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 || नमो तस्स भगवतो अरहतो सम्मासम्बुद्धस्स ॥
 නමෝ තසස භගවතො අරහතො සම්මාසම්බුද්ධස්ස.
 ५ नमो तसुस भगवतो अरहतो सम्मासम्बुद्धसुस५
 Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

1

Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta

or **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Truth

S 56.11 = Mv 1.6.17-31 + 32-37

Short name: **Dhamma,cakka Sutta**, The Dharma-wheel Discourse

Theme: The Buddha's traditional 1st discourse

Translated by Piya Tan ©2002, rev 2010

The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places.
 But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle
 and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too
 but there will be no special hurry.

(Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929 ch 34)

1 The group of 5 monks

1.1 MEETING THE 5 MONKS

1.1.1 After the 49 day-retreat in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree,¹ the Buddha leaves to look for the group of 5 monks (*pañca,vaggiya bhikkhu*) to break the good news of his awakening and teach them the newly discovered Dharma. On the way, he meets Upaka, who has the honour of hearing the Buddha's 1st declaration of awakening, but fails to fathom its significance.² The Buddha continues his journey to the deer park at Benares (Bārāṇasī) in stages and finally reaches **Isi,patana** (modern Sarnath), about 7 km north of Benares.³ As is the custom, he rests in the outskirts of Vārāṇasī and waits until morning to enter the city. Having collected his almsfood, taken his wash and eaten his meal, he heads straight for the hermitage where the 5 monks reside.

1.1.2 The oldest record we have of the 1st discourse is clearly that found in the **Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26),⁴ but these passages there widely differ from what is given in the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta or, briefly, "Dhamma,cakka Sutta" [§16.3 n]. This does not suggest any historical conflict: it merely means that while the latter records only the very first "official" teachings to the 5 monks, the former gives a more elaborate account of the "noble quest" and the attaining of the 9 abodes (the 4 dhyanas, the 4 attainments and cessation).

¹ On these 7 weeks, see **Dhamma & Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1 (5).

² On Upaka's non-returning, see SD 12.1 (4+5).

³ The distance the Buddha travels here should be noted: it is some 200 km from Gayā to Benares, and by road the distance is about 250-300 km, which will take some 10 days by foot (Nakamura, 2000:241). It would not be surprising if the Buddha has taught many others along the way, but what records we have of this must have been lost.

⁴ M 26,29-43 (SD 1.11).

Clearly, the Buddha gives the 5 monks numerous teachings, many of which must have been left unrecorded, but the essential ones have been handed down to us in the Dhammacakka Sutta and the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta, with the full background narrative given in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya. However, we may say that the Dhammacakka Sutta as the “1st discourse” specifically addresses the group of 5 monks to clear the air, or rather their minds, in preparation for greater things to come. [2.1.2]

1.2 TEACHING THE 5 MONKS. It is said that the Buddha gives his 1st discourse on the night of the full moon day of Āsāḷha (June-July),⁵ a festival still celebrated today amongst south-east Asian Buddhists as **Āsāḷha Pūjā**. The first sangha that arises from this momentous discourse comprises Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji. Since Āsāḷha Pūjā commemorates the teaching of the 1st discourse, it is often known as “Dharma day.”⁶ [1.1.2]

1.3 The Jātaka Commentary and Milinda,pañha mention “the 5 teachers” of the Bodhisattva, actually totalling 12, since the first “teacher” is really the group of 8 brahmins (Rāma, Dhaja, Lakkhaṇa, Mantī, Yañña or Koṇḍañña, Suyāma, Bhoja or Subhoja, Sudatta) who examine the Bodhisattva’s bodily marks during the nativity. The other three are Sabba,mitta (the deva who is said to inspire the Bodhisattva to go forth), Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāma,putta (J 1:56; Miln 237). **Koṇḍañña** is the youngest of the 8 brahmins who visit the Bodhisattva at his nativity. [1.3]

While seven others hold up two fingers, prophesying that the child would become *either* a world ruler (if he lives the household life) or a world teacher, a buddha (if he goes forth). Koṇḍañña alone holds up only *one* finger, certain that the child will leave home to become the Buddha. When the Bodhisattva renounces the world, Koṇḍañña approaches the sons of the other 7 brahmins (who have died by then) and invites them to renounce the world and follow the Bodhisattva.

Only four of them—Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji—agree to join him and together they are known as **the “group of 5”** (*pañca, vaggiya*) (J 1:56 f). As such, Koṇḍañña is the eldest of them, his

⁵ V 1:10 ff; S 5:420 ff; Mvst 3:330 f; Lalv 540(416) f. The Pali names of the ancient **Indian calendar** follow Vism 621 and its Tikā (based on Ñāṇamoli’s *A Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*, 1994), with the Skt names (within brackets) and number of days added:

Season	Sub-season	Month	Days	Equivalent
	Hemanta	(1) Māga, sira (Skt Mārga, śīrśa)	30	Nov-Dec
Hemanta (cold)	(winter)	(2) Phussa (Puṣya)*	30	Dec-Jan
	Sisira (cool)	(3) Māgha (Maghā)	30	Jan-Feb
	Vasanta	(4) Phagguna (Phālguna)*	30	Feb-Mar
Gimhāna (heat)	(spring)	(5) Citta (Caitra)	30	Mar-Apr
	Gimha (summer)	(6) Vesākha (Vaiśākha)	31	Apr-May
	Vassanā	(7) Jeṭṭha (Jyaiṣṭha)	31	May-Jun
Vassāna (rains)	(rains)	(8) Āsāḷha or Uttar’āsāḷha (Āṣāḍha)	31	Jun-Jul
	Sārada (autumn)	(9) Sāvana (Śrāvaṇa)	31	Jul-Aug
		(10) Poṭṭha, pāda (Proṣṭha, pada)*	31	Aug-Sep
		(11) Assa, yuja (Āśva, yuja)	30	Sep-Oct
		(12) Kattika (Kārttika)	30	Oct-Nov

[*Puṣya also called Pauṣa; Phālguna also called Phaggu; Proṣṭha, pada also called Bhādra, pada.]

Note: The Indian month begins on the first day of the waning moon and ends on the full moon.

⁶ **Visākha Pūjā**, also “Buddha day,” “Vesak day” (Singapore), “Wesak day” (Malaysia) (traditionally said to be on the fullmoon day of May), commemorates the Buddha’s nativity, awakening and parinirvana. **Māgha Pūjā** is often called “sangha day”: see **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74), SD 16.1 (6).

familiarity with the Buddha going back to even when the latter is just born, when he visits the palace for the child Siddhattha's naming ceremony, and confidently predicted the Bodhisattva's renunciation.⁷ [1.3]

1.4 According to **the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya, the Saṅgha,bheda,vastu** and its Tibetan counterpart in **the Dulva** (Tibetan Vinaya), the 5 monks—Koṇḍañña,⁸ Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji—are the Bodhisattva's former companions, who have been sent by the Buddha's father to look after him.⁹ According to the Ekottara Āgama, the 5 monks have been following him since his birth,¹⁰ which further associates them with the Buddha's family and native country.

1.5 The Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta Commentary similarly associates the 5 monks with the Buddha's home country, reporting that in his early youth, Koṇḍañña is one of the brahmins who predict the child Siddhattha's future spiritual career at his birth, but the other four of this group of 5 monks are the sons of the other sooth-saying brahmins at the Buddha's naming ceremony just after his birth (MA 2:87).

1.6 According to the **Lalita,vistara**, however, the 5 monks were Uddaka Rama,putta's disciples who have witnessed how the Bodhisattva quickly achieved what they had been seeking for a long time.¹¹ The fact that the Bodhisattva did not rest satisfied with this achievement also motivated them to leave Uddaka and follow the Bodhisattva.

Analayo, in his comparative study of **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta**, adds that:

The Lalitavistara's presentation seems more convincing, since if the five had been ordered to attend on the Bodhisattva, one would not expect them to abandon their mission once the Bodhisattva decided to stop his self-mortifications. If, however, they had followed him on their own accord and in the hope to benefit from his realizations, the decision to leave him once he had (from their perspective) given up striving becomes understandable. (2006:111)¹²

2 The 1st discourse: contents and purpose

2.1 THE SUTTA'S TEACHINGS

2.1.1 To prepare the 5 monks for the 1st discourse, if we are to follow **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), the Buddha first lists the 5 cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma,guṇa*), that is, the physical body, which needs to be transcended, as it were, before we can attain the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments, and finally, the cessation of perception and feeling, here equated the attainment of nirvana. This is, in fact, a neat summary of the Buddha's spiritual progress from the world to awakening itself.

Understandably, this passage serves as a sort of preamble to the 1st discourse (S 56.11), which is given to the 5 monks when they are finally ready to hear a proper formulation of the essence of the Buddha's awakening.¹³

⁷ It is on this account—his age—that he is declared by the Buddha as the “longest-standing” (*rattaññū*) of the monks (A 1:23,17). Coincidentally, he is also the eldest of the monks. On the significance of this, see SD 1.2 (1.3).

⁸ On *Koṇḍañña*, see **Nalaka,pāna S** (M 68), SD 37.4 (1.2.2).

⁹ T1421 = T22.104a19, tr Bareau 1963:146; Gnoli 1977:99; and a tr of Tibetan Dulva in Rockhill 1907:28.

¹⁰ EĀ 24.5 = T2.618b14, tr Bareau 1988:79.

¹¹ Foucaux 1884:212; Lefmann 1902.

¹² See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,26-30/1:171-173), SD 1.11(6). For further details on the 5 monks, see **Anatta Lakhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2 (1).

¹³ (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1. See (M 26,31-42/1:173-175), SD 1.11 (7).

2.1.2 The Buddha's 1st discourse serves 3 purposes: firstly, the Buddha clears up the unfortunate misunderstanding that has arisen between himself and his former colleagues regarding extremes and the middle way. The discourse refutes the constant criticism by rival sects of the alleged laxity of the Buddhist monastic rules. It also warns novices in advance of the dangers of extremes in practice, and to keep to the middle way. In other words, it deals with:

- (1) the exhortation on avoiding the extremes of sensual indulgence and of self-mortification [§§2-3];
- (2) the proclamation of the middle way, ie, the noble eightfold path [§4];
- (3) the statement of the 4 noble truths [§§5-12];
- (4) the declaration of the Buddha's supreme awakening [§13-15]; and
- (5) the exultation of the devas [§§17-19].
- (6) Koṇḍañña's attainment of the divine eye [§16].

The 4 truths are succinctly stated in the extant early texts,¹⁴ but there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, in greater detail and in different ways.

2.1.3 The 4 noble truths are the briefest synthesis of the entire teaching of the Buddha, since all those manifold doctrines of the Pali Canon are, without any exception, included therein. When we have studied the 4 noble truths with the help of the various references and explanations in the early Buddhist scriptures, we get a fairly accurate account of the essential teachings of the historical Buddha—this is the essence of **early Buddhism**.¹⁵ [S 56.11,5-8]

2.2 THE SUTTA'S PURPOSE

2.2.1 Scholars have noted that the 1st discourse, the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), is curiously "tucked away almost inconspicuously" in the Sacca Saṃyutta (eg S:B 1520), and which centres around the 4 noble truths and the noble eightfold path (which are teaching models of the 2nd period).¹⁶ The 1st-period suttas are usually unstructured but point directly to the awakening truths, such as the teachings of the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta.¹⁷

2.2.2 In the case of the 1st discourse, it is possible that the Buddha gives the 5 monks other teachings in preparation for what has been formalized as the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta. Surely, the 4 noble truths are not the only teaching the Buddha has given to his first monk disciples. The Vinaya, in fact, records that before the Buddha delivers the 1st discourse, he has to persuade the 5 monks that he is now awakened, unlike before. Surely, this would include some teaching that open up the minds and hearts of the 5 monks.¹⁸

2.2.3 However, no details are given, except that the Buddha declares to them: "Bhikshus, do you agree that I've not spoken to you like this before?" We may safely assume here that other teachings are also given prior to the 1st discourse itself. However, the 1st discourse is recorded by the council elders and reciters in such a manner as to highlight its primacy and significance.¹⁹ We are grateful to them that they

¹⁴ Eg **Dukkha S** (S 22.104/3:158 f), SD 42.20.

¹⁵ On the lateness of Dhammacakka Pavattana S (S 56.11), see **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (2.2).

¹⁶ On the 2 periods of the Buddha's ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).

¹⁷ See **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (1.3).

¹⁸ Mv 1.6.10-16 (V 1:8-10).

¹⁹ See **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (2.2).

have shared their memory of the first teachings with us so that we have a good idea of what happened in the first years and the teachings that first arose in this world-cycle for our benefit.

2.3 RELATED TEXTS

2.3.0 We have enough textual information to reconstruct the events immediately leading up to the teaching of **the 1st discourse** and its immediate aftermath. Most of this information come from **the Mahā,vagga** (Mv 1.6)—the narrative opening of the Vinaya—**the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26) and 2 suttas from the Saṃyutta Nikāya. These texts, arranged in their narrative sequence, are as follows:

2.3.1 The *Miga,dāya Pañca,vaggiya Desanā (Mv 1.6.10-16/V 1:8-10), SD 1.1(8)

2.3.1.1 The text recounts the first meeting between the Buddha and the group of 5 monks in the deer park at Benares. The Buddha announces his awakening to the 5 monks who are at first unconvinced. Finally, when the Buddha declares:

“Have you, bhikshus, ever known me to have spoken to you like this before?” (Mv 1.6.16)

The 5 monks are convinced, and they listen to him. [SD 1.1(8)]

2.3.1.2 This Vinaya account then continues, saying:

“Then, the group of 5 monks listened to the Blessed One again, gave ear to him and settled their minds for direct knowledge.”

The 5 monks are now ready to listen to the Buddha’s teaching. In fact, this Vinaya account then continues [Mv 1.6.17-31] straight into **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11,2 etc).

2.3.2 The Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26,29-43), SD 1.11

2.3.2.1 At this point, we have an important account preserved in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26,29-43). The Buddha opens his instructions by telling the 5 monks that we are “subject to decay ... disease ... death ... sorrow ... defilement,” yet we spend our lives seeking those very same things. Seeking “the undecaying ... the undiseased ... the death-free ... the sorrowless ... the defilement-free,” that is, the “supreme security from bondage, nirvana” he discovered it. [SD 1.11]

2.3.2.2 Then follows an ancient teaching called **the Pāsa,rāsi Sutta**, the discourse on the pile of snares (M 26,31-44). The Buddha teaches the 5 monks that the 5 cords of sensual pleasures (pañca kāma,guṇa)—the pleasures of forms, sound, smells and touches—entice and trap us in this cyclic world, like “a forest deer that is bound, lies down on a pile of snares (pāsa,rāsi),” and with whom the hunter does what he pleases. Just like this trapped deer, we are caught in the world and worldliness.

The way out is to rise above the senses and its powers by cultivating **the 9 progressive abodes (nava anupubba,vihāra)** [M 26,34.2-44]. These are the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling—with the help of these profoundly joyful and clear mental states, we blind **Māra** (the embodiment of all that is bad), free ourselves from suffering and awaken to true reality.

This Sutta ends with the narrator telling us that “the monks rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.” Clearly what follows here would be the Buddha instructing the 5 monks on how to meditate the way that he has himself has done. In the meantime, the Buddha continues instructing them.

2.3.3 The Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), SD 1.1

2.3.3.1 The Buddha goes on to explain **the 2 extremes** of views and ways that the unawakened cling to, that is, those who are devoted to sensual pleasures, that is, glorifying the physical body and worldliness, those who see the body as the source of suffering, and that purification comes from rejecting it, even torturing it. [§§1-3]

There is **the middle way**, that is the noble eightfold path—this is the way out of suffering to self-awakening, nirvana [§4]. To see the middle way and to follow it, we must fully understand **the 4 noble truths** [§§5-12]. The 1st truth is the universality of suffering; the 2nd truth is the *arising* of suffering through craving. This is **the meaning of life**.

The 3rd truth is *ending* of suffering: nirvana; the 4th truth is the path to *nirvana*, that is, the noble eightfold path. These embody **the purpose of life**. Having seen the true nature of worldliness, it behooves us to renounce it for nirvana, the death-free, the only way to end suffering for good. To gain nirvana, we need to take the inward journey of the noble path, that is, to renounce the world outside. Only then, we will be able to return to this world and teach true liberation to it.

2.3.3.2 This is what the Buddha has realized. Having realized this liberating and awakening truth, he now teaches the 5 monks so that they, too, would awaken to true reality. Hearing this, there arises in **Koṇḍañña** “the dust-free stainless Dharma-eye,” that is the clear understanding of the rise and fall, the impermanence of things [§16]. This “Dharma-eye” formula means that Koṇḍañña has attained any of the stages of the “learner” (*sekha*)—the streamwinner, the once-returner, the non-returner—but traditionally, he is said to become a streamwinner here.

2.3.4 The Pañca,vaggiya Pabbajjā (Mv 1.6.32-37), SD 1.1(9)

2.3.4.1 The Vinaya, in its continuous narrative on the 5 monks and the 1st discourse, now relates how they were instructed, and all successively became streamwinners: **Koṇḍañña** on the Āsaḷha full moon day. Koṇḍañña then expresses to the Buddha his wish to go forth [§32]. The Buddha accepts him by proclaiming, “Come, bhikshu!” (*ehi,bhikkhu*).

The Buddha advised and instructed (*ovādi anusāsi*) the monks—which suggests that they must have asked questions and some discussion ensued. The Vinaya tells us that **Vappa and Bhaddiya** then become streamwinners, and they, too, request to go forth. The Buddha accepts them with the proclamation: “Come, bhikshus!” (*etha bhikkhave*) [§33]. Then, **Mahānāma and Assaji** become streamwinners, seek admission, and the Buddha similarly accepts them with “Come, bhikshus!”²⁰ [§34].

2.3.4.2 The Commentaries, however, tell us that **Vappa** gains the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*), that is, streamwinning, on the day after Koṇḍañña does, that is, on the 1st day of the waning fortnight (*pāṭipada,-divase*); **Bhaddiya** does so on the 2nd day; then **Mahānāma** on the 3rd day; and finally **Assaji** the 4th.²¹ [9.1] Only the Aṅguttara Commentary says that Bhaddiya was the 1st to become a streamwinner, but otherwise gives the same account.²²

²⁰ Mv 1.6.33+35+36 (V 1:12 f).

²¹ VA 6:965,20-23; MA 2:192,22-25; ThīA 3,9-12; ApA 87,5-8. **Jātaka** states that Vappa gains streamwinning on the 1st day (J 1:82,14 f; tr J:J 109 f), followed by Bhaddiya, then Mahānāma, and finally Assaji (J 1:82,15-17). **Buddha,vaṁsa Comy**, too, mentions Vappa after Koṇḍañña but gives no details of the other 3 (BA 19; tr BA:H 29). **Vinaya** does not specify the days but mentions the realization of the other 4 in 2 groups: first Vappa and Bhaddiya, then Mahānāma and Assaji (V 1:12 f; tr V:H 4:19).

²² AA 1:147,23-23.

2.3.5 The Anatta,lakkhana Sutta (S 22.59), SD 1.2

2.3.5.1 Much of what the Buddha has taught the 5 monks thus far—especially the teachings of the 1st discourse (S 56.11)—is to prepare them for this vital discourse. In **the Pāsa,rāsi Sutta**, an ancient teaching embedded in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), the Buddha speaks of the 5 cords of sensual pleasures, and how the world is caught up with them [2.3.2.2].

2.3.5.2 In **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), the Buddha introduces the 5 monks to the teachings of the 4 noble truths and the noble eightfold path. Having understood the 4 noble truths, the 5 monks successively gain streamwinning, and become true disciples of the Buddha. Now as streamwinners, they are ready for a higher teaching—that of **non-self** (*anattā*).

In **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta**, they are first introduced to the teaching of the 5 aggregates: form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. This is a comprehensive teaching on the true nature of our body-mind existence:

- it is impermanent (already expounded in the first lessons to the 5 monks) [2.3.1];
- it is both *impermanent* and unsatisfactory (the Pāsa,rāsi Sutta) [2.3.2.2];
- it is unsatisfactory, suffering (taught in the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta) [2.3.3].

Now, the 5 monks are taught that all of sentient existence—embodied as the 5 aggregates—are impermanent, suffering and non-self. It has not essence, with neither meaning nor purpose in itself. Now, we can see its meaning, and with that we now have the true purpose of life: to awaken to freedom and nirvana.

On the 5th day of the waning fortnight—after all the 5 monks have become streamwinners—having heard **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta**, they all become **arhats**, the first awakened individuals other than the Buddha, but just like him.

