

SD 62.17 Truth and Path: Some key terms

The singularity and individuality of early Buddhism
 Theme: The noble individuals, 8, 9, 10 and related terms
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The paragraph numbering of this chapter—from [3]-[5.4.1]—continues from the introductory notes to the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta (A 9.41), SD 62.16, since they originally served as part of the introductory notes to that Sutta translation. They have been given a separate SD number since it deals with a number of important sutta terms and ideas at length, as evident from the title.

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3 Key Dharma terms

3.1 ANUPUBBA, VIHĀRA: MEDITATION AS RENUNCIATION

3.1.1 The form dhyanas

3.1.1.1 These 9 **progressive abodes** (*anupubba, vihāra*)¹—the Sutta calls them “the 9 attainments of progressive dwelling”—consist of the 4 dhyanas (*jhāna*) [§§5-8], the 4 bases (*āyatana*) (the 4 formless attainments) [§9-12], and the peak of mental concentration, that is, the “cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*) [§13]. In summary, the 9 progressive abodes are:

The 4 form dhyanas

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. the 1 st dhyana | <i>paṭhama jhana;</i> |
| 2. the 2 nd dhyana | <i>dutiya jhana;</i> |
| 3. the 3 rd dhyana | <i>tatiya jhana;</i> |
| 4. the 4 th dhyana | <i>catuttha jhana.</i> |

Sources

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha Sutta | S 40.1/4:262 f, SD 24.11 |
| Dutiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta | S 40.2/4:263 f, SD 24.12a |
| Tatiya Jhāna Pañha Sutta | S 40.3/4:264 f, SD 24.13 |
| Catuttha Jhāna Pañha Sutta | S 40.4/4:265 f, SD 24.14 |

The 4 formless bases or attainments

respectively, the bases of:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 5. the infinity of space | |
| 6. the infinity of consciousness | |
| 7. nothingness | |
| 8. neither-perception-nor-non-perception | |
| 9. signless freedom of mind ² | |

... Pañha Suttas

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>ākāsanañc'āyatana</i> | S 40.5/4:266, SD 24.15 |
| <i>viññāṇaṇc'āyatana</i> | S 40.6/4:266 f, SD 24.16 |
| <i>ākīñcaññ'āyatana</i> | S 40.7/4:267 f, SD 24.17 |
| <i>n'eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana</i> | S 40.8/4:268, SD 24.18 |
| <i>animitta ceto, samādhi</i> | S 40.9/4:268 f SD 24.19 |

Table 3.1.1.1 The 4 form dhyanas, 4 formless attainments and sources

3.1.1.2 Here follows a summary of the nature of the 4 form dhyanas, which will form the basis for our understanding of the other progressive abodes (that is, the formless bases and cessation). With the cultivation of the spiritual faculties (*indriya*) [Table 3.4.1], the 5 mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) [1.2.2] are suppressed or overcome, and the mind develops the respective dhyana-factors (*jhān'āṅga*), leading up to concentration, thus:³

	<u>initial</u> <u>application</u>	<u>sustained</u> <u>application</u>	<u>zest</u>	<u>joy</u>	<u>one-pointedness</u> <u>of mind</u>
1st dhyana	<i>vitakka</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	(<i>ek'aggatā</i>) ⁴
2nd dhyana	✓	✓	<i>ek'aggatā</i>
3rd dhyana	✓	✓
4th dhyana		✓

Table 3.1.1.2 The dhyana-factors

¹ See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,34.2-42), SD 1.11; **Jhānābhīññā S** (S 16.9), SD 50.7 (1.2.1.2); (**Navaka**) **Nibbāna S** (A 9.34), SD 55.1; (**Navaka**) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36) + SD 33.8 (2); SD 1.8 (2.2.3) (3) n.

² From such teachings as those of **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,17/1:184) we know that this is the same as **cessation of perception and feeling** (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*) (SD 7.14).

³ See SD 62.15 Table 3.4.1 + (3.4.2.6).

⁴ On “one-pointedness” (*ek'aggatā*) in the 1st dhyana, see SD 8.4 (5.1.2).

The key Pali terms for the dhyana-factors are as follows:

<i>vitakka</i>	“initial application,”	the mental effort to direct the mind to the object;
<i>vicāra</i>	“sustained application,”	the mental effort to fix the mind on the object;
<i>pīti</i>	“zest or joy,”	the exuberant joy arising when mind is fixed on the object;
<i>sukha</i>	“happiness,”	the settling of that joy into a psychosomatic ease;
<i>ek’aggattā</i>	“one-pointedness of the mind,”	when the mind is free from all sense-distractions.

3.1.1.3 A meditator overcomes *the 5 hindrances* by cultivating **the 5 spiritual faculties** [Table 3.1.1.3]. We may thus begin by invoking our joyful **faith** in the 3 jewels, in the training and in ourself, with which we dispel the hindrance of ill will (such as negative thoughts) [§5]. As a rule, this is the easiest hindrance to overcome;⁵ hence, we should begin our practice with faith. When properly done, we feel **zest** or active joy, which then energizes us to strengthen the spiritual faculties.

Asserting **effort**, the 2nd faculty, we suppress the hindrance of sloth and torpor as soon as it arises; this brings about **initial application**. Simply, this is diligently directing and re-directing the mind to the meditation-object (such as the breath).

(The 3rd faculty is that of mindfulness, but we will use this last to overcome the most difficult of the hindrances.)

Next, we cultivate the 4th faculty, **concentration**—the mind fixes itself to the meditation-object and remains there—which cuts off any hindrance of restlessness and worry. In this way, we overcome all thinking and the mind begins to “see” only the meditation-object. This brings a subtle form of bliss, that is, **joy** (*sukha*). While zest arises as an exuberant mental reaction to being freed from the hindrances, joy arises from the settling satisfaction for the same reason.

Using the 5th faculty, **wisdom**, we overcome the hindrance of doubt (arising through thinking). *Initial application* is the directing of the mind to the meditation-object; **sustained application** is the act of keeping the mind with the object, so that it is fixed there.

The 3rd and key faculty is **mindfulness** (watching the mind to harmonize its efforts). Its special function is to suppress sensual desire. Mindfulness then harmonizes all the other spiritual faculties: faith with wisdom; effort with concentration, empowering the mind to be fully fixed on the meditation-object—in breath meditation, the breath ceases to be a bodily formation and becomes a mental formation that is the breath—bringing about concentration. With the disappearance of all the 5 hindrances, the mind is said to be “born of solitude” (*viveka,ja*).⁶

⁵ On *dosa* (hatred, anger, ill will) as the easiest of the 3 unwholesome roots to overcome, see (**Akusala Mūla**) **Añña Tittthiyā S** (A 3.68), SD 16.4 (1.1).

⁶ See SD 8.4 (5.1.1.3).

The following **Table 3.1.1.3** gives a visual representation of what is described above:

spiritual faculty (<i>indriya</i>)		mental hindrance (<i>nīvaraṇa</i>)		dhyana-factor ⁷ (<i>jhān'aṅga</i>)
(2) effort	suppresses	(4) sloth and torpor	countered by	(1) initial application
(5) wisdom		(5) doubt		(2) sustained application
(1) (joyful) faith		(2) ill will		(3) zest
(4) concentration		(3) restlessness and worry		(4) happiness
(3) mindfulness		(1) sensual desire		(5) one-pointedness of mind

Table 3.1.1.3 Spiritual faculties, hindrances, and dhyana-factors [SD 32.1 (5.3)]

The traditional set sequences of spiritual faculties and mental hindrances have been given in round brackets, but have been re-arranged to reflect their relationships with dhyana-factors.

In this connection, too—regarding **the 1st dhyana**—the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta (A 9.41) says:

... quite secluded [detached] from sense-objects, secluded from unwholesome mental states,
I attained and dwelled in **the 1st dhyana**,
accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and
with zest and joy born of solitude. [§5.2]

3.1.1.4 Strictly speaking, during the 1st dhyana, the 5th dhyana-factor is concentration (*samādhi*), the 5th or last faculty; but the mind has yet to attain one-pointedness. This is because the subtle workings of the faculty of mindfulness still have to manage *initial application* and *sustained application*—these are subtle cognitive processes—that attempt to keep the mind fixed and focused on the meditation-object.

When we have learned to renounce all sensual pleasures [§4], that is, let go of thoughts and feelings, we also have no more need for *initial application* and *sustained application*. We then feel **zest** and **joy**. Now that the mind is free from even the subtlest thought [§6], the dhyana-factor of **one-pointedness of mind** arises.

3.1.1.5 Hence, in **the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta** (A 9.41), the Buddha describes how he attained the 2nd dhyana in the following way:

6.9 ... then, Ānanda, my mind plunged into the thought-free,
became radiant, settled, freed, seeing, 'This is peaceful.'

6.10 Now, Ānanda, on another occasion,
with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,
by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,
I attained and dwelled in **the 2nd dhyana**,

⁷ On the dhyana-factors (*jhān'aṅga*), see SD 8.4 (6).

free from initial application and sustained application,
with zest and joy born of concentration.

(§§6.9 f)

This is thought-free **2nd dhyana**. The Sutta records the Buddha's warning that even while in this dhyana, one can be distracted by any kind of thought (*vitakka*):

"While I was dwelling in this state, perception and attention accompanied by thinking assailed me: I felt it as an affliction." [§6.11]

The meaning here is that, while we are in the 2nd dhyana, thinking may intrude either as a "perception" (an idea) or when we seek the meditation-object. We then fall out of dhyana: this is an affliction, like a sickness (*abādhā*). [§6.12]

3.1.1.6 The 3rd dhyana arises when **zest** (exuberant joy) settles and disappears [§7], leaving only the factors of **joy** and of **one-pointedness of mind**. Besides these 2 key dhyana-factors, the 3rd dhyana also has 3 additional mental factors (*cetasika*) (not included amongst the dhyana-factors), that is, equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*satī*) and full awareness (*sampajañña*). This is a peculiarity of the 3rd dhyana.

The mindfulness and full awareness of the 3rd dhyana is that of equanimity. It is a profoundly joyful experience since the mind is "one-pointed." In worldly terms, it is like one enjoying a great football match or listening to beautiful piece of music with deep joy and focus. This means that the mind is free of its mundane cognitive processes, but feels only the joy of equanimity [3.1.3.2].

Here again, the Buddha warns us that the 3rd dhyana (like any dhyana) is fragile; the slightest thought or sensing will disrupt it, thus:

Yet, Ānanda, while I was dwelling in this state, perception and attention **accompanied by pleasure in equanimity** arose in me:⁸ I felt it as an affliction ... just as pain were to arise to one feeling pleasure only to afflict one. [§8.11 f]

3.1.1.7 In the 4th dhyana, we see the deepening presence of equanimity, that is, the peaceful mind freed from both pleasure and pain [§8]. Simply, **the 4 form dhyanas** refer to the calm and clarity of the mind when it is freed from all engagement or attachment to sensual activities and thoughts.

Since the mind is now fully freed—having transcended both feeling and minding—the meditator emerges from **the 4th dhyana** with a mind that is fully calm and clear. This is the open mind that is *able to manipulate matter, space and, to some extent, time*:⁹ the meditator is able to develop the various psychic powers.¹⁰

More importantly, this is the kind of mental calm and clarity that can bring liberating wisdom. With the calm and clear mind, one is able to see directly and fully into true reality; seeing and understanding the nature of *impermanence*, *suffering*, and even *nonself*; one is then awakened.

3.1.2 The formless bases

3.1.2.1 In the 4 form dhyanas, "**form**" (*rūpa*) refers to our ideas of shape and colour that limit space. In the **formless bases**, however, form is experienced as being both infinite and empty, immeasurable and indefinable; therein we transcend any such perception. Hence, they are called "**formless**" (*arūpa*).

⁸ This follows Be MSS listed in Ee, which read *upekhā, sukha, sahagatā*, "accompanied by the pleasure in equanimity." This fits the context better than the reading *upe(k)khā, sahagatā* found in Be Ce Se.

⁹ Simply put, although the arhats with psychic powers may be able to recall past lives, they are not able to travel in time.

¹⁰ On the psychic powers, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,6 f), SD 1.7.

The meditation-objects of the formless dhyanas are known as “**mind-bases**” (*āyatana*) [§§9-12], because the mind in these attainments (*samāpatti*) rests on these bases or supports for consciousness.¹¹ These profoundly still mind-bases are progressively more refined and more empty than the 4th form dhyana, progressively freeing itself from even consciousness. [3.1.1.5]

3.1.2.2 Strictly speaking, the 4 formless bases are all rooted in **the 4th dhyana** since they possess *the same 2 factors of equanimity and one-pointedness of mind*. Hence, the 4th dhyana is the base or foundation dhyana (*pāḍaka, jhāna*) for the arising of psychic powers [3.1.1.7], as well as for the formless bases, beginning with the base of the infinity of space.

The 4th attainment or form dhyana is also a **foundation for the arising of insight** (as a base for gaining the path and for awakening). However, *any of the 4 form dhyanas* can just as effectively be the foundation for liberating insight. To do this one emerges from the dhyana and applies the mind’s calm and clarity to seeing *impermanence* and so on for the development of liberating insight.

Since any of the 4 form dhyanas can be a foundation for developing liberating insight, there is no need for cultivating or depending on any of the formless bases. Moreover, the formless bases are essentially more refined levels of the 4th dhyana, experiencing consciousness in ever subtler form until the 4th formless base where consciousness is too subtle to be detected.

Hence, there is no need for the formless bases to act as foundations for insight when any of the 4 preceding form attainments can bring the meditator insight. The 4 formless bases are, as it were, states of mastery over mind and matter. In order to attain any of them, one must have first mastered all the 4 form dhyanas; or, strictly speaking, mastered the 4th dhyana. Hence, they are called “progressive abodes” [3.1.1.1].

3.1.2.3 The 1st formless attainment, **the base of the infinity of space** (*ākāśānañc’āyatana*), is rooted in the 4th form dhyana [3.1.2.2]—just as the preceding form dhyanas are rooted in the 1st dhyana and arise by the meditator renouncing the preceding dhyana; hence, they are called “progressive abodes” (*anupubba, vihāra*). The base of the infinity of space arises from the meeting of these 5 conditions:

- (1) “**By completely transcending the perception of form,**”¹² which is already accomplished with the attaining of the 1st formless attainment and climaxed in the 4th formless attainment. “Form” (*rūpa*) here refers to any engagement with an extraneous idea or thought.¹³
- (2) “**With the disappearance of the perceptions of sense-reaction,**”¹⁴ that is, the absence of all cognitive activity between any of the 5 sense-faculties and their respective sense-objects, similarly accomplished with the 1st-4th formless attainments. Only very subtle perception of mind-object remains.
- (3) “**With non-attention to perceptions of diversity,**”¹⁵ that is, without any idea of “self” and “other,” “this” (internal) or “that” (external); meaning that the notion of subject and object does not arise.
- (4) “**Aware that ‘space is infinite,’**”¹⁶ that is, the meditator is mentally “unified” with the meditation-object. There is only a very subtle awareness of infinite space. Since time is the perception of space, we will here experience time as infinite, too; in other words, there is no more experience of time as we know it.

¹¹ On *āyatana* as “mind-base,” see SD 40a.12 (3.6.2) & (*Āsava-k, khaya*) *Jhāna S* (A 9.36): SD 33,8 (2.2). On *āyatana* as “sense-base,” ie, sense-faculty, see *Sal-āyatana Vibhaṅga S* (M 137/3:216-222), SD 29.5.

¹² *Sabbaso rūpa, saññānaṃ samatikkamā*, SD 21,15 (2.1).

¹³ On how this happens, see *nāma, rūpa*, SD 62.15 (3.4.4).

¹⁴ *Paṭigha, saññānaṃ atthaṅgamā*, SD 21,15 (2.2).

¹⁵ *Nānatta, saññānaṃ amanasikārā*, SD 21,15 (2.3).

¹⁶ *Ananto ākāso’ti*, SD 21,15 (2.4).

- (5) “Having seen the danger in forms, I developed that (insight), and having penetrated the benefit in **the base of the infinity of space**, I pursued it. Then, Ānanda, my mind plunged into **the base of the infinity of space**, and became radiant, settled, freed, seeing, ‘This is peaceful’.” [§9 excerpts]

The base of the infinity of space (*ākāsanañc’āyatana*) is described in the **Ākāsanañc’āyatana Pañha Sutta** (S 40.5).¹⁷

3.1.2.4 The 2nd formless attainment, **the base of the infinity of consciousness** (*viññāṇañc’āyatana*), is developed by letting go of the base of the infinity of space. This means that the meditator renounces the meditation-object, that of the idea “space in infinite,” and what is left is merely **the consciousness** behind that meditation-object. The meditator then focuses on just that consciousness, and experiences it as infinite; hence, it is called “the base of the infinity of consciousness.” [§10.6 f]

The Buddha reminds the meditator not to fall back on the idea of *the infinity of space* which one was familiar with. Doing so will make one lose focus on the base of the infinity of consciousness, and bring one right back to that earlier base.

The meditator in the base of the infinity of consciousness experiences consciousness (the mind) as infinite (with neither beginning nor end). The experience is that of the profoundly blissful peace of the boundless mind.

The base of the infinity of consciousness is described in the **Viññāṇañc’āyatana Pañha Sutta** (S 40.6).¹⁸

3.1.2.5 The 3rd formless base, **the base of nothingness** (*ākīñcaññ’āyatana*), is when the meditator renounces the mind-object of consciousness. Hence, nothing is left, and this becomes the meditation-object at this profoundly radiant but subtle level of formless meditation.

Even at this profound level of formless attainment, there is the danger of the meditator falling back on to the base of infinite consciousness, with which he was familiar. When the mind falls back in this way, the meditator loses the base of nothingness.

The “nothingness” here refers to the meditation-object, which is an unimaginably subtle one. The meditator is still *aware* of nothingness. There is still a subtle presence of the mind that is the focus on nothingness as meditation-object. The moment the meditator sees “something,” that is, the mind that is focused on nothingness, he falls from that base, back into the base of the infinity of consciousness.

The base of nothingness is described in the **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha Sutta** (S 40.7).¹⁹

3.1.2.6 The 4th and last formless attainment is **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception** (*n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana*). At this stage, the meditator renounces even the meditation-object, that is *nothingness* itself. With the mind having no object whatsoever at this profound level of concentration, consciousness itself becomes so subtle that it cannot be said to exist or not exist. Hence, this is called the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. “Perception” (*saññā*) here means “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*). *Saññā* is used here (instead of *viññāṇa*) since consciousness is itself the meditation-object, one that is almost imperceptible.

The base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is described in the **N’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana Pañha Sutta** (S 40.8) SD 24.18.

¹⁷ S 40.5/4:266 (SD 24.15).

¹⁸ S 40.6/4:266 f (SD 24.16).

¹⁹ S 40.7/4:267 f (SD 24.17).

3.1.3 The cessation of perception and feeling

3.1.3.1 These 8 attainments (or the first 8 progressive abodes), properly used, are described in the early Buddhist texts as being capable of bringing arhathood itself. **The (Navaka) Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36), for example, includes parables in its explanations of the abodes, how letting go of an abode becomes the basis for attaining the following abode until cessation is reached.²⁰

3.1.3.2 “The peak of mental concentration” (*samādh’agga*)²¹ (the highest state possible for the mind to reach) is **the cessation of perception and feeling** (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*; or simply “cessation”). This state is attained only as a result of being totally free from any perceptual and affectual activity, that is, an experience of nirvana here and now. Hence, it is attainable only by arhats and some nonreturners; in the latter’s case, it is merely a vision of nirvana.

