he dies, he will arise in the plane of the non-returned known as **“the pure abodes”** (*suddh'āvāsa*), the 5 highest heavens of the form world.⁹⁷

Hence, from **Table 4.4**, we will see that the non-returned is rooted in **concentration** (*samādhi*). And as we have noted, *samādhi* can be properly cultivated to bring **dhyana** (*jhāna*) when we are grounded in moral virtue [4.2.1.5]. Hence, we should read the Table, under “The 3 trainings,” that moral virtue always precedes and supports concentration. Hence, like the streamwinner and the once-returned, the non-returned, too, is morally virtuous, and **a dhyana-master** who will never be reborn outside of the pure abodes, wherein he will blissfully live out the remainder of his potent karma.⁹⁸

4.4.2.3 The arhat, as evident from **Table 4.4**, has overcome all the 10 fetters, that is, including **the 5 “higher fetters”** (*uddham,bhāgiya saṃyojana*). The arhat has overcome all desires, including subtle wishes to be reborn in any kind of heaven, whether of the form world (*rūpa.loka*) or the formless world (*arūpa.loka*) [4.3.1.2]. He is free of conceit: he does not, in any way, get caught up in seeking others’ approval (for meaning or for purpose), nor habitually measure himself against others (as being better than, inferior to, equal to anyone else) as some kind of social status feeling or one-upmanship [4.3.2.1].

⁹³ On the purpose of life, see SD 54.2e (2.3.6.5). See also **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1 (5.2).

⁹⁴ S 12.41,10-14 (SD 3.3). On this virtue as one of the 4 limbs of a streamwinner, see SD 10.16 (11.2.2).

⁹⁵ On the streamwinner, see SD 10.16 (11).

⁹⁶ On the once-returned, see SD 10.16 (12). On his weakening the 3 unwholesome roots, see SD 10.16 (12.1.2.1)

⁹⁷ See SD 23.14 (Table 3).

⁹⁸ On the non-returned, see SD 10.16 (13).

Indeed, he has neither view nor bias in terms of “self” and “other,” since he has clearly seen the true reality of **non-self** [4.3.2]. His mind is always at peace and blissful, not a moment shaken by restlessness, which may still trouble even the compassionate non-returner. He has uprooted ignorance by clearly seeing the true nature of the 4 noble truths. In short, he is fully awakened, just like the Buddha, only that the Buddha is the first to awaken in our universe.⁹⁹

4.5 THE PATH AND THE TRAINING IN TIME AND SPACE

4.5.1 The path as horizontal progress in time

4.5.1.1 We now come to a very interesting way of seeing the Buddha’s gradual path of awakening. We can speak of the path as progressing in time as in space. We can see **the path** (*magga*) as an evolution of the “true individual” (*sappurisa*), the noble saint, in **time**, and **the training** (*sikkhā*) as a journey taken by the true individual in **space**, from the human realm to the divine realm and beyond to nirvana.

Temporal progress is the path of awakening itself, where over *time*, the saint transforms within—at first psychologically, and then, spiritually, by overcoming the fetters in their respective stages. The first 3 fetters may be regarded as “psychological fetters,”¹⁰⁰ in the sense that both **the streamwinner and the once-returner** master and free their **minds** so that they sense or know things, feel things and will themselves in a radically different way than the “untutored worldling” (*assutavā puthujano*): the streamwinner and the once-returner are thus cognitively, affectively and conatively superior beings, with their minds ready to evolve further on the path of awakening.

4.5.1.2 **The path** of a journey (over land and water) is, after all, a **horizontal movement**, under proper circumstances, moving onwards ever closer to the journey’s end. As the saint on the path of spiritual transformation first becomes a streamwinner, then a once-returner, after that, a non-returner, and finally, an arhat. This temporal progress is an “inner” transformation of the saint as a *true individual*.

4.5.1.3 In simpler terms, we can say that **all noble saints**—the streamwinner, the once-returner, the non-returner, the arhat—have mastered moral virtue. **The non-returns** have mastered both moral virtue and concentration. The streamwinner, the once-returner and the non-returner are all called “**learners**” (*sekha*) since they still have to learn what the path of training teaches them. **The arhats** have mastered all these and also wisdom: they are “**non-learners**” (*asekha*) in that they have completed their “horizontal” transformation on the path of awakening.

4.5.1.4 Alternatively, in terms of the teachings (this is especially an interesting **Abhidhamma** explanation), the whole path arises at one and the same time at the moment of awakening. This is an imaginative way of saying something like: at the end of the race, when the best runner touches the tape, he is *at once* the winner. Yet, we must not forget that the runner must have very well trained and then properly completed the race. The Buddha’s teaching is, after all, a gradual awakening.

4.5.1.5 Doctrinally, on this level, we may speak of a kind of “**horizontal**” working of the 37 limbs of awakening (*bodhi.pakkhiya,dhamma*),¹⁰¹ which is actually *all* of the Buddha’s teachings (also called the

⁹⁹ On the arhat, see SD 10.16 (14). On the arhat and the Buddha as awakened in the same way, see **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10; **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11.

¹⁰⁰ See SD 10.16 (11.0.3).

¹⁰¹ The 37 *bodhi.pakkhiya,dhammā* consist of the 7 sets: see foll n.

“7 sets”),¹⁰² in relation to the 4 paths (streamwinning, etc). On a lower level, especially in the breaking of the 3 fetters, this horizontal unified working and fruition is applied to the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*)¹⁰³ in relation to the attaining of streamwinning and of the dhyanas.¹⁰⁴

4.5.2 The training as vertical progress in space

4.5.2.1 At the same time, we can see the true individual or the saint as evolving in **space**, outwardly, as it were, away from the worldly crowd to a sublimely “higher society” of the heavens. While the streamwinner and the once-returned are only mentally transformed, we see both **the non-returned and the arhat**, at some point, even *physically* or “ontologically” evolving into higher beings. The non-returned, for example, goes to the pure abodes, comprising the 5 highest form-heavens. This is a kind of **vertical** evolution, a cosmological transformation, of the saint *when* he dies and *if* he is reborn.

4.5.2.2 This **vertical** evolution is also called a “cosmological” transformation because it corresponds quite closely to the hierarchy of the early Buddhist cosmos. We are reborn as **devas** through charity and moral virtue (keeping the precepts); as **brahmas** (of the form heavens) mainly through cultivating concentration (that is, the dhyanas), and the non-returned of **the pure abodes** through wisdom. Cosmologically, all the brahmas (like those of the pure abodes) are also devas, but none of the sense-world devas are brahmas.

4.5.2.3 The arhats remain mostly in the world while they live their last life. Upon dying they cease to exist in any definable way: they attain nirvana. Of course, even the streamwinner and the once-returned, may be reborn in the heavens, too, only into the sense-world heavens when they lack meditative karma; and in the form heavens, even formless heavens, when they die, having mastered dhyana.

As a rule, these 2 kinds of saints should be able to attain dhyana in order to be liberated. The streamwinner will do so within 7 lives (which can be relatively very long), while the once-returned will see nirvana in their following life. In any case, all these beings are cognitively, affectively and conatively each of their own unique class: they are **noble saints**.¹⁰⁵

4.6 THE 3 TRAININGS AS THE BASIS FOR THE FRUITS OF RECLUSESHIP

4.6.1 The practice is the path

4.6.1.1 All the Buddha’s teachings are connected to one another, but some are more connected than others. In some cases, the connection is so close *that one is the basis for the other*. Thus far we have seen how **the 3 trainings** are a rearrangement of the factors (*aṅga*) of the noble eightfold path (*ariyaṅgika magga*), which, when translated into practice is **the path** (*magga*) of awakening itself, the 4 stages of noble sainthood [Table 4.4].

¹⁰² The 7 sets are those of (1) the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), (2) the 4 right strivings (*samma-pa-dhāna*), (3) the 4 bases of spiritual success (*iddhi, pāda*), (4) the 5 spiritual powers (*indriya*); (5) the 5 spiritual powers (*bala*); (6) the 7 awakening-factors (*bojjhaṅga*), (7) the noble eightfold path (*magga*): SD 10.1. See prec n.

¹⁰³ **The 5 faculties** (*pañc’indriya*) can mean either our 5 physical senses [SD 17.2a (9.2)] or, more commonly (as the sense here), the spiritual faculties of faith (*saddh’indriya*), energy (*viriy’indriya*), mindfulness (*sat’indriya*), concentration (*samādh’indriya*), and wisdom (*paññ’indriya*), so called because they are vital for meditation progress (esp when balanced and harmonized): **Pañc’indriya**, SD 10.4.

¹⁰⁴ Dhyana is unnecessary (but helpful) in the attaining of streamwinning and once-returning: SD 3.3 (0.3); SD 8.5 (2); SD 23.6 (4).

¹⁰⁵ Cf a similar idea as mentioned by L S Cousins, 1984:57: see SD 9 (10.4.4).

4.6.1.2 Furthermore, one important truth connects all these teachings together: they are all **gradual** (*anupubbena*), that is, progressive. The 4 true individuals [4.4.2.1], by overcoming differing progressive sets of the 10 fetters [4.4] are defined as “**noble saints**” (*ariya*) [4.5.1], each progressively closer to awakening.

The 3 trainings, too, are a progressive, yet interdependent, process: moral virtue helps mental concentration, which in turn helps *moral virtue*, and *both* help the arising of wisdom, which in turn enhances *the other two processes*, back and forth: all happening *pari passu* (more or less at the same rate), evolving ahead.¹⁰⁶

4.6.2 The 3 universal characteristics. We have, in fact, spoken of **spiritual evolution** without “*anyone*” evolving. There is *only the path*, no one moves on it!¹⁰⁷ This is the principle of **non-self** [4.3.1.3] underlying all such conditioned truths and realities: they all attest to **the 3 universal characteristics** (*sāmañña lakkhaṇa*) since these characteristics are embodied in them [4.3.1.3]. They are each impermanent processes; hence, unsatisfactory, but whether alone or together, they characterize non-self, which when fully understood with right wisdom brings awakening and nirvana.

We shall now turn our attention to examine how the 3 trainings [4] branch out into how the renunciant goes through the path of awakening in its full glory as **the fruits of recluseship** (*sāmañña,phala*) [5]. The most detailed and complex of the gradual teachings.

5 The fruits of recluseship

5.1 DEFINITION AND NATURE OF SĀMAÑÑA,PHALA

5.1.1 Puñña and kusala. “**The fruits of recluseship**” (*sāmañña,phala*; Skt *śrāmaṇya,phala*) refers to the beneficial effects of Dharma-based practice. “Fruit” (*phala*) in this compound refers to the spiritual benefits that reach fruition in a recluse’s current or future life or lives. When the fruit is better rebirths, it includes merit (*puññā*). However, the whole process of the fruition of true recluseship (which is what *sāmañña,phala* entails) refers to the application of generating wholesome states (*kusala*) which *fruit* into progressively higher stages ending in nirvana itself.¹⁰⁸

5.1.2 The sāmañña,phala: a formula, not a pericope

5.1.2.1 Like other teachings and teaching-sets of the Buddha, the *sāmañña,phala* is a gradual process. However, it is not uniformly applied, even in the first 13 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya, all of which preserve passages on *sāmañña,phala*, the fruits of recluseship. These fruits are the spiritual benefits arising in the recluse’s current and future lives. This teaching of the Buddha is found in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) and its various sectarian versions [5.1.2.2].

On a mundane level, these benefits include respect from others, especially the members of higher classes, sensory restraint, contentment, overcoming of the mental hindrances, the attainment of the 4 dhyanas, insight, psychic powers, clairaudience, recollection of past lives, and so on. In terms of the progressive path of awakening, *sāmañña,phala* refers to the 4 stages of noble sainthood—the fruits of streamwinning, of once-returning, of non-returning and of arhathood, that is the attaining of nirvana.

¹⁰⁶ See SD 49.14 (4.1).

¹⁰⁷ *Magga atthi gamako na vijjati* (Vism 16.90/513). See also SD 10.16 (1.7.1.2).

¹⁰⁸ On *puñña* and *kusala*, see SD 54.2c (2.1).

