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The Notion of *Diṭṭhi*

The nature of doubt, views and right view in early Buddhism
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1 Early Buddhist training¹

1.1 THE 3 TRAININGS

1.1.0 Buddhist training is threefold: training in moral virtue, in mental concentration and in wisdom.² They are like the three legs of a tripod, standing together in harmony with one another, helping us progressively grow into true individuals,³ those with well-liberated minds in healthy bodies.

The 3 trainings are intimately connected with how we view ourselves and the world around us. The first, the training in moral virtue, is about overcoming wrong views, mostly in terms of our physical and social being. The second, mental training, is about cultivating right view (singular) [4.2] about ourselves, discovering our spiritual potential for inner peace and clarity. And the third, wisdom training, is opening ourselves up to a direct vision of true reality with an insight wisdom that is liberating. Let us look closer at each of these 3 trainings.

1.1.1 Training in moral virtue (*sīla, sikkhā*), in simple terms, concerns *the respect for our body and speech*. More broadly, they encompass *all our sources of knowledge* of the external world, that is, the workings of our 5 physical senses and their respective sense-experiences.⁴ Such information, however, rarely appear to us as they really are, because our minds *process* such sense-experiences, instead of actually reflecting them.

Our minds try to “make sense” of what we experience. For most of us, this “sense” of things is almost always based on our past experiences and on information from others. Such experiences, then, are, as a rule, second-hand, even third-hand. We rarely have direct experiences of things. In simple terms, these are our views (*diṭṭhi*), how we see ourselves and the world.⁵

Such views are necessarily incomplete, often false and shifting, but we tend to regard them as complete, true and final. Yet, over the years of our conscious lives, our knowledge and understanding have been growing, changing and becoming clearer. The question is whether we notice that these jigsaw pieces of information and insight are fitting together before us.⁶ [13.1]

Our physical senses, then, are the windows of knowledge, and the mind is the processor of such knowledge. The 5 physical senses and the mind are our most precious faculties: these are collectively called **the 6 sense-bases** (*saḥ, āyatana*). *We are* these 6 sense-bases. Moral conduct is the respect for what we really are: these 6 sense-bases, that is, respect for the body, for what supports the body, for the

¹ If you are very new to Buddhism, or reading this the first time, it is best to read through at least *this section* right through once. Then, if you are inclined to, look up the various cross-refs to glean what you can. It helps to remind ourselves that we are reading this not to add on to our store of Buddhist information, but to observe how we naturally relinquish our old views and open up to the truth and beauty of the Dharma, thus transforming ourselves into wiser and happier individuals, able to similarly inspire others. Do not rush this process; enjoy it as it goes.

² On the 3 trainings, see *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

³ On the true individual (*sappurisa*), see *Sappurisa S* (M 113), SD 23.7, & *Bāla Paṇḍita S* (M 129,27-50), SD 2.22.

⁴ On moral virtue (*sīla*), see *Sīlānussati*, SD 15.11.

⁵ See *The unconscious*, SD 17.8b.

⁶ On perception, see *Saññā*, SD 17.4.

body's freedom of activity and movement, for its propensity for truth and reality, and mental development.⁷

1.1.2 Training in concentration (*samādhi, sikkhā*). The second aspect of Buddhist training—that of mental concentration (*samādhi, sikkhā*)—is an effort to let these random views naturally fall into their proper places, so that we have a better understanding of the whole picture. To do this, we need to clear our mind of distracting sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts, so that it can *concentrate* or focus on the reality before us. Then, when the mind is clearer, it calms down to be able to see itself in its true reality. This, in essence, is called “meditation” or mental cultivation.⁸

The initial step in mental training is simply that of clearing the obstacles for the arising of joy as we meditate. Our connection with the Dharma—listening to it, teaching it, reflecting on it, or doing a simple concentration exercise—clarifies to us the Dharma and its goal. This arouses *gladness* in us, which leads to zest, which calms the body so that we feel happy (or very comfortable, *sukha*), and all this brings on mental stillness.⁹

1.1.3 Training in wisdom (*paññā, sikkhā*). Bodily harmony and mental focus, when properly directed, help us to transcend our bodies and minds, so that we are able to rise above our own fabricated and virtual world of the senses, and directly experience true reality, free of the senses. This is the training in wisdom. It is like a transcendental spring-cleaning of our six senses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—so that they work more faithfully, inspiring truth and beauty in our lives, and in due course, liberation.

Wisdom-training progressively helps us better to understand how we should work with views, so as to clear away the wrong ones, and build a good foundation of right view (note the singular) [4.2], that is, learning to see things directly as they are in our present moment awareness. In this way, we would in due course fully free ourselves of all views, and awaken to true reality and real happiness.

1.2 THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING METHODS

1.2.1 Within the first 20 years of the Buddha's ministry, the monastic community already has a solid core of great arhats. It is then that the Buddha allows the monastics themselves to ordain others, even if they have not attained the path, so that they can gain spiritual training towards awakening, or at least live morally virtuous lives as the basis for spiritual awakening.

1.2.2 In sociological terms, the Buddha here “rationalizes” his charisma, that is, transfers it to the sangha or monastic community, as it were.¹⁰ Entry into the monastic community is *routinized* into a “communal act” (*saṅgha, kamma*), which includes a ritual recitation of the “formal act” (*kamma, vācā*) of ordination that effectively incorporates a monastic into being.

⁷ On the nature of the 5 precepts, see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S**, SD 1.5 (2) & **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2). As right livelihood, see SD 37.8 (2.2). On the context of moral virtue in Buddhist training, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁸ On meditation, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1.

⁹ This I call the pāmujja sequence: see **Vimutt'āyatana S** (A 5.26/3:21-24), SD 21.5 (2).

¹⁰ Rationalization, as a sociological term, was “the master concept of M[ax] Weber's analysis of modern capitalism, referring to a variety of related processes, by which every aspect of human action became subject to calculation, measurement and control” (*Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed, 2006:319). See B S Turner, *Max Weber: From history to modernity*, London: Routledge, 1992.

1.2.3 Such monastics, formally ordained, are only members of the “conventional” *sangha* (*sammuti sangha*), that is, they are not saints of the path, at least not yet. A conventional monastic’s task is to keep to the monastic discipline and keep up mental cultivation. Meantime, they have to make sure that they do not fall into any wrong views, but to continue to straighten their views so that they do not in any way hinder or distract themselves from their meditation, or at least not make them break any precept or leave the order.

1.2.4 Hence, in the later years of the Buddha’s ministry, his teachings (and those of his awakened disciples, monastic and lay) are directly or indirectly based on the approach of *distinguishing between wrong view and right view*, and *rejecting the former and promoting the latter*. A wrong view, in other words, is what underlies unwholesome acts, while right view underlies wholesome acts. A classic discourse illustrating this process is **the Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9), which defines the unwholesome (*akusala*) and the wholesome (*kusala*), and an understanding of dependent arising in terms of the 4 noble truths.¹¹ In fact, this is the short definition of right view, that is, the proper understanding of the truths.¹² [2.1]

1.3 PERIODS IN THE BUDDHA’S MINISTRY

1.3.1 The early periods

1.3.1.1 It is a well known and accepted fact that the Buddha taught for 45 years—from his awakening at 35 up to his passing away at 80. Scholars generally agree that the Buddha’s period of teaching activity “was in the second half of the fifth century BC, perhaps extending into the first quarter of the fourth century.” Hajime Nakamura, K R Norman and Richard Gombrich all propose the Buddha’s dates as being within the range suggested by André Bareau: around 400 BCE, with a margin of 20 years in either side.¹³

1.3.1.2 The Buddha’s 45-year ministry, in terms of how the Dharma is presented to the intended audience, can be divided into 2 or 3 periods.¹⁴ The first period covers roughly the first 10 years, or at the most, the first 20 years, of the ministry,¹⁵ and the second, the remaining 25-35 years or so. We can more or less surmise that during **the 1st period** (the first 10-20 years of the ministry), the Buddha’s teaching consists of *a non-dual*¹⁶ approach to inner silence centred around the “silent sage.” [2.2]

This is a period of the great arhats and renunciants who are truly conscientious in their practice. Besides the arhats, there are the non-returners, the once-returners and the streamwinners. There is no need for the Pāṭimokkha (monastic code), which means that the Vinaya has not yet been introduced. There is only the “admonitory code” (*ovāda, pāṭimokkha*) (Dh 183-185).¹⁷ The Buddha’s teachings are

¹¹ M 9/1:46-55 (SD 11.14).

¹² (**Magga**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 45.8), SD 3.3(1.1).

¹³ L S Cousin 1996:58.

¹⁴ There is no clear or complete chronology of the Buddha’s teaching activities or a detailed history of the early Vinaya: so what is suggested here can only be conjectural at best. However, see Frauwallner 1956 & Prebish 1973. On the Buddha’s dates, see Prebish 2008.

¹⁵ Apparently, during the first 9 rains (*vassa*) at least, the Buddha’s ministry might be said to be trouble-free in terms of monastic discipline. The first recorded account of any significant monastic disorder is prob during the 10th rains, which the Buddha spends alone in the Pārileyyaka forest, as a result of his inability to quell the undisciplined monks of Kosambī. See (**Anuruddha**) **Upakkilesa S** (M 128/3:152-162) + SD 5.18 (1).

¹⁶ “Non-dual” here is used in a non-technical sense to simply reflect *the rejecting of extreme views*, focusing on inner awakening, esp in connection with the early teachings.

¹⁷ See **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74) @ SD 16.1 (6).

then simple, personal and directly touching the hearts of the ready listeners. Those who are able to empty themselves of their views become arhats; others, with lingering views, relinquish them in stages depending on their maturity on the path. [8.2]

1.3.1.3 Slight broader than the “1st period” is “**the early period**,” roughly the first 20-25 years of the Buddha’s ministry. During this period, a “monastery-park” (*ārāma*) was, as a rule, a “forest monastery,” with personal cells or residences called *vihara* for individual monks. These single-occupant viharas were scattered amongst the forested area of the monastery-park. There was also a communal Dharma hall, which also probably served as the consecrated convocation-hall (*uposathâgāra*), where the monks gathered fortnightly for the Pātimokkha recital.

1.3.1.4 A more detailed periodization of the Buddha’s 45-year ministry can be done in this manner:

<u>the Buddha’s age</u>			
0	35 years old	}	The 1 st period
5	40		
10	45		
15	50	}	The middle period
20	55		
25	60		
30	65	}	The 3 rd period
35	70		
40	75		
45	80 years old		

}	The early period		
		}	The late period or 2 nd period

1.3.2 The later periods

1.3.2.1 The middle period straddled between the 10th-15th years and the 30th-35th years. The sangha was growing, and the sangha was already sanctioned by the Buddha to admit monks who were not even learners, but independent enough to live as monastic trainees, keeping to the Vinaya and Dharma training.

The 3rd period or “last period” comprise the last 15 years of the ministry. By this time, most of the recorded suttas would have been taught. This is the “late canonical period” of the longer suttas with well structured doctrines, such as **the Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24, SD 28.3) [6.1]. **The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16, SD 9) belongs to this period, but its composition was concluded decades after the Buddha’s passing, but definitely by Asoka’s time.

A broader “**late period**” starts after the “early period” [1.3.1], that is, from the 25th to the Buddha’s passing. We can also call this “**the 2nd period**,” when the Buddha and sangha members regularly gave teachings to the general public or anyone ready for spiritual transformation. Various teaching models, familiar to us, such as the 3 unwholesome roots, the 4 truths, the noble eightfold path, dependent arising (up to 12 links in number), and so on, are used. [11]

1.3.2.2 This “period” categorization of the Buddha’s ministry does not suggest two discrete periods, but are more of a predominant trend. While it is true that the Buddha probably teaches almost exclusively in a “non-dual” manner to the spiritually ready listeners during the first period, he clearly must

have continued using this same method to others who are “quick learners” (*ugghaṭitaññū*),¹⁸ throughout his ministry. However, during the “2nd period,” he uses various approaches and teaching models to suit the spiritual maturity of his audience. [8.1.2]

1.3.2.3 It is also useful to speak of a “middle period” of between 2-3 decades straddling the 2 periods, that is, roughly from the 10th-30th years of the ministry; thus, we can speak of **the 3 periods** of the ministry. The middle period would be a time when, as the Buddha, his teachings and the sangha became more popular over a greater area of the central Gangetic plain, the Buddha and his disciples would be confronted with the challenges of the time, especially from other religious systems, including the brahmins.

Examples of suttas recording events from this middle period would be those relating the conversion of Vedic gods or the rejection of brahminical systems, especially rituals. A good example of the former is found in **the Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21), SD 54,9; and the latter, **the (Sattaka) Aggi Sutta** (A 7.44), SD 31.6. A sutta that demythologizes the tutelary gods of the quarters, transforming the various directions into reciprocal duties—famously shown in **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), SD 4.1—is likely to belong to the middle period, too.¹⁹

1.4 DHARMA-VINAYA. These twin trends lead to the core of the Buddha’s teaching, which was later systematized by the monastic community into an oral tradition and early canon—**the Dharma** (*dhamma*) or teaching, that is, methods for personal development—that has been successfully handed down to this day.

The Buddha has also introduced monastic rules and administrative procedures—forming **the Vinaya**, that is a structure for social development of the spiritual community—so that the Buddhist monastic sangha²⁰ survives to this day, too. The overall effect of the Buddha’s genius is that he has laid a solid foundation for Buddhism as the world’s first missionary religion, and a living salvific path that has lasted some 2,600 years.²¹

2 View and practice

2.1 RIGHT VIEW AS RIGHT CONDUCT

Ideally speaking, outsiders *view* Buddhism; Buddhists *practise* it. On a more practical level, we could say that while Buddhism is a set of views and rituals, the Dharma is about *right view* and *right conduct*. From the teachings of such discourses as **the Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta** (M 117), we are reminded that right view must underlie all the other factors of the noble eightfold path, that is, our bodily, verbal and

¹⁸ The 4 types of persons, in terms of how fast they learn the Dharma, are: (1) the intuitive or quick learner (*ugghaṭitaññū*); (2) the diffuse learner or the intellectual (*vipacit’aññū*), one who learns after a detailed treatment; (3) the guidable (*neyya*), one who needs tutoring; and (4) the slow learner (*pada,parama*), “one who merely knows the word of the text (but not the meaning or usage)” (A 2:135; Pug 41; MA 3:178, 5:60).

¹⁹ See SD 54.8 (1.1.3.3).

²⁰ The word *saṅgha* in the scriptures of all the schools of Buddhism refers only to the “monastic community,” i.e. the celibate renunciants. There is a tendency in the West, esp the US, to use sangha for their groups, a tendency prob rooted in their Judaeo-Christian history, used to the idea of a “church.” Meaning changes in words are unavoidable, but it is advantageous to us as Buddhists to remember their historical and textual senses and usages, esp when we adopt them for our own purposes.

²¹ See **The great commission**, SD 11.2 (11).

mental conduct directed into spiritual cultivation by our progressively breaking through into true reality and liberation.²²

For this reason, **right view** (*sammā,diṭṭhi*) is listed as *the first limb of the noble eightfold path*,²³ where it is defined as the penetration into the 4 truths in all their aspects, that is, *theory, practice, and realization*, as laid out in **the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), thus:

- | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| (1) The 1 st truth, ²⁴ | that is, suffering, | is to be <i>understood</i> . |
| (2) The 2 nd truth, | that is, the arising of suffering, | is to be <i>abandoned</i> . |
| (3) The 3 rd truth, | that is, the ending of suffering (nirvana), | is to be <i>realized</i> . |
| (4) The 4 th truth, | that is, the way to the ending of suffering, | is to be <i>cultivated</i> . |

And this noble eightfold path is **the “middle way,”** a path to be taken, avoiding the extremes of sensual indulgence and of self-mortification, that is, avoiding both annihilationism (*uccheda,diṭṭhi*) and eternalism (*sassata,diṭṭhi*).²⁵ In this way, we are not merely *having* right view, but we *are* morally virtuous and fully liberated. Hence, the Buddhist life is literally a living in truth for the sake of touching reality, tasting liberation. [10]

2.2 RIGHT VIEW AND THE FIRST DISCOURSES

2.2.1 Did the Buddha teach the first discourse?

2.2.1.1 PROBLEMS WITH THE FIRST DISCOURSE. If we take the “silent sage” (*muni*) [1.3.1] as the ideal renunciant of the first period [1.3.1], then we need to re-examine the first discourse or discourses “taught by the Buddha.” The famous first discourse, **the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), for example, is “tucked away almost inconspicuously” in the *Sacca Saṃyutta* (S:B 1520), and which centres around the 4 noble truths and the noble eightfold path (which are teaching models of the second period).

There are historical problems with the 1st discourse. Firstly, it is too well structured to fit the style of the Buddha’s first-period teaching-style. Of course, we could discount this apparent anomaly by accepting that the Buddha makes an exception of the 5 monks who are ripe and ready audience. A more probable answer will be mentioned later [2.2.2].

Secondly, the Sutta almost at once highlights the 4 noble truths, whereas it is often stated in the suttas that they are an advanced teaching, only intended for those who have been prepared to hear them. When teaching lay listeners, the Buddha frequently begins with a **“graduated talk”** (*ānupubbī,kathā*) or progressive teaching, in other words, he trains them in the gradual path, thus,

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

²² M 117/3:71-78 @ SD 6.10.

²³ For a def and details of the 8 limbs of 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 Cattārisaka S** (M 117/3:71-78), SD 6.10. See also Gethin 2001:190-226 (ch 6) for an insightful study.

²⁴ On why the truths are called “noble” (*ariya*), see SD 1.1 (4.4).

²⁵ On eternalism and nihilism, see **Dhammacakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,9-12), SD 1.1; **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3 (2.2).

He explained

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

When the Blessed One perceived that the listener's mind was *prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid*, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (*buddhānam sāmukkaṃsikā desanā*), that is to say, suffering (*dukkha*), its arising, its cessation, and the path. (V 1:15; D 1:10; A 4:186; U 49; J 1:8, 50; VbhA 423): see **Gradual way**, SD 56.1

2.2.1.2 THE FIRST SERMON AND RELATED TEACHINGS. Such teachings inspire the audience and help them to calm and clear their minds, so that they are joyful and open. Then, they are more likely to be ready to hear the 4 noble truths, and to understand them. These are, after all, teachings “peculiar” (*sāmukkaṃsikā*) to the Buddhas.²⁶ The reason for this is clear. Unless our minds are calm and open, any talk of suffering may be too disturbing, and distracting; hence, unskillful.

A view that Buddhism is “pessimistic” can be a powerful hindrance against seeing what is positive and healing in the Buddha's teachings. Such a view is only a reflection of our mind that fears losing what we see as a safe self-view. There is also a subtle, yet profound, fear of change and pain. Hence, such a view only proves that we do not really like any kind of suffering. Here, we need spiritual honesty and moral courage to face ourselves. We, the unawakened, are all “sick” with greed, hate and delusion, and it helps to begin by being realistic about it. This is what the 4 noble truths are about; they are a good place to begin our spiritual journey.

Then, perhaps we can understand better why the Buddha first teaches the 4 truths to the 5 monks. On the other hand, he must have surely given them other teachings, too, in preparation for what has been formalized as the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta. Surely, the 4 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 first discourse, he has to persuade the 5 monks that he is now *awakened*, unlike before. Although no details are given, except that the Buddha declares to them: “Bhikshus, do you allow that I have not spoken to you like this before?” We might safely assume here that other teachings are also given prior to the first discourse itself. However, the first discourse is recorded by the council elders and reciters in such a manner, so as to highlight its primacy and significance.

2.2.2 How old is the 1st discourse? It is likely that by the time of the councils and recitals, the 5 monks and many of the first-generation arhats had died, so that the council fathers or the reciters had to reconstruct these important early teachings. The oldest allusion we have to any “first discourse” is probably in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), which makes only general references to nirvana.²⁷ In other words, the council fathers or reciters highlighted the teachings that they regarded as central for the propagation and survival of the Dharma for *their* present and *our* future.

We have sufficient accounts of the early suttas, such as **the Sutta Nipāta**, to give us a good idea of the teachings the Buddha gave in the very early years of his ministry, that is, in the 1st period [1.3]. Hence, the Buddha's 1st discourse²⁸ is not only a teaching to the first 5 monks, but for all posterity, most of

²⁶ 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 ukkaṃsikā*, “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.

²⁷ M 26.29-30/1:173 @ SD 1.11.

²⁸ Se **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11), SD 1.1.

whom would have almost no prior knowledge of the Buddha's teaching or even any religious inclination (especially in later times).

2.2.3 Essence of the 1st discourse

In the Buddha's very first discourse (or its reconstruction), he advises us to avoid the two extreme views of annihilationism and of eternalism [2.1; 8.1]. If we accept the notion that in the very early years of the Buddha's ministry, he teaches "no views," and that the 5 monks should be spiritually mature enough to understand this approach, then it is possible that the first sermon, as we have it today, is a reconstruction of a forgotten teaching [2.2].

However, the Dhammacakkā Pavattana Sutta emphasizes *the rejection of a duality of views*: those of sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and to follow the middle way. **The middle way**, however, is defined in terms of the teaching models of the second-period, familiar to the sutta reciters. Of course, there is the possibility that the Buddha had actually taught the first discourse as we have it today (but without the closing exultation of the sense-world devas).²⁹ It is probable, too, that the Buddha has given other teachings in the style of the oldest parts of the Sutta Nipāta, which, however, have not come down to us.³⁰

3 Belief and faith

3.1 PARABLE OF THE PATH

Buddhism has often been described as a path (*magga*)³¹ or way (*paṭipadā*),³² which means that we need to *walk* it. We cannot merely *believe* in a journey; we need to make the journey and reach our destination. The whole project is called **the "4 noble truths"** [2]: the reason for the journey is that here we are being drowned and dispirited by suffering (*dukkha*), which has arisen from our own craving (*taṇhā*), the tendency to harp on others' haves and our own have-nots. The only way out is to rise above living this "double" life, and to taste the singular bliss of nirvana (*nibbāna*); and the journey there must be made by the safest way (*magga*).

To see life as suffering is to see things as they really are, that is to say, no matter what we have or what we are, we are never really happy. We only *think* we are happy or safe, but this is a hollow balloon waiting to be punctured in a matter of time. The point is that we all dislike suffering: it simply means we are not feeling really and fully happy as we should be.

One way to understand this seeming lack in life is that we have not really suffered. It is when something really bad happens to us, when our castle in the air comes crashing down, or our real-life castle is overrun by disasters, and then we discover our hidden strengths and forbearance, and we discover our true friends. Still, if we are wise enough, we will learn that it is best to have faith in ourselves. We are least likely to fail ourselves.

²⁹ S 56.11/5:420-424 (SD 1.1). The deva's exultation s found in §§17-19.

³⁰ See SD 1.1 (8).

³¹ As in "the noble eightfold path" (*ariya'atṭhaṅgika magga*): D 1:157,3; S 2:185,24*, 5:421,13; S 3:86,4* = A 2:34,4* = It 18,1*; Thī 158; or "noble path" (*ariya,magga*): M 3:72,19; Vbh 327,13; or "eightfold path" (*atṭhaṅgika magga*): (Dh 273). For a special study of the eightfold path, see SD 10.16.

³² As in "the middle way" (*majjhima paṭipadā*): 1:15,26+28+33; S 5:421,7; A 1:295,3; Pm 2:147,10.

3.2 BLIND FAITH, WISE FAITH

3.2.1 Blind faith

In this connection, we can speak of religious faith (*saddhā*) as being of 2 kinds: blind faith and wise faith. **Blind faith** or “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*),³³ is both baseless and irrational (M 2:170). It is the kind of faith demanded by a system based on beliefs that cannot be substantiated logically or naturally (that is, through our sense-experience).

The main problem with this kind of faith or belief-system is that it is heavily dependent on *an authority figure* to define the truth, to judge and measure us, and to favour or punish us. It is a power-based system, such as a theistic system (a God-religion). We are powerless to help or save ourselves; only some “other-power” could save us, as it were. Understandably, such a system is not only difficult, even impossible, to defend, but is easily open to abuse and harm.³⁴

3.2.2 Wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*),³⁵ on the other hand, is “faith with a good cause” (*ākāra, vati saddhā*), faith founded on seeing.³⁶ Such a faith is based on empirical facts and existential realities. In other words, we can observe these facts or even test them under proper conditions. For example, we know through observation that, just as we value our lives, both humans and animals do not allow themselves to be killed. Hence, the fact that life is precious must be a universal truth. This is, in fact, an example of the “golden rule.”³⁷ [13.3]

“**Existential realities**” here are the experiences of our physical senses and our mind (traditionally known as the “6 senses”). These are, in fact, our only sources of knowledge, and our objects of knowledge—what we can know—that is, the 6 sense-objects: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts. In fact, even the physical sense experiences are often filtered or distorted by our mental lenses. We see what we want to see; we hear what we want to hear; we sense what we want to sense; we think what we want to think: so we think, anyway. As such, we need to first carefully examine and understand the sources and objects of our knowledge.³⁸

3.3 FAITH, COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE

3.3.0 The 2 kinds of faith

Rupert Gethin speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective:

Faith in its **cognitive** dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions [4.3] or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.