It is called “**cessation**” because therein all breathing, all thinking and all perceiving have stopped. Life as we know it is not present; by modern measurements, the meditator is “dead,” or technically *lifeless*.

Only the arhat experience cessation, that is, initially as their fruition moment. The arhat may remain for a week in cessation, sometimes longer, says the Commentaries.²² During the state of cessation, the meditator may be said to be in “suspended animation.” Nonreturners, too, may be able to experience cessation when they temporarily overcome all the 5 higher fetters.²³

The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43) explains the difference between death and cessation as follows:

In the case of one who is dead, his bodily, verbal and mental functions have ceased, life is exhausted, the vital heat extinguished, the faculties destroyed. In the case of one who has entered the cessation of perception and feeling his bodily, verbal and mental functions have ceased, but his life is not exhausted, the vital heat is not extinguished, the faculties are purified.

(M 43,25/1:296 abridged; see M 44,16-21 & also M 43,42 & cf SD 1.11 (4.1))

While a dead body has neither vitality nor heat, and its sense-faculties “broken up” (dysfunctional), a person in cessation still has vitality and bodily heat, and his sense-faculties are “purified” (subtle).²⁴

While in cessation, the meditator neither knows nor feels anything in the ordinary sense. On emerging from it, the meditator is fully aware of “joyful equanimity,” the happiness of being freed from both thinking and feeling; hence, it is a living experience of nirvana. In this connection, **the (Udāyi) Nibbāna Sutta** (A 9.34) records Sāriputta as exulting to Udāyi, “Indeed, avuso, it is truly happiness where nothing is felt!”²⁵

4 Dharma as narrative and as teaching

4.1 MEDITATION OR THE PATH?

4.1.1 Significance of the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta

4.1.1.1 The (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta (A 9.41) records the Buddha as laying out in systematic sequence how he meditated through *the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments*, and reached *the cessation of perception and feeling*. Anyone who has gone for some residential meditation retreat or a monastic who

²⁰ A 9.36/4:422-426 (SD 33.8).

²¹ **(Catukka) Agga S 1** (A 4.74/2:79).

²² MA 1:125, 152; AA 1:152; DhA 1:109; BA 163.

²³ A nonreturner is one who has overcome all the 5 lower fetters: **Table 5.2.1**.

²⁴ **Mahā Vedalla S (M 43,25/1:296)**, SD 30.2; **Pāyāsi S (D 23/2:334)**, SD 39.4; **Vism 23.51/709**

²⁵ A 9.34,2/4:414 f (SD 55.1). On cessation, further see SD 30.2 (4); SD 48.7 (3.2); SD 50.7 (1.2).

regularly meditates knows that one's meditation, for various reasons, does not always follow a neat sequence of stages. Often, we are distracted by various external stimuli such as sounds and the weather, or internal conditions such as bodily discomfort and pains, and negative thoughts.

In the case of the Buddha, he had meditated by way of the ancient yogic tradition sitting for long hours of deep meditation for some 7 years. What he described in **A 9.41** is a systematic sequence of dhyanic states from the overcoming of external sense-distraction to the focusing of the mind free of the body (the dhyanas), the gradual renunciation of consciousness itself (the formless attainments), and, finally, with the attaining of awakening, he was able to transcend perception and feeling themselves, which is, in modern terms, a state of "suspended animation," in which he blissfully stayed for as long as a week each time.

4.1.1.2 The key themes of **A 9.41** are stated in the Buddha's own words of his joy in spiritual striving, exulting, "Good is renunciation! Good is solitude!" (*sādhū nekkhammaṃ, sādhū paviveko ti*) [§4.1]. **Renunciation** develops through a few important stages. First, the candidate formally renounces before the monastic sangha: this is conventional renunciation. It is a renunciation of the body in the sense that the renunciant removes his or her **body** from worldliness and distractions (especially sensual pleasures). This is regulated and expedited by the practice of the Vinaya rules, keeping to right livelihood, cultivating fellowship in the noble sangha, and developing spiritual friendship with experienced teachers.

Secondly, the renunciant himself or herself trains **the mind** to let go of negative thoughts and sensual distractions, and to cultivate positive emotions beginning with lovingkindness. The meditator then works to focus more fully on the mind by renouncing *all* thoughts and feelings. This is the renunciation of the mind. In fact, this is what **A 9.41** describes by way of the 9 progressive abodes (*anupubba, vihāra*) [§§5-13].

Thirdly and finally, there is the renunciation of mental defilements, called "**influxes**" (*āsava*), that is, overcoming sensual desires (this world), existence (the divine world) and ignorance (whatever that binds one to samsara), including wrong views. While the first two constitute "true renunciation," this third and final renunciation is that of awakening itself, or at least the attaining of streamwinning. This is the final renunciation, the highest letting go.

4.1.1.3 When we examine the 9 progressive abodes—as listed in **the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta** (**A 9.41**) and related suttas²⁶—these abodes are "non-conceptual" direct experiences of the mind, bringing profound peace and clarity. Emerging from such a calm clarity of mind *at any stage*, especially any of the first 4 dhyanas, one then dwells, directly examining—"one touches with the body (personally, with one's mental body)" (*kāyena phusitvā or phassitvā*)—the nature of true reality. This expression "touching with one's body" is often used in describing one's experience of any of the "8 liberations" (*aṭṭha vimokkha*) [5.3.1], but is also used in describing "personal experience" in deep meditation, or realizing nirvana, thus:

- the 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*) Ākaṅkheyya S, **M 6,10**/1:33; Kīṭā, giri S, **M 70,15**/1:477-479; Susīma S, **S 12.70**/2:123+127; **A 4.87**/2:87, **4.89**/2:90x3, **4.90**/2:91, **8.72**/4:315 f x4, expanded **10.9**/5:11.
- *kāya, sakkhī* "touches" the 8 bases (*āyatana*),
viz, 4 form dhyanas + 4 formless attainments **A 9.43**/4:451 f.
- one freed both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*) **A 9.45**/4:453; **Pug** 11, 14, 15, 29, 72 f. [5.3.3.7]
- the 4 paths (*magga*) **Kvu** 104-106 *passim*, 214-216 *passim*.
- the 4 noble truths (*ariya, sacca*) **Kvu** 107 f.

²⁶ (**Kassapa**) **Bhikkhuṇṇāpassaya S** (S 16.10/2:216), SD 92.7; (**Kassapa**) **Cīvara S** (S 16.11/2:221); **Anupubba, vihāra S** (A 9.32/4:409), SD 95.1 abridged; **Anupubba, vihāra Samāpatti S** (A 9.33/4:410), SD 95.2. The 9 states are briefly listed or alluded to in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.3.2(5)/3:265); **Das'uttara S** (D 34.2,2(9)/3:290); **Kaccāna S** (U 7.8/78*) *anupubba, vihārī*; **Pm** 1:5; **Vbh** 317, 335, 343; **Kvu** 419.

- the 8 individuals (*aṭṭhamaka*)
- learners and adepts (*sekhâsekha*)
- personal experiences in meditation (“bodily touching”) [see next]
- “dwell, bodily touching”

Kvu 241-244 *passim*.

Kvu 303 f.

Kosambī S, S 12.68/2:118, Āpaṇa S, S 48.50/5:226x2, Sekha S, S 49.53/5:230x2.

Ye amataṃ dhātuṃ kāyena phusitvā viharanti, “who dwells having realized the deathfree element,”²⁷ Mahā Cunda S (A 6.46/3:356).

4.1.2 *Nāma,kāya* in the Upasīva Māṇava Pucchā (Sn 5.6)

4.1.2.1 We should understand the model of the 9 progressive abodes (*nava anupubba, vihāra*) as a meditative or non-conceptual description of the Buddha’s own practice leading up to awakening. This model is to guide and inspire meditators in their own practice; it is also a very interesting description of the powers of the mind and consciousness. When we thus know and see how our mind works, we will be able to refine its powers so that we experience and attain a higher level of being that frees us from the distraction and demands of the sense-based world.

In simple terms, there is the “form body” or physical being (*rūpa, kāya*), composed of the 5 sense-faculties each of which projects itself to form a “mental image” (*nāma*) of an external object (*rūpa*). This is the worldly mind at work, or the mind applied to worldly tasks. In deep meditation, the mind is free from external objects and is directed to wholesome meditation objects, such as the breath. When the mind is fully focused on the breath, for example, the experience is said to be one of *nāma, kāya*; or one “touches the breath with the mind-body.”

Simply (in daily usage), we can take *nāma, kāya* as meaning “all that is connected with the mind,” in the wholesome sense.

4.1.2.2 The earliest occurrence of the term *nāma, kāya* is at Sn 1074 where it is mentioned by itself in the Upasīva Māṇava Pucchā (Sn 5.6/205-207). We shall look at only Upasīva’s main question and 2 verses germane to our study:

1069 [Upasīva:] “Tell me, O universal eye, the basis, depending on which I might cross this flood.”²⁸

1070ab *ākiñcaññāṃ pekkhamāno satimā
upasīvā ti bhagavā
n’atthī ti nissāya tarassu oghaṃ*

Mindfully looking on at nothingness,
(Upasīva, said the Blessed One,)²⁹
supported by “There is not, [It is not (so),]” cross
over the flood.

Sn 1074³⁰ *accī yathā vāta, vegena khitto
upasīvā ti bhagavā
atthaṃ paleti na upeti saṅkhaṃ*

Just as a flame tossed out by strong gust,
(Upasīva, said the Blessed One,)
goes out and is no longer reckoned (as “fire”),

²⁷ Comy: In connection with the nirvana-element called “the deathfree” because it is devoid of death. Having taken up a meditation subject, one dwells, in stages, having touched it [gained full concentration and realization] with the mental body” (*marāṇa, virahitaṃ nibbāna, dhātuṃ sandhāya kammaṭṭhānaṃ gahetvā viharantā anukkamena taṃ nāma, kāyena phusitvā viharanti*, AA 3:379). “The mental body” fig refers to one’s mind fully attaining nirvana.

²⁸ Upasīva is one of the 16 brahmin youths (*māṇava*), pupils of the aged ascetic Bāvarī. They lived on an island in the Godhāvarī river in the Deccan. SD 49.6b (2).

²⁹ This line denoting the speaker is hypermetrical, thus not originally part of the verse. It was prob inserted by the council elders for our convenience. Thus the designation a b c d refers to only the other 4 lines respectively.

³⁰ Sn 1074 is qu in PugA 190,18-22 with variants: *accī ... khittā ... paleti ... saṅkhyāṃ ... paleti ... saṅkhyāṃ*. The sense of the 2 passages are otherwise the same.

*evaṃ munī nāma,kāyā vimutto
atthaṃ pāleti na upeti saṅkhaṃ*

so too the sage, freed from the mental body,
goes out and can no longer be counted.³¹

According to **the Cūḷa,niddesa** (Nc, the canonical commentary on the Sutta,nipāta)³² and **the Sutta,-nipāta Commentary** (SnA, Param'attha,jotikā 2), Upasīva is one who has attained the formless base of nothingness (*ākāṅkhaññ'āyatana*), and interprets the Buddha's verses said to him in terms of this formless attainment.³³ Cūḷa,niddesa, commenting on "**mindfully looking on at nothingness**" (Sn 1070a), says that Upasīva habitually (*pakatiyā*) attains the base of nothingness, but he is not aware of it as his support.³⁴

4.1.3 Nāma,kāya and nothingness

4.1.3.1 How does one relate to the nothingness base as a support for spiritual progress? **Sn 1070b** records the Buddha as instructing Upasīva that he should, upon emerging from the attainment,³⁵ "look on at it" (that is, regard it) as "**There is not**" or "**It is not**" (*natthī ti*). This instruction is profoundly significant: it is found neither in the usual description of getting into the nothingness base nor getting out of it to get into the following base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception [§§10-12].

From what has been said above, it follows that the expression, *natthī ti*, refers to the directing of **insight** to see *the true nature* of the nothingness base. This is described by **the Cūḷa,niddesa** as follows: "Having emerged from the nothingness base, and looking on, discerning, surveying, meditating on, and investigating the mind and its mental factors:

1. as impermanent; 2. as suffering; 3. as an illness; 4. as a boil; 5. as a dart; 6. as misery; 7. as affliction; 8. as other; 9. as disintegrating; 10. as adversity; 11. as a calamity; 12. as fear; 13. as a disaster; 14. as trembling; 15. as fragile; 16. as unstable; 17. as not a shelter; 18. as not a cave; 19. as not a refuge; 20. as hollow; 21. as void; 22. as empty; 23. as nonself; 24. as disadvantage; 25. as subject to change; 26. as coreless; 27. as the root of misery; 28. as a murderer; 29. as extermination; 30. as subject to influxes; 31. as conditioned; 32. as Māra's bait; as subject to 33. birth, 34. old age, 35. sickness, and 36. death; as subject to 37. sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair; as subject to 38. defilement, 39. to arising, 40. passing away, 41. to gratification, 42. to danger, and 43. to escape (from suffering).³⁶

³¹ Comy glosses *nāma,kāya* as meaning "freed both ways" (*nāma,kāya pi vimutto ubhato.bhāga,vimutto*, SnA 594,28). On *upeti saṅkhaṃ*, cf Sn 209. See also R Morris, "Notes and Queries," JPTS 1885:44-46.

³² Found as part of **Niddesa**, the 11th volume in the Khuddaka Nikāya. Niddesa comprises Mahā,niddesa + Cūḷa,-niddesa; abbreviated as Nm and Nc respectively.

³³ *Ākiṅkaññ'āyatana,samāpatti(m)* (Nc:Be 25:103,14, 104,8 + 9 + 11 + 22, 105,22, 107,3); *ākāṅkhaññ'āyatana,vimokkho* (Nc:Be 25:105,26, 107,7); *ākāṅkhaññ'āyatana,brahma,loke* (SnA 594,123 f).

³⁴ *Ākiṅkaññam pekkhamāno satimā so brāhmaṇo pakatiyā ākiṅkaññ'āyatana,samāpattim lābhiy'eva nissayaṃ na jānāti, "ayaṃ me nissayo" ti* (Nc:Be 25:103,13-15).

³⁵ Since no thinking occurs *during* the meditation itself, one can only progress by fully scrutinizing insight on emerging from the state: this is in fact described in Cūḷa,niddesa: *Ākiṅkaññ'āyatana,samāpattim sato samāpajjivā tato vuṭṭhahitvā tattha jāte citta,cetasike dhamme aniccato pekkhamāno dukkho ...*, "Having mindfully attained the nothingness base, and emerged from it, looking on, discerning, surveying, meditating on, investigating the mind and its mental factors arising therein as impermanence, suffering ... (Nc:Be 256:103,16 f). See below for the full register of 43 insight terms: "Impermanent, suffering ..."; see also foll.

³⁶ **The 43 insight terms:** (*tīraṇa,pariññā*) 1. *aniccato*, 2. *dukkhato*, 3. *rogato*, 4. *gaṇḍato*, 5. *Sallato*, 6. *aghato*, 7. *ābādhato*, 8. *parato*, 9. *palokato*, 10. *ītito*, 11. *upaddavato*, 12. *bhayato*, 13. *upasaggato*, 14. *calato*, 15. *pabhaṅgato*, 16. *addhuvato*, 17. *atāṇato*, 18. *aleṇato*, 19. *asaraṇato*, 20. *rittato*, 21. *tucchato*, 22. *suññato*, 23. *anattato*, 24. *ādīnavato*, 25. *vipariṇāma,dhammato*, 26. *asārakato*, 27. *agha,mūlato*, 28. *vadhakato*, 29. *vibhavato*, 30. *sāsavato*, 31. *saṅkhatato*, 32. *mār'āmisato*, 33. *jāti,dhammato*, 34. *jarā,dhammato*, 35. *vyādhi,dhammato*, 36. *maraṇa,dham-*

While temporarily freed from lust and hatred (on account of dhyana), one renounces the nothingness base by regarding it with insight as being “impermanent,” or by way of any of the 43 modes of insight [above].

4.1.3.2 So too the sage, freed from the mental body (Sn 1074c) is a metaphorical expression for the path of practice, especially of the one who is “mentally silent,” a true sage (*muni*). The sage (*muni*) is naturally freed from the physical body (the senses) by way of the form dhyanas, and freed from form (mental projections of sense-based states) itself (*rūpa,kāya*) by way of the formless dhyanas. This freedom, gained by abandoning form by way of “suppression” (*tad-aṅgaṃ samatikkamā*), can only be temporary. (Nc:Be 25:109,15-17)

Free from both lust and hatred, the sage gains the 4 noble paths. As an arhat, he has fully understood the mental body and the form body. With this understanding, he is freed from the mental body and from the form body—he is *well freed*, by way of the highest liberation through non-clinging. Thus the sage freed from the mental body, *goes out*, is extinguished: attains final nirvana, that is, the nirvana without any residue. Hence, such a one “cannot be reckoned” (*na upeti*).

The words “reckoned” (Sn 1074b) and “counted” are the same Pali word *saṅkham*. The fire that has gone out is non-existent since all one’s defilements have been abandoned by uprooting (*samuccheda,-pahāna*). The sage (*muni*) who is awakened is no more a mere “statistic,” to be counted amongst the crowds of worldlings.

The Commentary explains that because he has attained final nirvana that is *without residue*, he cannot be indicated, reckoned or described as belonging to any social class or any kind of being, divine or otherwise, or as one with form or formless or non-percipient or neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient. There is no cause, no condition, no means by which he may be designated. He has gone out, is quenched, and can no longer be reckoned. This is as far as we can go to try to *describe*—set down in words, speech or ideas—a being who has attained final nirvana. (Nc:Be 25:109,23-28)

4.1.4 Nāma,kāya in meditation

4.1.4.1 Both the terms *nāma,kāya* and *rūpa,kāya* [4.1.3.2] occur in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15,20).³⁷ **Nāma,kāya** comprises the 4 formless groups of existence (*arūpino khandhā*): feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). It is distinguished from *rūpa,kāya*, the body-group comprising form (*rūpa*), that is, the 4 elements (*dhātu, mahā,bhūta*) [SD 17.1 & 2]. Broadly speaking, whenever the mind is in full concentration, the mind “touches the meditation object with the body.” By “**body**” (*kāya*) here is meant the “mental body” (*nāma,kāya*) (AA 3:379).

The term ***nāma,kāya*** also occurs in **the Paṭisambhidā,magga** (Pm 1:183), where it is defined as “feeling, perception, intention, contact, attention and naming; and as *nāma,kāya* they are also called mind-formations (*vedanā saññā cetanā phasso manasikāro nāmañ ca, nāma,kāyo ca ye ca vuccanti citta,saṅkhārā*).

The Netti-p,pakaraṇa similarly says, “*nāma,kāya* is feelings, perception, intention, thought, contact and attention” (*nāma,kāyo nāma vedanā saññā cetanā cittar phasso manasikāro ti*, Nett 77).³⁸

4.1.4.2 Pm’s and Nett’s broad definitions of *nāma,kāya* [4.1.4.1] may also apply to the mind in ordinary situations, but it is too broad to be applied to deep meditative states. In dhyana, for example, think-

mato, 37. *soka,parideva,dukkha,domanass’upāyāsa,dhammato*, 38. *saṅkilesa,dhammato*, 39. *samudayato*, 40. *atthaṅgamato*, 41. *assādato*, 42. *ādīnavato*, 43. *nissaraṇato tīreti*. (Nm 1:53,7-16; Nm:Be 40,15-22)

³⁷ SD 5.17 (5.1.1.2).