5.1.2.2 The *Sāmañña,phala Sutta* (D 2), “the discourse on the fruits of recluseship,”¹⁰⁹ as its name suggests, speaks comprehensively of the benefits of the renunciant’s life. The Sutta opens with the patricide king Ajāta,sattu,¹¹⁰ wishing to meet the Buddha, but is unable to express it from the guilt of having murdered his own father, king Bimbi,sāra.

When his physician Jīvaka suggests that they meet the Buddha, Ajāta,sattu at once agrees, and they at once set out to meet the Buddha. When they arrive at the Amba,vana, Jīvaka’s mango grove, Ajāta,sattu is at first terrified by the silence and is unable to even recognise the Buddha.

Having approached the Buddha, he expresses being impressed by the discipline and peacefulness of the assembled monastics, even imagining how good it would be that that his own son, Udāyi,bhadra were to be blessed with such peace that this assembly of renunciants now enjoys.¹¹¹

Ajātasattu asks the Buddha about the immediate benefits of such renunciation under the Buddha. He confides in the Buddha that he has already put this question to the 6 famous recluses of the day—Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesa,kambala, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta and Sañjaya Belaṭṭhi,putta—but is unimpressed by their answers.

In response to Ajātasattu’s query, the Buddha describes **the immediate benefits of renunciation** in progressive terms, from the most mundane to the most spiritually exalted. He says that even a servant or householder who becomes a renunciant receives the honour of kings. Moreover, a renunciant is free from taxation and the burden of family duties, and learns sense-restraint, mindfulness and contentment.

Being content, the renunciant becomes glad and calm, which becomes the basis for gaining the 4 dhyanas. Mastering them, the renunciant is able to direct his mind to developing the 6 superknowledges (*abhiññā*), which culminates in **awakening** and liberation from the cycle of rebirth in this life itself.

At the end of the Buddha’s teaching, Ajātasattu confesses his regret at having murdered his own father, the streamwinner Bimbisāra. He takes refuge in the Buddha and departs. After Ajāta,sattu’s departure, the Buddha declares to the congregation that if Ajātasattu had not murdered his father, he would have attained streamwinning right then and there.

5.1.2.3 That the eightfold path is *included* in or by **the 3 trainings** (or training aggregates)¹¹² is prominently highlighted by their being known as “the fruits of recluseship” (*sāmañña,phala*). This is a very popular theme in the longer suttas, especially those of **the Dīgha Nikāya**, where the *sāmañña,phala* is found in every one of its first 13 suttas.

However, there is no sutta formulation of the fruits of recluseship that we can take as a standard: there is no *sāmañña,phala* pericope or stock passage, detailing the progress of a true disciple based on the gradual training with the same progressive stages. However, there is a clear pattern in its formulation. Hence, it is best to refer to it as a **formula** rather than a stock passage.

¹⁰⁹ D 2/1:47-76 (SD 8.10). Its Chin version, 沙門果經 *Shāmén guǒ jīng*, is a Dharmaguptaka recension, tr as the 27th sūtra in the Chin Dīrgh’āgama (DĀ 27 @ T1.17a21-19c20).

¹¹⁰ On Ajāta,sattu, see SD 8.10 (1).

¹¹¹ Ajāta,sattu is prob also thinking that, knowing such peace, his son would not kill him as he did his father!

¹¹² On the significance of the instrumental (preposition) “by” earlier, see SD 40a.9 (2.2.2). **The 3 trainings** comprise the aggregates of morality (*sīla-k,khandha*), of concentration (*samādhi-k,khandha*), and wisdom (*paññā-k,khandha*): **(Ānanda) Subha S** (D 1:208), SD 40a.13; **(Sāriputta) Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:162), SD 110.5; **Sevitabba S** (A 3.26/1:125), SD 99.17.

	Sections in the suttas→		§§ Accomplishment in moral virtue, ¹¹³ renunciation	Sīla			Samādhi		Paññā Accomplishment of wis- dom; arhathood
				Short morality (cūḷa,sīla)	Medium morality (majjhima,sīla)	Great morality (mahā,sīla)	Accomplishment in concen- tration ¹¹⁴ (pre-dhyana)	The 4 dhyanas and powers	
	Table 5.2. The <i>sāmañña,phala</i> passages <i>Italicized references are peyyālā</i> [5.2.2.2]								
	<i>Sīla-k,khandha</i> (D 1-13)↓								
1	Brahmajāla Sutta	D 1/1:1-46 SD 25	—	8-10	11-20	21-27	—	—	—
2	Sāmaññaphala Sutta	D 2/1:47-86 SD 8.10	39-42	43-45	46-55	56-63	64-76	77-98	99.2-100
3	Ambaṭṭha Sutta	D 3/1:87-110 SD 21.3	2.2.1-5	2.2.6	2.2.7	2.2.8-14	2.2.15-21	2.2.22-25 (1-5)	2.2.25 (6)-34
4	Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta	D 4/1:111-126 SD 30.5	<i>40-42 (D 2)</i>	45	46-55	56-63	[5.2.2.4]	—	64-99
5	Kūṭadanta Sutta	D 5/1:127-149 SD 22.8	<i>41-44</i>	45	46-55	56-63	64-76	77-98	99
6	(Dīgha) Mahāli Sutta	D 6/1:150-158 SD 53.4	38-40	41-45	46-55	56-63	64-72	73-98	99 f
7	Jāliya Sutta	D 7/1:159 f SD 53.41	<i>38-40 (D 6)</i>	41-45 (D 1)	46-55	56-63	64-72	73-98	99 f
8	Kassapa Sīhanāda S	D 8/1:161-177 SD 73.12	<i>40-42 (D 2)</i>	8-10 (D 1)	11-20	21-27	<i>64-76 (D 2)</i>	77-98	99.2-100
9	Poṭṭhapāda Sutta	D 9/1:178-203 SD 7.14	7.3-7	7.8-7.12	7.13-22	7.23-8	9-10.2	10.3-13	56
10	(Ānanda) Subha Sutta	D 10/1:204-210 SD 40a.13	1.7-8	1.9-11	1.12-21	1.22-32	2.1-14	2.15-20	2.21-37
11	Kevaḍḍha Sutta	D 11/1:211-223 SD 1.7	9-11	12-13	14-23	24-31	32-44	45-51	52-66
12	(Sāla,vatikā) Lohicca S	D 12/1:224-234 SD 34.8	20	21-24	25-34	35-41	42-53	54-61	62-77
13	Tevijja Sutta	D 13/1:235-253 SD 1.8	40-42	43-45	46-55	56-62	63-74	75 (1 st dhyana)	—

¹¹³ *Sīla,sampadā*. See n at header before §39: (A) Accomplishment of moral virtue (*sīla,sampadā*).

¹¹⁴ *Citta,sampadā*. See prec n.

5.1.2.4 The 3 trainings, as we know [4], begins with moral virtue or “the moralities” (*sīla*)¹¹⁵—famously known as the “chapter on the moral virtue aggregate” (*sīla-k,khandha vagga*), such as in **the Sāmañña,-phala Sutta** (D 2),¹¹⁶ followed by mental cultivation (§§64-86), the knowledge of supernormal powers (§§87-96), and wisdom, that is, the attainment of direct knowledge and liberating wisdom (§§97-100).¹¹⁷

5.2 VARIATIONS OF THE SĀMAÑÑA,PHALA PROCESS

5.2.1 The 3 trainings in the sāmañña,phala. **The Sutta Piṭaka** (the basket of discourses)—a canon of the Buddha’s early teachings—opens with a chapter of 13 suttas (forming the *Sīla-k,khandha Vagga*).¹¹⁸ At the heart of each of these suttas are passages dealing with **the fruits of recluseship** (*sāmañña,phala*).¹¹⁹ Technically, the “fruits” of recluseship are fourfold: streamwinning, once-returning, non-returning and arhathood.¹²⁰

As evident from **Table 5.2**, the progressive *stages* of the fruits of recluseship are laid out, often in great detail, such as in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2). These stages of the fruits of recluseship generally follow a well-defined sequence of **the 3 trainings**: the preliminary stages of the path cultivate “moral virtue” (*sīla*), the middle stages “mental concentration” (*samādhi*), and the final stages “wisdom” (*paññā*).¹²¹ However, these 13 suttas often list the headings of training sets in different ways [5.2.2.3].

5.2.2 The sāmañña,phala formula

5.2.2.1 However, when we examine **the Sīla-k,khandha Vagga**—whose contents are summarized in **Table 5.2**—we will notice that only the “moralities” (*sīla*) aggregate (their section numbers §§ being highlighted in **bold**) appear almost uniformly (except for a few minor variations in terminology) in *all* the 13 suttas. In fact, the “moralities” or “silas,” as they are popularly known, form a pericope (a stock passage) of their own. It is possible that they once formed a separate “tract,” that is, as a kind of primitive “code of discipline,” that is, before the Pātimokkha itself was compiled. Hence, they are also likely to be the oldest layers of the Dīgha Nikāya.¹²²

5.2.2.2 Other than the *sāmañña,phala* passage of the very first suttas of the chapter, **the Brahma,-jāla Sutta** (D 1)—which lays it out in full, the other 12 suttas tend to give an abridged list (*peyyāla*, abbreviated as *pa* or *pe* in the texts themselves, meaning “and so on; etc”). This is, of course, a common convention in the longer suttas or where a series of suttas repeat key teachings already mentioned earlier.

In actual **recitation**, however, it is important to remember, such abbreviated stock passages are, as a rule, recited in full, since they form a cohesive part of the teaching sequence of the sutta. Hence, such abbreviated passages should, as a rule, be translated and read out in full, if we are to properly reflect on the sutta teaching as it is originally intended.¹²³

¹¹⁵ On the moralities (*sīla*), see SD 8.10 (3); SD 25.1 (3).

¹¹⁶ (D 2,3-68/1:63-70) & SD 8.10 (3), **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,8-27/1:4-11), SD 25.2.

¹¹⁷ See SD 40a.9 (2.2.3.3).

¹¹⁸ “The chapter on the groups of moral virtue,” comprising vol 1 of the Pali Text Society’s ed of Dīgha (D).

¹¹⁹ D 1:1-253. This usage of the term is found at D 1:51 f; Vism 215; VvA 71; VbhA 317. The **Majjhima** appears to use a slightly abbreviated form of *sīla-k,khandha vagga* material (M 1:178-184, 267-271, 3:33-36, 134-147). See Gethin 2001:208 for details. On the significance of translating and reading such passages in full: SD 52.4 (1.3.3.4).

¹²⁰ D 3:227, 277; S 5:25; Dhs 1016; DhsA 423; Miln 344, 358; three mentioned at Kvu 112.

¹²¹ D 2/1:47-86 (SD 8.10); see also SD 40a.9 (4.1).

¹²² On the “moralities,” see SD 8.10 (3).

¹²³ Exceptions, however, may be recurring passages that record wrong views or the words of distractors (such as Māra). See esp L S Cousins’ criticism of Bh Bodhi’s M tr, *The Middle Length Discourses*: SD 49.1 (6); SD 52.4 (1.3.3.3 f).

5.2.2.3 The Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), while laying out the 3 trainings in full, does not explicitly divide them into these 3 categories. The sections on *sense-restraint*, *mindfulness and contentment*, for example, are treated as *a preamble* to the “abandoning of the mental hindrances,” rather than as a part of “moral training.” This is also true of **the Kūṭa,danta** (D 5), **the Mahalī** (D 6), **the Jāliya** (D 7), **the Kevaḍḍha** (D 11) and **the Lohicca Suttas** (D 12).

The Poṭṭhapāda (D 9) and **the Tevijja Suttas** (D 13) break from the standard pattern after their account of the 4th dhyana, inserting passages on the 4 formless attainments and the 4 divine abodes respectively.

In **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3), only 2 categories are listed: “conduct” (*carāṇa*) for the moralities, and “knowledge” (*vijjā*) for the wisdom category. These terms are sometimes given more fully as “the accomplishment of conduct” (*carāṇa sampadā*) and “the accomplishment of knowledge,” respectively, to better reflect them as being those of *sīla* and *paññā* (of the 3 trainings).¹²⁴ The fuller terms are actually used in D 8 [below].