(Gethin 2001:107; emphases added)

³³ *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy).

³⁴ For the Buddha’s criticism of such a system, see **Te, vija S** (D 13/1:235-252), SD 1.8.

³⁵ *Avecca-p, pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69) = *avecca* (fr *aveti*, “he goes down to, understands”), “having understanding, penetrated”) + *pasāda*, “clear brightness, satisfaction, faith.”

³⁶ M 1:320,8, 401,23. See **Vassa S** (S 55.38/5:306), SD 45.10. On how faith arises from suffering, see **Upanisā S** (S 12.23), SD 6.12.

³⁷ See eg **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41.8/1:286 & 41.12/1:287), SD 5.7.

³⁸ See eg **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

3.3.1 Cognitive faith

3.3.1.1 Cognitive faith, in other words, is a received or learned faith, a belief in a holy book, a tradition handed down from above that must be accepted without question, or the questioning must be limited or refereed by some authoritative figure or body. It is the kind of faith that holds us down in a belief or dogma; it is a *static* belief. Too much questioning, especially when latitude and honesty prevail, would only unravel and deconstruct such a closed system.

Belief (certainly in the case of *religious* belief), as a rule, closely follows wishing or hoping. What we wish or hope for often translates into prayer. We conveniently forget about it when the prayer does not work, and feel convinced when we think it has worked.³⁹

3.3.1.2 Psychologically, for such a system to succeed, it must give no latitude to the intellect. Here, it is meaningful to say: *no thinking is allowed*, no reasoning; no questions should betray any lack of faith. Whatever we can know or express must be outshone by the greater glory of a higher power, which defines truth, good and everything else.

The narrowness of such a system dictates that it must find expression in some other way: usually this is done emotionally, such as through music, prayer and other *dissociative*⁴⁰ means of religious expression and psychological self-assurance. Or, its lifestyle must be ruled and regimented by some kind of moralistic code of rules and obedience, and the primacy of the tribe or group above the individual. Moreover, for them, there is no salvation outside the tribe; and without the tribe, they are nothing.

These are man-made beliefs and religions. In the natural state of things—or true reality—there is no salvation outside of the individual. Contrived religions and systems try to project some kind of agency that we should turn to, even be subject to. The reality is that such systems tend to be means of tribal allegiance and social control, where society is structured and hierarchical, and salvation is defined and dispensed from the top. In a natural system, such as Buddhism, the mind is supreme—as we think so we are—hence, we need to understand how we think, and to master this ability.

3.3.2 Affective faith, according to Gethin, is “a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary” [3.3.0]. “Affective” here I take as meaning that Buddhist faith has to do with “feeling” (*vedanā*). A classic statement on this explanation is found in **the Upanisā Sutta** (S 12.23), where it is shown that, while ignorance could bring about suffering, with some wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), that suffering can well arouse faith in us.⁴¹

Wise attention is looking into and through things (*manasikāra*) right down “to its source” (*yoniso*), that is, to see things as they really are. In simple terms, this means seeing the impermanence of every thing before us or we can imagine. All things, whether physical or mental, if they exist, are necessarily *impermanent*. To exist is to change; existence is change.

³⁹ See **Itṭha S** (A 5.43/3:47-49), SD 47.2.

⁴⁰ Dissociation is a term in psychology describing a wide range of experiences from a mild detachment from one’s immediate surroundings to more severe detachment from one’s physical and emotional reality. The main symptoms of dissociative disorders range from amnesia, repression, or denial to shifts in reality or alternate identities. These tend to be defence mechanisms, often resulting from emotional trauma, and they help to keep away difficult or undesirable experiences or memories. Such shifts in reality, however, are not as serious as reality losses in psychosis. However, they can cause one not to respond to others in a healthy, or even civil, way, which can be unsettling to say the least. If there are aggravating circumstances that they cannot cope with, they are likely to experience other symptoms, such as hearing voices (from “God”) or seeing “demons,” and so on.

⁴¹ S 12.23/2:29-32 @ SD 6.12.

To know this is *true knowledge*, but to understand it and to live by it is *true wisdom*. This evidence-based knowledge matures into direct knowledge, so that it becomes liberating *wisdom*, which fully transforms us, awakening us to true reality.

3.3.3 Either faith or wisdom

Chapter 25 of the **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (the Connected Suttas on the Descent) contains 10 suttas, all of which declare that even if we were to constantly reflect on impermanence, we would be able to attain streamwinning in this life itself, certainly at the moment of passing away. The suttas make a distinction between **2 types of individuals** who enter into “the certainty of rightness” (*sammatta, niyāma*), that is, the transcendent noble eightfold path, or the path of streamwinning (*sotāpatti, magga*).

These 10 suttas give the best definition (albeit a brief one) of the truth-follower and the faith-follower that we have in the Pali Canon.⁴² The difference between the two is that of their dominant spiritual faculty (*indriya*). The one who has strong faith, who resolves (*adhimuccati*) on the impermanence of the factors listed in the ten suttas, is a faith-follower (*saddhā’nusārī*). The one who focuses on wisdom, who gains understanding of the impermanence of the same factors, is a truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*).

Both the faith-follower and the truth-follower are declared as being sure of not passing away in this life without having realized the fruit of streamwinning. In either case, when the follower knows and sees for himself the reality of impermanence, he becomes a streamwinner. As such, the Okkanta Saṃyutta does not distinguish the character of the two—they are both effectively streamwinners. As far as impermanence is concerned, we can reflect on it with *faith* or examine it with *wisdom*: it works to liberate us either way.

3.4 TRAINING MODELS

3.4.1 The 3 wisdoms

The early Buddhist texts often speak of the various levels of training and understanding, especially in connection with right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*), or more simply, with wisdom (*paññā*). This is evident from the training model of “the 3 wisdoms” (*ti paññā*), as laid out in the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) and the **Vibhaṅga**, thus:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| (1) wisdom through <u>thinking</u> or | philosophical knowledge, | <i>cintā, maya paññā</i> |
| (2) wisdom through <u>listening</u> or | academic knowledge, and | <i>suta, maya paññā</i> |
| (3) wisdom through <u>cultivation</u> or | insight knowledge. | <i>bhāvanā, maya paññā</i> ⁴³ |

Wisdom (or knowledge) through thinking is noted first here for a good reason: we generally tend to think things out for ourselves before consulting others, especially teachers, for proper answers. We all start off with our own philosophies, as it were, with what we either know or do not. Yet much of what we know comes from *outside* of ourselves, especially through listening. The Pali for “what is heard” (*suta*) also means “learned” (rather than “realized”), and would today (besides hearing from others) include reading, the mass media, the internet and related forms.

Hence, **wisdom through listening** is placed second. In Buddhist training, such a “listening” should conduce to our mental concentration, leading to inner stillness. When these two aspects of learning give us a better understanding of the teaching, we are able to effectively meditate, and so gain **wisdom through cultivation**, a kind of personal realization or direct knowledge of some depth into true reality.

⁴² See Gethin 2001:126-138.

⁴³ D 33,1.10(43)/3:219; Vbh 324; DA 3:1002; PmA 1:130 (qu Vbh 324); VbhA 412. Cf CA 316, where *suta, mayā paññā* is explained first.

These threefold learnings, however, are best seen as being interactive. In other words, in actual training, we would be hearing a lot of teachings and receiving numerous bits of information about Buddhism in theory, but not in practice. What we only “hear” (or read) remains merely as theories. When these “heard theories” are put into practice and reviewed, they become “reflected wisdom.”

In other words, we begin to connect our bits of learning into meaningful patterns and pictures. Our meditative insights, too, play a very significant role in putting all that we know into a holistic perspective, raising us to a higher level of understanding and growing liberation.

3.4.2 The 3 good truths

The Commentaries have their own model of Buddhist training, called “the three good truths” (*ti saddhamma*), namely,

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---|
| (1) the good truth as <u>theory</u> | (<i>pariyatti saddhamma</i>), | textual aspect, |
| (2) the good truth as <u>practice</u> | (<i>paṭipatti saddhamma</i>), | moral virtue and meditation, and |
| (3) the good truth as <u>realization</u> | (<i>paṭivedha saddhamma</i>), | sainthood and liberation. ⁴⁴ |

The two models actually overlap and work together, although their emphases are somewhat different. If the three wisdoms provide a kind of *horizontal* [3.4.1], interactive process of learning, the three good truths see this as a vertical or upward spiral, as it were.⁴⁵

In other words, while the *wisdoms* are the learning process, the *good truths* are their levels. Each of the three wisdoms, as a good truth, functions or grows on three levels, as theory (a basic third-hand learning), practice (a hands-on understanding), and finally realization (being fully accomplished in that aspect of wisdom). In this way, we can also see the wisdom as spiralling towards vision and liberation.

4 Right view and growth

4.1 RIGHT VIEW COMES FIRST

The effect of thought upon action is frequently discussed in the Nikāyas.⁴⁶ In essence, as we have seen [2.1], it means that right view, coming first and foremost in all our actions, is very significant. It must be present in any wholesome action or state. Yet, right view, in its fullest sense, is *not* adopting a view or holding an opinion [8]. Right view is *how* we act (at least, mentally), and *acting* in a certain wise and wholesome way. Our actions (word and deed) then demonstrate the presence of right view. Thus, right view comes first.

4.2 RIGHT VIEWS, RIGHT VIEW

The plural form, “**right views**,” refers to individual right views that oppose or counter their respective wrong views. Such an action constitutes “counter-views,” “opposition views,” or “opposition understanding” [5.1], that is, they counter wrong views. It is our initial effort on the path to **right view** (singular), which means “no views,” at least momentarily (such as during a good meditation).

⁴⁴ VA 225; AA 5.33; cf Nm 143 where the first two are listed.

⁴⁵ This is clearly seen in its application to the 3 phases or turns (*ti parivaṭṭa*) giving us the 12 aspects or modes (*dvādas’ākāra*) of the 4 noble truths: see **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:420-424) & SD 1.1 (5).

⁴⁶ See eg (**Sāla, vatikā**) **Lohicca S** (D 12/1:224-234), SD 34.8; **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74/1:497-501), SD 16.1; (**Vaṅḡisa**) **Ānanda S** (S 8.4/1:188), SD 16.12; (**Akusala Mūla**) **Añña Titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201), SD 16.4; **Nivaraṇa Pahāna Vagga** (A 1.2/1:3-5), SD 16.3; (**Vicarita**) **Taṇhā S** (A 4.199/2:211-213), SD 16.2.

Our training is to ensure that wrong views are “countered,” or better, totally removed, so that we need not have to even consider them in any way. As such, right view is **singular**⁴⁷ because it does not hold anything: it is empty of wrong views, but is ready to be filled with the wisdom of wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*),⁴⁸ that is, learning to see directly into true reality.

Right views, as such, are always **provisional**. They are relative to wrong views, countering them. Right views prepare us for mental calm and clarity, so that we cultivate a singular mind of right view (singular). Just as a focused mind, a mind in samadhi, has a single object, or is fixed on joyful stillness, right view is a single-minded fixed on personal cultivation and progress towards self-awakening.

4.3 RIGHT VIEW AS PROPOSITION

Technically, a proposition is the *object*, that is, the meaning or content of a *statement* or assertion. Philosophers and logicians are not fully agreed as to whether or not propositions really exist. If they do exist, propositions are typically taken to be the objects of *propositional attitudes*, such as belief and desire, that is, on this view, when we *believe* something, or believe *in* something (a desire for something to be true), it is the proposition that we believe to be so, or our desire that it be so.⁴⁹

Right view is mainly propositional in an instructive sense, such as when it is taught to another (*parato ghosa*). Hence, it has a *cognitive* function for the unawakened, that is, how we make “sense” of something in our sense-experience (that is, through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching), but which we have not really fully understood on a personal (that is, mental) level.

However, on a soteriological level (for the sake of awakening), we need to see and taste the *affective* dimension of right view. We need to feel (experience) true reality for ourselves. If we are unfamiliar with such a truth, it might initially sadden or terrify us. However, as we begin to see an ever bigger picture of true reality, we feel safer, and as such, happier. As our true understanding grows, so does our happiness. This joy is reflected in our mind and body: our lives are changed for the better, and we are empowered to change other lives for the better.

4.4 RIGHT VIEW IS NON-CLINGING

4.4.1 A wrong view, according to the Abhidhamma, is always “rooted in greed” (*lobha, mūla*), always seeking and clinging.⁵⁰ Right view, on the other hand, is free from seeking and clinging, but it is a “seeing” that enhances understanding.⁵¹ To say “a” wrong view (with an indefinite article) and to refer to “right view” (without any article) is significant: A view is only *a* way of seeing something, either an incomplete, or a distorted one, or as something else.

Any view is, as a rule, a wrong view. A wrong view is wrong (or, at best, provisional) because it is only *a* view. It is wrong because we only keep holding on to it, instead of really understanding it. It is a wrong turn we made in the past; so, we must move on from there. We need to keep moving on, seeking the right direction: after all, the Dharma is a path. Only in giving up wrong views are we ready for right

⁴⁷ We see a similar “plurality” of worldliness and the “singularity” of the higher mind of the saints in the term *saṅkhārā* (pl) and *saṅkhāro* (sg): see SD 40a.9 (2.4).

⁴⁸ On wise attention, see **Yoniso Manasikāra Sampadā S** (S 45.55/5:31), SD 34.12 & **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, 19.14 (5).

⁴⁹ Based on Roy T Cook’s *A Dictionary of Philosophical Logic*, Edinburgh Univ Press, 2009.

⁵⁰ **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 15) gives an “dependent arising” cycle for the origins of social disorder, thus: “dependent on feeling, there is craving → seeking → gain → decision-making → desire and lust → attachment → possessiveness → avarice → safe-guarding → there arise various bad unwholesome state—taking up of the rod, taking up of the sword, conflicts, quarrels, disputes [strife], back-biting, harsh speech, false speech” (D 15.9/2:58 f), SD 5.17.

⁵¹ Gethin 1997: 216.

view. Views are like our breath, we take it in, we must then let it out: this is the only way to live, to grow.

4.4.2 Right view is, properly speaking, seeing directly into something. Right view, as such, keeps the cognitive process that is detached (always in the present), free from extremes (letting go of the past and the future) [2.1]. Believing in the past as the only truth is to have an annihilationist view; merely hoping believing in the future is to be caught up in an eternalist view. Even merely “viewing”: the present without seeing its impermanence, change and becoming other, is a view, too, a self-view.

A view, then, is something temporary, a stop-gap for the reality that is moving in right before our very eyes. The moment we see it, it is gone. Our views are the ballast in our hot-air balloon called Self: it will never rise into the open skies, and move on, if we do not let them go.

Right view, then, is not merely about *knowing* something (much less knowing *about* something), but it is a wholesome change in ourselves, a self-transformation [9.3]. The wholesome change begins with the “letting go” of craving (*taṇhā*), the active aspect of greed (*lobha*). In short, right view is the *non-clinging* or “letting go” aspect of wisdom (*paññā*).

4.4.3 Right view is “detached” in the sense of being unstuck *in the middle* (Dh 348),⁵² as observed by **Rupert Gethin**,

In the Theravāda understanding the tendency to fix opinions can only exist prior to stream-attainment. In stream-attainment, since the wisdom of stream-attainment is characterized as *sammā-diṭṭhi*, a form of *paññā* that precisely turns away from the inclination to hold fixed opinions; once the four truths have been directly seen, the mind has no inclination to either eternalism or annihilationism, the mind has no tendency to misinterpret Buddhist theory in terms of either annihilationism or eternalism. (Gethin 1997: 221 = 2004:23)

The middle way avoids both the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, of existence and non-existence, to be and not to be. We could generally say that this middle way is the most common approach that the Buddha takes when teaching the early saints, especially the 80 great elders [10.2.1]. This is understandable because they are all right and ready to receive the Buddha’s teaching, the truth that he has awakened to, with a minimum of skillful means, if any.

To them, “**to be or not to be**” is *not* the question, ‘tis neither nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, nor is it worthwhile to take arms against a sea of troubles.⁵³ It’s just a mote “in the mind’s eye,”⁵⁴ a troubling speculation that is unnecessary and unhelpful. They have found the “middle way.”⁵⁵

5 Wrong views and right view

5.1 OPPOSITION UNDERSTANDING

5.1.1 Opposition understanding defined

Let us once again look at the two training models of the 3 wisdoms and the 3 good truths [3.4]. On a broader perspective, we can regard both *thought* wisdom and *heard* wisdom, when well developed, as

⁵² See SD 8.9 (5).

⁵³ A Buddhist response to Shakespeare’s famous quote (*Hamlet* 3.1.56-83), 1602. Hamlet is basically wondering whether it is better to live or to die: he is deeply troubled by his life’s issues, but his fear of death is even greater.

⁵⁴ Cf *Hamlet* 1.1.112 (Horatio to Barnardo), 1.2.185 (Hamlet to Horatio).

⁵⁵ Cf SD 54.2e (2.3.5.4).

academic learning, that is, theoretical and systematic learning, or even “philosophical wisdom.” Such a training may help us have a better understanding in seeing the difference between wrong views and right view [7]. **Paul Fuller**, in his insightful work, *The Notion of Diṭṭhi* (2005), has provided us with two helpful terms: “opposition understanding” and “no views understanding” (2005:2-4).

We shall first examine Fuller’s term, “opposition understanding” here, and then his related term, “no views understanding” [8]. As the term “**opposition understanding**” suggests, it concerns (1) opposing views, that is, wrong views versus right view, and (2) we need to oppose or reject wrong views, and to adopt right view. Before we go on, we need to define our terms here.

5.1.2 Wrong views defined

5.1.2.1 What are wrong views and right view? (Note that “right view” is singular here.) The well-known **wrong view pericope** defines wrong views as follows:

- (1) There is nothing given, nothing sacrificed, nothing offered.
- (2) There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.
- (3) There is no this world, there is no next world.
- (4) There is no mother, no father.
- (5) There are no spontaneously born beings.
- (6) There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.

(D 2 = M 41 = 76 = 117)⁵⁶

5.1.2.2 The **Vibhaṅga** and later literature further break down these 6 statements into a set of 10 separate points, thus highlighting the significance of each of them. This is known as the “**10-ground wrong views**” (*dasa,vatthuka mucchā,diṭṭhi*), listing them thus:

- (1) There is nothing given.
- (2) There is nothing sacrificed.
- (3) There is nothing offered.
- (4) There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.
- (5) There is no this world.
- (6) There is no next world.
- (7) There is no mother.
- (8) There is no father.
- (9) There are no spontaneously born beings.
- (10) There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.

(Vbh 392,3-10)⁵⁷

5.1.2.3 Note that these [5.1.2.1] are *not* “tenets of faith” that we must accept or believe in to be “Buddhist” or to awaken. These are guidelines for spiritual issues that we need to work with. We need to ask ourselves why we reject any of these views, or why we doubt its veracity. Such an investigation helps in a better self-understanding in terms of cultivating right view [5.1.3], which, in turn, expedites

⁵⁶ **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,23/1:55), SD 8.10; **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,10/1:287), SD 5.7; **Sandaka S** (M 76,7.2/1:515), SD 35.7; **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117,5/3:71 f), SD 6.10. The wrong views here are refuted in **Apañṇaka S** (M 60,5-12/-1:401-404), SD 35.5.

⁵⁷ See SD 55.9 (2.2.2.2(85)).

spiritual development for self-awakening. While the 5 precepts [1.1.1] are moral guidelines for our body and speech, these 6 are the key wrong views that we need to avoid as guidelines for our mental growth and spiritual health. Also, while moral virtue is the basis for a wholesome society, mental cultivation—by way of avoiding wrong views and cultivating right view—is the basis for personal development or true individuation, that is, our evolution into a true individual (one who is bound for streamwinning in this life itself).⁵⁸

5.1.2.4 These **wrong views** can be simply explained as follows:

(1) This is the view that there is no fruit of giving (that is, no value in it).⁵⁹

(2) This is essentially a rejection of karma or accountability for our actions (that is, *akiriya, vāda*), implying antinomianism and amoralism.⁶⁰

(3) The Commentaries explain that “(a) ‘there is no this world’ means that when one is established in the next world, this world does not exist; (b) ‘there is no next world’ means that when one is established in this world, the next world does not exist.”⁶¹ According to this view, deeds done in such a deterministic system would not carry over into the afterlife, even if this view concedes to a hereafter.

(4) The Commentaries explain the fourth wrong view as meaning that “there is no fruit of good or of bad behaviour (towards any parent or both).” (MA 2:332 = DA 1:165). In a number of places in the suttas, the Buddha declares that “**Givers are not fruitless**” (*dāyakā ca anipphalā*), such as in **the (Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (A 10.177) and **the Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta** (KhP 7 = Pv 1.5).⁶² Giving is, in fact, a natural quality of goodness that is common in all religions, even outside of them, in wholesome human conduct. It is a part of natural morality,⁶³ widely encouraged by the Buddha.

(5) In the present context, we must take the term “**spontaneously-born**” (*opapātika*) in its non-technical and earliest sense, meaning all beings (except the arhats) are subject to rebirth (and redeath). In other words, it is derived from *upapāta*, a secondary derivation from *upapatti*, “rebirth.” To reject or doubt the teaching of rebirth, then, is wrong view, which may be rooted in a kind of materialism.⁶⁴

[5.1.2.5]

(6) The Majjhima Commentary explains this wrong view as referring to the non-existence of “all-knowing” (*sabbaññū*) buddhas (MA 2:322), meaning that awakening is impossible.

5.1.2.5 THE 3 MEANINGS OF *OPAPĀTIKA*. From the way the term “**spontaneously-born**” (*opapātika*) is used in the canon, we can deduce three important senses, which were apparently introduced at different times during by the Buddha in his teachings. Let us examine each of these 3 senses.

(1) The oldest sense of *opapātika*, that is, the earlier and most comprehensive but non-technical sense, is that of “**rebirth**” (*ponobbhava*) in general. This is the teaching that all beings are subject to rebirth (and redeath). In other words, it is derived from *upapāra*, a secondary derivation from *upapatti*,

⁵⁸ On the “true individual,” see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

⁵⁹ As in Ajita Kesakambali’s views: **N’atthi S** (S 24.5/3:206-208), SD 65.1; also MA 2:332 = DA 165; cf D 1:55; M 1:401, 515; S 3:206.

⁶⁰ As in Pūraṇa Kassapa’s views: **Karota S** (S 24.6/3:208 f), SD 23.10; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,16/1:52), SD 8.10.

⁶¹ MA 2:332 = DA 1:165.

⁶² A 10.177,9 + SD 1.6a (1.5.3); KhP 7,6 = Pv 1.5,6 @ SD 2.7. **Anipphala** = *a-ni-p,phala*, “not without fruit, not unrewarded, not without merit,” a double neg (**Udena S**, U 7.10/79,21, pl ~ā[ni]; = *na nipphalā sampatta, sāmañña, -phalā*, UA 384) = DhA 1:222,2; (**Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177/5:271,1, 273,8 f, *dāyako pi ~o*), qu PvA 28,27); **Tirokuḍḍa S**, *dāyakā ca ~ā*, KhP 7.6/6* (KhP A 212) = Pv 1.5.5/11* (PvA 28) ≈ 18.

⁶³ On natural morality (*pakati, sīla*), see SD 37.8 (2.1); SD 40.1 (13.2).

⁶⁴ See **Mahāli S** (D 6,13/1:156), SD 53.4. See also **Rebirth in early Buddhism**, SD 57.1.

“rebirth, re-arising.” This is, in fact, the sense that applies here [5.1.2.2 (5)], that is, as defined in the “wrong view pericope” [5.1.2.1] and the “right view pericope.”