³⁸ See also DA 2:501,1-14 on **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15,20), SD 5.17.

ing as we know it is finely marginal or fully ceases. Hence, none of the terms in the broad definitions of *nāma,kāya* applies to these dhyanic states. What then does *nāma,kāya* mean in such dhyanic states?

Simply, we can say that in dhyanic states, *nāma,kāya* refers to *what remains of the mind when thinking ceases*. Even in the absence of thinking—especially in the absence of thinking—the mind is calm and clear. It's like listening to a beautiful piece of music: we do not *think* about it but simply “lose” ourselves in the beauty of the sounds and silence. We “feel” the music; we *become* the music. We are still conscious without the thinking, perhaps with some thoughts, or with some stray or marginal thoughts. But in dhyana, there is no thinking at all.

However, the non-thinking mind in dhyana is subtly or subliminally aware—yet, it is “*clearly aware*”³⁹—like we are aware of the beautiful sounds of music. In fact, in dhyana, the gap between the knower and the known closes up; there is neither subject nor object; there is only the meditation experience. We have noted how the 5 dhyana-factors [3.1.1.2] become less as we progress through the form dhyana. In the last 2 form dhyanas there is only the equanimous mind with the refining and diminishing of consciousness.

As we have noted, too, **the nothingness base** is the highest stage of the “conscious” mind [4.1.3.3]. In the next stage—**the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**—consciousness is too subtle to be known or felt [3.1.2.6]. And in **cessation**, all perception (including thinking) and feeling are suspended; this is the “peak of mental concentration” [3.1.3.2]. There is no one who experiences such states, only the mind, that is, the mind-body; in the highest meditative stages, “nothing” is experienced! [3.1.2.5]

4.1.5 Something and nothing

4.1.5.1 *Kiñcana* literally means “something, anything,” referring especially to things one has, owns or wants, which may or may not exist. Since a key practice in early Buddhism is **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*), the habit of having things and of ownership is regarded as a burden and a hindrance to spiritual freedom. The Commentaries highlight the meaning of *kiñcana* as things, material and mental, that drag one down: hence, it has come to mean an “impediment” or “defilement.”

The opposite of *kiñcana*, “something,” is ***akiñcana***, “nothing,” a state of having no possessions (Sn 976); a state of nothingness (Sn 1070ab) [4.1.2.2], of “not having.” Since *akiñcana* describes the state of an arhat—one who has nothing by way of worldly possessions and views—we can say that it is a word for true renunciation. An arhat, by eradicating the 3 unwholesome roots of suffering, *lust, hatred and delusion*, is thereby ***akiñcana***, “one who owns or has nothing” or “one who is ownerless,” that is, one who is unburdened with things and who is not subject to anyone.

These ideas are based on the statement made by Sāriputta to Koṭṭhita, as recorded in **the Mahā-vedalla Sutta** (M 43): “Lust, avuso, is a something, hate is a something, delusion is a something. For a monk with influxes destroyed, these are abandoned, cut off at the root.”⁴⁰ This explanation is expanded in the Commentaries.

The line, “having nothing, not attached to sensuality and existence” (*akiñcanam kāmabhava asattam*) is found in **the Hemavata Sutta** (Sn 1.9/176b) and **the Mettagū Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.5/1059b). The Cūḷa-niddesa, commenting on *akiñcanam kāmabhava asattam*, says:

³⁹ Cūḷa Hatthi, padōpama S (M 27) eg says of the 3rd dhyana: “... with the fading away of zest (*pīti*), he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly aware, and experiences happiness with the body. He enters and remains in **the 3rd dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness. (M 27,21/1:182), SD 40a.5. Similarly, in **satipaṭṭhāna**, one is “clearly aware” in all the 4 contemplations: of *the body, feeling, of mind and dhammas*: SD 62.15 (2.1.5.1).

⁴⁰ *Rāgo kho, āvuso, kiñcano, doso kiñcano, moho kiñcano. Te khīṇāsavassa bhikkhuno pahīnā, ucchinna, mūlā.* (M 43,36/1:298,14-18), SD 30.2.

In the phrase “**owning nothing**,” lust is *something*, hatred is *something*, delusion is *something*, conceit is *something*, views are *something*, defilements are *something*, misconduct is *something*. One for whom these “somethings” have been abandoned, calmed, stilled, not subject to arising [to rebirth], burnt up by the fire of knowledge is called “one owning nothing.”⁴¹

(Nc 25:84,21-25)

4.1.5.2 The Upasīva Mānava Pucchā is a rare sutta where **the nothingness base** (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) is described as the “foremost of sentient meditative states,” the highest of those attainments accompanied by perception. Both the two subsequent states—neither-perception-nor-non-perception and cessation [3.1.1.1]—are free of any consciousness as we know it. Hence, the nothingness base is said to be “**freedom of perception**” (*saññā, vimokkha*, Sn 1071c, 1072c),⁴² in the sense that one is here intent on freeing intention itself (*adhimutti, vimokkhena adhimutto*) (Nc:Be 25:107,9).

I think here “intention or intent” (*adhimutta*) does not mean that one has not yet attained the nothingness base and is intent on attaining it. Rather, it means that one is determined *to let go of that base itself* by way of renunciation (the theme of A 9.41). It means getting rid of karma itself, which arises from making “something” of nothing. This is the same as transcending samsara, rebirth and suffering.

This is what I think “**freedom from intent**” (*adhimutti, vimokkha*) means in the Cūḷa, niddesa commenting on *saññā, vimokkhe paramēdhimutto*⁴³ where Ee Se read *saññe, vimokkhe parame vimutto*, “freed in the highest freedom of perception” (Sn 1071c 1072c). The majority reading *vimutto* (freedom) instead of *adhimutto* (intent) supports my interpretation above. Thus, by letting go of that meditation-object that is the “highest perception” (*parame*), one is “freed from perception itself” (*saññā, vimokkhe*).

4.1.5.3 Like *aneja*,⁴⁴ the word *akiñcana* is applied only to the Buddha and arhats. The yaksha **Hemavata** [4.1.5.1], for example, praises the Buddha as one “owning nothing, unattached to sensuality and existence” (*akincanāṃ kāmā, bhavā asattaṃ*, Sn 176b).

The Buddha, in his reply to **Mettagū’s** question, uses the very same phrase to describe the true brahmin, an arhat (Sn 1059b), and to **Todeyya’s** question, he answers by describing the sage (*muni*) (Sn 1091d). Another of the 16 brahmin youths, **Dhoṭaka** (Sn 5.6) [4.1.2.2] praises the Buddha as “a brahmin, moving about, owning nothing” (*akiñcanāṃ brāhmaṇāṃ iriyamānaṃ*, Sn 1063b).

In **the Sundarika Bhāra, dvāja Sutta** (Sn 3.4), when a curious brahmin asks the Buddha about his social class (*jāti*), the Buddha first replies,

“Neither a brahmin am I nor am I a prince; neither a vaisya [merchant class] nor anything else.” Then he describes himself as *akiñcana*, “one who has nothing” (Sn 455), meaning that he is freed from all karma; thus he is one awakened.

4.1.5.4 In two places, the Buddha declares “**one who owns nothing, takes nothing**” (*akiñcanāṃ anādānaṃ*) to be a true brahmin (Sn 620c, 645c). In a unique case, the Buddha even uses the phrase

⁴¹ *Akiñcanan ti rāga, kiñcanāṃ dosa, kiñcanāṃ moha, kiñcanāṃ māna, kiñcanāṃ diṭṭhi, kiñcanāṃ kilesa, kiñcanāṃ duccarita, kiñcanāṃ, yass’ete kiñcanā pahīnā samucchinā vūpasantā paṭipassaddhā abhabb’uppattikā ñāṇ’agginā daḍḍhā, so vuccati akiñcano* (Nc:Be 25:84,21-25). Here *kiñcana* explained as *palibodha*, “impediment” (*rāga, kiñcanan ti rāga, palibodhan*). *Dosa, kiñcanan ti ādi pi es’eva nayo*, NcA 27,15 f). Hence, *akiñcana* may also be tr as “one without (mental) impediments.”

⁴² Nc:Be 25:105,25-28.

⁴³ **Sn 1071c** Be *saññā, vimokkhe paramēdhimutto*; Ce *saññā vimokkha* (sic) *parame vimutto*; Ee *saññā, vimokke parame vimutto*; Se *saññā, vimokkhe parame vimutto*. **Sn 1072c** Be Ee as for 1071c; Ce *saññā, vimokke parame dhi-mutto*; Se as for 1071c.

⁴⁴ “Unmoved, unshaken; free from lust,” Sn 87, 368, 422, 477, 751, 953, 1043; Dh 414; Tha 38, 372.

akiñcana to describe *nirvana*: “Owning nothing, taking nothing (*akiñcanam anādānam*): this is the island with nothing beyond it. I call this nirvana” (Sn 1094).⁴⁵

The word *akiñcana* thus suggests an ideal of total renunciation, of casting off of both worldliness and religiosity. First, it signifies one who has left behind all external or worldly possessions so that one can wander freely, untroubled by concern over anything. And second, a kind of *higher renunciation* refers to one who has given up internal possessions—mental defilements—which may impede even one who lives the religious life, settled or itinerant.

4.1.5.5 When *akiñcana* is taken as an abstract noun, it becomes *ākiñcañña*, “nothingness.” This word is used for the 3rd formless attainment, **the base of nothingness** (*ākiñcaññ’āyatana*) [3.1.2.5]. This was the meditative attainment that the Buddha, before his awakening, attained during his apprenticeship under Ālāra Kālāma, as related in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26).⁴⁶

In **the Pārāyana Vagga** (the last chapter of the Sutta, nipāta), one of the oldest layers of the early Buddhist texts, the term appears without any explicit reference to the nothingness base except that **Upasīva** is told to contemplate *ākiñcañña* and then renounce it in order to cross the flood (that is, samsara) (Sn 1070-1072) [4.1.5.1].

Another of Upasīva’s colleagues, **Posāla** is instructed to see with insight the arising of *ākiñcañña* in order to understand that “Delight is a fetter,” and gain “the true knowledge of the brahmin who has lived the holy life”⁴⁷ (Sn 1115).

From the Sutta, nipāta, it seems that the terms *kiñcana* and *akiñcana* were well known in the meditative and ascetic culture to which the Buddha belonged, and thus were readily understood across traditions. But while non-Buddhist meditators were able to attain the base of nothingness as a formless attainment, only an arhat—because of his true and full renunciation—can be described as *akiñcana*.

4.2 THE TRUTHS AND THE PATH

4.2.1 What the Buddha teaches

4.2.1.0 The Buddha famously declares, “I teach only suffering and the ending of suffering” (*dukkhañ c’eva paññāpeti*⁴⁸ *dukkhassa ca nirodhan ti*)⁴⁹ [4.2.2.6]. If we do not like the word “suffering,” it is for that very reason we should seek to understand why we dislike it and why the Buddha makes suffering his central teaching for the world. This statement is elaborated in the well-known “first sermon”—**Dhamma, cakkha Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), the discourse on the turning of the wheel of truth⁵⁰—taught to the 5 monks in the deer park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath), near Benares, in the heart of the central Gangetic plains of India.

The focus of **S 56.11** is the 4 noble truths and the noble eightfold path. In other words, **the 4 noble truths** are the guiding principles for the practice of **the noble eightfold path**. Simply put, the Buddhist path training has the following implications and significance:

⁴⁵ See Nc 25:139; NcA 27; SnA 2:467. On *akiñcana* as an epithet for the Dharma and nirvana, see Nett 55,20-23*.

⁴⁶ M 26,15.15/1:165 (SD 1.11). The oldest record of the first sermon is found in **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,29-43/-1:173-175, the bulk of which is called **Pāsārāsi S**: SD 1.11 (7)).

⁴⁷ *Etaṃ ñāṇam tatham tassa brāhmaṇassa vusimato* (Sn 1115).

⁴⁸ 1 sg of **paññāpeti**, *paññayati*, *paññapeti*, or *paññapayati*, here meaning “makes known, declares; defines; teaches; prescribes.” *Paññāpeti*, lit, “I cause to know,” 1 sg caus of *pajānāti*, “he knows, understand.”

⁴⁹ **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,21.2), SD 21.13; **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,38), SD 3.13; **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,37), SD 21.12; SD 40a.1 (11.1.1); SD 58.1 (1.2.2.2).

⁵⁰ S 56.11/5:430-424 = Mv 1.6.16-31 @ V 1:10-12 (SD 1.1). On the 5 monks, see SD 1.1 (1).

4.2.1.1 (1) Suffering

The 1st universal truth is that suffering or unsatisfactoriness of some kind exists at all levels of human and sentient existence. This means that we are all evolving beings; we have yet to discover our full potential for personal good and social growth.

This is **the 1st noble truth** that is *suffering*: it means we can and need to grow, but we fail to see this potential in ourselves. We call this the 5 aggregates, basically, our body and mind, our very being.⁵¹

4.2.1.2 (2) The arising of suffering

Suffering arises from beings always seeking “something” or creating “something” in the quest for power, for having things, for controlling others, for dominating the environment, or even as the meaning and purpose of their lives. This is **craving** (*taṇhā*) or existential “thirst.”

This is **the 2nd noble truth** that is *the arising* of suffering: suffering arises when we fail to see and accept others (beings and things) as we positively see and love ourselves. Often, we see other people as simply “good” or “bad” without really understanding the real situation; thus we fail to see the real causes behind the effects that we notice. We should properly understand people and events as arising inter-dependently.

4.2.1.3 (3) The path to the ending of suffering

Suffering can be overcome, avoided or at least minimized at the lowest common level, that is, socially, by people learning to relate to one another as extensions of their individual selves, and to respect others, other beings and the environment, as moral realities:⁵² this is society at peace in a spiritual and creative sense. This entails wholesome social development, including living healthy lives bodily and socially; we call this **moral training** (*sīla, sikkhā*).

With wholesome social well-being, we are better equipped for individual development; we call this **mental training** (*samādhi, sikkhā*), that is, developing the mind to enjoy calm and clarity. “Calm” (*samatha*) refers to a focused mind that readily and healthily enjoys our body (the senses) with self-respect and respect for others; this is a basis for various levels of creativity, especially in the appreciation of truth and beauty. “Clarity” (*vipassanā*) is a clear mind capable of deep insight for seeing directly into true reality and so freeing ourselves from basic ignorance.

This is **the 3rd noble truth** that is *the path to the ending* of suffering: the mind can and needs to be trained to become free from suffering.⁵³ This is the noble eightfold path.

4.2.1.4 (4) The ending of suffering

On the individual level, we must each be at peace with ourselves: this is the ideal, meaning that it has to do with the mind (it can and needs to be trained); that is, the mind at peace. At the highest level, the peaceful mind blossoms with the total ending of craving, that is, **nirvana**.

This is **the 4th noble truth**, *the ending of suffering*: our understanding and acceptance that there is no self and others, only the mind shapes us and frees us. This is nirvana, freedom from time and space.

⁵¹ On the 5 aggregates as our body and mind, see SD 52.2e (1.2.1.3).

⁵² One way to understand this “moral reality” is respect for **the 5 universal values** of *life, happiness, freedom, truth and the mind*. These are that give meaning and goodness to the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*). See SD 1.5 (2.7 + 2.8); SD 51.11 (2.2.3.4); SD 54.2e (2.3.2.5).

⁵³ I have here followed the “practice model” of the 4 truths with the sequence 1-2-4-3, as given in **Mahā Saḷ-āya-tanika S** (M 149,11 etc) + SD 41.9 (2.4); SD 53.26 (2).

4.2.2 The greatest story ever told: The 4 truths

4.2.2.1 The Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26) seems to tell the story of the “first discourse” in a *different* way from that told in **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11)—they are *not* different stories, but the *same* story told in *different* ways. They are simply *new perspectives* into the first sermon, that together with the details of **S 56.11** give us the bigger view of the “greatest story.”

This is the versatile nature of an oral tradition (that is, not a word-based faith) where oral accounts are given for the benefit of the audience, even down to our own times. In such oral retellings of the Buddha’s historic past (the earlier years of the ministry), every different detail adds a new piece to the jigsaw puzzle of **the “great story”** (*mahā,vatthu*; Skt *mahā,vastu*) of awakening.⁵⁴

For over 2,500 years, since the Buddha first taught us the 4 noble truths—*on suffering and the ending of suffering*—no one has proven these truths to be false. Indeed, even a very negative reaction to these truths—that they are “negative” or depressing—only proves the point of the truth: it is the basic nature of life that it is “unsatisfactory” in some way.

Yet without turning to any religious fiction, power theology or external agency, the Buddha declares that we are ourselves capable of rising from this inadequacy to gain the peak of consciousness, and be free of suffering, free even of the heavens, and gain true freedom and happiness that is nirvana. This is **the greatest story** ever told.

4.2.2.2 The Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11) relates the Buddha as teaching the 5 monks how to thoroughly “experience” the 4 noble truths as *theory, practice and realization*, that is, the 3 principles of good truths or “**the 3 good truths**” (*saddhamma*) thus:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| (1) the true Dharma as <u>theory</u> | <i>pariyatti,saddhamma</i> | (textual and theoretical), |
| (2) the true Dharma as <u>practice</u> | <i>paṭipatti,saddhamma</i> | (moral virtue and meditation), and |
| (3) the true Dharma as <u>realization</u> | <i>paṭivedha,saddhamma</i> | (sainthood and freedom). ⁵⁵ |

These 3 phases are to be fully applied to each of the 4 truths, as laid out in **S 56.11**, fully and clearly explaining the functions of each of the 4 noble truths (by way of the teaching model). This gives us the 12 aspects of **reality-experience**, thus:

<u>truth (theory)</u>	<u>practice</u>	<u>realization</u>
(1) the 1 st truth:	1. suffering;	2. it is to be <i>fully understood</i> ; 3. it has been <i>understood</i> .
(2) the 2 nd truth:	4. the arising of suffering;	5. it is to be <i>abandoned</i> ; 6. it has been <i>abandoned</i> .
(3) the 3 rd truth:	7. the ending of suffering;	8. it is to be <i>realized</i> . 9. it has been <i>realized</i> .
(4) the 4 th truth:	10. the way to the ending of suffering;	11. it is to be <i>cultivated</i> . 12. it has been <i>cultivated</i> .

(S 56.11,9-12) + SD 1.1 (6.2.2.1)

Table 4.2.2 The 4 good truths and their 12 aspects

⁵⁴ For a brief comparative study of **S 56.11** and **M 26**, see SD 1.11 (7.2).

⁵⁵ Here, these 3 good truths are applied to the progress of the path saints. Worldlings (the unawakened) who apply these 3 good truths still need to attain the path, ie, gain at least streamwinning. See VA 225; AA 5.33; cf Nm 143 for the first two. For a variant, where the last 2 functions are inverted, see **Mahā Saṃ’āyatanika S** (M 149,10.6/-3:289) + SD 41.9 (2.4) & **Abhiññā S** A 4.251/2:246 f [A:B 5:254], SD 85.3.

