

BUDDHISM

A GUIDE TO BASIC

PRACTICE

By
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INTRODUCTION

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT MEANT FOR

The purpose of this book is not to attract people to Buddhism. That is the last thing in the author's mind. It is presumed that the reader already has an interest in Buddhism, and this book is an answer to that interest.

If you think that the author is trying to convert you to Buddhism, please do not go any further, just put this book aside and forget about it. Buddhists do not believe in converting any one to any thing. We respect human beings for who they are, whatever their systems of belief, full stop.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

Is it that you want to get a complete but summarised idea of all aspects of Buddhism, so that if you are interested in some particular aspects, you can use this book as a base from which to take off? If your answer is yes, then this is the right book for you.

This book has been written in simple language and with reference to the day to day experiences of an ordinary person.

It is not intended to be an academic presentation. It is not for the intellectual seeking never ending challenges. It is not for people very advanced in spirituality whatever that term might mean. It is not for research students.

It is meant for ordinary simple people who have heard of Buddhism and want to get a complete idea of its teachings without having to read scores of books, or without having to go after spiritual people the world over.

THE MAIN PURPOSE TO ACHIEVE

How will this book help? Firstly it will answer your assumed desire to learn Buddhism. Secondly, it will help you to succeed in whatever you are doing, provided it is not unwholesome. Thirdly, it will bring you happiness at home, at work, or in the community. Fourthly, you could if you so prefer step on to a solid path to spirituality. *Finally, the chapters in part (1) Section (1) are arranged in such a way that the reader can start practising at the end of any chapter. Further reading will be interesting and useful to the extent that success was experienced on account of practice. Absorbing a great deal of knowledge is not the intended pursuit. A little practice followed by a review of results gained thereby, is worth much more than mere knowledge.*

If these things satisfy you, please read on.

HOW ELSE CAN THIS BOOK BE USED?

This book can also be used as a text for a course on Buddhism. In fact the author himself has used more or less the same contents to run several courses in Brisbane.

Specialised courses such as courses in meditation, courses in Buddhist psychology can be developed using this book as the starting point. Again the author has already successfully tried this out.

FOR THOSE SEEKING ENLIGHTENMENT

For those who are seeking enlightenment, this book and related courses will help settle them on the Noble Eight Fold Path, the one and only path to enlightenment or final release from bondage, taught by the Buddha. It is up to the individual to decide whether to stay in family based worldly life or to become a monk or nun, leading a celibate life devoted to learning and practice aiming at enlightenment in this very life.

Seekers of enlightenment would best choose a teacher and stay close to the teacher for continued guidance. It is not necessary to verify whether the teacher is enlightened. When the teacher cannot offer any more, one should look for a better teacher. One should seriously think whether one needs changes within or changing teachers. Otherwise it will be a wasteful and even harmful exercise.

Even if one person saw the light, or got positioned such a way as to see the light sooner rather than later, as a result of reading this book and following the courses, the author will feel happy that his effort has been rewarded.

WHO WAS THE BUDDHA?

Buddhism originated from the teachings of the Buddha. If at this stage you feel curious to get an idea of the history of Buddhism, and who in fact the Buddha was, just have a glimpse at the relevant appendixes.

WHAT IS THE DHAMMA?

The teaching of the Buddha is called Dhamma; this was originally a Pali word but is commonly used in English writings. The Buddha taught in the Pali language. His teachings are recorded in Pali. Some early records were written in Sanskrit, another language used at the time of the Buddha. There are translations of most of the original Dhamma in English

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of four Parts, each comprising of a number of sections. The four parts cover the following subject areas without going too deep or into too much detail. The four parts deal with the following aspects of content:

- Part (1) The path to success and happiness. Panoramic windows on each major aspect of Buddhism giving a complete integrated view for the reader seeking success and happiness through knowledge and practice of Buddhism
- Part (2) A framework for practice and tests of diligent practice

Part (3) Enhancement of practice to a higher level

Part (4) A guide to Buddhist literature for in-depth research

Each part is sub-divided into sections. Each section has one or more chapters on specific topics.

One appendix deals with the life of the Buddha, and another deals with the history of Buddhism. There are many other books covering these subjects in greater detail.

In reading this book it is suggested that the reader should glance through all parts and sections of the book without getting too involved with any of them. Now and then the reader should look at the appendix on the life of the Buddha to the extent one feels like. That will help the reader to understand the Buddha not just as a person but rather as the teacher who gave us the Dhamma. In other words the Buddha should be seen through the window of Dhamma.

WHO WROTE THIS BOOK AND WHY?

The author is Rahu Sarath-Chandra (full name Rahubadde K.D.S.Sarath-Chandra), who was born in Dodanduwa, Sri Lanka, in 1935, and has chosen to live in Brisbane, Australia since 1979.

He wrote this book because he was seeking an answer to the same question as you are thinking of now. He looked all over since childhood for a meaningful summary of Buddhism and failed to find one. He has read books on Buddhism endlessly. He has sought advice from well known and lesser known teachers mostly in Sri Lanka and in Australia. He has built many Buddhist centres and has listened to hundreds of sermons. The author feels grateful to the many writers and teachers he came across. While he admits he did learn various valuable things, reflected on what he learnt, practiced what he learnt including the practice of meditation, his search for a meaningful complete summary of Buddhism still continued.

The author sincerely feels that this book will serve as a meaningful and complete summary of Buddhism for the ordinary seeker. It emanates from his life time search.

PART (1)

THE PATH TO SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS

This part consists of the following five sections:

An Outline of the Buddhist Path to Success and Happiness

Relationships among Strands of the Path

Basic Philosophy of Buddhism

Basic Buddhist Psychology

Basic Buddhist Meditation

PART (1) SECTION (1)
AN OUTLINE OF THE BUDDHIST PATH TO SUCCESS
AND HAPPINESS

This section consists of the following twelve chapters:

Chapter (1)	The Path in one Stanza
Chapter (2)	The Three Lane Path
Chapter (3)	The Single Lane Path
Chapter (4)	The Eight Lane Path: the Noble Eight-Fold Path
Chapter (5)	Right Speech as a Beginning on the Path
Chapter (6)	Right Action as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (7)	Right Livelihood as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (8)	Right View (Understanding) as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (9)	Right Thoughts as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (10)	Right Effort as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (11)	Right Mindfulness as a Strand of the Path
Chapter (12)	Right Concentration as a Strand of the Path

PART (1) SECTION (1)

CHAPTER (1) THE PATH IN ONE STANZA

At one stage the Buddha of our era, Sakyamuni Siddhattha Gotama summarised the teaching of all Buddhas, past, present and future, in the following stanza translated to English from the original Pali:

*Not to do any evil
To do what is good
To purify one's mind
Such is the teaching of all Buddhas*

If you understand this summary genuinely and fully, with no more questions to ask, that can be the end of your search.

Generally we can manage to sort out good and evil to some extent. Obviously we need some guidance and some standards. These will come from learning of the Dhamma in stages as required, Dhamma in Pali meaning 'the teaching' or 'the norm of the world'. This book is an attempt at giving a summary of the Dhamma to one who seeks.

Although we think we know, sometimes we come across situations in which it is not at all clear whether an action is evil or good. Is it entirely good or entirely evil; or is it partly good and partly evil?

There are several ways of solving this problem. One is to consult a teacher on each and every such case; this is not feasible. Another is to think calmly and clearly before coming to a conclusion. For this you need some amount of knowledge of the Dhamma and wisdom to sort things out.

A third method is to clean one's own mind. When that is done clarity automatically results and therefore problems reduce both in number and in magnitude.

Probably there are other methods.

The key seems to be the purification of one's own mind. If this aspect is overlooked, no amount of thinking or advice from a teacher would be of much avail. Most people tend to ignore the need to purify the mind. Some who want to clean the mind want it done instantly. How many things can we achieve instantly?

Cleaning the teeth takes a few minutes every day. Some people have no time to clean the bowels. Most have no idea of cleaning the blood circulation system. Cleaning a wound causes pain. Cleaning the mind cannot be easier than all these. So we should acknowledge the need to clean the mind, learn some techniques, put these into practice, and above all be patient.

The leading technique of cleaning the mind is meditation. The practice of meditation must be preceded by learning the methods and the meanings behind the methods. Then one needs to learn the obstructions to effective meditation. The practice must be orderly but regular. It should not disturb your day to day living unduly.

Meditation can be picked up fairly quickly but learning the considerations connected to meditation takes a great deal more time. This book briefly covers quite a few of these considerations.

The essential idea of meditation is given very briefly in this book in Section (5) of Part (1). The English word meditation means a kind of thinking. This is not the meaning of meditation in Buddhism. In Buddhism meditation implies development and growth of the mind. The original Pali word giving this meaning is Bhavana. However in this book Meditation is treated as if it really meant 'Bhavana'. This is merely for convenience.

These ideas are indirectly further buttressed and developed in other chapters.

PART (1) SECTION (1)

CHAPTER (2) THE THREE LANE PATH

Another similar though slightly different summary of the path has three lanes which are as follows:

Morality

Focusing of mind

Development of Wisdom

Morality ensures that one avoids evil, and does what is good. Focusing of the mind, and the development of wisdom, involve the study of the Dhamma, living according to the Dhamma and the practice of meditation.