There is no foundation—we can find no references in the suttas—for the notion that we should accept spontaneous birth as a Buddhist tenet, which has nothing to do with spiritual cultivation, but is related to the suffering cycle of lives and deaths (*samsāra*). We may include the teaching on the “spontaneous birth” of the non-returner as part of its oldest meaning here, but not a separate tenet in itself. After all, the highest goal in early Buddhism is the attaining of arhathood, while non-return is only a second choice, as it were, when we fail to attain the highest goal of full awakening.⁶⁵

(2) The second oldest sense of *opapātika* arose specifically in connection with the teaching of the **non-returner** (*anāgāmī*), who is said to be “spontaneously reborn” in the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*). This sense is given in the “non-returner pericope,” thus: “with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, one is spontaneously born (in the pure abodes) and will attain nirvana there without ever returning from that world.”⁶⁶

This notion of the *opapātika* was used to describe the non-returner when the concept was introduced. This is probably the first time that the idea of “spontaneous birth” is used with *opapātika*, that is, simply to describe the nature of the non-returner’s last rebirth. In a late stage during the canonical period, this word became a technical term to refer to a type of birth (*yonī*) for beings, as described below.

(3) The latest usage of the term *opapātika* is in its broad sense as a **typology of births or birth-realm**. Here, those beings that are *opapātika*—“spontaneously born” or “apparitionally arisen”—means that they have arisen without any generation by parents (asexually) or any biological agency or process (apparitionally).⁶⁷ This usage is found only in the late suttas and commentaries.⁶⁸

In this sense of “spontaneous birth,” *opapātika* refers to all divine, some humans,⁶⁹ pretas,⁷⁰ hell beings and some other subhuman realm beings—as stated in such texts as **the Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12).⁷¹ Such a process, as in the case of the heavenly rebirth of the deva Maṭṭa,kuṇḍali, is described as “dying with a heart of faith, as if waking from sleep, he arose in a 30-yojana wide heavenly mansion in the deva-world,”⁷² suggesting that he arises in the heavens as fully developed being.

This is a culturally bound teaching of the Buddha’s time, which is not fully applicable today. In later Buddhism, we find such a dated idea being used to introduce even more fanciful notions of fabulous beings and imaginative worlds. However, it is useful in helping us understand the context of the Buddha’s teaching and how it is to be properly understood for our own wholesome practice.⁷³

⁶⁵ See eg **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,46/1:62), SD 13.3. On the non-returner and the fetters, see SD 23.16 (1.1) n.

⁶⁶ *Pañcannaṃ orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā opapātiko tattha parinibbāyī anāvatti, dhammo tasmā lokāti*. See **Mahāli S** (D 6,13/1:156,20), SD 53.4; **Ākaṅkheyya S** (M 6,13/1:34,9 ≈ A 1:232,19), SD 59.1; **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,36/3:247), SD 4.17. See also **Rebirth in early Buddhism**, SD 57.1.

⁶⁷ MA 2:38. Technically, this is called parthenogenetic or agamogenetic. For etym of *opapātika* and other linguistic details, see **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,33.4) n, SD 49.1.

⁶⁸ **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,1.11(36)/3:230); **Pañītatara S** (S 29.2/3:241); MA 2:36; Vism 17.148/552. For other mythical accounts of such births, see BHSD: aupapāduka & Ency Bsm: opapātika.

⁶⁹ Eg Amba,pālī (ThĀ 213).

⁷⁰ Vbh 412,29.

⁷¹ M 12,33.4/1:73,4 f @ SD 49.1; also D 3:230; S 3:241; MA 2:36; Vism 471. For other mythical accounts of such births, see BHSD: aupapāduka & Ency Bsm: opapātika.

⁷² *Pasannamano kālaṃ katvā sutta-p,pabuddho viya deva,loke tirisa,yojanike kanaka,vimāne nibbatti* (DhA 1:28).

⁷³ Such a usage does have its problems, the main one being that, as a scientific term, it refers to only physical beings. In other words, we need to “borrow” or “convert” such words and re-define them in the way that computer scientists and experts borrow or coin new computer terminology. We should take care to avoid pre-defining such

5.1.3 Right view defined

5.1.3.1 We have already noted what constitutes wrong views [5.1.2], and what the wrong view pericope [5.1.2.2]. **Right view** (singular), on the other hand, is defined as follows:

There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed.
 There is fruit or result of good and bad actions [karma].
 There is this world, the next world.
 There are mother and father, spontaneously born beings.
 There are brahmins and recluses who, living rightly and practising rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.

(**Apañṇaka Sutta**, M 60,6/1:402), SD 35.5⁷⁴

Right view, in other words, is a way of seeing true reality. “Right view” is singular because in whichever way we see it, that is, behind every phenomenon we experience or the nature of things, we will see the same true reality, that is, the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of all that are conditioned, and the non-self of all the principles underlying such things or states.⁷⁵

We might even say here that we would rightly see it as “no” views, just as a view has no image of its own, but only reflects what is before it. Each of the views listed here are “right views” when contrasted in *opposition* to the wrong views commonly held by the world. Provisionally, we may find it helpful to refer to any one of such “right views” by way of correcting its opposing wrong view. Hence, right view, on a simple level, is the right and proper way of seeing the world, as being truly impermanent. [3.3.2; 12.2]

5.1.3.2 These are “**opposition views**” (to use Fuller’s term) [5.1]—they are in the plural, like wrong views—but they need to be *cultivated* to displace wrong views. Wrong view denies karma, that actions have no consequences; right view affirms karma, that actions have consequences. Wrong view rejects rebirth and other realms of beings; right view affirms them. Wrong view upholds an abiding self or a self that is identical with the body; right view rejects both.

In positive terms, right view corrects such wrong views through various teaching-models, such as the 4 noble truths (understanding any of them)⁷⁶ [2], dependent arising (understanding the arising and ceasing, or any, a few, or all, of these links),⁷⁷ or simply accepting the impermanence of all things (either through faith or through wisdom).⁷⁸ [8.2]

5.2 ATTAINING RIGHT VIEW

Right view (*sammā ditṭhi*), positively defined, is an “opposition understanding,” it opposes wrong views and corrects them. The importance of cultivating right view is attested by its various synonyms, such as “accomplishment of view” (*ditṭhi,sampadā*),⁷⁹ “accomplishment of wisdom” (*paññā,sampadā*),⁸⁰

terms when we read Buddhist literature, and ask two important questions: (1) What does the author or teacher mean or could mean here? (2) What sutta or dharma sense is this term trying to convey, or what do we need to remember regarding the Buddhist sense of this term?

⁷⁴ Further see SD 48.2 (3.4.4).

⁷⁵ See esp **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

⁷⁶ On the 4 noble truths, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1.

⁷⁷ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

⁷⁸ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.17.

⁷⁹ See **Sikkhā Vipatti S** (A 3.115/1:269); Pug 2.19/26.

and “purification of view” (*diṭṭhi, visuddhi*).⁸¹ Right view, in other words, is superior to wrong views, and it should be cultivated.

The Dīgha, jānu Sutta (A 8.54) equates having right view as being “accomplished in wisdom,” that is, such a person “is wise, possesses wisdom directed⁸² to the rising and falling away (of phenomena)⁸³ that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.”⁸⁴ In a parallel text, **the Patta Kamma Sutta** (A 4.61), this “accomplishment of wisdom” is defined as the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances [10.1.1], that is, a prelude to the attainment of dhyana.⁸⁵

Both these Suttas connect right view with meditation: in the former, it is the contemplation on the rise and fall of phenomena, and in the latter, it is the attaining of dhyana. In either case, the attaining of right view is defined as “accomplishment in wisdom.” We begin to see here that right view is being closely associated with both *mental cultivation* and its result, *wisdom*. We will now briefly examine right view in terms of the progress from mental cultivation to wisdom.

6 The progress of right view

6.1 THE 7 PURIFICATIONS

We have noted how each of the wrong views have to be corrected by their opposite “right views,” which are, as such, termed “opposition views” [5.1.3.2]. Right views (plural), then are the opposite of wrong views, but they are only preliminary steps in clearing the mind of wrong views and doubts, so as to reach deeper into the real issues and roots of the problem.

In early Buddhist training, then, wrong views and right view and are not opposites, nor is it even correct to say that “right view” is our spiritual goal—it is only a stage in the mental purification process. This is clear from the teaching on the 7 purifications where the “purification of views” (*diṭṭhi, visuddhi*) is only the *third* of 7 stages of spiritual development. The goal of the whole process is known as “the purification of knowledge and vision” (*ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi*). **The 7 purifications** (*satta visuddhi*) are as follows, such as the set taught in **the Ratha, vinīta Sutta** (M 24):⁸⁶

(1) The purification of moral virtue,	<i>sīla, visuddhi</i>
(2) The purification of the mind,	<i>citta, visuddhi</i>
(3) The purification of views,	<i>diṭṭhi, visuddhi</i>
(4) The purification by overcoming doubt,	<i>kaṅkhā, vitaraṇa, visuddhi</i>
(5) The purification by knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path,	<i>maggâmagga, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>
(6) The purification by knowledge and vision of the way, and	<i>paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>
(7) The purification of knowledge and vision.	<i>ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>

Briefly, these 7 purifications refer to the progressive stages of spiritual accomplishment leading to awakening.

⁸⁰ See **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54.15/4:285), SD 5.10.

⁸¹ See **Ratha, vinīta S** (M 24/1:145-151), SD 28.3 (2.3); A 1:95; Pm 1:182.

⁸² On directed cultivation, see further **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10/5:154-157), SD 24.2 (1.2).

⁸³ On watching the rise and fall of feeling, see **(Aññathatta) Ānanda S 1** (S 22.37/3:37 f), SD 33.11.

⁸⁴ A 8.54/4:281-285 @ SD 5.10.

⁸⁵ A 4.61.7-8/2:67 & SD 37.12, esp n at end of §8.2. Further see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

⁸⁶ M 24/1:145-151 (SD 28.3). For further analysis of the 7 purifications (incl other insight knowledges), see **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4 (3.2.1.3). See also Gunaratana 1985:154-174 & Moneyya 2005.

- (1) The purification of moral virtue refers specifically to the proper practice of keeping to the 5 precepts, and more broadly to moral virtue of other precepts that we have chosen to uphold to facilitate our spiritual development.
- (2) The purification of mind is the success in our mental cultivation. These are, of course, the first two of the 3 trainings (*sikkhā*).⁸⁷ The first two purifications bring about the fruiting the other 5 purifications—the fruit of the third training, that of wisdom (*paññā, sikkhā*).
- (3) The purification of views is the understanding of the 3 characteristics⁸⁸ in relation of the 5 aggregates.⁸⁹
- (4) The purification by overcoming doubt is ability to see conditionality in mental and physical phenomena.
- (5) The purification by knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path is the wisdom to discern what are false teachings and what are true teachings that leads to self-awakening, comprising of a fuller understanding of the 3 characteristics.
- (6) The purification by knowledge and vision of the way is a series of insight-knowledges up to the supramundane (the path to awakening).
- (7) The purification of knowledge and vision is that of seeing and understanding the 4 supramundane paths (the 4 levels of sainthood), short of arhathood.⁹⁰

6.2 THE 9 STATES TO BE CULTIVATED

These seven purifications are to be cultivated successively, each stage leading to and supporting the next, until liberation (that is, nirvana) is attained. None of these seven stages, *not even* the seventh and last, is liberation or nirvana itself. They are all mundane states, except for the last, which is supramundane.⁹¹ A more complete version of this set is called “**the 9 states to be cultivated**” (*nava dhammā bhāvetabba*), which includes the following last two stages, as stated in **the Das’uttara Sutta** (D 34):⁹²

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| (8) the purification of wisdom, and | <i>paññā, visuddhi</i> | |
| (9) the purification of freedom | <i>vimutti, visuddhi</i> | (D 34,2.2(2)/3:288) |

This progressive awakening to full freedom is famously laid out in **the Ratha Vinīta Sutta** (M 24), where immediately after stage (7), Sāriputta declares to Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta: “The holy life, avuso, is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of final nirvana without clinging.”⁹³

6.3 APOPHASIS

It is clear, then, that stages (8) and (9) are descriptions (not attributes) of nirvana. One who has attained nirvana would have purified wisdom (his understanding is no more conditioned by the world

⁸⁷ On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁸⁸ The 3 characteristics are impermanence (*aniccatā*), suffering (*sukkhata*) and non-self (*anattatā*): see **Atam, -mayatā**, SD 19.13 (1).

⁸⁹ “The 5 aggregates” (*pañca-k, khandha*), see SD 17, esp (**Dve**) **Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f), SD 17.1a.

⁹⁰ For details, see SD 28.3 (1).

⁹¹ See **Ratha Vinīta S** (M 24/1:145-151) & SD 28.3 (1).

⁹² See SD 28.3 (3.1).

⁹³ Cf S 4:48, 5:29; A 1:44, 4:74, 5:65. Comy says that in the view of those who assert that clinging is due to a condition, final nirvana without clinging means *final nirvana due to no condition*. The unconditioned death-free element has not arisen on account of a condition, so they speak of it as final nirvana without clinging. This is the end, the peak, the goal (*niṭṭha*). (MA 2:156). In simple terms, nirvana is when all conditions have been removed and understood to be inapplicable in any way.

nor by worldliness) and his freedom is complete (he has no more rebirth nor creates new karma). To say that these are descriptions, “not attributes,” of nirvana means that we are merely using language to point out qualities that *no more* arise in the awakened saint. Nirvana, since it is “unconditioned,” has no attributes. One way to talk about it is to use apophatic language, the language of negation.⁹⁴

Apophasis, however, is here *not* merely saying “no or not,” making negative statements. It is a way of expressing a higher level of truth, even the highest truth or the highest good, which is beyond the capacity of conventional language, or technical language (such as scientific lingo or logic), or reasoning, or academic thought. It is *not* the highest good, *not* nirvana, that is negated here, but it is *the language* that is being negated. Yet, reminding ourselves of the limitations of language and thought, nirvana is ultimately beyond both apophasis and cataphasis, both of which are philosophical and theological constructs: nirvana is *unconditioned* (which is still saying too much). [9.3.1]

On a higher level, we need to transcend even thinking itself, since thinking necessarily employs some form of *language*, which in turn uses *concepts*. In other words, it is not the real things that are being thought, but the images and after-images of what have really happened or thought to have happened. In short, thinking tends to create its own phantoms and to deal with phantoms, and often in the grandest of ways. In this sense, our minds work better, we see more clearly, after the maelstrom of all these phantoms have settled, even momentarily. This is, in fact, what good meditation does: it helps to settle our minds.⁹⁵ 9.3.1.3]

7 The singularity of right view

7.1 ONE THOUGHT LEADS TO ANOTHER

Scholars who have done a close study of early Buddhism have noted that while “wrong views” tend to be *manifold*, right view is properly singular,⁹⁶ that is to say we do *not* “have” or “hold” right view, but we must *be* “right view,” that is, to be free from views, or at least from a particular wrong view. Wrong views are gate-crashers into the blissful stillness of our minds: when one gets in, the rest will mob after—views never rain but pour—so that there is often no end to this.

Then, it rises and rages into a flood rushing in through our *senses*, sweeping us off our feet into intoxicating *visions* of grandeur, trying to fill what we imagine as missing from our lives. The whole hollow drama persists as long as *ignorance*—a lack of true self-knowledge—keeps leading us by our noses.⁹⁷

One thought leads to another, and they weave themselves into a never-ending tale of a snake biting its own tail. Often we know it is painful, and we clearly dislike it, but we are simply uncertain of what to do. So we bite back, and the pain hits back, and we bite back even harder. No wonder we are always looking for someone to blame for our pains!

⁹⁴ See **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47) @ SD 35.6 (3.4.5) & **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16 eg (10).

⁹⁵ See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7). On apophasis, see further D’Amato 2008.

⁹⁶ **Paul Fuller**, in his study of *The Notion of Diṭṭhi in Theravāda Buddhism*, eg, right at the start notes: “As a general rule I have usually referred to wrong views in the plural and right view in the singular as it is my argument that right view is a way of seeing whereas wrong views refer to various views such as the 62 views described in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (D 1:1-46).” (2005:173 n1)

⁹⁷ These are in fact the 4 influxes (*āsava*) of sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’-āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj’āsava*). The older set has only 3 influxes (with views incl under “ignorance”): **D 33.1,10(20)/3:216,9**; **M 9,70/1:55,10**, **121,11/3:108,18** (SD 14.11); **MA 1:86,10**, **3:41,25** (ad M 1:361,24); **S 38.8/4:256,4 = 45.163/5:56,15 = 47.50/189,29**; **A 3.58/1:165,16**, **3.59.4/1:167,22**, **6.63/3:414,11**; **Vbh 914/384,13**. Only the arhat overcomes all these influxes permanently: **D 33,1.10(58)/3:220**, **34,1.4(10)/3:275**; **M 2,22/1:12**, **9,71/1:55**, **36,38-44/1:2478-249**, **39,19-21/1:278-280**, **51,24-26/1:347 f**, **65,18-21/1:441 f**, **76,47-50/1:522**, **79,41-44/2:38 f**, **101,42-45/2:226 f**; **S 6.5/1:146***, **8.7/1:192***, **8.9/1:194***; **A 3.59.2-4/1:166 f**, **4.189/2:183**; **Sn 656**; cf **M 9,70/1:55**, **112,20/3:36**.

7.2 BETWEEN AN ETERNITY OF BEING AND OF NON-BEING

7.2.1 Thinking is measuring

The unawakened mind must take a stand: it must be either black or white, either yes or no, either you are with us or against us. This is a *political* way of thinking: if we are together we have more power; we could then speak louder than others, and get our agenda realized, and so on. Of course, when power is truly and wholesomely shared, we have a good community, society or country. However, we need *love* and *care* for such a system to be healthy in every sense of the word.

A yes-no or on-off Aristotelian⁹⁸ dichotomy works well for measuring people and things, such as in mathematics, science, medicine, computers and related technology, but we humans at our best are beyond measurement. We mostly live and act by way of *feeling*, which cannot really be measured, and need not be measured. When we measure, we must stop feeling. Conversely, to truly *feel* (to be creative or to be happy) we must stop measuring, we must suspend thinking, at least for the moment.⁹⁹

7.2.2 Polarization of views

7.2.2.1 EXISTENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE. In **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), the Buddha makes his classic statement on the world's need for expressing itself in terms of duality:

“This world, Kaccāna, mostly¹⁰⁰ depends upon a duality: upon (the notion of) **existence** and (the notion of) **non-existence**.

5 But for one who sees the arising¹⁰¹ of the world¹⁰² as it really is with right wisdom, there is *no notion of non-existence* regarding the world.

And for one who sees the ending of the world as it really is with right wisdom, there is *no notion of existence* regarding the world.¹⁰³

6 This world, Kaccāna, is mostly bound by fixation [attachment], clinging and inclination.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was the greatest of western philosophers, whose ideas shaped much of Europe until the Renaissance. His extant writings span a wide range of disciplines, from logic, metaphysics and philosophy of mind, through ethics, political theory, aesthetics and rhetoric, and into such primarily non-philosophical fields as empirical biology, where he excelled at detailed plant and animal observation and taxonomy. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/>

⁹⁹ On feeling and deep meditation, see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.5.2).

¹⁰⁰ “Mostly,” *yebhuyyena*, here refers to the ordinary being, except for the noble saints (*ariya,puggala*) who hold on to the extreme notions of either something exists (*atthitā*) (eternalism, *sassata*) or does not exist (*natthitā*) (annihilationism, *uccheda*) (SA 2:32). See foll n.

¹⁰¹ On the tr of the terms *samudaya* and *nirodha*, see Intro (3).

¹⁰² On the meaning of “world” (*loka*), see **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1.

¹⁰³ The 2 sentences of this verse are the 2 extremes rejected by the Buddha in **Lokāyatika S** (S 12.48/2:77), including 2 more: that all is unity and that all is plurality. Comy: In terms of dependent arising, “the origin of the world” is the direct conditionality (*anuloma paccayākāra*), “the ending of the world” is the reverse conditionality (*paṭiloma paccayākāra*). Here “the world” refers to formations (*saikhāra*). In reflecting on the direct-order dependent arising, (seeing the rise of phenomena) we do not fall into the notion of annihilationism; reflecting on the reverse dependent origination, (seeing the ending of phenomena) we do not fall into the notion of eternalism (SA 2:33). The Buddha’s teaching on the origin and ending of the world (in terms of the five aggregates) is found in **Loka S** (S 12.44/2:73 f).

¹⁰⁴ “Bound ... adherence,” PTS *upāy’upādānābhinivesa,vinibandha*, but the preferred reading is Be Ce *upāy’upādānābhinivesa,vinibaddha* = *upāya* (attachment, fixation) + *upādāna* (clinging) + *abhinivesa* (inclination, mindset,

6.2 But this person (with right view) does not engage in, cling to, incline towards that fixation and clinging, the latent tendency of mindset and inclination—he does not take a stand (that anything is) ‘my self.’¹⁰⁵

He has neither uncertainty nor doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.¹⁰⁶ His knowledge about this is independent of others.¹⁰⁷

It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is **right view**.

7 ‘Everything is [All exists] (*sabbam atthi*),’¹⁰⁸ Kaccāna, this is one extreme. ‘Everything is not [All does not exist] (*sabbam n’atthi*),’ this is the second extreme.” (S 12.15/2:16 f), SD 6.13

The world is a process—a series of persistent changes, ever becoming other, often different from what is expected—that it is false to speak of it simply as *being* or as *non-being*. They are but momentary waves of rising and falling, quanta of changes that are already gone when we perceive them. It is not *what* we are looking at, but *how* we are looking at, that we must carefully examine.

7.2.2.2 CRAVING FOR EXISTENCE AND FOR NON-EXISTENCE. For a moment, for a while, we could be gazing at the arising of an event, a series of changes that form some pattern for us to which we attribute meaning. Since we see it as an evolving horizon, the notion of non-existence does not apply. On the other hand, if we see the ending of an event, a devolving horizon, the notion of existence does not apply. Both “existence” and “non-existence,” as such, are relative terms: they simply describe how we view the world.

Sue Hamilton discusses how views in general are expressed within the conceptual duality of existence and non-existence, “within the conceptual framework of manifoldness and permanence” (2000: 183 f). In a sense, any view is a wrong view, precisely because it is a view, a position (2000:186). A view is necessarily supported by craving, gives rise to craving. That craving is either for existence (*bhava, taṇhā*) or for non-existence (*vibhava, taṇhā*). Craving for existence is the basis for eternalism (*sassata, diṭṭhi*), while craving for non-existence is the basis for annihilationism (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*).

Eternalism is the basis for such ideas as those of the Creator-God and immortal soul. Believers would claim that their faithful followers would be rewarded with an eternal heaven, and those who do not subscribe to their definition of God or truth, would be relegated to an eternal hell, and so on. **Annihilation-**

adherence) + *vinibaddha* (bound, shackled) [vl *vinibandha*, bondage]. Comy: Each of the three—fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]—arise by way of craving (*taṇhā*) and views (*diṭṭhi*), for, it is through these that one fixates to, clings to, inclines to the phenomena of the three spheres as “I,” “me” and “mine.” (SA 2:33). These 3 words appear to be syns or near-syns of latent tendencies, but I have rendered them in order of their subtlety (fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]). See S:B 736 n31.

¹⁰⁵ “But this... ‘My self,’” *tañ cāyaṃ upāy’upādānaṃ cetaso adhiṭṭhānaṃ abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeti na upādiyati nādhiṭṭhati “attā me” ti*. Comy: Craving and views are called “mental standpoint” (*cetaso adhiṭṭhana*) because they are the foundations for the (unwholesome) mind, and “the latent tendency of inclination [mindset],” or perhaps “inclination [mindset] and latent tendency” (*abhinivesānusaya*) because they stay in the mind and lie latent there (SA 2:33). This is a difficult sentence, and I am guided by the Sutta spirit rather than the letter. See S:B 736 n32. Cf **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3.9/3:10), SD 10.12.

¹⁰⁶ Comy: Suffering (*dukkha*) here refers to the 5 aggregates of clinging. What the noble disciple sees, when he reflects on his own existence, is not a self or a substantially existent person but only the arising and passing away of causal conditions (*paccay’uppanna, nirodha*) (of dependent arising). (SA 2:33). Cf **Selā’s** verses (S 548-551/1:134) & **Vajirā’s** verses (S 553-55/1:135).

¹⁰⁷ “Independent of others,” *apara-p, paccayā*. From stream-entry on, the noble disciple sees the truth of the Dharma by himself, and as such is not dependent on anyone else, not even the Buddha, for his insight into the Dharma. However, he may still approach the Buddha or an enlightened teacher for instructions and guidance in meditation until he attains liberation.

