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## *Sīla Samādhi Paññā*

Moral virtue, concentration, wisdom

Theme: The 3 spiritual trainings in early Buddhism

An introduction by Piya Tan ©2007

### 1 The gradual training

**1.1 UNIVERSALITY OF THE GRADUAL TRAINING.** One of the most common teaching-tools the Buddha uses to create the most conducive environment for awakening is the gradual teaching, or more technically, the “progressive talk” (*ānupubbī, kathā*). This account of the Buddha teaching Pokkhara, sāti, leading to his attainment of the Dharma-eye, is typical:

While the brahmin Pokkhara, sāti was seated at one side, the Blessed One gave him a **progressive talk**—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), on moral virtue (*sīla*) and on the heavens (*sagga*). He explained the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures (*kām’ādīnava*), and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm’ānisamsa*).<sup>1</sup>

When the Blessed One perceived that the brahmin Pokkhara, sāti’s mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas,<sup>2</sup> that is to say, **suffering, its ending, its cessation, and the path.**

(D 3,2.21/1:110 f), SD 21.3

Here, we have the clearest example of the application of the 3 trainings. The instruction begins with teachings centering around moral virtue, so that the mind in due course becomes free from mental hindrances, indicating mental concentration. Finally, the Buddha teaches him the four noble truths, constituting the wisdom aspect.

In fact, a recurring stock passage in **the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), reminds us how the training sequence leads to spiritual liberation:<sup>3</sup>

This is moral virtue, this is concentration, this is wisdom. Concentration, when well cultivated with moral virtue, brings great fruit and great profit. Wisdom, when well cultivated with concentration, brings great fruit and great profit. The mind, when well cultivated with wisdom, becomes completely free from the mental influxes,<sup>4</sup> that is to say, from the influx of sensual lust, the influx of becoming, the influx of false views and the influx of ignorance.

(D 16,1.12 + 1.14 + 1.18 + 1.21 + 2,4 + 2.10 + 2.20 + 4.4 + 4.12)

<sup>1</sup> This passage is stock: V 1:15; D 1:148; A 3:184 etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhānam sāmukkamsikā dhamma, desanā*. This is an occasion when the Buddha teaches the 4 noble truths directly to the laity; for occurrences, see V 1:16 (the youth Yasa), 16 (Yasa’s father, the seth houselord), 18 (to Yasa’s mother and former wife), 19 (Yasa’s five friends), 20 (Yasa’s fifty friends), 23 (to the group of 30 lucky youths, *bhadda, vagga*), 37 (to 12 “myriad” (*nahuta*) of brahmin houselords of Magadha, headed by Bimbisāra), 181 (Bimbisāra’s 80,000 village headmen), 226 (Belatṭha Kaccāna, between Rajagaha and Andhaka, vinda); D 3.2.21/1:110 (to Pokkhara, sāti), 5.29/1:148 (to Kūṭa, danta), 14.3.11/2:41 (to prince Khaṇḍa and Tissa the chaplain’s son), 14.3.15/2:43 (a crowd of 84,000), 14.3.19/2:44 (another similar crowd); M 56.18/1:379 f (to Upāli), 91.36/2:145 (to Brahmāyu); A 8.12.9/4:186 (to general Sīha), 8.21.5-6/4:209 (to the houselord Uggā of Vesālī), 8.22.5-6/4:213 (to the houselord of Hatthi, gāma), U 5.3/49 (to the leper Suppa, buddha).

<sup>3</sup> For a similar formula in Skt, see **Mahāparinirvānasūtra** 1950:160, 120. For further discussion on the progressive training, see *The Gradual Way*, SD 56.1 & also Jayatilleke 1963:396 f.

<sup>4</sup> “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “in-flow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj’āsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

## 1.2 RATIONALE OF THE 3 TRAININGS

**1.2.1 Cultivation and liberation.** As explained in discourses like **the (Ti) Sikkhā Sutta** (A 3.88), the set of 3 trainings of moral virtue (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), is a practical formula, leading us from our present state, through a cultivated state, into a liberated state. Spiritual development progresses more or less in this sequence, based on the full and integrated effect of the 3 trainings. If we want to realize wisdom, we must clearly cultivate some level of mental calm and clarity. Mental focus can only arise from a conducive environment of moral virtue.<sup>5</sup>

As practitioners, our training must begin with the cultivation of moral virtue, that is, the restraint of body and speech supporting a conducive external (or social) environment. However, the expression “external” here entails that we are always *a part* of our environment, never *apart* from it. The first aspect of Dharma training—that of moral virtue (*sīla*)—is practical, purposeful and intentional. In short, moral training civilizes us, making us wholesome social beings in a healthy environment. [1.2.2.2]

### 1.2.2 From species to individuals

1.2.2.1 We begin our lives being born into a species, herd or tribe we call the human race. Although we have a human body, meaning we are physically weaker or less dextrous than most animals, we are capable of learning and acting in ways that no animal can. What distinguishes us from the animal is our developing minds, which allow us to understand and use our physical senses for communication, control, creativity, growth and personal transformation, especially spiritual awakening and liberation.

However, we are only born with a human body, not with a human mind. Our humanity is primarily conditioned or nurtured by our parents, whether the ones who give birth to us (our biological parents) or those who raise us, especially with love (our surrogate parents). If we are raised in a morally virtuous way with the loving example of at least one good parent, to whom we are close or whom we emulate, then we benefit from the rudimentary training in moral virtue. [1.2.2.5]

In other words, with wholesome **parenting**—one with love and wisdom—we are humanized, raised up from our basic animal state. We learn the finer qualities and ways of humanity. Even though such a training may not uproot all of our animal nature, this is sufficient for us to live happily and beneficially as part of a family or community, and not merely an unthinking member of a crowd, a biological human state, into which we can recede, when the right (or wrong) conditions prevail. [1.2.2.6]

1.2.2.2 When proper parenting shapes us, and this occurs as a prevailing and widespread phenomenon, then we have a community, even a society. **A good society** is only possible when we are civilized, which means that we are at least civil to one another. Civility entails the respect for life, property, the person, truth and a clear mind—as embodied in the 5 precepts. [1.2.3]

While civilizing influences are a natural process founded on our common humanity and wisdom, culture is an artificial structure, built and enforced by our predecessors, but interpreted and reinforced by the authorities in our societies. As a rule, culture prohibits and limits, while civilization experiments and liberates us. Culture tries to preserve a race, or a community, as envisioned by our heads and their hands, those who are more powerful or influential than we are.

Civilization first arises as visions in our hearts, and then defined as techniques and technology in our heads and hands. Civilization, by its very nature, must evolve. It shapes us to become more than a member of species, a family, a society, or even a race. Culture, on the other hand, works to limit us to the ways of way of the powerful and influential few, who see it as benefitting them, deluded by the notion that it would benefit what they see as extensions of themselves. Culture sees us as a body and number in a group of bodies. Culture controls the body, civilization frees the mind.