3 The middle way

3.1 THE 2 EXTREMES

3.1.1 Significantly, the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta opens by addressing the prevalent views of the day: **the annihilationist** (or physicalist) and the eternalist [§3]. The physicalist view is a materialist and annihilationist one, that is, the belief that the “soul” (mind, or consciousness, etc) is identical with the body, so that when the body dies, it dies, too.²³ In other words, the body is meant to be enjoyed, and we should sow wild oats while we can, as it were. In fact, the sensual life of the young Bodhisattva broadly hints at this kind of materialistic philosophy.²⁴

3.1.2 The eternalist view is essentially the same today as it is in the Buddha’s time. There is a belief in some kind of eternal entity (Brahman, soul, divine essence) and its source or creator (usually some kind of God-idea). Among the Indian eternalists of the Buddha’s time, however, there is a popular belief that the body is basically bad, evil or unsatisfactory, or at best provisional (here, it concurs with much of the eternalist views of our times), so that with its destruction (deliberate or natural), we would inherit some kind of divine body or heavenly birth.²⁵ [§3]

²³ See **Sandaka S** (M 76,7/1:515), SD 35.7.

²⁴ See eg **Sukhumala S** (A 3.38/1:145 f), SD 63.7.

²⁵ See SD 53.38 (1.2.2).

3.1.3 These 2 extreme views and practices are also criticized in **the Cūḷa Dhamma Samādāna Sutta** (M 45), and which lists 4 ways of “undertaking things” (*dhamma samādāna*), that is, one’s spiritual progress, as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| (1) conduct that is pleasant now, | but resulting in future pain; |
| (2) conduct that is painful now, | but ripening in future pain; |
| (3) conduct that is painful now, | but ripening in future pleasure (or happiness); and |
| (4) conduct that is pleasant now, | and ripening in future pleasure (or happiness). |

The first refers to a life of sense-indulgence, while the second is that of self-mortification. These two kinds of practices should be given up and avoided. The third undertaking refers to when we have great difficulties with greed, hate or delusion, but we still we do not abandon our mental cultivation. The fourth undertaking, is the ideal one, as it is easy all the way, and the spiritual fruition is easily obtained, too.²⁶

3.1.4 The Buddha rejects both the physicalist and the eternalist views as being extremes [3.2]. However, note in the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta that while “the devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures,” or more briefly, “the devotion to sensual pleasures” (*kāma,sukh’allikānuyoga*) is described as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anatta,samhito*) [§3], “the devotion to self-mortification” (*atta,kilamathānuyoga*) is said to be only “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*dukkho anariyo anatta,samhito*) [§3]. This is because despite being “painful,” self-mortification, with some moral virtue, can bring about a divine afterlife; but such a goal is nevertheless “ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” because we are still caught up in samsara, and not liberated from suffering.²⁷

3.2 WHAT IS THE MIDDLE WAY?

3.2.1 In this sutta, the “middle way” (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) is declared to be the noble eightfold path. According to **Rupert Gethin**,

what the Bārāṇasī discourse appears to do is present a kind of apologetic and polemic in one. What is taught by the Buddha is truly a spiritual life (*brahma-cariyā*) in that it is free of vulgar sensual indulgence, on the other hand it is distinct from what Bronkhorst [1986] characterizes as the old severely ascetic main stream meditation tradition. From the point of view of the Bārāṇasī discourse, this is now superseded by the new middle way. What is important about the first discourse is the “middleness” of what the Buddha teaches. From this point of view, the *ariyo aṭṭh-aṅgiko maggo* is largely incidental to the discourse. (Gethin 2001:199 f; see 198-201)

3.2.2 Gethin goes on to point out that the application of the expression “the middle way” to the avoidance of sensual indulgence and of self-torture occurs in only four other passages. Only two of these concern the noble eightfold path exclusively, that is, **the Araṇa,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 139) and **the Rāsiya Sutta** (S 42.12), both of which describe the noble eightfold path as the “middle way” in exactly the same terms as the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta.²⁸

²⁶ M 45/1:305-309 (SD 32.4).

²⁷ See SD 51.1 (1.2.1.3+1.2.1.4); also **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (4.1).

²⁸ Respectively, M 139,4/3:230 f, (SD 7.8); S 42.12,4/4:330 (SD 91.3).

The other usages of “the middle way” mentioned by Gethin (2001:200 ff) include the following:

- (1) **The Acela(ka) Paṭipadā Suttas 1 & 2** (A 3.151+152), where three “ways” (*paṭipadā*) are given: that of indulgence (*āgālhā*), that of burning (*nijjhāmā*), and that of the middle way.²⁹
- (2) **The Dhamma,dāyāda Sutta** (M 3), “Here, brothers, greed (*lobha*) is bad, hate (*dosa*) is bad. There is the middle way for the abandonment of greed and hate It is this very noble eightfold path.”³⁰
- (3) **The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), **the (Pabajjā) Acela(ka) Kassapa Sutta** (S 12.17), **the Aññātara Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (S 12.46) and **the (Sabba) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (S 12.47), where the Buddha comments on the extremes of “all exists” (*sabbam atthi*) and “nothing exists” (*sabbam n’atthi*), and of eternalism (*sassata*) and annihilationism (*uccheda*) [3.1], and “not following either of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dharma by the middle” (*ete te ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammam deseti*). The “middle” here refers to dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*).³¹
- (4) **The Sampasādanīya Sutta** mentions the 2 extremes, followed by the attaining of the 4 dhyanas, without mentioning the eightfold path (D 28).³²

3.2.3 Gethin adds that “[t]his ‘middle’ would seem to be rather more significant for the subsequent development of Buddhist thought than the specific notion of the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* as the middle way between sensual indulgence and self-torment” (Gethin 2001:200 f). Furthermore, **A K Warder** points out that this is best exemplified in Nāgārjuna’s **Mūla,madhyamaka Kārikā**, where dependent arising appears to represent the “middle way” par excellence.³³ In fact, the canonical text most frequently quoted by Nāgārjuna is the Nidāna Saṃyutta (S 12), especially **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15).³⁴

4 The truths: terminology and scope

4.0 THE 4 TRUTHS IN PERSPECTIVE

4.0.1 Meaning and purpose of life³⁵

4.0.1.1 The 4 noble truths are systematically and heuristically structured—for the sake of identifying and solving problems—as follows:

The meaning of life:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|------|
| (1) the noble truth [reality], that is, suffering | <i>dukkha ariya,sacca</i> | [§5] |
| (2) the noble truth, that is, the arising of suffering | <i>dukkha,samudaya ariya,sacca</i> | [§6] |

The purpose of life:

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| (3) the noble truth, that is, the ending of suffering | <i>dukkha,nirodha ariya,sacca</i> | [§7] |
| (4) the noble truth, that is, the path leading to the ending of suffering | <i>dukkha,nirodha,gāminī,paṭipadā ariya,sacca</i> | [§8] |

²⁹ A 3.151+152/1:295-297.

³⁰ M 3,8/1:15 (SD 2.18).

³¹ Respectively, S 12.15/2:17 (SD 6.13); S 12.17/2:20 (SD 18.5); S 12.46/2:75 f (SD 83.9); S 12.47/2:76 f (SD 68.6).

³² D 28,19/3:113 (SD 14.14). This Sutta is not mentioned by Gethin.

³³ Warder, 1973:78-88.

³⁴ S 12.15/2:17 (SD 6.13) qu at S 22.90/3:134 f (SD 56.5). For a similar note on the middle way, see SD 10.16 (1.3.4). See also **Notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40.1 (10.1.1).

³⁵ See SD 55.7 (1.2.4.3).

4.0.1.2 The first two truths answer the question, “**What is the meaning of life?**” Life is impermanent, changing, and altering all the time. Whatever is impermanent cannot really satisfy us, especially when we hope to desire for some kind of permanent thing or state. Whatever is impermanent and unsatisfactory has no abiding essence. We have no control over such states. We do not even have real control over our own body or life. Our body becomes defiled and decays as it will and, in due course, our life ends when it will. This natural process is formulated in the dependent arising formula.³⁶

4.0.1.3 The last two truths answer the question, “**What is the purpose of life?**”—to grow mentally and spiritually, and to fully awaken to true reality. To do this, we need to prepare our body and speech as the bases for a calm and clear mind. When our mind attains true stillness, it sees into true reality. This is the wisdom that liberates us from the endless cycle of suffering, fuelled by craving and ignorance. The state of unconditioned awakening is called nirvana. The progress of awakening is described in the dependent ending formula.³⁷

4.0.2 Teaching unique to the Buddha

4.0.2.1 Early Buddhism has no “Buddhist creed”—like most God-based religions—and the 4 truths should never be understood as one. They do not represent “truth claims” that we, on becoming a Buddhist, must assent to, whether religiously or intellectually. This likely confusion lies in the word “truth” (*sacca*). As with many Indian terms—more so with early Buddhist terminology—we need to appreciate the polysemy of many of its key terms. [4.4.5]

4.0.2.2 The word *sacca* not only means “truth,” but it also means “real,” especially as “true reality, as against “virtual reality.” We know, for example, that a mirage is real all right, but what we see or experience of a mirage does not really exist, but a trickery of space, heat, light and perception. We can, then, speak of the “4 true realities” (*catu,sacca*) that the Buddha fully and finally understands on the night of the great awakening.

4.0.2.3 The Buddha makes no claims that the 4 truths are *his* truths, or that *he* is a divine agent or prophet of any kind. However, we do not see any other religions or system in human history that has formulated such a succinct understanding of the meaning and purpose of life like those embodied in the 4 noble truths. In this sense, these truths—in terms of discovery and formulation—are uniquely or peculiarly “Buddhist.” The technical term here for this is *sāmuḥkaṃsa* or *sāmukkaṃsika*, that is, “it is the Dharma teaching unique to the buddhas, namely, suffering, its arising, its ending, the path.”³⁸ [8.2].

4.0.2.4 The 4 noble truths may be teachings unique or peculiar to the Buddha(s), but its veracity and validity apply to all alike, Buddhist or not. Historically, these truths are not even “Buddhist,” which is a modern category. **The Dhamma Niyāma Sutta** (A 3.134) records the open declaration of this truth by the Buddha himself:

³⁶ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

³⁷ On dependent ending, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (19.3.2).

³⁸ *Yā buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsika dhammadesanā, taṃ pakāsesi dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ nirodhaṃ maggaṃ*. That is, only the Buddhas discover, formulate and teach them: V 1:16, 18, 2:156; D 1:110, 148; M 1:380; A 3:184, 4:186, 5:194; DA 1:277 (explained) = AA 4:101 (ad A 4:186); MA 3:92,9 = UA 283,13; Comys resolve it as *sāmaṃ ukkaṃsika*, “drawn up or raised by oneself”; ThaA 137; PvA 38, 195; VvA 50. See **(Dasaka) Uttiya S** (A 10.95,3.1) n, SD 44.13.

Bhikshus, whether there is the arising of tathagatas [buddhas thus come] or not, this element remains [is fixed], the fixedness of things, the order of things, that

all formations are unsatisfactory,	<i>sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā</i>
all formations are impermanent,	<i>sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā</i>
all dharmas [principles behind all things] are non-self. ³⁹	<i>sabbe dhammā anattā</i>

4.0.2.5 This 3rd line refers to the law of conditionality (*paccayatā*), the natural order of causes and effects.⁴⁰ Everything in this universe exists or occurs as the results (plural) of series and networks of causes and effects. Due to the limits of the powers of our own minds to accommodate such a gargantuan process of events, we usually only choose to see a particular event or aspect of an event and see “that” as the cause or effect of things. The point is that nothing arises from a single cause or produces a single effect. All events in the universe are, in some way, connected with one another—this is called “change” or “impermanence.”

4.0.2.6 It also means that no abiding entity called a “soul,” “self” or whatever is found either *within* the 5 aggregates (our mind-body being) [4.1.1(8)] or *without* it, such as the view that “the self is the world” (*so attā so loko*).⁴¹ In other words, we can only conclude that *sabbe dhammā anattā* means that “all dharmas (phenomena *and* the principles behind their conditionality) are non-self.” Nirvana, as we will see, does not fit anywhere in such a notion.

4.0.2.7 As Buddhists, we are simply committed to working to “practise the Dharma in accordance to the Dharma” (*dhammānudhamma,paṭipatti*), that is, following the Buddha’s Dharma (as teaching) for the sake of seeing the real dharma (true reality).⁴² Dharma, in the former sense, is that formulations and explanations of the truths, but these are not dogmas, but prescriptions for us to test, to “come and see” (*ehi,passika*).⁴³ Dharma, in the latter sense, is true reality, which when directly seen brings about our awakening and liberation. Thus, any Buddhist teaching should be seen directed to the truths of suffering and its ending⁴⁴ [8.1].

4.0.2.8 Traditionally, then, what the Buddha directly sees is true reality, what he teaches to us, and what liberates us from suffering are all called by the same name: **the Dharma or dharma**, the most polysemic word in all Buddhism. Here, for our purposes in our spiritual quest for nobleness, it is sufficient to usefully limit its senses to those of “true reality,” “teaching” and “way to awakening.”⁴⁵

4.1 THE LISTS OF SUFFERINGS

4.1.1 Sutta list of sufferings. A key passage in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta defines the 1st truth—the **noble truth that is suffering**—as a list of these 8 sufferings:

³⁹ See SD 26.8 (1).

⁴⁰ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

⁴¹ *So attā so loko*: as in **Pāṛileyya S** (S 22.81/3.98 f), SD 6.1; **Puṇṇāma S** (S 22.82/3:182 f), SD 17.11; **Atta Loko S** (S 24.3/3:204 f), SD 97.13. In other suttas—such as **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,15), SD 3.13—we see the form, *so loko so attā*, “the world is the self.” The two forms are prob synonymous since they refer to identity of “self” and “world.”

⁴² On *dhammānudhamma,paṭipatti*, see (**Sotāpatti-y**)**Aṅga S** (S 55.50) SD 70.1(1) & (**Sotāpatti**) **Phala S** (S 55.55,2 (4)) + SD 3.3(4.1) (2(4)).

⁴³ On *ehi,passika*, see SD 15.9 (2.4).

⁴⁴ **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/119), SD 21.13.

⁴⁵ See DEB respectively: dhamma (2.1), dhamma (6) and (dhamma (2.7)).

- (1) birth is suffering,
- (2) decay [old age] is suffering,
- [] [disease is suffering,]⁴⁶
- (3) death is suffering,
- (4) grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair are suffering,⁴⁷
- (5) to be with the unpleasant is suffering,⁴⁸
- (6) to be without the pleasant is suffering,⁴⁹
- (7) not to get what one desires is suffering,
- (8) —in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging⁵⁰ are suffering. [§5]

4.1.2 The 8 sufferings. In the Chinese Mahāyāna texts, this list (including “disease,” but excluding “grief, lamentation, etc”) are called “the 8 sufferings” (*aṣṭa,duḥkhatāḥ*). Buddhaghosa lists **the 8 occasions invoking urgency** (*aṭṭha saṃvega,vatthu*), as follows: birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), sickness (*vyādhi*), death (*marāṇa*), suffering of loss (*apāya,dukkha*), suffering of the past rooted in the round of rebirth (*atīte vaṭṭa,mūlaka dukkha*), suffering of the future rooted in the round of rebirth (*anāgate vaṭṭa,mūlaka dukkha*), and suffering of the present rooted in the search for food (*paccuppanne āhāra,pariyēṭṭhi,mūlaka dukkha*) (Vism 4.63/135).

4.1.3 The 3 kinds of suffering

SD 1.1(4.1)

(Sāriputta) Dukkha Sutta

The (Sāriputta) Discourse on Suffering | S 38.14/4:259
= (Jambu,khādaka) Dukkha Sutta (S 38.14), SD 75.22(14)

Traditional: S 4.4.1.14 = Saṃyutta 4, Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta 4, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 1, Jambukhādaka Vg 14
Theme: The 3 kinds of suffering [unsatisfactoriness]

3 “Suffering, suffering’ (*dukkha*), avuso Sāriputta, so it is said. What, avuso Sāriputta, is suffering?”

3.2 “There are 3 kinds of suffering (*dukkhatā*), avuso, namely:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| (1) bodily suffering [the suffering of pain], | <i>dukkha,dukkhatā</i> |
| (2) the suffering that is the formations, | <i>saṅkhāra,dukkhatā</i> |
| (3) suffering due to change. | <i>vipariṇāma,dukkhatā</i> |

These, avuso, are the 3 kinds of suffering.

4 But, avuso, there is a way for the full understanding of these 3 kinds of suffering.

5 What, avuso, is the way for the full understanding of these 3 kinds of suffering?

5.2 It is this very noble eightfold path, avuso, that is the way for the full understanding of these 3 kinds of suffering, that is to say:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) right view, | <i>sammā diṭṭhi</i> |
| (2) right thought [right intention], | <i>sammā saṅkappa</i> |
| (3) right speech, | <i>sammā vācā</i> |
| (4) right action, | <i>sammā kammantā</i> |
| (5) right livelihood, | <i>sammā ājīva</i> |

⁴⁶ Only in the Vinaya & Saṃyutta versions; not mentioned in Comys.

⁴⁷ Found in most MSS but not in Be and Ce.

⁴⁸ “The unpleasant,” *appiya*, also tr “what one loves not.”

⁴⁹ “The loved,” *piya*, also tr “what one loves.”

⁵⁰ *Pañc’upadāna-k,khandha*, viz, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1) & SD 17. What is briefly mentioned here is elaborated in the 2nd discourse, **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| (6) right effort, | <i>sammā vāyāma</i> |
| (7) right mindfulness, | <i>sammā sati</i> |
| (8) right stillness [concentration]. | <i>sammā samādhi</i> |

This, avuso, is the noble eightfold path that is the way for the full understanding of these 3 kinds of suffering.”

6 “Good is the path, avuso! Good is this way for the full understanding of suffering!⁵¹
And, avuso, it is indeed sufficient for the sake of diligence.”

— evaṃ —

4.1.3.1 The 3 kinds of sufferings listed in **the (Sāriputta) Dukkha Sutta** (S 38.14) can be explained as follows:

- (1) “**physical suffering**,” or, the suffering as pain, that is, affective suffering: it covers both physical pain (*dukkha*) and mental pain (*domanassa*), as well as “sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain [grief], despair,” etc; “pain as suffering” (*dukkha,dukkhatā*, lit “the suffering of pain”); [4.1.3.2]
- (2) “**suffering due to change**,” that is, suffering as change, or potential suffering, that is, pleasurable feelings, since they bring pain when they change, fall beyond expectation, etc (*vipariṇāma,dukkhatā*); [4.1.3.2]
- (3) “**suffering due to formations**,” suffering as conditions, or existential suffering, that is, the inherent inadequacy of conditioned existence, that is, of the 3 worlds (the sense-world, the form-world, and the formless world), including the suffering of arhats; it is suffering on account of rise and fall of phenomena (*saṅkhāra,dukkhatā*).⁵² [4.1.3.3]

4.1.3.2 The 1st kind of suffering—the **physical**—includes both bodily pain and mental displeasure, arising from past karma and present conditions [4.1.3.1(1)]. The 2nd kind of suffering is that due to **change**: these are the pleasant feelings themselves; for, they bring suffering when they end; we cannot always have what we desire; we often get what we do not desire; the pleasure falls below our expectation, and so on. The 3rd is **all conditioned phenomena** of the 3 worlds:⁵³ all existence is oppressed by the rise and fall, the unsatisfactoriness, and the non-self nature of phenomena.

In the above list [§5], **the 3 main categories of suffering** can be summarized as follows:

- (1) birth, decay, disease, death; sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain [grief], despair, etc;
- (2) not to be with the pleasant, to be without the pleasant; and
- (3) the 5 aggregates.

The way to end suffering, “in short” (*saṅkhittena*)—that is, *essentially*—lies in a full understanding of the 5 aggregates.⁵⁴ Or, even more briefly, “whatever is felt, that is included in *dukkha*.”⁵⁵

The 3 kinds of suffering in some detail are explained in **the Visuddhi,magga**.⁵⁶ [6.1.1]

⁵¹ *Bhaddako avuso maggo bhaddikā paṭipadā etasā dukkhataṃ pariññāya.*

⁵² Listed as *dukkha,dukkhatā saṅkhāraa,dukkhatā vipariṇāma,dukkhatā*, foll the rule of “waxing components” [SD 55.7 (1.2.3.5) n]: D 33,1.10(27)/3:216; S 38.14/4:259; S 45.165/5:56; Vism 16.34-5; Nett 12. See also Gethin, 1998: 60-62.

⁵³ The 3 worlds are the sense world (*kāma,loka*), the form world (*rūpa,loka*), and the formless world (*arūpa,loka*). See **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (5.2) & **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (7.2). For details, see **Viññāṇa-ṭṭhi**, SD 23.14.

⁵⁴ See eg **Pañca-k,khandha**, SD 17.