¹⁰⁸ On the two “notions” in this sentence, see Intro (2).

ism, on the other hand, feeds such views as our body is the self or soul, so that when the body perishes so does the mind (in other words, this is our only life): this is also called materialism, that is, the view that the body is identical with the self, and the rejection of karma (moral accountability for actions) and rebirth (survival). As such, views, insofar as they are rooted in craving, are necessarily unwholesome.

7.2.2.3 VIEW CURRENTS. If we are unawakened, we are often caught up with ideas of what we sense. We regularly and simply take mind-shots of passing events, keep on examining them, store them in our albums and archives under “like,” “dislike” and “ignore.” These collected past images become a sort of identikit, with which we try to make sense of current events. The reality is that we have created new virtual realities and are living in that cyberspace.

As we move through life wearing our virtual-reality masks, goggles and helmets, real and living moments rise and fall all around us. Those self-made images, as soon as they arise, are dead and gone forever. So our lives have become an uneasy pastiche of past views, ready to vanish away as soon as we turn to a new mind-shot, or in our backward reviews, we realize, slowly or suddenly, that we have taken the wrong angles or we simply lose interest in them. In fact, we have been changing our minds, making new decisions, more often than we change our clothes, but since we are rarely aware of this fundamental process of our minds, we keep on insisting that we are *always* right. But we have been left behind, locked up, in our prison of the passing past, a zoëtrope of lights and shadows, moving yet not moving.

The reality is that there is only this current thread of fleeting changes we call life. Since we have no control over *change*, the situation is simply unsatisfactory, *suffering*. This suffering appears to be real as long as we are *fixated* on the idea that we can freeze this flow of changes the way we want it, or we look for some permanent picture of our like or love. And so, we go in quest of the fountain of youth, or that pot of gold at the rainbow’s end, or an elixir of eternal health. So we keep looking, but never finding, led on by the carrot of hope. We keep going after it as long as we think we do not have it.

The point is that we can only go with the flow, unconditionally, at peace with everything: this is a foretaste of nirvana. Since we are not there yet, we need to make this effort to leave the past where it is, smile at it; let go of the future, smile at it; and shift our focus happily on to the fleeting present, where we truly live.

7.2.3 Unifying our views

7.2.3.1 CURRENT VIEWS. When an unawakened mind takes a stand, it often sees itself, reservedly or unreservedly, as the only right one, so that “only this is right; everything else is wrong.”¹⁰⁹ The unawakened mind is like a **fortune-teller** who tells others their fortunes (“You have it all wrong; this is what you should do”) but he himself does not even know his own real fortune. The point is that truly happy and successful people do not see their fortune in being fortune-tellers.

To say that *only this is right* is to take a mind-shot—our mindshot—of passing reality and declare that it is everything there was, will be, or is. But here, it may be easier to understand the situation if we imagine our minds to be glass windows or lenses that we look through. If our windows or lenses are crystal clear, we might perfectly see outside.

Then again, we might not get the whole picture (if this is really possible at this stage). We tend to be selective at what we experience. So we dislocate a piece of life’s jigsaw and hold it up high to be life itself. But that piece we have dislocated is already dead in our cold fingers.

¹⁰⁹ *Idam eva saccam mogham aññan’ti*, eg **Pāsādika S** (D 29/3:136×7, 138, 139, 140×2), SD 40a.6; **Aggi Vaccha,-gotta S** (M 72/1:484×3, 485×3), SD 6.15; **Pañcattaya S** (M 102/2:234×2), SD 401.12; **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136/3:212, 213×2, 214), SD 4.16; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139.12/3:235), SD 7.8; **(Anātha,piṇḍika) Diṭṭhi S** (A 10.93/-5:186×2), SD 87.4; **Nānā Titthiya S** (U 6.4/67×10, 70×21), SD 40a.14; Nm 2:290; Dhs 202×3.

We might scoop up a handful of water from **the passing river of life**, but it is no more the river. The best we can do is perhaps to follow its flow, whether joyfully walking along its bank, or calmly riding a boat on its waters.

As we follow the river on its banks or its waters, we pass various kinds of changing vegetation and landscape. We see mountains from afar, around which the river curves in a near circle, an ox-bow, so that we could view almost all the sides of a mountain. Is there one and only right view of a mountain? Our view depends upon where we stand and from where we are looking.

If the Dharma is a path, and life a journey, then we must live that journey, we must keep on moving ahead. No matter how fine or breath-taking the views might be, we must move on. We need to go on to reach the open sea and on to our true destination, whose beauty and peace surpass everything we have experienced or could imagine.

7.2.3.2 CLAIMING TO HOLD NO VIEWS. Sometimes we might think it possible, or wish it so, *to take no stand at all*, but this, too, has its own difficulties. The brahmin Dīgha,nakha, for example, once approaches the Buddha and declares, “I do not accept everything!” that is, he rejects all opinions and claims to have no views. The Buddha’s reply is short and clear, “That, brahmin, is a view, too!”

After explaining to Dīgha,nākha the nature of views (that, for example, they cause disputes), the Buddha goes on to explain the impermanence of the body and the nature of feelings (*vedanā*), from which views tend to arise. The Buddha then applies the *nibbidā* formula,¹¹⁰ that with a full understanding of feelings, we are naturally revulsed towards them, and so free ourselves of liking and disliking. Understanding the Buddha’s teaching, Dīgha,nakha becomes a streamwinner, and his nephew, Sāriputta, who is standing nearby fanning the Buddha, becomes an arhat.¹¹¹ [8.3]

7.2.4 The path of non-proliferation

The proliferation of thinking or *papañca* has been recognized by the Buddha, from the start, as a key problem to human mental development. **Ñāṇananda**, a leading Sinhala philosopher monk of our time, in his insightful study of mental proliferation, highlights the role of view-proliferating thoughts: *papañca* is “the inveterate tendency towards proliferation in the realm of ideation” (1971:17).

The Buddha’s teaching, on the other hand, is “against the flow” (*paṭisota,gāmī*) of thinking, which, in turn, helps to curb craving and clinging (1971:14). In this sense, especially in connection with meditation, early Buddhist training has been described as “a path of non-proliferation” in the Aṅguttara (*nippapañca,pada*, A 3:294 f) and the Thera,gāthā (*nippapañca,patha*):

<p><i>Yo papañcam anuyutto papañcābhirato mago virādhayī so nibbānaṃ yoga-k,khemaṃ anuttaraṃ</i></p>	<p>Who, caught up with proliferation, delighting in <u>mental proliferation</u>, is a beast [a simpleton]: he has missed nirvana, the supreme release from the yoke. (Tha 989)</p>
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<p><i>Yo ca papañcam hitvāna nippapañca,patho rato ārādhayī so nibbānaṃ yoga-k,khemaṃ anuttaraṃ</i></p>	<p>Who, having given up proliferation, delights in <u>the path of non-proliferation</u>: he wins nirvana. the supreme release from the yoke. (Tha 990)¹¹²</p>
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¹¹⁰ See **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 (2.2).

¹¹¹ **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74/1:497-501), SD 16.1 & also **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 (2.2). For a philosophical analysis, see Fuller 2005:153-156.

¹¹² See Ñāṇananda 1971:22-34: The path to non-proliferation. For a sutta elaboration, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18/1:108-114), SD 6.14.

8 Right view and no views

8.1 NON-DUALITY

8.1.1 Not taking any stand

The fact that views are an obstacle to seeing true reality is central to Buddhist learning, practice and realization. The goal of spiritual training is to overcome *all* views, including right view.¹¹³ As evident from the earliest texts, especially **the Aṭṭhaka Vagga** (Sn 766-975), and also **the Pārāyana Vagga** (Sn 976-1149), *right view* is simply equated with “no views.”¹¹⁴ For those familiar with the early Buddhist contemplative tradition, this is clearly a key notion in mental training.

The Aṭṭhaka Vagga records the Buddha’s teachings from the very early years of his ministry. There was no need then for doctrines and philosophies (like those in the later suttas) as the minds of those very first disciples have already tried and tired of them [1.3]. We see no clear hints of “the 4 truths,” or “eightfold path,” or “dependent arising,” or any teaching models that we are familiar with in the later years of the ministry. This verse typically illustrates the situation:

<p><i>upayo hi dhammesu upeti vādaṃ anūpayam̐ kena katham̐ vadeyya attaṃ nirattaṃ na hi tassa atthi adhosi¹¹⁵ so diṭṭhim idh’eva sabbāti¹¹⁶</i></p>	<p>Engaged, one engages in dispute about teachings, but how could one dispute with the disengaged. For, there is neither taking up or rejecting— he has shaken off all views in this very world (Sn 787)¹¹⁷</p>
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The persistent trend of such primitive teachings is that of *turning away from all views*, wrong or right, of whatever level. All argumentations are to be avoided; the true sage is truly silent—he is **the “silent sage” (muni)**.¹¹⁸ Such a sage, besides Shakyamuni, the Buddha himself, is the layman sage, Bāhiya Dāru, ciriya, whose awakening lion-roar goes like this:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>27 Where neither water nor earth,
there no stars shine,
there the moon glows not,</p> | <p>nor fire nor wind finds a footing,
nor the sun blazes,
nor is there darkness.¹¹⁹</p> |
| <p>28 And who knows this for himself,
then, from form and formless¹²⁰</p> | <p>through sagehood—a sage, a brahmin—
freed is he, from joy and pain, too.</p> |

(**Arahatta**) **Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10/9), SD 33.7¹²¹

¹¹³ Among the scholars who have noted this are: L Gómez 1976:137-165; N Katz 1982:214-228; S Collins 1982: 87-115; R Hayes 1988:42, 50-52; R Gombrich 1996:16 f, 28 n1. It is more fully discussed in P Fuller 2005.

¹¹⁴ Respectively, **Sn 4/766-975/151-189** & **5/976-1149/190-223** (ie ch/verse/page).

¹¹⁵ **Adhosi**, aor of *dhunāti*, *dhuvati* (2), “shakes, tosses; shakes off, removes, liberates oneself from; destroys”: see DP sv *dhunāti*.

¹¹⁶ Alt tr: “he has shaken off views about the all in this very world.” See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

¹¹⁷ See Fuller 2005:

¹¹⁸ See eg **Uddhacca, kukkucca**, SD 32.7 (3.1).

¹¹⁹ This verse alluding to *nirvana*, qu at Nett 150; cf “Where do these four primary elements—earth, water, fire, wind—cease without remainder?” **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11.67-85/1:215-223) & SD 1.7 esp (2). Cf Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.2.10-12: “There the sun does not shine, | nor the moon and the stars; | There lightning does not shine, | of the common fire need we speak! | Him [the Ātman] alone, as he shines, do all things reflect; | this whole world radiates with his light.” || (Patrick Olivell’s tr, *The Early Upaniṣads*, 1998:447-449; see also Paul Deussen (tr), *Sixty Upaniṣads of the Veda*, 1897:581). Cf Śvetāśvatāra U 6.14; Kāṭha U 5.15

¹²⁰ These 2 last lines apparently allude to the 9 progressive abobe (the 4 dhyanas, 4 formless attainments, and the cessation of perception and feeling): see **Rahogaṭa S** (S 36.11/4:216-218), SD 33.6.

While the first verse sings of transcending all conditionality, the closing verse's theme is that of rising above all dualities.

8.1.2 Beauty is truth, truth beauty

8.1.2.1 To the unawakened, the Buddha's sutta language might not always seem straight forward. Often, the Buddha would resort to an almost mystical or "twilight" language, an intentional communication, specially worded for the occasion.¹²² He has to *word* his wordless realization. Indeed, if it were the first time that we have seen a rolling mountain valley on a beautiful cloudless day, or when we leisurely gaze into the gentle glow of a sunset on the ocean's edge, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to convey the moment's beauty or our profound joy, except perhaps in poetry or poetic form, or in some kind of mystical language, that is, words free from their conventional cages and routines.¹²³

8.1.2.2 There are no two ways, no duality, in **spiritual experience**. For, it is a taste of truth and beauty, or better, of truth-beauty: beauty is truth, truth beauty.¹²⁴ However, when we try to convey its meaning, we need to speak in terms of truth *and* beauty: they are like the two sides of the same precious coin. This non-duality of truth and beauty—that the truth must also be beautiful as well as true and liberating, and what is liberating must also be true and beautiful—is an important thread running throughout the Buddha's teaching.¹²⁵

The emphasis of the first-period teachings is, as a rule, on the *truth* of the Dharma as teaching and the *beauty* of the Dharma as practice or experience. Furthermore, since the Dharma is true and liberating, it goes almost without saying that it is also good and beautiful (which are emphasized in the second period).

8.1.2.3 The second-period emphasis, on the other hand, is famously declared in **the *sāsana* ("teaching") pericope**: "He teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, endowed with meaning and phrasing" (*so dhammaṃ deseti ādi,kalyānaṃ majjhe,kalyānaṃ pariyosāna,-kalyānaṃ sāttham sa,vyañjanam*).¹²⁶

The word ***kalyāṇa*** means both "good" (in the moral and social senses), regarding the teaching, and "beautiful" (in an aesthetic sense), regarding the practice. The Dharma, in theory and in practice, is both good and beautiful; it is truth and beauty—it frees us and keeps us joyful. All this works in connection with the 3 trainings.¹²⁷

¹²¹ See **Muni S** (Sn 1.12/207-221/35-38), SD 80.8.

¹²² See **Dhammapada 97**, SD 10.6 (5).

¹²³ See **Dhammapada 97**, SD 10.6.

¹²⁴ This line is from the English Romantic poet John Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn" (1819) whose closing lines go: "When old age shall this generation waste, | Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe] Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st | 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all | Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'" <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173742> & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_a_Grecian_Urn.

¹²⁵ On Buddhism as literature, see SD 40a.14 (4.1).

¹²⁶ Only sg form is listed here: **D** 2,40/1:62 (SD 8.10), 1:62, 1:87+88, 1:100, 1:111, 1:128, 1:150, 1:206, 225, 2:-46×2, 47, 48, 3:76×2; **M** 1:179, 1:267, 1:285, 1:290, 1:334, 1:401, 2:55, 2:133, 2:141, 2:146, 2:162, 2:164, 2:226, 3:134, 3:280, 3:291; **S** 1:105, 4:122, 123, 4:315×2, 316×2, 317×2, 5:352; **A** 3,30/1:130×3, 131×3, 1:180, 4,160/2:-147, 4:208, 5,30/3:30, 6,56/3:381×2, 382×2, 9,4/4:361×3, 362×7, 10,99/5:204; **It** 3,4,5/79×3, 4,8/111; **Sn** 3,7/-103,12; **Nc:Be** 75, 126, 144, 189, 192, 213, 215, 217; **Pug** 3,7/31×3, 32×3, 4,24/57; **V** 1:21, 35, 242 3:1. Note that the phrase appears most frequently in the more ancient texts. For the pl form, search CSCD using "dhammā ādi-kalyāṇā." For full formula & explanation, see **Dhammānussati**, SD 15.9 (2.1); also SD 40a.4 (4.2.2 & 4.3).

¹²⁷ See ***Sīla samādhi paññā***, SD 21.6.

The “beginning” (*ādi*) here refers to moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*): keeping the body (the 5 senses) and speech restrained is beautiful because it keeps us blame-free and prepares us for mental cultivation. The “middle” (*majjha*) here refers to mental training (*samādhi,sikkhā*): when the mind is free from the mental hindrances,¹²⁸ it attains samadhi and dhyana, which are beautiful experiences conducive to realizing the liberating truth. The “end” (*pariyosānā*) is wisdom training (*paññā,sikkha*), that is, the ability and habit of seeing the rise and fall of things, and seeing true reality by way of impermanence, suffering and non-self.

“Good” in the beginning, the middle, and the end also means that the teaching is valid and efficacious at all times: the past, the present and the future. This is an important sense of the “timeless” (*akāl-ika*) quality of the Dharma.

Let us examine these two periods further.

8.2 THE 2 PERIODS OF THE MINISTRY

8.2.1 Non-dual teachings

We do not, at all, hear the *sāsana* pericope in the first-period teachings [1.3; 8.1.2]. All the 16 suttas of ancient Aṭṭhaka Vagga (Sn ch 4), for example, are renunciant-centred, focused on celibacy and a view-free mind.¹²⁹ Here is a quick survey of **the Aṭṭhaka Vagga**:

Sn 4.1	Kāma Sutta	(Sn 766-771)	Sensual and material pleasures burden us.
Sn 4.2	Guh’atṭhaka Sutta	(Sn 772-779)	The body is like a cave with many painful secrets.
Sn 4.3	Duṭṭh’atṭhaka Sutta	(Sn 780-787)	Negative views tend to bring about quarrels.
Sn 4.4	Suddh’atṭhaka Sutta	(Sn 788-795)	Mental purity does not come from outside.
Sn 4.5	Param’atṭhaka Sutta	(Sn 796-803)	Rising above disputes brings us to the highest.
Sn 4.6	Jarā Sutta	(Sn 804-813)	All things are impermanent, even our own bodies.
Sn 4.7	Tissa Metteyya Sutta	(Sn 814-823)	The true renunciant is above all sexuality.
Sn 4.8	Pasūra Sutta	(Sn 824-834)	The wise do not quarrel about purity.
Sn 4.9	Māgandiya Sutta	(Sn 835-847)	The wise sage is free from views, even of pleasure.
Sn 4.10	Purā,bheda Sutta	(Sn 848-861)	Untroubled by past, future or present, we are fearless.
Sn 4.11	Kalaha,vivāda Sutta	(Sn 862-877)	Quarrels arise from feelings and perceptions.
Sn 4.12	Cūḷa Viyūha Sutta	(Sn 878-894)	To proclaim any view is to quarrel with others.
Sn 4.13	Mahā Viyūha Sutta	(Sn 895-914)	True purity is not in our views, but our conduct.
Sn 4.14	Tuvaṭṭaka Sutta	(Sn 915-934)	A morally virtuous monastic quickly awakens.
Sn 4.15	Atta,daṇḍa Sutta	(Sn 935-954)	A true sage grasps not at anything.
Sn 4.16	Sāriputta Sutta	(Sn 955-975)	A monastic should devote himself to mental peace.

8.2.2 Beyond knowledge

This verse from **the Param’atṭhaka Sutta** (Sn 4.5) gives us an insight into the nature of the awakened mind:

<i>Attam pahāya anupādiyāno</i>	Having abandoned the grasped, he takes it up no more,
<i>ñāṇe’pi so nissayaṃ no karoti</i>	nor does he rely upon knowledge.

¹²⁸ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca,nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual desire, (2) ill will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness and worry, and (5) doubt. See *Nīvarana*, SD 32.1.

¹²⁹ While this statement is true of Aṭṭhaka Vagga, we know from ancient texts such as **Pabbajjā S** (Sn 3.1/405-424) that the Buddha meets with various lay people (such as king Bimbisāra) who benefit from Dharma teachings. In other words, the Buddha clearly teaches simpler versions of the Dharma suitable for his lay or new audience.

*sa ve viyattesu na vagga,sārī
diṭṭhim pi so na pacceṭi kiñci*

Indeed, he stands aside, following no group,
nor does he resort to any view. (Sn 800)¹³⁰

“The grasped” (*atta*)¹³¹ here is a view that is taken up; in other words, he has truly given up all views, as his mind is free from speculations. “Knowledge” (*ñāṇa*) here refers to information derived through the 5 physical senses and processed by the mind. Since an arhat has “direct knowledge” (*aññā*), he does not need to rely on sense-based knowing. Hence, he has a clear and immediate present-moment awareness of the situation before him. Understandably, he would naturally not be dragged into any view or groupthink, since he is liberated from views.

Luis Gómez gives the essence of the Aṭṭhaka Vagga’s non-dual spirit in these words:

The Aṭṭha[ka Vagga]’s doctrine ... is a “no-doctrine” in the sense that someone who accepts this doctrine is expected to have an attitude with respect to it which is precisely the contrary of what we normally expect from someone who espouses a theory. And this is not the philosophical silence of skepticism nor the methodological bracketing of the phenomenologist. It is the simple fact that to be practically consistent, a theory of the silencing of the moorings of apperception must be self-abrogating. Thus, the theory is incomplete without the practice because theory cannot silence itself by itself. It must culminate in a practice which will bring its consummation by consuming it. (1976:149 = 2005 3:195)

8.2.3 The versatile teaching

The *sāsana* pericope [8.1.2.3] is very often mentioned in the second-period teachings, especially in connection with the 3 trainings [1.1]. In fact, while we often see clear and detailed instructions in meditation during the suttas of the second period, we almost never see such teachings in the first-period accounts. The reason for this is obvious: the first-period listeners (*sāvaka*)—who become saints merely upon hearing the Dharma, as it were—are spiritually mature and ready (*veneyya,puggala*).¹³² As such, the general teaching emphasis during the first period is that of *non-duality*, while in the second period, various *teaching models* (besides the non-dual approach) are used by the Buddha and the early saints.

9 The no-view understanding

9.1 SCHOLARLY INSIGHTS

We will now further examine the first-period teaching style. We have seen that the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga primarily negate all views, even if, in theory, they express what is true (in the unawakened sense). Various scholars have given us their insights into this. Although **Richard Gombrich** thinks that saying the Buddha “has no viewpoint ... at all” is an “extreme position,” he agrees that such a situation is found, albeit only, in the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga (1996:16). **Richard Hayes** describes such an approach as “doxastic minimalism” (“keeping one’s opinions as few as possible”), comparing it to the ideas of the first Greek skeptic philosopher Pyrrho (c360-c270 BCE) (1998: 52).

Steve Collins, in his *Selfless Persons*, says that these two ancient Sutta Nipāta chapters of poems “represent the summation, in Theravāda literature, of the style of teaching which is concerned less with the content of views and theories than with the psychological state of those who hold them” (1982:129, emphasis added). Collins, in his footnote here, then suggests reservations to Luis Gomez’s calling these

¹³⁰ For a philological analysis of this verse, see Sn:N 338 n800.

¹³¹ Comys gloss this as follows: *gaham* (Nm 1:107), *gahitam* (SnA 530); ie pp of *ā +√DĀ*, “to give”; opp *niratta*. See prec n.

¹³² SnA 1:331; see **Buddha as myth**, SD 36.2 (5.1.1).

parts of the Sutta Nipāta “Proto-Mādhyamika” (1976) because of the radical devaluation of views of whatever sort.

While there is certainly some sense in this description, we must remember that the later Madhyamaka school knew of the strong distinction between right and wrong views in other parts of the Buddhist tradition, and so its radical stance could have a clear relation to that tradition; in the Sutta Nipāta, we cannot presume that the sentiments expressed here have taken cognisance of that distinction, and are speaking to it. (1982:283 n36)

9.2 TEACHING CONTINUITY

We have noted that there are two periods in the Buddha’s 45-year ministry [1.3], the first of which is characterized by a “non-dual” or “no views” approach [8.2.1] and the second with a more versatile “teaching models” approach [8.2.3]. The basic idea of the former is that all views (wrong and right), if we are attached to them, are wrong. *Right views* are useful insofar as they provide us with more latitude whereby wrong views are rejected for the sake of right view [4.2]. The former, non-dual “no view” approach is characteristic of two of the most ancient Buddhist texts we have, **the Aṭṭhaka Vagga** and **the Pārāyana Vagga** [8.1.1].

The question now is whether there is any continuity between this ancient “no views” understanding [14] and the “right view” understanding in the second-period teachings. This question is easier to understand if we examine it “backwards,” that is, we start with the second-period teachings, with their models of the 3 unwholesome roots, the 4 noble truths, the noble eightfold path, dependent arising (up to 12 links in number), and so on [8]. None of these models appear in the first-period teachings (such as those in the Aṭṭhaka Vagga and the Pārāyana Vagga) [8.1.1].

Is it possible for us to have right view without any of these right-view models, and, if so, how is this possible? The short simple answer is *yes*, it is possible, and that this is the “middle way.” If views are used (as in the second-period teachings) they are *not* used with attachment, that is, not as dogmas. They are simply provisional answers, waiting for clearance, as it were. Hence, it is said in the Sutta Nipāta that the awakened saint abandons all views, never to revert to them, “nor does he rely upon knowledge” (*ñāṇe’pi so nissayaṃ no karoti*, Sn 800c) [8.2.2]. The question then arises: what really is this middle way? This is the question we will be discussing, along with related ones, for the rest of this essay. [10]

9.3 PROPOSITIONS

9.3.1 Buddhist teachings as propositions

9.3.1.1 Scholars have come up with various interesting ways to answer this question: how are we to regard the various right-view statements since they could be set aside anyway? A former Buddhism scholar, **Paul J Griffiths** thinks that such a notion as “all views about nirvana are false” ultimately would not work,¹³³ and suggests that the Buddhist tradition wanted to express a **proposition**¹³⁴ but not a view (1986:157 n63).