1.2.2.3 The most limiting and disabling form of culture is that which prevents us from tapping our own vision and dreams for a better society and humanity. Such a culture is simply bent on preserving the past without considering the costs. This can be found in anything that is racial (the worst of which is gen-

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<sup>5</sup> A 3.88/1:235 ! SD 24.10c. However, it will soon become apparent that this sequence is a matter of emphasis, rather than a mutually exclusive progression; for, all three trainings facilitate one other. See **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/-1:235), SD 24.10c.

ocide) and ethnic forms of religion (including Buddhism), where a liberating or spiritual system is forced to fit their Procrustean bed of parochial biases.<sup>6</sup>

**Procrustes** (Προκρούστης) (“the stretcher,” one who hammers out metal)<sup>7</sup> is, in Greek mythology, a son of Poseidon (god of the sea) and a rogue smith and bandit from Attica. He is arguably the most interesting of Theseus’ challenges on the way to becoming a hero. Procrustes welcomes passing strangers to his house by the road between Eleusis and Athens. He treats them hospitably with a pleasant meal and a night’s rest in his special iron bed, which he declares “adjusts” itself to whomever lies upon it.

What Procrustes does not reveal is how this “one-size-fits-all” bed works. As the guest lies down on the bed, Procrustes forces himself upon him, stretching him on a rack if he is too short for the bed, and lopping off his legs if he is too long.<sup>8</sup> Theseus turns the tables on Procrustes, fatally adjusting him to fit his own bed, and cutting off his head.<sup>9</sup>

1.2.2.4 On the other hand, culture can and must be the handmaiden of civilization, working as a civilizing influence, bringing out the best of our humanity to benefit the many and posterity. Culture, in other words, is neither a dead pyramid nor a customary routine merely to shape us in the image of the past, or fetter us to the ways of the powerful, nor even to preserve our race (what aspects of race are we preserving?). A race that does not grow beyond itself is destined to degenerate through in-breeding, missing the blessings of other communities, and be buried in the past, dead to the present.<sup>10</sup>

**False culture** tries to mummify us forever in the cocoon of birth, race, colour, status, wealth, pleasure, power, religion, superstition, hagiology and ideology, which serve as memes<sup>11</sup> to legitimize or authenticate the position or power of an elitist few. It sees us merely as statistics, numbers of a tribe, all goaded and spurred in the same direction, often the wrong one, like lemmings. It is the one (often it starts with an individual, like the Buddha) who walks against and above the drowning floods of such false culture, giving us safety directions towards the shallows and sandbanks, even plucking us out of its dangerous waters onto the safe terrain of humanity and spirituality.<sup>12</sup>

**True culture** is the ability and willingness to openly embrace others simply because we are humans, that we are living beings. It thrives best on the rich alluvial plains of social interaction fed by the rivers flowing down from the heights of vision and creativity that allows us to celebrate truth and beauty,<sup>13</sup> in short, our humanity. Yet, it is from this level ground that those with a vision of truth and beauty can soar well above and beyond our human limits and worldly constraints, or at least our hearts leaping up in joy at even a glimpse of it. That is, if we are able and willing to tame and train the mind.

1.2.2.5 **Civilization**, even at its best, has its limits. It is a human effort, starting with an idea by an individual, but needs a common acceptance, application and proliferation of that good idea. Such an enterprise is the best that humans can mutually give or get, when we fully accept one another as persons, with a right to life, happiness, freedom, truth and progress. Civilization, in other words, is a means to a greater end, which is that of giving us the qualities and courage to break out of the cocoon of culture to become true individuals.

We are born into a biological species with a human body. Our minds are shaped by other humans so that we can be a healthy member of a functional society. Ultimately, we are on our own, when we need to

<sup>6</sup> Cf SD 9 (5.4); SD 13.4 (10.3).

<sup>7</sup> His real name is Prokoptas or Polypemon. Procrustes is his surname; nicknamed Damastes (Δαμαστής), “the tamer pr subduer.”

<sup>8</sup> It is also said that he has two beds, one long and one short, and uses them accordingly to “adjust” his guests.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Tripp, *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*. Meridian, 1970:498.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procrustes>.

<sup>10</sup> Ethnic Buddhism is often an example of a race-based, even racist, Buddhism. It would be helpful to discuss, even just think about, its implications and problems, and what positive steps can be made to alleviate it.

<sup>11</sup> See **Memes**, SD 26.3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf **Udakūpama S** (A 7.15), SD 8.26.

<sup>13</sup> On Buddhism as truth and beauty, see SD 40.1 (8.1.2); SD 46.5 (2.4.2) as aesthetics; SD 37.8 (2.3) in right livelihood. See also Piya Tan, Reflection, “No views frees,” R255, 2012.

mature into individuals, shaping the course of our family, community, society and world. It is this **individuation** process that raises us above our animal instincts and set us apart from the animal herd.

Biological evolution and social development can only bring to the level of human and social progress. Only through **personal and individual effort**, are we really able to cultivate selflessness (or at least to recognize narcissism and abandon it) that allows us to see ourselves as a living part of humanity, and seeing humanity as a whole and beyond. We are body and mind: our body evolves *biologically*, our person grows *socially*, and our mind must be shaped *spiritually*.

1.2.2.6 By “**spirit**” is meant something more than just body and mind. We can call this the “divine state” that transforms us into true individuals. The qualities of **true individuality** are known in the suttas as **the divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*), and they are fourfold:

- (1) a healthy self-acceptance and a wholesome unconditional embrace of others (lovingkindness);
- (2) the capability to reach out to others even when they do not deserve it (compassion);
- (3) the capacity for appreciating and enjoying the good and gain in others (gladness); and
- (4) being emotionally independent no matter how things turn out around us (equanimity).<sup>14</sup>

The 3 trainings, in short, raise us from our animal state, through a human state, to attain divinity even here and now as true individuals. The health and progress of a society depends on the presence and activity of such individuals.

1.2.2.7 In summary, we can tabulate the 3 trainings, their process and results in the light of universal values, thus (use this for group discussion):

<u>the training</u>	<u>worldly progress</u>	<u>human evolution</u>	<u>spiritual progress</u>	
(1) moral training	civilization (life)	a human tribe or group	humanization	[1.2.2.5]
(2) mental cultivation	culture (happiness)	a community or society	individuation <sup>15</sup>	[1.2.2.6]
(3) wisdom training	freedom (esp mental)	the spiritual community	spiritual liberation	[1.2.5]

**1.2.3 The 5 precepts.** **The training in moral virtue** (*sīla, sikkhā*), in *practical* terms, consists of the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*) [Table 1.2]. They are not commandments: the Buddha did not invent them nor impose them on us, and no one would punish us for breaking any of them.<sup>16</sup> These precepts are a practical formulation of *natural morality*, that is, they reflect **the universal values** of life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom.<sup>17</sup> Just as a sports or a game is defined by its rules, and as such is meaningful, fair and enjoyable, even so the 5 precepts are the basic rules of life that make it meaningful, just and enjoyable.