In **the Kassapa Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 8), we see the headings “accomplishment of moral virtue” (*sīla,sampadā*) and “accomplishment of wisdom” (*paññā,sampadā*). In **the Subha Sutta** (D 10), they are familiarly called “the aggregates of moral virtue” (*sīla,k,khandha*), “the aggregate of concentration” (*samādhi,k,khandha*) and “the aggregate of wisdom” *paññā-k,khandha*.¹²⁵

5.2.2.4 The Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta (D 4) curiously lists only the categories of *sīla* and *paññā*, and apparently omits mentioning *samādhi*. However, when we carefully read the fully laid-out text and translation, we will see that section on **samadhi** and **the dhyanas** are listed under the 3rd category of “wisdom.” We shall discuss this further below [5.2.3.2].

5.2.3 Overview

5.2.3.1 Understandably, it would have been odd if the *sāmañña,phala* were a lengthy pericope that is repeated in exactly the same way in each of the first 13 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya. If these suttas are records of actual teaching sessions, or even edited reports of such sessions—just as we would edit a talk or lecture into a readable report—they would reflect diverse ways in which the Buddha would present his teaching of the *sāmañña,phala*, the fruits of recluseship based on the 3 trainings. These variations may be as diverse as the protagonists of the sessions and suttas. Hence, we see different, often unique, presentations of the accounts based on the *sāmañña,phala* formula [5.1.2].

5.2.3.2 For example, in **the Sōṇa,daṇḍa Sutta** (D 4), the *sāmañña,phala* passage comprises only those on *sīla* and *paññā*, apparently, that on *samādhi* [5.2.2.3] has been omitted. This unique rearrangement of passages is the Buddha’s response to the brahmin Soṇadaṇḍa’s claim that the essential qualities of a brahmin are “moral virtue and wisdom.”¹²⁶ As a skillful means, the Buddha has included the whole category of **samādhi** (meditation and dhyanas) under “wisdom”! This is the Buddha’s teaching skill that we should well note.

Even though certain key sections may seem to be omitted in a sutta’s text, it is clear that the *unmentioned* aspects of the gradual training are still at work in the person. We can thus see that the *sāmañña,-*

¹²⁴ See SD 21.3 (1.1.5).

¹²⁵ SD 30.5 (3.2). See also Gethin 2001:207 n79.

¹²⁶ See **Soṇa,daṇḍa S** (D 4,16) SD 30.5. Note that **§99.6** concludes by saying: “This wisdom of his, too, brahmin, is that wisdom.” This tag refers to a long passage starting with §64, the section on *samādhi* (“mental development”). On this “twofold training,” see SD 30.5 (3.1 f).

phala passages, despite their variations, present the one and same vital process in the Buddha’s teaching—the **gradual and progressive way** of listening, learning and liberation in the Buddha’s teaching.

6 Gradual progress in meditation

6.1 THE 9 PROGRESSIVE ABODES

6.1.1 Preliminaries

6.1.1.1 In early Buddhism, **the gradual way** does not only apply to teachings [3] and to training [4], as we have noted, but also to *the progress to* and *on the path* [5]. Here, we will briefly survey the key means to gaining the Buddhist path ending in nirvana, that is, **meditation leading to arhathood**. This meditation progress is, of course, a gradual process, too. Specifically, we will briefly survey **the 9 progressive abodes** (*anupubba, vihāra*).

6.1.1.2 The 9 progressive abodes (*anupubba, vihāra*) are a sequence of meditative or mental states of successive attainments of ascending stages, comprising the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa-j, jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa, samāpatti*), culminating in the cessation of feeling and perception (*saññā, vedāyita, nirodha*), which is sometimes equated with arhathood itself.

The 9 abodes comprise “**the 8 attainments**” (*aṭṭha samāpatti*), a collective name for the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments,¹²⁷ with which cessation is sometimes linked.¹²⁸ The 9 attainments would then be synonymous with the 9 progressive abodes. The “progressive” abodes, however, are so called because each abode arises on account of the cessation (*nirodha*) of the previous one or a key aspect of it.¹²⁹

6.1.2 Gradual progress in dhyana

6.1.2.1 The Pabbateyya Gāvī Sutta (A 9.35) is an instructive text on how to properly progress in meditation, especially the dhyanic cultivation. The Sutta opens with **the parable of the clever mountain cow**: a mountain cow desiring to seek greener pastures would first carefully place its front hoof firmly on a solid spot before lifting its hind foot, so that it goes safely over the terrain.¹³⁰

In the parable, the cow’s *placing its front hoof firmly on a solid spot before moving forward its hind hoof* refers to how a meditator, on attaining **the 1st dhyana**, should properly master it and be in no hurry to go into the 2nd dhyana. Only when we have had a good footing in the 1st dhyana will we be able to move into the 2nd dhyana effectively. This applies to all the other dhyanas, including the formless attainments: we must have mastered the 4 form dhyanas before we can reach the 1st formless attainment.

Hence, after listing each dhyana, the Sutta says: “*He enjoys the sign, cultivates it, continuously works on it, focuses on it, so that it is well fixed.*”¹³¹ Gradual progress in meditation means that we should care-

¹²⁷ SA 2:398 *aṭṭha, samāpatti, jhāna*; AA 3:154 f; BA 155; ApA 196; NcA 146. Sometimes, they are loosely referred to as the “8 dhyanas.”

¹²⁸ MA 1:125.

¹²⁹ See SD 33.8 (2).

¹³⁰ The Sutta opens with the parable of a foolish cow (§1) that harms itself by not carefully moving the rocky hilly terrain. The wise cow (§2) moves carefully and safely.

¹³¹ *So taṃ nimittam āsevati bhāveti bahulī, karoti svādhiṭṭhitam adhiṭṭhāti.* (A 9.35, 2.2 etc), SD 24.3.

fully follow the meditation stages, beginning with the 1st dhyana before going on to the 2nd, and so on—this applies to each of the 9 progressive abodes, on which the Sutta elaborates.¹³²

6.1.2.2 A similar instruction is given in the first 9 suttas of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (S 40) on meditation progress. We are reminded: “*Be not heedless* (in that meditative state), *stabilize the mind* (in that state), *unify the mind* (in that state), *let the mind concentrate* (in that state).”¹³³ This is said of the 1st dhyana in **the (Savitakka) Jhāna Pañha Sutta 1** (S 40.1), the 1st of a series of 9 suttas, each successively dealing, in turn, with the 9 progressive abodes.¹³⁴

6.2 THE FIVEFOLD MASTERY

6.2.1 The commentarial tradition and later meditation teachers refer to the practical teachings of **the Pabbateyya Gāvī Sutta** [6.1.2.1] and the 9 suttas of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** [6.1.2.2] as **the fivefold mastery** (*pañca, vāsī*):¹³⁵

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) Mastering the advertence (<i>āvajjana, vāsī</i>): | the ability to bring the mind into dhyana; |
| (2) Mastering the attainment (<i>sampājjana, vāsī</i>): | entering dhyana quickly and whenever we wish to; |
| (3) Mastering the resolution (<i>adhiṭṭhāna, vāsī</i>): | staying in dhyana for as long as determined; |
| (4) Mastering the emergence (<i>vuṭṭhāna, vāsī</i>): | easily emerging from dhyana at the appointed time; |
| (5) Mastering the review (<i>paccavekkhaṇa, vāsī</i>): | discerning dhyana-factors after emerging from it. |
- (Pm 1.459/1:99 f; Vism 4.131/154, 23.27/704, etc)

6.2.2 In simpler terms, this list means:

- (1) **Directing.** Properly directing the mind.
- (2) **Sustaining.** Sustaining the stillness.
- (3) **Attending.** Attending to the clear stillness.
- (4) **Emerging.** Properly emerging from the stillness.
- (5) **Reviewing.** Reviewing the practice.

The first step in proper meditation is to **direct** or keep our attention on the meditation sign, such as the breath. At first, it seems to be external (say, a movement of air). We gradually “internalize” the sign, by simply being mindful of the knowing¹³⁶ of the experience.

Once we notice any mental stillness, we **sustain** it. We simply keep it so by doing *nothing*. If this is difficult, we may gently note: “Peaceful ... peaceful ...” or happily smile at the stillness. In other words, just feel and enjoy the stillness.

When we keep **attending** to the stillness in this way, we will notice subtle changes in it. At some point, we may just feel the stillness and nothing else, as it were. This is a very profoundly joyful feeling. Remember: we should not react to the feeling in any way: we just let it be.

¹³² A 9.35/4:418-422 + SD 24.3 (3).

¹³³ *Mā ... pamādo ... cittaṃ saṅṭhāpehi ... cittaṃ ekodi, karohi ... cittaṃ samādahati.*

¹³⁴ S 40.1/4:262 f), SD 24.11. For the 9 suttas: SD 24.3 (1).

¹³⁵ Pm 1:96 f, 100; Vism 4.131 f/154, 6.24-30/124-125; ApA 108; Abhs:BRS 342; VismT:Be 1:312. See Gunaratana 1985:74-77; Pa-Auk 2003:55-58. Besides these fivefold mastery, the meditator should also cultivate to gradually extend the counterpart sign (*nimitta, vaḍḍhana*) until it fills the “whole universe” (that is, becomes boundless) and beyond. [9]

¹³⁶ In meditation (such as on the breath), we should focus on the “knowing” of the process: SD 7.13 (2.3.3.3).

At some point, we may just “notice” how calm or joyful the stillness is. We may not even be aware that a long time has elapsed. It’s time to **emerge** from the stillness. This is a gut feeling: if we stay on any longer, we will lose the stillness anyway.

While we are still feeling the wake of the stillness, we should **review** our experience. Mentally note how it is like and whatever we think then. This reviewing is a strategy to remember this profound experience so that we are inspired to sit again in due course.¹³⁷

6.3 THE 2 BENEFITS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ABODES

6.3.1 Ways of awakening

6.3.1.1 We have noted thus far that the training of a Dharma practitioner, for both lay and monastic, is a gradual one, in terms of **the 3 trainings** [4], beginning with moral training, which forms the basis of mind training or concentration, and both of these are the support for wisdom that frees us from suffering. With the right and proper practice—such as the perception of impermanence, or better, meditation leading to dhyana—our progress is gradual but the 3 trainings of the path are interdependent. [4.6.1]

6.3.1.2 There is the way of training *for* the path; there is the training *on* the path itself. **The training** is, as a rule, gradual and progressive: *sīla* supports *samādhi*, and both support *paññā*. This is the way of **the good worldling** (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*).¹³⁸ Unlike the “blind worldling” (*andha putjujjana*), the “good worldling,”¹³⁹ though not even on the path, makes an effort to keep the precepts and keep his mind calm and kind. His progress towards the path is gradual, dependent mostly on merit (*puñña*), a kind of “consequentialist” karma¹⁴⁰ working in his favour. They give offerings, keep the precepts, listen to Dharma talks, even do some meditation. This may not always be the rule, but it happens often enough.

The path is the way of the learner (*sekha*) (the streamwinner, the once-returned and the non-returned) and the adept or non-learner (the arhat), too. As a rule, especially the learners tend to practise charity, keep the precepts, even live celibate lives and meditate. Their actions are, as a rule, what we call “virtue ethics” [3.1.3].

6.3.1.3 **The path** (*magga*) of the learners is, as a rule, gradual: one becomes a **streamwinner** first, overcoming the 3 fetters; then the **once-returned; the non-returned** who overcomes the 5 fetters; and finally **the arhat** who overcomes all the 10 fetters [Table 4.4]. However, this gradual progress may not seem sequential. It is, as if, the saint skips a stage (or two) and attains a higher stage, or even the highest (arhathood).

A case in point is that of **the layman Ugga of Vesālī**, who, as it were, breaks all the 5 fetters the first time, and becomes a non-returned [3.2.2.3]. In other words, it appears as if **the learners**—especially the streamwinner and the once-returned—may skip the intervening stage or stages to become a non-returned, even an arhat.