¹³³ For a discussion on ineffability, see Keith Yandell 1979.

¹³⁴ “A proposition is the object that is the meaning, or content, of a statement or assertion” (R T Cook, *A Dictionary of Philosophical Logic*, 2009). “A proposition is the semantic kernel of a sentence that determines its truth conditions, regardless of the syntactic form and lexical filling of the given form of expression” (*Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, 1996)

9.3.1.2 We will not go into the philosophical or scholarly details here, as these are better gleaned from Griffiths' book itself. What is interesting to us here (who are keen to benefit from Buddhist learning for the sake of awakening in this life) is that the word "proposition" is useful as a sort of "middle term" between the Buddha's awakened mind and our unawakened world. It is a sort of provisional language that we can use as a bridge to cross over into wordless and timeless nirvana, or at least see its approaches.

Fuller gives us an insightful summary of the problem here:

One way of stating the distinction between the non-attachment to all views and the adoption of right view and the rejection of wrong view is as follows: one path structure holds that, by necessity, there can be no positive assertion, no cataphasis.¹³⁵ Right view should not replace wrong view—no *view* is the "right view."

The other path structure states that there can be a right view, a *sammā-diṭṭhi*, that is of such a nature that it expresses what is both doctrinally true and is of value. This second path structure gives validity to *sammā-diṭṭhi*. The apophasis of no views is itself a hindrance.¹³⁶ It denies the means towards the goal. Right view, *sammā-diṭṭhi*, agrees with the *dhamma* and is a valid means towards the goal of *nibbāna*, *micchā-diṭṭhi* disagrees with doctrine and destroys the path. (2005:4)

9.3.1.3 Apophasis [6.3]—the language of negation—might not seem helpful for a seeker seeking instructions for getting out of worldly unknowing, but it is the best way that we can bend language towards the wordless and unknowable freedom. The awakened and those approaching awakening, and perhaps the intuitive, clearly understand *the powerlessness of words*: they are like dumb and dead signposts along the wayside of the paths of communication and understanding. But if we read these signposts properly, we are well on the way to our destination. Meantime, we need to stay on the middle way and keep moving in the best way we know.

9.3.2 Why no dogmas in early Buddhism

The suttas of early Buddhism give definitions of wrong views [5.1.2] and of right views [5.1.3], but these are never regarded as dogmas, in the sense of inviolable truths revealed by the Buddha, but are statements of truths that he has realized. He is like **someone who knows well the way to a certain destination**, and instructs us on how to safely and quickly travel there.¹³⁷ If we heed his instructions, we would reach our destination quickly and safely. If we do not, then we face all kinds of dangers. It is not that the Buddha is punishing us (this is not the nature of the Buddha), but that perhaps the conditions are not right yet, or that we are facing the momentary fruits of our own actions.

Furthermore, no matter how well we know the map of the route and the journey's details, or debate over them, we still need to make the journey. It is not how well we have mastered the maps, or even how good or big the map is, or the size of our vehicle, but we need to complete the journey ourselves. Once the goal has been reached, we do not need the maps, instructions or vehicles any more.¹³⁸ We can then go out to scout for lost travellers and help others along the way to the safe city.¹³⁹ [16.2]

¹³⁵ Cataphasis is an allusion to something unmentionable by denying that it will be mentioned, as in *Since you do not like the mention of God, I will not mention God in our discussion.* [6.3]

¹³⁶ For a def of "apophatic" and "cataphatic," see *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (edd) A Richardson & J Bowden, London, 1983: sv apophatic.

¹³⁷ See "the man from Manasākaṭa" parable in **Te,vijja S** (D 13,37-39/1:248 f), SD 1.8.

¹³⁸ See the parable of the raft: **Alaggadûpama S** (M 22,13/1:134 f), SD 3.13.

¹³⁹ See the parable of the ancient city: **Nagara S** (S 12.65,19-21/2:105 f), SD 14.2.

9.3.3 Right view is *not* a proposition

If the Buddhist teachings are not dogmas, then are they simply *propositions*? [8.4.1]. It is useful to examine this, as it helps us to understand the true relationship between wrong views and right view. Many of us, for example, have the notion that wrong views are to be corrected or transcended by right views (plural). The wrong view that there is *no* rebirth should be corrected by the proposition that there *is* rebirth. The wrong view that actions do *not* have any consequence should be corrected by the proposition that actions *do* have consequences. Thus, we think, that this is all there is to it.

Similarly, the annihilationist and eternalist views are not corrected or replaced by the *views* of the 4 noble truths or of dependent arising¹⁴⁰ [11]. Even if we replace one view with another, wrongly or rightly, a view is a view is a view. *The view is not the thing*. In other words, at an unawakened stage of the Buddhist path, any position, whether eternalist or annihilationist, can only be “corrected” by a *non-position*, a transcendence of all views. [16.1]

In other words, right view, in Buddhist training, is not simply the displacing of wrong view with right view, which in any case, is still a view. Any such view, would still be rooted in one of the three unwholesome roots, that is, lust, hate or delusion (especially the last) [11.2.1]. Right view, as we shall see below, is the *rejecting* of all views, or treating them as merely *provisional*, by our living a virtuous life, that is, abstaining from the 10 unwholesome courses of action, as the basis for mental cultivation and progress. [8.5.2.2]

9.4 Right view as the rejecting of wrong views

A reflection on **the Pāṭaliya Sutta** (S 42.13), a dialogue between the headman Pāṭaliya and the Buddha—a key discourse teaching that right view is not having any view but living a virtuous life—is very useful in giving us a better understanding of the true nature of right view. In the Sutta, the Buddha does not prescribe any right views that we often see in other suttas. In the first part of the Sutta, the Buddha impresses on Pāṭaliya that *whoever conducts himself badly has wrong view*.¹⁴¹ “Bad conduct” here is defined as any of the 10 unwholesome courses of action (*akusala kamma, patha*).¹⁴²

In the second part of the Pāṭaliya Sutta, Pāṭaliya complains to the Buddha that various teachers give confusing teachings, namely, nihilism (such as there’s no good in giving, etc) and non-action (a rejection of karma) [5.1.2]. The Buddha’s reply is very instructive for us in terms of our own Dharma practice. The Buddha advocates “Dharma concentration” (*dhamma, samādhi*), which should be done with proper “mental concentration” (*citta, samādhi*).

The Buddha then explains how **Dharma concentration** (*dhamma, samādhi*) is brought about. First, we give up all the ten wrong courses of action. Here, the Buddha significantly declares: “Having given up wrong view, one is of right view” (*micchā, ditṭhim pahāya sammā, ditṭhiko hoti*), without advocating any of the right views we see elsewhere in the suttas. Then, we go on to cultivate lovingkindness, and with this unconditional heart, we reflect on each of the two wrong views and their respective wholesome opposites. In each case, we rejoice in the fact that we have right view, and as such suffer no negative result, but will attain a happy heaven rebirth.

¹⁴⁰ See, however, Roger R Jackson who discusses a passage from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa, bhāṣya*, where Vasubandhu shows how the 4 truths “correct” other propositions: Roger R Jackson, *Is Enlightenment Possible? Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje on Knowledge, Rebirth, No-Self and Liberation*, New York, 1993:50 f. (Fuller’s n)

¹⁴¹ Also S 42.13/4:345-347 (SD 65.1).

¹⁴² Unwholesome courses of action (*akusala kamma, patha*) are those of the body, speech and the mind—the 3 doors of human action that make us accumulate bad karma, resulting in undesirable circumstances for us—totaling up as **the 10 courses of unwholesome actions** (*dasa akusala kamma, patha*), as follows: 3 unwholesome bodily actions: (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) sexual misconduct; 4 unwholesome verbal actions: (4) false speech’ (5) divisive speech; (6) harsh speech; (7) frivolous talk; 3 unwholesome mental actions: (8) covetousness; (9) malevolence; and (10) wrong views. (M 41.7-10/1:286 f), SD 5.7.

Our meditation progress, based on such a reflection, is described in **the *pamuḍḍa* formula**, thus:

[Reflecting on a wholesome action]	<u>gladness</u> (<i>pāmuḍḍa</i>) arises.
For one who is gladdened,	<u>zest</u> (<i>pīti</i>) arises.
For one whose mind is zestful,	his body is <u>tranquil</u> (<i>passaddha</i>).
One whose body is tranquil	experiences <u>happiness</u> (<i>sukha</i>).
The mind of one who is happy	attains <u>samadhi</u> [becomes concentrated].
(S 42.13/4:351,24+352,22+353,22+354,23+355,21+356,14+357,14+358,17), SD 65.1 ¹⁴³	

As a result of this, we abandon doubt, helping us rid of wrong view.¹⁴⁴ Clearly, then, right view is not what view we have, but the abandoning of wrong view. This happens in tandem with living a morally virtuous life. In short, right view is not an *affiliation*; it is an attitude.

10 The middle way

10.1 THE MIDDLE WAY: SUFFERING DEFINED

10.1.1 Avoiding the extremes

10.1.1.1 It is well known that in the Buddha’s very first official discourse, **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), he points out the two extremes to be avoided, that is, sensual indulgence and self-mortification [2.1], and that the “middle way” is the noble eightfold path. However, as **Rupert Gethin** has pointed out, the application of the expression “**the middle way**” to the avoidance of sensual indulgence and self-mortification occurs in *only four other passages* (2001:199 f). Only two of these concern the noble eightfold path exclusively, that is, **the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 139)¹⁴⁵ and **the Rāsiya Sutta** (S 42.12),¹⁴⁶ both of which describe the noble eightfold path as the “middle way” in exactly the same terms as the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta.¹⁴⁷ The middle way has greater significance.

10.1.1.2 The “middle way” (*majjhima paṭipadā*) is, in fact, the essence, as well as the totality, of the Buddha’s teaching. In the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta, for example, **the noble eightfold path** is called the “middle way” because it epitomizes the whole of Buddhism in terms of the 3 trainings [1.1]. The essence of Buddhism is that it is a path, but a path does not move: we need to move on that path; we must fully live that path by completing the journey and reaching our destination.

As we have noted, the path is the “middle way,” the avoiding of the extremes of denying the body and of glorifying it. The path is an elevated highway, as it were, well above the desert of self-mortification and the swamp of self-indulgence. Our journey on this highway is powered by our vision of dependent arising [10.2.1]. In simple terms, this is a necessary and vital understanding that our spiritual progress is not dependent on any external agency (such as a God-idea), but on avoiding the wrong conditions and maintaining the right conditions for such a progress.

¹⁴³ See S 47.10 @ SD 24.2 (1.1).

¹⁴⁴ For a commentarial explanation, see Vism 7.99b/220 @ SD 15.10a (6).

¹⁴⁵ M 139,4/3:230 f @ SD 7.8.

¹⁴⁶ S 42.12,4/4:330 @ SD 91.3. For details, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11) @ SD 1.1 (3.2).

¹⁴⁷ **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28) mentions the 2 extremes and the attaining of the 4 dhyanas, without mentioning the eightfold path (D 28,19/3:113), SD 14.14.

10.1.1.3 Dependent arising, then, is about conditionality (*paccaya*). The better we understand how we are conditioned, what sort of conditions are best for our journey, the easier and faster we move on. Indeed, the journey itself provides the conditions for us to know ourselves better, and to tap and tune our own goodness. It is an inner journey of seeing what has hindered our personal development, and a vision of how we can progress spiritually.

10.1.2 Craving and views

10.1.2.1 A journey is always attended by views all around us. We might enjoy good views, or avoid the less savoury ones. But if we are to journey on, we must simply leave the views where they are, by the path, and move on. The views are merely incidental to the path, but they are not essential to the journey.

In the final analysis, then, the middle way is *beyond all views*, whether wrong or right, good or bad. Here, in other words, we see the melding of the teaching methods of the two periods of the Buddha's ministry [1.3]: the "no-views" approach of the first period and the "teaching methods" of the second period.

10.1.2.2 All this shows the Buddha's teaching is not only the "middle way," but also as a "**gradual path**," with something suitable for every mental disposition. Once the training is taken up, the path travelled on, it, too, progresses gradually, gently reaching greater heights of bliss and deepening gradually with wisdom, and then sloping gently, like the great ocean, into the spiritual freedom.¹⁴⁸

The Buddha rejects the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification because they both affect the body in a terribly negative way. In our sensual indulgence, we *misuse* our body as a mere plaything of the physical world, oblivious of its spiritual capacity for higher attainments. In self-mortification, on the other hand, we *abuse* the body instead of using it as a vehicle for awakening. In avoiding the two extremes, our physical body begins to be shaped into a *bodhi*-bound vessel by way of **moral virtue**, that is, sense-restraint (abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual conduct, falsehood and mental confusion) and right speech (truthful, unifying, pleasant and beneficial).

10.1.2.3 Once the body is harmonious within and without, it becomes calm and stable so that we can fully focus on the mind. Mind-work begins with clearing away of "bad, unwholesome states" (*pāpa akusala dhamma*), meaning the 5 mental hindrances of sensual lust, ill will, restlessness and worry, sloth and torpor, and doubt.¹⁴⁹ The question now is: *What causes these mental hindrances*—is there a single cause or condition underlying them? In a manner of speaking (*pariyāyena*),¹⁵⁰ we can answer that it is our views. The mind precedes all mental states, a defiled mind defiles the acts of the mind, the body and speech; a pure mind purifies such actions (Dh 1-2).¹⁵¹

10.1.2.4 The notion of views in early Buddhism, then, begins with (1) accepting wrong views for what they are, (2) with this understanding, we let them go, and then cultivate right view. In this sense, right view is said as working in opposition to wrong views: this is on the level of moral conduct. Our bodily actions and speech, guided by the precepts and lovingkindness, oppose wrong views, expressed negatively as not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not muddling up our minds. In doing so, to that extent, we are acting with right view. But we are still capable of relapsing into old habits, and

¹⁴⁸ Cv 9.1.4 = V 2:238 f; see **Gradual way**, SD 56.1.

¹⁴⁹ See **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

¹⁵⁰ On this important term, see **Pariyaya nippariyāya**, SD 68.2.

¹⁵¹ See **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (4.5).

often do fall back into negative old ways. This is because our *minds* have yet to be well developed. Hence, we are still being controlled by our views.

10.1.3 Ending craving

On the mental level, we need to suspend all views, at least temporarily, so that our minds are calm and clear of wrong views, even to become fully concentrated in bright bliss. Then, our minds are totally free of thoughts: *no thoughts, no views*. It is then that we truly experience the mind as it really is. This is like cleaning our lenses so that we can see very clearly. With a clear mind, we are able to see directly into true reality, and attain direct knowledge and liberating wisdom.

The notion of view (*diṭṭhi*) in early Buddhism, then, is ultimately not about truth or falsehood, being or non-being, and any other duality, but about the ending of craving, or, as traditionally put, the Buddha's teaching is about suffering and its ending [11.1]. As noted by **Rupert Gethin**, the early Abhidhamma sees "right view" (*sammā, diṭṭhi*) in just this way:

... when the Dhamma, saṅgaṇī states that right view occurs as a mental concomitant of ordinary, sense sphere, skilful consciousness—a kind of consciousness that the commentaries suggest might occur when we give a gift, or turn away from harming a living creature or taking what is not given, or perform some other meritorious and auspicious action—it is not suggesting the occurrence of a dispositional attitude towards propositions of Buddhist teachings, nor acquaintance with basic Buddhist doctrine, nor even a theoretical understanding of Buddhist doctrine.¹⁵² Rather we must take it at face value: the Dhamma, saṅgaṇī is claiming that at the time of the occurrence of that consciousness some kind of direct awareness of the nature of suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation occurs. (1997:223 f = 2004:25)

10.2 THE MIDDLE WAY: ENDING OF SUFFERING

10.2.1 The middle of the middle way

10.2.1.1 The Kaccāna, gotta Sutta (S 12.15), **the Acela Kassapa Sutta** (S 12.17), **the Aññātara Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (S 12.46) and **the (Sabba) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (S 12.47), all share the same theme: the Buddha points out the 2 extreme views that "all exists" (*sabbam atthi*) and that "nothing exists" (*sabbam n'atthi*), that is, respectively, the notions of eternalism (*sassata, vāda*) and of annihilationism (*uccheda, vāda*). Then, "following neither of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dharma by the middle" (*ete te ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammam deseti*). Here, the "middle" refers to dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*).¹⁵³

While dependent arising is a specific teaching model, "**the middle way**" is the living undercurrent of the Buddhist stream flowing down into the ocean of awakening. Indeed, as **Gethin** observes, "This 'middle way' would seem to be rather more significant for the subsequent development of Buddhist thought than the specific notion of the *ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo* as the middle way between sensual indulgence and self-torment" (2001:200 f). This is especially true of philosophical Buddhism of early Mahāyāna, such as in the thoughts of Nāgārjuna (c150-c250) and his followers.

¹⁵² The nature of "theoretical understanding" according to the Abhidhamma is complex and connected with the Abhidhamma treatment of *paññatti* or "concept" and one of the possible classes of objects of consciousness; see A K Warder, "The concept of a concept," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1,2 1971:181-196. (Gethin's n, edited)

¹⁵³ 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. For other contexts of the "middle way," see **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11) @ SD 1.1 (3.2).

10.2.1.2 While I generally agree with Gethin’s sentiments, I would add that this is more of a matter of emphasis rather than of doctrinal or practical *development*. In other words, the “middle way” approach is present in the Buddha’s teaching from the beginning. As already noted [2.2], the Buddha regularly uses the “no-view” approach during the first period, while the “teaching method” approach is more common in the later decades of his ministry. The choice of his teaching approach very much depends on the kind of audience he is engaged with.

While the very first arhats, especially the 80 great elders¹⁵⁴ [4.3], probably all gain awakening through the “no-view” approach of the Buddha (such as the teachings of the Aṭṭhaka Vagga, the Pārāyana Vagga¹⁵⁵ [8.1.1], and the early strata of the Majjhima Nikāya), in the later years, his audiences is often bigger or less spiritually mature so that he has to resort to simpler teaching methods (such as the discourses of the Saṃyutta Nikāya¹⁵⁶ and the Aṅguttara Nikāya),¹⁵⁷ and many of them using mythical language (such as those of the Dīgha Nikāya).¹⁵⁸ In fact, most of the suttas preserved in the early oral tradition, especially those with the opening marker, “Thus have I heard” (*evam me sutam*),¹⁵⁹ as a rule are records of the second-period teachings of the Buddha and his early saints.

10.2.2 Right view and no views

Paul Fuller, in his interesting work, *The Notion of Diṭṭhi*, proposes that neither the “opposition understanding” [5.1] nor the “no-view understanding” [9] gives a proper explanation of the notion of *diṭṭhi*. He thinks that there are *not*, in fact, two tendencies found within the early texts, and that the attainment of right view and the practising of no views amount to the same thing. In other words, to say that one has right view is to say that one has no view. The consequence of achieving right view is that one does not hold *any* view. The aim of the path is the transcendence of all views. (2005:1 f)

My own understanding as stated above [eg 9.2], is that the “opposition understanding” and “no-view understanding” are parallel methods used by the Buddha throughout his ministry. However, during the first period [1.3.1], he uses the “no-view” approach most of the time since his audience almost always comprises spiritually mature individuals. During the second period, he probably uses the “oppos-

¹⁵⁴ PmA 1:6; ThaA 3:205; VbhA 388: see **Aṭṭha, puggala S** (A 9.59), SD 15.10a (7).

¹⁵⁵ And also in **Majjhima Nikāya**, eg **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86/2:97-105), SD 5.11.

¹⁵⁶ Such as **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356), SD 1.5; suttas of **Kosala Saṃyutta** (S 3) and of **Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta** (S 42), and chapters dedicated to specific teaching models, such as dependent arising (**Nidāna Saṃy**, S 12) and the aggregates (**Khandha Saṃy**, S 22). Even in such chs as “the unconditioned” (**Asaṅkhata Saṃy**, S 43) and “the undetermined” (**Avyakata Saṃy**, S 44) resort to teaching methods, although there are a few hints of the “no-views” approach.

¹⁵⁷ Most of **Aṅguttara** suttas are generally brief statements and assume our having a grasp of the teachings in the previous Nikāyas for their elaboration, and the wide range of topics is geared mainly to the laity. However, full-fledged classics such as **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65) centering around the 3 roots of actions (A 3.65/1:188-193), SD 35.4a, and **Velāma S** (A 9.20) on giving and meditation (A 9.20/4:392-396), SD 16.6.

¹⁵⁸ The longest of D suttas, **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16/2:72-167), SD 9, records the events and legends of the Buddha’s last days. **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17/169-199), SD 36.12 is a magnificent mythology of meditation. **Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-97), SD 2.19 is a humorous jibe at the brahminical class system of cosmogonic proportions. **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22/2:290-315), SD 13.2 is a very structured presentation of a developed satipaṭṭhāna meditation.

¹⁵⁹ Ānanda becomes the Buddha’s personal attendant (*upaṭṭhāka*) during the 20th year and for the last 25 years of his life (D 16.5.15/2:144; DA 2:420; AA 1:293 f; ThaA 3:112; ApA 308; J 4:95; UA 425), and one of Ānanda’s “boons” as personal attendant is that the Buddha would recount to him discourses that were given in his absence. However, it is uncertain Ānanda remembers how far back the teachings goes, or whether he remembers only teachings given during his tenure as personal attendant. See J Brough 1949-50 & **Spiritual friendship**, SD 34.1 (3.2.3).

ition” approach more often since more of his audience are those who are less spiritually mature and are lay people.

Of course, many of those who have the benefit of the opposition understanding (cultivating right view) would, in due course, with better mental concentration, have brief glimpses or partial insights into the no-view understanding. As they gain greater insight into their practice, they would then gain awakening to freedom from all views. Such a person is, according to **the Ārāma,daṇḍa Sutta** (A 2.4.7), said to have “passed beyond lust and fixation to view, bondage, greed, possession, attachment” (*diṭṭhi, rāgābhīnivesa, vinibandha, paligedha, pariyuṭṭhān’ajhosāna ... samatikkanto*).¹⁶⁰

10.2.3 Right knowledge of reality

We have noted above that right view is not a correct proposition that counters an incorrect proposition [9.3]. We can extend this understanding of right view to be correct knowledge of the Dharma, that is, a conduct free from craving and grasping. **Carol Anderson**, in her study of the 4 noble truths, *Pain and Its Ending* (1999), equates the notion of views with doctrine (that is, the views themselves are the Dharma). Fuller thinks that “this severely distorts her understanding of the notion of *diṭṭhi*.” The notion of doctrine is better understood as *the Dharma*, while the notion of *diṭṭhi* is better understood as *knowledge* of the Dharma. (2005:7 f)

Right view is *right knowledge* of the Dharma, wrong view is wrong knowledge of the Dharma. Right view, in other words, is a true knowledge of things as they really are, that is, understanding for the ending of suffering. Wrong view, on the other hand, is *false knowledge* of reality, which binds us to suffering.

10.2.4 Rightly knowing the Dharma

At least two basic points support the idea that *views should be understood as knowledge of Dharma*. First, right view and wrong view deal, respectively, with a correct grasp and an incorrect grasp of the teachings and reality. “Teachings” here refers to what (“truths”) we have learned from others (*parato, ghosa*), while “reality” refers to what we have, at some level, wrongly surmised or rightly realized (*manasikāra*) for ourselves.¹⁶¹

The parable of the water-snake (M 22) is very instructive here, reminding us that, firstly, we need to understand the meaning and purpose of the teachings, and secondly, the teachings are not meant for argumentation nor should they lead to quarrels.

Suppose a man needing a water-snake, looking for a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake, sees a large water-snake and grasps its coils or its tail. It would turn back and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, and because of that he would suffer death or deadly pain. Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of the water-snake.

So too here some misguided person learns the Dharma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels and answers to questions—but having

¹⁶⁰ A 2.4.6/1: 66,20 (SD 84.9).