<u>Pañca, sīla</u>	<u>The 5 Precepts</u>
1. <b><i>Pāṇātipātā</i></b> <i>veramaṇī sikkhā, padaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>	I undertake the training-rule to refrain from <u>harming life [killing]</u> .
2. <b><i>Adinn’ādānā</i></b> <i>veramaṇī sikkhā, padaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>	I undertake the training-rule to refrain from <u>taking the not-given</u> [stealing].
3. <b><i>Kāmesu micchā, cārā</i></b> <i>veramaṇī sikkhā, padaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>	I undertake the training-rule to refrain from <u>sexual misconduct</u> .
4. <b><i>Musā, vādā</i></b> <i>veramaṇī sikkhā, padaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>	I undertake the training-rule to refrain from <u>falsehood</u> .
5. <b><i>Surā, meraya, majja, pamāda-ṭ, thāna</i></b> <i>veramaṇī sikkhā, padaṃ samādiyāmi.</i>	I undertake the training-rule to refrain from <u>strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness</u> .

**Table 1.2** The 5 precepts.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see *Brahma, vihāra*, SD 38.5.

<sup>15</sup> Essentially, this is when we understand and accept true reality. On individuation, see **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a (1.2).

<sup>16</sup> For a technical analysis of the precepts, incl values, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41), SD 5.7 (2).

<sup>17</sup> On moral values, see SD 1.5 (2.7+8).

On closer examination, we can see that the 5 precepts entail *self-restraint*, that is, self-control over our body and speech. *The first three precepts* are broken through wrong or unwholesome bodily actions, and the fourth, through wrong or unwholesome communication. *The fifth precept* prevents heedlessness, especially drunkenness and addiction that would make it hard to keep the other four precepts. In fact, the fifth precept, as we shall soon see, is the link to the next aspect of Dharma training.

The proper keeping to the 5 precepts empowers us with tolerance (if not, compassion) towards others, charity and generosity, restraint and contentment, honesty and transparency, and mindfulness. These qualities are the foundations and lifeblood of a wholesome community and society. These qualities allow us, humans and all beings, to live harmoniously and productively together, without harming ourselves nor the environment.

**1.2.4 Values.** In Dharma training, keeping the precepts is not merely good in itself. While it is true that precept-keeping is necessary and vital in inculcating true *value* into life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom, precept-keeping (because it entails restraint of the body and speech), more importantly, prepares the environment conducive for *mental cultivation*, which is the second aspect of Dharma training.<sup>18</sup>

How does this work? We are *habitual* beings, our lives often autopiloted by our past. If such a past is crowded and polluted by violence, greed, lust, falsehood and confusion, they only contribute to stress and foolishness. Keeping the precepts cuts down or prevents, that is, at least temporarily, removes these distractions so that we can calm our mind. A progressively calm mind goes on to realize its true light and strength. This is the essence of **the training in mental concentration** (*samādhi, sikkhā*).

In simple terms, then, the universal and natural values<sup>19</sup> remind us that moral training (and the keeping of the precepts) are not merely a ritual observation of rules so that we are “good” or “pure.” More importantly, they humanize us to show such qualities as kindness, compassion, respect, openness and humility. Such qualities not only make us good humans, but also prepare us mentally for a deeper level of training, those of the mind and wisdom.

**1.2.5 Wisdom.** A morally virtuous life supports a healthy mind, and together, they prepare us for **the training in wisdom** (*paññā, sikkhā*). A simile helps here. Keeping the precepts (training in moral virtue) is like preparing a workshop to make optical lenses. The training in mental concentration is like the actual grinding and polishing of the lenses. Finally, the training in wisdom is like clearly seeing through the lenses and understanding what we see there.

And what we see through the lenses of our calm and clear mind is that all existence is *impermanent*. Impermanence means that both people and things, our minds and bodies, are characterized by constant change, not turning out the way we want them to, and that they will not always be around for us. If we are unable to understand or unwilling to accept this universal nature of existence, then we *suffer* pain twice over: we suffer *physical* pain and *mental* pain.<sup>20</sup> Our calm and clear mind, on the other hand, sees physical pain—bodily pains, how things decay, or even death—but the wise mind does not suffer pain on that account. On attaining nirvana, we are finally free of all pains, physical *and* mental.

On a basic human level, this **wisdom** training helps us understand how moral training is a healthy response to the true realities of life—that is, to live a healthy and quality life. Wisdom here helps us see the truth of life on a practical level so that we can deal with it. On a higher human level, our wisdom opens us up to the beauty of our vision, interaction and oneness with these realities. The 3 training, then, is a Buddhist way of cultivating truth and beauty in our lives that prepares us with a vision of awakening to true reality that is to come.

<sup>18</sup> It is also important to understand that moral virtue is *not* abandoned “after it is cultivated.” See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (8).

<sup>19</sup> They are “universal” because they define true civilization and wholesome culture; they are “natural” in that we humanly and spiritual evolve with them, and that they are ethically and morally potent (without any religion or institution to define them so). These are the basic qualities that make a religion or system wholesome.

<sup>20</sup> See **Nakula, pitā S** (S 22.1/3:1-5), SD 5.4.

## 2 The *sāmañña,phala* (fruits of recluseship) pericope

**2.1** We have been examining the 3 trainings in their commonly known sequence, that is, as moral virtue, concentration and wisdom (*sīla samādhi paññā*). This well known training sequence is not only reiterated in **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), but they are classified in terms of the factors of the noble eightfold path, thus:<sup>21</sup>

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of moral virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right thought—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of wisdom. (M 44,11/1:301)

**2.2** Throughout the Nikāyas, the training is often described in a *well-defined sequence of moral virtue, concentration, and wisdom*. The 13 suttas of the opening chapter of the Dīgha Nikāya, “On the Aggregates of Moral Virtue” (*Sīla-k,khandha Vagga*), invariably present the three trainings as “the fruits of recluseship” (*sāmañña,phala*). Here the sequence of the training is a familiar one:

- The first stage of the path is “moral virtue” (famously known as the Sīlas or Moralities), forming probably one of the earliest parts of the Dīgha Nikāya, and originally probably existed as a separate tract on its own.<sup>22</sup>
- The second stage is “mental concentration” (*samādhi*), that is, meditative attainments, normally comprising the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances, the 4 dhyanas, and the first five of the 6 direct knowledges (*abhiññā*)<sup>23</sup> which arises from the dhyanas.
- The third stage is “wisdom” (*paññā*), that is, only the sixth direct knowledge alone, namely, the “knowledge of the destruction of mental influxes” (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*), entailing arhathood. This level of training is generally defined in terms of the realization of the 4 noble truths and the destruction of the 4 influxes.

**2.3** Although the training sequence is a well-defined one, in the *Sīla-k,khandha Vagga*, the terminology often varies, depending on the context and purpose of the sutta. The very first sutta of the Dīgha, **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1), in fact, only presents the section on moral virtue (the Moralities or *sīla*), without clearly defined sections for concentration and wisdom. However, they are almost invisibly present. The whole section on the 62 bases for wrong views (D 1.28-104) constitutes the Buddha’s “concentration,” since this knowledge has arisen from his deep meditations. The section on “Samsara and Liberation” (D 1.105-147), where the Buddha explains that all these 62 bases of wrong views arise through feeling and contact, constitutes his “wisdom.”