In other words, the path progress is like in a game of cosmic “**Snakes and Ladders**” but without the Snakes.¹⁴¹ The learners, by their diligence in overcoming the fetters, climb the ladders of spiritual trans-

¹³⁷ For details on these instructions, see SD 24.3 (2.3).

¹³⁸ DA 1:59 = PmA 1:266.

¹³⁹ DA 59,11 (qu PmA 266,9); PmA 1:40,26 (qu ItA 1:61,8); UA 269,25, 269,29 =ItA 2:35,13.

¹⁴⁰ “As we sow, so we shall reap” Karma: **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10), SD 39.2; SD 3.5 (1.1).

¹⁴¹ An ancient Indian game based on karma and samsara: SD 48.1 (6.3.1.5).

formation to become non-returners and arhats, never falling back or down the snakes' mouths. They have completely removed all the snakes (which represents the samsaric cycle, the uroboros).¹⁴²

6.3.1.4 Hence, the progress of the noble saints on the path of awakening may seem “sudden,” but the truth is that it is **unpredictable**, but it is the certain fruit of gradual progress. Progress on the saint's path has the characteristics of **the durian**, a highly prized local fruit, and fast catching on overseas, too. This is the precious fruit of a tall equatorial fruit tree (25-50 m = 82-164 ft high) of the genus *Durio* with 30 species (mostly in Borneo; 13 in Malaysia) and over 300 varieties native to SE Asia. Its best known species is *Durio zibethinus*. The famous fruit is large (up to 30 cm = 12 in long and 15 cm = 6 in wide), weighing between 1-3 kg (2-7 lbs)—about as large as an average watermelon.

It has a spiky rind (hence, its local name *durian*, from Old Malay *duri*, “thorn”). The colour of its prized fruit ranges from yellow to brown, and its pungent odour, odd look and rich creamy taste are well loved by locals but most foreigners would feel disagreeable (to say the least) when first encountering them. The novelist Anthony Burgess writes that eating durian is “like eating sweet raspberry blancmange in the lavatory.”¹⁴³

The point of mentioning this king of local fruits is that, in the wild, it takes some 6 or more years to **fruit**, but the grafted plants in only 4-5 years; and even fruit twice annually, during the hot and dry season, from June to August. The fruits are never plucked; the ripe ones will fall in their own time (usually in the night), and have to be at once collected before wild animals (that can detect their smell half a mile away) devour them or they are stolen by thieves! Indeed, the Indonesian and Malay saying, “*durian run-tuh*” (literally “durian fall”) means “windfall” (sudden or unexpected prosperity).

Like the durian that ripens and naturally falls, **the saints** mature naturally in their own time, their awakening occurring *unexpectedly*, giving the impression that it is “sudden,” like a durian windfall. The other spiritual significances of this fruity allusion are left to the Dharma-minded durian-lover to mull over as they enjoy their durian feast.

6.3.2 Attaining arhathood

6.3.2.1 The (Navaka) Jhāna Sutta (A 9.36) is a remarkable record of how **arhathood** can be attained through dhyana; then, emerging from it, we work to overcome the fetters [4.4]. The Sutta opens by stating that “the destruction of the influxes,” that is, **arhathood**, is “dependent on” one or other of the 9 progressive abodes: the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 formless dhyanas, and the cessation of feeling and perception.¹⁴⁴

The meditator's breakthrough into sainthood is described in this remarkable stock passage that follows the description of each of the first 7 of the 9 progressive abodes [6.3.2.2]:

“**2.2** Whatever states that are therein, by way of form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness,¹⁴⁵

he regards them as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien [as being other], as breaking up, as empty, as non-self.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² On the uroboros (or ouroboros), see SD 23.3 (1); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.3).

¹⁴³ A Burgess, *The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy*, W W Norton, 1993:68. Further on durian, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durian>.

¹⁴⁴ A 9.36,1 + SD 33.8 (2).

¹⁴⁵ These are the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*): see SD 17.

¹⁴⁶ “Impermanent ... non-self,” *aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhatto parato palokato suññato anattato*: as at M 1:435, 500; A 4:422 f; cf A 2:128; Miln 418. Comy says that the marks of suffering are sixfold (*dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhatto*), the impermanent twofold (*aniccato palokato*), the non-self

2.3 He turns his mind away¹⁴⁷ from these states.¹⁴⁸

Having turned his mind away from these states, he directs his mind to **the death-free element**,¹⁴⁹ thus:

‘This is peaceful, this is sublime,¹⁵⁰ that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nirvana.¹⁵¹

If he is steady therein, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.”

(A 9.36,2.2-2.4), SD 33.8

This is a classic description of a **dhyana-based practice of insight** (that is, *samatha* leading to *vipassanā*).¹⁵² The mind is first calmed and cleared of all hindrances (and defilements). Then, emerging from that dhyana, the calm and clear mind is directed to seeing the true characteristics of the aggregates (or any of them), and then the stillness of nirvana is taken as the mental object. This much can be put into words while the rest must be experienced for oneself.

6.3.2.2 Now, although **the (Navaka) Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36) typically lists all the 9 progressive abodes, awakening into final knowledge (arhathood) only occurs in the first 7 abodes, that is, excepting the last 2: those of *the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception* and of *cessation*. The reason for this is given by the Buddha at the end of the Sutta itself, thus:

“Thus, indeed, bhikshus, to the extent there is **attainment with perception**, to that extent there is the penetration into true knowledge.”¹⁵³ (A 9.36,16.2 etc) SD 33.8

The meaning of this teaching is that awakening can only occur for us when we are **percipient**. Here is an important situation where we are reminded not to impose external or exotic categories into any early Buddhist term or teaching without due consideration for the Pali context. This is also an occasion

threefold (*parato suññato anattato*) (MA 3:146). This refrain (and the rest) shows the attainment of calm (*samatha*), leading to the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*), or “insight preceded by calm” (*samatha, pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*), ie, on emerging from dhyana, one contemplates on it as an object of insight, reflecting it as having arisen through conditions, esp volition: see **Mahā Mālunkya,putta S** (M 649,16/1:435-437), SD 21.10; see also **Aṭṭhaka, nagara S** (M 52,4/1:350), SD 41.2, where Comy says that this is *samatha, pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*; see **(Yuganaddha) Paṭipadā S** (A 4.170/2:157), SD 41.5. See Intro (3.2).

¹⁴⁷ “Turn ... away,” Be Ce Ee WT *paṭivāpeti*, Se *paṭiṭṭhāpeti* throughout. **Paṭivāpeti** der from √VAP, “to shear or sow” (M 1:435 = A 4.423; DhsA 407). Other vll: *paṭipādeti*, *paṭiḷapeti* (MA), *paṭicāreti*, *paṭivāreti* (SHB, but inconsistent). See A:H 4:225 n, where EM Hare suggests reading *paṭinivatteti*, “to cause to turn away, to avert,” see McDonnell’s Skt Dict, sv √VRT. See also SED which gives *pratinivartayati*, sv *parti-ni-√VRT*. One reason for this bewildering list of variant readings is prob that the reciters or redactors (after the Buddha’s time) were themselves not sure of the appropriate action at this point in the meditation. This problem, unfortunately, is even more rampant today.

¹⁴⁸ Comy: “He turns his mind away” (*cittam paṭivāpeti*) from the 5 aggregates included in the dhyana, which he has seen to be marked with the 3 characteristics (of impermanence, suffering, non-self) (MA 3:146). He goes on to regard the dhyana or attainment, thus: “This is peaceful nirvana” (see below). See SD 33.8 (3.3).

¹⁴⁹ *So tehi dhammehi cittam paṭivāpetvā [paṭinivattetvā] amatāya dhātuyā cittam upasamharati*.

¹⁵⁰ *Paṇītaṃ*, as at M 2:235, 263; A 4:423, 5:8, 110, 320, 322, 354 ff.

¹⁵¹ *Etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ yad idaṃ sabba, saṅkhāra, samatho sabbūpadhi, paṭinissaggo taṇha-k, khayō virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ ti*, as at M 1:136. See also V 1:5; D 2:36; S 1:136; A 5:8.

¹⁵² Doctrinally, this is a case of “insight preceded by calm” (*samatha, pubbaṅ, gama vipassanā*), one of the 4 methods of vipassana/samatha combination: SD 41.1 (2.2.1).

¹⁵³ *Iti kho, bhikkhave, yāvata saññā, samāpatti tāvatā aññā, paṭivedho*. See SD 33.8 (3.5); SD 55.19 (1.1.3.2).

when a word or idea in a living language (like English) is enriched by a Dharma-rooted explanation. It is thus helpful to remember this as a case of **the rule of contextuality**.¹⁵⁴

6.3.2.3 “Percipient” (*saññī*) here (in “meditation language”) is qualified as “percipient but not sensing.” There is some subtle level of “knowing” but it is not any sense-based knowing or sensory cognition, that we experience in daily life. It helps to use some kind of “intentional language”¹⁵⁵ here (a kind of vocabulary and usage that are applicable only here and may not make good sense elsewhere). The dhyana meditator, at this level, only knows with the mind of his mind: our bodyless and sense-free mind, as it were, look at itself, like 2 huge clear mirrors facing each other.

The “seer” sees an infinity of images. Now, is this in the mirror or in the seer’s mind? We can speak or write prodigiously at length on this (dismissing it as some foolish airy or ethereal talk), but none of it is the real experience itself. The final irony is that the “seer” does not even see “himself” in such a nirvanic vision!

All this (on perceiving but not sensing) is actually explained in **the (Navaka) Ānanda Sutta** (A 9.37).¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the descriptions of awakening through applying insight into a dhyana or an attainment as explained in **the (Navaka) Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36) is found in a number of other suttas, too.¹⁵⁷

6.3.3 Attaining non-returning

The (Navaka) Jhāna Sutta (A 9.36) gives an alternative choice of awakening should we be unable to attain arhathood—if we still have lingering fetters, we would still be able to attain **non-returning**, thus:

If he does *not* attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,¹⁵⁸ then with the destruction of **the 5 lower fetters** [Table 4.4], he becomes one with spontaneous birth (*opapātika*) (in the pure abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world. (A 9.36,2.4 etc), SD 33.8

The non-returner (*anāgāmi*), as we know [4.4.2.2], has overcome all the 5 lower fetters. He is so called because upon dying, he is reborn in one of the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*) [4.4.2.2], never to “return” to earth (never to be reborn here) nor anywhere else, but cultivates his meditation to overcome the rest of the mental fetters holding him back to samsara.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ On the rule of context or contextuality rule, see SD 53.5 (4.2.3); SD 54.3b (2.3.2.3).

¹⁵⁵ SD 26.11 (6.5); **Dh 97** SD 10.6 esp (5).

¹⁵⁶ A 9.37 (SD 55.18).

¹⁵⁷ See eg: **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64,9-15), SD 21.10; **Anupada S** (M 111), SD 56.4; **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52,-12-14), SD 41.2; **(Nānā,karaṇa) Puggala S 2** (A 4.124), SD 23.8b. For overview, see SD 33.8 (4).

¹⁵⁸ “Desire ... delight in dharmas” (*dhmma,rāga dhmma,nandī*), as at **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52,4/1:350), where Comy explains that these 2 terms refer to the desire and lust (*chanda-rāga*), here meaning simply “attachment,” with respect to calm and insight. If one is able to let go of all attachment to calm and insight, one becomes an arhat. If one cannot discard them then one becomes a non-returner and is reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:14). *Dhamma* here clearly does not mean “teaching” or “Teaching,” but meditative states; thus, it is best rendered as “dharma.”

¹⁵⁹ On the 5 kinds of non-returners (depending on their level in the pure abodes): **Sa,saṅkhāra S** (A 4.169,1+4), SD 50.7; SD 8.5 (11.3). On the pure abodes, see SD 23.14 (Table 3).

