

Three kinds of skilful means (2 of 3)

Source: **SD 30.8 *Upāya*: skilful means, bringing the truth to the level of the people for their benefit and liberation**¹ by Piya Tan ©2009.

3.4 OCCASIONS FOR SKILFUL MEANS. We will now look at some examples of skilful means used by the Buddha. We shall group them into three kinds of skilful means, that is, of body [3.4.1], of speech [3.4.2], and of mind [3.4.3]. It should be noted that in all such examples, the dynamics underlying the skilful means is that of instruction (*anusāsana*), that is, converting the other party to the Dharma, even to awakening itself.

3.4.2 Skilful means of speech. The most common skilful means of the Buddha understandably is that of speech, especially in teaching. The Buddha's teaching dynamics always works in two ways: to gladden the audience and to prepare the listener or audience for liberation.

3.4.2.1 GLADDENING THE AUDIENCE. In **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), the Buddha says, "Bhikshus, both before² and now what I teach is *suffering and the ending of suffering*."³ The ending of suffering is of course joyful. In fact, joy is always a natural part of the Buddha's teaching, as evident from **the Bahu-vedaniya Sutta** (M 59):

Ānanda, when the Dharma has been shown thus by me in a relative manner, it may be expected that there are those who would approve of, or allow, or rejoice in what is well said, well spoken, by others, such that they would dwell in concord, rejoicing in one another, without disputing, blending like milk and water, looking at one another with loving eyes.

(M 59,5.2/1:398), SD 30.4⁴

Elsewhere, especially at the end of an alms-offering, the Buddha would give thanks by way of a Dharma instruction, as shown in this stock passage:

Then the Blessed One instructed, inspired, roused and gladdened him with a Dharma talk,⁵ rose from his seat and departed. (D 4,27/1:127, 16,3.21-23/2:109 f; S 47.10,4/5:154)

This action sequence reflects the basic structure of the Buddha's teaching method:

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| (1) the Dharma is shown | (<i>sandassetvā</i>); |
| (2) the listener/s are filled with enthusiasm | (<i>samādapetvā</i>); |

¹ SD 30.8: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/30.8-Upaya-Skillful-means.-piya.pdf>

² Comy: That is, from as early as the first discourse given under the Bodhi tree (S 5:420-424/56.11, V 1:10-12).

³ M 22.38/1:140, SD 3.13. This important statement, also made to Anurādha (Anurādha S, S 22.86/3:119), refers back to §37. Here the Buddha in effect declares that a living being has no self but is a mere aggregate of factors, material and mental events, connected by a process that is inherently *dukkha*, and that nirvana, the ending of *dukkha*, is not the annihilation of being but the termination of that very same *dukkha* process. This statement should read in conjunction with Kaccāna, gotta S (S 2:17/12.15 = 3:134 f/22.90, SD 6.13), where the Buddha says that one with right view, who has discarded all the doctrines of a self, sees that whatever arises is only *dukkha* arising, and whatever ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing. (See M:ÑB 2001:1211 n267)

⁴ For a more elaborate context, see Dhamma, cetiya S (M 89,11/2:120 f), SD 64.10; see also Spiritual friendship: A textual study, SD 34.1 (3.2.3).

⁵ "Having instructed, ... and gladdened them," *dharmmiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādapetvā samuttejetvā sampahamsetvā*.

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| (3) they are fired with commitment | (<i>samuttejetvā</i>); and |
| (4) filled with joy | (<i>sampahamsetvā</i>). |

The Commentaries explain that

by <u>instructing</u> him,	the Buddha dispels the listener's <i>delusion</i> ;
by <u>inspiring</u> him,	<i>heedlessness</i> is dispelled;
by <u>rousing</u> him,	<i>indolence</i> is dispelled; and
by <u>gladdening</u> ,	brings the practice to a <i>conclusion</i> . (DA 1:300; UA 242; SnA 446)

In short, when we teach Dharma to benefit others, we should do our best to *bring instruction, inspiration, motivation and joy* to the listener. These four qualities are, in fact, the sixth or last of the ideal skills of a Dharma speaker, as stated in **the (Dhamma,desaka) Udāyi Sutta** (A 3:184).⁶

However, when this happiness is only of a worldly level, it is not an end in itself, but serves as the basis or precursor for a higher liberating Dharma (which we now will examine).

3.4.2.2 PREPARING THE AUDIENCE FOR LIBERATION. A good teacher prepares his students well for the lesson, and they fully benefit from the teaching. The Buddha does this using the graduated teaching or progressive talk (*ānupubbī,kathā*). **The Upāli Sutta** (M 56) records how the Buddha gives the houselord Upāli a progressive talk, followed by a teaching on *4 noble truths*, resulting in Upāli becoming a stream-winner, thus:

Then the Blessed One gave the houselord Upāli a **progressive talk**—that is to say, he spoke
on giving (*dāna*),
on moral virtue (*sīla*) and
on the heavens (*sagga*);
and explained the danger, the vanity and disadvantages of sense-pleasure
(*kām'ādīnava*),
and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm'ānisaṃsa*).