Again as in the earlier summary, one can ask the question as to what is morality. What some people consider to be moral others consider immoral. How does one make a choice?

Consulting a teacher is useful but not always feasible. Thinking is helpful provided one has knowledge of the Dhamma, has practised the Dhamma and has practised meditation.

The ultimate method to solve these problems is meditation.

Focusing of mind here does not mean concentration only. It also implies calming of the mind and the cultivation of mindfulness. These are discussed under the section on meditation.

Development of wisdom is initially the development of the mind to be able to sort out between good and evil from a moral point of view. The deeper meaning of wisdom is the ability to see things as they are. This is really insight. Ultimate wisdom is the ability to see the four noble truths taught by the Buddha, discussed in section (3) of Part (1). Insight is discussed under the section on meditation.

Again we come back to a combination of morality and mind development. It will be appreciated that an understanding of the mind, its structure and its workings will be helpful in attempting to develop the mind.

A brief consideration of the mind and its operations is included in this book. The entire body of this type of knowledge is called Buddhist psychology. It is spread every where in the Dhamma, and is also presented in a compendium in one section of the Dhamma called the Abhidhamma or higher learning. The Abhidhamma in the original writings is not easy to understand at least for ordinary minds. A simple presentation of some elements of Abhidhamma is found in the present author's publication titled 'Buddhist Psychology: the Building Blocks'. It uses examples from day to day life in the modern world.

PART (1) SECTION (1)

CHAPTER (3) THE SINGLE LANE PATH

A single lane path based on a single vital point of practice is given in the discourse titled ‘The Great Discourse on the Establishment of Mindfulness’. This discourse which is pretty long describes in detail how a person can develop mindfulness, and at the beginning of the discourse, the Buddha says that this is the way forward.

So, the learning and practice of mindfulness is in one way a summary of the teachings of the Buddha. English translations of this discourse are available, and some aspects of it can be readily understood. Full understanding of the discourse can be facilitated by a teacher provided that the learner actually practises mindfulness meditation.

The way this discourse is worded, it is not simply a discourse on mindfulness. It in fact resolves into the methodology for development of insight leading to the total development of wisdom up to the point of enlightenment.

One should be careful not to get caught up in words such as mindfulness and insight, more so if one attempts to hold on to a particular interpretation of these words. Gradual study of the Dhamma needs to be coupled with similar advancement in meditation.

In the very first discourse of the Buddha titled ‘Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma’, the Buddha stated that the four noble truths must be realised, and that the way to such realisation is the noble eight fold path.

Putting the two discourses together, we can try to get a common meaning. If the Noble Eight Fold Path is the way to enlightenment, since mindfulness is one of the eight strands of the path, why is it called the one way to enlightenment in the discourse on mindfulness?

There is no contradiction or compromise. The Buddha knew exactly what he was saying. Later when we study the Path we shall see that all the other seven strands of the path are facilitated by the one key called mindfulness. There is more to it than this, but there is no denying that mindfulness is central to the practice.

So, it is not incorrect to say that mindfulness is a one-word summary of the teachings of Buddhism.

The path to enlightenment is also the path to success in day to day life for all of us and that success tends to give us increasing levels of happiness. Whether we learn Buddhism with the aim of worldly success and happiness, or whether we are aiming at spirituality and the ultimate realisation of enlightenment, the path is exactly the same. The difference is in the level of learning and practice.

A person who is mindful in common parlance is also successful and happy to the extent that he is mindful. Take it higher and the returns will also be higher.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (4) THE 8-LANE PATH : THE NOBLE EIGHT-FOLD PATH

The most famous Buddhist path to success and happiness is the eight lane path better known as the Noble Eight Fold Path. At this stage you will see that all these different summaries are simply alternative presentations of the same facts.

The path consists of eight factors, lanes, strands, or sub-paths or whatever one wants to call these and these are as follows:

Right View or understanding
Right Thought
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Concentration

Comparing with the earlier summaries, right speech, action and livelihood can be treated together as morality.

Right effort, mindfulness and concentration taken together constitute the development of the mind.

Right view or understanding and right thoughts imply the development of wisdom.

This way it is clear that the second summary and this summary amount to the same thing, but differ in the extent of analysis. The reader is invited to compare this summary with the first one.

The author feels that the entire Dhamma can be brought together using the noble eight fold path and this is the style of presentation adopted in this book.

The easiest way to understand the Path is to begin with known aspects, or the aspects that are easy to see. What are they? Thought, speech, action and livelihood are the ones easy to see and easy to grasp. Simple as they look, these four account for our behaviour, our happiness and our unhappiness. We should not misguide ourselves to believe that we understand every thing relating to thought, speech and action. Engaging in a livelihood involves us in thought, speech and action.

Speech and action in turn depend on thought. Thought is a mental process and so are the other four strands of the Path, namely, View, Effort, Mindfulness, and concentration.

Ultimately it boils down to a study of the mind, using our own behaviour as a stand point and identifying methods of improving ourselves in every way.

Therefore in the next few chapters we shall look at the teachings dealing with speech, action and livelihood, and then go onto sections dealing with the mind. Later we shall see what techniques are taught for developing the mind. That will give us good grasp of the details of the Path.

When we try to move forward along the path, there will be obstacles to surmount. We need to learn what the common obstacles are and in each case in what ways we can deal with them. At the same time there will be factors that help us in our progress. Again we need to learn how best we can identify helpful factors and how we can gather them.

We can also study the reasoning behind some of the recommended actions, so that we can develop a reasonable level of confidence in them.

That will take us to the end of this book. When you finish reading, you will have a fair idea of what the Buddha taught stated briefly and in general terms. Thereafter, if you feel keen or even curious about some particular matters, some guidance is available in the reading and reference lists.

The more important thing after reading the book is to put into practice what you have learnt so that you can test the validity of the teaching through your own experience, without blindly believing what others have to say. That is the most important lesson. Otherwise you could end up being an academic on Buddhism for ever looking for more and more information, analysing more and more, or you could end up doubting every thing you learnt.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (4A) ALTERNATIVE ACTION PLANS USEFUL IN PRACTICE

The purpose of this chapter is merely to draw attention to the fact that there are many apparently alternative action plans taught in various discourses of the Buddha. These are not really alternatives to the noble eight fold path. These are rather useful sequences of actions which indicate alternative ways to get into practice. Each person is different from the others. The availability of these many sequences or chains of action help different people to get into to the path of practice. Ultimately these result in the fulfilment of the noble eight fold path. Some examples are given below.

The following path has been worked by reversing the sequence shown in the discourse on ignorance found in the Theravada scriptures:

- 1 Associating noble friends
- 2 Hearing the Dhamma
- 3 Developing an interest in the Dhamma
- 4 Developing wisdom based attention
- 5 Developing knowledge and mindfulness
- 6 Discipline of the senses
- 7 Morality relating to mental, verbal and physical activity
- 8 Abatement of the five hindrances
- 9 Dawn of wisdom

The reader will note that in this path, the starting point is easily seen, and can be done with very little effort. Step number nine above equates to the completion of the perfection of practice of the noble eight-fold path

Another path is indicated

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (5) RIGHT SPEECH AS A SIMPLE BEGINNING ON THE PATH

The gift of speech makes humans more capable than animals. But most social unpleasantness is due to poor words. The tongue can turn in any direction. From troubles among relatives, among friends to riots and wars, serious damage is caused by wrong speech. The glib tongue is usually guilty of all four types of wrong speech.

What is the root of wrong speech? It is unguarded thoughts. Where are these rooted? Mental states such as greed, anger, selfishness, pride and jealousy. We all have these to whatever extent. Therefore wrong thought results, and then wrong speech causes damage.

There is a spiral effect. Wrong speech leaves little time for thinking. In the absence of time to think properly, wrong speech multiplies. That is why a worthless minor conversation gets heated and could end up in the exchange of blows or even death.

The author thinks that a decision to talk a little and learn to smile more to compensate for that is an easy way of reducing wrong speech. That has a spiral effect in the positive direction.

Four types of wrong speech mentioned in the Dhamma. The first step is to reduce wrong speech and then the second step is to cultivate right speech. We shall take each type of wrong speech in a little detail.

FOUR TYPES OF WRONG SPEECH

FALSE SPEECH

The Buddha was very emphatic about the need to avoid false speech. A person who is given to false speech can easily slide down to commit many other wrongs or crimes. Stories say that false speech is one thing that the aspirant to Buddhahood avoided at all costs during his sojourn in past births. There must be some special value in this principle.

In his very first admonition to the 7-year old novice monk (samanera) Ven.Rahula, he dealt with this principle, using the analogy of the water vessel, with a little water, water thrown away, overturned, and seen empty when upright again, to illustrate the worth of a person who is not ashamed to tell lies.

The author uses the technique of what he calls benevolent pride saying to him-self, 'I am a respectable person, so it is not right for me to lie'. That is the wholesome mental state called *shame*, which we study later. Examination of common consequences is another method. What will happen if I tell this lie? This is another mental state called *fear*, we study later.

If we ask each person whether he or she tells lies, they are most likely to deny. They cannot even remember the last time they told a lie. One does not remember things that one wants to forget. If we do not tell 100% lies, we probably tell lies of a lesser percentage. And, we have a reason for each one. We think a soft lie is alright. Mental defilements accumulate.