These are **the 12 modes or aspects** (*dvādas'ākāra*) of true reality.⁵⁶ Clearly then, the teaching of the 4 truths, as related in **S 56.11**, is not an “intellectual exercise,” as we may otherwise surmise at *the word level* of the text. It is a description of what happens when the mind awakens to true reality. As unawakened beings, we tend to see truth as words (theories, dogmas, etc) which we argue over. The words don't actually change, but we change; we must, if we are to grow. To awakening and awakened beings the words are windows through which they see true reality and smile: they know and see what words hide.

4.2.2.3 The 12 modes of the 4 noble truths clearly imply that there are different levels of profundity in understanding the 4 truths, which range from the first appreciation of one who has just stepped on the path all the way to the penetrating insight of one who has reached full awakening. These truths are clearly not presented as an intellectual exercise in merely reasoned understanding.

Rather, the truths have to be experienced in a prolonged task, highlighted with the metaphor of “3 turnings.” Only on completing the 12 modes of engaging with the truths does Buddha declare that he has reached awakening, thus:

13 [Mv 1.6.27] So long, bhikshus, as my knowledge and vision of these 4 noble truths as they really are in their **3 phases and 12 aspects** were not thoroughly purified in this way, **[423]** up until then, bhikshus, I did *not* claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening in this world

14 [Mv 1.6.28] But when my knowledge and vision of these 4 noble truths as they really are in their *3 phases and 12 aspects* are thoroughly purified in this way, then I claim to have awakened to the incomparable full awakening *in this world* (S 56.11,13 f/5:423), SD 1.1

4.2.2.4 A careful scrutiny of the “truth” passage of **S 56.11** (§§5-15) will convince us that the 4 noble truths are *not* the actual content of the experience of awakening. That content of awakening is:

the middle way, awakened to by the Tathāgata, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana. ... That is to say,
right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. (S 56.11,4), SD 1.1

Then, and only then, the lay-out of **the 4 noble truths** follows in some detail (S 56.11,5-15), that is, by way of the 3 good truths (*saddhamma*) bringing about the 12 aspects of true reality [4.2.2.2]. In other words, **the noble eightfold path** is the “content” of awakening [4.2.2.3], the full realization of true reality. This is the actual experience of awakening as “the path” (*magga*) which will be prescribed again and again to all Dharma practitioners. This leads to the **experience** of awakening.

To *describe* the realization of awakening with the help of the model of the 4 noble truths may be said to be an intellectual exercise; in other words, these truths as **words** do not necessarily imply that such realization occurs in a way that directly involves the formulations used for describing these 4 noble truths.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ SD 1.1 (6.2).

⁵⁷ G Polak, “How was liberating insight related to the development of the four jhānas in early Buddhism?” JOCBS 2016:103 suggests that the early Buddhist notion of liberating insight at the time of awakening needs to be understood as involving a “psychological mechanism which does not have to be deliberately and consciously practised ... It need not necessarily produce any explicit knowledge as a direct result, but should still be cognitive in character and able to cause change in a human being.” Hence, the intent reflection on the truths can help prepare the ground for awakening by informing the cultivation of insight during the early stages of the path.

4.2.2.5 Hence, the teachings of the **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** and its parallels do not imply that the Buddha, at the moment of awakening, mentally said to himself: “This is suffering; this is the arising of suffering,” and so on. The **4-truth model** is a mental tool for presenting to the unawakened as the Buddha’s or an arhat’s review knowledge or retrospective overview of the awakening process, based on a medical model describing *disease, cause, prescription and cure*⁵⁸—as found in, for example, the **Salāyatanika Sutta** (M 149). Evidently, the Buddha was himself very familiar with traditional medicine and medical health,⁵⁹ as evinced by such documents in both the Vinaya (eg, the **Bhesajja Khandha**) and⁶⁰ the suttas (eg, the **Sīvaka Sutta**, S 36.21).⁶¹

4.2.2.6 The realization itself at the moment of awakening is, of course, the experience of **nirvana** (*nibbāna*). This is clearly evident from the formula of realization behind the 3 turnings describing the 3rd noble truth as that of *the ending of suffering* [4.2.1.3] found in the **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta**. It is with the realization of nirvana that suffering ends.

Thus the Buddha declares that he teaches “*only suffering and its ending*” [4.2.1.0]. To clarify suffering (*dukkha*) entails clarifying its arising (*samudaya*). To prescribe suffering’s ending (*nirodha*) is also to prescribe the way (*magga*) to end it. Here we have the well-known “**teaching model**” sequence of the 4 noble truths as used in the **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta**.

In either truths scheme—the teaching model or the practice model—the terms used in the truth descriptions [4.2.2.2, 4.2.2.5] above also clarify the relationship between the 3rd noble truth (the ending of suffering) and the other 3 truths. When we have experienced the ending of suffering, we also know what suffering is or is like. Having understood the ending of suffering, we would also want to take the way to end suffering. We have thus nursed ourselves to spiritual health.

4.2.2.7 The 4-truth scheme is thus a panoramic vision of the true reality that is suffering and the right path that is its ending. We can thus clearly see the real problem and its true solution. A vital implication of this two-truth overview of true reality is that we now know that *suffering arises in the mind* (by way of craving)—*craving is suffering*—and thus its ending is also in our own minds—there is the need for self-reliance.

Thus in a single vision we are able to see what is preventing us from being healthy in mind and spirit, and how we can and must be healthy without need of any external agency or faith in dogmas. The word may lead to the path, but the word is *not* the path. It is the path that inspires us with the words to see the journey for what it is and to make that journey. Our body is the path, our mind is the journey.

A single finger points to the moon, but 3 others hold down the thumb and point back to ourselves.⁶² The moon reflects an ancient light from the past; the 4 fingers and the up-thumb are reminders that we should move ahead where the light shows the path. That moon is the Buddha; the fingers are the 4 truths with the thumb as the goal, nirvana.⁶³

4.2.3 Putting the sutta jigsaw pieces rightly together

4.2.3.1 On the word level, the teachings of the **Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26) seem to tell a story about the 5 monks, different from that of the **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), but this differ-

⁵⁸ On this “practice model” of the 4 truths, see (4.2.1.3) n on the 1-2-4-3 sequence of the truths.

⁵⁹ On the Buddha as a “doctor,” see Sn 560; also SD 43.7 (2.2); also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,5.2), SD 5.8. On early Buddhism and Indian medicine, see SD 1.1 (5.3).

⁶⁰ Mv 6 @ V 1:199-252.

⁶¹ S 36.21 + SD 5.6 (1).

⁶² See SD 1.1 (5.1) Personal experience of reality.

⁶³ In this imaginative metaphor, the thumb should be curled under the middle finger.

ence is only apparent and complementary. While **S 56.11** is a cameo of the teaching on the 4 truths to the 5 monks, **M 26** gives us, amongst other things, details about how the Buddha meets and convinces the 5 monks (§§26-28) that he is now buddha, awakened. Such a narrative is helpful in giving us a panoramic historical perspective to S 56.11, which gives only an account of the Dharma teaching.

M 26 then recounts the Buddha's "first sermon" at the deer park at Isipatana [4.2.1.0] to the 5 monks (§§26-30). While S 56.11 gives a succinct set of teachings on the 4 truths and the noble eightfold path, M 26 gives a broad narrative about how the Dharma was taught to the 5 monks:

29 Bhikshus, I was able to convince the group of 5 monks.

Bhikshus, sometimes I instructed 2 monks while the other 3 went out for alms, and the 6 of us lived on what those 3 monks brought back.

Bhikshus, sometimes I instructed 3 monks while the other 2 went for alms, and the 6 of us lived on what those 2 monks brought back. (M 26,29/1:173), SD 1.11

Naturally, numerous teachings were given by the Buddha to the 5 monks during the narrative time of the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta. Imagine the 5 monks living with the Buddha, interacting with him individually or in twos or more, daily conversing with the teacher, listening to his talks, asking him questions, and also meditating by themselves.

What has come down to us are recollections of such Dharma sessions and moments of spiritual friendship, formalized as **suttas** for our benefit today. As we study the suttas, we must also remember that they are excerpts from ongoing conversations the Buddha had with saints, people and beings of his day.

The suttas are selected episodes of **the great story** of the Buddha, his disciples and the Dharma. The story becomes *greater* when we study, practice and understand it. It becomes the greatest story when this story is told and retold to others.

4.3.3.2 The main part of **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26) closes with the words:

"Then, bhikshus, the group of 5 monks, thus taught and instructed by me, ... realized the undefiled supreme security from bondage, **nirvana**. The knowledge and vision arose in them:

'Unshakeable is *our* freedom of mind. This is our last birth. Now there is no more rebirth (for us)!'"⁶⁴ (M 26,30.7/1:173,7-20), SD 1.11

There is nothing unusual about this statement: at some point, the 5 monks, doing their own practice of meditation, personally guided by the Buddha himself, gained arhathood.

Then follows an ancient textual fragment known as **Pāsa,rāsi Sutta**,⁶⁵ the discourse on the pile of snares, which closes M 26. The first of 2 Suttas' themes is a warning about the 5 cords of sensual pleasure as "**Māra's snares**": mindlessly indulging in the senses prevents us from focusing our minds to see true reality and so gain true happiness.

The second M 26 common theme is that of **the 9 progressive abodes** (*nava anupubba, vihāra*). Dhyanas not only keep us safely out of Māra's sight—dhyana "blinds" Māra—the dhyanas, properly used, can bring us awakening; we are then fully freed from Māra.

We are not told whether the 5 monks experienced the 9 progressive abodes. However, from the contemplative tradition, we know that a meditator may attain *any dhyana*, especially the 1st dhyana,

⁶⁴ At **M 26,18.7**, the Buddha says this of his own awakening. Compare this ancient account of the arhathood of the 5 monks with that of **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11), SD 1.1. On the significance of this passage: SD 1,11 (5.3.5.2).

⁶⁵ For a discussion on **Pāsa,rāsi S**, see SD 1.11 (7).

which is the basis for the other 3 form dhyanas. Then, on attaining the 4th dhyana, one with just a bit more effort will be able to attain the 4 formless attainments.

Then, the meditator emerges from dhyana and directs his mind to scrutinize true reality, and thereby gains awakening [Table 5.3.5]. Thus, the teaching on the 9 progressive abodes—like the one in **the (Nava-ka) Tapussa Sutta** [§§5-12]—is the gamut of the Buddha’s meditative experience and are listed in the Sutta as the stages of true renunciation leading to awakening itself.

5 The 2 paths or the one way?

5.1 SATIPAṬṬHĀNA, THE “ONE-GOING PATH”

5.1.1 *Ekāyana, magga*

5.1.1.1 The Sati’paṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10) opens with the Buddha declaring:

⁶⁶“Bhikshus, this is **the one-going path** (*ekāyano maggo*),⁶⁷
for the purification of beings, [56] for overcoming sorrow and lamentation,
for the disappearance of pain and displeasure,⁶⁸ for gaining the right way,⁶⁹
for realizing nirvana,
that is to say, **the 4 focuses of mindfulness**.⁷⁰ (M 10,2/1;55 f), SD 13.3

What does it mean to say that **satipatthana** is the “one-going path”?

Sati’paṭṭhāna is resolved as *sati* (mindfulness) + *upaṭṭhāna* (setting up), meaning the establishment or focuses of mindfulness by way of the following:

(1) contemplation of the body	<i>kāyānupassanā</i> ;	body-based meditation;
(2) contemplation of feelings	<i>vedanā’nupassanā</i> ;	feeling-based meditation;
(3) contemplation of mind	<i>cittānupassanā</i> ;	mind-based meditation;
(4) contemplation of dharma	<i>dhammānupassanā</i> ;	reality-based meditation.

One “dwells ⁷¹exertive, clearly aware, mindful,” meditating on the body (especially the breath meditation), on feelings, on the mind and on realities that arise in the mind, “removing covetousness and displeasure [discontent]⁷² in regard to the world.”⁷³

⁶⁶ Quoted at Kvu 158.

⁶⁷ *Ekāyano maggo*, lit, “one-going path,” alt “the path where one goes by oneself,” ie “the direct one-way path to samadhi.” See SD 13.1 (3.2). *Ekāyana* should not be confused with the post-Buddha term *eka, yāna*, “one vehicle,” which, in Mahāyāna polemics against early “Hīnayāna” teaches that the ultimately true path is Buddhahood, that even arhats have to become Buddhas.

⁶⁸ *Dukkha, domanassa*, sometimes tr as “pain and sadness.” Tr here follows **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,18 (4.3 + 4)), SD 13.2, = **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141,16+17), SD 11.11. Cf (**Bhaya**) **Vera S** (A 5.17) where we have “mental pain or displeasure” (*cetasikam pi dukkhaṃ domanassaṃ*) (A 5.17,4/3:205, passim), SD 6.4. See Walshe 1996 (D:W 589 n627). For a broader sense of *domanassa*, see SD 13.1(4.2).

⁶⁹ “For gaining the right way,” *ñāyassa adhiḡamāya*; ie, the eightfold path. See SD 13.1 (3.3).

⁷⁰ “Focuses of mindfulness,” *sati’paṭṭhāna*: see SD 13.1 (3.1).

⁷¹ *Ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhiḡjhā, domanassaṃ*. Here we find 4 of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’-indriya*) in action: see SD 13.1 (4.2).

⁷² “Covetousness and displeasure,” *abhiḡjhā, domanassaṃ*, alt trs: “desire and discontent,” “desiring and disliking,” or “longing and loathing.” Walshe (1995:335 & n632) renders it as “hankering and fretting [in regard to the world].” See SD 13.1 (4.2).

⁷³ “in the world (*loka*),” refers to sense-experiences and worldliness. See SD 13.1 (4.2.4).

Simply put, this means that **the purpose of satipatthana** is primarily to help the mind to renounce any engagement with the senses so that the mind is able to fully focus on itself for the attaining of dhyana. Emerging from dhyana, the meditator then applies the dhyanic calm and clarity to directly scrutinize true reality, that is, impermanence, suffering and possibly nonself. This is the very same principle underlying all meditations, which we will briefly survey below.⁷⁴

5.1.1.2 The term *ekāyana, magga* is resolved as *eka* (one), *ayana* (going),⁷⁵ and *magga* (path). Buddhaghosa, in the Majjhima Commentary, gives us a brief survey of the polysemy of the term, *ekāyana*, which I will briefly explain, thus:⁷⁶

- (1) *eka, maggo na dvedhā, patha, bhūto*: “the single way, comprising a path that is not (broken) in two.” Satipatthana is a single undivided learning and practice; it is neither a sectarian highway nor a theological “Way of the Word.” It is the path of one who is *single-minded* in seeking true reality.
- (2) *ekena ayitabbo*:⁷⁷ “that which should be reached by one,” that is, to be traversed by oneself; not through someone else or some outside agency; the “one” (*eka*) also means the mind or “mental concentration,” that is, meditation (neither blind faith nor ostentatious rituals nor religious power) by which the path is traversed; in short, we progress up the path by self-effort;
- (3) *ekassa ayano*: “the going of one,” that is, to be travelled by one alone (it’s like being born or dying: we evolve alone on the path and awaken *alone*), because it is a mental journey and spiritual path. Aloneness is not loneliness, since there are others who will awaken, too;⁷⁸
- (4) *ekasmiṃ ayano*: “the going (found only) in one,” that is, found only in the Buddha’s teaching;
- (5) *ekam ayati*: “it goes to the one,” that is, it leads directly to only one goal, nirvana.

(DA 743 = MA 1:229 f; cf PmA 485 f, NmA 52 f) [3.5.3+4]

From this key teaching, it is clear that there is a single path of Dharma-centred practice. All meditation practice is for the purpose of calm or of insight, or of both, and the ultimate purpose of this is to gain awakening.

5.1.2 The truths, the path and satipatthana

5.1.2.1 We have already looked at **the 4 noble truths** [4.2], that is, the realities of *suffering*, its *arising*, its *ending*, and *the path* leading to its ending. We have also seen that the noble eightfold path is none other than the 4th and last truth in the well known teaching model [4.2.2.6]. The path is the 3rd truth in the practice model, wherein the path is placed 3rd because it leads to the 4th truth, that of nirvana [4.2.1.4].

We can thus say that the 4 truths and the eightfold path are actually a single network of teaching and practice, leading to only the “one” goal [5.1.1.2]. There is only the “one dharma,” *the same truth, teaching and goal*. The difference lies in whether one knows and accepts it or not, whether one practises it or not, whether one realizes it or not.

From **Table 5.1.2** we can see that **right mindfulness** (*sammā sati*) (the 4 satipaṭṭhānas) precedes **right concentration** (the dhyanas), showing how the first leads to the second. We can also see that **right view**

⁷⁴ For an overview of the 4 satipatthanas, see SD 62.15 (2).

⁷⁵ Cf the commentarial form, *āyana* (from *eti* = *ayati*, “he goes”), “coming; producing; a path or way”; a late term (Nc 104,16; Vism 26,30; DhsA 259,24).

⁷⁶ For citations, see CPD: *ekāyana*. See also Analayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization*, 2003:27-29.

⁷⁷ *Ayitabbo*, *ayano*, and *ayati* here come from *√i* (to go); *ayati* = *eti*, “he goes, goes toward; he reaches, obtains; he reaches (a state); he is involved (in)” (see DP: *eti*¹).

⁷⁸ There are, of course, others, too, who do likewise, but the real effort is always a personal one.

is depicted as “seeing the 4 truths.” Thus we can see that *the truths, the path and satipatthana* are not separate teaching systems or ways of practice, but are all closely interrelated teachings, leading to the same goal.

the noble eightfold path

the 3 trainings

right view	<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>	directly seeing the 4 truths	}	wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)
right intention	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>	charity lovingkindness compassion		
right speech	<i>sammā vācā</i>	refraining from false speech refraining from divisive speech refraining from harsh (hurting) speech refraining from frivolous talk	}	moral conduct (<i>sīla</i>)
right action	<i>sammā kammantā</i>	refraining from taking life refraining from taking the not-given refraining from sexual misconduct		
right livelihood	<i>sammā ājīva</i>	refraining from wrong speech and action		
right effort	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>	preventing unarisen unwholesome states abandoning arisen unwholesome states cultivating unarisen wholesome states maintaining arisen wholesome states	}	mental concentration (<i>samādhi</i>)
right mindfulness	<i>sammā sati</i>	contemplation of the body contemplation of feeling contemplation of the mind contemplation of dharmas		
right concentration	<i>sammā samādhi</i>	cultivating the 4 dhyanas		

Table 5.1.2 The eightfold path, its limbs and components

5.1.2.2 The 4 satipatthanas [5.1.1.1] embody right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), forming the 2nd of the 3 trainings, that of “concentration or mind training” (*samādhi sikkhā*), and the 7th limb of the path, itself, as shown in **Table 5.1.2**. Both the 4 satipatthanas and the eightfold path constitute the “one-going path” (*ekāyana magga*). In practice, they both keep us moving on in the direct path of spiritual growth by way of focusing ourselves to mindfully cultivate *the body, feelings, mind and dharmas*. This frees us from negative karma so that we cultivate a wholesome mind to see directly into true reality and free ourselves. We can see them as two perspectives of the one and same way, one *descriptive* (the eightfold path), the other *practical* (satipatthana); one is a map, the other the journey.

5.1.2.3 We can also see both the eightfold path and satipaṭṭhāna as the same path of practice, that is, **the eightfold path** as the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t, taya*) in *moral virtue, concentration and wisdom*, and **satipaṭṭhāna** as the details of concentration training, that is, the 4 contemplations (*anupassanā*), those in

the body, feelings, the mind and realities. Both the path and satipaṭṭhāna (“the one-going path”) [5.1] lead to the same goal.