⁵⁵ *Yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmiṃ. Kaḷāra S* (S 12.32/2:53), SD 83.6. See also **Raho,gata S** (S 36.11/4:216,-20-217,3), SD 33.6.

⁵⁶ Vism 16.34 f/499,14-21. The Vism lists the 3 sufferings following the sutta sequence [4.1.3.1] n on “waxing components.” See also SD 55.7 (1.2.3).

4.1.3.3 The sources quoted above [4.1.3.1 n]—the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), the **(Sāriputta) Dukkha Sutta** (S 38.14) and the **Dukkhātā Sutta** (S 45.165)—arrange the 3 kinds of suffering as (1) the most common (physical suffering); (2) the most universal (formations); and (3) the most difficult to notice until it occurs (change). This does not seem “systematic” but this is what we have in the suttas, and we should remember this.⁵⁷

Interestingly, the sequence found in the **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta** (S 56.11)—as 1-3-2 [§5]—is to highlight the key suffering as the 5 aggregates of clinging, as shown in the **(Sacca) Khandha Sutta** (S 56.13), SD 53.26. Hence, it is listed the 3rd and last of the 3 kinds of suffering. This suggests a late attempt at systematizing the sequence of the 3 sufferings to prominently highlight the 5 aggregates, which helps us appreciate their significance as constituting the 1st noble truth.⁵⁸ [6.2.2.2]

4.1.4 The 4 kinds of sufferings

4.1.4.1 We can also speak of a set of 4 kinds of suffering (or 4 sufferings)—birth, decay, disease and death—which are often found listed as the first four in the lists of sufferings in the Sutta [eg §5]. These are the sufferings or painful realities that characterize all worldly life. In other words, they are physical suffering, that is, *dukkha,dukkha*, or the suffering of the body.

4.1.4.2 In other words, these 4 sufferings are actually only the manifestations or symptoms of real suffering. According to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the suffering that we should really deal with is that of the 5 aggregates (*pañc’upādāna-k,khandhā dukkhā*) [§5(8)]. These are the sufferings that are close to the very roots of suffering—craving and ignorance. When we understand the nature of the 5 aggregates, they help us loosen our clinging to the world, and the world’s grip on us. Mental cultivation and insight wisdom finally awaken and liberate us from real suffering.

4.1.4.3 Those liberated in this way are also freed from birth, decay, disease and death. We can call these 4 sufferings “symptomatic suffering(s)” because they are only the signs and symptoms of real suffering. Then, we call “suffering due to change” (*vipariṇāma,dukkha*)—the second of the 3 kinds of suffering [4.1.3]—“emotional suffering” or “imagined suffering,” because these are our own reactions to loss and changes in ourself and in others (including our mood changes), in things and the environment.

4.1.4.4 The arhats—because they are fully awakened to true reality—are free from real suffering. They are free from birth, decay, disease and death, in the sense none of these symptoms affect their minds in any way. Only their bodies (what remains of their 5 aggregates), because they are physical, continue regenerating itself (in this last life), continue to decay, sometimes fall sick, and finally dies (“final” in the literal sense, since there is no more rebirth; hence, no more redeath).

When we understand this, we have a good idea why nirvana—the final state of the Buddha and the arhats—are also “described” (for the convenience of the understanding of the unawakened) as being the opposites of birth, decay, disease and death—nirvana is thus non-birth, non-decay, non-disease and non-death, that is to say [cf 4.2.2.3]:

<i>ajāta</i>	or	<i>abhūta</i>	“birth-free”	being unborn, being free of rebirth, hence, no redeath;
<i>avyādhi</i>	or	<i>ajarā</i>	“decay-free”	not subject to change, bodily or mental, or disease and dis-ease;

⁵⁷ It is helpful to recall that one of the hallmarks of the early Buddhist texts is their often “impromptu” approach and lack of technicality. Any sign of systematization is likely to be a later development, as shown here. On non-technicality in the early Buddhist texts, see SD 51.8 (3.2.1.1).

⁵⁸ On this “odd” arrangement of the 3 sufferings, see SD 53.26 (2.1.2.6).

<i>asoka</i> or <i>abhaya</i>	“fear-free”	without craving, there is no fear, nor danger from the world;
<i>amara</i> or <i>amata</i>	“death-free”	without rebirth, there is no redeath, the cycle is finally broken.

The most popular of these terms for nirvana are *ajāti*, *ajarā*, *abhaya* and *amata*.⁵⁹

Further discussions follow [4.2.2].

4.2 JĀTI AND ITS CONTEXT.

4.2.1 Jāti refers to rebirth itself. In the early after-centuries, Buddhist scholastics and commentators tend to interpret *jāti* as gestation or as the process of being born, that is, the pain which we bear in our mother’s womb up to the moment of being born. Scholars have noted that the Sarvāstivādins have a propensity to interpret *jāti*, *dukkha* as the suffering in a mother’s womb and at birth, despite the fact that the original concept of *jāti* is found in **Vasubandhu**.⁶⁰

It is clear from the early texts, however, that *jāti* (birth) generally refers to *rebirth* itself. This is clearly evident from two key early suttas, **the Mahā, satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22) and **the Sammā, diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), thus:

And what, bhikshus, is birth?

The birth, becoming, descending (into a womb), (arising,)⁶¹ generating, manifesting of the aggregates, obtaining the sense-bases in various beings, in various groups of beings, here and there—this, bhikshus, is called birth.⁶² (D 22,18/2:305), SD 13.2, = (M 9,26/1:50), SD 14.1

4.2.2 Jāti jarā vyādhi maraṇa

4.2.2.1 Toshifumi Gotō, in his 2005 study,⁶³ shows that early Buddhist conception of “the 4 sufferings” —birth, decay [ageing], disease and death—that is, the first four in the list of 8 or 9 sufferings, closely parallels Yājñavalkya’s characterization of the *Ātman* [the abiding “self”].⁶⁴ Comparing the four attributes of the *ātman* in Yājñavalkya doctrine, as found in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad,⁶⁵ namely, *ajāra* (undecaying), *amāra* (undying), *abhāya* (fearless) and *amṛta* (immortal). [4.1.4]

At a glance, these four words appear to be colourful qualifiers without any discernible difference in meaning. In the Buddha’s time (and before that), however, these words “express the essential qualities of the *Ātman* which transcends this very fear (*bhaya*) [the fear of death]” (Gotō 2005:84). Indeed, such notions as the *Ātman* or eternal soul is to overcome the fear of death, and of the after-death state, just as the Almighty God-idea is used to overcome psychological insecurity with God serving as a protective “heavenly father.”⁶⁶ Hence, the *Ātman* makes one “fearless” (or, unfearing, fearfree) (*abhāya*).

⁵⁹ M 26,12 (SD 1.11); S 45.7/5:8, 47.41/5:184; U 8.3/80; It 2.2.6/37 f; Tha 219; Thī 512.

⁶⁰ See eg Muroji 1966:181-196; Gotō 2005:81-85.

⁶¹ *Nibbatti*, so Ke & M 3:249.

⁶² *Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi satta, nikāye jāti sañjāti Okkanta [nibbatti]* abhinibbati, khandhānam pātubhāvo āyatanānam paṭilābho, ayam vuccati jāti.* *Ke & M 3:249.

⁶³ “Yājñavalkya’s characterization of the *ātman* and the four kinds of suffering in early Buddhism.”

⁶⁴ The Upaniṣads describe the *Ātman*, thus: “This immense. unborn self is none other than the one consisting of perception here among the vital functions (*prāṇa*). There, in that space within the heart, he lies—the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all!” (*Sa vā eṣa mahān aja ātmā yo’yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu. Ya eṣo’ntar hṛdaya ākāśas tasmīṃ śete, sarvasya vaśī, sarvasyeśānaḥ, sarvasyādhipatiḥ*, BĀU 4.4.22).

⁶⁵ BĀU 4.4.30-31; also BĀU (Mādhyandina ed) 3.8.8, amongst other negated qualifiers of *etād ... akṣāram*, “this imperishable one.” See Gotō 2005:72-74.

⁶⁶ On Buddhism and the God-idea, see **Te, vija S** (D 13), SD 1.8 (5).

4.2.2.2 According to the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, when a person attains Brahman, he becomes *amṛta*. Although here *amṛta* means “immortal,” it does not mean that someone alive who does not die on earth (for which the word *amāra*, “undying” is used), but that there is no more death at all. This is because *punar-mṛtyú* (repeated death in a heavenly world resulting in rebirth on earth, or “redeath”) is transcended. In this case, according to Upaniṣads, Ātman is absorbed into Bráhman.⁶⁷ The term *amāra* (“undying”), however, is not attested anywhere in Vedic literature, except in later literature.⁶⁸

In philosophical terms, these two terms—*amata* (“immortal, death-free”) and *amara* (“undying”)—probably reflect the way that Vedic thinkers and the early believers understood of the Buddha’s realization of *nirvana*. Evidently, the Buddha consciously uses these terms as qualifiers of nirvana so that the brahmins and believers of the Vedic system—his main intended audience—could understand his teachings through conceptual familiarity. Other similar expressions include the teaching being referred to as “the door of immortality” (*amata,dvāra*).⁶⁹

4.2.2.3 Gotō concludes his 2005 essay by showing the correspondence between the Vedic and the Buddhist terms, thus:⁷⁰

<u>Upaniṣad qualifiers for Ātman</u>		<u>Buddhist terms for suffering</u>	
<i>ajāra</i>	“undecaying”	<i>jāti</i>	birth, rebirth
<i>amāra</i>	“undying”	<i>jarā</i>	ageing, decay
<i>abhāya</i>	“fearless”	<i>vyādhi</i>	disease
<i>amṛta</i>	“immortal”	<i>maraṇa</i>	death

Here, we see how the Upanisadic adjective *ajāra* (undecaying) is related to the Pali noun *jarā* (decay), by referring to opposite qualities. Similarly, the Upanisadic *amāra* (undying) (used almost exclusively as an epithet of Ātman) is related to the Pali *marañā* (death) in reflecting contrary qualities. The Upanisadic *amṛta* (immortal) points to the opposite of the Pali *jāti* (birth, rebirth). The Upanisadic *abhāya* (fearless), however, is replaced by the Pali *vyādhi* (disease), “a more concrete notion for our usual life” (Gotō 2005: 84). **Gotō** concludes:

The conception of life and world in early Buddhism have thus inherited the reflections on birth and death in the old Upaniṣads, and further explicated them. The predominance of the pessimistic view of life in early Buddhism⁷¹ can be explained from this historical background; it is rooted in the negative discussions about re-dying (*punar-mṛtyú*) in the heavenly world since the Brāhmaṇa period.

The teaching of Gotama Buddha, which aims to deliver the ordinary people from their concrete suffering, tends to observe phenomena of human life more realistically than his forerunners and endeavors to elucidate the causality of existence in Samsāra without admitting the

⁶⁷ BĀU (Mādhyandina ed) 4.4.8 f (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 14.7.2.8 f), BAU (Kāṇva ed) 4.4.6 f. Gotō 2005:75 f, 80.

⁶⁸ Eg Manu,smṛti 2.148 = Viṣṇu,smṛti 30.46 (*sā* [scil *jāti*] *ajar’amarā*); in the meaning of “god” (Baudhāyana-Dharma,sūtra 4.8.7).

⁶⁹ Mv 1.5.7 (V 1:5 f) = D 2:39 = M 1:168 f = S 1:137 f; It 80; Vv 1035/5.14.27. See Sakamoto-Gotō, JIBS 41,1 1992: 471 n2. See also CPD: *amata-dvāra* & *amata-nibbāna*. On *amata,dvāra*, see **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34,12/1:227,11*), which Comy glosses as the “noble path’ (*ariya,magga*)..

⁷⁰ This set of the four words occurs also in Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3:8,8 (Mādhyandina ed, lacking in Kāṇva ed) among other negated qualifiers of *etād ... akṣāram*, “this imperishable one.”

⁷¹ By “pessimistic” here, Gotō is evidently referring to the recurring early Buddhist statements on the universality of suffering, etc, not that the Buddha teaches a negative life-view without happiness or salvation: see Gotō 2005 §8.

existence of “the eternal subject of existence,” ie Ātman, thus resulting in the doctrine of Prā-tītyasamupāda. (Gotō 2005:85)

4.2.2.4 By the time of the Buddha, mystical speculations and religious philosophy had developed for over a millennia, and these traditions were widespread, well known and well respected. Most of the great sages—such as those from whom arose the Upaniṣads—were recluses living apart from society, but greatly influenced the wise, wealthy and powerful. With the rise of urbanism, such teachings were taken up by more worldly specialists—especially the brahmins—who used such ideas to introduce their own teachings and rituals for the purpose of controlling the masses, especially the wealthy and powerful, and to attract funds and services of society. Many knew such undercurrents, but few could do anything about them. The Buddha was surely the foremost of those who clearly and consistently spoke against these false ideas and wrong ways.

To reach out to the masses, especially the wiser and the readier, he employs languages and figures that are familiar to his audience, both the brahmins and believers in the Vedic system, and those against the brahmins and their ways. In doing so, he easily and effectively reaches out to them with his teachings.⁷² In many ways, the Buddha has to be innovative to counter and correct the highly influential and falsely profound mystical talk of imaginative visions which impress the ignorant and gullible masses of his days and even today.

4.2.2.5 One of the Buddha’s favourite skillful means is to demystify the religious garble of the brahminical teachings into the plain language of the people,⁷³ and demythologize the beguiling rituals into beneficial practices for personal cultivation and self-reliance.⁷⁴ Above all, the Buddha has to expose the ideologies of karma and dharma as brahminical self-aggrandisement and class exploitation.⁷⁵

Karma, declares the Buddha, is not right ritual action, but personal accountability in doing good and avoiding bad.⁷⁶ Dharma is not social hierarchy to being ritual and mental slaves to the brahmins and their false faith,⁷⁷ but reciprocal social responsibility,⁷⁸ and above all, working for a good society that allows its members to become true individuals capable of self-awakening to the highest happiness here and now.⁷⁹

4.3 SAMUDAYA AND NIRODHA. The terms *samudaya* [§§6, 10] and *nirodha* [§§7, 11] are commonly translated respectively as “origin” and “ending, cessation.” However, from the teachings of this Sutta, which underlies the Buddha’s Teaching as a whole, they are better rendered as “arising” and “non-arising.” **Payutto** makes an important note:

Generally speaking, the word ‘cease’ [or ‘end’] means to do away with something which has already arisen, or the stopping of something which has already begun. However, *nirodha* in the teaching of Dependent Origination (as also in *dukkhanirodha*, the third of the noble truths) means **non-arising**, or non-existence, of something because the cause of its arising is done away with. For example, the phrase ‘when *avijjā* is *nirodha*, *saṅkhārā* are also *nirodha*,’ which is usually taken to mean, “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional impulse ceases,” in fact means that ‘when there

⁷² See “Did the Buddha ‘borrow’ ideas from the Upaniṣads?” SD 6.15 (5); **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3), SD 21.3 (3).

⁷³ Eg the ignoble and the noble quests, **Ariya Pariyesanā** (M 26,5-13), SD 1.11.

⁷⁴ On the true “brahmin” as the arhat, see Sn 620-647 in **Vāsetṭha S** (M 98 = Sn 3.9), SD 37.1.

⁷⁵ **Aggañña S** (D 27), SD 2.19; **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD1.8.

⁷⁶ **Vāsetṭha S** (M 98 = Sn 3.9), esp Sn 612-619 + SD 37.1 (1.3).

⁷⁷ **Assalāyana S** (M 93), SD 40a.2.

⁷⁸ **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31), SD 4.1.

⁷⁹ **Esukārī S** (M 96), SD 37.9.

is no ignorance, or no arising of ignorance, or when there is no longer any problem with ignorance, there is no volitional impulses, volitional impulses do not arise, or there is no longer any problem from volitional impulses.’ It does not mean that ignorance already arisen must be done away with before the volitional impulses which have already arisen will also be done away.

Where *nirodha* should be rendered as **cessation** is when it is used in reference to the natural way of things, or the nature of compounded things. In this sense it is a synonym for the words *bhaṅga* (breaking up), *anicca* (transient), *khaya* (cessation) or *vaya* (decay). For example, in the Pali it is given: *imaṃ kho bhikkhave tisso vedanā aniccā saṅkhatā paṭiccasamuppannā khaya-dhammā vayadhammā virāgadhammā nirodhadhammā*—“Bhikshus, these three kinds of feelings are naturally impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, transient, subject to decay, dissolution, fading and cessation” [S 4:214]. (All factors occurring in the Dependent Origination cycle have the same nature.) In this instance, the meaning is “all conditioned things (*saṅkhāra*), having arisen, must inevitably decay and fade according to supporting factors.” There is no need [here] to try to stop them, they cease of themselves.

As for *nirodha* in the third noble truth (or the Dependent Origination cycle in cessation mode), although it also describes a natural process, its emphasis is on practical considerations. It is translated in two ways in the Visuddhimagga [Vism 16.18/495]. One way traces the etymology to *ni* (without) + *rodha* (prison, confine[s], obstacle, wall, impediment), thus rendering the meaning as “without impediment,” “free from confinement.” This is explained as “free of impediments, that is, the confinement of *saṃsāra*.” Another definition traces the origin to *anuppāda*, meaning “**not arising**,” [and goes on to say “*nirodha* here does not mean *bhaṅga*, breaking up and dissolution.”]⁸⁰

Therefore, translating *nirodha* as “cessation,” although not entirely wrong, is nevertheless not entirely accurate. On the other hand, there is no other word which comes so close to the essential meaning as “cessation.” However, we should understand what is meant by the term.

(Payutto 1994:106-108; slightly edited with emphases added)⁸¹

4.4 TRANSLATING ARIYA,SACCA

4.4.1 Ariya. In Brahmanism, the term *ariya* (Skt *ārya*) refers to the “noble” people who migrated into India, while in Buddhism it is used in a spiritual sense. The Buddha wisely uses this well-known word, but gives it a new meaning, reflecting his own vision, and to encourage others to turn away from a racially delimiting for a spiritually liberating life.

4.4.2 “Why noble?” In the 1st discourse, each of the 4 truths is called an *ariya,sacca*, a “noble-truth.” Although the popular translation “noble truth” is a possible meaning, British philologist **K R Norman** thinks that it is “one of the least important, and ... one of the least likely.”⁸² The commentators interpret it as: “truth of the noble one or noble ones” or “truth for a noble one,” that is, “truth that will make one a noble,” or, sometimes, “noble truth,”⁸³ or the “Noble Ones’ Truths.”⁸⁴ Here, the “noble ones” are those who are partially or fully awakened: streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats, along with the Buddha.

⁸⁰ This bracketed reading is untraceable in the Visuddhi,magga.

⁸¹ For a paraphrase of this and its Dharma practice, see SD 57.16 (2.1.1).

⁸² Norman 1990:13; also 1982, 1997:16.

⁸³ Eg DA 2:542; AA 2:145, 281; SnA 1:278, 300; UA 283; ItA 1:62, 85, 118; ThaA 1:205, 3:49; VvA 215; VbhA 84 f, 122.

⁸⁴ Norman 1990:12.

Strictly speaking, it is problematic to speak of a truth as being “noble,” as such a quality properly refers to living beings. It is more meaningful, for example, to speak of the “noble ones,” who are so called precisely because they have gained insight into these truths. While Norman prefers the translation, “truth of the noble one (the Buddha),” he accepts that the term may be deliberately polysemous. If we speak of “truth for a noble,” by extension, we can also speak of “ennobling truth.”⁸⁵

4.4.3 “Realities.” Rupert Gethin, another British scholar, comments, “The word *satya* (Pali *sacca*) can certainly mean truth, but it might equally be rendered as ‘real’ or ‘actual thing’,” hence, we have “4 ‘true things,’ or ‘realities’” (Gethin 1998:60). This explanation is especially helpful because the 1st discourse speaks of the truths as follows: the first is “to be understood”; the second is “to be abandoned”; the third is “to be realized”; and the fourth is “to be cultivated.”

Note that the second truth is a *truth* or *reality* to abandon: it is not a truth to be abandoned. What is to be abandoned here is *craving*, as a result of which we are *ennobled*; hence, an “ennobling truth.” On the other hand, we must be careful not to describe craving itself as “ennobling.” However, they are certainly truths that the noble saints have realized, or having realized (according to their functions), we become noble saints. Hence, they are “the realities *for the noble one(s)*.”

4.4.4 “Action plan.” Peter Harvey notes, “It is also apparent that these Ennobling Realities are not something that Buddhists should respond to with ‘belief.’ To ‘believe’ them is to mishandle them, rather than to treat them appropriately by respectively understanding, abandoning, realizing and developing them.” (2007: 320). The 4 noble truths are, in short, an “action plan” for a practising Buddhist.