7 The Buddha’s gradual awakening

7.1 EARLY SOURCES ON THE BUDDHA’S AWAKENING¹⁶⁰

7.1.1 Gradual progress in the Bodhisattva’s quest for awakening

7.1.1.1 The Buddha’s description of his own awakening process is well documented and preserved in a number of early suttas. The following suttas each presents basically the earliest record of the Buddha’s account of his **full self-awakening** (*sammā sambodhi*) in progressive detail:

				The key events		
<u>Table 7.1. Early suttas on the Buddha’s awakening</u>				Recalling his childhood experience of the 1st dhyana : the middle way	The 4 dhyanas	The 3 knowledges (including arhathood)
S = Sutta						
1	Bhaya,bherava Sutta	M 4 ,22-33 = (2)	SD 44.3	—	§§22-26	§§27-33
2	Dvedhā Vitakka Sutta	M 19 ,14-24 = (1)	SD 61.1	—	§§14-17	§§18-24
3	Mahā Saccaka Sutta	M 36 ,31-44 = (4)	SD 49.4	§§31-32	§§34-37	§§38-44
4	(Majjhima) Saṅgārava S	M 100 ,28-41 = (3)	SD 10.9	§§28-30	§§31-34	§§35-41
5	Mahā Assa,pura Sutta	M 39 ,15-21	SD 10.13	—	§§15-18	§§19-21

7.1.1.2 All these 5 suttas [Table 7.1] give the same account of the Buddha’s awakening process, in practical summary. The Buddha goes into **dhyana**, with which he is very familiar, after 7 years of practice (besides his inclination for it even as a child) [7.1.2.2]. We know this duration from **the Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24). The Sutta relates how **Māra** shadows the Bodhisattva during his 6 years of self-mortification, seeking to find in him the slightest fault (in the moral sense), and even after the awakening, continues to spy on him into the 1st year of the ministry.¹⁶¹ [7.1.1.6]

An interesting question arises here: Did Māra actually find any fault in the Bodhisattva? Surely, we must credit Māra with some small victory for his fervent efforts in playing **the Buddha’s foil**. In fact, this is clearly when the Bodhisattva discovers the “middle way” between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification [7.1.2.2], to go into dhyana by the breath meditation. Before doing this, he needs to regain his health and he takes some regular almsfood. Māra surely sees this as a failure on the Bodhisattva’s part—as do the 5 monks!

¹⁶⁰ For a comparative table of the Buddha’s early-life sutta parallels, see SD 49.4 (Table 7).

¹⁶¹ SA 1:185. See SD 36.5 (1.1.3).

7.1.1.3 The 5 monks, who have been attending to the Bodhisattva since his early days as a recluse, being judgemental, are clearly disappointed: they see the Bodhisattva as having failed for not pursuing self-mortification to its very end. Perhaps, if he were to *die* in the process, the 5 monks would have celebrated him as some kind of heroic saint of “**holy suicide**” (*sallekhamā*), as in the Jaina ritual death. But there would be *no* Buddha and *no* teaching.

Māra would surely have delighted, at least relieved (for the wrong reasons), at the Bodhisattva’s “failure” in giving up self-mortification. The 5 monks (or their leader, Koṇḍañña) must have presumed that the Bodhisattva values life over his spiritual quest. He has given up the quest! So they think: judging the Bodhisattva, they leave him.

Not even our closest relatives, loved ones, best friends or significant others always stand by us when we are at crossroads of vital or life decisions. What we see as most precious in our life must often be pursued or proffered by *ourselves*, *all alone*. This is the essence of **self-effort**. It is rooted in the courage to go for it alone if need be; yet, with our courageous decision, the fruits benefit more than just ourselves alone.

Surely, Māra has some significant influence in making the “majority” (the crowd) of 5 judges and reject the Bodhisattva at such a crucial time. But the Bodhisattva has renounced the crowd—if he had thought that “the majority is right!” and gratified them by returning to his self-mortification, he would still have failed anyway. We would not have remembered him, much less follow his teaching today.

7.1.1.4 The lesson here is a very significant one. In all **the key turning-points in our life**, we are essentially alone: we must *ourselves* make the final move or not. In our greatest living moments of learning, discovering, inventing or awakening, we are always alone. We are the lone Artist at his best, creating his timeless masterpiece with joy and beauty, and so that others may enjoy it, too.

The lesson of **the gradual way** is clear: in the spiritual quest, there is *no* failure. Every step taken, even when we need to step back, is always *ahead* in time, closer to the goal. A “**failure**” is only a path not to be taken. It reminds us that there is the “middle path,” right there between failure and awakening.

For this reason, the best known depiction of the Buddha is that of him **sitting alone radiantly meditating under the Bodhi tree**. This is a vital reflection on the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) that if we are to truly follow the path of awakening, we must spend some significant moments **alone** in self-search (even in something as basic as sutta study) leading to self-awakening. When we think we have *failed*, this only happens if we are still caught in the world or worldliness. The lone image of the radiant Buddha simply reminds us to turn to **the middle way**.

7.1.1.5 The truth is that if the Bodhisattva had truly failed, he would have actually rather *died*. Reflecting on his struggle for awakening, as recorded in **the (Mahā) Padhāna Sutta** (Sn 3.2), “the *Mahā* discourse on the striving,” the Buddha says:

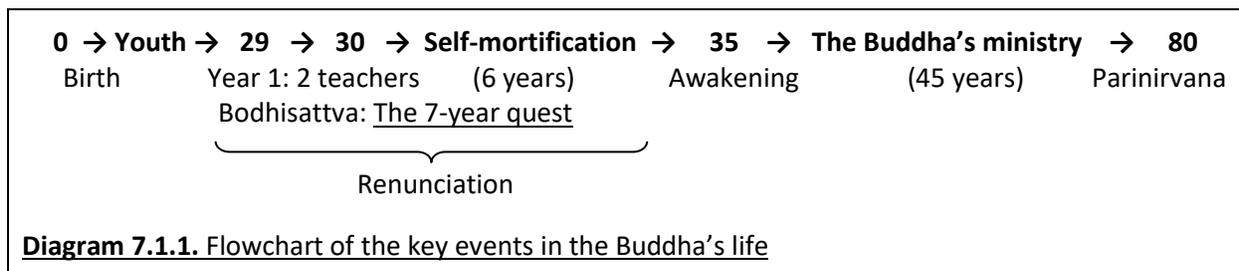
16	<i>Esa muñjaṃ parihare dhi-r-atthu mama jīvitaṃ saṅgāme me mataṃ seyyo yañ ce jīve parājito</i>	(Sn 440)	This muñja-grass ¹⁶² I wear: shame on my life! Better is my death in battle than if I were to live defeated.	
17	<i>Pagāḷh’ettha na dissanti eke samaṇa,brāhmaṇā</i>		Some recluses or brahmins, having plunged here, are not seen.	b a

¹⁶² *Esa muñjaṃ parihare*. Comy: In the course of battle, men who fight on without retreating let known their state of non-retreat by tying muñja-grass on their head, or flag, or weapon, and declare: “Remember me as one who wears this!” (*Saṅgāmāvacarā anivattino purisā attano anivattanaka, bhāvaṃ ñāpanatthaṃ sīse vā dhaje vā āvudhe vā muñja, tiṇaṃ bandhati, “taṃ ayam pi pariharati’cc-eva maṃ dharehi*) (SnA 390,23-26). For detailed nn on these 2 Sn verses, see SD 5.11 ad loc.

tañ ca maggaṃ na jānanti
yena gacchanti subbatā (Sn 441) For, they know not the path
 which those of true practice go.

The point is that the Bodhisattva, in giving up what does not work, which endangers his life, preventing him from his true life's quest, brings himself back to **the true quest** for awakening. It is, in a way, a "strategic retreat." The real battle is yet to come, and the Bodhisattva now prepares himself for that key moment to rout Māra and his evil host for good.

7.1.1.6 One last point here concerns **the 7 years** (*satta vassa*): what really are these years in terms of **the Buddha's chronology**? From what we have just discussed, here is, essentially, a flowchart of the key events in the Buddha's life:



From **the Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24), we know that **Māra** shadows the Bodhisattva throughout the 6 painful years of his self-mortification [7.1.1.2]. We can also deduce that **the 1st year of the renunciation** (years 29-30) is spent with **the 2 teachers**.¹⁶³ Hence, we can conclude that **the Bodhisattva's renunciation** lasted a total of **7 years**. However, the Satta Vassa Sutta refers only to the 6 years of self-mortification plus the 1st year of the ministry. The details and difference in the durations should be well noted.

7.1.2 The middle way

7.1.2.1 The suttas [Table 7.1] all speak of **the Buddha's awakening** as beginning with his attaining **the 4 form dhyanas** and **the 3 knowledges**, especially the 3rd knowledge, that of **the destruction of the influxes** (*āsava-k, khaya ñāṇa*). With the overcoming of **the 3 influxes** (*āsava*) of *sensual lust, existence and ignorance*, he awakens to become **the Buddha**, the 1st arhat.

The 3 influxes are synecdoches for **the 10 fetters** (*dasa samyojana*) [4.4], thus:

"**the influx of sensual lust**" (*kām'āsava*): the 1st 5 or "lower" fetters;
 "**the influx of existence**" (*bhav'āsava*): greed for form existence and for formless existence
 (fetter 6 + 7, the 1st 2 of the higher fetters),
 "**the influx of ignorance**" (*avijjāsava*): the 5 higher fetters.

"The influx of views" (*diṭṭh'āsava*)—the "4th influx" added to form the later better known tetrad—is, in the older triad, included in the influx of "ignorance."¹⁶⁴ The 2 sets refer to the same kinds of defilements—those that hold us back to the world and its sufferings. However, didactically, they serve different functions or emphases.

¹⁶³ S 4.24/1:122-124 (SD 36.5).

¹⁶⁴ For details, see also SD 30.3 (1.3): Table 1.3.3.5; SD 50.12 (2.5.2): Table 2.2.2.

While **the fetters** (*samyojana*) [4.4] highlight our “**ignorance**” that projects our “self” as the virtual world (dependently arisen), which is then dismantled with wisdom; **the influxes** (*āsava*) refer to our *mind* and its creative dynamics (the 5 aggregates of clinging) which should be seen as “non-self,” which we should simply let go of so that we are truly and fully free.

7.1.2.2 Two of the 5 suttas of **Table 7.1—the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) and **the (Majjhima) Saṅgā-rava Sutta** (M 100)—have identical accounts of the Buddha’s awakening; the former addressed to the young nirgrantha Saccaka, the latter to the brahmin youth Saṅgārava. They add an important detail: the reason for the Bodhisattva turning to **the middle way**. From the time of his renunciation to the end of his self-mortification, the Bodhisattva works with the notion that *any* kind of pleasure was bad; that bodily asceticism was less bad, but “neither was connected with the goal” (does not lead to awakening).¹⁶⁵

How does the Bodhisattva realize this vital truth that brings him Buddhahood?

The Buddha explains that this turning-point (taking the middle way) occurs to him when he recalls how, as a 7-year-old child,¹⁶⁶ “when my father the Sakyan was occupied” with the royal sowing festival,¹⁶⁷ “sitting in the cool shade of a jambul tree,”¹⁶⁸ enters into **the 1st dhyana**. “Following that memory,”¹⁶⁹ recalls the Buddha, “I realized, ‘That is the path of awakening!’”¹⁷⁰

Now let us look at *the context of this key episode* in the Bodhisattva’s life—how this memory of “the 1st dhyana” fits into the gradual progress of his quest, discovering the middle way, leading up to the great awakening. [7.1.3]

7.1.2.3 One last interesting point before we do that. The phrase “**the 1st dhyana**” (*paṭhama jhāna*) here can mean either his “1st meditation” or the “1st meditative absorption”: *jhāna* can mean either *broadly* “meditation,” or *specifically* the 1st of the 4 form dhyanas.¹⁷¹ It is popularly known here as “the first jhana” or “the first meditation,” as if it is the child Siddhattha’s very *first* such experience. This may well be true: he seems, after all, to be spiritually precocious.

Logically, if he is able to attain the 1st dhyana (either or both senses) on his own, it is likely either that this is due to his spiritual precocity, or that he has been taught by some good teacher. However, if we are to accept that his father Suddhodana is protective of him, wanting him to be a man of the world¹⁷²—the future ruler¹⁷³—Suddhodana is highly unlikely to have allowed any religious teacher near him, much less, to teach him meditation. Anyway, the fact remains that he is **a spiritual child prodigy**.