**2.4 The Subha Sutta** (D 10) gives a well-defined sequence of categories, namely, “the aggregate of moral virtue” (*sīla-k,khandha*), “the aggregate of concentration” (*samādhi-k,khandha*), and “the aggregate of wisdom” (*paññā-k,khandha*). **The Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), on the other hand, while giving the three trainings in full, does not explicitly take them as three categories—and this is also true of **the Kūṭa,-danta Sutta** (D 5), **the Mahāli Sutta** (D 6), **the Jāliya Sutta** (D 7), **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11), and **the Lohicca Sutta** (D 12).

<sup>21</sup> Some Skt sources give a different arrangement: *samyag,dṛṣṭi, samyak,samkalpa* and *samyag,vyāyāma* are *praj-ñā,skandha* (the aggregate of wisdom); *samyag,vāk, samyak,karmānta* and *samyag,ājīva* are *sīla,skandha* (the aggregate of moral virtue), and *samyak,smṛti* and *samyak,samādhi* are *samādhi,skandha* (the aggregate of concentration): see Śrāvaka,bhūmi, in Alex Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvakabhūmi Manuscript*, 1961:101; *Satya,siddhi Śāstra of Harivarman* (tr A Sastri) 1978: 2.43, 448 f.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2), SD 8.10 (3).

<sup>23</sup> The 6 superknowledges (*cha-ḷ-abhiññā*) are: (1) psychic powers (*iddhi,vidhā*); (2) clairaudience or the “divine ear” (*dibba,sota*); (3) telepathy or mind-reading (*parassa ceto,pariya,ñāṇa*); (4) retrocognition or the knowledge recollection of past lives (*pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa*); (5) clairvoyance or the “divine eye” (*dibba,cakkhu*) or knowledge of the passing-away and re-appearance of beings, faring according to their karma (*cutūpapāta yathā,kammū-paga,ñāṇa*); and (6) the knowledge of the destruction of mental influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*). See **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11), SD 1.7 (1).

**2.5 The Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3), in keeping with the drift of the Buddha debate with Ambaṭṭha, mentions moral virtue in the standard manner, but highlights “conduct” (*carāṇa*) (encompassing concentration) and “knowledge” (*vijjā*) (encompassing all the knowledges). In **the Soṇa,daṇḍa Sutta** (D 4), only “moral virtue” and “wisdom” are highlighted, and in **the Kassapa (Mahā) Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 8), they are presented as “the accomplishment of moral virtue” (*sīla,sampadā*), “the accomplishment of concentration” (*samādhi,sampadā*), and “the accomplishment of wisdom” (*paññā,sampadā*).

**2.6 The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9) and **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13) depart from the standard pattern after the account of the fourth dhyana, inserting descriptions of the four formless attainments (in the former sutta), and the four divine abodes (in the latter).<sup>24</sup>

### 3 The training and the sequence of the path-factors

**3.1 THE PATH COMPRISES THE 3 TRAININGS.** **The Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44) contains an important dialogue on the noble eightfold path, which is here produced in full for further examination:

(9) “Sister, what is the noble eightfold path?”

“Avuso Visākha, it is just this noble eightfold path, that is, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.”

(10) “Sister, is the noble eightfold path conditioned (*asaṅkhata*) or unconditioned (*saṅkhata*)?”

“Avuso Visākha, the noble eightfold path is conditioned.”<sup>25</sup>

(11a) “Sister, are the three aggregates (*khandha*) (of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*) composed of the noble eightfold path, or are the noble eightfold path composed of the three aggregates?”

“The three aggregates, avuso Visākha, are not composed of the noble eightfold path, but, avuso Visākha, the noble eightfold path is composed of the three aggregates.<sup>26</sup>

(11b) Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of moral virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right thought—these dharmas comprise the aggregate of wisdom.”  
(M 44,9-11/1:300 f)

Section 9 lists the noble eightfold path according to the well known sequence, beginning with right view. Section 10 means that the noble eightfold path is still a *path*, a means of spiritual awakening. Section 11, due to its cryptic nature, has generally been ignored by even the leading scholars of Buddhism, except for **Rupert Gethin**, and I here present his findings.<sup>27</sup>

This commentarial explanation may help us understand section 11 better:

Herein, because the *magga* is specific while the three aggregates are all inclusive, therefore, because of the specificity, it is comprised by the three all inclusive aggregates like a city by a kingdom.  
(MA 2:361 = Vism 16.95/514)

So why is it that the noble eightfold path comprises the three aggregates, but not vice versa? Gethin explains:

Technically, what this seems to mean is that one can instance *dharmā* such as *vicāra* and *pīti*, for example, which as *jhāna*-factors have a place in *samādhi-kkhandha*, yet are left out of the reckoning in the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*. More generally this must mean that the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* should be understood as having a more specific import than the all embracing gradual

<sup>24</sup> For further discussion, see Gethin 2001:207-212.

<sup>25</sup> Comy explains *saṅkhata* as “thought out, arranged, put together, worked at, produced, to be attained by the attaining” (*ceṭito kappito pakappito āyūhito nibbattiṭṭo samāpajantena samāpajjitabbo*). (MA 2:361)

<sup>26</sup> *Na kho āvuso Visākha ariyena aṭṭhaṅgikena maggena tayo khandhā saṅgahīta, tīhi ca kho āvuso Visākha khandhehi ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo saṅgahīto.*

<sup>27</sup> Gethin 2001:210-212.

scheme of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. At first sight this might seem to contradict some of what I have said above, namely, that the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* does embrace and comprise spiritual practice in its entirety, that it does represent the sum of the Buddhist path as presented in the Nikāyas. However, in fact, I think this allows us to form a clearer idea of how and in what sense this is so. (2001:211 f)

Gethin then goes on to say:

The triad of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* implies a comprehensive graded description of these stages of the spiritual path. In terms of content it comprises the successive stages in full, and while reflecting the overall general nature of the actual stages of the path, it does in part represent something of an ideal scheme.

The *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* does something rather different. While it does not by way of content fully embrace the aggregates of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, the eight factors do collectively touch on and comprise each of these three aspects—uniquely among the seven sets.<sup>28</sup> This the eight factors collectively represent, as it were, an actual manifestation of all three aspects, so that the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* can be seen as the essential distillation of the aggregates of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

The *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* comprises the whole of the spiritual life precisely in the sense that it is the consummation of the development of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. It is the path or way of life that issues from that development. Its end is a reflection and crystallization of the way one has come.