4.4.5 Pali polysemy and modern English idiom

4.4.5.1 Brian Levman, in his PhD thesis, makes this note of **Pali polysemy**:

... the phonological fluidity of the lingua franca is mirrored in the richness of its semantic fabric. One word could and did have several meanings Nevertheless, to what extent the polysemy can be used to elucidate the meaning of the early Buddhist texts is problematical. We have seen that the Buddha and his disciples were not adverse to this phenomenon of semantic polysemy. Unlike the Vedic tradition, where words were fixed and absolute sonic effusions of the absolute, language in the early Buddhist suttas mirrors the interdependent nature of life; there was nothing absolute about the meaning and one used words in full awareness of their conventional applicability and usefulness in describing intergrading phenomena—like milk, cream, curds, or the various kinds of self ... without being misled by their supposed reality. (2014:465)

4.4.5.2 Modern English tends to be narrow and exacting when defining technical usages of terms, or even in the usage of words in reference to certain ideas. Amongst the users of ancient Indian languages—the teachers and compilers of the early Buddhist texts, to be more specific—however, it is not uncommon for them to be aware of more than one meaning to a word. Those who use such words are aware of their **polysemy**, and are conscious of all the meanings simultaneously as they use it.⁸⁶

Often, the more “exact” we try to be in our translation of a word from a certain context, the more likely we are to render it so narrowly that it fails to reflect the meaning or usage in other contexts. The translation of *ariya, saccāni* as “noble truths” is one such term. When we use this translation, we are ex-

⁸⁵ Further see (Khandha) **Dukkha S** (S 22.104/3:158 f), SD 42.20 (2).

⁸⁶ On polysemy in Pali, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2). See also **Dh 97** @SD 10.6 (1.2.1) & the “Open door” verse, SD 12.2 (3).

cluding all their other senses. In fact, this translation—while not wrong in itself—is probably the least important of all the possible meanings.⁸⁷

4.4.5.3 It helps, then, for us to be aware of the polysemy of Pali terms and teachings,⁸⁸ as a rule—and to simultaneously apply them as we use them in their contexts. This, of course, means that we should be well aware of their usages and the nature of the teachings that they convey. This does not mean that all the senses apply all the time. The skill of a good sutta commentator or Dharma teacher is his ability to tease the proper or intended sense of the term or passage. Indeed, when we use an English translation—especially when it seems to be an exacting one—we need to be able to see in between the words despite themselves.

The translation “**noble truth**” is too well known and familiar to go away. Indeed, its simplicity is immediately appealing to the public or beginner than, say, “ennobling truths,” or even “the noble ones’ truths.” Even technically, it is still acceptable, as it is a literal translation of *ariya,sacca* as “noble-truth.” In normal English, it is acceptable to dispense with the hyphen (or it could stay, if we are sticklers to technicality). We should nevertheless be fully aware of the helpful explanations and definitions scholars have provided us with above. We simply need to define our terms and choose the simplest, sharpest razor there is to cut through ignorance and suffering.⁸⁹

5 The nature of the truths

5.1 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF REALITY

5.1.1 The details of the Buddha’s spiritual experience in terms of the 4 noble truths are recounted in such suttas as **the Bhaya Bherava Sutta** (M 4)⁹⁰ and **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36).⁹¹ These truths are first expounded to the world at Benares (**Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta**, M 141)⁹² and taught throughout his 45-year ministry as “the teaching special to the Buddhas” (M 56).⁹³ Both **the Tathā Sutta 1** (S 56.20) and **the Tathā Sutta 2** (S 56.27) declare that “the 4 noble truths are true, not false, not otherwise,”⁹⁴ but the latter adds: “therefore, they are called ‘noble truths’.”⁹⁵

5.1.2 The noble truths are concisely presented in such texts as **the Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9),⁹⁶ and in detail in **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141). Sāriputta’s unique presentation is recorded in **the Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta** (M 28),⁹⁷ where it is stated that “just as the footprint of any living being that walks

⁸⁷ See Norman 1990:12 f. c

⁸⁸ See SD 10.16 (1.3.1).

⁸⁹ **Occam’s razor** or **Ockham’s razor** (Lat *lex parsimoniae*) is the law of parsimony, economy or succinctness. It is a principle urging us to select from among competing hypotheses and ideas that which makes the fewest assumptions and thereby offers the simplest explanation of the effect. On how we define words or give them meaning, see *Saññā*, SD 17.4 (2.3).

⁹⁰ M 4,31/1:23 (SD 44.3).

⁹¹ M 36,42/1:249 (SD 1.11).

⁹² M 141,2/3:248 (SD 11.11).

⁹³ M 56,18/1:380 (SD 53.33.b).

⁹⁴ *Imāni kho bhikkhave cattāri ariya,saccāni tathāni avitathāni anaññathāni*, S 56.20/5:430 f (SD 53.33a) = S 56.27/-5:435 (SD 53.33b).

⁹⁵ **Tathā S 1**: *Tasmā ariya,saccānī ti vuccanti* (S 56.27/5:435), SD 53.33a.

⁹⁶ M 9,14-18/1:48 f (SD 11.14).

⁹⁷ M 28/1:184-191 (SD 6.16).

can be placed within an elephant’s footprint, and so the elephant’s footprint is declared to be the foremost of them, even so, all wholesome states can be included in the 4 noble truths” (M 28).

5.1.3 The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta fully and clearly explains the functions of each of the 4 noble truths, thus:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------|
| (1) The 1 st noble truth, | that is, suffering | is to be <i>understood</i> . | [§9] |
| (2) The 2 nd noble truth, | that is, the arising of suffering | is to be <i>abandoned</i> . | [§10] |
| (3) The 3 rd noble truth, | that is, the ending of suffering (nirvana) | is to be <i>realized</i> . | [§11] |
| (4) The 4 th noble truth, | that is, the way to the ending of suffering | is to be <i>cultivated</i> . | [§12; 6.2.2.1] |

5.1.4 The Sutta is also unique in presenting **the 3 phases** (*ti,parivaṭṭa*) of each of the truths, namely [6.2]:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| (1) the knowledge (ie, understanding) of <u>the truth</u> , | <i>sacca,ñāṇa</i> |
| (2) the knowledge of <u>the task</u> to be done regarding each truth, and | <i>kicca,ñāṇa</i> |
| (3) the knowledge of the <u>accomplishment</u> of these tasks. | <i>kata,ñāṇa</i> [5.1.5] |

5.1.5 The commentarial version of these phases is called “**the 3 good truths**” (*saddhamma*):

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| (1) the true Dharma as <u>theory</u> | <i>pariyatti.saddhamma</i> | (textual aspect), |
| (2) the true Dharma as <u>practice</u> | <i>paṭipatti.saddhamma</i> | (moral virtue and meditation), and |
| (3) the true Dharma as <u>realization</u> | <i>paṭivedha.saddhamma</i> | (sainthood and freedom). ⁹⁸ [6.2] |

When these 3 phases are applied to each of the 4 truths, they total as the 12 modes or aspects (*dvādas’-ākāra*). [6.2]

5.2 TRUTH AND REALITY

5.2.1 The truth “that is”

5.2.1.1 “**Truth**” (*sacca*) here refers to a formulation of the reality (*tathā*) that exists in and around us. It is not merely a formulation, but our apprehension of the nature of reality. At first, we apprehend it theoretically; then, through practice, and finally, realizing the true nature of reality for ourselves.

5.2.1.2 In doctrinal terms, **the 4 noble truths** are a formulation of true reality—along with the attending wisdom and freedom—that the Buddha realizes on his awakening. I have translated *ariya,sacca* as “**the noble truth that is ...**” rather than the more familiar “the noble truth of ...” because they are not merely theoretical statements, such as “the theory of relativity” (which refers to an impersonal observation). But the noble truths are *healing truths*. Above all, the fourth noble truth is that of the way out of suffering, that is, the practice that leads to spiritual freedom.

5.2.1.3 The sense of “**that is**” here should be properly understood: it is not a disjunctive but a copula (equalizer). When we say “the noble truth that is suffering (*dukkha*),” it means that “noble truth = suffering,” that is to say: the existence and reality of suffering *when understood* constitutes a knowing that en-

⁹⁸ Here, these 3 good truths are applied to the progress of the saints of the path. Worldlings (the unawakened) who apply these 3 good truths, still need to attain the path, ie, attain at least streamwinning. See VA 225; AA 5.33; cf Nm 143 for the first two. For a variant, where the last 2 functions are inverted, see **Mahā Saḷ’āyatanika S** (M 149, 10.6/3:289) + SD 41.9 (2.4) & **Abhiññā S** A 4.251/2:246 f [A:B 5:254], SD 85.3.

nobles us to that extent. It makes us see it for what it really is: we have experienced suffering, and thus understood it. It is just like saying, “the noble truth, that is, suffering,” but it should be understood in this way. The same principle applies to the three noble truths with their respective functions.

5.2.2 Scholarly notes

5.2.2.1 This approach is supported by the difficulties resulting from taking these 4 realities as “truths of,” as made clear in this observation by **Analayo**:

A closer examination of the Pāli version of this first discourse brings to light a curiosity, as the discourse presents the second noble truth of the origin of *dukkha* as something that needs to be abandoned.⁹⁹ Yet what needs to be abandoned is the origin of *dukkha*, not the noble truth itself. Hence in this case it would seem possible that not only the qualification “noble,” but the whole expression “noble truth” may not have been part of the earliest version of this statement.

(Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*, draft, 2006, ad M 3:348)¹⁰⁰

5.2.2.2 For the phrase, *taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkha, samudayaṃ ariya, saccaṃ pahātabbaṃ*,¹⁰¹ Bodhi renders it as “this noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned” (S:B 1845). **Woodward** has earlier on noted, “but we must omit *ariya-saccaṃ*, otherwise the text would mean ‘the Ariyan truth about the arising of Ill is to be put away’” (S:W 5:358 n1). **Norman** adds that

what the Buddha said was that pain should be known, its origin given up, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation practised. Woodward therefore did not go far enough. He should have suggested the removal of the word *ariya-saccaṃ* from all four items in the ‘gerundival’ set.”
(Norman 1982:385)

5.2.3 The truths as experience

Early Buddhism is a path to spiritual healing, awakening and freedom. In other words, it is a practical system where we seek to directly discover true reality, to which the Buddha himself has awakened. As reality can only be a personal experience, its expression or words are called a “truth.” The fourfold statement of the Buddha’s direct experience of reality is called *the 4 noble truths*, which is at best a theoretic statement pointing to the “realities” of suffering, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending.

Hence, the “truths” are simply signboards: they are the fourfold reality that we must work with. No matter how well defined the terminology may be, it is still not the experience. The name is not the thing named. For one who has experienced true reality, there is no need of words for it.

5.3 THE TRUTHS AND MEDICAL HEALTH

5.3.1 We all easily notice that the noble truths have a familiar sequence, reflecting that of medical formula or regime. In the Dhammacakkavattana Sutta (S 56.11), we have the familiar “teaching” sequence of **suffering → arising → ending → path**. However, there is an ancient version of the formula which follows the “practice” sequence, found in **the Mahā Saḷāyatanika Sutta** (M 148) and other suttas, laid out thus: **suffering → arising → path → ending**. [6.2.2.2]

⁹⁹ *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkha, samudayaṃ ariya, saccaṃ pahātabbaṃ* (S 56.11/5:422,12).

¹⁰⁰ See also his important fn there.

¹⁰¹ S 56.11/5:422,12.

In both formulas, especially the older “practical” sequence of **the Mahā Saḷāyatanika Sutta** (M 149), we see a clear correlation with the sequence of medical treatment, thus:¹⁰²

<u>The noble truths</u>			<u>Medical treatment regime</u>
(1) suffering	(<i>dukkha</i>)	3 kinds [6.1.3]	disease
(2) arising	(<i>samudaya</i>)	craving	diagnosis
(3) path	(<i>magga</i>)	the eightfold path	prescription and treatment
(4) ending	(<i>nirodha</i>)	nirvana	cure and good health

5.3.2 There is no strong evidence that such a medical regime existed in ancient India, especially before the Buddha’s time. Surely such a formula would be well known and recorded in some ancient tradition or text. As such, it is unlikely that the Buddha had borrowed this idea from outside. It is more likely that he has come up with this formula on his own.

That the Buddha would have easily come up with this practical sequence (or the theoretical one) is because he is himself familiar with medicine and medical health. The kshatriya or warrior clan, used to martial arts and battling, surely knew of health and healing methods, to treat their bodily wounds and mishaps.

Moreover, in both the Vinaya (eg, **the Bhesajja Khandha**) and¹⁰³ the suttas (eg, **the Sīvaka Sutta**, S 36.-21),¹⁰⁴ we have accounts that evince a great familiarity with traditional medicine and medical health.¹⁰⁵

Important early Buddhist teachings, such as those of the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind) are the basis for traditional Indian and Asian medicine.¹⁰⁶ The early suttas also show a great familiarity with medical knowledge,¹⁰⁷ the human anatomy, especially the internal components of the human body.¹⁰⁸ And we also have accounts of the works of the greatest of the ancient Indian doctors, **Jīvaka**.¹⁰⁹

5.3.3 This is not surprising at all, since even extant Ayurvedic treatises stem from a later period, after the Buddha.¹¹⁰ Indeed, despite brahminical and non-Buddhist attempts to credit otherwise, modern scholars have shown that traditional Indian medicine is clearly rooted in Buddhist monastic medicine.¹¹¹

6 Mastery of the 4 noble truths

6.1 THE 3 TYPES OF SUFFERING

¹⁰² M 149,20+refrain + SD 41.9 (2.4); see SD 10.16 (1.4.3.3).

¹⁰³ Mv 6 = V 1:199-252.

¹⁰⁴ S 36.21 + SD 5.6 (1).

¹⁰⁵ On the Buddha as a “doctor,” see Sn 560; also SD 43.7 (2.2); also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,5.2), SD 5.8. On early Buddhism and Indian medicine, see SD 1.1 (5.3).

¹⁰⁶ Teachings on the 4 elements are very common, eg **Maha Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28,6-27) + SD 6.16 (3) & **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,13-18), SD 4.17. See also SD 3.11 (4).

¹⁰⁷ See SD 36.9 (5).

¹⁰⁸ See eg **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,6), SD 19.16.

¹⁰⁹ See eg **(Majjhima) Jīvaka S** (M 55) + SD 43.4 (2).

¹¹⁰ For a detailed discussion, see Wezler 1984; cf Oldenberg 1881:374 n2; Har Dayal 1932:159; Filliozat 1934:301.

¹¹¹ See Zysk 1982, 1998, 2011.

6.1.1 The (Sāriputta) Dukkha Sutta (S 38.14) categorizes suffering into 3 kinds:

- (1) affective suffering (due to physical and mental pain) (*dukkha, dukkhatā*, literally, “the suffering of suffering”),
- (2) temporal suffering or “suffering in change” (that is, due to the ending of pleasant feeling”) (*vipariṇāma, dukkhatā*), and
- (3) existential suffering or “suffering due to formations” or “suffering of conditionality,” in the inherent inadequacy in conditioned existence (*saṅkhāra, dukkhatā*).

(S 38.14/4:259; also S 45.165/5:56; D 3:216)

Here, (1) “**Affective suffering**” is bodily painful feeling and mental painful feeling, or more simply, “ordinary suffering,” something we feel negatively affecting our body or our mind.¹¹² **The (Sāriputta) Dukkha Sutta** (S 38.14) calls this “the pain of pain” or “the suffering as pain” (*dukkha, dukkha*), that is, a natural feeling arising on account of the impermanent nature of the body and mind manifested by way of both “*nature*” (past karma) and “*nurture*” (present conditions).

In psychodynamic¹¹³ terms, this is related to “neurotic conflict between impulse and prohibition with a stable self-structure and whole-object relations,¹¹⁴ as well as to ‘ordinary human unhappiness,’ which Freud once said was the exchange for resolution of neurotic suffering” (Engler, 1984:44). It would be interesting to be able to make some comparative study of these two approaches to pain and suffering.

(2) “**Temporal suffering**” is bodily pleasant feeling and mental pleasant feeling, either of which brings suffering when any of them end.¹¹⁵ It thus includes mental or psychological suffering. Psychodynamically, this corresponds to “the borderline condition and the functional psychoses, when disturbance in the sense of self-continuity, fluctuating drives and affects, contradictory and dissociated ego states, lack of a stable self-structure, and lack of constant relations with the object world are the core problem” (ib).

At this stage of personality development, prior to individuation¹¹⁶ and stability in object relation, *change* is the deepest and most pervasive threat to the fragile self. Every experience of separation or loss we experience threatens the reality and integrity of our notion of self, a notion that still depends on perceiving some immediate presence and benefit of external objects.

(3) “**Existential suffering**” is related to all conditioned phenomena of the 3 worlds¹¹⁷ because they are oppressed by the rise and fall of all phenomena. According to Buddhaghosa, this (*saṅkhāra, dukkha*) refers to “the equanimous feeling and the remaining formations of the 3 planes.”¹¹⁸

To the western or westernized minds, this is an entirely new category of psychopathology. At this level, “object-seeking as such is experienced as pathogenic, contradictory as that may sound in terms of

¹¹² Vism 16.34 f/499.

¹¹³ Psychodynamic is “a free label for (a) all those psychological systems and theories that emphasize processes of change and development and/or (b) those systems and theories that make motivation and drive central concepts” (A S Reber, *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985; Reber et al, 4th ed, 2008). Also: “Of or relating to the psychoanalytic approach in which unconscious motives are a focus” (Matsumoto, *Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*, 2009)

¹¹⁴ In simple terms, object relation refers to how we relate to others.

¹¹⁵ **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.24/1:393), SD 40a.9.

¹¹⁶ On a simple level, individuation refers to a healthy emotional evolution into a mature person, and on a higher level, to the attainment of streamwinning: see SD 8.7 (4).

¹¹⁷ **The 3 worlds** are the sense world, form world and formless world: **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (5.2).

¹¹⁸ *Upekkha, vedanā c’eva avasēsā ca te, bhūmakā saṅkhārā udaya-b, baya, paripīḷitattā saṅkhāra, dukkham* (Vism 16.35/499).

normal developmental theory” (Engler, 1984:44). The very attempt to connect a self and objects that shows some constancy and continuity¹¹⁹ becomes a therapeutic problem. In other words, if we try to see or seek any succour or stability in the 5 aggregates,¹²⁰ we would simply be disappointed, to say the least.¹²¹

6.1.2 The key goals of object relations development are identity and object constancy, that is, a healthy sense of self and wholesome relationship with externals (people and things). Under “normal” circumstances, we are likely to be fixated to an idea (about ourselves or others) and personal development is basically stagnant.

Normalcy, in other words, is a state of arrested development: “the worldling is as if mad” (*ummattako viya hi puthujjano*, MA 1:25). “Moreover,” adds Engler, “it can be viewed as a pathological condition insofar as it is based on faulty reality testing, inadequate neutralization of the drives, lack of impulse control, and incomplete integration of the self and the object world.”¹²²

In simpler terms, we are mentally undeveloped, even unhealthy, if we fail to relate wholesomely to the external world, or we fail to understand and appreciate our strengths and limitations in relating to others and to things, or we lack adequate self-control, or we fail to feel a sense of harmony between ourselves and our environment.

6.1.3 The Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11) defines the first noble truth as follows:

Now this, bhikkhus, is **the noble truth that is suffering**:

birth is suffering,
 decay is suffering,
 [disease is suffering,]
 death is suffering;
 grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair are suffering;
 to be with the unpleasant is suffering;
 to be without the pleasant¹²³ is suffering;
 not to get what one desires is suffering,
 —in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging are suffering. [§5]

In this list, the 3 categories of suffering are as follows:

- (1) affective suffering: birth, decay, disease, death, grief etc;
- (2) temporal suffering: not to be with the pleasant, to be without the pleasant;
- (3) existential suffering: the 5 aggregates.

These 3 kinds of suffering are elaborated in **the Visuddhimagga** (Vism 16.34 f/499).¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Joseph D Lichtenberg, “The development of the sense of self,” *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association* 23,3 1975:453-484.

¹²⁰ See SD 17.

¹²¹ For an ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy) view of this, see SD 43.1 (4.2).

¹²² Jack Engler 1984:44; also Muzika 1990. For an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) perspective, see **Buddhism as a method of self-healing**, SD 43.1 (3).

¹²³ “The loved,” *piya*, also tr “what one loves.”

¹²⁴ Further see n at §5 below. On the relationship between suffering and feeling (*vedanā*), see SD 17.3.

6.2 THE 3 PHASES, 4 MODES AND 12 ASPECTS**6.2.1 The 3 good truths**

6.2.1.1 The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta makes a unique declaration: that the Buddha's mastery of the 4 noble truths comprises 3 phases (*ti, parivaṭṭa*) and 12 modes or aspects (*dvādas'ākāra*) [§§9-12].