Now we will briefly examine how this important episode fits into the account of the Bodhisattva’s gradual progress in his quest for awakening.

¹⁶⁵ While “self-mortification” (“devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures”) is said to be only “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” “sense-indulgence” (devotion to self-mortification) is described as “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal ...”: **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,3) + n, SD 1.1

¹⁶⁶ J 1:57; BA 277 f.

¹⁶⁷ *Rañño vappa,maṅgala* (J 1:57; BA 277 f). Popularly called “the ploughing festival.” See SD 52.1 (5.1.2) The ploughing festival.

¹⁶⁸ The **jambul** is the black plum of India (*Eugenia jambolana*); it is *not* the jambu tree (*Syzygium aqueum*), which is not found in India, but in SE Asia: see SD 16.15 (3).

¹⁶⁹ Majjhima Comy adds that the meditation done by the young Siddhattha is the mindfulness of the in-and-out-breaths (MA 2:291).

¹⁷⁰ M 36,31 (SD 49.4); M 100,28 (SD 10.9).

¹⁷¹ SD 33.1b (1.1).

¹⁷² On Suddhodana as a protective father, see SD 52.1 (7.2.2).

¹⁷³ On the prediction of prince Siddhattha’s future, see SD 52.1 (4.4).

7.1.3 Gradual renunciation of extremes: the middle way

7.1.3.1 The most detailed canonical account we have of the Bodhisattva's 7-year quest for awakening [Diagram 7.1.1] is found in the **Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36),¹⁷⁴ and the **(Majjhima) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100).¹⁷⁵ Both accounts are identical [7.1.2.1], and begin by mentioning the episode of the 2 teachers, Ājāra Kālamā¹⁷⁶ and Uddaka Rāma,putta (the son of Rāma).¹⁷⁷

From Ājāra, the Bodhisattva learns and masters **the base of nothingness**,¹⁷⁸ the 3rd of the 4 formless attainments;¹⁷⁹ from Uddaka, he learns Rāma's meditation method and reaches **the base of neither perception nor non-perception**,¹⁸⁰ the 4th and last of the formless attainments. He does so well that he is invited by the 2 teachers to lead their respective communities. But since neither of these meditations brings him any awakening, he is "dissatisfied with (their) Dharma," and leaves them.¹⁸¹

7.1.3.2 The 2 Suttas (**M 36** and **M 100**) [7.1.3.1] continue by explaining to us why the Bodhisattva turns to self-mortification. This is called "**the parable of the fire-sticks**."¹⁸² Essentially, the first 2 similes of the parable highlight the incompatibility of sensual lust with spirituality, while the 3rd simile shows how a purified mind easily promotes good.

The 1st fire-stick simile is that of someone trying to start a fire with a sappy fire-stick that is soaked in water. While our mind is filled with sensuality, yet we still indulge in it, it's like jumping from the frying-pan into the fire!

The 2nd fire-stick is still sappy but it is left on dry land. Our mind is filled with sensuality, but we do not indulge in it. Since we are still *thinking* about sensuality we are basically still indulging in it in our mind!

The 3rd fire-stick is dry and rubbed on another dry piece of wood: they easily start a fire. Even so, *a pure mind in a pure body* is the best way, even the *only way*, to attain good. Thus, reasons the Bodhisattva: *the body must be purged of all sensuality, and be deprived of it*. What better way to do this than to inflict pain upon the body! Such was the extreme view of some religious practitioners then (and even today).¹⁸³

And so he embarks on 6 long painful years of **self-mortification**.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁴ **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31-44), SD 49.4. See also SD 52.1 (13).

¹⁷⁵ **(Majjhima) Saṅgārava S** (M 100,11-41), SD 40.9, although a shorter account, gives new details regarding the importance of moral virtue in meditation (M 100,14-16) before the Bodhisattva embarks on his self-mortification. [7.1.3.2]

¹⁷⁶ Also at **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 16,15.2) SD 1.11. Buddhaghosa says that **Ājāra** was also called Dīgha,piṅgala; **Kālamā** was his family name (DA 2:569 = MA 2:171). See SD 1.1 (4).

¹⁷⁷ Note that Uddaka's late father, **Rāma**, was the attained teacher, not Uddaka. On Uddaka, see SD 1.1 (4).

¹⁷⁸ the base of nothingness (*ākiñcaññ'āyatana*): **Ākiñcaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7), SD 24.17.

¹⁷⁹ The 4 formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*): SD 24.11 (5).

¹⁸⁰ The base of neither perception nor non-perception (*n'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana*): **N'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.8), SD 24.18.

¹⁸¹ The 2-teacher episode: M 36,14-15 (SD 49.4) = M 100,12-13 (SD 10.9). **The 2-teacher episode** attests that **dhyana** (*jhāna*) was well known in the Buddha's time and even before. There is no good reason to doubt this episode. For a fuller discussion, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b.

¹⁸² M 36,17-19 (SD 49.4) = M 100,14-16 (SD 10.9); also at **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85,15-17), SD 55.2. See SD 49.4 (Table 7.1.3). Cf the "2 fire-sticks" parable: **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,19.4) SD 4.17.

¹⁸³ For details on the parable of the 3 fire-sticks, see SD 49.4 (4).

¹⁸⁴ Details of the Bodhisattva's self-mortification are found in M 36,20-30 (SD 49.4) = M 100,17-27 (SD 10.9).

7.1.4 Gradual renunciation: A recap

7.1.4.1 Let us recap the development of views and practices of the Bodhisattva as he undergoes his spiritual quest thus far—showing his **gradual progress through renunciation and on to buddhahood**. We are familiar with the accounts of prince Siddhattha’s **life of abandoned luxury and pleasure** in the 3 mansions (or palaces).¹⁸⁵ Psychologically, his father is “flooding”¹⁸⁶ his life with wild worldliness, hoping that this will entice him to remain in the world.¹⁸⁷

7.1.4.2 Siddhattha’s protected life of luxury and pleasure in the 3 mansions, ironically, does *not* prepare him for the real world of suffering out there. Hence, it is not difficult to understand how shocked he is when he sees **the 3 signs (nimitta)** or “divine messengers” (*deva, dūta*)—an old man, a diseased person, and a corpse, *as if for the first time*. **The 4th sight** is radically different—that of a calm happy renunciant: this inspired radiant joy (pasāda) in him: a bright silver lining around 3 dark clouds.¹⁸⁸

The 3 signs represent the true realities of life: decay, disease, death (the 3 D’s). The spiritually precocious young Siddhattha at once sees how false his own life has been: his family, nobility, power, wealth and pleasure—all are subject to impermanence. His experience is that of “**spiritual urgency**” (*samvega*), a total sense of angst, a life bereft of meaning and purpose.¹⁸⁹

7.1.4.3 The 4th sight (the renunciant) is a clear hint of the way out. His next immediate step is to give up the false world he is trapped in: he **renounces** its crowdedness (*sambādha*) in quest of the “space” or way out (*okāsa*).¹⁹⁰ He is already familiar with meditation even as a child [7.1.2.2], a spiritual legacy of numerous lives learning about being and suffering, even living the holy life under various past buddhas.¹⁹¹

Meditation (jhana) is nothing new to the Bodhisattva. The central Gangetic plain of his time teems with religious seekers and teachers of meditation like Āḷāra Kālāma and Rāma, Uddaka’s father. In less than a year, he masters the formless attainments [7.1.3.1]. Not finding the answer he seeks through meditation, that is, his mind, he then seeks it through his **body**. He spends 6 years of self-mortification. Such extreme forms of asceticism are common in his time. He has to try everything, as it were—after all, he is to become *the Buddha*, who overcomes *all* suffering.

7.1.4.4 Towards the end of the 6 years of **self-mortification**, the Bodhisattva is left with the barest of the minimum of the human frame—an almost fleshless living cadaver of skin and bones—at the extreme end of flickering life. According to one traditional Thai account, after taking a wash in the river he was so weak that the river-currents almost washed him away and he just managed to clamber back onto the bank, breathless and almost lifeless.¹⁹² This near-death experience teaches him a serious lesson: that self-mortification would only end in fruitless death. It would certainly not bring any awakening.¹⁹³

Since the painful austerities bring neither superhuman state nor noble attainment, concludes the Bodhisattva, “**Could there be another path to awakening?**” It is at this point, state the 2 Suttas (M 36 and M 100), that he recalls how as a 7-year-old, he attains the 1st dhyana [7.1.2.2]. “Could that be the path to awakening?” He realizes: “**That is the path to awakening!**”

¹⁸⁵ On the pleasure in the 3 mansions (or palaces), see SD 52.1 (6.1).

¹⁸⁶ On psychological “flooding,” see SD 43.2 (2); SD 52.1 (7.2.2.1).

¹⁸⁷ See SD 52.1 (6.1).

¹⁸⁸ On the 4 sights and their significance, see SD 52.1 (7).

¹⁸⁹ On *samvega*, see SD 1.11 (3); SD 9 (7.6).

¹⁹⁰ On the metaphor of “a space in the crowdedness” (*sambādh’okāsa*): **Sambādh’okāsa S** (A 6.2), SD 15.6.

¹⁹¹ As the brahmin youth, Jotipāla, he lives as a monk under the Buddha Kassapa (the buddha just before him): **(Majjhma) Ghaṭikāra S** (M 81), SD 49.3.

¹⁹² This account is prob from the traditional Siamese work, *Pathom Somphoti Katha*.

¹⁹³ On self-mortification and why it does not help, see SD 49.4 (5.3).

It occurs to him, then, that **the dhyanic experience**, unlike self-mortification, even sense-indulgence, is profoundly and wholesomely pleasant. “Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states?” It occurs to him: “**I fear not the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states!**”¹⁹⁴

Hence, despite the protests and disapproval of the prejudiced 5 monks who have been with him all this time of spiritual struggle, the Bodhisattva gives up the extreme of self-mortification, and decides to heal his health back to normal by taking proper almsfood of “boiled rice and porridge.”¹⁹⁵ The 5 monks, disappointed, leave him, but he is clear and adamant of his new path, ready to go for it even all alone—he later calls this “**the path of one-going**” (*ek’āyana magga*).¹⁹⁶

7.2 THE BUDDHA’S DESCRIPTIONS OF HIS AWAKENING

7.2.1 The 4 dhyanas

7.2.1.1 Both the **Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) and the **(Majjhima) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100) continue by recording the Buddha’s description of his own awakening process. First, using the breath meditation, he goes into the 4 dhyanas.¹⁹⁷ Then, follows a very important passage on how dhyana helps with gaining **insight** (*vipassanā*) as **the 3 true knowledges** (*vijjā*),¹⁹⁸ thus:

When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to unshakable steadiness,¹⁹⁹ **[248]**

I directed it to:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| (1) the knowledge of the recollection of past lives ²⁰⁰ ... | <i>pubbe,nivāsanānussati,ñāṇa</i> |
| (2) the divine eye [clairvoyance], ²⁰¹ | <i>dibba,cakkhu</i> |
| (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes. ²⁰² | <i>āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa</i> |

(M 36,44), SD 49.4, = (M 100,35-41) SD 10.9

7.2.1.2 We see here the Bodhisattva, having emerged from **the 4th dhyana**, “directs” his mind (“purified ...”) to progressively letting **the 3 true knowledges** (*ti,vijjā*) arise in the 1st watch (from 6-10 pm), the middle watch (10 pm-2 am) and the last watch (2-6 am) respectively. In other words, just as dawn breaks, routing the night, the Buddha arises in the world to rout our ignorance, to enlighten and awaken us.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ On the 2 kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of renunciation—see **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.3/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure felt by the awakened mind, see **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

¹⁹⁵ M 36,33 (SD 49.4) = M 100,30 f (SD 10.9). Also at **Bodhi Rāja,kunāra S** (M 85,3), SD 55.2.

¹⁹⁶ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,2), SD 13.3; SD 3.1 (3.4).

¹⁹⁷ M 36,34-37 (SD 49.4), = M 100, 35-38 (SD 10.9).

¹⁹⁸ Also called (spiritual) knowledges (*ñāṇa*) or superknowledges (*abhiññā*).