Intention is all important. If my intent is to mislead someone, it is a lie. If my intent is otherwise, probably it is not a lie. However, silence is a better option, when a lie is about to be told. The story of the Arahant in Anuradhapura is an unusual case.

The more disciplined people tell less lies, and softer ones, or lies that are subtle, causing little damage. We need to go up past that point, using the ideal of an Arahant.

Exercise (1):

Take an actual case of a doubtful statement, and examine the difficulty of determining whether it is a lie or not a lie.

SLANDER

The second type of wrong speech is slander or carrying tales about others. *It is a false statement intended to damage someone's reputation.* False speech and hurting another are both involved. It is also called back-biting. The literal meaning of slander in Pali is the breaking up of a friendship.

The slanderer is like a mosquito that sings close to one's ear, and then bites venomously often making the listener sick. The listener also pays a heavy price. The tale carrier gets close to one's ear, speaks softly and sweetly, and then pumps his poison.

Slandering begins at home, then goes to the school and then to work and to the community. For some people this is the only pastime they have.

The author feels that if someone believes a slander, then it is *useless having a good reputation in the mind of such a low level person.* Reputation among respectable people will stay unchallenged. Taking it further, *we live for a short time* and what does my reputation mean when I am dead and gone? Thirdly for the size of this universe, *my reputation is not a big thing.* Why bother? These are the three techniques the author applies.

It is a fact that slanderers get identified by society eventually, and then they get into the frying pan, not the victims of their slanders.

If I want to help a friend by advising him to keep away from a bad person, I may be able to achieve that result in a different way, say by introducing a much better associate. Or, I can take him to a seminar on good friends.

Can one tell a slander via innuendo? Yes one can. But a very general piece of advice may not amount to a slander.

Slandering usually takes place apparently to help close relatives, or close friends, but in fact the intentions can be vicious.

Exercise (1):

Take an actual case, and examine the difficulty of determining whether one has told a slander or not told a slander.

HARSH SPEECH

This is the third type of wrong speech. These are discourteous, unpleasant, rough and strong words. The Buddha says that in the mouth of some foolish people a hatchet grows, and when they use harsh words, they cut themselves. Unpleasant gestures and crooked smiles can have the same effect as harsh words. The written word can have the same effect.

In practical terms rarely does one achieve a useful result using harsh words; so *it is a waste of words*. Because everybody has an ego, if I use strong words, the other person does the same, and with time, emotions rise to higher levels.

Harsh speech does not arise from rational thinking but *via emotions*; learning to stay calm is one method of avoiding harsh speech.

The Bodhisatta (aspirant to Buddha-hood) once had a problem with his mother who was given to harsh speech, but although he was a king he did not want to retort. One day a beautiful bird made a most unpleasant noise and later an ugly bird made a sweet musical sound. People praised the ugly bird for the nice sounds. The son used this example to educate the mother to use softer words.

FRIVOLOUS SPEECH

This is gossip, idle talk, idle chatter, wasteful talk, time fill talk or meaningless talk. We all do this to varying extents. We wait for the next chance to indulge in gossip. Why does this happen? Imbecility, malice and even greed contribute to this tendency. A practical reason is that some people have nothing worthwhile to do in free time.

Malice promotes disparaging talk about others. Such people use gossip to amuse themselves at the expense of others. When the talk goes around, reprisals result. This is dirty behaviour. Idle chatter of this type creates enemies for life and enemies for the next life and so on.

People who indulge in malicious gossip often specialise in the *art of collecting information*. They keep peeping at others like eagles, sniffing like dogs, to pick up some dirt from someone. Then they rush to the telephone or rush in their cars to the most gullible person, to deliver the dirt. *They are like walking garbage trucks*. Often their information is wrong, but there are enough idiotic and gullible people who are prone to believe what they say.

Imbecility promotes scandal and rumour, because people who spread rumours *pray on believing idiots*, who in turn spread the rumours, not knowing what they are talking about. Again there are reprisals. If one asks a question there is no useful answer except something like *'so and so told me; everybody is saying the same thing.'* True, everybody must be saying the same thing because the world is so full of imbeciles living under the pretence of intellectuals. *In Sinhalese such people can be called Pilihiduwo*, a bluish bird who thrives on dirt. After sometime, such people get identified in communities!

People who have *time to waste* feel lonely and inactive, and to break that they indulge in gossip dragging others downwards. It is a form of greed. Idle chatter causes disharmony in society and impedes its progress.

How can we reduce this foolish tendency? First we can learn a lesson from the Buddha's life. He was called Muni, meaning the silent. He said "when you are gathered together there are two things to be done, either talk about the Dhamma or keep nobly silent."

We must note that when there is no idle talk, we become serene, and we tend to concentrate on useful things.

We must keep busy, plan the use of our time. *Reading becomes useful here*. Do something constructive like gardening. Do some voluntary work and feel happy about it.

We must understand the harmful effects on us and others caused due to idle chatter.

The author tries all these methods, and he is convinced about their success. Now we can consider briefly examples of right speech.

EXAMPLES OF RIGHT SPEECH

TRUTHFUL SPEECH

The ability to speak makes us more versatile than animals. Right speech would ensure the highest benefits. We can learn by talking. We can resolve problems by talking.

Speaking the *truth* a person becomes upright, dependable, straight, transparently straight and sincere according to the discourse on metta. Truth, honesty and integrity go together; respect follows them.

Truth is the first lesson Buddha taught Rahula. Every child should learn this early. Sometimes, losses may result from trying to be truthful. Such losses are trivial, as the gains are much greater.

Being truthful leads to inner happiness and confidence, and leads to reduction of fear and worry.

Where the truth causes damage to one-self and to others, one may keep silent. In difficult situations wisdom must be used.

SPEAKING RESPECTFULLY AND KINDLY OF OTHERS

It does not cost us anything to speak of others respectfully and kindly. Where credit is due, it must be given to another.

One needs to be careful not to mislead others in this type of speech. We should learn to talk about a fact relating to a person rather than the person, and be specific on the point. General statements can be misleading.

SPEAKING SOFTLY AND PLEASANTLY

A soft and pleasant manner of speaking creates a good environment and safeguards harmony. Courteous speech belongs to this category.

OBSERVING SILENCE

Silence when nothing useful can be spoken is a good principle. The Buddha is called Muni, which means silent one.

A practical benefit is that when you are silent you can hear.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (6) RIGHT ACTION AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

The gift of bodily action though similar to that of animals, is more elaborate in the case of humans. Again the way we use the body is not necessarily better than the way of animals. One reason is our ability to plan and manoeuvre. The wrong use of the body by one person could result in depravation of the full use of the body of another or unending mental pain to another.

What is the root of wrong actions? Again it is unguarded thoughts. Where are these rooted? Mental states such as greed, anger, selfishness, pride and jealousy. We all have these to whatever extent. Therefore wrong action is the result. Wrong action also involves wrong speech quite often.

Wrong action can be compulsive and pre-meditated or impulsive. Impulsive action emanates from limited thinking and mistakes are seen after the action.

Four types of wrong speech mentioned in the Dhamma. The first step is to reduce wrong speech and then the second step is to cultivate right speech. We shall take each type of wrong speech in a little detail.

The Dhamma explains wrong actions to be avoided and recommends right actions to adopt. Here the four common wrong actions are selected for discussion.

FOUR TYPES OF WRONG BODILY ACTION

KILLING A LIVING BEING

This is the first of four primary wrong actions. The idea of killing covers all living beings, *all that breathe*, all that are *conscious of their existence*. I value my life and I loathe death; other living being have the same concern and I need to respect that concern. All living *beings are fearful* of anything that might hurt them or cause their death.

People try to justify killings attributing various reasons like looking for food, business, health etc. Whatever the reason given is, killing is still killing.

Hurting must be looked at in the same way; hurting may cause eventual killing, or partial killing.

Getting another to kill is not different. When confronted with the need to kill an animal, we should look for other means of solving the problem we are trying to solve.

Exercise (1):

Discuss cases in which it is thought an act of killing can be justified. Discuss the case of a medical student or a scientific researcher.

STEALING

Stealing means the taking of a thing that belongs to another. The deprived person becomes unhappy and is hurt. It also causes fear and worry. Stealing is *another way of hurting another*. It can lead to other wrongful actions.

Using office stationery and facilities without authority is stealing. Civilised people are not supposed to engage in obvious and gross stealing, but this belief tends to ignore subtle stealing, or respectable stealing. An employee who does not do his duty sincerely is in fact stealing. How many can claim never to have done it? An employer who does not pay for work done in full is also stealing. Putting a false tax return, amounts to stealing.

Poverty is supposed to be a reason for stealing. In relative terms everybody is poorer than somebody else, so one can have an excuse to steal. Some One interpretation is that poverty is caused by the rich stealing from the poor in crafty ways. Tax evasion, price fixing and many other contrivances are used by the rich and these tend to increase poverty of others indirectly. All of us have a duty to alleviate poverty, not just by giving handouts but by doing the right thing.

Rich nations use their power to effectively steal from poor nations and to prevent total collapse they give foreign aid. It is like giving vitamin injections to a slave to prevent the death of the slave. It is not done out of mercy but out of greed.