¹⁶¹ These are 2 well known ways in which doubts can arise, viz, (1) “the voice of another” (*parato ghosa*), ie, by listening to another, and (2) unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*), or not seeing our sense-experiences as being impermanent, etc (**Mahā Vedalla S**, M 43,13/1:294 (SD 35.1); **Āsā Vg**, A 2.11.7/1:87): see **Yoniso Manasikāra Sampadā S** (S 45.55/5:31 & SD 34.12 (2), and also of overcoming them, viz, (1) “the voice of another” (*parato ghosa*), ie, by listening to the true teaching (*saddhamma, savana*), and (2) wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), ie, relating all our sense-experiences as being impermanent (AA 2:137): see **Vicikicchā**, SD 12.8 (2.1.2). *Parato ghosa* as an aspect of spiritual friendship, see **Upaddha S** (S 45.2/5:2 f) & SD 34.9 (2.1.3).

learnt the Dharma, they do not wisely examine the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings.

Without examining the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are not convinced of it [they fail to see its wisdom].

Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates, and they do not enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma. Those teachings, wrongly grasped by them, bring them harm and suffering for a long time to come. Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of the teachings. (M 22,10/1:133 f), SD 3.13

10.2.5 Wrong views hurt

In a manner of speaking, even a good thing, the Dharma, can bring us suffering, *if we grasp it wrongly*. It is not the Dharma, but our wrong view, that is hurting us. Wrong view is a wrong grasp of a teaching, right view is a correct “grasp” of it. Yet, right view is an understanding that is free from grasping or clinging.

The word “grasp” here is of course used figuratively, and means “to understand.” Indeed, none of the views should be grasped. But we must be careful here not to misconstrue the Dharma as being “**pragmatic**,” that the Dharma is both true and false, and it depends on how we look at it. This view is as silly as thinking or saying that fire does not burn us, it depends on how we use it. [11.1.1]

On a deeper level, we are here stating that the Dharma should not be misunderstood only as *value* statements, because they are also statements of *truth*. The Dharma is both true and valuable. We will now examine this point more carefully.

11 The meaning and purpose of the Dharma

11.1 SUFFERING AND ITS ENDING

11.1.1 THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHISM

We have just mentioned that it is *wrong* to view the Dharma merely as something “pragmatic,” that is, something only of “practical” use to us, and as such it is not important whether it is true or false [10.2.5]. This is often exemplified in the wrong and unwholesome statement that “good and bad depends on how we think.” While it is true that the Dharma is *useful* (helping us overcome ignorance and suffering), it is also *true* (it harmonizes with true reality). In other words, the Dharma is *both* true and useful: it concerns both truth and value. [13]

These vital dual aspects of the Dharma (“dual” only in a manner of speaking) points to the very heart of the Dharma, *the meaning and purpose of the Buddha’s teaching*. In this connection, the Buddha succinctly says: “**I only declare suffering and the ending of suffering**” (*dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti*, S 22.86).¹⁶² The 4 noble truths [2] have been crystallized into two synecdoches (short-forms) here: “suffering” and “the ending of suffering.”

“Suffering” here refers to *both the first and the second noble truths*, that is, suffering and its arising. This is the **truth** or *meaning* aspect of the Dharma, which answers the question: What is the meaning of life? [11.1.2] “Ending of suffering” refers to *both the third and fourth noble truths*, that is, the ending of suffering and the path leading to the ending of suffering. This is the **value** or *purpose* aspect of the Dharma, which answers the question: What is the purpose of life? [11.2]

¹⁶² The fuller quote is “As before, Anurādha, so too now, I declare only suffering and the end of suffering” (*pubbe cāham Anurādha etarahi ca dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti*) (**Anurādha S**, S 22.86/3:119), SD 21.13.

11.1.2 The meaning of life

11.1.2.1 The answer to the first question is found in **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*). Briefly, dependent arising, with its 12 links, can be summarized as follows: Because of:

- (1) ignorance (*avijjā*), a lack of direct vision of the 4 noble truths, a person engages in
- (2) volitional activities (*saṅkhāra*), unwholesome and wholesome karmic actions of mind, speech and body. These sustain
- (3) consciousness (*viññāṇa*), determining where he will re-arise at the moment of conception, when there arises
- (4) name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*), a living physical form (*rūpa*) and its sense-faculties (*nāma*), which in turn mature into
- (5) the 6 sense-bases (*saḷāyatana*), that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind. When any of these sense-faculties meet their respective sense-objects, there is
- (6) contact (*phassa*), which conditions
- (7) feelings (*vedanā*), based on our perception recognizing it as being pleasurable, or painful, or neutral. As a result,
- (8) craving (*taṇhā*) arises, intensifying into
- (9) clinging (*upādāna*), as we fuel what we like, reject what we dislike, and ignore what we regard as neutral. These build up our volitional activities, sustaining our renewed
- (10) existence (*bhava*) and a potential new
- (11) birth (*jāti*), which continues in
- (12) decay-and-death (*jarā,maraṇa*).¹⁶³

Or, put more poetically,

In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to the attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.

(James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, NY: Viking Press, 1967:18)

11.1.2.2 The meaning of life, then, can be defined as follows. We are born in ignorance but we are capable of learning, that is, choosing rightly between right and wrong, between good and bad. Through suffering, we selectively learn how to reduce destructive emotions and unproductive situations and actions. Life for us, as such, is a physical and social evolution, but there comes a time when we reach such a level of personal and mental maturity so that we can and must think and act for ourselves. (If not, we will continue to suffer ourselves and to bring suffering upon others.) This individuation process is the beginning of personal development and spiritual evolution.¹⁶⁴

In short, we first need to respect and restrain our body (including speech): this is the action and result of moral virtue. This cultivated body (*bhāvita,kāya*) then becomes the basis for our practice of calming and clearing the mind, that is, mental cultivation, resulting in a cultivated mind (*bhāvita,citta*). Such a cultivated body provides happiness in our lives here and now; such a cultivated mind opens itself

¹⁶³ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (4); **Mahā.nidāna S** (D 15) @ SD 5.17 (4). For an alternate summary, see S:B 518.

¹⁶⁴ On the individuation process, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48) @ SD 8.7 (4); also Piya Tan, “We got class?” (Reflection 12 0523): dharmafarer.org.

to the meaning of life. When our lives are imbued with happiness and meaning, we rise above the masses ever ready for awakening to higher reality.¹⁶⁵ This succinctly describes the 3 trainings [1.1].

11.2 IGNORANCE AND CRAVING

11.2.0 Ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*) are the conjoined twins that sustain and perpetuate our existence. While *ignorance* is a blindness, an inability to see beyond the surface of things, *craving* is the frantic survivor, always running after its selfish ends. Ignorance is blind; craving lame. So ignorance carries craving on its shoulders; craving tells ignorance where to go, and ignorance blindly obeys, but often stumbles.

Ignorance is the inability to see anything about ourselves, so it is blind to our potential for goodness and personal growth. Craving is compelled to look externally for answers, measuring itself against others. It seeks what others have, or perceives them as worth having. But since we cannot own anything, we keep on chasing shadows, and stumbling and suffering in the process.¹⁶⁶

11.2.1 Ignorance

The first two noble truths are explained as dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), understanding which answers our question, “What is the meaning of life?” The third and fourth truths are the functions of “dependent ending,” which has no special Pali term, but is known simply as the “reverse process” (*paṭiloma*) of dependent arising.¹⁶⁷ This “ending of suffering” [11.1.2] includes *the path* leading to that goal. They answer the question: “What is the purpose of life?” It is to find a way out of suffering, realize our potential for good, and live a truly happy life.

What prevents us from realizing our true purpose or goal in life? What keeps us in the rut of suffering, preventing us from tapping our potential for goodness, and hiding truth and beauty from our lives? The short answer is: **ignorance** (*avijjā*), more specifically, a lack of direct understanding of the 4 noble truths [2.1]. Hence, this is a mental or spiritual blindness. Most of us have all our other faculties functioning, but this inner or willful *blindness* both limits our sight, filters it, distorts it, and creates its own virtual realities of our daily world. This is called delusion (*moha*), the manifestation of ignorance in our daily lives.

Spiritual ignorance is so deeply ingrained in us that it is more strategic to begin by dealing with delusion, which shapes the daily lives of the unawakened. This spiritual ignorance dictates our lives through the unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). Delusion or ignorance in disguise, in other words, does not work alone, but goads us on to lust after what we like, to hate what we dislike, and to simply ignore what we see as being neither. In other words, we are *dictated by views*, living in our own glass-house of views.

11.2.2 Craving

11.2.2.1 CRAVING AND VIEWS. If *ignorance* is a blurring blinding shadow, then fear is what it evokes in us, making us run amok blurred and blinded, rushing at the smallest pin of light, like a moth inexorably drawn to a glorious blaze. We crave for what we see as lacking in us. It is a learned lack: we measure ourselves against others in terms of *haves* and *have-nots*, deluded by the notion that to merely *have* is to *be* happy. This is craving at its most primitive, projecting itself as wrong views.

¹⁶⁵ On happiness and meaning, see Piya Tan, “Sad is not really bad” (R278), 2013: dharmafarer.org.

¹⁶⁶ See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3 (2.2); also SD 55.17 (2.3.2.4).

¹⁶⁷ See **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (19.3.2).

In this sense, views are the manifestations of craving, expressed as lust and hate, collecting what we see as desirable, rejecting what we deem as undesirable. **Craving** manifests itself insidiously in two ways, that is, as “existence craving” (*bhava, taṇhā*) and as “nihilist craving” (*vibhava, taṇhā*). Although either craving might dominate a person, *both* could just as often haunt the same person, as they are really the two sides of the same craving coin.

11.2.2.2 CRAVING FOR EXISTENCE (*bhava, taṇhā*) is not so much a desire to “be,” as it is the craving to *have*, a collecting tendency, to see goodness and happiness in terms of *things* and *quantities*. At its lowest, it is a calculating existence dead to any true feelings. Underlying this dark drive is a powerful **conceit** (*māna*) of measuring others in terms of a superiority conceit (“I am superior to you”), an equality conceit (“I am as good as you are”) and an inferiority conceit (“I am inferior to you”).¹⁶⁸

All these conceited measurings have only one narcissistic purpose: *what can I get from others?* This is an **asura** attitude of using others, even exploiting others, in every way possible, and rejecting those we see as being useless to us.¹⁶⁹ Asuras are erstwhile gods, who fall from their divine state through their being inebriate.¹⁷⁰ They devolved, as it were, into subhuman narcissistic demons.

Craving can degrade us into subhuman kleptoparasites or brood parasites, like many species of **cuckoos**, laying their eggs in other birds’ nests. The harder-shelled cuckoo egg hatches earlier than those of the host, and the cuckoo chick grows faster, too. In most cases, the chick evicts the eggs or young of the host. As the cuckoo chick has no time to learn this behavior, it must be a genetic instinct. The chick encourages the host to keep pace with its high growth rate with its rapid begging call, and the chick’s open mouth, serving as a sign-stimulus or inborn behaviour to external sensory stimulus.¹⁷¹

An **asura** cleverly and secretly tries to plant his (or her) views in us, making empty promises of wealth, wellbeing, pleasure, power and salvation—so that we slave for him. He tries to entice us into servitude with his looks, titles, status, sanctity and sweet talk, tacitly inducing us to hand over our remote-controls to him. We then devolve into obedient shadows in the guru’s blinding light, oblivious of our own potential for creativity, self-awakening and liberation.

11.2.2.3 NIHILIST CRAVING (*vibhava, taṇhā*), the antithesis of existence craving [11.2.2.2], is just as destructive, but demeaning, to boot. Having measured ourselves against others, we might feel powerless to be or to better them. Out of desperation, we see *annihilating* them as the only way, even if this means annihilating ourselves. This is often exemplified in the mass-destruction trends in misguided theistic cults today.

If the “existence craving” turn us into asuras, then the “annihilation craving” transmogrify us into any of the other suffering or self-destructive subhumans. We habitually crawl beast-like, in and out of cyclic in quest of food and fun, with preconceived notions and predictable emotions, and a lack of a desire for learning, even neglecting body-mind health, living as if *this* is our only life or *our* life is the only valued one, a mere measurable thing. We even see others as prey to be conned, captured, collected, even killed—with neither love nor respect for life.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ See **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

¹⁶⁹ On asura as a psychological state, see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10) @ SD 39.2 (1.3).

¹⁷⁰ On the asuras’ origin, see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 11.10) @ SD 39.2 (1.1).

¹⁷¹ Robert B Payne, *The Cuckoos*, Oxford, 2005 & *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 26 May 2012: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/wildlife/4109282/Cuckoo-chicks-dupe-foster-parents-from-the-moment-they-hatch.html>. See Wikipedia: Brood parasites (26 May 2012).

¹⁷² See esp **Saṃsappanīya Pariyāya S** (A 10.25/5:288-291), SD 39.7; also **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.19-20/-3:71 f), SD 3.3.

Or, we could be addicted to substances (such as glue or drugs), or never really enjoying anything we keep collecting, no matter how much we may have: we are virtual shades or pretas. Those of us who are regularly violent and intolerant, caught up in killing one another, mass bombing others and being bombed ourselves, are in a virtual hell state. Even while having a human body, our minds could fall into any of these subhuman planes. As we think, so we crave; as we crave, so we are. We become what we desire.¹⁷³

11.3 DEPENDENT ENDING

Wrong views feed our greed, hate and delusion. When these unwholesome roots become habitually strong, we *become* them. Our lives, despite our minds, devolve, falling into subhuman states. So we need to get out of the subhuman rut that we have fallen into, and to break away from the gravity of our dark nature or the trajectory towards lower rebirths: we need to reject wrong views, rooted in greed, hate and delusion, and to cultivate right view, rooted in non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion, that is, moved by charity, lovingkindness and wisdom.¹⁷⁴

Once again, we need to review the context of views here. The understanding of views as *correct or incorrect knowledge of doctrine* has far-reaching implications for Buddhist training. Firstly, on a deeper level, there is really no “opposition” between wrong views and right view as incorrect and correct truth-claims, but an opposition between craving and the ending of craving. Secondly, the rejection of all views is neither advised nor possible for the unready, but we need to give up craving and clinging to wrong views. Thirdly, the non-arising of views is the *result* of deep meditation (temporary) or of full awakening (permanent).

12 Self and views

12.1 THE OLD SELF

The notion of non-self, not-self or soullessness (*anattā*) is a touchstone of sort for those who claim to understand or accept early Buddhism. There are Buddhism scholars who think that there is a real self which is not nirvana (I B Horner), or a “true self” which is nirvana, but is not apprehended (Edward Conze), or a true self that is beyond categories of “existence” and “non-existence” (George Grimm).¹⁷⁵ Even the Theravada Dhammayut monk Ṭhānissaro (Geoffrey DeGraff) thinks that there is a “consciousness without surface (*viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*), which is experienced independently of the 6 sense media (M 49).”¹⁷⁶

Our willingness and ability to accept the teaching of non-self, or better, a full understanding of it, is the final testimony to our embracing the Dharma fully, so that we are able to finally let it go for the sake of awakening. The notion of non-self is a test, as it were, *whether we are willing and able to fully let go of the most subtle of views*, that there is some sort of abiding entity amidst the incessant changes that characterize life and reality. Even when we feel ready to fully embrace the Dharma, some of us are sometimes unwilling or unable to wipe off that last stubborn mote that we consciously or unconsciously identify with. We simply cannot give up the last ghost of our own creation.

¹⁷³ See Reflection, **We are not born human**, R216, 2011: <http://dharmafarer.org>.

¹⁷⁴ See **(Akusala Mūla) Añña Titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201), SD 16.4. On the presence of delusion in all unwholesome action (*akusala kamma*), see SD 5.7 (2.2.1(5)).

¹⁷⁵ For details, see Harvey 1995:17-19.

¹⁷⁶ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.038.than.html> & <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.049.than.html#fn-9>

12.2 PERSISTENCE OF THE SELF

If I read **Luis Gómez** rightly here, he has apparently noted this tendency [12.1] even amongst Buddhists:

Much of early Buddhist philosophy could be thought of as a vain attempt at reinterpreting the doctrine of detachment in terms of metaphysical formulas. To this purpose, the concept of non-self— no doubt very old, but lacking in metaphysical denotation in its early history—was to fit perfectly. The fundamental question should have been whether any discursive structure could adequately express a doctrine of complete detachment, which often underlined the importance of transcending all forms of speech, of breaking the bonds of conceptualisation. But there can be no doubt about the fact that most Buddhists understood the non-self doctrine literally and considered detachment rather as the corollary of non-self, not conversely. (1973:371)

Gómez is saying that early Buddhist teaching, as a contemplative tradition, discourages us from speculating and thinking. Ultimately all beings, states and ideas have no essence in themselves: they are all impermanent (*anicca*). What is impermanent cannot really bring us the kind of pleasure we seek in things and the world: they are all unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). What is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot be said to be “I,” “me” or “mine.” There is nothing with which we can really identify our *body* (no real “I”); no thing we can really *identify* with (no “me”); and nothing we can really *own* (no “mine”).¹⁷⁷

The teaching of “non-self,” then, is neither a proposition nor a statement against the view that “there is a self,” but a teaching that we should *not* cling to the self-notion. It is the clinging that is the problem, not the speculation whether there is a self or not.

Gómez is wondering if there is any view, even a right one, that can express the Dharma: *a view that knows or understands the teachings without being attached to them*. How can any proposition, even a “correct” one, not become an object of clinging, and so become wrong? All views are, as such, potential expressions of craving. In fact, it is not so much that *views* are the problem, but the *grasping or attachment* to them. Gómez suggests that the real issue is that of *overcoming clinging*. This is what **right view** is really about: the knowledge or understanding of non-self is an experience of non-clinging, of letting go, of liberation.

12.2 THE WRONG QUESTIONS

The Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta (M 63) takes this position (that the Dharma is not about holding views, even right ones) further. Māluṅkyā,putta asks the Buddha the notorious **10 questions**, namely, *whether there is any truth in any of these statements*:

The world

- (1) The world is eternal.
- (2) The world is not eternal.
- (3) The world is finite.
- (4) The world is infinite.

The self (or soul)

- (5) The self is the same as the body.
- (6) The self and the body are separate.

¹⁷⁷ See eg **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 56.12/3:66-68), SD 1.2.

The *tathāgata*¹⁷⁸

- (7) The *tathāgata* [a being or saint] exists after death.
- (8) The *tathāgata* does not exist after death.
- (9) The *tathāgata* both exists and does not exist after death.
- (10) The *tathāgata* neither exists nor not exist after death.¹⁷⁹

The Buddha replies that the true purpose of the spiritual life—understanding suffering and working to end suffering [11.1.1]—and employs the well known *parable of the man wounded with a poisoned dart*.¹⁸⁰ The purpose of the spiritual life is to remove the roots of the world’s sufferings as soon as possible. Religion and philosophy can wait.¹⁸¹

13 Truth and value

13.1 THE 5 PRECEPTS

The themes of *right practice* and *right view* are not only the foundation of Buddhism, but form the very structure of the Buddhist life, nourishing and supporting it so that it blossoms into *right knowledge*, that is, awakening itself. This, as we have seen, is called the 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā*) [1.1]. The first training is that of keeping our body and speech morally virtuous [1.1.1].

However, even at this preliminary training, there are elements of right view (and this is what we will examine in this section). When our lives are morally virtuous, it is easier to harmonize our minds, so that it is fully calm and clear, able to directly see into true reality. Understandably, the early Buddhist notion of **morality** (*sīla*) is profoundly moulded and moved by right view, a direct understanding of true reality. This is clearly seen in the form and structure of the most basic moral practice according to early Buddhism, that is, the 5 precepts.

13.2 NATURAL MORALITY, CONVENTIONAL MORALITY

13.2.1 Why does the precept against killing start and top the list, and why are the precepts listed in such a sequence? First, we need to have some idea of the Buddha’s vision of the moral life. The moral life, according to early Buddhism, is not good in itself, but serves as *a basis for mental cultivation*. In this sense, and only in this sense, can we say that moral virtue is *pragmatic* [10.2.5].

In fact, Buddhist ethics is basically **naturalist** since it is rooted in psychological aspects of the agent, namely, the motivation behind an act.¹⁸² It may be said to be **objectivist** since the rightness or wrongness

¹⁷⁸ In speculations, clearly *tathāgata* has a broader sense of “saint,” in a general sense of someone liberated, *not* necessarily only a buddha or arhat. For a canonical def of *tathāgata*, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29,28 f/3:135 f); also Toshiichi ENDO 1997:195-206 (ch V). On the ineffability of the *tathāgata*, see Harvey 1995:235-245. See foll §3.

¹⁷⁹ This tetralemma is found in many places in the Canon. In **Param,marāṇa S** (S 16.12/2:222 f) the Buddha mentions it to Mahā Kassapa; in **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/3:116-119). The tetralemma is mentioned by lemma in 4 suttas in Saṃyutta (S 24.15-18/3:215 f). **Avyākata Saṃyutta** contains some suttas dealing with it (S 44.2-8/4:381-397); see S:B 1080 n165. For a philosophical discussion, see Jayatilleke 1963: 350 & Kügler 2003:100 f. For a more detailed analysis of the 10 points in terms of the tetralemma, see **Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (2).

¹⁸⁰ M 63,4-5/1:428 f @ SD 5.8.

¹⁸¹ A similar approach is found in **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72/1:483-489), SD 6.15. See **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16 (20): Right view is “no view.” For a more detailed study on the 10 questions, see **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10.

¹⁸² Keown 1992:25-56 (ch 2).

of an act is assessed independently of subjective moral perception or preference.¹⁸³ Insofar as Buddhist ethics has a definite goal (*attha*), it is described as **teleological**, rather than deontological.¹⁸⁴

13.2.2 When we speak of “natural” morality, we usually accept that there is a *conventional* morality, that is, moral conduct that is defined and dictated by common agreement. Early Buddhism clearly distinguishes between “natural morality” and “conventional morality.” While natural morality is that of the 5 precepts, conventional morality characterizes most of the monastic rules and procedures, that is to say:

- (1) “natural morality” (*pakati, sīla*), that is, universal moral virtues.¹⁸⁵
- (2) “conventional morality” or “prescribed morality” (*paṇṇatti, sīla* or *paññatti, sīla*) that is, promulgated morality based on the prescribed training rules (*paṇṇatti, sikkhāpada*). (Vism 1.40/15)

Natural morality reflects basic and universal truths and values, such as the primacy of life, respect for property of others, personal freedom, truth and knowledge [13.3]. Conventional (or prescribed) morality, on the other hand, comprises ethical rules, moral codes, proper procedures and accepted conduct that make a community or society more orderly, to allow growth and progress, and in the long run, serve the truths and values of natural morality. At least, this is the way that moral virtue is envisioned in early Buddhism.¹⁸⁶

13.3 MEANING OF “MEANING”

Now we return to the first of the two questions asked earlier: Why does the precept against killing start and top the 5 precepts? [13.2]. The answer to this begins by our asking some very basic questions, indeed, questions that are meaningful, such as these: *What is the meaning of life? Why are we here? What is life? Why is there suffering? What is the purpose of life?* These are not easy questions to answer, but they are very important ones.

Before we can answer such questions, we need to know what they *mean*. We also need to know the meaning of “meaning”! Philosophers define “**meaning**” variously as follows:

- (1) our understanding of words and sentences, and our ability to give them a symbolic function;
- (2) its connection with our psychological conditions, such as wanting or intending, and with human conventions and rules; and
- (3) the connection between meaning and other semantic notions, such as reference and truth.¹⁸⁷

Suppose you tell me or ask me something, and I’m not sure about it. So I ask you, “What do you mean?” Perhaps, (1) I want to know how you define at least some of your words and expressions. Or (2) what you plan to do or want me to do or are trying to tell me. Or (3) what you have just said tells me something about you (such as your state of mind), or point out something else to me.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Jayatilleke 1970; Weeraratne 1976:58-65. It is for this reason, too, that we cannot say Buddhist ethics is “pragmatic,” in the sense that good and bad depends how we view it or that moral virtue has no purpose beyond assisting in mental cultivation. Indeed, any awakened being, an arhat, would be, by nature, morally virtuous: see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7.

¹⁸⁴ Deontology refers to ethics as *duty*, that some acts need to be done or not done as an obligation, regardless of their consequences.

¹⁸⁵ Nett 191; Vism 1.41/15.

¹⁸⁶ On natural morality & conventional morality, see **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8 (2.1). On the rationale of the 3 trainings, see **Sīla, samādhi, paññā**, SD 21.6 (1.2).

¹⁸⁷ For details, see Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed, NY, 1984: sv meaning.

¹⁸⁸ **Unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (8.2.1.2).

For our present purposes, let us simplify all this to two main ideas: what you are describing and what you are prescribing, that is, especially what you are informing me and what you want me to do or not to do. Broadly speaking, we are talking here about “what is true” and “what is desirable,” facts and wants, or *truth* and *values*. All this will become clear in a moment.