5.1.3 On *bhāvitā* and *bhāvanā*⁷⁹

5.1.3.1 Although the Pali canon contains many passages recording the Buddha speaking on the arhat’s full cultivation or self-mastery, we only find a handful of suttas where all the 4 factors—that is, mastery over **the body** (*bhāvitā, kāya*), in **moral virtue** (*bhāvitā, sīla*), in **the mind** (*bhāvitā, citta*), and in **wisdom** (*bhāvitā, paññā*)—are defined or stated together, such as these texts:⁸⁰

Mahā Saccaka Sutta	M 36/2 and <i>passim</i>	SD 49.4
(Piṇḍola) Bhāra, dvāja Sutta	S 35.127/4:111	SD 27.6a(2.4)
Loṇa, phala Sutta	A 3.100/1:249-253 x5	SD 3.5
(Dasaka) Mahā, cunda Sutta	A 10.24/5:42-45 x6	SD 72.12
Cūḷa, niddesa	Nc:Be 26,3 f	(lists the 4 terms mentioned)

Other passages in the canon mention at most *3 kinds of cultivation*. Following on from the 3 trainings, for example, **the Saṅgīti Sutta** arranges 3 kinds of cultivation as follows:

The threefold training entails the training in higher virtue (*adhisīla, sikkhā*), the training in higher mind (*adhicitta, sikkhā*), and the training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā, sikkhā*).

The 3 kinds of cultivation entail bodily cultivation (*kāya, bhāvanā*), mental cultivation (*citta, bhāvanā*), and wisdom cultivation (*paññā, bhāvanā*). (D 33,1.10(47+48)/3:119)

5.1.3.2 The suttas do not otherwise define the 4 terms—*bhāvitā, kāya, bhāvitā, sīla, bhāvitā, citta* and *bhāvitā, paññā*—probably because the Buddha’s disciples in his time were familiar with these terms and there was thus no need to define them. The passages containing these definitions tend to be answers or explanations the Buddha gives to non-Buddhists, for example, to wanderers and ascetics of other traditions [5.1.3.1]. Similarly, the 4 kinds of **cultivation** (*bhāvanā*)—which lead to self-mastery (*bhāvitā*)—are not found as a set in the Pali canon, unless one counts the Burmese edition, which includes **the Peṭako-padesa** (Peṭk),⁸¹ which says:

In the eightfold path is found the fourfold cultivation: moral cultivation (*sīla, bhāvanā*), bodily cultivation (*kāya, bhāvanā*), mental cultivation (*citta, bhāvanā*), and wisdom cultivation (*paññā, bhāvanā*). (Peṭk 191,14-16)⁸² [5.1.3.4]

⁷⁹ This section is partly based on Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, 2021:799-802 (§7.12 Appendix 2).

⁸⁰ Payutto, however, states that “there is no single passage in which these four factors are defined together. There exist only cases in which one or a few of these factors are defined in specific circumstances, for example by correcting a misunderstanding about one or more of these aspects of development. ... the four kinds of development (*bhāvanā*)—which lead to self-mastery (*bhāvitā*)—are not found together as a group in the Tipiṭaka.” (2021:799).

⁸¹ Both **Peṭakōpadesa** (*piṭaka*, “basket of texts,” + *upadesa*, “disclosure”) and **Netti-p.pakaraṇa** (*netti*, “guide,” + *pakaraṇa*, “literary text”) are paracanonical works on Pali hermeneutics, written c 2nd-1st cent BCE as a guide for interpreting the suttas. Peṭk was written earlier prob as a trial or draft project, and was outshone by the far superior Nett, both attr to one “Kaccāna” (the name of the Buddha’s disciple foremost in elaborating Dharma taught in brief). The actual author is unknown. Nett has a comy (by Dhammapāla), but not Peṭk. The Burmese regard both Peṭk and Nett as canonical and locate them in the Khuddaka Nikāya.

⁸² Here moral cultivation is placed before bodily cultivation.

5.1.3.3 The Commentary on the **Lona,phala Sutta** explains “**of uncultivated body**” (*abhāvita,kāya*, A 3.99,2 + *passim*) as referring to a worldling caught in cyclic life bereft of any bodily cultivation.⁸³ “Body” here refers to the 5 senses. Hence, “one bodily cultivated” is said to be developed in the 5 sense-doors; this means that one is well restrained in the senses.⁸⁴

The contrasting terms “**bodily cultivated**” (*bhāvita,kāya*) and “**bodily uncultivated**” (*abhāvita,kāya*) are explained in the **Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), where Saccaka initially identifies *kāya,bhāvanā* (“bodily cultivation”) as “self-mortification.”⁸⁵ The Commentary explains that the Buddha takes “bodily cultivation” to mean “cultivation of insight” (*vipassanā bhāvanā*), and “mental cultivation” to be “cultivation of calmness” (*saṁatha bhāvanā*) (MA 2:285).

Considering the bifurcation of meditation into “calm” and “insight” appears only in post-canonical texts, we may take the term *abhāvita,kāya* to simply mean “torturing the body” or “not taking proper care of one’s physical health” and *bhāvita,kāya* to mean “keeping oneself sensually restrained and bodily healthy.” This fits well with the Buddha’s own daily routine:

After sitting for long hours giving teachings, the Buddha would do some walking, often in meditation. Then he would rest, and just before dawn, meditate; again, at dusk, he would do some walking and then meditate. Walking meditation (*caṅkamaṇa*) entails slow, focused, mindful walking with the meditation focus usually at the point of contact the foot makes with the ground or the movements of the other foot, or both alternately.

5.1.3.4 The **Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) speaks of the *bhāvita* terms as follows:

9 “And how, Aggivessana, is one cultivated in body and cultivated in mind?”

Here, Aggivessana, a pleasant feeling arises in an instructed noble disciple.

9.2 When touched by that *pleasant feeling*,

he is neither infatuated with pleasure *nor* goes on being infatuated with pleasure.

Then, that pleasant feeling *ends* for him.

With the ending of the pleasant feeling, painful feeling arises.

9.3 When touched by **painful feeling**,

he neither sorrows, nor grieves, nor laments, nor weeps, nor beats his breast, nor falls into confusion.

9.4 For him, Aggivessana, the arisen pleasant feeling does *not* overwhelm his mind and remain—because of his **cultivated body**,

and the arisen painful feeling, too, does *not* overwhelm his mind and remain, because of his **cultivated mind**.

9.5 In whomever, Aggivessana, there are such twin aspects—that arisen pleasant feeling **[240]** does not overwhelm his mind and remain, because of his cultivated body,⁸⁶ and that arisen painful feeling, too, does not overwhelm his mind and remain,

⁸³ *Abhāvita,kāyo* ti ādīhi kāya,bhāvanā,rahito vaṭṭa,gāmī puthujjano dassito (AA 2:361,3 f).

⁸⁴ *Pañca,dvāra,bhāvanāya vā bhāvita,kāyo. Etena indriya,samvara,sīlaṃ vuttam*” (AA 2:361,9-11).

⁸⁵ M 36,4/1:237 + SD 49.4 (1.2.3).

⁸⁶ *Yassa kassaci, aggivessana, evaṃ ubhato,pakkham uppannā’pi sukhā vedanā cittam na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati bhāvitattā kāyassa*: see §8.4+n. The Sutta here relates pleasant feelings to bodily cultivation and painful feelings to mental cultivation [M 36,8.4, SD 49.4]. Comy then glosses “bodily cultivation” as insight and “mental cultivation” as concentration. See (5.1.3.3).

because of his cultivated mind⁸⁷—
 he, Aggivessana, is thus cultivated in body and cultivated in mind.”⁸⁸

(M 36,9/1:237), SD 49.4

The Commentaries explain that *kāya, bhāvanā* here refers to insight meditation (*vipassanā*), while *citta, -bhāvanā* refers to concentration (*samādhi*), that is, calm meditation (*samatha*) (MA 2:285,1-4).

5.1.3.5 The special term for “exercise” for monastics is *jaṅghā, vihāra*, “walking exercise.” This involves some kind of free walking around, a bit more rigorous than walking meditation. Normally, such a walking exercise would be done in a suitably peaceful or cool place, such as in the shade of a vihara (dwelling quarters), along a forest path or in open ground in the park or forest.

Another form of monastic exercise occurs as **the daily almsround** (*piṇḍa, cāra*; Sn p414) during early morning. Like “walking exercise,” this almsround may be slightly more rigorous. Furthermore, the Buddha and monastics often go on **long walks** (*carika*), wandering around the country, from village to village, town to town, city to city, teaching Dharma, and accepting converts and candidates for renunciation.

5.1.4 Bhāvita and bhāvanā as used outside the canon

5.1.4.1 Note also that the term *sīla, bhāvanā* (“moral cultivation”) does not appear at all in the canon (apart from the Peṭakopadesa) [5.1.3.2 n]. The term *sīla, bhāvanā* thus only exists inherently in the term *bhāvita, sīla*. In contrast, the Commentaries frequently mention all 4 aspects of self-mastery (*bhāvita*) and all 4 kinds of cultivation (*bhāvanā*) as sets, and provide a fair number of explanations for these terms.⁸⁹

These explanations, however, sometimes seem to conflict with one another. This is often because the Commentaries tend to explain words and expressions contextually. The terms *citta, bhāvanā* and *paññā, -bhāvanā* tend not to be problematic and are clear enough. Apparent confusion and contradictions tend to arise in regard to the terms *kāya, bhāvanā* and *sīla, bhāvanā* (and by extension to the terms *bhāvita, kāya* and *bhāvita, sīla*). Here again we should read these respective expressions *contextually*, as if applying them to a particular passage or situation.

5.1.4.2 The Peṭakopadesa [5.1.3.2] seems to give definitions at variance with other texts for all 4 kinds of cultivation (*bhāvanā*). Note the following passage:

In the eightfold path are found **the fourfold cultivations**: moral cultivation, bodily cultivation, mental cultivation and wisdom cultivation.

Therein the body is cultivated by way of	right action and right livelihood.
Moral conduct is cultivated by way of	right speech and right effort.
The mind is cultivated by way of	right thought and right concentration.
Wisdom is cultivated by way of	right view and right mindfulness.

⁸⁷ *Uppannā’pi dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati bhāvitattā cittassa*. Essentially, §§8+9 are saying that the Buddha (and his disciples, too) are able to maintain natural inner calm even when painful feelings arise in the body (in terms of bodily actions and speech) or the mind (in terms of thoughts).

⁸⁸ In the Skt version, Saccaka simply asks if the monks cultivate both body and mind. When the Buddha answers yes, he asks if the Buddha himself also cultivates both body and mind. The Buddha replies that if anyone were to speak rightly he would say that the Buddha has cultivated both body and mind. The Pali and Skt versions agree that Saccaka asks if the Buddha has ever experienced pleasant or painful feelings that overwhelm his mind. The Buddha then gives a detailed account of his ascetic practices as bodhisattva. On *bhāvita, kāya + bhāvita, citta*, see (5.1.3.1).

⁸⁹ For refs, we only need to search **CSCD** using the words like “kāyabhāvit*,” “sīlabhāvit*,” “*bhāvit*” and “*bhāvan*,” in turn, each with a wild-card asterisk tag. Using the initial * and final * will yield practically all words that contain *-bhāvita-* and *-bhāvanā-* in them and you have to select the words you need.

By way of these fourfold cultivations, these 2 factors come to fulfilment: the mind (*citta*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

Citta here refers to calm meditation (*samatha*) and *paññā* refers to insight meditation (*vipassanā*). (Peṭk 191,14-23)

Let us compare this Peṭk passage with a parallel in **the Nettipakaraṇa** (Nett) [5.1.3.2 n]. Here, the 4 kinds of cultivation (*bhāvanā*) are not explained, but **the fourfold self-mastery** (*bhāvita*), which is inherently connected to the kinds of cultivation, is explained.

One will see that here the explanation contradicts in part that of Peṭk 191 above (the variant terms are *italicized*):

Of the 3 aggregates (*khandha*), the aggregate of morality (*sīla,khandha*) and the aggregate of concentration (*samādhi,khandha*) constitute calm meditation (*samatha*), while the aggregate of wisdom (*paññā,khandha*) constitutes insight meditation (*vipassanā*)

That monk is cultivated in body, cultivated in moral conduct, cultivated in mind, cultivated in wisdom.⁹⁰

When the body is cultivated, 2 factors are cultivated:	right action and <i>right effort</i> ;
when moral conduct is cultivated, 2 factors are cultivated:	right speech and <i>right livelihood</i> ;
when the mind is cultivated, 2 factors are cultivated:	right <i>mindfulness</i> and right concentration;
when wisdom is cultivated, 2 factors are cultivated:	right view and <i>right thought</i> .

(Nett 91, excerpts)

5.1.4.3 Note that the terms *bhāvanā* and *bhāvita* can also be translated as “cultivation” + “(fully) cultivated” or “training” + “(fully) trained.” The suttas use the term *vaḍḍhita*, adjective of *vaḍḍhana* (“growth, development”) as a synonym for *bhāvita*- in the term, ***bhāvita,kāya***, thus:

The Mahā Niddesa Commentary on the Tissa Metteyya Sutta (Sn 5.3/119) explains *bhāvita,kāyo ti vaḍḍhita,kāyo*, “*Bhāvita,kāya* means bodily developed” (NmA 2:267,3), and **the Aṅguttara Commentary** on the Loṇa,phala Sutta (A 3.99) details the term and adds: “one is *bhāvita,kāya* by way of contemplation of the body, or, on account of bodily development, he is said to be bodily cultivated,”⁹¹ and adds that ***bhāvita,sīla*** means “morally developed” (*bhāvita,sīlo to vaḍḍhita,sīlo*) (AA 2:361,9-12).

In fact, most commentarial explanations conform with the **Netti-p,pakaraṇa**, but often seem to be at odds with the **Peṭakopadesa**. Take, for example, this passage from **the Netti-p,pakaraṇa Commentary** on *bhāvita,kāya* and *bhāvita,sīla*:

With the fulfilment of proper common moral conduct (*ābhisamācārika,sīla*),⁹² one is **bodily cultivated** (*bhāvita,kāya*);

with the fulfilment of moral conduct fundamental to the holy life (*ādi.brahma.cariyaka,sīla*),⁹³ one is **morally cultivated** (*bhāvita,sīla*).

Moreover, by way of sense-restraint (*indriya,samvara*) one is bodily cultivated (in the 5 sense-doors) (*bhāvita(pañca,dvāra),kāya*);

by way of other forms of moral conduct one is morally cultivated. (NettA:Be 155,1-9)

5.1.4.4 The Aṅguttara Commentary on the Loṇa,phala Sutta (A 3.99) elaborates on the same 2 terms, *bhāvita,kāya* and *bhāvita,sīla*, with some distinctiveness, thus:

⁹⁰ Cf S 35.127/4:111; A 3.99/1:249; Peṭk 191. [5.1.3.1]

⁹¹ So hi kāyānupassanā,saṅkhātāya kāya,bhāvanāya ***bhāvita,kāyo*** nāma. Kāyassa vā vaḍḍhitattā *bhāvita,kāyo*.

⁹² On *ābhisamācārika,sīla*, see SD 55.8 (3.3.2).

⁹³ On *ādi,brahma.cariyaka,sīla*, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,30), SD 7.14; SD 10.16 (1.6.2.6).

By way of bodily cultivation (*kāya, bhāvanā*), that is, by contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), one is called **bodily cultivated** (*bhāvita, kāya*) ...

Moreover, by cultivating the 5 (sense-)doors (*pañca, dvāra*) one is **bodily cultivated**.

The term “bodily cultivated” refers here to moral conduct as sense-restraint (*indriya.samvara, -sīla*).

As for the term “**morally cultivated**” (*bhāvita, sīla*), it refers to the 3 remaining kinds of moral virtue.⁹⁴ (AA 2:361,9-15)

In connection with the 4 pairs of terms connected with *bhāvanā* and *bhāvita*, other Commentaries and Subcommentaries give only occasional explanations of the terms *bhāvanā* and *bhāvita*. For example, the **Saṃyutta Commentary** states:

“The term *bhāvita, kāya* refers to the body endowed with the 5 (sense-)doors.” (SA 2:395).

This passage is consistent with the two commentarial passages cited above.

Furthermore, some commentarial and subcommentarial passages emphasize that the term *bhāvanā* in the context of the 4 kinds of cultivation does not refer to spiritual practice currently engaged in—to practice applied in order to reach the goal—but rather to the practice of arhats which is completed or has already reached the goal. For example, the **Dīgha Subcommentary** says:

“It is cultivation by the fact of having been cultivated.” (*bhāvita, bhāvena bhāvanā*, DAṬ 3:277).

5.1.4.5 The apparent anomalies described in this section regarding the definitions and meanings of the 4 terms—*bhāvita, kāya*, *bhāvita, sīla*, *bhāvita, citta* and *bhāvita, paññā*—and their correlated terms, *kāya, bhāvanā*, *sīla, bhāvanā*, *citta, bhāvanā* and *paññā, bhāvanā*, can be explained by the “rule of contextuality,” which is based on the later canonical term, *attha, rasa*,⁹⁵ meaning “the taste or essence of the meaning (in facts as opposed to theory).”⁹⁶ It shows the rich versatility and polysemy of Pali suttas.

“**Context**” means to bring together (con-) the texts or words (*vyañjana*) where their meaning (*attha*) coincides. We can then and thus see how the meaning of the text is brought out by the usage of the related terms. Thus, the words of the canon (or any Dharma-rooted teaching) are not a fixed lexicon or prison of words; rather, the words are mental work to free the meanings behind the letters: we need to *read in between the lines*, free the spirit from the letter. This is the living Dharma. Thus by the living Dharma, we experience the Dharma and see the light.

5.2 LIVING THE DHARMA THROUGH PRACTICE

5.2.1 The noble individuals: 4 and 8

5.2.1.1 Early Buddhism speaks of the noble saints and those bound for sainthood as “**individuals**” (*puggala*). Since they have attained some level of sainthood or awakening—they have attained the noble path as *streamwinners, once-returns, nonreturners and arhats*—they are called “**noble individuals**” (*ariya puggala*). Apparently, the Buddha was making a statement against notions of racial supremacy

⁹⁴ The 3 remaining kinds of moral virtue are those in regard to the Pātimokkha (*pātimokkha.samvara, sīla*), to purity of livelihood (*ājīva.pārisuddhi, sīla*), and to the reflective use of supports (*paccaya.paṭisevana, sīla*).

⁹⁵ Nm 143,2 + NmA; Pm 2:88,34, 491,11 = 544,4, 3:12,12; Yam 1:54,10.

⁹⁶ CPD sv attha-rasa.

(rejecting the notions that the fair-skinned priestly brahmins were the highest class) and of class discrimination (rejecting the notion that other caste-members are inferior and some even outcastes).⁹⁷

One is neither “pure” nor “impure” by *jāti*, birth or class,⁹⁸ nor by appearance;⁹⁹ truly, one is *pure* when one does good; one is *impure* when one does evil. Thus those who habitually live moral lives, have stilled and freed their minds, and have gained the wisdom that brings them spiritual freedom are called “**noble**” (*ariya*; Skt *arya*). These are the saints of the Buddhist path of awakening.