When the Blessed One knew that the houselord [380] Upāli's **mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid**, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas,⁷ that is to say, suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path.⁸

And just as a clean cloth, with all its stains removed, would take dye,⁹ even so, in the houselord Upāli, while right there on his seat, there arose the dust-free stainless Dharma-eye [vision of truth],¹⁰ thus:

"What is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of ending."	<i>Yaṃ kiñci samudaya,dhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodha,dhamman ti.</i>
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⁶ A 5.159/3:184 @ SD 46.1.

⁷ *Buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsikaṃ desanā*.

⁸ This is stock: V 1:15, 2:156, 192; D 1:110, 148, 2:41; M 1:379; A 3:184, 4:186, 209; U 49.

⁹ See Vatthūpama S (M 7,2/1:36), SD 28.12.

¹⁰ *Evam eva upālissa gahapatissa tasmim yeva āsane virajam vīta,malaṃ dhamma,cakkhum udapādi*. Comy says that here, the "Dharma-eye" (*dhamma,cakkhu*) is the path of streamwinning (MA 3:92): in Brahmayu S (M 91,36/2:145), it refers to the 3 paths (*tiṇṇaṃ maggānaṃ*) (ie culminating in non-return); in Cūḷa Rāhul'ovāda S (M 147,9/3:280), the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k,khaya*) (ie arhathood). The following sentence: "All that is subject to arising is subject to ending," shows the mode in which the path arises. The path takes ending (nirvana) as its object, but its function is to penetrate all conditioned states as being subject to arising and ending." (MA 3:92)

Then, the houselord Upāli, (is one) who has seen the Dharma [truth],¹¹ won the Dharma, knew the Dharma, plunged into the Dharma, crossed over doubt, abandoned uncertainty, who has gained moral courage [intrepidity]¹² in the Teacher's teaching, independent of others, ...¹³
(M 56,18/1:380 f), SD 27.1

The Buddha's teaching method progresses from the known or more easily known (the nature and benefits of *bodily* action resulting in happiness), to *mental* benefits (letting go of the senses and living a contented life). All this serves to calm and clear the listener's mind, so that it is ready for the more difficult teaching that serves as a window into true reality, that is, the 4 noble truths. If the listener gains direct knowledge into the 4 noble truths, he would at least attain streamwinning, as Upāli is reported to have done here.¹⁴

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¹¹ "The truth" (*dhamma*) here refers to the 4 noble truths. Having seen the truth for himself, he cuts off the fetter of doubt and now has "the noble and liberating view that accordingly leads the practitioner to the complete destruction of suffering" (*yā'yaṃ diṭṭhi ariyā niyyānikā niyyāti tak, karassa sammā, dukkha-k, khayāya*, Kosambiya S, M 48,7/1:322)

¹² *Vesārajja*. Comy on Tha 289 defines "intrepidity" (*vesārajja*) as "with all the influxes completely destroyed, the teacher has no fear from any quarter" (*sabb'āsava, parikkhīṇaṃ satthāraṃ akuto, bhayaṃ*) (ThaA 2:122). Mahā Sīha, nāda S (M 12) says that there are 4 kinds of intrepidity, that is, no one can justly the Buddha that (1) his awakening is incomplete, (2) that he has not destroyed all the influxes, (3) that mental obstructions, as defined by the Buddha, do not obstruct them, and (4) that when he teaches the Dharma, it does not lead to the complete destruction of suffering (M 12,22-28/1:71 f), SD 49.1.

¹³ *Atha kho kūtadanto brāhmaṇo diṭṭha, dhammo patta, dhammo vidita, dhammo pariyogāḷha, dhammo tiṇṇa, - vicikiccho vigata, kathaṃ, katha vesārajja-p, patto apara-p, paccayo satthu, sāsane*. As at Ambaṭṭha S (D 3,2.21-22/-1:110); Kūtadanta S (D 1:150); Cūḷa Saccaka S (M 5/1:234 f x2); Upāli S (M 1:380); Mahā Vaccha, gotta S (M 1:491); Dīgha, nakha S (M 1:501); Brahmāyu S (M 2:145); Sīha S (A 4:186); Ugga S 1 (A 4:209); Ugga S 2 (A 4:214); Kuṭṭhi S (U 5.3/49).

¹⁴ Further, on the 5 principles of teaching the Dharma to others, see SD 46.1 (4).