The 3 phases (*ti, parivaṭṭa*) are:

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

6.2.1.2 The 4 modes (*ākāra*) refers to our tasks regarding each of the 4 truths, thus:

- (1) the truth that is suffering (*dukkha*) **should be understood** (*pariññeyya*): the reality;
- (2) the truth that is the arising (*samudaya*) of suffering **should be abandoned** (*pahātabba*): the truth;¹²⁵
- (3) the truth that is the ending (*nirodha*) of suffering **should be realized** (*sacchikātabba*): the solution;
- (4) the truth that is the path (*magga*) to the ending of suffering **should be cultivated** (*bhāvetabba*): the practice.

6.2.1.3 Apparently, this teaching of the 4 modes was a late canonical formulation, and its fullest analysis is first recorded in **the Vibhaṅga**, chapter 18, on “the analysis of the heart of the teaching” (*dhamma-hadaya vibhaṅga*), section 7.¹²⁶ True to Abhidhamma spirit, all the possible analytical aspects are considered, thus:

The truth that is the arising should be directly known, fully understood. It is to be abandoned. It is neither to be cultivated nor to be realized.

The truth that is the path should be directly known, fully understood. It is neither to be abandoned. It is to be cultivated, not to be realized.

The truth that is the ending should be directly known, fully understood. It is neither to be abandoned nor cultivated. It is to be realized.

The truth that is suffering should be directly known, fully understood. Sometimes it should be abandoned. It is neither to be cultivated nor realized. Sometimes it is not to be abandoned.

Samudaya, saccaṃ abhiññeyyaṃ pariññeyyaṃ pahātabbaṃ, na bhāvetabbaṃ na sacchikātabbaṃ

Magga, saccaṃ abhiññeyyaṃ pariññeyyaṃ, na pahātabbaṃ bhāvetabbaṃ, na sacchikātabbaṃ.

Nirodha, saccaṃ abhiññeyyaṃ pariññeyyaṃ, na pahātabbaṃ na bhāvetabbaṃ sacchikātabbaṃ.

Dukkha, saccaṃ abhiññeyyaṃ pariññeyyaṃ, siyā pahātabbaṃ, na bhāvetabbaṃ na sacchikātabbaṃ, siyā na pahātabbaṃ.
(Vbh 416,37-427,4)

Interestingly, the Abhidhamma arranges the 4 truths here according to the practical sequence keeping to what is to be abandoned, what is to be cultivated. This follows the natural sequence of Section 7 of the Chapter dealing with “**what is to be directly known**” (*ahiññeyya*) and so on, and not with the 4 truths, which are fully treated in Chapter 4 of the Vibhaṅga.

6.2.1.4 These 3 phases of each of the 4 truths total up as their 12 aspects (*dvādas'ākāra*). The Commentarial version of these 3 phases are called **the 3 “good truths”** (*saddhamma*) [5.1.5], namely,

¹²⁵ This is the truth that are the conditions (“cause”) of suffering.

¹²⁶ Vbh 426 f.

<i>sacca,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>theory</u> (textual learning),	<i>pariyatti saddhamma</i>
<i>kicca,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>practice</u> (moral virtue and concentration),	<i>paṭipatti saddhamma</i>
<i>kata,ñāṇa</i> :	the true teaching as <u>realization</u> (wisdom).	<i>paṭivedha saddhamma</i>

(VA 225; AA 5.33; cf Nm 143 where only the first two are listed)

6.2.2 A comparative study

6.2.2.1 Both the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11) and its Chinese parallel in the Saṃyukta Āgama (SĀ 379) list the 3 phases and 12 aspects of the 4 noble truths. While agreeing in content, they however differ in sequence. This comparative table shows their relationship [Table 6.2.2].¹²⁷

6.2.2.2 The Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11) sequence of the 4 truths presents each of them in the format of *theory, practice and realization*. This is likely to be the kind of “truth-process” that would arise in an average person who is being taught these truths or who is learning the Dharma, or who is mindful enough to reflect on the spiritual significance of his experiences. Since the last set concerns *cultivation*, this is clearly a “gradual” truth-process of learning and understanding them.

S 56.11 (Pali) [§§9-12]

SĀ 379 (Saṃyukta Āgama)

The first noble truth: suffering	<i>dukkha</i>	The first noble truth: suffering	苦諦
Suffering should be known	<i>pariññeyya</i>	The second noble truth: craving	集諦
Suffering has been known	<i>pariññāta</i>	The third noble truth: nirvana	滅諦
		The fourth noble truth: the path	道諦
The second noble truth: craving	<i>taṇhā</i>	Suffering should be known	當知
Craving should be abandoned	<i>pahātabba</i>	Craving should be abandoned	當斷
Craving has been abandoned	<i>pahīna</i>	Nirvana should be realized	當作證
The third noble truth: nirvana	<i>nibbāna</i>	The path should be cultivated	當修
Nirvana should be realized	<i>sacchikātabba</i>		
Nirvana has been realized	<i>sacchikata</i>	Suffering has been known	已知
The fourth noble truth: the path	<i>patipadā</i>	Craving has been abandoned	已斷
The path should be cultivated	<i>bhāvetabba</i>	Nirvana has been realized	已作證
The path has been cultivated	<i>bhāvita</i>	The path has been cultivated	已修

Table 6.2.2: Comparative table of the 4 truths (Nikāya and Āgama)

We have at least two sequences of the truths. We have just mentioned the better known “**Dhamma,-cakka**” **sequence** or theoretical sequence is familiarly listed as “1-2-3-4,” that is,

suffering→arising→ending→path. (S 56.11,5-8), SD 1.1

Then, there is the “**Saḷ-āyatanika**” **sequence** or practical sequence, which is given as “1-2-4-3,” thus:

suffering→arising→path→ending, (M 149,11) + SD 41.9 (2.4)

¹²⁷ Cf Choong 2010:62. For a later canonical 16-cycle model of the awakening process, see **Oram,bhāgiya Ss** (S 45.179), SD 50.11, and **Uddham,bhāgiya Ss** (S 45.180), SD 50.12.

which is more natural in terms of the *practice* progress of insight. The sequence itself is also found in **the Āgantuka Sutta** (S 45.159), **the Pariññeyya Sutta** (S 56.29), and other suttas,¹²⁸ although not as numerous as those with the theoretical sequence.

The “**Sal-āyatanika**” (M 149) sequence or practice sequence of the 4 truths (arranged as 1-2-4-3), along with their explanations, recurs on their own in **the Abhiññā Sutta** (A 4.251).¹²⁹ Although the Dhamma,cakka sequence of functions is better known, it is likely that the Sal-āyatanika sequence is much older. In other words, it is probably the original sequence, which later, for the sake of easier teaching, follows the theoretical (or teaching) sequence. Understandably, the later Dhamma,cakka sequence (1-2-3-4) is better known throughout Buddhist literature, as it is a more convenient teaching model.¹³⁰

6.2.2.3 The Āgama version (SĀ 379) presents the sequence in sets according the 3 phases. According to this scheme, the 4 noble truths (as a set) should first be “examined” (諦 *dī*). However, 諦 also means “truth,” which applies better here. In the second set of 4 truths, the operative word is the verb 當 *dāng* (simplified as 当), meaning, “to be, ought to, should,” referring to the “practice” aspects of the truths, that is, they are accepted and acknowledged in our lives, but we have not fully internalized them yet. Only in the third set or stage, do we truly “know” or “realize” (知 *zhī*) the 4 truths.

The Āgama (SĀ 379) version, as such, lists the 4 noble truths according to commentarial notion of the threefold “good truths” (*saddhamma*) as already mentioned above, namely,

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| • knowing the “truths” | <i>sacca,ñāṇa,</i> | or, understanding them in theory | <i>pariyatti;</i> |
| • knowing the “duty” | <i>kicca,ñāṇa,</i> | or, putting this theory into practice | <i>paṭipatti;</i> |
| • knowing their “accomplishment” | <i>kata,ñāṇa,</i> | or realization regarding the truths | <i>paṭivedha.</i> |

The Āgama sequence of the 3 phases and 12 aspects of the noble truths, as shown above, apparently reflects a “sudden” process.

6.2.2.4 In fact, there is a short but unique **Gavam,pati Sutta** (S 56.30), which supports such an approach. In reply to a monk’s question, the monk Gavam,pati declares thus:

Avuso, I have heard and learned this before [from] the Blessed One himself:

“Bhikshus, one who sees suffering, also sees the arising of suffering, also sees the ending of suffering, also sees the path leading to the ending of suffering.

One who sees the arising of suffering, also sees suffering, also sees the ending of suffering, also sees the path leading to the ending of suffering.

One who sees the ending of suffering, also sees suffering, also sees the arising of suffering, also sees the path leading to the ending of suffering.

One who sees the way leading to the ending of suffering, also sees suffering, also sees the arising of suffering, also sees the ending of suffering.” (S 56.30/5:436 f), SD 53.1

¹²⁸ S 45.159/5:52, SD 74.10; S 56.29/5:436.

¹²⁹ A 4.251/2:246 f [A:B 4.254], SD 85.3. See also esp **Mahā Niddesa**: Nm 1:21, 40, 94, 149, 2:271, 349, 456, 460, 494; **Cūḷa Niddesa**: Nc:Be 31, 35, 64, 85, 90, 232. **Paṭisambhidā,magga** has both sequences: **Dhamma,cakka seq**, Pm 1:46, 48; **Sal-āyatanika seq**, 1:4, 184×2, 187, 294×3. **Vibhaṅga**: Vbh 426×12, 427×14, 428; Kvu 86, 88, 107, 108, 170, 216×2; Peṭk 143; **Nett** 311/59, 651/111×2, 656/111, 661/112, 897/175; Miln 69.

¹³⁰ There is another sequence, a unique one, arranged as 1-4-2-3, found in **Sela S** (Sn 559 = Tha 828 = M 92,19, SD 45.7). This unique sequence is clearly the result of poetic licence. See also SD 41.9 (2.4).

This passage, a hapax legomenon (not found anywhere in the Nikāyas)¹³¹ is quoted by Buddhaghosa (along with Pm 1:119) in his **Visuddhi,magga** (Vism 22.93) to prove that path-knowledge (*magga,ñāṇa*) performs 4 functions in a single moment.¹³² On the strength of a single passage, it is difficult to accept such a view as being as canonical, especially where we do not have the full context of Gavampati's quoting the Buddha (to whom does this statement refer?)¹³³

6.2.2.5 What is relevant here, however, is what scholars have observed in the comparative study of early Buddhist texts (the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas). Scholars like Norihisa Baba (2004) and Analayo (2010a) have noted the tendency of Āgama discourses to incorporate passages in the Pali that are found only in its commentarial literature (Baba 2004:946).¹³⁴

7 Versions of the Sutta

7.1 In 1938, N Aiyaswami Sastri examined 11 texts regarded as versions of the Buddha's 1st discourse.¹³⁵ N J Smith, in his Internet paper, listed "The 17 versions of the Buddha's first discourse" (2001),¹³⁶ giving each of them a code, their references and the approximate date of each (where known):¹³⁷

The Pāli versions (P), which were written down about 500 years after the Buddha, that is, around the 1st century BCE, are:

Pali1, Pali2	Sutta:	S 5:420-435.
Pali3	Vinaya:	V 1:10-12.

The Chinese versions (Chin) with translation dates are:

Sutta:

Chin1	T109	(T2.503b-c, 2nd cent CE),
Chin2	T99.379	(T2.103c-104a, 5th cent CE) = SA 379,
Chin3	T110	(T2.504a-b, 8th cent CE) and
Chin6	T125.19.2	(T2.593b-c, 4th cent CE) = EĀ 19.2.

Vinaya:

Chin4	T428	(T22.788-9, 5th cent CE) and
Chin5	T1421	(T22.104-5, 5th cent CE).

The Sanskrit versions (Skt):

Skt1	Mahāvastu 3:330-335, S2 (late 2nd cent BCE according to Peter Harvey, 1992:89), ¹³⁸
Skt2	Lalita,vistara 540 (416-8), (between 200 BCE and 200 CE ibid p15), and

¹³¹ The only other place in the Canon for this is in the Abhidhamma: Kvu 2.9.19/220.

¹³² Vism 22.93/690, where he also qu Pm 1:119,1-3 (a late canonical Abhidhamma-style work); see also Vism 22.92-689 f. In **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142), eg, separate alms-giving is mentioned to each of the 8 kinds of saints (eg the arhat-to-be and the arhat), showing that the transition from the former to the latter is *not* "a mind-moment," ie, not immediate.

¹³³ Technically, we can safely say that this refers *only* to the attainment of the fruition of arhathood, not to the other stages of the path.

¹³⁴ Cf Alex Wayman 1980.

¹³⁵ "The first sermon of the Buddha." *New Indian Antiquary* 1,8 Nov 1938:473-492.

¹³⁶ Last revised 11 Dec 2002. <http://www.bigfoot.com/~josmith.1/buddhism/budaword/from chinese/index.html>.

¹³⁷ Here slightly edited.

¹³⁸ P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices*, UK: Cambridge Univ Press, 1992.

Skt3 Raniero Gnoli¹³⁹ who dates the characters to the 6th-7th century (1977: xiii, 134-139).
N Dutt¹⁴⁰ dates the Gupta script of this text as from the 6th century CE (1984: i).

The Tibetan versions (Tib). The dates of the translation of the Tibetan texts from the Sanskrit are generally accepted as 8th century CE, that is, not long after the great debate whether to follow Chinese or Indian Buddhism. According to Aiyaswami Sastri (1938:476) from the Narthang edition of the Kanjur (bKah hGyur):

Sūtra: Tib1 mDo xxvi 88-91,
Tib2 mDo xxvi 431-4, and
Tib3 mDo xxx 427-32 (believed to be translated from the Pali).
Vinaya: Tib4 Dulva iv ff 64-7, and
Tib5 Dulva xi 69-72.

Beijing ed (Ōtani repr, Tokyo, 1956)¹⁴¹ P747 P21.259 P1003 P39.1

7.2 Aiyaswami Sastri (1938:475) points out that some of the Tibetan Sūtra and Vinaya texts are nearly identical and correspond as follows: Tib1 = Tib4 and Tib2 = Tib5. This is also the case with the Pali versions: Pali1 = Pali3. It is probable that the Sūtra texts in these cases were merely replications of the Vinaya texts.¹⁴² In this case, there would be only two versions in Pali and three in Tibetan, and the total would actually come to 14 distinct versions.

7.3 The details of the main sections of the sutta are given here according to Pali1:

Section 1	The two extremes and the middle path: The two extremes to be avoided are self-indulgence and self-mortification. The middle way, which avoids the two extremes, is the noble eightfold path.
Section 2	The second delivery of the discourse
Section 3	Definition of the 4 noble truths
Section 4	The 12 aspects: The 4 noble truths are analysed into 3 phases, that is, in <u>theory</u> , their <u>practice</u> and their attainment or <u>realization</u> .
Section 5	The Buddha's declaration of his awakening: It is only after having realized the twelve aspects as they really are that Siddhattha claimed full awakening (become Buddha).
Section 6	Koṇḍañña's realization of the Dharma-eye.
Section 7	Prefixing of Koṇḍañña's name to Añña Koṇḍañña (Koṇḍañña who knows).
Section 8	The gods' exultation at hearing the discourse.
Section 9	Naming the discourse.
Section 10	Attainment of the Dharma-eye.

¹³⁹ R Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanghabhedavastu* Part 1. 2 vols 1977-78. Rome: ISMEO, 1977:134-9.

¹⁴⁰ Dutt N, *Gilgit Manuscripts* vol 3 pt 2, 2nd ed, 1984, Sri Satguru Publications, India.

¹⁴¹ Citations which follow given as "P" Sūtra no, followed by "P" Vol.Page.

¹⁴² "Being an oral tradition originally, it is probable that the story of the Buddha was told chronologically, as a story. This can be seen in the Vinaya texts and the later Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. Only later would the discourses (suttas) have been extracted and grouped according to various categories, probably first topically (as in the Saṃyutta Nikāya) and then later by number of items [or topics] (as in the Aṅguttara Nikāya)." (N J Smith)

7.4 Smith collates the 17 versions into these 8 classes:

1. Pali2
2. Skt3
3. Tib2 (=Tib5) and Chin3
4. Chin2
5. Pali1 (=Pali3), Tib3, Skt1, Skt2, Chin1, Chin5
6. Chin4
7. Tib1 (=Tib4)
8. Chin6.

As can be seen, Class 5 is the class with texts from each language source. Pali2 is the other Pali text and Chin6 is the other Chinese text that Smith regards as variants and they each form a class of their own. These are the only two texts in our corpus that have only one section.

8 The authenticity of the Sutta

8.1 THE 1ST DISCOURSE

8.1.1 The Buddha's first Dharma teaching

8.1.1.1 On account of the well-structured and, in part, very technical, parts of the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta, it is unlikely to be historically the earliest Dharma discourse spoken by the Buddha, and this was given to the group of 5 monks. It is certainly a record of the first teachings of the Buddha as *remembered* by the council elders. However, it only gives us a part of the 1st discourse given by the Buddha.¹⁴³

It was highly probable that the later disciples, monastic and lay, would have asked the Buddha about “the 1st discourse.” In response, it is very likely that the Buddha would have himself give some kind of reprise of it. The 1st discourse was thus presented, not as a historical testimony, but as a Dhamma instruction based on the earliest teachings updated by the council elders as a discourse for the edification of the new generation of monastics and for us today.¹⁴⁴

8.1.1.2 The Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26) preserves perhaps the most ancient record we have of the very 1st discourse given by the Buddha to the 5 monks—this is a general instruction on the nature of birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow and defilement.¹⁴⁵ If this is not the original form of the “1st discourse” itself, it must be *the gist* of the Buddha's first teachings to the 5 monks or *a key section* of the 1st discourse—we cannot really be sure. However, this is certainly older than the teachings of **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11).

8.1.2 The first 3 discourses traditionally believed to have been given by the Buddha are **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) and **the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta** (S 38.28). They are not only historically related but seamlessly flow in proper sequence.

¹⁴³ See SD 53.25 (2.1.2).

¹⁴⁴ See SD 53.40 (2.3.3.2).

¹⁴⁵ M 26,30/1:173 (SD 1.11).

The 1st discourse is a systematic statement of the Buddha's discovery of "suffering and its ending,"¹⁴⁶ and what is merely mentioned, "in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging"¹⁴⁷ are suffering" [§5], is elaborated in the 2nd discourse, **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59),¹⁴⁸ that is, the aggregates are explained in full. In the 3rd discourse, **the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28),¹⁴⁹ the focus shifts to the "all" (*sabba*), that is, the 6 sense-bases, a teaching specifically given in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).¹⁵⁰

8.2 THE SUTTA'S POPULARITY. The importance of the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta is attested by the numerous versions of it in various Buddhist canons. A list of 17 versions of it is found above [6]. The Sutta is clearly well known enough by Asoka's time—alluded to in his **Bhabru-Bairat edict**¹⁵¹—to have it recommended as a *vinaya,sāmuḥkkaṃsā* ("an extract of the training" or "the exalted teaching"), which scholars have rightly identified as **the Dhammacakka Pavattana**,¹⁵² which after all is a "summary" of the unique teaching (*sāmuḥkkaṃsikā dhamma,desanā*) of the Buddha on the 4 noble truths.¹⁵³

8.3 The Sutta is analyzed in **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141) and **the Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 99-105). It is also commented on in **the Visuddhi,magga** (Vism 16.32-83) and **the Sammoha,vinodanī** (VbhA 93-122). Rewata,dhamma, a Burmese monk who lived in Britain, has written a detailed study of this text based on its commentaries, entitled *The First Discourse of the Buddha*.

8.4 THE SUTTA'S TITLE. The very 1st discourse of the Buddha as recorded in the account of his public ministry in **the Vinaya** (V 1:10-12), however, appears to be a later account. **The Saṃyutta account**,¹⁵⁴ the 11th sutta of the Sacca Saṃyutta (Connected Discourses on the Truths), is the older one. In both cases, however, the title is not as we know it today. The Sanskrit version is found in **the Lalita,vistara** (Lalv 540.426 f) and **the Mahavastu** (Mvst 3:330 f).

8.5 "Spoken by the Tathagata." The title "Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta" appears only in the Commentaries (eg J 1:92, DA 1:2, etc). In other versions, such as the PTS edition, the title is given as *Tathāgatena vuttā* (spoken by the Tathāgata). **Sujato**, in his "general integrated sutta theory" (GIST),¹⁵⁵ notes:

¹⁴⁶ **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/119), SD 21.13.

¹⁴⁷ *Pañc'upadāna-k,khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47 Vbh 1): see SD 17. What is briefly mentioned here is elaborated in the 2nd discourse, **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2. See above here.