People who resort to subtle stealing cannot be regarded as civilised.

WRONG SEXUAL CONDUCT

It is natural that the form and appearance, voice, smell, taste and touch of a woman excites a man, and the opposite is true for women. The Buddha says that he does not know of any other single thing that prompts attraction. So, we start from that simple fact. One who denies such attraction is either a saint or very close to being one. If that is so, it is good.

The Buddha also describes sex as the strongest impulse in human beings. In fact a lot of other impulses and behaviour patterns can be directly or indirectly attributed to sex.

A person giving in to an impulse is weak and gets weakened to that extent. In the case of young people it is not just an impulse but almost like a fire waiting to engulf oneself and others, at the slightest opportunity. Fear of consequences is one saving factor. Even those with a lot of grey hair are prone to get the youthful impulses back again.

Lay people are not required to keep away from sex; the Buddha never said that as he was a pragmatist.

Sexual urge needs careful handling. Suppression is probably not good. Reasonable restraint (*samyama*) is one way of handling sexual urge. Restraint can be developed through reflections. One needs to be thoughtful about the controlling effect of sex, and one needs to reflect on consequences of excessive sexual enjoyment.

There are meditations that are specially intended for this problem. Meditation on the loathsomeness of the human body and meditation on the falsity of apparent form are recommended. Developing loving kindness and compassion also help in dealing with sexual

wrongs. It is also good to avoid over eating specially meat. Paying attention to certain types of TV shows, porn sites, and reading certain types of books also need to be avoided.

If a person wants to remain single, one must be honest about it. If it is difficult he or she can get married. Once a person gets married one must be faithful. If a married person goes after those outside wedlock, and makes a habit of it that will be a cause for downfall, according to the discourse on downfall. A marriage between an old man and a very young girl will also cause downfall.

The Buddha says that a wife is the comrade supreme of the husband and that the best wife is one that pleases her husband. So, the parties need to honour that relationship.

There are several ways of engaging in wrong sexual conduct for a lay person. Some of these are as follows:

- sexual relations with a person still under the protection of parents or guardians
- sexual relations with a married person, not one's spouse
- sexual relations with one who is engaged

Careless sex for fun is not encouraged. There are many teachings of the Buddha and writings in commentaries on the teaching that deal with sex. Why is it so important?

Firstly, wrong sexual conduct destroys harmony and righteousness in society. Then there is no happiness and there is degeneration of society. It brings an end to a civilization.

Secondly, sex is a barrier or at least an impediment to those who aspire to obtain enlightenment. That is why celibacy is the key precept for monks and nuns. For lay persons sex is listed at the third precept and for monks and nuns (Sangha) at the first precept. The author feels that the sangha needs to be respected on this point if not anything else. Other little faults can be overlooked if this precept is upheld.

Even for married persons taking the eight precepts including a day of celibacy, on a regular basis is recommended. This helps in developing restraint.

INTOXICATION

Consuming intoxicating drinks, drugs, chemicals etc. needs to be considered under bodily actions, as it is not covered elsewhere. The main advantage that humans have over animals is that they have a fairly developed mind. The mind has the ability to sort out good from bad. Intoxicants paralyse the mind temporarily or render it weird. Under intoxicants a human is deprived of the usefulness of the mind to a great extent. Because the mind prompts what to say and what to do, an intoxicated person gets down to the level of an animal. At least non-drinker has a better chance of being more civilised.

The other aspect is that resources are wasted, causing other problems. Drinking can eventually lead to disaster.

Intoxicants destroy health in many ways. Old age diseases are rampant in people who are given to intoxicants.

In the discourse on downfall, taking intoxicants is listed as one factor for the down fall of a person.

Drinking in the hope of getting over a problem is simply foolish; there are many other alternatives.

The excuse that a little is alright is false; it may be little on the first day. Next day it has to be more in order to get the exhilaration. There is no real limit.

RIGHT BODILY ACTIONS

Saving lives, helping to save lives, helping those in distress, helping people to avoid danger, Clearing dangerous substances or objects, helping the sick, helping people about to die, helping old and sick persons, preventing riots and wars, volunteer work in hospitals and prisons, voluntary teaching and other services, looking after the sangha, serving charities, helping ascetics and the like are *opposite to killing and hurting*.

These are right actions as they are related to generosity and renunciation of what we have including time. These are also related to compassion and loving kindness.

Apart from their intrinsic value, such actions have the ability to reduce the opportunity for wrong actions, and to pave the way for mind development.

Showing respect for the privacy of individuals, and for the safety and security of the vulnerable including women and children, people in difficulties and destitution, are right actions. It will leave *less room for sexual misconduct*.

Acting with due care in sexual matters is the *opposite of wrong sexual conduct*. As men are traditionally considered more aggressive in general, a male should learn to show respect to women; an elderly woman as a mother, a woman of comparable age as a sister, and a young girl as a daughter. This type of Buddhist tradition makes life easier for women.

The institution of marriage should be respected both by those who are married and by those who associate with them.

Practising honesty and integrity, at work and in the community are *opposite to stealing*. Protecting and showing due regard to the property of others is similar.

Generally harmless conduct is recommended.

To maintain such standards, effort and occasional renewal of effort is required. The right view is necessary. Above all mindfulness as to what one is about is useful. It is easy to get swayed into wrong action, but right mindfulness and right views can protect a person from wrongful tendencies.

As an *opposite of the taking of intoxicants*, one can consider taking good food. In the disciplinary rules for monks and nuns, many aspects of this matter are considered. Consuming only what is necessary for the sustenance of life, and not being greedy for food are given attention. In the case of lay persons, depending on the type of livelihood, one may consume food for reasons other than sustenance. The need for special food for a professional sportsman is an example. A sick person is another. Even in such cases moderation still applies.

Apart from the teachings, moderation in eating is known to result in good health.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (7) RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

As in the case of right speech and right action, wrong livelihood will be considered first. Much of what was observed in regard to speech and bodily action apply here too. The Dhamma spells out five cases of wrong livelihood but in the modern world the list could be extended quite a lot.

When considering both wrong and right livelihood, the significance of thought needs to be emphasised. All actions and words emanate from thoughts.

FIVE TYPES OF WRONG LIVELIHOOD

There are five specific types of wrong livelihood that need to be avoided, and are mentioned in discourses. These are:

- 1 Dealing in arms and weapons and machinery for killing
- 2 Dealing in animals for slaughter
- 3 Dealing in slaves
- 4 Dealing in intoxicants
- 5 Dealing in poison

These are all connected to wrong actions discussed before.

It must be observed that these five trades have been listed as applicable to Indian society at the time of the Buddha. In today's society, we should be adding a few more specific trades to this list. The basis of selection should be harm done to oneself and harm done to others.

In modern society the following activities could be considered for addition to the list.

Malicious journalism where a journalist's primary aim is the money and not the welfare of society or the principles of journalism is one possibility. Newspapers and journals, radio and television presentations provide ample examples. Malicious political propaganda through the media is a specific case in this category. Advertisements that cause harm to society are allowed to go unnoticed.

The application of science and technology for destructive purposes is a major candidate. The pioneers responsible for the first atomic bomb have clearly shown their regret for opening the door to wanton mass destruction. They have already passed judgment. The use of chemicals and biological organisms for mass destruction also belong to this category.

The proliferation of credit facilities directly contributes to the destruction of families. Property scams and false wealth creation schemes savour of downright deception.

The harm caused by organised betting activities, and the provision of uncontrolled access to betting facilities is worth listing.

Society has openly acknowledged the harm resulting from child pornography. Now the internet is widely used for business activities causing harm to society.

The general criterion used in assessing whether a particular trade is harmful seems to be the dominant prevalence of wrong thought, speech and action. There could be many cases that are difficult to decide. In such cases it is best to be reasonable and wise.

In passing it is noted that monks and nuns are not supposed to engage in a livelihood. They need to depend on lay supporters for survival that is for food, robes, medicine and lodging. In the modern commercial world, many difficulties have been experienced in this regard. New solutions to this problem ought to be explored.

RIGHT LIVELIHHOD

The need to practise a good trade or profession was implied under wrong livelihood. A good guiding principle is to have an honest and non-destructive means of living. Honesty here also implies hard work. Working in harmony with others is also implied.

In the modern world avoiding the destruction of the environment is an important consideration in maintaining a good livelihood. Destruction of the environment indirectly causes harm to society. This matter has been considered in many discourses.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (8) RIGHT VIEW (UNDERSTANDING) AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

Having completed the discussion of the apparently physical aspects of the path, namely right speech, action and livelihood, we shall now consider the five remaining aspects that are less visible and pertain more to mental aspects. There is no particular order in which to consider these.

In this book the following sequence is adopted:

Right View
Right Thought
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Concentration

So far we have not studied the mind and mental processes. The above five aspects will therefore be considered using common ideas we all have about the mind. After we study the mind, we can refine our approach to these aspects. Most people find the study of the mind a little too hard to comprehend, and the author has found that once the above aspects are introduced, study of the mind becomes easier and motivating.

In this chapter we examine right view only and the other aspects are dealt with in the above order in later chapters.

Suppose we are confronted with a problem of choosing a livelihood. Things might not be all that clear, particularly in borderline cases. We have to think out the pros and cons of a particular type of employment or business. In that thinking process the mind might run all over, considering a wide variety of matters. If too many things are addressed the thinking process might not yield useful results, and we could end up in confusion and frustration.