In other words, the development of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* in all its various aspects culminates in right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right striving, right mindfulness, right concentration—*paññā*, *sīla* and *samādhi*, the three essential aspects of spiritual practice in perfect balance. It is only in this manner that the treatment of the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* becomes properly intelligible. (2001:212; reparagraphed)

### 3.2 THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PATH

**3.2.1 The trainings and the eightfold path.** The purpose of the noble eightfold path is to overcome wrong view and attain right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*). The Dharma-centred life as modelled on the noble eightfold path is not a sequential progression, but is a holistic living that involves all aspects of our daily activity and processes, mental, verbal and physical, directed by wholesome intentions (those, to some degree, free from greed, hate and delusion).

Such an existential pattern is consciously initiated or sustained so that it becomes a spontaneous habit. This is a spiral, self-augmenting path, each moment is reinforced by the previous ones, and in turn reinforcing the next and subsequent moments. To the extent the path is sustained by right view, to that extent, the various other factors harmoniously work, moving in the direction of self-awakening.

Again, it should be understood that **right view**—the awareness and understanding of the true nature of impermanence—is not a given, but needs to be constantly cultivated and directed to the other seven path factors: that is, envisioning impermanence at work in our thoughts, body, speech, work, drives, awareness and mental focus.

It is as if, by this process, atoms of right view are gradually being assembled in a conscious holistic pattern, or quanta of light are slowly merging together, so that the light becomes ever brighter, if the effort is properly sustained, so that the ensuing clarity reveals itself as a total vision of true reality, as supramundane right view. Such a spiritual path, with all its factors, can be diagrammed in the following manner:

<sup>28</sup> The seven sets are the 4 *satipaṭṭhāna*, 4 *samma-p, padhāna*, 4 *iddhi, pāda*, 5 *indriya*, 5 *bala*, 7 *bojjhaṅga*, and 8 *ariya, magga*, whose factors total 37. These are regarded as the essence of early Buddhism as found in the Nikāyas. For a monograph, see Gethin 2001. See also **Bodhi, Pakkhiya Dhamma**, SD 10 for a comprehensive introduction.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>(<i>āṅga</i>)</b>	<b>Training (<i>sikkhā</i>)</b>	<b>(<i>khandha</i>)</b>
(7) Right view	<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>	} <u>III. Wisdom aggregate</u> (freedom-based mind)	<i>paññā khandha</i> (straightened views)
(8) Right intention	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>		
(1) Right action	<i>sammā kammanta</i>	} <u>I. Moral virtue aggregate</u> (the body and speech)	<i>sīla khandha</i> (wholesome conduct)
(2) Right speech	<i>sammā vācā</i>		
(3) Right livelihood	<i>sammā ājīva</i>		
(4) Right effort	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>	} <u>II. Concentration aggregate</u> (the mind)	<i>samādhi khandha</i> (mental stillness)
(5) Right mindfulness	<i>sammā sati</i>		
(6) Right concentration	<i>sammā samādhi</i>		

**Table 3.2.1 The noble eightfold path and the 3 trainings** [also at SD 47.3, Table 1.3.1.2]<sup>29</sup>

So right view is the *beginning*, as well as the *end*, of the spiritual life. How should we understand this? This is explained in the **Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117). The recurring theme of this sutta is the primacy of **right view** with regard to “noble right concentration along with its support and requisite”<sup>30</sup> and that “in this regard, bhikkhus, right view comes first.”<sup>31</sup> This means that the spiritual path centres around mindfulness or meditation, the other factors support it, and the goal is right view.

This statement of the primacy of right view opens each of the first three main sections of the sutta. **The first section** of the sutta explains that right view comes first because it knows wrong view and right view as they really are [§4]. In the same way, with right view, we know the other factors (*āṅgā*) as they really are, namely, as wrong intention and as right intention [§10], as wrong speech and as right speech [§16], as wrong action and as right action [§22], as wrong livelihood and as right livelihood [§28]. The wrong factors are rooted in the unwholesome. The right factors are of two kinds: the mundane (*lokiya*): they have mental influxes, partake of merit, and result in acquisitions (of the aggregates, ie continued existence): this is the path of true Dharma practitioner. The right or “noble” factors are supramundane (*lok’uttara*): they are without mental influxes, and are truly path factors, that is, they move us on to spiritual liberation; that is, this is the path of the saints.<sup>32</sup>

**3.2.2 The mundane and supramundane trainings.** As we have just mentioned, there are two levels of the noble eightfold path: the mundane (*lokiya*) and the supramundane (*lokuttara*). The mundane eightfold path (*lokiya magga*) is the way of the unawakened practitioner by way of consciously keeping to the moral precepts, keeping up mindfulness, and the growing awareness of true reality. The supramundane path (*lok’uttara magga*) is often referred to as “the ninefold supramundane dharmas” (*nava,lok’uttara dhamma*), comprising the four pairs of saints (that is, the saints of the path and the saints of the fruition),<sup>33</sup> and nirvana.<sup>34</sup>

The supramundane path is also called the tenfold rightness (*sammattā*),<sup>35</sup> that is, the ten qualities of the adept or arhat (*asekha,dhamma*), which is also the very last entry in the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33).<sup>36</sup> The

<sup>29</sup> See D 2:312; M 1:61, 3:251; Vbh 235.

<sup>30</sup> *Ariyaṃ... sammā,samādhim...sa,upanisaṃ sa,parikkharāṃ*, M 117.2/3:71, 3/3:71.

<sup>31</sup> *Tatra sammā,diṭṭhi pubbaṃ,gamā*, M 117.4/3:71, 10/3:72 f, 16/3:73, 22/3:75, 28/3:74, 34-35/3:76 f.

<sup>32</sup> M 117/3:71-78 ! SD 6.10.

<sup>33</sup> On these 8 types of saints, see **Aṭṭha,puggala S 1** (A 8.59/4:292), SD 15.10a(1).

<sup>34</sup> Dhs 1094.

<sup>35</sup> **Saṅgīti S** (D 33) lists only the 8 path-factors first as “wrongness,” *micchatta* (D 33,3.1(1)/3:255) and then as “rightness,” *sammattā* (fem) (D 33,3.1(2)/3:255); as *sammatta* (neut): **Micchatta S** (S 45.21/5:17 f). The 10 rightness (*dasa sammattā*): **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,3.3(6)/3:272), **Das’uttara S** (D 34,2/2(10)/3:292); **Micchatta S** (A 10.103/-5:211 f); **Samāṇa Vg, Paccorohaṇi Vg, Parisuddha Vg, Sādhū Vg, Ariya,magga Vg, Puggala Vg** (A 10.103-166/5:211-249), ie excl A 10.101-102.

<sup>36</sup> D 33.3.3(6)/3:271.

list is repeated in **the Das'uttara Sutta** (D 34), also the list item in the whole discourse.<sup>37</sup> These ten qualities are also listed in **the Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta** (M 117), thus

- (1) In this regard, bhikshus, right view comes first.  
And, bhikshus, how does right view come first?
- (2) From right view comes right intention;<sup>38</sup>
- (3) from right intention comes right speech;
- (4) from right speech comes right action;
- (5) from right action comes right livelihood;
- (6) from right livelihood comes right effort;
- (7) from right effort comes right mindfulness;
- (8) from right mindfulness comes right concentration;
- (9) from right concentration comes right knowledge;
- (10) from right knowledge comes right freedom.