5.2.1.2 The most important of the noble saints is **the arhat** (*arahata*), who is fully awakened and liberated just like the Buddha. The only difference is that the Buddha is *the first arhat in the world*, and the other arhats and learners (*sekha*), the 3 remaining individual types, are regarded as “Buddha followers” (*buddhānubuddha*).¹⁰⁰ Like the Buddha, the arhats have uprooted all defilements, beginning with the 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hatred and delusion), and so will not be reborn. The Buddha, due to the duration of numerous lives he has taken on the path to awakening, also has boundless wisdom.¹⁰¹

In other words, generically speaking, the most important individual in early Buddhism is **the arhat** (which includes the Buddha) who is an “adept” (*asekha*), so called because he has no more need of spiritual training. The other saints—the streamwinners, the once-returners and the nonreturners—are thus generically classed as “learners or trainees” (*sekha*), since they are still undergoing some kind of path-training, that is, in breaking the remainder of the fetters¹⁰² [Table 5.2.1.3].

So we have here *the simplest grouping of saints*, that is, into 2 groups of noble individuals, comprising **the adepts** (*asekha*) or the arhats, and **the learners** (*sekha*), who are on the way to awakening. We may think of the latter as “beings bound for awakening” but we do not call them Bodhisattvas (*bodhi,satta*), since the term is only used for the historical Buddha before his awakening, specifically in his last life, and broadly, when he is identified as the future buddha, that is, after he has aspired before another living buddha to become a fully awakened buddha himself.¹⁰³

5.2.1.3 The 2nd group of noble individuals (after the 2 groups of noble individuals) are **the 4 noble individuals** (*ariya,puggala*), as described by the Buddha in **the Mahāli Sutta** (D 6)¹⁰⁴ and in many other suttas.¹⁰⁵ The 4 individuals are defined by the kinds of “fetters” (*samyojana*), of which there are a total of 10, that they each have broken or weakened. These 4 noble individuals and the fetters they have overcome may be summarized as follows:

⁹⁷ Technically, there were, in the Buddha’s time, only 3 social classes (*jāti*) who regarded themselves as “noble: (*ariya*; Skt *arya*); a 4th group, artisans (*sudda*; Skt *śūdra*), was a fluid group of any kind of menial workers, who were not regarded as *ariya*, and were regarded as “outcastes.” There is the *pañcama* (“the 5th”)—the dark-skinned autochthonous people—who were also regarded as outcastes. See **Tevijja S** (D 13,19) n, SD 1.8.

⁹⁸ **Vāseṭṭha S** (M 98,12.3 = Sn 650/122), SD 37.1; SD 10.8 (6.2).

⁹⁹ Dh 393.

¹⁰⁰ SD 15.10a (1.1.1).

¹⁰¹ See SD 50.19 (1.2.1.1 (4), 1.3. 4).

¹⁰² On the 2 types of noble individuals, *sekha* and *asekha*: A 1:63, 231 f.

¹⁰³ For a special study on “Aspiration to buddhahood and discipleship,” see SD 62.11.

¹⁰⁴ D 6,28-35/1:156 (SD 53.4).

¹⁰⁵ On the 4 types of noble individuals, see: **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19,62/2:251 f); **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,13/3:107), SD 14.14; **Pāsādika S** (D 29,25/3:132), SD 40a.6; **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,9-12/3:80 f), SD 7.13; Pug 63.

noble individual (<i>ariya, puggala</i>)	training (<i>sikkhā</i>)	fetters broken (<i>saṃyojana</i>)
1. streamwinner (<i>sotāpanna</i>)	perfect moral conduct; proficient level of concentration and wisdom	1. self-identity view (<i>sakkāya, diṭṭhi</i>); 2. doubt (<i>vicikicchā</i>); 3. attachment to ritual and vows (<i>silā-bata, parāmāsa</i>);
2. once-returner (<i>sakad-āgamī</i>)	perfect moral conduct; proficient level of concentration and wisdom	weakened greed, hatred and delusion;
3. nonreturner (<i>anāgāmī</i>)	perfect moral conduct and concentration; proficient level of wisdom	4. sensual lust (<i>kāma, rāga</i>) 5. aversion (<i>paṭigha</i>);
4. arhat (<i>arahata</i>)	perfect moral conduct, concentration and wisdom	6. lust for form existence (<i>rūpa, rāga</i>); 7. lust for formless existence (<i>arūpa, rāga</i>); 8. conceit (<i>māna</i>); 9. restlessness (<i>uddhacca</i>); 10. ignorance (<i>avijjā</i>).

Table 5.2.1.3 The 4 noble individuals and the 10 fetters [Payutto, 2021:653 Table 7.1; modified]

Essentially, **the streamwinner**¹⁰⁶ is regarded as a “noble individual” because:

- (1) he does *not identify* with his body (as self or soul), nor with his feelings, nor perception (memories) nor consciousness (the mind);
- (2) he has *no doubt* about the nature of the Buddha’s awakening, nor about the nature of true reality, nor his ability to progress on the path to gain arhathood in due course; and
- (3) he does *not rely on any external agency* (any kind of God-idea, gods, demons) for faith or support; he is neither religious in the blind or ritualistic sense, nor superstitious.

The once-returner,¹⁰⁷ in addition to having broken the first 3 fetters (like the streamwinner), is *less troubled or controlled by greed, hatred and delusion*. In other words, he has weakened fetters (4) and (5) [Table 5.2.1.3]. This means that he may attain arhathood in his next life right here as a human; hence, he is called “once-returner.” However neither the streamwinner nor the once-returner has broken *all* the 5 lower fetters; hence, they are still subject to rebirth (but not more than 7 lives for the former, and 1 more for the latter); although they still have some (but manageable) level of greed, hatred and delusion.

The nonreturner has *broken all the 5 lower fetters* that would hold them back in the sense-world. Upon dying, they are reborn in their own dimension known as the “pure abodes” (*suddhāvāsa*) where they end their karma and gain arhathood.¹⁰⁸ The suttas mention some laymen nonreturners, too.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ On the streamwinner, see SD 50.19 (1.2.1.1 (1)).

¹⁰⁷ On the once-returner, see SD 50.19 (1.2.1.1 (2), 1.3.1).

¹⁰⁸ **The pure abodes** (*suddhāvāsa*) are the 5 highest form dimensions populated by only nonreturners, where they attain arhathood and nirvana. Their pure-abode lifespans are: **Āviha** (“Non-declining,” 1000 MK), **Ātappa** (“Untroubled,” 2000 MK), **Sudassā** (“Beautifully Visible,” 4000 MK), **Sudassī** (“Clear-visioned,” 8000 MK) and **Akaniṭṭha** (“Peerless,” 16000 MK) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). MK = *mahā kappa*, ie, a full cycle of a world-period or cycle of the universe (V 3:4 = D 3:51, 111 = It 99; D 1:14; A 2:142). See SD 10.16 (13.1.6); SD 23.14 (Table 3). For cosmological map, see SD 1.7 Appendix; for world cycle, see SD 2.19 (9); SD 49.8b (15.2).

¹⁰⁹ See SD 50.19 (1.2.1.1 (3)), 1.2.1.2, 1.3.2 f.

The arhat, as we have noted [5.2.1.2], like the Buddha, is fully awakened; the only difference is that the Buddha was the first arhat in the world, and the other arhats and learners (*sekha*) [5.2.1.2] came after the Buddha and are thus his followers (*buddhānubuddha*). Another unique quality of the Buddha is that he has boundless mental powers (including psychic powers) and wisdom. It is thus proper to remember that the Buddha is always an arhat, too.¹¹⁰

The Kandaraka Sutta (M 51,3) records the Buddha as stating that the arhats and the learners “dwell with their minds well established in the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*).”¹¹¹ (SA 3:200,6-68). This shows that they practise the same kind of Dharma taught in the suttas which are accessible to us, too, except that the arhats have fully mastered the teachings and realized true reality.

5.2.1.4 When the 4 noble individuals [5.2.1.3] are further considered with the 10 fetters [Table 5.2.1.3], we get the group of **the 8 noble individuals** (*aṭṭha purisa, puggala*). These 8 are also classified as “**the 4 pairs of individuals**” (*cattāri purisa, yugāni*): these are 2 well known terms found in the recollection of the sangha (*saṅghānussati*).¹¹² The 4 noble disciples become the 8 individuals when we relate them according to the fetters they have broken, in the following way (like undergraduates and graduates in progressive university training):

A. Learners (*sekha*) or “individuals who still have clinging” (*sa, upādisesa, puggala*): the 3 noble individuals

I. Streamwinners (*sotāpanna*)

1. The streamwinners-to-be (*sotāpanna, magga*). Those training to walk the noble path. They work to perfect moral conduct, and master concentration and wisdom.

2. The streamwinners-become (*sotāpanna, phala*). Those who truly and rightly walk the noble path.¹¹³ They have perfect moral conduct and an adequate level of concentration and wisdom. They have abandoned the first 3 fetters, those of *sakkāya, diṭṭhi, vicikicchā* and *sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*.¹¹⁴ [Table 5.2.1]

II. Once-returners (*sakadāgāmi*)

3. The once-returners-to-be (*sakad-āgāmi, magga*). Those who have abandoned the first 3 fetters and have perfect moral conduct and an adequate level of concentration and wisdom. They train to overcome the stronger forms of greed, hatred and delusion.

4. The once-returners-become (*sakad-āgāmi*). Those who will return to this world one more time and eliminate all suffering. They have perfect moral conduct and an adequate level of concentration and wisdom. Apart from abandoning the first 3 fetters, they have attenuated *greed, hatred and delusion* to a greater degree than streamwinners.¹¹⁵

III. Nonreturners (*anāgāmi*)

5. The nonreturners-to-be (*anāgāmi, magga*). They have weakened the 5 lower fetters, and almost overcome lust and aversion. They have perfect moral conduct and concentration, and an adequate level of wisdom. With their mastery of dhyanas, they are able to break all the lower fetters.

¹¹⁰ On the Buddha as arhat, see **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10; **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11; SD 62.11 (2.2.3.2).

¹¹¹ SA 3:200,6-8. See SD 62.15 (1.2).

¹¹² On the recollection of the sangha, see **Saṅghānussati**, SD 15.10a; **(Mahānāma) Gilāyana S** (S 55.54,5), SD 4.10.

¹¹³ See **Sāriputta S 2** (S 55.5/5:347 f), SD 16.5.

¹¹⁴ **(Chakka) Abhabba S 7** (A 6.91/3:438) states that those “accomplished in view” (*diṭṭhi, sampanna*), ie, streamwinners, are also free from (acute) *greed, hatred and delusion* which lead to states of woe (*apāya*).

¹¹⁵ **MA 2:94 f** states that once-returners have abandoned the fetters of *coarse* lust and ill will, and that nonreturners have abandoned even *subtle* lust and ill will. Visuddhimagga states that once-returners have reduced lust and aversion (Vism 22.22/676 f). All of these interpretations are complementary.

6. The nonreturners-become (*anāgāmi, phala*). They reach final awakening while in the pure abodes [5.2.1.3 n] where they arise after death without returning to this world. They have perfect moral conduct and concentration, and an adequate level of wisdom. They have abandoned two more fetters, those of sensual lust and aversion, thus destroying the first 5 (that is, the lower) fetters, which bind one to the sense-world [Table 5.2.1.3].

B. Adepts (*asekha*, “those who have finished training”) or *anupādisesa, puggala* (“those without clinging”):

IV. Arhats (*arahata* or *arahanta*, “worthy ones”)

7. The arhat-to-be (*arahata, magga*). They have almost overcome almost all 5 the higher fetters. They have perfect moral conduct, concentration and wisdom. They may, like the nonreturners, still have some concern for promoting the Dharma or feel *restless* towards those unwilling or unable to progress on the path.¹¹⁶

8. The arhat-become (*arahata, phala*). They are those worthy of offerings and respect; those who have broken the spokes of the wheel of *saṃsāra*; those free from mental influxes (*āśava*). They have perfect moral conduct, concentration and wisdom. They have abandoned the remaining 5 fetters (the higher fetters), which bind one to rebirth in the dhyanic planes. Thus they have abandoned all the 10 fetters and are not reborn.

5.2.1.5 The 8 noble individuals are precisely these 4 noble individuals (*ariya, puggala*) described above [5.2.1.4], but each level of awakening is subdivided as a pair (like apprentice and master craftsman):¹¹⁷

1. One practising to realize streamwinning.
2. Streamwinner (one who has realized the fruition of streamwinning).
3. One practising to realize once-returning.
4. Once-returner (one who has realized the fruition of once-returning).
5. One practising to realize nonreturning.
6. Nonreturner (one who has realized the fruition of nonreturning).
7. One practising to realize arhathood.
8. Arhat (one who has realized the fruition of arhathood).

These 4 pairs of noble individuals are known as “**the community of disciples**” (*sāvaka, saṅgha*), that is, the noble disciples (*ariya, sāvaka*) of the Buddha, the accomplished “listeners” (*sāvaka*) and spiritually exemplary beings. They form the 3rd of **the 3 jewels** (*ti, ratana*) of Buddhism in whom followers take refuge (*saraṇa, gamana*), that is, whom they emulate in their own lives. There is also **the recollection of the sangha** (*saṅghānussati*) which speaks of “the 4 pairs, the 8 kinds of noble individuals; these are the Blessed One’s disciples” (*yad idaṃ cattāri purisa, yugāni, aṭṭha purisa, puggalā, esa bhagavato sāvaka, - saṅgho*).¹¹⁸

5.2.1.6 In the suttas, these disciples of the Buddha are later referred to as the “**noble sangha**” (*ariya, - saṅgha*). In the older texts, the term *ariya, saṅgha* is used only once as a synonym for *sāvaka, saṅgha*, in a

¹¹⁶ A famous example is that of Brahmā Sahampati who shows his concern when he thinks that the Buddha was “hesitating” to teach the Dharma: **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26, 19.4) SD 1.11; **Why the Buddha “hesitated” to teach** SD 12.1 (2.1.3, 2.3.4).

¹¹⁷ D 3:255; A 4:292. The Abhidhamma divides these 8 into 2 groups: those accomplished in the path (*magga, - samaṅgī*) and those accomplished in the fruition (*phala, samaṅgī*): Pug 73.

¹¹⁸ Eg, **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.7/1:37), SD 28.12; **(Chakka) Mahānāma S** (A 6.10/3:286), SD 15.3.

verse of **the (Chakka) Dhammika Sutta** (A 6.54).¹¹⁹ The phrase *ariya,saṅgha* is, however, very common in the Commentaries, especially the Visuddhi,magga.¹²⁰

When the term *ariya,saṅgha* was more widely used than *sāvaka,saṅgha*, the term, “**conventional sangha**” (*sammati,saṅgha*) was used to refer to the monastic *bhikkhu,saṅgha*. **Sammati,saṅgha** means the “agreed-upon or authorized” sangha, referring to any gathering of more than 3 properly ordained monks. While the conventional sangha comprises only ordained monastics, **the noble sangha** encompasses *all the 4 kinds of noble individuals* [5.2.1.3], both ordained and lay.

The following terms are often paired in contrast: *sāvaka,saṅgha* with *bhikkhu,saṅgha*, and *ariya,saṅgha* with *sammati,saṅgha*. In any case, the later terms *ariya,saṅgha* and *sammati,saṅgha* do not contradict the older terms but give a wider perspective on the meanings of the word **saṅgha**, especially in highlighting that the sangha is not merely an organized monastic group or ecclesiastical hierarchy, but a *Dharma-spirited community of all true practitioners*.

5.2.2 The noble individuals: 9 and 10

5.2.2.1 The (Navaka) Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta (A 9.12) divides streamwinners into 3 types and nonreturners into 5 types; together with once-returners, they make **9 types** of “individuals with residues of clinging” (*sa,upādi,sesa,puggala*), a term synonymous with *sekha*, “learners”¹²¹ [5.3.3 B].

Sa,upādisesa puggalā are thus the same as the first 3 noble individuals below [5.3.3 A]. They still have “fuel” (*upādi*), that is, “clinging” (*upādāna*) or mental impurities. **Anupādisesa puggalā**, that is, the arhats, are free from clinging and impurity, and fully awakened.

Note that **upādi** here is synonymous with *upādāna* (“clinging”).¹²² This differs from the *upādi* in *sa,upādisesa nibbāna* and *anupādi,sesa nibbāna*, where *upādi* translates as “that which is clung to,” that is, the 5 aggregates of clinging.¹²³ The equating of *upādi* with *upādāna* corresponds with the Buddha’s teachings on essential spiritual qualities, such as the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*satī’paṭṭhāna*), the 4 paths to success (*iddhi,pāda*), and the 5 faculties (*indriya*), which often end with the possibility of one of two results from cultivating these qualities: *either arhathood in this very life, or, if there is a residue of clinging, the state of nonreturning*.¹²⁴ The term *upādi* in these contexts refers to *upādāna* but generally refers to mental defilements (*kilesa*).

5.2.2.2 The (Navaka) Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta (A 9.12) opens with saying the following:

[T]hese 9 persons , who, <u>having died with residues of clinging</u> (<i>sa,upādi,sesa</i>), are	
fully freed from hell,	<i>parimutto nirayā</i>
fully freed from the animal birth,	<i>parimutto tiracchāna,yoniyā</i>
fully freed from the preta realm,	<i>parimutto pitti,visayā</i>
fully freed from the state of misery,	<i>parimutto apāya,-</i>
the bad destination, the suffering state.	<i>duggati,vinipātā</i>
	(A 9.12,2-10/4:380 f), SD 3.3(3)

¹¹⁹ A 6.54/3:373 (SD 84.3).

¹²⁰ Eg Vism 7.89-100/218 f; VAT:Be 1:13.

¹²¹ **(Navaka) Sa,upādi,sesa S** (A 9.12/4:380 f), SD 3.3(3).

¹²² This follows Comys eg AA 4:40, 174.

¹²³ See SD 17 series, eg SD 17.8a (13.2.2).

¹²⁴ *Diṭṭh’eva dhamme aññā satī vā upādi,sesa anāgāmitā*. **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,22/2:314), SD 13.2; **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,46/1:62, 481), SD 13.3; **Aṭṭhika S** (S 46.57/5:129); **(Indriya) Phala S** (S 48.65/5:237), SD 88.17; **(Iddhi,-pāda) Phala S 1** (S 51.25/5:285); **(Pañcaka) Iddhi,pāda S 1** (A 5.67/3:81 f) SD 106.15, **Sati Supaṭṭhita S** (A 5.122/3:143), **(Dasaka) Pabbajjā S** (A 10.59/5:108); It 39; Sn 140, 148. Explained in Comys, eg ItA 1:169; SnA 2:503.

The Sutta then lists the following **9 noble individuals** who die with residues of clinging, that is, still un-awakened, (beginning with the highest, *in descending order*), thus:

(1) an attainer of nirvana in the interval [the intermediate state], ¹²⁵	<i>antarā, parinibbāyī;</i>
(2) an attainer of nirvana upon landing, ¹²⁶	<i>upahacca, parinibbāyī;</i>
(3) an attainer of nirvana without exertion, ¹²⁷	<i>asaṅkhāra, parinibbāyī;</i>
(4) an attainer of nirvana with exertion, ¹²⁸	<i>sa, saṅkhāra, parinibbāyī;</i>
(5) one bound upstream (<i>uddhamsota</i>), heading for the Akaniṭṭha realm. ¹²⁹	<i>akaniṭṭha, gāmī;</i>
(6) the once-returner, ¹³⁰	<i>sakad-āgamī;</i>
(7) the single-seeder, ¹³¹	<i>eka, bījī;</i>
(8) the clan-to-clan-goer, ¹³²	<i>kolaṃ, kola;</i>
(9) the seven-at-most, ¹³³	<i>satta-k, khattu, parama.</i>

(A 9.12,4-10/4:380 f), SD 3.3(3)

This list begins with the 5 kinds of nonreturners, then the once-returner and finally the 3 kinds of stream-winners. They are said to be “with residues of clinging” (*sa, upādi, sesa*) because they still have some defilements to be removed; but they are all on the path of awakening as learners or trainees (*sekha*).