13.4 THE GOLDEN RULE

13.4.1 Truth and value of life

Now let us apply what we have just discussed to the question: Why does the precept against killing start and top the list of 5 precepts? [13.2]. The answer has to do with what we understand as “truth” and “value,” what is universally true and what everyone (all living beings) want, so to speak. All those questions we have asked [13.3] are basically about “life” or has to do with the fact that we “live” or are “alive.” Hence, we can safely say that life is the most important thing here, since without it, all these questions are meaningless: there will be no one to ask them anyway!

The *fact* is that **life** is the most important (meaningful) and precious (valuable) thing that we have. As far as we are concerned, we *have* life, we *are* alive, we *love* our life, we want to *live*. Next, we would naturally know is that there are others like us, or not like us, but they too *have* life and are *alive*. Surely, they too, human or non-human, love their lives and want to live. Let us call this “the first principle,” since it is the most self-evident truth. This principle is the basis of what we know as the “golden rule.”

13.4.2 The scope of the golden rule

The golden rule can be stated as follows: “I should *not* do to others what I do not want others to do to me; I should *do* to others what I want others to do to me.” Understandably, such a broad statement makes some philosophers justifiably suspect to be only “an empty recommendation.” It could be cleverly defined by philosophers, ideologues, theologians, preachers and anyone for their own selfish advantages and agenda, or out of pure ignorance.

We further need to clarify what is meant by saying, “*what we ought not to do to others, and what we ought to do to others.*” It means that we should neither *omit* any moral restraint nor should we *commit* any immoral deeds. In other words, there are two sides of the golden rules or two aspects of moral conduct: the “stop” or “do not” aspect (the morality of omission, or negative morality), especially the 5 precepts, and the “go” aspect (the morality of commission, or positive morality), particularly the cultivating of lovingkindness.¹⁸⁹

Such questions cannot be fully or properly answered without reference to our desires and the facts of human nature.¹⁹⁰ These desires and facts are none other than the *values* and *truths* we mentioned above. They are even more clearly defined by the Buddha, for example, in **the Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7), thus:

“Here, houselords, a noble disciple reflects thus:

‘I am one who wishes to live, who does not wish to die; who desires happiness, who dislikes suffering.

Since I am one who wishes to live and does not wish to die, who desires happiness and dislikes suffering, if someone were to take my life, that would not be pleasing nor agreeable to me.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ On precept and values, see *Sīla samādhi paññā* SD 21.6; SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 37.8 (2.2); SD 47.3 (2.2.5.1).

¹⁹⁰ For a simple but helpful philosophical reading on this, see Adler 1985:122 f.

¹⁹¹ This is the locus classicus for the “golden rule”: see SD 1.5(1).

Now, if I were to take the life of another—of one who wishes to live, who does not wish to die, who desires happiness, who dislikes suffering—that would not be desirable nor agreeable to him, too.

What is undesirable and disagreeable to me [354] is undesirable and disagreeable to others, too. How can I inflict upon another what is undesirable and disagreeable to me?

(M 55,6/5:354 f), SD 1.5

13.4.3 The threefold purity

In the following sections, the Sutta then explains the other two body-based precepts and the four speech-based precepts in the same vein, applying the golden rule. In short, the golden rule is not taken as a pious *carte blanche*. The Buddha clearly defines it in terms of clear wholesome moral conduct. The above passage then continues with the pericope on **the “threefold purity”** (*ti, parisuddhi*), defined as follows:

Having reflected thus,	
he himself abstains	from destroying life,
he exhorts others to abstain	from destroying life, and
he speaks in praise of abstaining	from destroying life. ¹⁹²
Thus, his bodily conduct is purified in 3 respects.	(M 55,6/5:354), SD 1.5

The same is said for each of the remaining two body-based precepts and the four speech-based precepts. This pericope shows that moral virtue is not merely personal practice, but is meant to be social action, the basis of a wholesome community. The act of praising someone when he refrains from breaking a precept is in itself a positive communication that reinforces social solidarity and encourages wholesome personal development.

13.4.4 Criteria for moral action

The Amba, laṭṭhika Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (M 61) describes another dimension of Buddhist ethics, that of **the “threefold purity”** of our actions. How are we to determine if an action is morally wholesome? If an action would harm us, or harm others, or harm both, such an action should *not* be done. Here, “both” refers to “society” at large, or in today’s lingo, the environment. In other words, “Whatever I do *should in no way harm me, others or the environment.*”¹⁹³

Having understood all these basics, we are now ready to go back to answer the second of the two questions we asked earlier: Why are the precepts listed in such a sequence? [13.2].

13.5 THE 5 PRECEPTS, 5 VALUES

13.5.1 Natural morality, embodying both truths and values that are universal, are codified in the 5 precepts, as summarized here:

¹⁹² “[H]e himself abstains from harming life, exhorts others to abstain from harming life,” ie, one keeps the precepts oneself and encourages others to do the same: this is “one who lives both for his own good and for the good of others” (**Atta, hita S**, A 4.96/2:96 f; **Sikkhā S**, A 4.99/2:98 f). “[He] speaks in praise of abstaining from harming life” refers to spiritual friendship and the practice of gladness (*muditā*).

¹⁹³ M 61/1:414-420 @ SD 3.10.

<u>Precept</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
(1) against killing	life	our <i>being</i> is the most precious thing there is,
(2) against stealing	happiness	we must <i>have</i> support for life to continue,
(3) against sexual misconduct	freedom	we must be free to <i>do</i> or <i>not</i> to do things,
(4) against false speech	truth	we can only really <i>communicate</i> in truth,
(5) against heedlessness	wisdom	the <i>mind</i> is what benefits most from all this.

Now we can answer the second of the two questions we asked earlier: Why are the precepts listed in such a sequence? [13.2].

13.5.2 We have already seen why and how **life** forms the basis of the first precept: it is based on the *value* of life [13.4]. It is a universal truth that life exists, and just as I treasure my life, so do other beings. From this truth proceeds the value of life: our actions are moral if we act in a manner as to *value* life. The value of life *prescribes* that we should not destroy life, nor harm or cause harm to any living being in any way.

Such an action, in other words, must be motivated by lovingkindness (*mettā*), or unconditional acceptance of self and others. Indeed, lovingkindness is the essence of the golden rule. Only when we have lovingkindness can we fully and effectively keep to the precepts. It is out of lovingkindness that we do not kill or harm others, and not break any of the other precepts.

13.5.3 From the truth of life, proceeds the truth that we want to have a **happy** life. Otherwise, life is not likely to be worth living. To be happy means to *have* sufficient supports of life: food, clothing, shelter and health. Just as we *value* our own happiness, we understand that others, too, value their own. As such, we ought not to take the properties of others, as it would devalue their lives.

13.5.4 Similarly, just as we value our **freedom**—the right to determine our own bodily actions and have our personal space—so do others. Sexuality is the most private of our physical being. Its activity is often symbolic of a personal and emotional commitment to our partner. Sexuality also has the potential of procreating our own kind, which entails a heavy responsibility and commitment on our part to humanize and socialize such a new being, so that he is capable of realizing his personal and spiritual potentials. Ideally, we love someone, or live with someone, or raise someone, so that he (or they) can become a truly free and healthy individual. To truly love one another is to celebrate our *individuality*, our ability to be our best or true self. (Here, self refers to the mind and heart.)

13.5.5 The next most basic truth is the value of **truth** itself. All that we have said and agreed to must be true for them to be of *value* to us. Having understood and accepted this truth, we need to uphold it. This is the basis for an effective and wholesome communication. The importance of this particular precept is highlighted by the fact that it has *four aspects*: the 4 right speeches—that our speech should be truthful, unifying, pleasant and helpful. Truth in speech facilitates communication and fellowship; unifying speech promotes unity of effort and optimizes our abilities and resources; pleasant speech is a celebration of the human spirit that is capable of creating beauty and expressing truth to divine heights; and helpful speech is our words' ability to uplift others to such a level as to inspire self-effort towards personal development and spiritual liberation.

13.5.6 The 5th precept, humble as it might sound, reflects the *spirit* or purpose of the precepts, that we are not only body, but also **mind**. The *value* of the mind lies in the fact that it is the door to inner calm

and clarity, that are the bases for liberating wisdom. It is on the mental level that we can truly transform ourselves on the path to awakening.¹⁹⁴

13.6 IS AND OUGHT

13.6.1 Divorcing “is” from “ought”

13.6.1.1 DAVID HUME. Modern scholars of Buddhism who are familiar with western academic disciplines, such as philosophy, have given us some valuable insights into the significance of the Buddha’s teachings, especially those on views (*ditṭhi*), to which we will limit our discussion here. The Buddha’s teachings on views —the nature of wrong views, right view, and no views¹⁹⁵—are clearly relevant even today. In fact, we shall see how, for example, the overlapping of *truth* and *value*, description and prescription, is and ought, in the early Buddhist notion of moral virtue, outshines modern philosophy which divorces the two vital aspects of mental development.

The divorcing of the categories of “is” and “ought” in western philosophy is usually traced to the Scottish philosopher, **David Hume** (1711-1776). In a famous statement in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1793) (written when he was only 26), Hume declares that we cannot derive an “ought” from an “is.” In his readings of works dealing with moral and philosophical issues, such as claiming God’s existence, Hume notes that he is often surprised to find their authors shift from saying what *is* or what is not the case in reality to asserting what *ought* or ought not to be done in human conduct:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence.

For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, ... (1793:3.1.1; 1972:203 f; paragraphed)

This has been dubbed “the naturalist fallacy” or “Hume’s law” by philosophers, attesting to its influence.¹⁹⁶ Hume is arguing that a statement of fact, how things are, “cannot provide a logical basis for morality.”¹⁹⁷ We cannot, as such, by pointing to the nature of things, derive what is of value. The former, a *descriptive* statement, cannot provide us with any valid ground for reaching a conclusion of the latter

¹⁹⁴ On the 5 values, see **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356) @ SD 1.5 (2).

¹⁹⁵ Once again, in terms of the 3 trainings, we can see “rejecting wrong views” as a vital part of the training in moral virtue; “promoting right views” as an aspect of mental training; and “having no views” as the result of wisdom training. [14]

¹⁹⁶ Not all philosophers, however, agree that it is actually a “fallacy,” but it serves as a useful departure for discussing the relationship between fact and value, what is reality and what we do about it. See Flew’s *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1994, sv naturalistic fallacy.

¹⁹⁷ Hudson 1969:16.

kind, a *prescriptive* statement.¹⁹⁸ This is clearly a useful philosophical tool for exposing theological ideologies for what they are—false, manipulative and harmful.

13.6.1.1 ALASDAIR MACINTYRE. Another Scottish philosopher, **Alasdair MacIntyre** (b 1929), in *After Virtue* (1981), however, thinks that the dichotomy between “is” and “ought,” separating fact from value, is a modern phenomenon. Indeed, MacIntyre argues that the distinction between “is” and “ought” was never made until modern times.¹⁹⁹ Such a distinction was certainly never made in early Buddhist moral ethics, as noted by **Paul Williams**:

In the Indian context it would have been axiomatic that liberation comes from discerning how things actually are, the true nature of things. That seeing things how they are has soteriological benefits would have been expected, and is just another way of articulating the “is” and “ought” dimension of Indian Dharma. The “ought” (pragmatic benefit) is never cut adrift from the “is” (cognitive factual truth). Otherwise it would follow that the Buddha might be able to benefit beings (and thus bring them to enlightenment) even without seeing things the way they really are at all. And that is not Buddhism. (2000:40)

With the rise of scientific instruments and technology to measure the workings of the brain, there is a growing interest in Buddhism, especially its meditation and mind teachings. It is this area that now highlights how the Buddha understands human behaviour and the significance of his teachings on moral ethics that does not divorce truth and value.

13.6.2 A “non-cognitive” ethics?

In a significant way, from Hume’s time, western philosophers have generally kept reality and ethics apart. Ethics, as it were, has a life of its own, and should be discussed in its own right. This may be useful in a classroom, but does not really in any way help to uplift us in the quality or understanding of human conduct.

In our own times, this approach has been called a “non-cognitive” ethics, as it does not take into account our experience of reality. **Mortimer J Adler** astutely quips that this is “an elegant way of saying that ethics or moral philosophy does not have the status of genuine knowledge.”²⁰⁰ However, this attitude is fast changing in our own times as modern psychology begins to see growing evidence of the intimate connection between the “neural ‘is’ and the moral ‘ought’.”²⁰¹

As academia becomes more interdisciplinary, there is a growing consensus amongst academics, especially mind specialists, that moral judgements are based largely on intuition, “gut feelings,” about what is right or wrong in particular cases. Sometimes, however, such intuitions conflict, both within and amongst individuals. Which intuitions are reliable, if at all? Such questions are better answered with our improved understanding of where intuition comes from, in the first place.²⁰²

For Buddhists, the answer is clear: *all our intuitions come from the mind*. The reality that we see, or think we see, and the values that we deduce from this, or project to this, all arise in the mind and proceed from there. As such, it is *unnatural* to divorce truth from value. To live our lives more *naturally*,

¹⁹⁸ Eg, there is the sun rising (descriptive), therefore there is a God and we should believe in him (prescriptive). See Adler 1985:117-122.

¹⁹⁹ 1981:54-57, 80 f & 2007:56-61, 84. See also Hudson 1969.

²⁰⁰ Adler 1985:118.

²⁰¹ J Greene, “From neural ‘is’ to moral ‘ought’: what are the moral implications of neuroscientific moral psychology?” 2003.

²⁰² J Haidt, “The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment,” 2001.

with truth and value harmoniously blended, is to live fully and wholesomely, free from any problems arising from theism or religion, which philosophers like Hume have issues with [13.6.1].

13.6.3 Right view is unified

Once we accept *the overlapping of truth and value*, indeed, see their necessary cooperation, a whole new vista of moral life opens to us. In early Buddhism, right view does not make any distinction between truth and value, between “is” and “ought.” The value that we see is based on *how* we see things: the more insightful our vision, the greater the value. Hence, early Buddhism instructs us how to see *with insight*, to see things as they really are, to give wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*).²⁰³

According to early Buddhism, what we *desire* is inseparable from what we *know*, and what we know inseparable from what we desire. In other words, thought and action mutually affect one another. The mind *describes* or learns through the senses; the mind also *prescribes* or acts through the senses. But we can understand and master such processes.

We can master the mind by first calming the body and then clearing the mind. The mind often becomes muddled on account of the body (the activities of the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body). When such activities are settled or stilled for a moment, so that we do not have to direct our attention in 5 diverse ways, we can now focus it on just *the mind*, the source of all describing and prescribing.²⁰⁴

When the mind is still, it sees itself crystal clear, like a well-focused telescope. It is a radiant stillness, an inner light that can only be *felt*, personally experienced, each for ourselves. It is a radiance so blissful that we must find it meaningless when pinned down into words and things. Religion can only try to recruit and regiment this radiant and blissful silence for the measuring and multiplying of faith and funds; but religion must ultimately fail, and only harm its followers, even subtly. For the liberating light is within us, not outside, and none can point it out to us; we must see it for ourselves with our inner eye. This is the true realm of no views.

14 Wrong views, right view and no views

14.1 WRONG VIEW BLINDS

14.1.1 To see and to feel

What is it that is holding us back from the inner vision of “no views”? [13.6.3]. The simple answer is: our own inclination to views. Being unawakened, whatever views we hold, must end up as wrong or warped views. We merely see them as views, so that our lives essentially remain unchanged. On the other hand, our views might even petrify our hearts into a believing that we already know what need to be known, or even that we know everything. More commonly, when we tire of a view, we simply abandon it for another. The point is we can never be too sure about any view. A view, by its very nature must change.

How we view things affects how we view ourselves: how we think, speak and act. When our view is tinged with greed, hate or delusion [11.2.1], then an unwholesome course of actions follows. When our view is unsullied by these three unwholesome roots, then a wholesome course of actions ensues. This is reason enough to reject wrong view and adopt right view. Right view moves us to end craving.

²⁰³ Wise attention is said to be the “internal condition” for the noble eightfold path: see **Meghiya S** (A 9.3), SD 34.2 & **Virtue ethics**, SD 18.11 (6.4). For functions of wise attention, see **Āghāta Paṭivinaya S** (A 5.162) @ SD 39.6 (2.0). See also **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14(5).

²⁰⁴ There is some parallel between the pair, “describing” (on account of the senses) and “prescribing” (a mental activity), and the pair, “sense-impression” (*paṭigha, samphassa*) and “conceptual impression” (*adhivacana, samphassa*), as described in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 16.10-20/2:62), SD 5.17.

Right view is able to end craving because it directly sees reality: it is a true description of things as they really are. The mind is no more fooled by the senses; the senses are no more dictated by the mind. They work harmoniously together, balancing both thinking and feeling, harmonizing cognitively and affectively. To think or to cognize is to relate our experiences in terms of *the past*: it is a helpful learning process, but we need to rise above them. To feel or affect²⁰⁵ is to simply and fully taste the *present* moment as it moves, not missing a beat.

14.1.2 “Is” and “ought” unified

Why does early Buddhism put great emphasis on the notion of views? Views bring about mental rigidity: we are often stuck in our views and stoned by them. In other words, we are often attached to our views and blinkered by them. Our views colour and distort our experiences so that they become other than true reality. And so we are caught in the loop of sensual desire and the rut of ignorance.

If views are an active engagement with the world, it is craving (*taṇhā*) that feeds this engagement and sustains it. With such a mind, we might even *know* Buddhism, have right views about the Dharma, but they are still merely *views*. They are only passing mindshots of reality out there [7.2.3.1]. Our lives remain unchanged and unmoved by goodness, or the change and movement are merely momentary and quirky.

We might even counter and correct wrong propositions (statement of truth) [9.3], but they are right only insofar as we do not have any grasping or attachment. They are *right views* so long as they do not have any of the unwholesome aspects of *wrong views*. The 4 noble truths, as propositions, are not meant to be apprehended as views, but should be examined with detached awareness. A mirror reflects the reality before us in all truth, but it does not hold back the image.

To fully understand early Buddhist ethics and to cultivate moral virtue effectively, we need to understand and accept the common ground on which *truth* and *value*, “is” and “ought,” stand. Wrong view does *not* see what is: it is wrong in the sense that it does not see reality. It sees things in such a way as to have negative effects, often with destructive results. What we see wrongly as “is” wrongly becomes *ought*: if this is our only view, then we have fallen into the error of eternalism. What we see wrongly as “is not” wrongly becomes *ought not*: if we uphold only this as true, then we have committed the error of annihilationism [7.2.2.2]. The point is clear here: from *is* arises “ought”; from *is not* arises “ought not.” [13.6]

14.2 RIGHT VIEW SEES

14.2.1 The beginning of wholesome states

Wrong views rationalize killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech and mental cloudiness. Moral virtue, through right view, creates and supports a life-affirming and happiness-centred ambience. Moral virtue is not only about the purification of bodily action and speech, it is also an effort to keep clear from wrong views. Properly nurtured, such an environment conduces not only to social growth, but also to mental cultivation. Mental cultivation is naturally motivated by right view, or more specifically, by the “straightening of views” (*diṭṭh’uju,kamma*).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ I’m trying to use this word to reflect the “opposite” of *cognize*. Surely its sense here is apparent, but needs some familiarity before it can have its own life, as it were.

²⁰⁶ Specifically, the phrase *diṭṭhi ca ujuka* (“and a straight view”) (S 47.3,3.3/5:142) refers to *the view of one’s ownership of karma* (*kamma-s,sakatā,diṭṭhi*) (SA 3:199). *Diṭṭhi’ju,kamma* or *diṭṭh’uju,kamma* is commentarial, glossed as the right view and wise faith in connection with the 10 bases of meritorious actions (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*) (DA 1:231 = MA 1:132 = AA 2:109 = ItA 2:45. Cf CA 102; DhsA 157, 159): see Puñña,kiriya,vatthu S (A 8.36/4:241-243), SD 22.17.

In the **(Anubaddha) Bhikkhu Sutta** (S 47.3), the Buddha warns monastics not merely to follow him around, but to get on with their training and meditation. To follow the Buddha, in other words, is to practise his teaching. When a monk asks him how he should do this and so becoming an heir to the Dharma, the Buddha replies:

In that case, bhikshu, **purify the very beginning of wholesome states.**

And what is the very beginning of wholesome states?

It is moral virtue that is well purified, and view that is straight.²⁰⁷ (S 47.3.3.3/5:142), SD 24.6a

Then with moral virtue and straightened view, the practitioner should go on to practise the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), that is, mindfulness based on the body, on feeling, on the mind, and on mental realities. The benefit and goal of such a proper practice is the attainment of arhathood or non-returning.²⁰⁸

14.2.2 Growing vision

Wrong view is wrong because it is distorted by greed arising from not seeing true reality. Right view is right because it is a vision of true reality that is self-transforming, leading to the end of craving. Wrong view is not a wrong proposition that needs correction by a right view. Wrong view is harmful because it is both false and useless (without value): it does not describe reality nor prescribe how to be free of suffering. As a result, wrong view keeps us rutted in a loop of cyclic habits, a snake trying to devour its own tail, a uroboros.²⁰⁹

Experiencing the world (that is, the 5 physical senses) through wrong view is not simply a cognitive error which can be corrected by its opposite, right view. This wrong view is delusion accumulated through the habits of ages. Similarly, right view is insight into true *reality*, an insight that overlaps with what is of *value* (conducive to personal and mental development). Wrong view does not see suffering, its arising, its ending, and the way to its ending, whereas right view understands suffering, abandons craving, realizes nirvana, and follows the path to suffering's end. In short, right view knows suffering and its ending, what *is* and what *ought* to be done, or the truth and its value,

On the other hand, right view is not the rejection of a wrong teaching and the adoption of a right teaching. Nor is it a rejection of all views: the delusion of not having any view is itself a view!²¹⁰ [16.1]. When we directly see true reality, we also see the end of craving and suffering. This direct insight combines the “is” with the “ought” of our lives, unifying reality with value. Reality is *described* in the first two noble truths; value is *prescribed* in the last two noble truths [13.6].

The first two truths are penetrated through *cognitive* training (mindfulness); the last two truths are realized through *affective* training (a wholesome response to true reality). They may be seen separately (as thinking and feeling) by the unawakened but are unified and purified in the awakened. In fact, as the path to awakening, the 4 truths work naturally together to transform the practitioner. The path and the goal are really one and the same, in the sense that they are cultivated inwardly. Both truth and value are part of the same individual; the “is” and the “ought” work together to see directly into true reality.

²⁰⁷ “View that is straight,” *diṭṭhi ca ujukā*, ie, the view that we are responsible for our own actions (*kamma-s, -sakatā, diṭṭhi*) (SA 3:199). This entails both acceptance of karma and rebirth. See SD 24.6a (2).

²⁰⁸ S 47.3.3.3/5:142 @ SD 24.6a.

²⁰⁹ A uroboros is a serpent or dragon biting its own tail, symbolizing samsara. The myth of Sisyphus reflects this tendency, too: see **Yodh’ājīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).

²¹⁰ See **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74/1:497-501) esp §2, SD 16.1.

14.2.3 The moment cannot be frozen

As our meditation improves—as we feel a growing sense of calm and light in body and mind—we would naturally understand the subtler nuances of the Buddha’s teachings preserved and handed down in the *word*, to be teased out in the *spirit*. We are also likely to be more naturally able to see clear and joyful patterns of reality and goodness, of truth and beauty, in and around us. Overarching all this is a real sense of less desire for views, much less for dogmas. We even begin to see through religion. We are on the way to becoming emotionally independent individuals.²¹¹

Views are only useful in passing, like wheels working best in their turning. They could be imagined as individual frames in a roll of celluloid film. If we look at only a single frame, we are unlikely to get the whole picture or story. We need to watch the whole mind-made movie from some distance (with some detachment) to have a good idea of what the story is about. Our lives, for most of us, are movies still in the making; for many of us, movies still playing; and, as such, our lives should not be judged by its single frames, or even episodes, except as part of a learning process.

On a more mundane level, this applies to our sense-experiences. When we try to grasp a passing moment, it becomes a mental hindrance. Whatever we grasp at for a replay or for storage is already dead into the past. Or we could try, on account of an experience or memory, to project our desire into the future, but when the future is here, it almost always is not what we want or expect it to be. These are views we try to grasp: they are wrong views.