¹⁹⁹ *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudu,bhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñ-ja-p,patte.*

²⁰⁰ *Pubbe,nivāsanānussati,ñāṇa*, detailed at Vism 13.13-71/411-423.

²⁰¹ *Dibba,cakkhu*, clairvoyance, not to be confused with the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*) (see n in §102).

²⁰² *Āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) has been variously translated as taints, corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*ditṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). See BDict: *āsava*.

²⁰³ Cf **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26) where the Buddha describes his awakening in terms of giving up “what is subject to birth” (*jāti,dhamma*) for the “unborn” (*ajāta*), “what is subject to decay” (*jarā,dhamma*) for the “undecaying”

7.2.1.3 The 3 knowledges (*ti, vijjā*) make the Buddha an arhat.²⁰⁴ **The 1st knowledge**—that of retro-cognition—allows him to know his own past lives. Through this knowledge, he is able to recount his own past lives,²⁰⁵ and retell countless Jātaka stories where, as a rule, he is the key protagonist in each of them. This knowledge confirms the truth and reality of **rebirth**, one of the key early Buddhist teachings.²⁰⁶

The 2nd knowledge—that of clairvoyance—allows him to see the cycles of lives and deaths of others — how beings fare according to their karma—so that he is able to fully and rightly understand their personalities, and with that, to give them the right teaching or meditation to awaken then and there. With this clairvoyance, for example, he at once recognizes the wanderers Upatissa and Kolita (Sāriputta and Moggallāna) when they first meet him.²⁰⁷ This knowledge also confirms the truth and reality of **karma**, another key teaching of early Buddhism.²⁰⁸

The 3rd knowledge—that of the destruction of the influxes—frees **the arhat** from sensual lust, existence and ignorance (elaborated as the 10 fetters) [7.1.2.1]; that is, it defines awakening as an arhat. This is the only supramundane knowledge of the 3, and is found in all arhats. Hence, in terms of awakening, *both the arhat and the Buddha are identical* [4.4.2.3]. While this knowledge is found in *all* arhats, the other two vary in depth according to the dhyana ability of the individual arhat; some arhats may not have any of the first 2 knowledges.

7.2.2 Two remarkable points

7.2.2.1 Two remarkable points are worth noting here, the first concerns **the breath meditation** (*ānāpāna, sati*). This is the meditation, says the Majjhima Commentary, used by the child Siddhattha during his 1st-dhyana meditation²⁰⁹ [7.1.2.2]. This very same breath meditation is the one used by the Bodhisattva to awaken himself to buddhahood. We can surmise this from the Icchā,naṅgala Sutta (S 54.11)

The Icchā,naṅgala Sutta (S 54.11) records the Buddha as praising **the breath meditation**, that is, “the cultivation of the samadhi of breath mindfulness” (*ānāpāna-s, sati samādhi bhāvanā*), calling it “the noble abode” (*ariya, vihāra*), “the perfect abode” (*brahma, vihāra*)²¹⁰ and “the Tathagata’s abode” (*tathāgata, vihāra*). Hence, breath meditation is not only the most ancient and authentic of Buddhist meditations, but also the one most recommended for our personal or group practice, especially when it can also bring us into the dhyanas.²¹¹

7.2.2.2 The 2nd point worth noting here is how the Buddha’s audience responds whenever the Buddha teaches in public. **The Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) preserves this fascinating passage:

(*ajarā*), “what is subject to disease” (*vyādhidhamma*) for the “disease-free” (*avyādhi*), “what is subject to death” (*marāṇa, dhamma*) for the “death-free” (*amata*), “what is subject to sorrow” (*soka, dhamma*) for the “sorrowless” (*asoka*), “what is subject to defilement” (*saṅkilesa, dhamma*) for the “undefiled” (*asaṅkiliṭṭha*), **nirvana** (M 26,18/1:-167,9-27), Later, he repeats these same words to the 5 monks who, hearing them, become arhats (M 26,30), SD 1.11.

²⁰⁴ These 3 knowledges are also those of the *te, vijja* arhats, their first 2 knowledges (which are mundane) are limited while the Buddha’s ability to recall his own past lives and those of others are unlimited. The 3rd knowledge—that of arhathood or awakening—is the same in all arhats; the Buddha, too, is an arhat, except that he is the first to arise. He discovers the path and teaches it to others [4.4.2.3 n]. On different kinds of arhats: SD 4.25 (Table 6.3.3).

²⁰⁵ Such as his past life as the monk Jotipāla under the past buddha Kassapa, as related in (**Majjhima**) **Ghaṭikāra S** (M 81), SD 49.3 [7.1.4.3].

²⁰⁶ On the 6 teachings of early Buddhism (“right views”), see SD 40a.1 (5.1.3).

²⁰⁷ Mv 1.23-24 (V 1:40-43).

²⁰⁸ See prec n on “rebirth.”

²⁰⁹ MA 2:291,1-3.

²¹⁰ This usage of *brahma, vihara* should not be confused with the same term used for the “divine abodes.”

²¹¹ S 54.11/5:325 f (SD 44.9). On the breath meditation, see **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118,5-7+15-22), SD 7.13; also **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62,24-30), SD 3.11.

“Now, Aggivessana, I recall teaching the Dharma to an assembly of many hundreds, and even then, each person thinks,

‘The recluse Gotama teaches the Dharma thinking of me!’²¹²

But, Aggivessana, it should not be seen thus. The Tathagata teaches the Dharma to others only for the sake of making things clear.²¹³

At the end of the talk, Aggivessana, I steady the mind internally, settle it, focus it, and concentrate it on the very same concentration sign²¹⁴ as before, in which I constantly dwell.”²¹⁵

(M 36,45), SD 49.4

The individual members of the Buddha’s audience feel connected with the Buddha when he teaches because they can personally relate to the truth of his teaching. Even in this precious moment with the Buddha, there is a sequence in the Dharma working on the listener, thus: he is “instructed, inspired, roused, gladdened” (*sandasseti samādapeti samuṭṭejeti sampahamseti*) by the Dharma he teaches. This is called “**the 4 stages of the teaching.**”²¹⁶

7.3 THE TRUTHS AND DEPENDENT ARISING

7.3.1 How dependent arising works

7.3.1.1 The 3 knowledges (*ti.vijjā*) are the defining knowledge of the Buddha as **an arhat**. As for the Buddha himself, he has comprehensive understanding of true reality. Such understanding may be expressed in various ways for the benefit of his audience. The best known expression of such knowledge is that of **dependent arising** (and its opposite counterpart, dependent ending).

What is **the function** of dependent arising? It is an elaboration of the 2nd and the 3rd noble truths, showing the full cycle of how ignorance leads to **suffering**, and how with the **ending** of *ignorance*, there is the ending of *suffering*:

the noble truths

- | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|
| (1) suffering | (<i>dukkha</i>) | |
| (2) its arising | (<i>dukkha,samudaya</i>) | — dependent arising (<i>paṭicca samuppāda</i>) |
| (3) its ending | (<i>dukkha,nirodha</i>) | — dependent <u>ending</u> (<i>*paṭicca sannirodha</i>) [7.3.2] |
| (4) the path | (<i>dukkha,nirodha,gaminī paṭipadā</i>). | |

In this formulation—showing how **dependent arising** as the 4 noble truths works—we see the 1st truth, suffering, included in *dependent arising*, while the 4th truth, **the path**, is *dependent ending* itself. This is an overview, a full picture, of the Buddha’s teaching as famously and tersely stated as “**the noble truths of dependent conditionality,**” thus:

²¹² *Mam’ev’ārabha samaṇo gotamo dhammaṃ desetīti.*

²¹³ *Yāvad eva viññāpan’atthāya tathāgato paresaṃ dhammaṃ deseti.*

²¹⁴ Comy explains the “concentration sign” (*samādhi,nimitta*) here as the fruition attainment of emptiness (*suññatā,phala,samāpatti*) (MA 2:292). See also **Māhā Suññata S** (M 122,6)+n, SD 11.4.

²¹⁵ *So kho ahaṃ aggivessana tassāy’eva kathāya pariyosāne, tasmim’-yeva purimasim’ samādhi,nimitte ajjhatam eva cittam saṅghapemi sannisādemī ekodim’ karomi samādahāmi, yena sudar’ nicca,kappaṃ viharāmīti.* Comy explains the “sign of concentration” (*samādhi,nimitta*) here as the fruition attainment of emptiness (*suññata,phala,samāpatti*). In **Māhā Suññata S** (M 122), the Buddha describes how he dwells “in voidness internally by giving no attention to all signs” and how he responds to visitors (M 122,6), SD 11.4.

²¹⁶ SD 38.2 (4.2.3). These 4 qualities, as a set, are the 6th or last of the ideal skills of a Dharma speaker: **(Dhamma Desaka) Udāyi S** (A 5.159), SD 46.1; **Kathā,vatthu A** (A 3.67), SD 46.11.

“I declare only suffering and suffering’s ending.”

(*dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti*).²¹⁷

7.3.1.2 The basic (twin) cycle of the 12-link dependent arising and dependent ending are laid out in such discourses as **the (Nidāna) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1) and **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15),²¹⁸ thus:

(1) Dependent arising

With **ignorance** as condition, there are
with *volitional formations* as condition, there is
with *consciousness* as condition, there is
with *name-and-form* as condition, there are
with *the 6 sense-bases* as condition, there is
with *contact* as condition, there is
with *feeling* as condition, there is
with *craving* as condition, there is
with *clinging* as condition, there is
with *existence* as condition, there is
with *birth* as condition there arise

volitional formations;
consciousness;
name-and-form;
the 6 sense-bases;
contact;
feeling;
craving;
clinging;
existence;
birth;
decay-and-death,
sorrow, lamentation,
physical pain, mental
pain and despair.

Paṭicca,samuppāda

avijjā → *saṅkhāra*
viññāṇa
nāma,rūpa
sa’āyatana
phassa
vedanā
taṇhā
upādāna
bhava
jāti
jarā,maraṇaṃ
soka,parideva-
dukkha,domanass’-
upāyasā
dukkha

Such is **the arising** of this whole mass of

suffering.

(2) Dependent ending (*paṭicca sannirodha*) [7.3.2]

But with the utter fading away

and **ending** of
with the ending of

ignorance,
volitional formations,
consciousness,
name-and-form,
the 6 sense-bases,
contact,
feeling,
craving,
clinging,
existence,
birth, there end

volitional formations end;
consciousness ends;
name-and-form ends;
the 6 sense-bases end;
contact ends;
feeling ends;
craving ends;
clinging ends;
existence ends;
birth ends;
decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation,
physical pain, mental pain and despair.
suffering.

—Such is **the ending** of this whole mass of

(S 12.1/2:1 f); (S 12.15/2:16 f), SD 6.13²¹⁹

Sequence (1) is that of **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*): beginning with ignorance followed by 11 links, ending in suffering. These are the “12 links” (*dvādasā nidāna*), showing how *ignorance* builds up to “the whole mass of *suffering*.” [7.3.2]

²¹⁷ **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,21.2) + SD 21.13 (2); **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,38), SD 3.13; SD 40a.1 (11.1.1); SD 53.40 (2.1.1).

²¹⁸ S 12.1/2:1 f (SD 83.1) & 12.15/2:16 f (SD 6.13).

²¹⁹ On the “12 links” (rather than “11 links”), see SD 5.16 (1.4.2).

Sequence (2) is the same 12 links “reversed,” as it were, that is, **dependent ending** (*paṭicca sannirodha*), beginning with the *ending* of ignorance. With the arising of true wisdom or right knowledge (full understanding of the 4 noble truths), ignorance is removed; then, the other links fall away like a row of dominos.

7.3.1.3 Dependent ending is not elaborated in the suttas as much as dependent arising for 2 reasons: firstly, we must know, in theory and practice how suffering arises before we can know how it ends. Secondly, unlike dependent arising, which “takes time” [7.3.2.1], dependent ending seems rather abrupt, in the sense that, once ignorance is routed, there is no more suffering—nothing more, as it were, happens. The dependent ending is also given in full merely for a better understanding of *dependent arising*, which is, in fact, also about the *ending* of suffering: we gain the timeless, death-free nirvana.