¹⁴⁸ SD 1.2. On its possible origin, see **Assaji S** (S 22.88), SD 42.8 (2.3).

¹⁴⁹ SD 1.3.

¹⁵⁰ SD 7.1.

¹⁵¹ M Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature* v2 1933 (rev):606 f (App III on p16).

¹⁵² Sujato [2013](#). For earlier refs, see eg H Oldenberg's *Vinaya* ed, V:O 1879:xiv, xl n; T W Rhys Davids, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Soc* (JRAS) 30,3 Jul 1898:629; Oldenberg, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (ZDMG) 52 1898: 634; J Bloch, ZDMG 63 1909:325; A J Edmunds, *Buddhist Bibliography*, 1904 & JRAS 1913:385-387; D Kosambi, *Indian Antiquary* 41 1912:40; E Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* v1: *Inscriptions of Asoka* (new ed), Oxford, 1925:xxv, xlili f, 172 ff; H G A van Zeist 1966 in *Ency Bsm* 2:182; N A Jayawickrama, *Pali Buddhist Review* 1,3 1976:138; see also A Cunningham, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* v1 [1877](#):22 f. (See Winternitz 1933:580 for more refs.)

¹⁵³ Here we have the better known use of *sāmuḥkkaṃsā*, but in a quite different sense: the *sāmuḥkkaṃsikā* teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, arising, ending, the path (*yā buddhānaṃ sāmuḥkkaṃsikā dhammadesanā, taṃ pakāsesi dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ nirodhaṃ maggaṃ*). This is from a stock passage referring to the Buddha gradually bringing a listener to ever higher or deeper teachings, so that they are ready to listen to the 4 noble truths. In this context, too, as noted by Sujato (2013), the meaning of *sāmuḥkkaṃsā* as either "extract" or "exalted" fits well.

¹⁵⁴ S 56.11/5:420-424.

¹⁵⁵ See *The GIST*, 2004:37 f.

This is, on the face of it, a bit odd, for most of the discourses are, of course, attributed to the Buddha. However, the terms “Spoken by the Buddha” and “Spoken by the Disciples” occur in the Chinese recensions. Perhaps the label *tathāgatena vuttā* referred originally, not to the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta specifically, but to a section within a collection of discourses that consisted purely of teachings given directly by the Buddha himself. (Sujato, 2004:38)

In his footnote, Sujato says that “this line of reasoning suggested itself independently to both Rod Bucknell and myself” (2004:77 n11).

8.6 THE RĀSIYA SUTTA (S 42.12.4-5) is a short discourse recording the Buddha’s teaching to Rāsiya the head-man and is practically identical to the opening section of **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** [§§3-4], that is, the avoiding of the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification for the middle way, and the noble eightfold path. At the end of the long anthology of teachings given to Rāsiya, he takes refuge in the three jewels without any mention of his attainment (S 42.12,4-5/4:330 f).

8.7 THE (KHANDHA) DUKKHA SUTTA (S 22.104) is perhaps the most succinct discourse on the 4 truths, and might be even amongst the oldest, if not the oldest, text we have of the teaching. It does not use the qualifier *ariya* (“noble”), as found in “4 truths” formula given in the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta, which was probably modelled on it or built up from it.¹⁵⁶

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SD 1.1(8)

*Miga,dāya Pañca,vaggiya Desanā

The teaching to the group of 5 monks at the Deer Park
Theme: The first meeting between the Buddha and the group of 5 monks
Pabbajjā Kathā, The talk on the going-forth, **Mv 1.6.10-16** (V 1:8-10)

Introduction

8.8 The Mahā,vagga, the first of the two chapters (the other is the Culla,vagga) comprising the Khandhaka of the Vinaya, records the early ministry of the Buddha. **The Mahā,vagga** (the great chapter) begins with the Buddha’s awakening. It begins with the Buddha’s awakening and early events; followed by the first teachings and foundation of the monastic order. Then, there are accounts of various ways the first monks are accepted into the early community, and the rule attending the monastic ordination procedures.

The Culla,vagga or Cūḷa,vagga (the lesser chapter) deals with the rules and procedures for the proper living conduct (including the health) of monastics, including the ordination of nuns. The Cullavagga closes with an account of the 2nd council, held at Vesālī, marking the origins of the Theravāda.

8.9 The Mahā,vagga preserves accounts of the events leading up to the 1st discourse, and its immediate events. It records the Buddha in his quest for awakening, attended by the 5 monks. When the Buddha learns that neither self-indulgence nor self-mortification will bring him the answer he seeks, he realizes the vital significance of healthy body supporting a healthy mind in such a difficult quest.

Essentially, this is a joy-based meditation or dhyana which calms and clears his mind, so that he is able to see directly into true reality, and so awakens to full liberation. From his awakening experience, he

¹⁵⁶ S 22.104/3:158 f (SD 42.20). For a study on the evolution of the 4 truths, see SD 53.41 (2).

formulates the eightfold path, which, in practical terms, is *the* middle way for all who follow his teaching in quest of awakening.

8.10 The Bodhisattva’s abandoning the painful self-mortifying meditations and way of life is seen by the 5 monks as backsliding. They abandon him, but he perseveres, and alone gains awakening under the bodhi tree. Seeking for the most suitable students,¹⁵⁷ the Buddha realizes that the 5 monks, who have diligently attended to him, are the ones whom he should first teach his discovery.

However, when the Buddha approaches the group of 5 monks in the deer park outside Benares, they still nurse their misapprehension that he has fallen back to a life of luxury (*bahulla*). The Buddha manages to convince them that he is now a different person, and they are willing to listen. He opens his 1st discourse to the 5 monks by telling them to avoid the two extremes, and how this would benefit them in their quest for awakening.

The purpose of the 1st discourse, then, can be said to be that of clearing the minds of the 5 monks of their misapprehension so that they are open and ready for the real teaching that would awaken them—this is, of course, the teachings of the 2nd discourse—that of the 3 characteristics, especially non-self.

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*Miga,dāya Pañca,vaggiya Desanā

The Teaching to the Group of 5 Monks at the Deer Park

(Mv 1.6.10-16)

The Buddha meets the 5 monks

[Mv 1.6.10] Then, the Blessed One, walking on tour, in due course, approached the group of 5 monks in the deer park at Isi,patana, outside Benares.

The group of 5 monks saw the Blessed One coming in the distance. Seeing him, they agreed among themselves,¹⁵⁸ saying:

“Avuso, this recluse Gotama is coming, he lives in luxury, [V 1:9] he is wavering in his striving, he has reverted to a life of luxury [abundance].¹⁵⁹ He should neither be greeted, nor stood up for, nor should his bowl and robe be received. All the same, a seat may be laid out; he may sit down if he wants to.”

11 However, as the Blessed One gradually approached the group of 5 monks, they, not keeping to their own agreement, approached the Blessed One.

One received his bowl and robe, one put out a seat, one brought water for washing the feet, a foot-stool, a foot-stand.¹⁶⁰

The Blessed One sat down on the seat made ready, and the Blessed One, while he was sitting down, washed his feet.¹⁶¹ Then, they addressed the Blessed One by name¹⁶² and with the word, “avuso [friend].”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), where the Buddha reflects on the most suitable students to teach (M 26,22-24), SD 1.11.

¹⁵⁸ “Agreed amongst themselves,” *aññamaññaṃ katikaṃ sañthapesuṃ*: only Be has *katikaṃ*.

¹⁵⁹ *Bahullam*, lit “muchness,” VA 964 takes it to mean abundance of robes, etc. Clearly here, it simply means “luxury,” in ref to the Bodhisattva’s breaking his fast, taking a meal and resorting to the middle way.

¹⁶⁰ “Foot-stand,” *pāda,pīṭha*, a stool (*ṭhapanaka*) to put the washed foot or feet on (VA 913). Cf V 4:231, 310.

¹⁶¹ Described in **Brahmāyu S** (M 91,20/2:139), SD 63.8.

¹⁶² Here, we have a precedence of showing respect to elders and teachers by not addressing them by name.

¹⁶³ “Avuso,” anglicized of *āvuso* (masc) (voc related to *āyu*, “age”), meaning “brother” (only to equals or juniors) amongst Buddhists, or “friend,” with non-Buddhists. Seniors are usu addressed as “bhante” (angl of *bhante*, “sir”)

The Buddha announces his awakening

12 When this was said, the Blessed One spoke thus to the group of 5 monks:

“Do not, bhikshus,¹⁶⁴ address a Tathagata [one thus come] by name, and with the word ‘avuso.’

A Tathagata, bhikshus, is an arhat [worthy one], fully self-awakened.

12.2 Give ear, bhikshus, the death-free has been found; I instruct, I teach dharma.¹⁶⁵

Practising in keeping with what is instructed, having soon realised here and now by your own super-knowledge that supreme goal of the holy life,¹⁶⁶ for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, may you abide in it.”¹⁶⁷

13 When this was said, the group of 5 monks spoke thus to the Blessed One:

“But surely, you, avuso Gotama, did not come to a superhuman state,¹⁶⁸ to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones,¹⁶⁹ by this conduct, by this course, by this practice of austerities.¹⁷⁰

So, how can you now come to a superhuman state, to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, when you live in luxury, wavering in striving, and having reverted to a life of luxury?”

The triple statement

14 When this was said, the Blessed One spoke thus to the group of 5 monks:

“A Tathagata, bhikshus, does *not* live in luxury; he does *not* waver in striving; he does *not* revert to a life of luxury.

14.2 A Tathagata, bhikshus, is an arhat, fully self-awakened.

Give ear, bhikshus, the death-free has been found; I instruct, I teach dharma.

for both laymen and monastics. This usage is remarkably similar to [Chinese](#) 老 *lǎo*, meaning “old in age or for a long time,” esp as suffix to surnames, eg, 张老 *Zhāng lǎo*, 王老 *Wáng lǎo*, 李老 *Lǐ lǎo*. See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16) where the Buddha declares *āvuso* should no longer be used, and that monastics are to address one another according to seniority (D 16,6.2) + n, SD 9.

¹⁶⁴ Note that the Buddha is recorded here as addressing the 5 monks as *bhikkhave*. An interesting anachronism, but with narrative licence! We should imagine that the Buddha is confident of the conversion of the “5 monks.”

¹⁶⁵ *Arahaṃ bhikkhave tathāgato sammā,sambuddho, odahatha bhikkhave sotāṃ, amatam adhigataṃ, aham anu-sāsāmi, ahaṃ dhammaṃ desemi.*

¹⁶⁶ This supreme goal (*brahma.cariya,pariyosāna*) is said to be the “unshakeable liberation of mind” (*akuppā cetō,-vimutti*): see **Mahā Sārōpama S** (M 29,7), SD 53.8; **Cūḷa Sārōpama S** (M 30,23), SD 53.9, where it refers to the fruition of arhathood (MA 2:232); a related term, *asamaya,vimokkha*, “permanent liberation,” refers to the 4 paths, the 4 fruits, nirvana. The “unshakeable liberation of mind” is the one dharma that “should be realized” (*sacchikātabba*) (D 34,1.2(10)), see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,18.7) n, SD 1.11; **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,14.2) SD 1.1.

¹⁶⁷ *Yathā’nusiṭṭhaṃ tathā* [in all MSS except Se] *paṭipajjamānā na cirass’eva yass’atthāya kula,puttā sammad eva agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti, tad anuttaraṃ brahma.cariya,pariyosānaṃ diṭṭh’eva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissathā’ti. Viharissati*, although future, clearly functions in an exhortatory mode.

¹⁶⁸ “A superhuman state” (*uttari manussa,dhamma*). It refers to the attainments of dhyana and of noble sainthood (VA 2:489). False claims to any such state by a monastic entails “defeat” (*pārājika*), immediate loss of monkhood: Pār 4 (V 3:91, 101). On the Buddha’s superhuman states, see **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,34+43 etc), SD 49.1 = *SD 2.24.

¹⁶⁹ “The distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones,” *alam-ariya ñāṇa,dassana,visesa*. See **(Anuruddha) Upakkilesa S** (M 128,15) SD 5.18; **(Pabbajita) Abhiṅga S** (A 10.48,2(10) SD 48.9.

¹⁷⁰ *Tāya pi kho tvaṃ āvuso gotama iriyāya* [Se *cariyāya*] *tāya paṭipadāya tāya dukkara,kārikāya n’ev’ajjhagā uttari manussa,dhammā alam-ariya,ñāṇa,dassana,visesaṃ.*

Practising in keeping with what is instructed, having soon realised here and now by your own super-knowledge that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, may you abide in it."

15 But, a **2nd time**, the group of 5 monks spoke thus to the Blessed One:

"But surely, you, avuso Gotama, did not come to a superhuman state, to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, by this conduct, by this course, by this practice of austerities.

So, how can you now come to a superhuman state, to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, when you live in luxury, wavering in striving, and having reverted to a life of luxury?"

15.2 And a **2nd time**, the Blessed One spoke thus to the group of 5 monks:

A Tathagata, bhikshus, is an arhat, fully self-awakened.

Give ear, bhikshus, the death-free has been found; I instruct, I teach dharma.

Practising in keeping with what is instructed, having soon realised here and now by your own super-knowledge that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, may you abide in it."

15.3 And a **3rd time**, the group of 5 monks spoke thus to the Blessed One:

"But surely, you, [V 1:10] avuso Gotama, did not come to a superhuman state, to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, by this conduct, by this course, by this practice of austerities.

So, how can you now come to a superhuman state, to the distinction of knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, when you live in luxury, wavering in striving, and having reverted to a life of luxury?"

The Buddha convinces the 5 monks

16 When this was said, the Blessed One spoke thus to the group of 5 monks:

"Have you, bhikshus, ever known me to have spoken to you like this before?"¹⁷¹

"Not like this, bhante."¹⁷²

16.2 *"A Tathagata, bhikshus, is an arhat, fully self-awakened.*

Give ear, bhikshus, the death-free has been found; I instruct, I teach dharma.

Practising in keeping with what is instructed, having soon realised here and now by your own super-knowledge that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from home into homelessness, may you abide in it."

16.3 And the Blessed One was able to convince the group of 5 monks.¹⁷³

Then, the group of 5 monks listened to the Blessed One again, gave ear to him and settled their minds for direct knowledge.¹⁷⁴ [*The Vinaya account then continues with §2 of S 56.11 below.*]

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¹⁷¹ *Abhijānātha me no tumhe bhikkhave ito pubbe eva, rūpaṃ bhāsitaṃ etan'ti.* Be:Ka Ce Se *bhāsitaṃ etan'ti.* Only Be *pabhāvitam etan'ti.*

¹⁷² *No h'etaṃ bhante.*

¹⁷³ From here, **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,29-43), SD 1.11, account diverges. This simply shows that there are other teachings given to the group of 5 monks.

¹⁷⁴ *Atha kho pañca, vaggiyā bhikkhū bhagavantaṃ sussūsiṃsu, sotaraṃ odahiṃsu, aññā cittaṃ upaṭṭhāpesuṃ.* "Settled their minds for direct knowledge," *aññā cittaṃ upaṭṭhāpesuṃ.* **Lohicca S** (D 12) mentions two cases of failures in the practice of self-mortification (D 12,16/1:230, 17/231), SD 34.8. On Koṇḍañña as the first to attain *aññā*, see below, **Dhammacakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,20), SD 1.1.

Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta

The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Truth

Or, The 1st discourse • S 56.11 = Mv 1.6.17-31

[420] 1 Spoken by the Tathāgata.¹⁷⁵

[Thus have I heard.]¹⁷⁶

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the deer grove¹⁷⁷ at Isipatana near Benares. [421]

The 2 extremes

2 [Mv 1.6.17] Then,¹⁷⁸ the Blessed One addressed the company of 5 monks, thus:

“Bhikshus,¹⁷⁹ there are these **2 extremes** to be avoided by one who has gone forth. What are the two?

3 THE 2 EXTREMES:

(1) **The devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures**¹⁸⁰—it is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],¹⁸¹ and

(2) **the devotion to self-mortification**¹⁸²—it is painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ *Tathāgatena vuttā*. PTS ed has this title. See Intro (1) above.

¹⁷⁶ Most MSS omit. The PTS ed has *tathāgatena vuttā*, “spoken by the One Thus Come” as title. See prev n.

¹⁷⁷ “Deer park,” *miga,dāya*, or “deer grove,” the best known of which is this one outside Benares (S 5:421), where the 1st discourse is given, as recorded in **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,1/4:420), SD 1.1; another in Bhesakalā forest, near where Nakula,pitā and Nakula,mātā live: see **Anumāna S** (M 15,1/1:95) SD 59.3; **Māra Tajjanīya S** (M 50,1/1:332), SD 36.4; **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/3:1), SD 5.4; **Sama,jīvi S** (A 4.55,1/2:61), SD 5.1; **Nakula S** (A 6.16/3:-295), SD 5.2; **Nakula,mātā S** (A 8.48,1), SD 5.3; and another outside Nādikā [Ñātikā]: see **Cūla Gosiṅga S** (M 31,1), SD 44.11, **Mahā Gosiṅga S** (M 32,1),SD 44.12. For other refs, search CSCD using “migaḍāy*.” On tr of *dāya*, see SD 49.1 (6) (§1 & §42).

¹⁷⁸ S[āmyutta] *Tatra kho ...* ; V[inaya] *Atha kho ...* .

¹⁷⁹ On the necessity of translating the vocative *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhave* (or *bhikkhavo*) as “bhikshu” and “bhikshus” respectively rather than “monk/s” is explained in Collett & Analayo 2014:791.

¹⁸⁰ *Kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga* (V 1:10,12 = S 4,330,29 = 5:421,4; D 3:113,20; S 5:421; MA 1:104,15; UA 351,23). Comy on **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,18/3:113,19) glosses *kāma* here as “the objects of sense-pleasure” (*vatthu,kāmesu*, DA 896,27). On *vatthu,kāma* and *kilesa,kāma*, see SD 38.4 (3.1.2); SD 41.4 (2.3.1).

¹⁸¹ “Low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” *hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anattha,samhito*. On *gamma = gāma,dhamma*, see **Gavesī S** (A 5.180,17) n, SD 47.16. See foll n.

¹⁸² *Atta,kilamathānuyoga* (D 3:113,21 (DA 3:109,12); M 3:230,10 (MA 2:384,9); S 4:330,30, 5:421,5 = V 1:10,13).

¹⁸³ On these **2 extremes**, see (3.1). Note that while “the devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures” (*kāma,-sukh'allikānuyoga*) is described as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anattha,samhito*), “the devotion to self-mortification” (*atta,kilamathānuyoga*) is not said to be “low, vulgar,” but only “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*dukkho anariyo anattha,samhito*). Despite being “painful,” self-mortification, with some moral virtue, can still bring about a divine afterlife; but such a goal is still “ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” because we are still caught up in samsara, unliberated from suffering. See **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (4.1). On *sukh'allikānuyoga*, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29,23/3:130), SD 40a.6.

3.2 Bhikshus, without turning to either of these extremes, there is **the middle way**¹⁸⁴ awakened to by the Tathagata [thus come], that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.¹⁸⁵

The middle way

4 [Mv 1.6.18] And what, bhikshus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana?

4.2 It is **this very noble eightfold path**,¹⁸⁶ that is to say,

(1) right view,	<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>
(2) right thought [right intention],	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>
(3) right speech,	<i>sammā vācā</i>
(4) right action,	<i>sammā kammantā</i>
(5) right livelihood,	<i>sammā ājīva</i>
(6) right effort,	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>
(7) right mindfulness,	<i>sammā sati</i>
(8) right concentration.	<i>sammā samādhi</i>

4.3 This, bhikshus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.

The 4 noble truths¹⁸⁷

5 [Mv 1.6.19] (i) Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth [reality] that is suffering**:¹⁸⁸

(1) birth	is suffering; ¹⁸⁹	<i>jāti pi dukkhā</i>
(2) decay ¹⁹⁰	is suffering;	<i>jarā pi dukkhā</i>
(3) disease	is suffering; ¹⁹¹	<i>vyādhi pi dukkhā</i>
(4) death	is suffering;	<i>marañam pi dukkharā</i>
[grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair	are suffering]; ¹⁹²	<i>[soka, parideva, dukkha, domanass'- upāyāsā pi dukkhā]</i>

¹⁸⁴ *Majjhima paṭipadā*.

¹⁸⁵ See **Araṇa, vibhaṅga S** (M 139,3/2:230), SD 7.8, where the statement is made in an exhortative tone.

¹⁸⁶ For a def and details of the 8 limbs that is the eightfold path, see **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,23-31/3:250-252), SD 11.11; **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,21/2:311-313), SD 13.2; also **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10. See also Gethin 2001:190-226 (ch 6) for an insightful study.