A more effective and economical method is to adopt limited lines of thinking at one time. The question is how do you demarcate manageable bands of thinking? Such a narrow band can be called a view.

One option is to consult a teacher or read a book and identify a view. Suppose in our problem of choosing a right livelihood, we adopt the view that killing is best avoided. We can pick up that view say from this book itself. The author says so having examined the Dhamma.

Thus, using this narrow view we can eliminate livelihoods involving killing. Hence we narrow down the band width and gain some economy in thinking. Using this method we have a greater chance of arriving at a conclusion.

What we have adopted is a tentative view, which can be revised if necessary with more learning and practice.

It is not a good thing to hang on to views at all costs. We should have an open mind that allows us to listen to an alternative point of view. Maybe after more research and experience we can revise or even abandon an existing view. There is nothing wrong with that. The real danger is in having strong views, or doctrines, or dogmas.

Straight away we can conclude that strong and uncompromising views are intrinsically wrong views. Blind beliefs are wrong views. The unending small wars going on in today's world are all due to blind faith, blind belief, and strong views.

The beauty of Buddhism is that it invites enquirers to challenge its views, and put them to test. The famous discourse of the Buddha to the Kalama princes is an apt illustration of this free enquiry approach of Buddhism. Buddhism does not proclaim that if you do not accept its teachings you will be condemned to eternal hell or any thing even short of that.

In the discourse to the Kalama princes, the Buddha says that one should not believe some thing just because elders believed in it, or because it was in some ancient book, mmmmmmmmmmm, even just because it was taught by the Buddha himself. One should test the validity of a view, belief, statement or whatever, only if in one's own experience one is convinced that it is such and such.

EXPAND THE ABOVE

A Buddhist uses a view tentatively and as a working hypothesis, and nothing more. One can ask why a tentative view is necessary at all. It is simply for economical and effective thinking.

If one decides to avoid tentative views too, the exertion will be much more, and the possibility of going astray and getting lost is very high. Therefore one needs to be realistic.

Every now and then we have to make choices. The choice of right view is only one such choice. On what basis do we choose a view?

We can learn from those who have been successful and happy in the past. In general we form our views on the basis of the Dhamma we learn, and the wisdom we develop through learning coupled with practice, that practice to include meditation.

With higher levels of learning, practice and wisdom, we keep choosing better views, and refining existing views.

Views can be tested and clarified using seven philosophical ideas taught in Buddhism. The first three of these are, (1) the fact that every thing is changing for ever, (2) that we cannot hold onto what we like and that this causes pain of mind, and (3) in the ultimate analysis, there is no concrete, abiding, permanent substantiality in a living being. The third idea is not easy to grasp until we study the mind. These three ideas, not exactly defined here, are commonly called the three features of existence.

The next four ideas are commonly called the four noble truths. Again without defining these, the basic ideas can be stated as follows. Firstly, living beings are not satisfied with what they have and keep seeking endlessly, secondly that the mental state of craving is the cause of this unsatisfactoriness, thirdly that this state can be ended, and fourthly that there is a way towards that cessation of unsatisfactoriness.

In the Noble Eight Fold Path we are in the process of studying is that way.

Let us take a simple illustration in real life. Suppose I am unhappy in my job because I think I have a bad boss and I am about to decide to enter into a do or die battle with the boss. Here I am taking a view based on which I intend to act. The principle of continual change enunciated in

the above philosophy could suggest to me that my relationship with the boss cannot be permanent, as nothing is permanent. Maybe I would get a good job or that the boss will get one go elsewhere. On this basis I can look for alternative courses of action. The author recalls many cases of people whom he helped to get over problems that were nearly the same as stated here.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (9) RIGHT THOUGHTS AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

Earlier we discussed right speech and right action as well as right livelihood as three mainly visible strands of the Noble Eight Fold Path. It was also mentioned that all these emanate from right thoughts. Even the other five strands right view and so on depend on or involve right thoughts at some stage. Hence right thoughts are of primary importance.

Where and how are thoughts generated? What causes them to be right or wrong? These questions are answered in the sections dealing with the mind and mental processes. We shall discuss these avoiding technicalities at this stage.

Thoughts are generated using the core of the mind as the means. The core is also called the consciousness. Consciousness derives specific characteristics from the mental states associated with it at a given time. Ultimately thoughts are classified as right or wrong depending on whether the associated mental states are right or wrong.

Therefore it is necessary examine mental states and some of their characteristics. Three common mental states are greed, hatred and delusion. When these are associated with consciousness, the latter acquires so to say their colours. All these lead to the formation of wrong thoughts. There are many more such unwholesome mental states, for example jealousy and worry. At least nine others are treated as common. Due to such mental states thoughts become wrong or unwholesome thoughts.

Similarly, right thoughts arise in association with wholesome mental states, some of which are opposites of unwholesome mental states. Examples are generosity, loving kindness, wisdom, and appreciative joy.

There are many other wholesome mental states such as compassion, equipoise, tranquillity, pliancy, adaptability, workability, proficiency and so on which in turn give appropriate qualities to thoughts.

Right or wrong thoughts can also arise from various combinations of elementary mental states which could be very large in number.

Hence if one is to manage one's thoughts, one needs to develop the ability to identify the underlying mental states and manage them. This is normally done through learning and practice of the Dhamma and through wisdom which develops with meditation.

It is interesting to note that the Buddhist idea of wisdom gets close to a combination of right view and right thoughts. There is no mention of intelligence although common intelligence should help in understanding or taking the right view. A wise person thinks and he thinks correctly depending on the view adopted or the level of understanding.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (10) RIGHT EFFORT AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

The effort discussed here is not physical effort. Physical effort can be classified under right actions. Our interest here is mental effort. Now, there are seven other strands in the Noble Eight Fold Path. In order for any of these right, implies the need for mental effort. That is our concern here.

In other words suppose one is in the bad habit of going late to work, from a worldly point of view it is wrong action in connection with livelihood. If one wishes to change that bad habit, the mere wish will never actually change it. Mental effort must be gathered and invigorated so as to get a result. That is the relevance of right effort.

Why does effort subside? Effort too depends on thoughts, and the latter on consciousness. Consciousness has an inherent feature called life force, an energy that enlivens the other mental states. This energy like all other things has the nature of arising and ceasing, increasing and decreasing. Surrounding energy is required to increase the level of energy of the life force. In turn the energised life force can be harnessed to develop increased effort. This is not a circular argument. Dependencies are numerous and complex. Dependency is not one to one and back and forth.

The vital factor is a decision to put in effort. That helps to summon surrounding contributing factors. The contributing factors help to increase effort.

Sometimes we succeed in renewal of effort on our own in the normal course of events. Some times a shocking experience facilitates renewal. More often a trigger is the cause for renewal of effort. Triggers for renewal of effort could be provided by good friends, teachers, lectures, books, and the problems experienced by others.

Effort can also subside due to wasteful restlessness of the mind. Thoughts not supported by tentative views can grow haywire and the mind then tries to move in every direction and reach numerous objects at one span of time. Unable to reach any thing it will decide to go into a sort of sleep, technically described as sloth and torpor. In sloth and torpor, there is little opportunity to apply effort.

Good friends are valuable here too, as are likely to provide a trigger to help the person to get out of the mental slumber and inactivity.

Four standard avenues for the application of effort are discussed in the Dhamma. The first is effort to discard current unskilful actions, the second is to prevent the performance of unskilful actions so far not done, the third is to continue to perform current skilful actions, and the fourth is to perform skilful actions hitherto not done.

The sheer volume of effort is not important. The quality of effort is more important. Quality of effort is enhanced by developing mindfulness. It is also aided by developing right view. In fact the great discourse on the forty factors very clearly states that these three strands of the path, namely right effort, understanding (or view) and mindfulness operate cyclically supporting and promoting one another. This spiralling mental action helps to develop all the other strands of the path, firstly the morality strands, and then finally concentration.

The author submits that the faculty of concentration fully developed opens another cyclical operation, namely the energising and illumination of the entire path. That includes effort again. Hence the lower cycle gets invigorated and this is why continued and ardent practice becomes successful.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (11) RIGHT MINDFULNESS AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

THE IDEA OF MINDFULNESS

As mentioned before, right mindfulness is almost a one word summary of Buddhism. If you really understand what mindfulness is and if you are always mindful, then the rest will almost automatically follow. The famous Great Discourse on the Establishment of Mindfulness, states that right mindfulness is the key to progress on the noble eight fold path and thence to enlightenment. At some points it says that this is in fact the only way.

Health is important for sustained effective practice and in fact it is necessary for success and happiness in life. Western medical researchers have clearly demonstrated that right mindfulness contributes to developing and maintaining good health, even when certain life threatening diseases set in. Medical practitioners use mindfulness meditation to help patients recover from serious illnesses.

The terms presence of mind, awareness, attention and memory have similar meanings but not exactly the meaning of mindfulness in Buddhism. Awareness often relates to knowledge as to current or past experiences, but may involve thinking, assessing, choosing or rejecting such experiences. Attention too may be similar. Memory is the result of an experience and is not an action like being aware or paying attention. Characteristics of right mindfulness includes, mental dynamism every moment, and yet excludes getting involved in thinking, assessing, choosing, rejecting, liking or disliking and so on. Bare awareness and bare attention are terms invented to get closer to the Buddhist idea of right mindfulness.