—Thus, bhikshus, the learner on the path is endowed with 8 factors, but the arhat with 10 factors.<sup>39</sup>

(M 117,34/3:76), SD 6.10

This statement is very interesting as it shows how the path seems to work sequentially, from right view right up to right freedom, that is, nirvana itself. However, it should be noted that this is the “rightness” (*sammattā*) of the arhat, who is fully self-awakened. His whole life moves in this manner. For the learners (*sekha*), that is, the saints short of the arhat, there are the supramundane eightfold path, and for the good worldling (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*),<sup>40</sup> there is the mundane eightfold path.

The noble eightfold path, in terms of training practice, is not a series of progressive stages of a spiritual journey; clearly not in a linear sense, anyway. Instead, it is a way of practice (*paṭipadā*), a spiritual highway with eight lanes, or better, seven lanes, with *right view* as the distance markers, place and destination names, warning signs, and the destination itself. In other words, the eightfold path is what we *are* when we become a Dharma pilgrim, namely, a person with eight wonderful qualities, initiated by right view, motivated by right viewed, heading for right view.<sup>41</sup>

**3.2.3 The trainings and the purifications.** The three trainings form the basis for spiritual growth leading to sainthood and nirvana. We can compare the trainings to another training model, actually two training models, that is, *the seven stages of purification* (*satta visuddhi*) and *the nine factors for striving for total purification* (*nava pārisuddhi padhaniyaṅga*; mentioned in the Das'uttara Sutta, D33). The three-training model is in fact an abridged model or summary of the disciple's training. Or, in historical terms, the seven or nine purifications are likely to be elaborations of the three trainings.

Compared to the purification models, the brevity of the three training is more expeditious: it is easier for the beginner to understand and remember these three trainings, their practice and goal, rather than a longer list, such as the seven stages of purification or the nine purifications. For the more advanced practitioners, namely, those with high moral virtue, deep mental concentration, and some level of wisdom, the third training then would be a synecdoche or short form for the rest of the purification stages.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> D 34.2.3(10)/3:292.

<sup>38</sup> Comy: For one with right view of the path (*magga*), the right intention of the path arises. Similarly, for one with the right view of the fruit (*phala*), the right intention of the fruit arises. The other factors (except the last two) applies in the same way as the supramundane path. (MA 4:134)

<sup>39</sup> The additional two factors are those of the arhat. Right knowledge (*sammā ñāṇa*) is the review knowledge (*pac-cavekkhaṇa ñāṇa*) that he has destroyed all defilements, and right freedom (*sammā vimutti*) is his experience of deliverance from defilements. (MA 4:135). This tenfold set is called “the 10 rightness” (*dasa sammatta*) (D 3:271, 292; M 1:42; A 5:212).

<sup>40</sup> The good worldling is an unawakened person who is willing and able to learn the Dharma for liberation. See SD 5.4 (3).

<sup>41</sup> See Gethin 1998:83 f; 2001:211 f.

<sup>42</sup> On the 7 stages of purification, see **Ratha,vinīta S** (M 24), SD 28.3 Intro.

## 4 The 3 trainings and the 10 fetters

**4.1 The (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta** (A 3.85) is a definitive discourse on how the three trainings are related to the attaining of sainthood.<sup>43</sup> The sutta is also the locus classicus on how the various kinds of saints break the ten spiritual fetters (*samyojana*), which are as follows:<sup>44</sup>

- |  |   |                    |
|--|---|--------------------|
| (1) self-identity view ( <i>sakkāya, diṭṭhi</i> ),                   | } | The lower fetters  |
| (2) spiritual doubt ( <i>vicikicchā</i> ),                           |   |                    |
| (3) attachment to rules and rites ( <i>sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa</i> ), |   |                    |
| (4) sensual lust ( <i>kāma, rāga</i> ),                              |   |                    |
| (5) repulsion ( <i>paṭigha</i> ),                                    |   |                    |
| (6) greed for form existence ( <i>rūpa, rāga</i> ),                  | } | The higher fetters |
| (7) greed for formless existence ( <i>arūpa, rāga</i> ),             |   |                    |
| (8) conceit ( <i>māna</i> ),   |   |                    |
| (9) restlessness ( <i>uddhacca</i> ),                                |   |                    |
| (10) ignorance ( <i>avijjā</i> ).                                    |   |                    |

In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first five are the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*), so called because they bind us to existence in the lower realms. The rest are the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya*), that bind us to the higher realms. Either way, the fetters chain us to samsara.

**4.2** The basic model of sainthood consists of the four types of saints, each with their attainment of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, and the kinds of fetters they have broken, as follows:

	Moral virtue	Concentration	Wisdom	Fetters broken
<b>Streamwinner</b>	Complete	Limited	Limited	The first 3 fetters
<b>Once-returner</b>	Complete	Limited	Limited	The first 3 fetters & diminishing of lust, hate, delusion
<b>Non-returner</b>	Complete	Complete	Limited	The 5 lower fetters: reborn in the Pure Abodes, <sup>45</sup> and there attains final nirvana
<b>Arhat</b>	Complete	Complete	Complete	All 10 fetters

**Table 4. The 4 types of saints and the three trainings** (A 3.85/1:231 f), SD 3.3(2).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> A 3.85/1:231 f! SD 3.3(2).

<sup>44</sup> S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377.

<sup>45</sup> The Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*) are the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who live their last lives there before becoming arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akaniṭṭhā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

<sup>46</sup> Cf Vism 1.14/6.

To be a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*), you need the following training:

- (1) fulfill moral virtue, that is, to at least consciously keep to the 5 precepts;
- (2) maintain some level of mindfulness, that is, mental calm and clarity (without the need for dhyana);
- (3) a simple level of wisdom, namely, a basic understanding of impermanence, or simply total faith in the universality of impermanence;
- (4) living our lives in this manner, we will gradually diminish and abandon
  - (a) the self-identity view (that this body is an abiding entity),
  - (b) spiritual doubt (that is, we committed to the possibility of awakening and clearing any doubt regarding the four noble truths), and
  - (c) superstition (that is, not blindly relying on rituals or vows for spiritual solace and liberation).

Streamwinning may arise immediately, or in the following life, or within three lives, but surely within seven lives. Meanwhile, you will be reborn in a family or environment conducive for spiritual cultivation. With streamwinning and all the other stages of sainthood, you will never be reborn in any of the subhuman suffering states.

To be a once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), you must fulfill moral virtue, but need not have complete concentration, nor complete wisdom. On abandoning the first three fetters, and with the diminishing of lust, hate and delusion (that is, the three roots of unwholesome karma), you become a once-returner, returning only once to this world to make an end of suffering.

To be a non-returner (*anāgāmi*), you need to fulfill moral virtue *and* mental concentration, but need not have complete wisdom. The state may arise immediately here, and you may attain nirvana in transit to be reborn in the Pure Abode, or you are reborn there to exhaust your karma, with some exertion, or without any exertion, or you may attain arhathood as you progress successively up to the highest of the Pure Abodes.