¹⁸⁷ On a notion that the 4 truths might originally not have been part of this Sutta, see Bronkhorst 1993: 106-111.

¹⁸⁸ On the list of sufferings, see (4.1).

¹⁸⁹ In the early after-centuries, commentators tend to interpret *jāti* as gestation or as the process of being born it, but it is clear from the early texts that it generally refers to *rebirth* itself. See (4.2).

¹⁹⁰ *Jarā*, incl old age, aging.

¹⁹¹ *Vyādhi pi dukkhā*: Only in the Vinaya & Saṃyutta versions; not mentioned in Comys. Vism Comy: "Disease is omitted here [eg D 22,18/2:305; S 56.11,5/5:421, etc] because no individual is meant, and there are persons in whom disease does not arise at all, such as the venerable Bakkula [M 124]. Otherwise, it may be taken as included in suffering itself. For, in the ultimate sense, disease is bodily pain conditioned by the imbalance of the elements" (VismAṬ 527). This is a common characteristic in later literature: see **M Hara**, 1977 & 1980.

¹⁹² Found in Ee Se (esp in daily chant) and other MSS but not in Be and Ce. This addition is prob late, as it is not found in the Chin versions. The Chin often speak of the "8 sufferings" (*bākū*), as listed above.

(5) to be with the unpleasant ¹⁹³	is suffering;	<i>appiyehi sampayogo dukkho</i>
(6) to be without the pleasant ¹⁹⁴	is suffering;	<i>piyehi vippayogo dukkho</i>
(7) not to get what one desires	is suffering,	<i>yam p'icchaṃ na labhati tam pi dukkhaṃ</i>
(8) in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging ¹⁹⁵	are suffering.	<i>saṅkhittena pañc'upādāna-k,khandhā pi dukkhā</i> ¹⁹⁶

6 [Mv 1.6.20] (ii) Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth [reality] that is the arising of suffering**:¹⁹⁷ it is this craving that leads to renewed existence [rebirth], accompanied by pleasure and lust, seeking pleasure here and there; that is to say,¹⁹⁸

(1) craving for sensual pleasures,	<i>kāma,taṇhā</i>
(2) craving for existence,	<i>bhava,taṇhā</i>
(3) craving for non-existence [for extinction].	<i>vibhava,taṇhā</i>

7 [Mv 1.6.21] (iii) Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth [reality] that is the ending of suffering**:¹⁹⁹ it is the utter fading away and ending of that very craving, giving it up, letting it go, being free from it, being detached from it.²⁰⁰

8 [Mv 1.6.22] (iv) Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth [reality] that is the path leading to the ending of suffering**: [422]

It is this very noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

The 3 phases and 12 aspects²⁰¹

(1) THAT WHICH SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD [Mv 1.6.23]

¹⁹³ "The unpleasant," *appiya*, also tr "what one loves not."

¹⁹⁴ "The loved," *piya*, also tr "what one loves."

¹⁹⁵ *Pañc'upādāna-k,khandha*, viz, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1). What is briefly mentioned here is elaborated in the 2nd discourse, **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2.

¹⁹⁶ **Sacca,vibhanga S** (M 141): *Katamañ cāvuso, dukkhaṃ ariya,saccam? Jāti'pi dukkhā, jarā'pi dukkhā, maraṇam pi dukkhaṃ, soka,parideva,dukkha,domanass'upāyāsāpi dukkhā, yam p'icchaṃ na labhati tam pi dukkhaṃ; saṅkhittena pañc'upādāna-k,khandhā dukkhā* (M 141,10), SD 11.11.

¹⁹⁷ On the translation of this phrase, see (4.3).

¹⁹⁸ Comy to **Bhāra S** (S 22.22), SD 17.14: "Seeking delight here and there" (*tatra,tatrābhinandinī*) means having the habit of seeking delight in the place of rebirth or among the various objects, such as forms. Lust for the 5 cords of sense-pleasures is "**craving for sense-pleasures**" (*kāma,taṇhā*). Lust for form-sphere existence or formless-sphere existence, attachment to dhyana, and lust accompanied by the eternalist view, is "**craving for existence**" (*bhava,taṇhā*). Lust accompanied by the annihilationist view is "craving for annihilation [extermination]" (*vibhava,taṇhā*). (SA 2:264). **Bodhi**: "This explanation of the last two kinds of craving seems to me too narrow. More likely, craving for existence should be understood as the principal desire to continue in existence (whether supported by a view or not), craving for extermination as the desire for a complete end to existence, based on an underlying assumption (not necessarily formulated as a view) that such extermination brings an end to a real 'I.'" (S:B 1052 n38). There is actually a simpler explanation: they are also unconscious cravings; hence, we are unlikely to even know that we have such views; see SD 49.2 (3.2.2.3). On craving for sensual pleasures, see **Kāma-c, chanda**, SD 32.2.

¹⁹⁹ On the tr of this term, see (4.3).

²⁰⁰ *Yo tassā,y'eva [or tassa-y-eva] taṇhāya asesa,virāga,nirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo.*

²⁰¹ On the 3 phases (*ti,parivaṭṭa*) and 12 modes (*dvā,das'ākāra*): see (6.2). On the 4 basic modes—*pariññeyya, pahātabba, sacchikātabba* and *bhāvetabba*, see (6.2.2).

9 (1) ‘This is *the noble truth that is suffering*’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before,²⁰² there arose in me vision [the eye], there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.²⁰³

(2) ‘This noble truth that is *suffering*²⁰⁴ is **to be fully understood**’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(3) ‘This noble truth that is suffering **has been fully understood**’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(2) THAT WHICH SHOULD BE ABANDONED [Mv 1.6.24]

10 (4) ‘This is *the noble truth that is the arising of suffering*’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(5) ‘This noble truth that is the arising of suffering²⁰⁵ **should be abandoned**’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(6) ‘This noble truth that is the arising of suffering **has been abandoned**’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(3) THAT WHICH SHOULD BE REALIZED [Mv 1.6.25]

11 (7) ‘This is *the noble truth that is the ending of suffering*’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(8) ‘This noble truth that is the ending of suffering **should be realized**²⁰⁶’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(9) ‘This noble truth that is the ending of suffering **has been realized**’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

(4) THAT WHICH SHOULD BE CULTIVATED [Mv 1.6.26]

12 (10) ‘This is *the noble truth that is the path*²⁰⁷ *leading to the ending of suffering*’—thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.

²⁰² “Things unheard before,” *ananussutesu dhammesu*. Apparently, this statement on “things unheard before” refers to the fact that the liberating Dharma has been forgotten in India up to the Buddha’s time.

²⁰³ *Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariya, saccaṃ ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*. The 5 key Pali terms are *cakkhu*, *ñāṇa*, *paññā*, *vijjā*, and *āloka*, all synonyms for liberating knowledge. *Vijjā* is derived from *vindati*, “to know,” but Comy glosses it as *paṭivedha*, “penetration,” as though it derived from *vijjhati*, “to pierce,” acknowledge its sense here as a kind of liberating knowledge. (SA 2:22). As at **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,2/19.2), SD 49.8a.

²⁰⁴ It is the suffering rather than the “truth” that is to be understood (*pariññeyya*). See Norman 1982:377-391.

²⁰⁵ It is the arising rather than the “truth” that is to be abandoned (*pahātabba*). See Norman id.

²⁰⁶ It is the ending rather than the “truth” that is to be realized (*sacchikātabba*). See Norman id. See Intro (6.2.2).

²⁰⁷ It is the path that is to be cultivated (“walked”) rather than the “truth.” See Norman ib.

(11) ‘This noble truth that is the path leading to the ending of suffering should be cultivated’—*thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.*

(12) ‘This noble truth that is the path leading to the ending of suffering **has been cultivated**’—*thus, bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light.*

The supreme awakening

13 [Mv 1.6.27] So long, bhikshus, as my knowledge and vision of these 4 noble truths as they really are in their **3 phases and 12 aspects**²⁰⁸ were not thoroughly purified in this way, **[423]**

13.2 up until then, bhikshus, I did *not* claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening in this world with its gods, its maras and its brahmas,
this generation with its recluses, its brahmins, its rulers,²⁰⁹ its people.

14 [Mv 1.6.28] But when my knowledge and vision of these 4 noble truths as they really are in their **3 phases and 12 aspects** are thoroughly purified in this way, then I claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening *in this world*.

14.2 only then, bhikshus, did I claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening in this world with its gods, its maras and its brahmas,
this generation with its recluses, its brahmins, its rulers, its people.

14.3 [Mv 1.6.29] The knowledge and vision arose in me:

‘Unshakable is my freedom of mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more rebirth (for me)!’²¹⁰

15 The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, the group of monks rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

Kondañña

²⁰⁸ On the “3 phases and 12 aspects,” see (6.2).

²⁰⁹ *Deva*, here in the sense of “devas by convention” (*sammati, deva*), ie, kings. The other 2 types of *deva* are “gods by rebirth” (*upapatti, deva*) and “gods by purification” (*visuddhi, deva*), ie, the Buddhas, pratyeka-buddhas and arhats. (Nc 307; KhA 123)

²¹⁰ *Akuppā me ceto, vimutti. Ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo’ti.* See SD 4.25 (2.3-2.4).

6 And while this discourse [explanation] was being given,²¹¹ there arose in the venerable **Koṇḍañña** the dust-free, stainless Dharma eye,²¹² thus: “Whatever is of the nature to arise is also of the nature to cease.”²¹³

The heavens exult

²¹⁴17 [Mv 1.6.30] And when the wheel of truth [dharmacakra] had been set in motion by the Blessed One, **the earth-bound devas** let their voice be heard, thus:²¹⁵

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped²¹⁶ by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18 Having heard the cry of the earth-bound devas, the devas of **the 4 great kings** let their voice be heard, thus:

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.2 Having heard the cry of the 4 Great Kings, **the devas of the 33** let their voice be heard, thus:

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.3 Having heard the cry of the devas of realm of the Thirty-three, **the Yāma devas** let their voice be heard, thus:

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.4 Having heard the cry of the Yāma devas, **the Tusita** [Contented] **devas** let their voice be heard, thus:

²¹¹ *Imasmiñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmim bhaññamāne*. As tt, *veyyākaraṇa* means “the expositions, ie, elaboration of brief teachings of the Buddha,” such as **Bhadd’eka,ratta S** (M 131), SD 8.9. But at this very early stage in the Buddha’s ministry, it is clearly non-technical, and mean simply, “discourse” or “explanation.” On the 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching, see SD 30.1 (4).

²¹² “Dharma-eye,” *dhamma,cakkhu*. The opening of the Dharma-eye refers to the perception of the law of change, denoting the attainment of streamwinning, thus putting us irrevocably on the path of awakening. It is, as such, spiritually superior to the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*) (D 2,95/1:82), which is an advanced form of clairvoyance, but it is inferior to the wisdom eye (*paññā,cakkhu*) which is the wisdom of the arhat. **Cūḷa Niddesa** mentions 5 kinds of eyes: (1) the physical eye (*maṃsa,cakkhu*); (2) the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhu*); (3) the wisdom eye (*paññā,cakkhu*) of the arhats; (4) the buddha eye (*Buddha-cakkhu*); and (5) the universal eye (*samanta,cakkhu*), the omniscience of the Buddhas (Nc 235; It 2.2/52): see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90/2:125-133), SD 10.8 (2) & **Sandaka S** (M 76), SD 35.7.

²¹³ *Yarṃ kiñci samudaya.dhammaṃ sabban tarṃ nirodha,dhamman ti*. §16 connects directly into §20, and makes good sense even without §§17-18, which were prob interpolated later.

²¹⁴ This whole section on the devas’ exultation [§§17-19] is prob a later addition, as the Sutta still stands without it, ending at §15 (with the traditional ending marker). On the 1st discourse as a probable reconstruction, see **Notion of ditṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (2.2).

²¹⁵ “Let their voice be heard,” *saddaṃ anussāvesuṃ*. *Anussāvesumi* is aor of *anussāveti*, “to cause to be heard, proclaim.” The meaning is that they exulted, shouted in joy.

²¹⁶ “Cannot be stopped,” *appaṭivattiyarṃ*, lit, “not to be turned backwards,” ie irreversible.

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.5 Having heard the cry of the Tusita devas, **the Nimmāṇa,rati devas** [who delight in creating] let their voice be heard, thus:

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.6 Having heard the cry of the Nimmāṇa,rati devas, **the Para,nimmita,vasavatti devas** [who delight in the creation of others] let their voice be heard, thus:

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

18.7 Having heard the cry of the Paranimmita,vasavatti devas, **the devas of Brahmā’s host** let their voice be heard, thus:²¹⁷

“In the Deer Grove at Isipatana near Benares, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed wheel of truth [424] that cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

19 [Mv 1.6.31] Thus, at that very moment, that very second,²¹⁸ in that very instant, the cry spread as far as **the Brahmā world**,²¹⁹ and this ten-thousandfold world-system²²⁰ **shook, quaked and trembled**, and **a boundless glorious radiance** appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.²²¹

Aññā Koṇḍañña

20 Then, the Blessed One uttered this Udāna [inspired utterance]: *“Aññasi vata bho Koṇḍañña! Master Koṇḍañña has indeed understood!”*

²¹⁷ It is interesting and important to note that the list of exulting devas stops here with the Brahmās of the 1st dhyana. The reason for this is that, as there is still some level of mentation here—by way of initial and sustained applications (*vitakka,vicāra*)—these Brahmās are still in contact with the sense-world. In the realms beyond the 1st dhyana, thought-process as we know it ceases completely so that these beings enjoy the glory of their meditative state as pure light or profound peace for as long as their karma fuels it. See **Bhava Ss 1-2** (A 3.76-77), SD 23.13 (3).

²¹⁸ *Tena khaṇena tena layena tena muhuttana*. Ce Se Ke omit *tena layena*. See SD 17.2b (1.1.1.1).

²¹⁹ Note that only *brahma,loka* is mentioned here, and earlier only *brahma,kāyikā* [§18.7]. See SD 57.1 (8.2.5.6).

²²⁰ See **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,147), SD 25.2; SD 54.3c (3.3). For the early Buddhist conception of the universe, see SD 49.8b (15.1.3).

²²¹ *Itiha tena khaṇena tena layena tena muhuttana yāva brahma,lokā saddo abbhuggacchi. Ayañ ca dasa.sahas-si,loka.dhātu saṅkampi sampakampi sampavedhi, appamāṇo ca uḷāro obhāso loke pāturahosi atikkamma devānaṃ devānubhāvan ti.*

In this way, the venerable Koṇḍañña received the name “Aññā²²² Koṇḍañña, *Aññā Koṇḍaññā*” [Koṇḍañña who has understood! *Koṇḍañña who has understood!*]²²³

— *pathamam* —

9 Going forth of the 5 monks

SD 1.1(9)

Pañca,vaggiya Pabbajjā

The going-forth of the group of 5 monks

Theme: The first arhats and the formation of the noble sangha

Pabbajjā Kathā, The talk of going-forth, **Mv 1.6.32-37** (V 1:12 f)

9.1 The Mahāvagga (“great chapter”) of the Vinaya continues where the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (S 56.11, SD 1.1) ends. The Mahāvagga is the first of the two chapters of the Khandhaka, the section of the Vinaya which preserves an account of the early years of the Buddha’s ministry.

Details about these early events are also found in the Commentaries, such as Dhammapāla’s **Therīgāthā Commentary**, which says that, at the end of the teaching of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, on the full moon of Āsāḷha, 18 crores (180,000,000) of brahmas led by **Koṇḍañña** “drank the nectar of the Dharma,” that is, attained streamwinning.²²⁴ The other 4 monks became streamwinners successively on the following 4 days [2.3.4]. On the 5th day, the Buddha taught them **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) [9.2].

9.2 The following account—provisionally entitled **Pañca,vaggiya Pabbajjā** (“the going-forth of the group of 5 monks”)—is a narrative of their attaining the Dharma-eye (here, meaning “streamwinning”).²²⁵ Interestingly, this account (which is strictly *not* a sutta) has no actual teachings by the Buddha, except for generally mentioning that the Buddha “exhorted, instructed” (*ovādi anusāsi*) them [§§33, 35, 36].

Clearly this refers to miscellaneous teachings, especially those related to clarifying or elaborating on the first sermon. In fact, immediately after this account, a more sustained teaching follows (Mv 1.6.38-48).

²²² In the earliest sense, *aññā* simply means “knowledge,” evidently here it refers to “final knowledge” (Jayatilleke 1963:432) since it has brought Koṇḍañña his final liberation. On this account, Aññā (or Aññāta) Koṇḍañña is declared by the Buddha to be the “longest-standing” (*rattaññū*) of the monks (A 1:23). On the origin of his sobriquet & surname: *Aññā or Aññāta Koṇḍañña*, see V 1:12,18 = S 5:424,10; S 1:193,31 f. It is possible that *aññāta* is the honorific or nickname he received as the first to awaken after the Buddha, while *aññā* is his personal name; see A:W 2:16 n2. On *Aññāsi Koṇḍañña*, cf V 1:12,17) = A 1:23,17 (cf AA 1:136-148); J 1:82,11; U 77,1 (Aññāta Koṇḍañña; UA); MA 2:37,19; DhA I 97,1; ThīA 3,8 (~*pamukhā aṭṭhārasa brahma,koṭiyo*); DhA 1:87,1 (do); UA 371; DhsA 35,21 (do). Author of Tha 673-688 (Tha:RD 284-287); Ap 1.48,24-50,5. Cf M 2:43, 3:29; S 1:24.

²²³ Here **Koṇḍañña** becomes a streamwinner. On the 5th day of Āsāḷha, all the 5 monks attain arhathood upon listening to the **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,24/3:68), SD 1.2. Koṇḍañña, having become a streamwinner, requests for the going-forth (*pabbajjā*) and the ordination (*upasampadā*). The Buddha admits him with the words: “Come, O bhikkhu! Well-proclaimed is the Dharma of the Blessed One; live the holy life for making a complete end of suffering (*ehi bhikkhu, svākkhāto bhagavato dhammo, cara brahma, cariyam sammā dukkhassa anta, kiriyāya*)” (V 1:12). This is Koṇḍañña’s ordination and the earliest form of ordination conferred by the Buddha.

²²⁴ ThīA 3,8 f. V 1:10 f (V:H 4:15-17); S 56.11/5:424 (SD 1.1).

²²⁵ On the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*), see SD 49/8b (7.5).

We know this teaching famously as **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59),²²⁶ which closes with the 5 monks becoming (along with the Buddha), the first arhats in the world.²²⁷

9.3 This narrative, being a part of the Vinaya, is clearly a late canonical work. It must have been put together, like the rest of the Vinaya, as a sort of after-thought. While the Vinaya was compiled as a record and guide to monastic discipline for a time when the Buddha is no more living, accounts such as the first two discourses of the Buddha and their attendant events were put together so that the Buddhist community—including we today who are reading this—have a complete, or at least, a good idea, of the early teachings of the Buddha and record of his public ministry.

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Pañca,vaggiya Pabbajjā

The Going-forth of the Group of 5 Monks

Mv 1.6.32-37

Koṇḍañña's renunciation

[Mv 1.6.32] Then, the venerable **Añña Koṇḍañña**,
having seen dharma,²²⁸ attained dharma, understood dharma, plunged into dharma,²²⁹
having crossed over doubt, having cleared away uncertainty, having won moral courage,
independent of others, in the Teacher's Teaching,²³⁰
said this to the Blessed One:

²²⁶ S 22.59/3:66-68 ≈ Mv 1.6.38-47 (V 1:13 f), SD 1.2.

²²⁷ That is, in our epoch of this world-cycle (*kappa*), on which, see SD 2.19 (8 f) & SD 49.8 (15.2).

²²⁸ "Dharma" (*dhamma*) here refers to the 4 noble truths (*catu,sacca,dhamma*). 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), SD 64.1.

²²⁹ These 4 phrases—*diṭṭha,dhammo patta,dhammo vidita,dhamma pariyogāḷha,dhammo*—says BA, refer to the "4-truth dharma" (*catu,sacca,dhamma*) (BA 13 f, 16), ie, suffering is "seen" (*diṭṭha*), its arising (craving) is "understood" (*vidita*), the path is attained (*patta*), its ending (nirvana) is plunged into (*pariyogāḷha*)." For this collation to work, the middle two phrases need to be switched around.