In an elementary and practical sense right mindfulness begins from simply knowing where you are, how you are, and having a general awareness of the current and proximate space and time co-ordinates. The term proximate is relative and cannot be defined in terms of centimetres or seconds. One needs to understand it in the current context. This simple idea of mindfulness is depicted by the terms presence of mind, being in the present, being in the 'now', and 'presence', though it can also mean a mental potentiality energising at a higher plane.

Once elementary physical mindfulness is established, it can be developed to include purely mental mindfulness meaning knowledge of what goes on in the mind. Again while one watches the things going on in the mind, one can also get into thinking about every thing observed. At the level of development at which that thinking is suspended and the mental activity is reduced to bare knowledge of what is going on, in a dynamic moment to moment basis, then we can say there is right mindfulness to that extent. It may not occur continuously, but can occur continually, intermittently, or even occasionally depending on how well the mind is trained.

Reviewing the above observations, it should now be understood that in a state of right mindfulness, a person 'knows' what goes on in the mind, what thoughts are trying to progress, what thoughts are going to cease, how a thought tries to extend, expand, ramify, get coloured with greed, hatred or confusion and so on. That knowledge is bare knowledge, and nothing more. What else can the mind do in addition to having bare knowledge? The mind can, as it usually does, try to evaluate each mental occurrence. How? For instance when a hateful thought comes in, the person could start why such a 'dirty thought' came in. That way hatred develops, and the mind will run a mile with that hatred. If that happens, the person is not simply having bare knowledge. The mind acquires involvements as usual.

So, we try to wean the mind off discursive troublesome thinking and make it dwell on bare knowledge of the mental processes going on, which is harmless.

THE PURPOSE OF MINDFULNESS

One can ask 'what is wrong with discursive thinking? Can we stop thinking or is it necessary to reduce thinking?'

When you are consciously trying to solve a problem or prepare a plan or programme, there is thinking. There is no harm with that. Suppose you are thinking about the past or the future, but you are not hundred percent conscious of the fact that you are thinking, then, you can expect trouble and damage. Why?

Suppose you get involved in a memory of a hated event. The thinking carries you deeper into the hatred. The hatred multiplies and you might start worrying. Dreaming of a fantasy you could similarly get carried deeper into greed and restlessness. This is what keeps happening to us most of the time and our troubles keep multiplying. If we are to reduce our troubles, this type of auto-thinking, without being conscious, must be reduced.

That is what we try to achieve through the development of right mindfulness.

THE MECHANICS OF MINDFULNESS

When there is mindfulness, the very fact that you notice the arrival of a wrong thought has the effect of pushing it away. It operates like a security guard at the gate of a factory, noticing an intruder using his security lights. The mere fact that the light is put on, results in the intruder running away.

Some intruders might not run away that easily. Then other techniques need to be applied. These are the methods and techniques we learn through the understanding and practice of the Dhamma and meditation.

Meditation is therefore a central pillar in Buddhist knowledge and practice. Mindfulness is one major result of meditation provided appropriate methods are used.

The sections on meditation contain a great deal more information on this subject.

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

The well known great discourse on mindfulness discusses in some detail what are called the four foundations of mindfulness. The four are, the body, feelings, mind and phenomena associated with the mind. It is not recommended that one should do all the meditations in each category. Even the mastery of the first meditation under the category of body would be sufficient to get established in mindfulness. This is in fact mindfulness on the fact of breathing in the simplest possible detail.

PART (1) SECTION (1) AN OUTLINE OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (12) RIGHT CONCENTRATION AS A STRAND OF THE PATH

THE IDEA OF CONCENTRATION

Concentration normally means bringing every thing into one small area. When the heat rays from the sun are concentrated using a convex lense, it is possible to burn a piece of dry paper. Normally the sun's rays do not burn things that easily. It is the concentration of the rays that resulted in the result of burning. It focuses energy into a small area. Concentration also means unification of mind.

It is obvious that calm facilitates concentration. Calm in the mind cannot arise if the body is not calm. That is why the observance of some code of discipline is necessary before trying to calm the mind. Five precepts or the eight precepts of livelihood are two sets of rules of training to consider prior to meditation.

Earlier we discussed the development of effort. If the effort we apply is concentrated the results will be better. For that the mind has to be trained in concentration. This is the primary idea of developing concentration.

In worldly life the value of concentration is often mentioned, particularly in connection with studies, solving problems, and generally in any work or community situation in which you try to achieve a result.

In a spiritual sense, concentration of mental energy on one point or one subject, or one matter treated as the object, is of great value in the practice of certain forms of meditation or at certain points in all types of meditation.

As the mind dwells exclusively on one point, by definition, all thoughts are eliminated, and as a result mental factors generating impurities in the mind also get eliminated. Hence concentration or one-pointedness by itself makes the mind wholesome, peaceful, and entirely calm. In perfect concentration it is called rapture or ecstasy. It is treated as an extremely pleasant experience. Rapture can occur at a few different levels.

Some systems of belief consider rapture to be nothing less than enlightenment and that it is an end in itself.

However, Buddhism considers rapture to be impermanent as it can be disturbed by external or internal factors. However, even according to Buddhism, concentration at the higher levels can be used as a stepping stone to realise the truth or in other words to attain enlightenment.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCENTRATION

Generally, meditation of every form helps in the development of concentration. However, there are specific methods and techniques that emphasise or fast track the development of concentration. Some of these are discussed in detail under meditation.

Breathing meditation is generally reckoned under the category of mindfulness development. However, it also results in the development of concentration, not on one physical point, but on a limited physical area, or a single physical activity.

PART (1) SECTION (2) RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRANDS OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (13) RELEVANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRANDS OF THE PATH

The individual strands of the path are difficult to practice without seeing the inter-connections. Again we look at the three relatively tangible elements of practice namely, thought, word and deed. One can say with some confidence that negative thoughts, words and deeds were avoided, and positive thoughts, words and deeds were cultivated to some extent. If we choose to be satisfied with this belief, we may stagnate at that level of very basic practice and run the risk of sinking to lower levels, given the slightest opportunity, and often quite unwittingly. So, the solution is to review recent practice and see where we failed, to what extent and why.

As thoughts are less tangible and as their characteristics are manifested in the resultant words and deeds, we may equally well examine our words and deeds.

Imagine a case where we did tell a lie. We may review and see that it was told to help get over a difficult situation with no serious intention to tell a lie. Still we may feel that we did the wrong thing. Why did that happen?

Maybe as the thought to tell the lie arose in my mind, I did not observe it arising; in an instant the thought got transformed into a lie. Now I might regret that it happened. What was the missing element of practice that caused it? It is the absence of *right mindfulness*. Had I been mindful, the moment the unskilful thought arose in my mind, I would have noticed that event. If I wanted I could have nipped it in the bud before the lie came out. If I were slower in talking and weighed things beforehand, I might have avoided the wrong words. We can discuss mindfulness later, but for now, a simple solution will be to observe in and out breathing as best as we could.

It may also be that I was not sure whether words I was about to utter was or was not a lie, according to the teaching. This would be a case of poor view or poor understanding. So we should try to develop *right understanding*. It is not just reading or hearing about it to gather knowledge. It is not even just realising the meaning of what we learned. It is conviction through self examination, looking at possible consequences, seeing the nature of a lie in all its ramifications, and using all the wisdom I could muster, understanding fully that it does not help us up the path, then that gets close to right understanding. The level of understanding can spiral upward, as we keep practising and reviewing the practice.

Suppose I thought that the mistake was trivial, and that it is alright, and do not think about it any more, then there is no *right effort*. This way stagnation or sinking down, are likely to result. The Buddha's last words were 'Be diligent, O'disciples.....' We have to develop diligence, and we cannot be lazy and inactive. We have to put in right effort at every turn. Good friends and a good environment help in developing right effort.

Yet another possibility is that I was thinking of ten different things at that time and I failed to notice that I was about to tell a lie. That is, I failed to bring the mind to bear on the matter. This is absence of *right concentration*.

So, we can see that in a little occurrence like telling a lie, the four less tangible aspects of the noble eight fold path do operate to our detriment.

Concerted methods of developing these four strands of the path are discussed later. Learning the Dhamma and practising meditation are two of them.

In the foregoing we discussed the simple case of telling a lie. The same considerations apply to cases in which we commit any of the negative behaviours listed before.

The more one examines actual experiences, the stronger one becomes in the practice. Not only that, each aspect of the practice is helped and buttressed by success in other aspects. In a group discussion, we should examine actual cases and cast the knowledge on to real situations to get convinced.

Discussion of the following illustrations may help one to deal with actual situations, so as to raise the level of practice. In each illustration, limited additional facts may be assumed, and the situation analysed. Kamma implications and the gravity of the kamma also can be discussed.

Kamma is a Pali word denoting the connection between an action and the result of the action, action here including thoughts, words and deeds. The law relating to Kamma states that an unwholesome action causes an unwholesome or painful result. A wholesome action causes a wholesome or pleasing result.