The arhat is defined in **the (Sekha) Uddesa Sutta** (A 3.85) as one who has fulfilled all the three trainings—moral virtue, mental concentration, and wisdom—and destroyed all the ten fetters—or more commonly, he is said to have destroyed the four mental influxes (*āsava*)<sup>47</sup>—as such, they are known as “those with influxes destroyed” (*khīṇāsava*), one fully liberated here and now, not to be reborn any more.<sup>48</sup>

**4.3** The suttas often speak of the eight kinds of saints or “the eight individuals” (*aṭṭha purisa, puggala*), or “four pairs of persons” (*cattāri purisa, yuga*). Each of the four kinds of saints are of two kinds, such as the streamwinner: there is the streamwinner of the path (*sotāpanna, magga*, ie streamwinner-to-be) and the fruition streamwinner (*sotāpanna, phala*, ie streamwinner-become), and so on. The term “path” (*magga*) means that he is already walking that path, and as such is on the way “to be” a full-fledged saint, and the fruition (*phala*), which means that he has “become” a full-fledged saint of that category.<sup>49</sup> Except for the arhat-become (who has attained the fruition of arhathood), all the other seven saints are known as “learners” (*sekha*), as they still have a few more fetters to break free from [“the ten mental fetters” below].<sup>50</sup>

**4.4** These four categories of sainthood have often been mistaken as “stages” of spiritual development. They may be regarded as stages in the sense that at each successive level, the saint progressively overcomes more and more of the ten mental fetters;<sup>51</sup> but one need not go through all the “stages” to awaken to liberating wisdom. Indeed, it is sufficient to become a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*); for, in not more than seven lives, one shall surely have eradicated all the mental fetters and be liberated.

<sup>47</sup> “Mental influxes destroyed,” *khīṇ’āsava*: see (1).

<sup>48</sup> A 3.85/1:231 f), SD 3.3.

<sup>49</sup> S 1:220; A 2:56 4:373; Sn 227.

<sup>50</sup> See **Aṭṭha, puggala S 1** (A 8.59/4:292), SD 15.10a.

<sup>51</sup> **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*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 illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya*).

**4.5 The Sa,upadisesa Sutta** (A 9.12) mentions nine kinds of saints—three kinds of streamwinners, the once-returned, and 5 kinds of non-returned—“who having died with the aggregates of existence remaining are liberated” from the suffering states. These nine saints form the true “holy community” (*ariya,saṅgha*).<sup>52</sup>

## 5 The training as envisioned in the Commentaries

**5.1 THREE LEVELS OF DEFILEMENTS.** The Commentaries—that is to say Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla—explain the three trainings in technical detail, for which the commentarial tradition is well known. They distinguish the defilements as occurring on three levels:

- (1) the latent tendency (*anusaya*), where they remain dormant until the right conditions arise;
- (2) the obsessive level (*pariyuṭṭhāna*), where they arise and habitually seize the mind;
- (3) the transgressive level (*vītikkama*), where they motivate unwholesome bodily action and speech.

At the start of Buddhaghosa’s **Visuddhi,magga** and in the Commentaries, he notes that<sup>53</sup>

- Moral virtue counters transgression (*vītikkama,paṭipakkha*) due to defilements;
- Concentration counters our obsessive nature (*pariyuṭṭhāna,paṭipakkha*) due to defilements; and
- Wisdom counters latent tendencies (*anusaya,paṭipakkha*), at the root level.

In other words, *the practice of the precepts* is effective in prevent overt violence through unwholesome actions of the body and of speech. *The practice of mental concentration* helps us deal with habitual and obsessive mental states arising through greed, hate and delusion, the three root-conditions for our breaking of the precepts.<sup>54</sup> And *wisdom* totally uproots our latent tendencies, the deeply secret storage of negative reactive habits accumulated each time we repeat an unwholesome action or do not express ourselves wholesomely when we are able to.

### **5.2 ABANDONING THE DEFILEMENTS**

**5.2.1** In the Commentaries, Buddhaghosa defines the three levels of abandoning defilements in terms of the Tipiṭaka (the Three Baskets), as follows:

Hence, the training in higher moral virtue (*adhisīla,sikkhā*) is specifically discussed in the Vinaya Piṭaka, the training in higher mind (*adhicitta,sikkhā*) in the Sutta Piṭaka, and the training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā,sikkhā*) in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

In the Vinaya Piṭaka is taught the abandoning of transgression (*vītikkama-p,pahāna*), as transgression in defilements is diametrically opposed to moral virtue.

In the Suttanta Piṭaka is taught the abandoning of obsession (*pariyuṭṭhāna-p,pahāna*), as obsession is diametrically opposed to concentration.

In the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is taught the abandoning of latent tendency (*anusaya-p,pahāna*), as latent tendency is diametrically opposed to wisdom.

In the first is the abandoning by substitution (*tad-aṅga-p,pahāna*), and in the others the abandoning by suppression (*vikkhambhana pahāna*) and the abandoning by eradication (*samuccheda pahāna*).

In the first is the abandoning of the defilement of misconduct; in the others, that of the abandoning of the defilements of craving and view.

*Tathā hi Vinaya,piṭake visesena adhisīla,sikkhā vuttā, Suttanta,piṭake adhicitta,sikkhā, Abhidhamma,piṭake adhipaññā,sikkhā.*

*Vinaya,piṭake ca vītikkama-p,pahānam, kilesānam vītikkama,paṭipakkhattā sīlassa.*

<sup>52</sup> A 9.12/4:378-382 ! SD 3.3(3).

<sup>53</sup> Vism 1.13/5; DA 1:20; DhsA 22.

<sup>54</sup> See eg **Mūla S** (A 3.69/1:201-205), SD 18.2.

*Suttanta,piṭake ca **pariyuṭṭhāna-p,pahānaṃ**, kilesānaṃ pariyuṭṭhāna,paṭipakkhattā samādhissa.*

*Abhidhamma,piṭake **anusaya-p,pahānaṃ**, anusaya,paṭipakkhattā paññāya.*

*Paṭhame ca **tad-aṅga-p,pahānaṃ**, itaresu **vikkhambhana,samuccheda-p,pahānāni**.*

*Paṭhame ca duccharita,samkilesa-p,pahānaṃ, itaresu **taṇhā,diṭṭhi,samkilesa-p,pahānaṃ**.*

(VA 1:22 = DA 1:19 = DhsA 22)<sup>55</sup>

It is a well known fact that the Abhidhamma (as we know it today) did not exist in the Buddha's time, and that it was compiled by later scholastics.<sup>56</sup> However, if not taken in a dogmatic manner, such Abhidhamma teachings, especially where they do not conflict with the early suttas, can be helpful in a modern discourse on Buddhist psychology.<sup>57</sup>

**5.2.2 Dhammapāla**, in his Thera,gāthā Commentary, defines the three levels of abandoning defilements without mentioning the classification of the “three baskets,” thus:

Hence, the avoidance of the extreme of what is regarded as the indulgence in sense-pleasures should be understood by way of the attainment of moral virtue. That of what is regarded as the devotion of self-mortification by way of the attainment of concentration, and the taking of the middle way by way of wisdom.