5.2.2.3 The (Dasaka) Niṭṭha Sutta (A 10.63) goes on to detail 10 kinds of noble individuals, “accomplished in right view.” The first 9 are the same as the 9 individuals mentioned in **the (Navaka) Sa, upādi, sesa Sutta** (A 9.12) [5.2.2.2] but are here categorized into 2 groups, that is, as those who win their goals here (who awaken here in our world) and those who win their goals after leaving this world (in the ensuing rebirth or rebirths). The 10th individual is the arhat who is listed as the 5th of those who awaken in this world itself.¹³⁴

The 10 noble individuals, all of them said to be “accomplished in right view” (*diṭṭhi, sampanna*), are as follows:

(1) the seven-at-most,	<i>satta-k, khattu, parama;</i>
(2) the clan-to-clan-goer,	<i>kolaṃ, kola;</i>
(3) the single-seeder,	<i>eka, bījī;</i>
(4) the once-returner, and	<i>sakad-āgamī;</i>
(5) the arhat [worthy one]. ¹³⁵	<i>araha.</i>

¹²⁵ **Saṅgīti S**: D 33,2.1(17)/3:237. For a discussion of the doctrinal problem here and on the intermediate state, see **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (4-5).

¹²⁶ **D 33,2.1(17)/3:237**, one who while living beyond half of the life-span, or at the moment of death, attains the holy path for overcoming the higher fetters (Pug 1.43). See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (4-5).

¹²⁷ **D 33,2.1(17)/3:237**, one who overcomes the higher fetters without exertion (Pug 1.44). See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (4-5).

¹²⁸ **D 33,2.1(17)/3:237**, one who overcomes the higher fetters with some exertion (Pug 1.45). See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (4-5).

¹²⁹ **Niṭṭha S** (A 10.63,3) SD 3.3(1.2); SD 2.17 (4-5): for refs to the 5 kinds of non-returners, see SD 2.17 (4.4.2).

¹³⁰ This is resolved as *sakad* = *sakid* or *sakim* (“once”) + *āgamī* (“return”).

¹³¹ “Having taken only one more human rebirth, (one) makes an end of suffering.” (A 9.12,8/4:380 f): see below.

¹³² “Having re-arisen and wandered amongst two or three families, (one) makes an end of suffering.” (A 9.12,9/4:381), SD 3.3(3): see below.

¹³³ “Having re-arisen and wandered amongst gods and humans for 7 lives at the most, (one) makes an end of suffering.” (**Sa, upadisesa S** A 9.12,10/4:381), SD 3.3(3): see below.

¹³⁴ A 10.63/5:119 f (SD 3.3(1.2)).

¹³⁵ *Arahā* here (as at Sn 1003) is 3 sg nom: see Geiger & Norman, *A Pāli Grammar*, 2000 §98.1.

Those who win their goals after leaving this world¹³⁶ are the 5 kinds of nonreturners, as follows

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| (6) an attainer of nirvana in the interval [the intermediate state], | <i>antarā, parinibbāyī</i> |
| (7) an attainer of nirvana upon landing, | <i>upahacca, parinibbāyī</i> |
| (8) an attainer of nirvana without exertion, | <i>asaṅkhāra, parinibbāyī</i> |
| (9) an attainer of nirvana with exertion, | <i>sa, saṅkhāra, parinibbāyī</i> |
| (10) one bound upstream (<i>uddhamṣota</i>), heading for the Akaniṭṭha realm. | <i>akaniṭṭha, gāmī</i> |
- (A 10.63/5:119 f), SD 3.3(1.2)

Table 5.2.2.3 The 10 noble individuals

In this categorization of saints—all unified under the designation, “accomplished in right view”—all of them are “learners” (*sekha*) except for the arhat, who is an “adept” (*asekha*). The 9 learners are the theme of the (Navaka) *Sa, upādi, sesa Sutta* [5.2.2.2].

5.3 THE 8 LIBERATIONS AND THE 7 INDIVIDUALS

5.3.1 The 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*)

5.3.1.1 Before we look at the 7 individuals, we should at least have some familiarity with the 8 liberations. Since this has to do with meditation, we also need to understand the significance of the spiritual faculties (*indriya*) [Table 3.1.1.3], which are also connected to the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*). The term *indriya* comes from *indra*,¹³⁷ and literally means “ruling principles” or “controlling factors.” They are the mental qualities that empower our spiritual practice, especially meditation. They reduce or counter unhelpful mental conditions such as *lack of confidence, laziness, negligence, distraction and ignorance*.

Hence, the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*) are:

faith (*saddhā*), effort (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

When we practise Dharma we are likely to have and need varying degrees of these faculties, especially effort (*virīy’indriya*) and mindfulness (*sat’indriya*) to begin with. The other 3 faculties are vitally decisive factors in the spiritual realization of noble individuals (*ariya puggala*): faith (*saddh’indriya*), concentration (*samādh’indriya*) and wisdom (*paññ’indriya*).

5.3.1.2 Liberation (*vimokkha*) is the freedom from unhelpful and negative mental qualities, arising from the delight of being distracted by an object one is drawn to. This liberation, however, is dependent on the power of concentration in the state of dhyana, and exists only as long as one remains in dhyana.¹³⁸ The “freedom” here refers to transcending the sense-based and mental processes as we know them. It is not the full liberation from defilements and suffering that is synonymous with nirvana.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ On “after leaving this world,” see SD 3.3 (1.2.1.3).

¹³⁷ *Inda* (Skt *indra*) means “lord or leader” and is the title for Sakra as “lord of the devas,” *sakka devānam-inda: Sakka, pañha S* (D 21, 1.1.2 + *passim*), SD 54.8 (2.1.2.2).

¹³⁸ Except for the 8th and last *vimokkha*, ie, cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha* or *nirodha, samāpatti*), attainable only by arhats and by some nonreturners.

¹³⁹ *Vimokkha* corresponds with *vimutti* (freedom) only in the term *ceto, vimutti* (liberation through samadhi).

These **8 liberations** (*aṭṭha vimokkha*)¹⁴⁰ may be briefly explained as follows:¹⁴¹

The 1st liberation: “Dwelling in form, one perceives form” (*rūpī rūpāni passati*).

The **1st liberation** refers to any of the 4 form dhyanas of one who practises *kasiṇa* method¹⁴² and uses an attribute of the body as meditation-object. The meditator does the preliminary exercise (*parikamma*) on an internal form (in our own body), for example, the dark (*nīla*) of the eyes for a “blue” *kasiṇa*, the lightly tan skin for a yellow *kasiṇa*, blood for a red *kasiṇa*, the teeth for a white *kasiṇa*. The concentration sign (*nimitta*) however arises *externally* (MA 3:258 f). The “transcending” (*abhibhāyatana*) of the forms is the attainment of dhyana together with the arising of the sign.

The 2nd liberation: “Not perceiving internal form, one perceives external form” (*ajjhataṃ arūpa,saññā bahiddhā rūpāni passati*).

This refers to any of the 4 formless attainments of a meditator using an external object for *kasiṇa* meditation. The preliminary *kasiṇa* exercise is done on an external form (a *kasiṇa* object), such as an element or a colour, for the arising of the concentration-sign.

The 3rd liberation: “Absorbed in beauty” (*subhan’t’eva adhimutto hoti*).

This is traditionally the colour kasiṇa meditation. The **Paṭisambhidā,magga** includes the dhyana arising from cultivating the 4 divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra* or *appamaññā*): lovingkindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*), and *equanimity* (*upekkhā*); the abode pervades everywhere without limits. Meditation on the 4 divine abodes inspires one to see all beings as beautiful, “non-repulsive” (*appaṭikkūla*), thus without any feelings of dislike or disgust.¹⁴³

The 4th liberation: “Abiding in the base of the infinity of space” (*ākāsānañc’āyatana*).¹⁴⁴

With the end of perception of aversion¹⁴⁵ or sense-impingement¹⁴⁶ (*paṭigha,saññā*) and perception of diversity (*nānatta,saññā*), one transcends the perception of form (*rūpa,saññā*). One meditates on the infinity of space. [3.1.2.3]

The 5th liberation: “Abiding in the base of the infinity of consciousness” (*viññāṇañc’āyatana*).

Transcending the base of the infinity of space, one attains the base of the infinity of consciousness. One then meditates on the infinity of consciousness. [3.1.2.4]

The 6th liberation: “Abiding in the base of nothingness” (*ākāśaññā’āyatana*).

Transcending the base of the infinity of consciousness, one attains the base of nothingness. [3.1.2.5]

The 7th liberation: “Abiding in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (*n’eva,saññā,nā-saññā’āyatana*). [3.1.2.6]

Transcending the base of nothingness, one attains the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

The 8th liberation: “Abiding in the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*).

¹⁴⁰ See D 3:262; A 4:306 f. Explained at Pm 2:38-40; DA 2:513; MA 3:255; AA 4:146.

¹⁴¹ See SD 5.17 (10.2).

¹⁴² In *kasiṇa*, the 10 meditations are on the colours blue, yellow, red, and white [D 16,3.29-31, SD 9; SD 15.1 (9.2)], and on the elements earth, water, fire, wind [air], space and consciousness (or light) [SD 49.5b (1.1-1.4)].

¹⁴³ Pm 5.20/2:39 (SD 49.5b (3.3.2)).

¹⁴⁴ For details on this formless liberation and the foll 3, see SD 49.5b (3.3.4-3.3.7).

¹⁴⁵ In the case of emerging from a divine-abode dhyana.

¹⁴⁶ *Paṭigha* here can also mean “sense-contact”; referring to the end of all physical sense-perception.

Transcending the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one attains the cessation of perception and feeling, also known as the “attainment of cessation” (*nirodha,samāpatti*). [3.1.3]

We can tabulate the processes of liberation in the dhyanas and attainments in this way:

<u>liberations</u> (<i>vimokkha</i>)	<i>jhāna</i>	<u>attainment</u> (<i>samāpatti</i>)
<div> <div> <div>vimokkha 1</div> <div>vimokkha 2</div> <div>vimokkha 3</div> <div>vimokkha 4</div> </div> <div>4 <i>rūpa jhāna</i></div> </div> <div> <div> <div>vimokkha 5</div> <div>vimokkha 6</div> <div>vimokkha 7</div> <div>vimokkha 8</div> </div> <div>4 <i>arūpa jhāna</i></div> </div>		<div> <div>8 <i>samāpatti</i></div> <div>9 <i>anupubba,vihāra samāpatti</i></div> </div>
	= <i>nirodha samāpatti</i>	

Table 5.3.1 Gradual progress of meditative attainment [Payutto 2021:723 Fig 7.1]

These 8 liberations comprise all 9 “attainments of the progressive abodes” (*anupubba,vihāra,samāpatti*) as depicted in **Table 5.3.1**.

5.3.2 The 5 faculties and the 8 liberations

The spiritual faculties (*indriya*) are linked to the liberations (*vimokkha*) in this way: when a person begins spiritual practice, especially meditation, he or she will have a dominant faculty of either *faith* or *wisdom*. If that person cultivates concentration to a level higher than the 3rd liberation (that is, attains formless dhyana), the faculty of concentration (*samādh’indriya*) will become the dominant faculty.

Practitioners whose dominant faculty remains faith may attain the 4 form dhyanas but they will not attain the formless attainments. Properly speaking, they do not attain “freedom” (*vimokkha*). Concentration as a dominant faculty, however, in the end must give way to and act as a basis for wisdom. Up to that point, *concentration* will facilitate the attainment of the higher liberations.

5.3.3 The 8 noble individuals: Learners and adepts

5.3.3.0 We can now go somewhat deeper into our study of how the noble individuals (*ariya puggala*) are connected to the faculties and the liberations. Ordinarily, **7 noble individuals** are listed from *the highest to the lowest*, but to conform with the presentation of the 8 noble individuals given earlier, they are listed here from the lowest to the highest.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,8/3:105), **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(11)/3:253 f); **(Sattaka) Puggala S** (A 7.14/4:10 f), SD 50.30-(2.1.2); **(Sattaka) Avyakata S** (A 7.51/4:76 f), SD 40a.11; Pm 2:53 f. For varying explanations, see Payutto, *Buddha-dhamma*, 2021: Ch 7, Appendix 7.

5.3.3 (A) Learners, individuals still having clinging

5.3.3.1 Faith-follower (*saddhānusārī*)

The traditional explanation is that “a faith-follower” or “faith-devotee” is a person striving for streamwinning and cultivating the noble path with faith as the dominant faculty. If this person attains streamwinning, he becomes one “**faith-freed**” or “one liberated by faith” (*saddhā, vimutta*) [5.3.3.3].

A faith-follower may be one who does not “bodily touch” (*kāyena phusitvā*) [directly experience] and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and formless (*arūpa, samāpatti*), but some of the influxes (*āsava*) are destroyed through seeing the noble truths with wisdom. He has adequate faith in and love for the Tathāgata. Furthermore, he has the 5 faculties: those of *faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*.

5.3.3.2 Truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*)

A “truth-follower” or “dharma-devotee” is a person striving for streamwinning and cultivating the noble path with wisdom as dominant faculty. If this person attains streamwinning, he becomes “one attained to right view” or “**view-attainer**” (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*) [5.3.3.4].

The truth-follower is a person who does not “bodily touch” and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and formless, but some of the influxes are destroyed through seeing the noble truths with wisdom. He has adequately understood by wise reflection those teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata. He has the 5 faculties: those of *faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom*.

5.3.3.3 Faith-freed (*saddhā, vimutta*)

“One faith-freed” or “liberated by faith” is a person who truly understands the noble truths, has virtuous conduct, and has destroyed some of the influxes (*āsava*) [4.1.1.2] through wisdom, and has faith as the dominant faculty. This refers to all those who have attained streamwinning up to those who strive for arhathood with faith as dominant faculty.

The faith-freed is a person who does not bodily touch and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and formless, but also some of the influxes are destroyed through seeing the noble truths with wisdom. His faith is planted, rooted and established in the Tathāgata.

If one attains arhathood, one is “freed by faith” or “**faith-freed**” (*saddhā, vimutta*) [5.3.3.6].

5.3.3.4 View-attainer (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*)

“One attained to right view” is a person who truly understands the noble truths, has virtuous conduct, and has destroyed some of the influxes (*āsava*) through wisdom. This refers to all those who have attained streamwinning up to those who strive for arhathood with wisdom as dominant faculty.

The view-attainer does not “bodily touch” and abide in those liberations that are peaceful and formless, but some of the influxes are destroyed through seeing the noble truths with wisdom. He has clearly understood and correctly applied with wisdom those teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata.

If one attains arhathood, one becomes “**wisdom-freed**” (*paññā, vimutta*) [5.3.3.6].

5.3.3.5 Body-witness (*kāya, sakkhī*)

A “body-witness” is one who abides in and has “touched with the body” the 8 liberations, and has destroyed some of the influxes (*āsava*) through wisdom. This refers to all those who have attained streamwinning up to those who strive for arhathood with concentration as dominant faculty.

A body-witness “bodily touches” and abides in those liberations that are peaceful and formless, and some of the influxes are destroyed through seeing the noble truths with wisdom.

If one attains arhathood, one is “**freed both ways**” (*ubhato. bhāga, vimutta*) [5.3.3.7].

5.3.3 (B) Adepts, individuals free from clinging

5.3.3.6 Wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutta*)

One “wisdom-freed” or “wisdom-liberated” is a person who does not abide in and “bodily touch” any of the 8 liberations that are peaceful and formless, but whose influxes have all been destroyed by understanding the noble truths with wisdom. This refers to the arhats who have practised insight (*vipassanā*) as their principal meditation up to the moment of full awakening.

5.3.3.7 One freed both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*)

Ubhato.bhāga, vimutta translates variously as “one freed in both ways,” “twice-liberated,” or “both-way freed.” Such a one bodily touches and abides in the 8 liberations, and destroys all of the influxes by understanding the noble truths with wisdom. This refers to the arhats who have developed a high degree of samatha (calm concentration) and use this tranquillity as a foundation for practising insight to reach full awakening.¹⁴⁸

5.3.4 Comments on Tables 5.3.4ab

5.3.4.0 There are a few noteworthy comments in relation to noble individuals as outlined in the two diagrams below [Tables 5.3.4a and 5.3.4b]:

5.3.4.1 It should be noted that despite the strength of any other faculties within a person, at the moment of full awakening, wisdom always predominates (*paññā, kāle paññā’indriyaṃ ādhipateyyaṃ hoti*).¹⁴⁹ **Paṭisambhidā, magga**, in its summary of the process of spiritual penetration by way of reflecting on impermanence, explains it as follows:

- (1) In one with great resolution (*adhimokkha*) attending to **impermanence**, the faith faculty is dominant.
- (2) During penetration, 4 faculties follow it, as co-nascent conditions, as mutuality conditions, as support conditions, as association conditions; these are a single function.
- (3) Penetration is in the sense of seeing. So one who penetrates develops, one who develops penetrates. During development, 4 faculties follow it, as co-nascent conditions, as mutuality conditions, as support conditions, as association conditions; these are a single function.
- (4) **At the time of spiritual penetration, the wisdom faculty is predominant.** At the time of penetration, 4 faculties follow it, as co-nascent conditions, as mutuality conditions, as support conditions, as association conditions; these are a single function.
- (5) *Development is in the sense of a single function.*
- (6) *Penetration is in the sense of seeing. So one who penetrates develops, one who develops penetrates.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ For refs to the *ubhato.bhāga, vimutta* pericope, see SD 49.5 Appendix.

¹⁴⁹ Pm 2:51,5; on the “one faculty” to be cultivated, see **Pubb’ārāma S 1** (S 48.45/5:222).