Names of people are A,B,C etc. The incidence of elements of the acts, specially intention and its intensity can be considered. For instance motive, planning, preparation, intention, results are common elements. Note that some cases are so complicated that we may never get the correct answer. In such cases, just pass them for the time being. Continued arguments are of no help in such cases.

Case (1): A, sees a woman behind a large tree; a sturdy and disturbed man B runs behind him and asks me, "Did you see a woman going this way?", and fearing what might happen, I say "no" to the man. Am I telling a lie? What are the reasons for my answer?

Case (2): A is charged with stealing. B his son saw the act. When questioned, B says he did not see things clearly. He feels sorry for his father. Is B telling lie?

Case (3): A, a security guard knows that B, who works with him, takes bribes. A, while having coffee in the canteen with friends excluding B, says that B, is a dishonest person and should never be trusted. Is A, spreading a slander?

Case (4): W, a woman takes no interest to discipline her son. All sorts of problems arise. H, the husband gets angry and speaks very harshly to W, threatening to kick her out if she does not take some action. All he wanted was to see that the child gets disciplined. Is H, committing the unskilful act of harsh speech?

Case (5): H, a husband, is very worried that his wife W, who is careless, might injure herself. So, he scolds his wife in harsh terms. Is this harsh speech?

Case (6): When we meet friends we keep talking about all sorts of things from the harshness of the weather to a war somewhere. The list of topics is endless. Analyse the skill or lack of it involved.

Case (7): In a mosquito infested area, a person P, kills the insects after they land, one after the other with no end. When asked P says, he does not want to get malaria, as his children will catch it when he returns home. Analyse his skill or lack of it.

Case (8): A high school girl who is pious says that she does not mind killing animals for studies as she wants to cure sick people when she becomes a doctor.

Case (9): In a certain Sinhala film, the son of a hunter says that he and his father would kill animals to make a living, and he teaches a child monk that it is really bad to kill an animal for fun. Analyse.

Case (10): Some people (not Buddhists!) wantonly kill believers of other religions seriously thinking that it is intended for the good of the world. There have been wars such as the crusades based on religion. Analyse.

Case (11): During a war, as the opponents get killed, some ordinary people celebrate. They seem to have a good reason for going to war. Analyse.

Case (12): A petty government officer regularly puts false travelling claims. When asked by a friend, he says he does not get the correct pay for the work he does. There is some truth in that too. He also says he cannot feed his children with his salary only. Analyse.

Case (13): An engineer E, instructs a road building contractor C, to deliver any excess bitumen to his house, as it might otherwise go waste. Actually he wants a bitumen driveway at little expense. He pays the contractor for his labour. Analyse the situation of E and C.

Case (14): Y, a young married man observes that the lady in the next house L, is thoroughly neglected by her husband, and treated harshly. Y feels sorry and placates L often. This relationship grows, as Y's wife is a doctor working far away. In fact the doctor also feels sorry for L. Things go very far. Analyse Y's behaviour.

Case (15): An old man M, who had never taken intoxicants, took to drinking suddenly, for the reason that his wife ill-treated him, which was also true. After some time he became violent and nearly killed his wife, who suffered serious injury in an altercation. Analyse.

PART (1) SECTION (2) RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRANDS OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (14) EFFORT AS A KEY NAVIGATION FACTOR OF THE PATH

Imagine an object essentially like a diving bell. It is ovular in shape, the height greater than the width. The object normally floats in the ocean but somewhere a lot below the surface. For some reason, some parts of the object accumulate dirt from outside due to osmosis or some other process. The dirt renders the object heavy, and slowly it goes further down. Strangely, the dirt absorption ratio increases as the object dives further down. The ocean is also increasingly dirty at lower levels, it is very deep, and so the object does not crash to the very bottom. Of course if something is not done to clean the dirt, it will some day crash to the bottom.

Imagine further, that the ocean is cycle of continued existence, the continuing cycle of birth and death, and the object is, my-self. In every life, I live in an environment polluted with dirt. I keep absorbing dirt and becoming heavy. The likely result is that I sink to a lower level, hopefully not to the bottom. I remember that a wise man told me, that if I float upward somehow, and reached the surface, I had a good chance of escaping the dirt around, and that my dear will be real bliss. But, how do I clear the dirt; it is accumulating at a high rate all the time. Sometimes I feel that others in my position who are also floating deep in this ocean are spreading their dirt. I might be wrong in making that assumption.

If I am lazy and I undertake very little cleaning action, I could be stagnating at the same or similar levels, but cannot rise up to escape the dirty surroundings. So, a major effort seems necessary.

The Buddha's last words implored us to be diligent, not to delay, not to be lazy, and we should therefore strive on with diligence towards our success and happiness goals or our spiritual goals, whatever we have chosen.

The momentum of progress itself keeps us moving forward if we do not pause. This does not always happen. How do we come back if we strayed away from diligent practice? The best way seems to be associating with good friends. A teacher also is treated as a good friend. A good friend will say or do things in such a way that we are prompted back into diligence. The more we improve in our practice, we become good friends to others and they reciprocate. This has been mentioned as the key to staying on the path. We can discuss this in detail later.

Reading a good book or listening to a good lecture also helps us to revive practice. Sometimes, a shocking experience or observing the shocking experience of another, tends to bring us back to practice.

Seeing a Buddha statue, a bodhi tree, holy sites, temples, sessions of practice as on a religious day, can also serve as triggers to practice.

After getting prompted by a trigger, how exactly do we revive the cleaning operation, to help us to rise up? The answer is in the effort-understanding-mindfulness cycle explained later. The key to navigating either at similar levels or navigating upward towards clean space is effort, and without that we would stagnate or sink to the bottom.

PART (1) SECTION (2) RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRANDS OF THE PATH

CHAPTER (15) THE ENERGISING EVM TRIO

What is EVM? E means effort, V means View or Understanding, M means mindfulness. These three strands of the path together form a powerful trio that serves a major purpose in advancing on the path.

We must develop right understanding to see how it relates to right effort and right mindfulness, not generally but as the middle link in a cyclical operation of these three aspects of the noble eight fold path. In particular, we learn a method of raising the level of our practice, simply by following a procedure recommended by the Buddha. It is clearly mentioned in the Discourse on the Forty Factors (Maha Cattarisaka Sutta).

To start with we should remember that for most of us, an external or internal trigger, prompts us to make the physical and mental effort to revive or develop our practice. When we start making such an effort, the next element is to make choices. Should I do this or not do this? Is this the best thing to do? Am I sorting out things correctly? Should I consult a person who knows more? So many questions come up in the mind. To the extent we are able to take the right view our choices will be more correct. So the application of initial right effort triggers right view or understanding.

In making the right choice, another arm of practice is called in. That is right mindfulness. While I am making choices, past perceptions come to the surface of the mind and tend to cloud the issue. To the extent that we have developed right mindfulness, we would be able to see such thoughts arising in the mind. We can catch the thief. When those confusing thoughts are noticed as they come up, without delay, we can let them pass. In other words when we do not pursue them or get involved, they get dissipated. So now we experience right mindfulness. Things become clearer.

Then, we get more energy to apply more effort. The result is more right view and more right mindfulness. Hence, a cycle starts operating, effort-view-mindfulness-effort-view-mindfulness and so on. One aspect triggers or prompts the other two. One aspect helps to nurture the other two. One aspect helps to support, buttress and strengthen the other two.

The cycle really operates in a spiralling manner. Gradually each completed cycle moves the level of practice upwards, as in a spiral.

While this cycle keeps operating in the mind, any thoughts arising in the mind tend to be right thoughts. Any speech emanating from such thoughts is bound to be right speech. Any action emanating from such thoughts is bound to be right actions. A livelihood based on right thought, word and deed is bound to be right livelihood.

Hence the continued operation of the above cycle continuously cleanses our behaviour. As our behaviour is cleansed, right concentration becomes gradually easier. Again, right concentration has the same effect, that is, it makes easier and stronger, all the other seven aspects of the noble eight fold path. In fact in the above discourse, the Buddha dwells on the development of right concentration and then illustrates how the strands of the path work together in unison for common benefit.

This teaching must not be looked at as another parcel of knowledge. In real life we must try the process out and observe how it works. Repeated trials give us the conviction that it does work for us. Incessant pursuit definitely takes us to higher levels of practice.

That would move us higher in the ocean of existence and at the right time, we would leave behind all dirt, all defilements, all attachments, and that is enlightenment. Short of that we are assured of success and happiness.

CHAPTER (16) THOUGHT, CONCENTRATION AND MINDFULNESS

Again we make an effort to improve right understanding. This time it will be in relation to types of meditation. Earlier we noted the importance of right mindfulness and right concentration in moving along the noble eight fold path. Mindfulness can be practised in a basic manner, and concentration develops accordingly. Some further study is necessary to improve both aspects. Both these form part of what we call meditation. It is time to understand meditation generally, and see where these two aspects of the path fit in. Moreover what is the connection of thoughts to meditation?

In general meditation is the cultivation of the mind, the development of the mind; both are helped by discipline of the mind.

The Buddha says that an untamed, lacking in discipline is the real cause of our troubles, and the lack of happiness. The study of the mind is a subject by itself, and it is not proposed to go into detail here. If we understand that discipline is generally useful and good, we shall proceed from the hypothesis that disciplining the mind is a useful exercise. Meditation helps to discipline the mind. How?