Right view, as such, is a close watch on the current trend of events, living every moment of the present. For, that is all we can really do. In an important sense, we need to *feel* the moment. To feel a moment is to fully experience it. To *think* is to paste our own views onto the moving window of reality before us. If we watch ourselves carefully enough, we might see ourselves as a series of small changes, trying to make sense of things. A felt moment is really a true taste of change itself. When we embrace this change, when we see it as being really our being itself, then we are enriched by a profound sense of fulfillment.

If we have lived long enough, we would have probably learned that *only change is certain*; the rest is uncertain. Even when we think we have known enough, or think that we have lived long enough, unwelcome surprises and rude shocks often hit us from the horizon of our unknowing.

We *think we know*: two most potent ingredients for life imprisonment. While thinking limits ideas, turning them into perishable goods and clever noises, knowing makes mummies of living truth and beauty. To *think* too much is to allow words to get in the way of our best interests. It is the dead weight that prevents our hot-air balloon from rising into the open heights. To *know* too much often strips us naked of all veneer of comfortable tales and correct lies that hide our true lives.²¹² We must be selfless enough to accept ourselves as we really are, because our wholesome transformation begins here.

14.3 NO VIEWS FREE

14.3.1 How to have no views

It is possible to have no views, even when we are not arhats, or are still unawakened. This is when we have calmly and happily gone into some deep meditation, deep enough to let go of the body and its senses, so that we are fully focused on the mind. The mind has settled down so fully that all thoughts have been stilled. Even beginners who properly go into meditation would notice that although their thoughts are still there, they have gently receded into the background, so that they feel a great sense of stillness.

²¹¹ See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

²¹² See Piya Tan, “Stop, thinking” (Reflection 12 0411): <http://dharmafarer.org>.

In deeper meditation, when it is so peaceful that there is nothing to focus on, there is no need for any mental effort, as it were, we simply enjoy the deep free silent bliss. For some of us (especially beginners), this might come in a flash, a first blush, but its effect is profound and forever. It is helpful to remember how good we feel at that time, as this would serve as a helpful springboard for future meditations. The constant recall of such blissful states is a self-cultivation of lovingkindness that is very effective in clearing our minds of unnecessary and unwholesome thoughts. This is of course only a temporary respite and short-term measure.

14.3.2 Using the past

There is a way that our past can be useful to us. We could, for example, see certain patterns in our negative conduct that brings about pain in us and others. We tend to flood our lives with past constructions of pain, depriving us of such happy memories that trigger and sustain present-moment happiness. We have to renounce these bad habits. We need to recall or reflect on moments of joy, patterns of happiness, good habits of the heart, we have lived.

We can put together all that we have discussed here into something *practical*. In terms of the 3 trainings [1.1], we can see

“rejecting wrong views”	as a vital part of <u>the training in moral virtue</u> ;
“promoting right views”	as an aspect of <u>mental training</u> ; and
“having no views”	as the result of <u>wisdom training</u> .

On an even more *practicable* level, we can see wrong views as our unhappy past: we need to let go of them as painful mental constructions. Right views, for the moment, are our happy present, relish them while they last. It is because this happiness is momentary, almost elusive, that it is so valuable to us. Yet there is no way of measuring its value. For true happiness needs nothing, wants nothing: it *is* everything, as it were; hence, it is immeasurable.

15 Is everything mind-made?

15.1 REALIST OR IDEALIST?

Is everything in the mind, or is the external world real? Is everything mind-made or can we experience the physical world? Are our moral judgements, or any judgement for that matter, *perceptions* of external reality or *projections* of internal attitudes? These are clearly not questions we can answer even in a short essay, much less in the conclusion of this one. However, we can make some useful remarks in relation to what has been discussed here, that is, right view.

Under “normal” circumstances—*normal* meaning our daily lives and their attending events—we are likely to be what philosophers and ethical thinkers call “**moral realists**.” They are those who believe that some things are right or wrong, independent of what we think whether individually or as a group. For example, if we were to see a group of rough youths pouring gasoline over a stray cat and burning it, we don’t need to wonder that it is wrong: we *know* it is wrong.²¹³ This means that we accept that such acts are *inherently* wrong, or naturally bad, and that such wrongs are true, independent of our moral beliefs and values, or those of any particular group or culture. Indeed, we might recall that this is an example of “natural morality” [13.2].

This realist notion of morality starkly contrasts with an **idealist** or anti-realist notion of, say, *beauty*. When we gaze at a brilliant sunset or a cloudless, moonless night sky full of stars, we might feel as if the

²¹³ G Harman, *The Nature of Morality*. NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1977:2.

beauty is inherent in the night sky, but many people acknowledge that such beauty, rather than being in the skies, is really “in the eye of the beholder.”

15.2 MIND-MADE OR HARD-WIRED?

Similarly, we cannot really “explain” —neither logically nor rationally—why we are attracted to certain people and dislike others. Monkeys, too, have their special preferences regarding those they choose as their mates. But the way man and apes, humans and non-humans, perceive beauty is clearly different. Surely, then, beauty is *mind-made*, or as we say today, “hard-wired” in us.

However, “mind-made” and “hard-wired” can mean very different things. In early Buddhism, “mind-made” (*mano,mayā*) basically refers to the fact that our actions (mental, bodily and verbal) are usually conditioned by our inclination dictated *unwholesomely* by greed, hate or delusion, or *wholesomely* by non-greed, non-hate or non-delusion (or love, charity or wisdom). Being “hard-wired,” on the other hand, seems to apply more to an evolutionary process or a psychological inclination found in our brains. However, suffice it here to say that the *psychological* aspects of the term “hard-wired” are close to, even overlap, the Buddhist notion of “mind-made” in important ways.

15.3 NATURAL OR CONDITIONED?

15.3.1 Social conditioning?

Joshua Greene, in his thought-provoking article on “From neural ‘is’ to moral ‘ought’” (2003), asks the meta-ethical (“meaning and judgement”) question: “Are the moral truths to which we subscribe, really full-blown truths, mind-independent facts about the nature of moral reality, or are they, like sexiness, in the mind of the beholder?” One way to try to answer this sort of question, he proposes, is to examine what is in our minds.

Understanding how we make moral judgements might help us to determine *whether our judgements are perceptions of external truths or projections of internal attitudes*. More specifically, Greene adds, we might ask whether the appearance of moral truth can be explained in a way that does not require the reality of moral truth. He points to recent evidence from neuroscience and allied disciplines showing that moral judgement is often an intuitive, emotional matter. Although many moral judgements are difficult, much of them are accomplished in an intuitive, effortless way.

An interesting feature of many intuitive, effortless cognitive processes is that they are accompanied by a perceptual phenomenology. For example, says Greene, humans can effortlessly determine whether a given face is male or female without any knowledge of how such judgements are made. We have no clear experience of working out whether that person is male or female: we just *know* it. By contrast, he then notes, we do not look at a star in the sky and see that it is receding.

As humans, Greene says, we do not automatically or naturally process spectroscopic redshifts. All of this makes sense from an evolutionary point of view, he concludes. We have evolved mechanisms for making quick, emotion-based social judgements, for “seeing” rightness and wrongness, because our intensely social lives favour such capacities, but there was little selective pressure on our ancestors to know about the movements of distant stars. (2003:849)

15.3.2 Conditioning and self-awareness

To a great extent, Greene [15.3.1] is right about social conditioning and evolutionary hard-wiring. We are conditioned by society and by our environment. Society continually tries to condition and control us, unless we are able to develop a growing sense of self-awareness and accept some level of personal responsibility for our actions.

Self-awareness is the very first beginning of a natural knowing that we are different from others, that we are or can be an *individual*, or at least a *person*. Not all societies see all their members as

“persons,” which we can simply define as “free individuals.”²¹⁴ Very often, religion or political ideology would define and limit our conduct and values, what we should see as meaningful and what we should strive for in life. This is especially true in tribal and theistic religions. To be a tribe member is to empty ourselves of any individuality and be but a limb of the tribe, a cog in the tribal machinery.

Early Buddhism, however, while accepting the vicissitudes of social realities, rejects those conditions that prevent us from tapping our inner potential and stunting the human spirit. Indeed, it must be the role of society to provide an environment that encourages us to express our wholesome creativity, and inspires us to realize our spirituality to the fullest. In other words, it must be a good society.

A good society is the cradle and school for wholesome individuals.²¹⁵ We, as such individuals, understand and accept wholesome conditionings, such as those of the precepts [13.1]. Based on such moral virtue, we easily cultivate the divine abodes—lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity.²¹⁶ With these qualities, we cultivate the positive “social emotions” to become good leaders, if we choose to, or good professionals, or good teachers, or good family members. Whatever role we assume will be wholesome, and will benefit others.

As practitioners, our disciplined minds easily settle and clear up, so that we gain dhyana, or at least attain some level of mindfulness, and easily let go of wrong views, cultivate right view, and learn to keep our minds ever more free of views in due course. We are like the moon in a clear, cloudless night sky brightening the world (Dh 382).

15.4 IS EVERYTHING IN THE MIND?

15.4.1 Before venturing further, let us examine an important and related teaching given in **the Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta** (A 6.63). After listing the 5 physical sense-objects, the Buddha declares that these are *not* “sensual objects” at all, but are regarded as “cords of sensual pleasures” in the “noble discipline” (*ariyassa vinaye*), that is, in the training of the noble eightfold path—“noble” here meaning that we have risen out of the lowly life of being caught up and controlled by our physical senses and negative habits. The Buddha declares:

—Bhikkhus, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma,guṇa*).²¹⁷

The thought of lust²¹⁸ is a person’s desire:²¹⁹

there are no sensual pleasures in the diversely beautiful²²⁰ in the world.

The thought of lust is a person’s desire.

The diversely beautiful in the world remain just as they are.

So here²²¹ the wise remove desire (for them).²²²

(A 6.63,3.2/3:411), SD 6.11

²¹⁴ See **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b.

²¹⁵ On the true individual, see **Cūḷa Puṇṇama S** (M 110/2:20-24), SD 45.4 & **Sappurisa S** (M 113/3:37-45), SD 23.7. See also **The person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b (7.3).

²¹⁶ See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

²¹⁷ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. On *kāma,guṇa*, see **Kāma-c, chanda**, SD 32.2 (2.3). See foll n.

²¹⁸ On *saṅkappa, rāga*, “thought of lust” or “lustful intention,” see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.4).

²¹⁹ *Saṅkappa, rāgo purisassa kāmo*. Be Ce Ee Se all give the same 5-line stanza. It recurs in **Na Santi S** (S 1.34), SD 42.6 without line a. Here [§3.4] the stress is in our own thinking or intention, while in S 1.34, it is on the nature of the world. Note how line a flows into b, and line c into d. Line e points to what should be done.

²²⁰ “Diversely beautiful,” *citra*: see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.3).

15.4.2 One important thing we can deduce from this passage is that early Buddhism accepts the external world as real in itself. In other words, early Buddhism is not idealist: the external world exists independent of our perceptions. What is “mind-made” (*mano,mayā*) is our *perceptions* of the world (see Dh 1-2).

15.4.3 As true practitioners, we should be well restrained in body and mind. When something catches our eye, or stimulates any of our other senses, or arises in the mind, we should “**grasp neither its sign nor its details.**”²²³ The moment a thought about a certain object arises in the mind, it ceases, and a new one arises. Outside of meditation, in our daily interactions, we should take care to note the moment an unwholesome root arises along with such a perception, and at once abandon that perception, or we would apply an appropriate counter-measure,²²⁴ or cultivate lovingkindness.

15.4.4 Hence, we are master minders (masters of the thought-paths). Of such a person, the Buddha declares: “He will think only the thought that he wants to think; he will not think the thought that he does not want to think. He has cut down craving, discarded the fetters,²²⁵ penetrated conceit²²⁶ and made an end of suffering.”²²⁷ We are thus fully free of views.

16 Are all views false?

16.1 “THIS STATEMENT IS FALSE”

Before we close, let us briefly look at an interesting problem of language and philosophy in connection with views. **Paul J Griffiths**, in his book, *On Being Mindless* (1986), discusses the nature of nirvana, where he considers the problems involved in a proposition, that is, they are not intended to state a position, not meant to be a view. It can propose (for example, an action), but such a proposal must not be subject to clinging. (1986:157)

Griffiths discusses the dilemma we face when we state that “all views about *nirvāṇa* are false”: by that very same token, he concludes, we must concede that this statement is false, too, since “all views about *nirvāṇa* are false.” More broadly, Griffiths is pointing to the dilemma that “all views are false” is itself a false view, because “all views are false”! In this connection, he describes the Buddhist method thus:

The most common [method] in Buddhist texts is to say that this view—all views about Nirvana (or in some schools about anything at all) are false—is not itself a view but (something like) a meta-

²²¹ “So here the wise” (*ath’ettha dhīrā’ti atha etesu ārammaṇesu paṇḍitā chanda,rāgaṃ vinayanti*, “here then the wise removes lust and desire in the sense-objects,” SA 1:63). In other words, “here” refers to our minds.

²²² On this verse’s significance, see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.1).

²²³ See **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14: see (1.1) for refs.

²²⁴ Such as those taught in **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20/1:118-122), SD 1.6.

²²⁵ **The 10 fetters** (MA 1:87), *dasa saṃyojana*, (in connection with sainthood) are: (1) personality view (*sakkāya,-ditṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma,rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*). The Abhidhamma gives a slightly different set (not in connection with sainthood), viz, sensual desire (*kāma-c,chanda*), repulsion (*paṭigha*), conceit (*māna*), views (*ditṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), desire for existence (*bhava,rāga*), attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata parāmāsa*), envy (*issā*), avarice (*macchariya*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) (Vbh 17). See M:ÑB 2001:42 f.

²²⁶ By means of vision and by getting rid of them, both through penetration (*abhisamaya*) (MA 1:87,4).

²²⁷ See **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20,8.2/1:122), SD 1.6.

linguistic and metaphilosophical pointer to the truth, which, naturally, transcends all verbalization. If this move is to work—and ultimately I don't think it can—we need some fairly tight criteria for what “views” are and why such things as the proposition “all views are false” isn't one. Such criteria are not usually given in Buddhist texts. If an attempt were made to generate some criteria which would exclude “all views are false,” the probable result would be to empty such statements of all philosophical power. Suppose we suggest as a necessary (and possibly sufficient) condition for any proposition P to be considered a “view” that P and its contradictory cannot both be true; if the proposition “all views are false” isn't a view given this condition, then it's hard to know what it is or why anyone would want to assert it or even what it would mean to assert it. Can one assert a proposition P which does not logically exclude not-P? (1986:157 n 63)

According to Griffiths, the Buddhist position that “all views are false” cannot be true since “all views are false.” This, however, is tarring everything by the same brush. For, we will see that the suttas do not, in fact, take the statement “all views are false” as a view. We have noted above [9.4] that the negation of views is *not* always itself a view.²²⁸ To reject a wrong view, for example, is to that extent having no views. To the extent that we keep the mind view-free, especially during meditation, we feel at peace and easily move on to mental concentration.

As long as we do not cling to any view, we are capable of growing spiritually. In early Buddhism, as we have seen, any view, wrong or right, if clung to, is regarded as “wrong view.” If we hold a view, it means that we do not see the real thing: a view of a thing is not the thing itself. All views are provisional at best.

In this sense, all views are false [15]. Right view is of course more helpful than wrong view: it is more useful to have some correct idea of the thing, not to be all muddled up about it. Understandably, we need to rid of wrong views first and foremost. To this extent, such a right view is said to be wisdom (*paññā*), when it brings about “the withering away²²⁹ of wrong view; and also the withering away of the many bad unwholesome states that arise, conditioned by wrong views, and the many wholesome states that arise with right view as condition are fulfilled through cultivation.”²³⁰ [9.3.3]

16.2 USING VIEWS

As Rupert Gethin has suggested, “even so-called ‘right views’ can be ‘views’ (*diṭṭhi*) in so far as they can become fixed and the objects of attachment” (1997:217 f = 2004:20). The Buddhist notion of right view, *sammā-diṭṭhi*, is not meant to express a position because, as Gethin suggests, “right view should not be understood as a view itself, but as freedom from all views.” (1997:218 = 2004: 20). He goes on to explain:

Since Buddhist texts furnish *miccha-diṭṭhi* with a formal content, it is all too tempting—perhaps because of the intellectual and cultural assumptions indicated by Griffiths—to assume that *sammā-diṭṭhi* has a formal content that is precisely the inverse of *miccha-diṭṭhi*, and that ‘right view’ thus consists in a propositional attitude (whether dispositional or occurrent) towards that content: right-view consists in assent to the claim that things are impermanent, suffering and not-self, to the claim that the five aggregates are suffering, the cause of suffering is craving, the cessation of suffering is the cessation of craving, and that the way leading to the cessation of suffering is the eightfold path, and so on. (1997:223 = 2004:24 f)

²²⁸ See *Dīgha, nakha S* (M 74.2/1:497 f), SD 16.1. See also Collins 1982:122 & Fuller 2005:153-156.

²²⁹ “Withering away,” *nijjīṇṇa*, lit “dying down, decaying (through age).”

²³⁰ *Mahā Cattārisaka S* (M 117.35/3:75), SD 6.10.

Gethin's statement should be understood in the light of the raft parable,²³¹ which does not question the truth or falsity of the Dharma, but highlights its proper understanding and usage (truth and value).²³² When we improperly grasp the Dharma, we will hurt ourselves; when we properly grasp the Dharma, we will be liberated. *Even a true statement should not be clung to, what more a false or bad one.* Ultimately, it is not about what views we hold, but whether we put them into practice for what they are intended in the first place, and in doing so our lives are transformed and uplifted. The raft is for crossing over the dangerous waters. Once we are safely across, we do not need the raft any more.

16.3 THE MAIN POINTS

Let us look at the main points before we close. Firstly, we noted that the Buddha's ministry can be divided into two unequal periods, the first is when he mostly uses the "no-view" approach to teach the spiritually mature, and the second period, during which when he applies various "teaching models" and skillful means. These methods are versatile in their ability to deal with various hindrances to spiritual progress. [1-3]

Secondly, for most of the Buddha's later followers, and for us today, spiritual progress would be gradual, beginning with the ridding of wrong views, promoting right views, and then freeing ourselves of views altogether when the occasion permits, such as during a good meditation. Understanding the nature of views and clearing our minds of them prepare us for mental training. [4-6]

Thirdly, as long as we are not awakened, *we have views*, we must work with views, and very often they are *wrong* views. When we understand wrong views as wrong, to that extent we have right view. When we reject those wrong views, we are likely to think and act wholesomely. [7-9]

Fourthly, we must differentiate between "views" and the Dharma: they are not the same thing. A *view* is merely our understanding or misunderstanding of the Dharma. The notion of *ditṭhi* is about how we know aspects of the Dharma, or our growing awareness of the Dharma itself, which is actually self-knowing, leading to awakening. [10-12]

Finally, we have seen that early Buddhism does not distinguish between "is" and "ought," that right view should be understood as embracing both truth *and* value. The purpose of Buddhist training is to directly see into reality. This is not a "view," right or wrong, but our morally virtuous conduct: the path is to be journeyed on; the Dharma here is a *practice*. Such a practice transforms us by seeing things as they really are. This insight, in short, unifies the notions of "is" and "ought," truth and value [13-15].

16.4 WHAT BUDDHISTS SHOULD REALLY DO

Strictly speaking, early Buddhism is neither a system of beliefs nor a set of religious practices. This is not to deny that the Buddha has left us some practical guidelines to worldly happiness and spiritual wellbeing, and the precious records of the early reciters' applications of such teachings to various aspects of our lives. Looking at the broader Buddhist picture, however, we must admit that these are all provisional teachings. As we have examined in this paper, the ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to *be free of views*, to be spiritually liberated. Liberation, on a simple level, at least, is a free mind and a boundless heart.

As the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma, became *teachings*, turning into Buddhism, a forest of words began to hide the tree of awakening. As Buddhism spread amongst other cultures, converting them, Buddhism itself was (and is) in due course converted into acculturated or ethnic Buddhisms: we have Indian Buddhism, Sinhala Buddhism, Burmese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, and now Western Buddhism, and so on. Clearly,

²³¹ For the parable of the raft, see Alaggadūpama S (M 22.13/1:134 f), SD 3.13.

²³² See Ganeri 1997:45-50 (§2.3).

these are predicated Buddhisms, qualified, modified and defined by their prefixes. Nevertheless, all this is a rich, colourful and social spread of Buddhist civilization.

On a vertical scale, we, each of us as individuals, need to begin and sustain our work on Buddhism—for, we *are* Buddhism. We are likely to have started our Buddhist life with some teaching or teacher that we *like*, meaning something or someone that probably agrees with our personal inclinations. Those of us who do meditate or keep up some form of mindfulness practice may outgrow this stage in due course. Those of us whose Buddhist diet is mainly what is *read, seen or heard* from others (usually agreeable speakers on Buddhism), might gratifiedly remain in this comfort zone.²³³

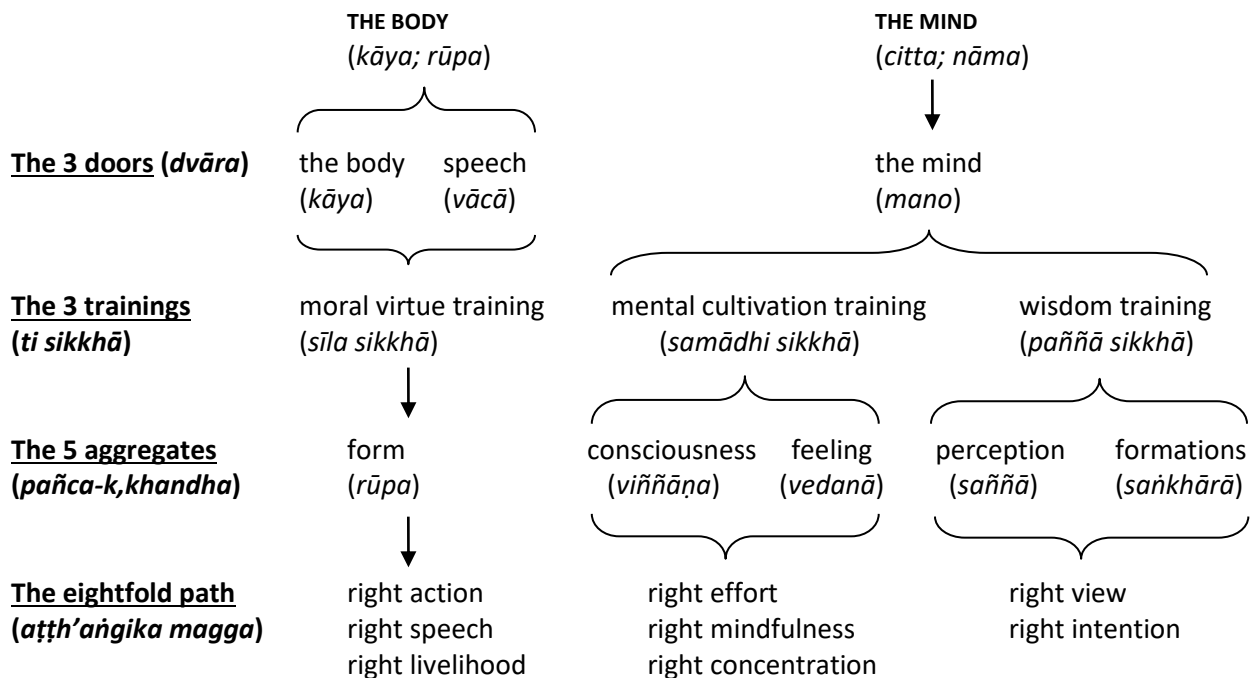
If we, consciously or unconsciously, take Buddhism as *a comfort zone*, then it is likely that there are those things that would discomfort us. Based on our discussions here, we can helpfully say that these discomforting things are views. Our views separate us from others, and prevent us from growing, from freeing our minds and hearts—from true happiness itself.

Hence, it helps to remind ourselves that Buddhism is not about views and beliefs—it is rather a tool, a practical skill, specially taught to us by the Buddha for letting go of views, for non-clinging. There is *no* point to be made here, except the point of *the breath* to be seen so that it leads to the stillness of *mental focus*. This is a point so still, yet so sharp, it easily pricks through the blinds of ignorance and balloons of craving, bursting and shattering them, so that we find ourselves in the blissful spaciousness of awakening.

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APPENDIX:

The Buddha’s teaching models (a basic collated list)



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²³³ I have omitted mention of those who see Buddhism as a “living”: see Piya Tan, “Buddhism for life or for a living?” (Reflection 12 0606).

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