¹⁵⁰ (1) *Aniccatō manasikaroto adhimokkha, bahulassa saddh’indriyaṃ ādhipateyyaṃ hoti.* (2) *Paṭivedhāya cattār’indriyāni tad-anvayā honti, saha-jāta, paccayā honti, aññam-añña, paccayā honti, nissaya, paccayā honti, sampayutta, paccayā honti, eka, rasā honti. Eka, ras’atṭhena bhāvanā.* (3) *Dassan’atṭhena paṭivedho. Evaṃ paṭivijjhanto’pi bhāveti, bhāvento’pi paṭivijjhati. Anattato manasikaroto veda, bahulassa paññ’indriyaṃ ādhipateyyaṃ hoti. Bhāvanāya cattār’indriyāni tad-anvayā honti, saha-jāta, paccayā honti, aññam-añña, paccayā honti, nissaya, paccayā honti, sampayutta, paccayā honti.* (4) **Paṭivedha, kāle’pi paññ’indriyaṃ ādhipateyyaṃ hoti.** *Paṭivedhāya cattār’indriyāni tad-anvayā honti, saha-jāta, paccayā honti, aññam-añña, paccayā honti, nissaya, paccayā honti, sampayutta, paccayā honti, eka, rasā honti.* (5) *Eka, ras’atṭhena bhāvanā.* (6) *Dassan’atṭhena paṭivedho. Evaṃ paṭivijjhanto’pi bhāveti, bhāvento’pi paṭivijjhati.* (Pm 2:51,1-19)

Similarly, when one with great tranquillity (*passaddhi*) attends to **suffering**, the concentration faculty is dominant in him When one with great knowledge (*veda*) attends to **nonself**, the wisdom faculty is dominant in him In all 3 cases, at the time of spiritual penetration, **wisdom** always predominates.
(Pm 2:51,1-30)

<u>the 7 noble individuals</u> (<i>satta ariya, puggala</i>) ¹⁵¹	<u>dominant faculty</u> (<i>indriya</i>)	<u>liberations 4-8</u> (<i>vimokkha</i>)	<u>the 8 noble individuals</u> (<i>aṭṭha ariya, puggala</i>)
1. <i>saddhā'nusārī</i> 2. <i>dharmānusārī</i>	faith wisdom	}	1. one practising for streamwinning
3. <i>saddhā, vimutta</i> 4. <i>diṭṭhi-p, patta</i> 5. <i>kāya, sakkhī</i>	faith wisdom concentration		2. streamwinner 3. one practising for once-returning 4. once-returner 5. one practising for nonreturning 6. nonreturner 7. one practising for arhathood
6. <i>paññā, vimutta</i> 7. <i>ubhato, bhāga, vimutta</i>	wisdom concentration	yes yes }	8. arhat

Table 5.3.4a Noble individuals, faculties and liberations [Based on Payutto, 2021:726 Fig 7.2]

This diagram shows the connection between the 7 noble individuals, 8 noble individuals, the 5 spiritual faculties and the 8 liberations.¹⁵²

For a sequential version of what is depicted above [Table 5.3.4a], see the following flowchart:

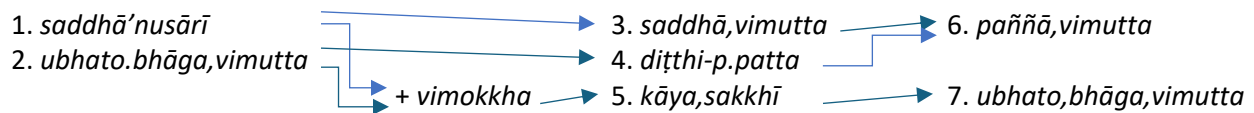


Table 5.3.4b Noble individuals, sequential progress [Payutto 2021:726 Fig 7.3]

¹⁵¹ Here Payutto (2021:722 Fig 7.2) uses *dakkhineyya, puggala*. I have opted for the more familiar “noble individuals” (*ariya, puggala*). The 2 terms refer to the same thing.

¹⁵² This diagram reflects the outline given in the Pali Canon (cf A 1:120; Pug 74), which Vism claims is a straightforward presentation. **Paṭisambhidā, magga** uses an outline it says is “indirect” or “figurative” (*pariyāya*) which differs greatly (Pm 2:53-55). Vism and later texts often use this later outline: Vism 21.74.-78/659 f; VismT:Be 2;455-468. Cf A 1:120; Pug. 72.

the 8 noble individuals:

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ① | one practising for streamwinning | |
| ② | streamwinner | abandoned the first 3 fetters |
| ③ | one practising for once-returning | |
| ④ | once-returner | weakened greed, hatred and delusion |
| ⑤ | one practising for nonreturning | |
| ⑥ | nonreturner | abandoned the first 5 fetters |
| ⑦ | one practising for arhathood | |
| ⑧ | arhat | abandoned all the 10 fetters |

the 7 individuals	①	② ③ ④	⑤ ⑥ ⑦	⑧
	1. <i>saddhā'nusārī</i>	+ concentration of the 4 dhyanas	3. <i>saddhā,vimutta</i>	} 6. <i>paññā,vimutta</i>
	2. <i>dharmānusārī</i>		4. <i>diṭṭhi-p,patta</i>	
		+ <i>vimokkha</i> (of the formless attainments)	5. <i>kāya,sakkhī</i>	7. <i>ubhato,bhāga,vimutta</i>

Table 5.3.4c The noble individuals: the 8 and the 7 [Based on Payutto 2021:728 Fig 7.4]
[The circled numbers collate the 8 noble individuals (above) with the 7 individuals below.]

5.3.4.2 A simple definition of **body-witness** (*kāya,sakkhī*) is “one who first attains dhyana and later attains nirvana” (Pm 2:52). Note also that only a body-witness who is a nonreturner is able to attain the 8th liberation (cessation) [5.3.1.2].

5.3.4.3 The Commentaries and Subcommentaries state that “**one freed both ways**” (*ubhato.bhāga,-vimutta*) is freed in two ways: freed from the corporeal body (*rūpa,kāya*) by the formless attainments, and from the mind-body (*nāma,kāya*) by the noble path. One is liberated on two occasions: when suppressing (*vikkhambhana*) the defilements by the power of concentration in dhyana, and when completely uprooting (*samuccheda*) the defilements.¹⁵³

When one freed both ways attains the 3 knowledges, one is called “3-knowledged” (*te,vijja*). If he attains the 6 superknowledges, one is called “6-knowledged” (*cha-l-abhiññā*). If one attains the 4 analytic insights (*paṭisambhidā*), one is called “accomplished in the analytic insights” (*paṭisambhida-p,patta*).

5.3.4.4 One wisdom-freed (*paññā,vimutta*) practises primarily insight (*vipassana*) meditation; one practise calm (*samatha*) meditation only to have an adequate foundation for insight. One therefore does not experience the exceptional fruits of calm beyond the first 4 dhyanas; one does not gain the formless attainments, the attainment of cessation (*nirodha,samāpatti*), the 2 mundane knowledges (*lokiya,vijjā*): the recollection of past lives and the knowledge of the rebirth of beings, nor does one attain the 5 mundane superknowledges (*abhiññā*): psychic powers, the divine ear, telepathy, recollection of past lives, and the divine eye.¹⁵⁴ In principle, however, one can be an arhat with the 4 analytic insights (*paṭisambhida-p,-patta*).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Eg, DA 3:514; AA 2:148; PugA 190; Vism 660.

¹⁵⁴ (**Arahatta**) **Susīma S** (S 12.70/2:121-127), SD 16.8.

¹⁵⁵ For a comparison of *paññā,vimutta* and *ubhato.bhāga,vimutta*, see D 15/2:68-71.

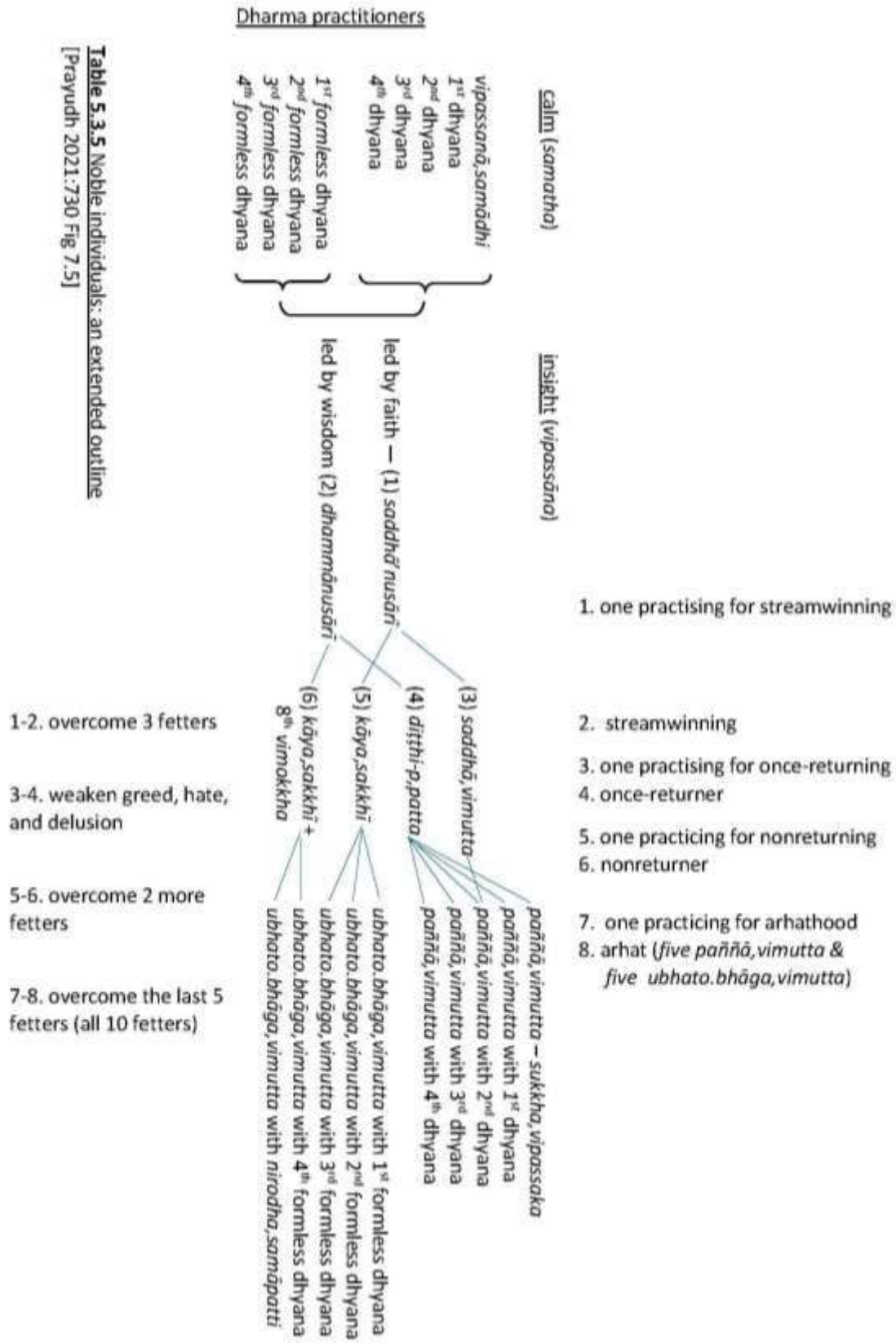


Table 5.3.5 Noble individuals: an extended outline [Prayudh 2021:730 Fig7.5]

5.3.5 Contextuality rules

5.3.5.1 A collative summary of the subjects described above can be laid out in keeping with the teachings of the Pali Canon, with support from the Commentaries, as shown in **Table 5.3.5**.

5.3.5.2 To avoid confusion, it is important here to distinguish between the 2 ways of teaching:

- (a) explaining indirectly or limiting one's examination to particular aspects (*pariyāya*); and
- (b) explaining directly, absolutely and comprehensively (*nippariyāya*).

This is especially relevant in the discussion on the 2 types of arhats: the wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutta*) and the one freed both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*).

The one freed both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*) is liberated in two ways: they have attained arhat-hood and have also attained the formless attainments. **The wisdom-freed** (*paññā, vimutta*) has attained arhat-hood but if they attain dhyana, it is no higher than the 4th dhyana.

Although there are only these 2 types of arhats, it can be confusing when, for example, an arhat is described as “**one freed in mind**” or “mentally liberated” (*ceto, vimutta*). It should be noted here that *ceto, vimutta* is simply another name for *ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*. The term *ceto, vimutta* emphasizes the chosen mode of practice (in this case *samatha*) for attaining arhat-hood. However, it does not imply that liberation was attained solely by concentration.

5.3.5.3 In some texts, arhats who have practised calm and insight are randomly called “mind-freed” (*ceto, vimutta*) or “wisdom-freed” (*paññā, vimutta*) depending on which faculty is stronger. For example, the Commentaries call Sāriputta one “wisdom-freed” and Mahā Moggallāna one “mind-freed.”¹⁵⁶ Sometimes these two terms are used *together* to describe the same arhat who has attained both these ways to liberation.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, in **the Paṭisambhidāmagga**, for example, we see the same terms used in different ways to describe arhats. The terms “faith-freed” (*saddhā, vimutta*), “view-attainer” (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*) and “body-witness” (*kāya, sakkhī*) are used for practitioners all the way until the moment of full awakening.¹⁵⁸ We need to understand that the texts and (especially) the Commentaries tend to explain arhats in rather flexible or contextual ways (*pariyāyena*); otherwise, we may think that there are a number of other kinds of arhats.

5.3.5.4 Similar confusion may arise in the explanations of other Dharma terms. Take for example the definition of **right mindfulness** (*sammā, sati*) as equivalent to the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*sati'paṭṭhāna*).¹⁵⁹ The 4 focuses of mindfulness are generally considered a comprehensive method of practice comprising all spiritual qualities, including effort (*ātapa*) and clear awareness (*sampajañña*). Doubt may then arise as to how *sati'paṭṭhāna* can be confined to merely *right mindfulness*. In this case, *sammā, sati* is the mindfulness suitable to or applied in the 4 focuses of mindfulness.

Another example is the cultivation of concentration (*samādhi, bhāvanā*), of which there are 4 kinds.¹⁶⁰ The description of the 4th kind of samadhi cultivation includes: *When cultivated and developed, this medita-*

¹⁵⁶ Eg, M 64,16/1:437; MA 3:191.

¹⁵⁷ A 5.71/3:84. Essentially, all those who have attained arhat-hood have gained these 2 kinds of liberation [below].

¹⁵⁸ Pm 2:53-55; cf A 9.43/4:451-453. At A 1:24, Vakkālī is listed as the foremost of monks who are *saddhā, vimutta* (or *saddhādhimutta*). Vism explains the terms according to Paṭisambhidāmagga (Vism 21.74-78/659 f).

¹⁵⁹ Eg, **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22/2:313), SD 13.2.

¹⁶⁰ Eg, **Saṅgīti S** (D 22,1.11(5)/3:222 f).

tion leads to the destruction of the influxes. One may wonder how concentration (*samādhi*), which is equivalent to “calm” (*samatha*), can lead to the destruction of the influxes without “insight” (*vipassanā*).¹⁶¹

Here, then, concentration should be understood as the heart of a meditator’s practice, like a battleground where various spiritual qualities gather to battle the defilements.¹⁶² The cultivation of concentration in this context is not isolated; it is used in conjunction with and as a support for other meditation techniques.

5.3.5.5 Some post-canonical texts divide *vimokkha* (“freedom” or “liberation”) into 3 kinds and expand them into categories, according to insight into each of the 3 universal characteristics (*ti, lakkhaṇa*), and link them to the dominant faculties. These **3 liberations** are:¹⁶³

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) “liberation by voidness” | <i>suññata, vimokkha,</i> |
| (2) “liberation by the signless” | <i>animitta, vimokkha,</i> |
| (3) “liberation by the undirected” | <i>appaṇihita, vimokkha.</i> |

These interesting categories and explanations are later developments; we can study them on our own time from the relevant texts.¹⁶⁴

5.4 CONCLUSION

5.4.1 Neither word nor fiat, but truth and fact

5.4.1.1 In significant ways, early Buddhism is a “reality check,” not a word-based religion. In practice, early Buddhism was a contemplative tradition; there are many who today diligently work to keep to this “mind-freeing” enterprise, from forest monks to scholars to cognitive psychologists. They are also helping us better understand some of the more difficult concepts relating to the mind.

The Buddha speaks from his own mental training and meditative experiences, and he has set up a “path” for the cultivation of our body (moral virtue), the development of the mind (mindfulness, awareness, and concentration), both leading to the knowing and seeing of true reality that brings us spiritual awakening and freedom.

Early Buddhism rejects any kind of “word”-based dogma in the sense that the suttas are like personal diaries of the spiritual experience of the Buddha and his great saints, and manuals for us to emulate their lives and experiences so that we ourselves can taste the very same freedom that is awakening.

5.4.1.2 To use another favourite metaphor of mine: early Buddhist spirituality is like the experience of **beautiful music**. When we listen to music, we suspend all thinking; we directly feel the music and its beauty. To play beautiful music, we need to train under a great master, but we must develop our own skills in playing and interpreting the music. Above all, we must love and live music.

Mastering whole dictionaries of musical terms or the manuals of music history and critical reviews may make us good music scholars or music historians, but a true musician simply knows, loves and lives

¹⁶¹ **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44) records the nun Dhammadinnā as stating that concentration meditation includes the cultivation of those factors focused upon (*nimitta*) and of supporting spiritual qualities. (M 44,12/1:301), SD 40a.9.

¹⁶² Cf **Jana,vasabha S** (D 18,27/2:216 f), SD 62.3; **Mahā Cattarīsaka S** (M 117,2/3:71) SD 6.10; (**Magga**) **Samādhi S** (S 45.28/5:21); **Niddasa S** (A 7.42/4:40).

¹⁶³ These 3 terms are also descriptions of nirvana: SD 60.1d (2.2.5.3).

¹⁶⁴ Pm 2:35-71; Vism 11.66-78/657-659; Abhs 9.29. Vinaya lists these 3 liberations, but comys explanation is different; see: V 3:92 f, 4:25 f; VA 2:493. Moreover, comys classify the 5 *paññā, vimutta* and the 5 *ubhato.bhāga, mutta* here according to the foundations of *samatha* meditation: eg, DA 2:512, 3:889; MA 3:188; PañcA 191.

the music. Just as the music maestro plays and interprets the music, the meditator renounces the senses to fully delve into the mind, free the mind from words and thoughts, even feelings. The maestro frees the music from the instrument and score; the meditator frees himself from the body and the mind.

5.4.2 Reading and listening

5.4.2.1 Any informed sutta student or specialist is likely to tell us that while every sutta of fair length teaches us Dharma “for the moment”—teachings that help us with better understanding of ourselves—their narratives often need to be carefully reconstructed and digested with reflection as we discover new perspectives and connections of the teachings. With a better understanding of the Dharma comes a clearer and more inspiring vision of the narrative regarding the Buddha and his great story of awakening.

On the other hand, a better understanding of the Dharma narrative—such as those behind **the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta** and **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta**—helps us better understand, for example, how the Buddha teaches the 5 monks, and how his teachings are to be understood and practised. The idea that every sutta is a jigsaw piece or a few fitting pieces helps us with a vision of an emerging “great story” of awakening and how it can benefit us today. Yet, it is even more vital that we fit the various jigsaw pieces of our Dharma understanding over time so that our own mind evolves with a true and whole vision of self-awakening.

5.4.2.2 Modern scholars are trained to read or interpret the word of Buddhism, even challenge the **Buddha’s teachings**, in the name of academic progress.¹⁶⁵ However, as Dharma practitioners, we, as a rule, begin at the word level (*pada, pārama*).¹⁶⁶ Then we work to free the spirit from the word of Dharma, that is, where the sense “needs to be drawn out” (*neyy’attha*). We then know and see “**the sense that is drawn out**” (*nīt’attha*).¹⁶⁷ In short, we should let the suttas speak to us, we must learn to listen deeply to the suttas so that we become true “listeners” (*sāvaka*), and in due course truly know our own minds and is thus awakened and liberated from suffering.

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¹⁶⁵ In true learning spirit, this is, of course, in keeping with the spirit of **Kālāma S** (Kesa, puttiya S) (A 3.65), SD 35.4a, not to accept any view except when it is morally wholesome and spiritually liberating.

¹⁶⁶ At times, Dharma teachings can at once be clear “with the sense drawn out,” as often with basic teachings on moral conduct. On *pada, pārama*, see **Ugghaṭṭitaññū S** (A 4.143), SD 3.13(3.3).

¹⁶⁷ See **Neyy’attha Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.5 f/1:60), SD 2.6b.