Table 7.3.2. Dependent arising²²⁰

PAST	1. Ignorance 2. Volitional formations	Karma cycle (<i>kamma.bhava</i>) 5 existential causes: 1,2,8,9,10
PRESENT	3. Consciousness 4. Name-and-form (mental and physical existence) 5. The 6 sense-bases 6. Contact 7. Feeling	Rebirth cycle (<i>upapatti.bhava</i>) 5 psychological results: 3-7
	8. Craving 9. Clinging 10. Existence	Karma cycle (<i>kamma.bhava</i>) 5 psychological causes: 1,2,8,9,10
FUTURE	11. Birth 12. Decay-and-death	Rebirth cycle (<i>upapatti.bhava</i>) 5 existential results: 3-7

7.3.2 The graduality of dependent arising

7.3.2.1 To have some idea how dependent arising works as a **gradual process** (of varying speed), we will briefly examine how it works in real life. **Dependent arising**, it must be noted, works in 2 temporal modes: either “across time” or “at a time”—diachronically or synchronically—either mode operating in a *gradual* sequence of the 12 links or a part thereof.

To help understand this better, we will use a well-known diagram [Table 7.3.2], showing how the 12 links extend “across time” or “at a time.” There are those who view that dependent arising operates

²²⁰ See SD 5.16 (13).

across time, that is, over the past, the present and the future in this life, over 3 consecutive lives, even over past lives, the present, and the possible future. And there are those who view that dependent arising is only in “this life,” or “**at a time**,” momentarily (but repetitively), happening right here and now, as it were.²²¹

In the following discussion, with the help of Table 7.3.2, we will see that both views are right, both modes actually explain *what* we “**are**” (at a time, synchronically, psychologically) and *how* we “**become**” (across time, diachronically, existentially). In either case, there is the basic gradual sequence of past conditions (or causes), present results, present conditions, and future results: this, in fact, is what is reflected in Table 7.3.2.

This sequence is, in reality, dynamically multifold and recurrent: like the working of atoms, protons, neutrons, etc, at the subatomic level, and to understand them, we resort to an atomic model, which freezes their actions so that we can closely examine the nuclear activity in our own time. Dependent arising (and dependent ending) are the “nuclear” levels of our lives and existence.

7.3.2.2 Dependent arising is usually used to explain or understand the diachronic workings of our being *over time*.²²² We are rooted in **a karmic past** of (1) ignorance and (2) volitional formations. Primordial ignorance is always with us (unless we are awakened), which compels us to generate karma of body, speech and mind. These two roots work with (8) craving, (9) clinging and (10) existence (becoming) *in the present*, influencing our (3) consciousness, with which we project (4) forms, giving names to them, and they become sense-data for (5) the 6 sense-bases. When we attend to any of these sense-bases, there is (6) contact, from which arises (7) feeling. This forms our present **existential being** (what we are).

Further, what we are *now* (our existential being) is ridden with (8) craving, chasing the pleasant, avoiding the unpleasant, ignoring the neutral; (9) clinging to these, we feed our latent tendencies of lust, repulsion and ignorance: this feeds our (10) existence (the existential being) which is what we are right now.

On account of our current *existence* (as unawakened beings), we continue in (11) birth which gives us another *body* of sorts—which goes through (3-7) all over, which naturally entails (12) decay-and-death. This is **a diachronic model** of dependent arising, *across time*, explaining our existential being rooted in past karma, fed by present karma, and propelled into further future states.

Traditionally, links 1-2, together with 8-10, represent **the karma cycle**, containing the 5 karmic causes of rebirth. Links 3-7, together with 11-12, represent **the rebirth cycle**, containing the 5 karmic results. This basically explains how we are *born*, *die*, and continue to be *reborn*, basically caught in the same dependent arising cycle. This again is the diachronic or “existential” model of dependent arising, *across time*, that is, over the 3 periods of time, showing how the past shapes our present conditions, which then shape our future.

7.3.2.3 Now, we will examine **the synchronic model** of dependent arising, “at a time,” that shapes our psychological being *this very moment* [Table 7.3.2]. Being unawakened, we are rooted in (1) ignorance, which works with (8) craving, compelling us to act, on account of (2) volitional formations through the 3 doors of body, speech and mind. We (9) cling to habits we see as pleasant, reject the unpleasant, and feel bored with the neutral. Our karma *becomes* us, what we are, our (10) existence.

All this feeds and grows our (3) consciousness, our sense for “things.” We (4) name every form that is sensed. These feed and accumulate as our (5) 6 sense-bases. When these come into (6) contact with any sense-object, we routinely perceive them in terms of what we are clinging to, arousing our (7) feelings of liking, disliking and being bored.

²²¹ See SD 5.16 (8-10).

²²² Here follows, in this section, an explanation of Table 7.3.2.

Our (1) ignorance of what is really going on continues to fuel our (8) craving, which go on (9) clinging to the familiar pleasures, rejecting the unpleasurable, ignoring the neutral, thus feeding *the latent tendencies* of our (10) existence, which gives (11) birth to our person and personality, on account of which there is “this whole mass of suffering,” including (12) decay-and-death.

7.3.2.4 The Buddha, newly awakened, says **the Nāgara Sutta** (S 12.65), examines dependent arising and dependent ending of suffering.²²³ What is related in this Sutta is apparently only given by way of summary. For, there are 3 discourses—**the Sambodha Suttas 1-3** (U 1.1-1.3)—each of which details respectively how the Buddha reflects on dependent conditionality (*paccayākāra*), as follows:

Bodhi Sutta 1	U 1.1 (SD 83.13) ²²⁴	The 1 st watch	dependent arising (direct cycle) (<i>anuloma</i>)
Bodhi Sutta 2	U 1.2 (SD 83.14)	The middle watch	dependent ending (reverse cycle) (<i>paṭiloma</i>)
Bodhi Sutta 3	U 1.3 (SD 83.14)	The last watch	dependent conditionality in both cycles (<i>anuloma-paṭiloma</i>)

These 3 suttas each record one of the 3 cycles, in its proper sequence, in the way the Buddha reflects on them, attesting to his full mastery of this skillful means of expounding on how **dependent conditionality** deals with “suffering and its ending.” [7.3.1.1]

7.3.2.5 The various occurrences of the full dependent arising formula can be summarized as falling into the following cycles:

<i>paṭicca,samuppāda</i>	dependent arising ; refers to the “normal” (<i>anuloma</i>) or forward or direct cycle: “with the arising of <i>ignorance</i> ...” ²²⁵
* <i>paṭicca,sannirodha</i>	dependent ending ²²⁶ ; refers to the “reverse” (<i>paṭiloma</i>) cycle,: “with the ending of <i>ignorance</i> ...” ²²⁷
<i>anuloma</i>	(1) the “ normal (forward)” dependent <u>arising</u> : “with the arising of <i>ignorance</i> ” (2) the “ counter ” dependent arising: “with the arising of <i>suffering</i> ” ²²⁸
<i>paṭiloma</i>	(1) the “ normal (forward)” dependent <u>ending</u> : “with the ending of <i>ignorance</i> ” (2) the “ reverse ” dependent ending: “with the ending of <i>suffering</i> ” ²²⁹
<i>paccayākāra</i>	(literally, “the dependent mode”) dependent conditionality , a common term encompassing both dependent arising and dependent ending
<i>paccayatā</i>	conditionality , an abstract term for all processes related to dependent arising and dependent ending. (SD 5.16 (0.1.2))

²²³ S 12.65,2-18 (SD 14.2) compares his awakening to the rediscovery of an ancient living city hidden deep in the jungle (S 12.65,19-21), which can be reached by an ancient path, the noble eightfold path (S 12.65,22)—he masters the 4 truths of dependent conditionality (S 12.65,23-32), and he teaches this Dharma so that it is well taught amongst devas and humans (S 12.65,33).

²²⁴ On these 3 Suttas, cf Mv 1.1-7 (V 1:1 f). See also H Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha* vol 1, 2000:197-202.

²²⁵ (**Paṭicca.samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,3), SD 5.15; Vinaya says the Buddha reflects on dependent arising both ways, “normal and reverse” (*anuloma,paṭiloma*), Mv 1.1.1-7 (V 1:1 f). Udāna, however, says thus: 1st watch (6-10 pm) normal sequence, 2nd watch (10-2 am) reverse sequence, 3rd watch (2-6 am) both ways (U 1-3).

²²⁶ *Sannirodha*, a neologism: *sarī* (“together”) + *nirodha* (“ending”). See SD 55.12a (5.2.2).

²²⁷ (**Paṭicca.samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,16.2), SD 5.15; Mv 1.1.1-7 (V 1:1 f); U 1-3. See n for *paṭicca samuppāda*.

²²⁸ **Vipassī S** (S 12.4,2 etc) + SD 49.9 (4.1.1-4.1.2).

²²⁹ **Vipassī S** (S 12.4,16 etc) + SD 49.9 (4.1.1-4.1.2).

7.4 DEPENDENT ENDING

7.4.1 The 12 links' weakest point. Dependent arising explains how, through ignorance, we gradually but surely end up with suffering. Existentially, the roots of our suffering may have come from the distant past or from the recent past in this life itself. Through dependent arising, we become creatures of habit, and so continue to feed the conditions leading to our suffering in a repetitive cycle of ritual, even predictable, behaviour. The dependent arising formula is laid out in full to help us see where the links are weakest.

If we carefully look at **the 12 links** [Table 7.3.2], we may notice that **its weakest link** is between (7) feeling and (8) craving. When feelings arise in us, we can train ourself not to feed those feelings, which would otherwise fuel our craving, so that we continue to be trapped in the uroboros [6.3.1.3], the self-devouring serpent that is suffering. One way to do this is to prevent ourself from reacting to any (6) contact (that is, sense-stimuli), is by simply not giving them any attention.²³⁰

7.4.2 "Drop by drop." We must then be diligent in *not* attending to any unwholesome sense-stimuli. But often, we are tricked by them because we do *not* really know what they are (ignorance). The moment we examine them, we are sucked into their web of deceit and desire, and we then have great difficulty extricating ourself from craving and clinging.

When we are caught in such a predicament, it is often helpful to reflect on it as being **impermanent**. Even the greatest *pleasure* must pass away. Often, when pleasure passes away, we will only feel *suffering* relative to that loss. Hence, it is not worth the pain: pleasure leads to suffering.²³¹

Habitually reflecting on impermanence primes us against falling into the rut of *feeling and craving*. It is like being a seasoned and wise shopper: we know what goods are really good and which bad. We know what is worthy of buying, what not. We also know when to stop shopping, and to really enjoy and share what we already have and benefit from it.

Being habitually mindful of impermanence, then, helps us remove some level of *ignorance*, so that we do not act and react to create bad karma (volitional formations), which shapes our consciousness negatively, and so on, so that we no more suffer as a worldling by becoming **a streamwinner**. Just as bad gradually *accumulates* and then crushes us, good gradually *builds up*, too, and then liberates us. Clearly, the wise knows which to choose.

*Mā'vaññetha pāpassa
na maṃ taṃ āgamissati
uda,bindu,nipātena
uda,kunbho'pi pūrati
pūrati bālo pāpassa
thoka,thokam pi ācinam*

Do not look down on bad,
thinking, "It will not come to me!"
Like falling drops of water,
they fill the water-pot—
the fool himself fills up with bad,
little by little he is flooded. (Dh 121)

*Māvamaññetha puññassa
na maṃ taṃ āgamissati
uda,bindu,nipātena
uda,kumbho'pi pūrati
pūrati dhīro puññassa
thoka,thokam pi ācinam*

Look not down on good [merit],
thinking, "It will not come to me."
Like falling drops of water,
they fill the water-pot—
the wise fills himself up with good,
little by little he flourishes. (Dh 122)

— — —

²³⁰ See *Nimitta and anuvyañjana*, SD 19.14.

²³¹ On the relativity of pleasure and pain, see *Cūḷa Vedalla S* (M 44,24.2), SD 40a.9.

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