Thus should be understood the abandoning of transgression (*vītikkama-p,pahāna*), by way of the attainment of moral virtue. The abandoning of obsession (*pariyuṭṭhāna-p,pahāna*) by way of the attainment of concentration, the abandoning of latent tendency (*anusaya-p,pahāna*) by way of the attainment of wisdom.

Or, the clearing away of the defilement of misconduct should be understood by the attainment of moral virtue; or, the clearing away of the defilement of craving by the attainment of concentration; or the clearing away of the defilements of view by the attainment of wisdom.

Or, the transcending of the lower realms (of suffering) should be understood as (being effected) by the displacement [*tad-aṅga*, by substituting an unwholesome thought with an opposite but wholesome one] of these (defilements). The transcending of the sense-realm is by the abandoning by suppression (*vikkhambhana*). The transcending of all existences should be understood as (being effected) by the abandoning by eradication (*samuccheda*). Thus it should be known.

*Tathā **sīla,sampadāya tesam kāma,sukhānuyoga,samkhatassa antassa parivajjanaṃ dasseti. Samādhi,sampadāya atta,kilamathānuyoga,samkhatassa, paññā,sampadāya majjhimāya paṭipadāya sevanam dasseti.***

*Tathā **sīla,sampadāya tesam vītikkama-p,pahānaṃ kilesānaṃ dasseti. Samādhi,sampadāya pariyuṭṭhāna-p,pahānaṃ, paññā,sampadāya anusaya-p,pahānaṃ dasseti.***

***Sīla,sampadāya vā duccharita,samkilesa,visodhanam, samādhi,sampadāya taṇhā,samkilesa,-visodhanam, paññā,sampadāya diṭṭhi,samkilesa,visodhanam dasseti.***

***Tad-aṅga-p,pahānena vā nesam<sup>58</sup> apāya,samatikkamo dassito. Vikkhambhana-p,pahānena kāma,dhātu,samatikkamo, samuccheda-p,pahānena sabba,bhava,samatikkamo dassito ti vedittabban.***  
(ThaA 1:14 f; ItA 1:169)

<sup>55</sup> Sentences 2-4 at MA 1:20.

<sup>56</sup> The first council (Rājagaha) mentions only *Dhamma,vinaya*, without mention any Abhidhamma (Cv 11 = V 2:284-293). According to Frauwallner, the Abhidhamma was probably composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE (*Abhidharma-Studien IV. Der Abhidharma der anderen Schulen*, WZKS 15, 1971b:106). Furthermore, the early Buddhist sects, each had their own Abhidharma Piṭaka, often at variance with one another. See Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature*, 1996: II.3. See also **Dhamma and Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1.

<sup>57</sup> By “Buddhist psychology,” I generally mean especially the second aspect of Buddhist training, that of mental concentration, and whatever teachings that are related to mind-training as envisaged by the Buddha.

<sup>58</sup> *Nesam*, 3 pl dat-gen of *eso* (Sn 293): see Geiger, *A Pali Grammar*, 2000 §107.2.

## 6 How the 3 trainings benefit us

As in any training, it is difficult to master all the stages at first. Indeed, Dharma training as a rule begins with moral virtue because it is the easiest of the trainings, and yet, deals with the most palpable aspects of life. There are “immediate” benefits even for those who remain only on the moral training level. It leads to happy rebirth in the sense-world (*kāma,loka*). The cultivation of both moral virtue and concentration leads to rebirth in the brahma realm, that is, the form world (*rūpa,loka*). But when moral virtue, concentration and wisdom are cultivated to fulfilment, all rebirth is transcended. *The 3 trainings are the best form of birth control!* **The Vimutti,magga** sums this up succinctly, thus:

After acknowledging the path of freedom, through virtue, he transcends the way to the suffering states (*apāya*). Through mental concentration, he transcends the sense-sphere. Through wisdom, he transcends all existence.

If he practises moral virtue to fulfilment, but practises little of concentration and wisdom, he will reach streamwinning,<sup>59</sup> and once-return.<sup>60</sup> If he practises moral virtue and concentration to fulfilment, but little wisdom, he will reach non-return.<sup>61</sup> If he practises moral virtue, concentration, and wisdom to fulfilment, he will reach the supreme liberation of the arhat.

(Vimutti,magga, Intro = *The Path of Freedom*, tr Ehara, Soma & Kheminda, 1961:5; rev)

Although we commonly view the three trainings as being three “stages,” all three—indeed, all the eight path factors—are actually interdependent and facilitate one another. As clearly noted by **Gethin**,

In other words, the hierarchy does not mean that when the novice at the initial stages of the path establishes *sīla*, he does not also in some way and to some degree begin to develop *samādhi* and *paññā*, or that when the adept at the advanced stages of the path develops *paññā* he does not need *sīla* or *samādhi*. (2001:209)

This vital point is clearly stated in **the Soṇa,daṇḍa Sutta** (D 4), first by the brahmin, and then endorsed by the Buddha, thus:

“...Master Gotama, just as one might wash one hand with the other, or one foot with the other, even so, wisdom is fully washed by moral virtue, moral virtue is fully washed by wisdom.

Where there is moral virtue, there is wisdom; where there is wisdom, there is moral virtue. One who has moral virtue has wisdom; one who has wisdom, has moral virtue. Moral virtue and wisdom are declared to be foremost in the world.”

“So it is, brahmin.

Where there is moral virtue, there is wisdom; where there is wisdom, there is moral virtue. One who has moral virtue has wisdom; one who has wisdom, has moral virtue. Moral virtue and wisdom are declared to be foremost in the world.” (D 4.21-22/1:124)

It is important to understand that moral virtue is *not* abandoned “after it is cultivated.” Moral virtue is not a product of a process, but the willingness and ability to respond wholesomely to others and the environment as a result of our own wholesome mind. As unawakened beings, we have to *deliberately* direct our mind towards morally virtuous deeds and states, but for the arhat, it is *spontaneous* nature. Furthermore, the unawakened *depends* on moral virtue (as good karma) for their wellbeing, but the arhat is no more “made of moral virtue,” since his mind is liberated from duality.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Cf **Sa,upadisesa S** (A 9.12,8-10/4:380 f), SD 3.3 & Table 4 above.

<sup>60</sup> Cf **Sa,upadisesa S** (A 9.12,7/4:380), SD 3.3 & Table 4 above.

<sup>61</sup> Cf **Sa,upadisesa S** (A 9.12,6/4:380), SD 3.3 & Table 4 above.

<sup>62</sup> On how the arhat is “beyond good and evil,” see **Samaṇa,maṇḍika S** (M 78,11(3)/2:27), SD 18.9 & **Beyond Good and evil**, SD 18.7.

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