²³⁰ This para thus far: *Atha kho āyasmā aññāta,koṇḍañño diṭṭha,dhammo patta,dhammo vidita,dhammo pariyogāḷha,dhammo tinṇa,vicikiccho vigata,katharṃ,katho vesārajja-p,patto apara-p,paccayo satthu,sāsane* is stock: Mv 1.6.32-37 (V 1:12) (streamwinning of Koṇḍañña, Vappa & Bhaddiya), Mv 1.6.36 (V 1:13) (streamwinning of Mahānāma & Assaji); **Yasa's father** (Mv 1.7.10 @ V 1:16,26), SD 11.2(7); **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,2.21-22/1:110); **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5,29/1:149); **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35,24/1:234, 26/1:235); **Upāli S** (M 18/1:380); **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491); **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74,15/1:501); **Brahmāyu S** (M 91,36/2:145); "a fortunate group of 20 friends," **Tiṃsa Bhikkhu S** (S 15.13,5), SD 48.3; **Sīha S** (A 8.12,9/4:186); **Ugga S 1** (A 8.21/4:209); **Ugga S 2** (A 8.22/4:214); **Kuṭṭhi S** (U 5.3/49).

“May I, bhante, receive the going-forth²³¹ in the Blessed One’s presence, may I receive ordination?”²³²

32.2 “Come, bhikshu,”²³³ said the Blessed One, “Well taught is the Dharma. Live the holy life for the utter ending of suffering!”²³⁴ So this came to be this venerable one’s ordination.

The renunciation of Vappa and Bhaddiya

33 Then, the Blessed One exhorted, instructed those remaining monks with Dharma-talk. Then, while they were being exhorted, instructed by the Blessed One with Dharma-talk, the dust-free, stainless **Dharma-eye** [vision of truth]²³⁵

arose in the venerable Vappa²³⁶ and in the venerable Bhaddiya,²³⁷

that “whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to end.”²³⁸

34 They, *having crossed over doubt, having cleared away uncertainty, having won moral courage, independent of others, in the Teacher’s Teaching, said this to the Blessed One:*

“May we, bhante, receive the going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence, may we receive ordination?”

34.2 “Come, bhikshus,” said the Blessed One, “Well taught is the Dharma. Live the holy life [V 1:13] for the utter ending of suffering!”²³⁹

So this came to be these venerable ones’ ordination.

35 Then, the Blessed One, eating the food brought back by these,²⁴⁰ exhorted, instructed those remaining monks with Dharma-talk, saying:

“Let the group of six²⁴¹ live on whatever the three monks bring when they have walked for almsfood.”

²³¹ *Pabbajjā*. At this early stage, this simply means “acceptance” into the noble sangha (*ariya,saṅgha*), as the candidate is qualified, as a streamwinner, etc. Only later, when the admission is institutionalized, esp for new converts, who “go forth” (*pabbajjā*), ie, the initial going forth from home into homelessness, and also admission as a novice (*sāmaṇera*).

²³² *Upasampadā*, admission as a monk (*bhikkhu*). At this early stage, the *upasampadā* is obviously unknown, and is here mentioned after the fact by the Vinaya compilers. Here, the qualified candidates (at least streamwinners) are admitted by a simple but full recognition, “Come!” (sg *ehi* or pl *etha*).

²³³ This *ehi bhikkhu* admission is the first and oldest way by which one becomes a monk. The Buddha himself admits the candidate, as here and below [§§34.2, 37.2]. They are all streamwinners, and are thus *de facto* or “noble” (*ariya*) sangha members (not the institutionalized “conventional” order, *sammuti,saṅgha*, introduced later). See *Pabbajjā*, SD 45.16 (1).

²³⁴ Note here and below [§§32.2, 34.2 37.2] that the *ehi* formula closes with “for the utter end of suffering” (*sammā dukkhassa anta,kiriyāya*), signifying that the candidates are not yet arhats, whose *ehi* formula lacks this phrase: see *Pabbajjā*, SD 45.16 (122).

²³⁵ Comy says that the “Dharma-eye” (*dhamma,cakkhu*) [SD 49.8b (7.5)] is the path of streamwinning. In **Brahmā-yu S** (M 91,36/2:145), it refers to the 3 paths (*tiṇṇaṃ maggānaṃ*), ie, culminating in non-returning; in **Cūḷa Rāhul’-ovāda S** (M 147,9/3:280), the destruction of influxes (*āsava-k,khaya*). 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)

²³⁶ Vappa’s verse is at Tha 61; see also MA 2:192; AA 1:147; ThaA 150; VA 965; J 1:82.

²³⁷ Bhaddiya does not seem to have any Tha; but see VA 965; MA 2:192; AA 1:147; J 1:82.

²³⁸ *Yarṇ kiñci samudaya,dhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodha,dhamman’ti*.

²³⁹ This is the earliest form of admission into the sangha, performed by the Buddha himself: see SD 45.16 (1.2).

²⁴⁰ Koṇḍañña, Vappa and Bhaddiya.

²⁴¹ The Buddha and the 5 monks.

The renunciation of Mahānāma and Assaji

36 Then, while they were being exhorted, instructed by the Blessed One with Dharma-talk, the dust-free, stainless **Dharma-eye** arose in the venerable Mahānāma²⁴² and to the venerable Assaji,²⁴³ that “whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to end.”

37 They, *having crossed over doubt, having cleared away uncertainty, having won moral courage, independent of others, in the Teacher’s Teaching, said this to the Blessed One:*

“May we, bhante, receive the going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence, may we receive ordination?”

37.2 “**Come, bhikshus,**” said the Blessed One, “**Well taught is the Dharma. Live the holy life for making an utter end of suffering!**”

So this came to be these venerable ones’ ordination.

— evaṃ —

Reading

[See SD 1, Main Bibliography, or SD 01, Sutta Guide]

Aiyaswami Sastri, N

1938 “The first sermon of the Buddha.” *New Indian Antiquary* 1,8 Nov 1938:473-492. Examination of 11 versions of the Dhammacakka Sutta.

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²⁴² Mahānāma does not seem to have any Tha; but see VA 965; MA 2:192; AA 1:147; J 1:82.

²⁴³ Assaji is the elder whom Sāriputta meets and, impressed by his peaceful demeanour, asks for teachings and is converted, along with Moggallāna (V 1:39 f): he meets the wanderer Saccaka, **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35/1:227), SD 26.5, and **Assaji S** (S 22.88/3:124-126) + SD 42.8 (1) Assaji; see also MA 2:270, 271. C A F Rhys Davids, in *Sakya, or Buddhist Origins* (1928:122 ff), attr the *ye dhammā hetu-p,pabhavā* verse (Mv 1.23.5) to Assaji; see also her *Gotama the Man*, 1928:76 f, 108, 242; *A Manual of Buddhism for Advanced Students*, 1900:215. Her pioneer works, however, are very dated.

1. The Truths and the Path

Saccā & magga

Levels of knowing

1. Truth *sacca, ñāṇa*:
heard, thought
2. Practice *kicca, ñāṇa*:
cultivated
3. Realization *kata, ñāṇa*:
self-realized

1. Suffering

dukkha

- 1.1 Theory (truth)
- 1.2 To be understood
- 1.3 Has been understood

2. The arising of suffering

samudaya

- 2.1 Theory (truth)
- 2.2 To be abandoned
- 2.3 Has been abandoned

3. The ending of suffering

nirodha

- 3.1 Theory (truth)
- 3.2 To be realized
- 3.3 Has been realized

4. The path leading to the ending of suffering

magga

- 3.1 Theory (truth)
- 3.2 To be cultivated
- 3.3 Has been cultivated

The 8 sufferings
also called

Physical suffering (*dukkha, dukkha*)

1. birth
2. decay
[][disease] *only in V & S*
3. death
4. grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair

Suffering = change (*vipariṇāma dukkha.*)

5. to be with the unpleasant
6. to be without the pleasant
7. not to get what one desires

Suffering = formations (*saṅkhāra dukkha*)

8. **the 5 clinging aggregates**

*See §5(i) n.

Craving

1. for sense-pleasure:
kāma, taṇhā
hedonism
2. for existence:
bhava, taṇhā
→ *eternalism*
sassata, diṭṭhi
3. for non-existence:
annihilationism
uccheda, diṭṭhi
(materialism)

Nirvana

1. with remains
sopādisesa nibbāna
[no defilements,
no clinging aggregates]
the 1st Awakening
2. without remains
nirupādisesa nibbāna
[no aggregates at all]
the Great Nirvana

The Anatta, Iakkhaṇa Sutta (S 22.59) elaborates on these aggregates; **the Āditta, pariyaṇa Sutta** (S 35.28) then presents the 6 senses using the imagery of fire.

The noble eightfold path

ariya, aṭṭh'āṅgika magga

Training in wisdom (*paññā sikkhā*)

1. **right view** *sammā, diṭṭhi*
[understanding the noble truths]
2. **right thought** *sammā, saṅkappa*
[thoughts of renunciation, of goodwill, of non-violence]

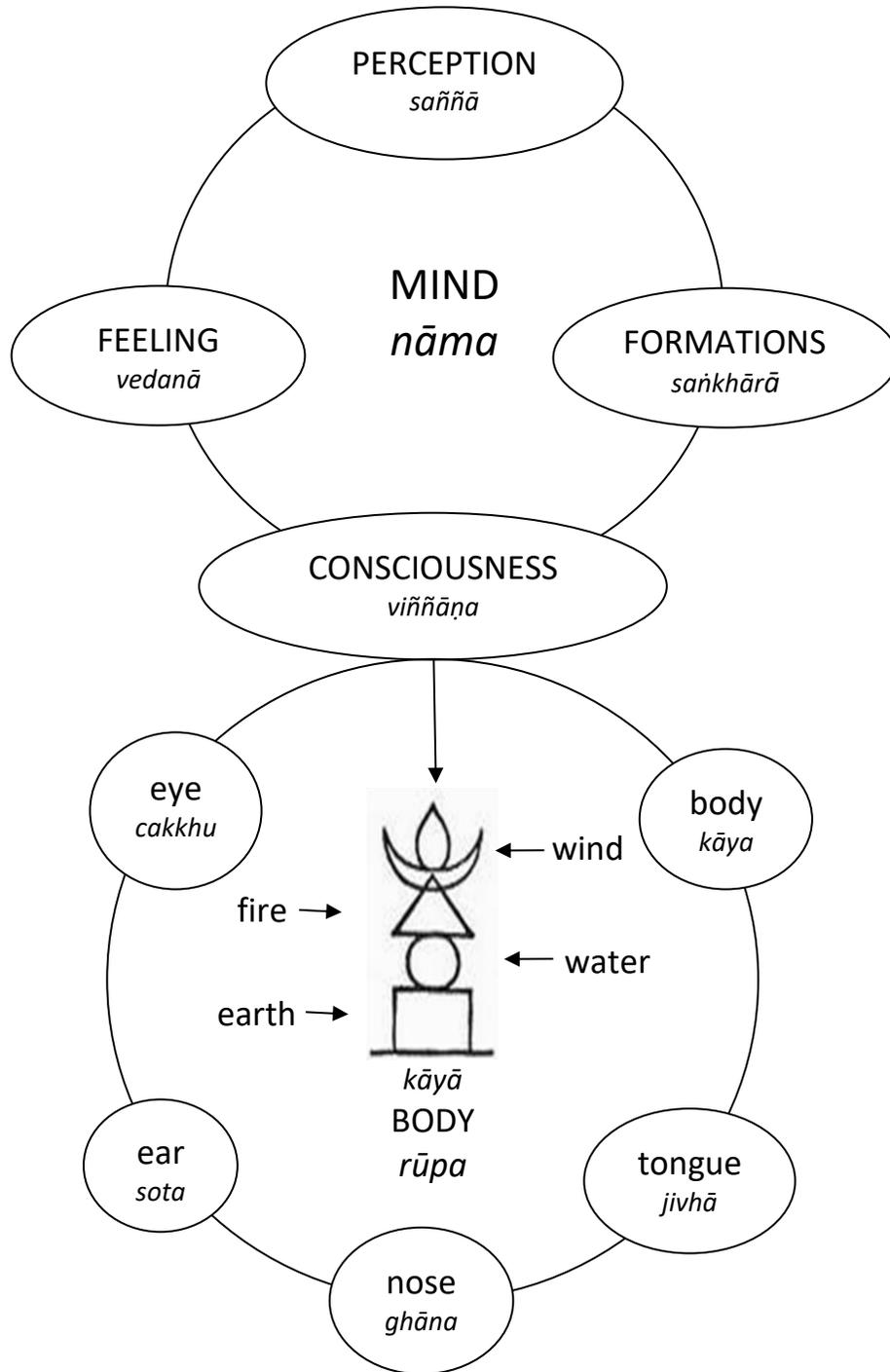
Training in moral virtue (*sīla sikkhā*)

3. **right speech** *sammā, vācā*
[truthful, unifying, pleasant, beneficial]
4. **right action** *sammā, kammantā*
[no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct]
5. **right livelihood** *sammā, ājivā*
[not harming oneself, others, or environment]

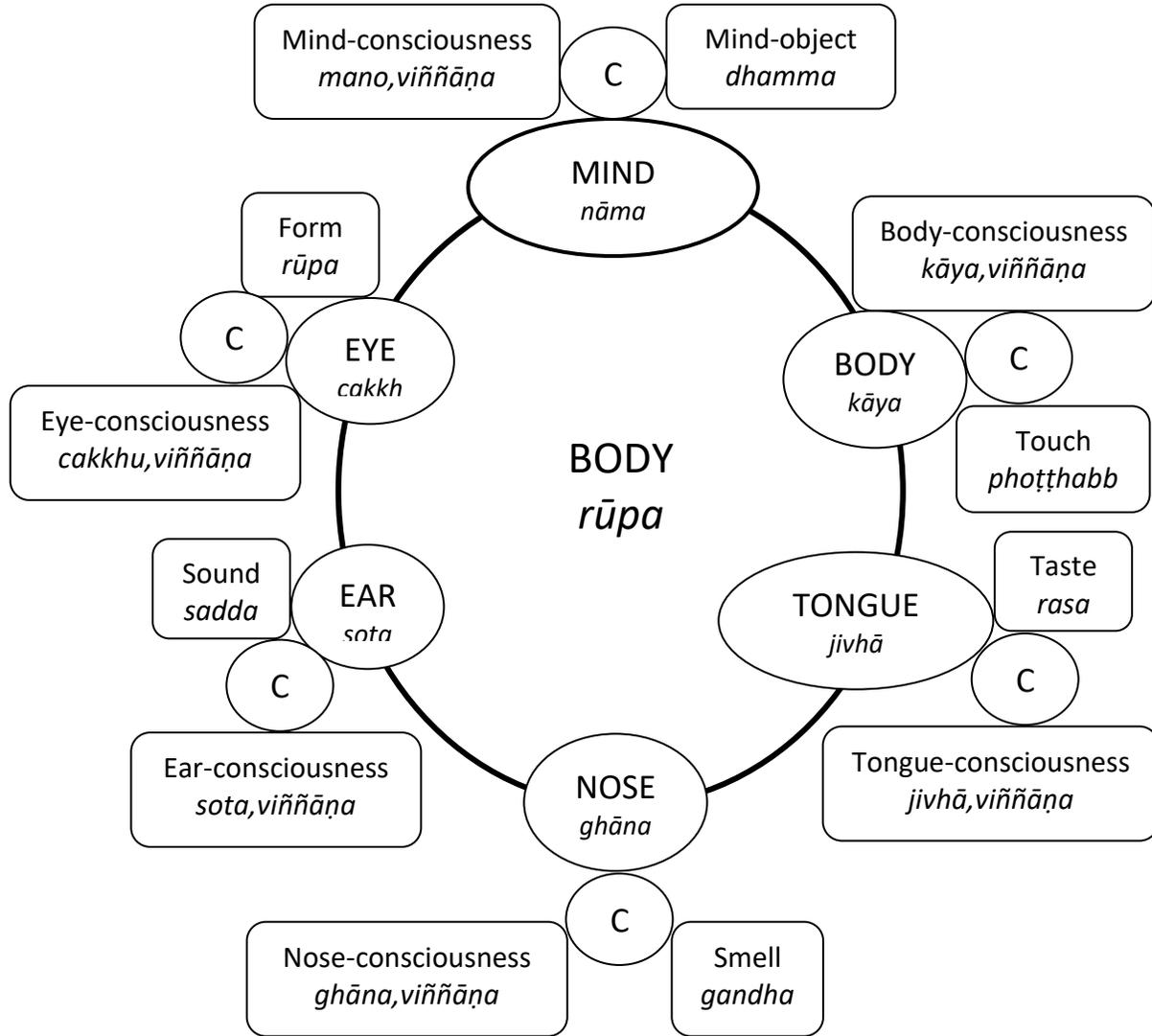
Training in concentration (*samādhi sikkhā*)

6. **right effort** *sammā, vāyāma*
[prevent, give up evil; cultivate, maintain good]
7. **mindfulness** *sammā, sati*
[the 4 focusses of mindfulness]
8. **right concentration**
sammā, samādhi [the 4 dhyanas]

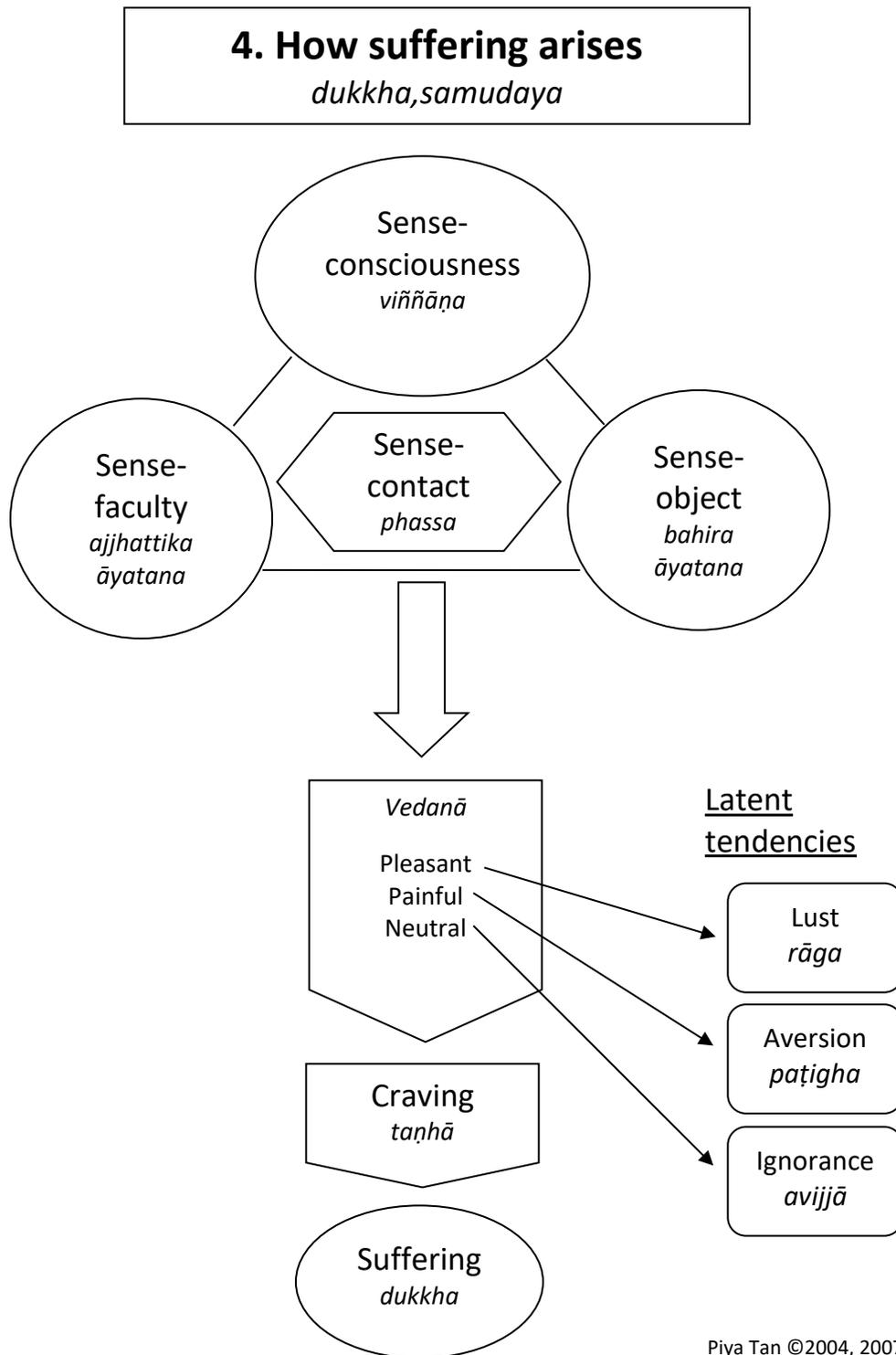
2. The 5 aggregates and the 6 senses
pañca-k,khandha & saḷ'āyatana



3. The 18 Elements
aṭṭhārasa āyatana



C = respective sense-contact or stimulus



For a diagram of the 6 sense-faculties, see **Indriya, bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152), SD 17.13 Table 3a.



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