The nature of the mind is to incessantly rush towards sense objects, to dwell on them, and to rush towards memories of past experiences, often moving from one to the other so many times per second. In the process it loses energy, and hardly achieves any useful wholesome purpose capable of giving lasting happiness and satisfaction. Having got frustrated and fatigued, after rushing around, the mind gets into a state of inaction and inertia, sloth and torpor. It is not easy to pull it out of this state. Melancholy and depression may result. That is certainly not happiness.

Each meditation teacher has his own way of teaching meditation. The author has chosen the following sequence to learn and practice. However, our aim at this point is not to learn meditation but clear our minds about different forms of or ideas about meditation. We first try to get into a good posture, not too comfortable and not too hard. Then we examine our posture and verify it is alright. Already we are meditating, because the mind is dwelling on one subject, namely the posture of the body. In a small way it is *contemplative meditation*, with the body as the object of contemplation.

If I still do not seem relaxed, a *calming meditation* is useful. A set of calming meditations I could use are:-(1) counting from 1 to 10 slowly, and counting from 10 to 1 in reverse, repeating the process several times,(2) reviewing the five colours of the international Buddhist flag, blue, yellow, red, white and orange, and back in reverse order, several times, (3) imagining a cool water feature I have actually seen, as if I am there right now, and (4) feeling how relaxed and happy I am right now.

At this stage I should be relaxed and calm, and if not I could walk around a little and repeat the process. Given that a reasonable level of calmness has been established, I can now try one form of *mindfulness meditation*, namely breathing meditation. Initially, all I do is to observe the in-breath coming in through the nostril, and the out-breath going out. After a short time, I can feel near the nostril, that a stream of air comes in and then another goes out. Here I am mindful of the breath. A few things may disturb me every now and then, but that is alright. If nothing disturbs me, then probably I do not need any more meditation.

I can also try to practice concentrating on an object, initially on a physical object. A blob of light falling through a little hole in the roof is a good one. Any other object that is neither

attractive nor repulsive could be chosen. In *concentration meditation*, I try to keep my mind solely on the chosen. Again occasional diversions will occur, but that is alright.

When my mind is concentrating on a single object like the light, we might also notice the flickering of the light, that is, the ever changing nature of the light. That is insight into one of the three features of existence, namely impermanence. It really results from the concentration. We can call this insight or *insight meditation*. This can be done in many other situations.

At an elementary level we can do all these types of meditation. Many people are confused about these types of meditation and think too much of the classification. We should get over this barrier. Close examination of meditative experience will show that these different types of meditation except perhaps contemplative meditation can and do occur at the same time. These (calm, mindfulness, concentration) are only different aspects of the one consciousness. However, in a given situation one aspect might be stronger than the others.

For instance, when I am doing breathing (mindfulness) meditation, my mind is calm, and it is also concentrating, the object being the flow of air through the nostril. So, one type of meditation does not eliminate the other. They co-exist, in varying intensities.

CHAPTER (17) EFFORT, MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

Here again we have a combination of strands of the path that makes the practice of each for fruitful. In particular, the practice of effort and mindfulness contribute to the development of concentration. Effort leads to the will to revive or commence practice and then to stay on it, as well as to enhance practice.

The 'four right efforts' are recommended. These were discussed under effort. In fact these four are considered pre-requisites of concentration.

The arousing of the four types of mindfulness is regarded as an indication that the mind is getting concentrated. These are discussed under the heading mindfulness.

These considerations indicate that concentration and mindfulness need not be looked at as two separate things to achieve independently.

At this stage it would be useful to review the chapters on effort and mindfulness.

PART (1) SECTION (2) RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STRANDS OF THE PATH **Chapter (18) Speech, Action and Livelihood as a combination**

When we consider thought as a primary base for all activity, we can see that speech and action emanate from that base, namely, thoughts. One can question why there cannot be any speech not based on thoughts, and action not based on thoughts. The presumption is that it is impossible. Even a 'thoughtless' word or bodily action is rooted in thoughts however brief or weak the thoughts might be. It is possible that such thoughts are too quick, impulsive, careless, misguided, or that the thinker is hardly aware of the incidence of such thoughts. Still it is a fact that a thought necessarily preceded a word or an action.

Often we hear people saying 'I never thought about it before saying it', but that is just not true. The fact is that the thinking in such cases might have been wrong or inadequate.

What about reflex actions? The first question is what 'reflex' means. Scientists say that when messages are conveyed to the brain for decision and determining responses to stimuli, if there is imminent danger the messages are short-circuited at some proximate point in the body, and a response decision is communicated very quickly to appropriate limbs and organs. Such responses are called reflex actions. In such cases we can interpret such actions as body functions having nothing to do with the mind (operating through the brain). According to Buddhism such actions are not classified as actions proper. They just happen. The individual is not responsible because the thought process does not occur. There can be other interpretations too but we shall not enter into academic argumentations.

Thoughts are not tangible and not easily recognised. Hence rather than trying to refine our thoughts, it is easier to do something about the consequences of thoughts, namely, speech, bodily action, and livelihood. The latter can be treated as a confluence of thought, speech and action.

After the event we can review our words and deeds and discern what type of thoughts prompted us to resort to such words or deeds. We can also review their consequences. Then we need to make determinations as to improved behaviour in the future. If this kind of simple down to

earth practice is gradually developed, all other strands of the path also get refined with little additional effort.

In short, this combination of thought, word, deed and livelihood, enables us to keep our practice easy and simple; it means doing the do-able without complaining about the not so do-able things.

Chapter (19) Right View and Thought Equating to Wisdom

Right view or understanding and right thoughts can be regarded as the two foremost factors determining efficacy and efficiency in the progress up the path. The reason is that these two strands working together amount to wisdom. Wisdom is articulated through correct thinking. The correctness of thinking is facilitated by taking the correct direction. The correct direction is determined by narrowing down angle of view. Deep understanding helps in choosing the right view. Conversely, right view results in wise pursuits including wise thinking. Hence, there is a sort of interdependence among wisdom, right thought, right view and right understanding.

Wisdom in this context and generally in the context of Buddhism is the ability to sort out between right and wrong things. It is neither intelligence nor knowledge, though both these might help in enhancing wisdom. However, it needs to be realised that knowledge of the teaching is valuable in choosing the right view, because the teaching itself sorts things for us to a great extent and as a result we know what is wholesome and what is unwholesome.

Thinking of the teaching and examining (that is also thinking) how the teaching applies in real day to day life is highly recommended. That is the only way to keep out blind faith. The conviction (albeit tentative) that we gain from experience settles the right direction for us. Once the right direction is chosen, a great deal of efficacy and efficiency results, as otherwise we would be trying endless methods and endless lines of thought and action causing waste of time, energy and other resources.

There is a presumption here that guided development is economical, because in effect we borrow the wisdom of the Buddha at every stage. This is reasonable as all research and development in whatever field of study and practice take off from the existing bases of knowledge. Even the Buddha of the present era commenced earnest practice along the path using the guidance of past Buddhas, although his final realisation of enlightened was unguided. It is recommended that the teaching and the help of those practising the teaching intensely be used to one's advantage. We need not re-invent the wheel.

SECTION (3) BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

Chapter (20) Introductory Notes Relating to Buddhist Philosophy

Philosophy is often for the erudite, abstract, academic, speculative, argumentative, logical, or sometimes pathetically just begging the question. On the other hand Buddhist philosophy is based on facts of life as experienced by any and every individual. Buddhist philosophy presents one or more hypotheses and invites us to test their validity in our own experience. There is an inherent challenge to look for contradictions. Why and how does a thing happen? Is there a sensible intelligible reason for it? These are the questions we try to answer.

Buddhism is certainly not materialism, it has little to do with idealism, and it is relatively closer to realism. Mind is supreme in Buddhism although we see it existing in association with a material body. The morals and practices in Buddhism all relate to day to day living and hardly any emphasis is placed on idealism. It is however true that certain achievements mentioned in Buddhism are supra-mundane and to ordinary people these may sound more like ideals than real things.

In the following chapters, a few selected topics pertaining to Buddhist philosophy are considered in the hope that these considerations will closely relate to day to day practice as a Buddhist.

Chapter (21) *The Three Features of Existence*

Whatever we do or experience needs to have some acceptable common basis. Normally such a basis when it is fundamental is called a philosophy. Buddhism recommends a way of life that brings success and happiness on a day to day basis. That happiness can be developed to a worldly spiritual level and then with more concerted practice to a very high spiritual level culminating in enlightenment, the ultimate of all achievements. If it promises so much it must have some philosophical backing.

Buddhist philosophy is based on three hypotheses as to the nature of all existence. The *first hypothesis* is that all worldly things are subject to what can be called the law of impermanence. The *second hypothesis* is that all worldly existence has the nature of unsatisfactoriness. The *third hypothesis* is that in relation to a living being, there is no abiding, substantial, eternal entity that can be treated as a soul.

The first hypothesis is also stated as the law of change. There is nothing in this world that is permanent. Things that seem to be permanent in fact do change over a long period of time. This is true of the entire universal system or a minute component such as the atom. Not all changes are visible in the normal way. It is an interesting challenge to look for some thing that seems permanent. So far no one seems to have found one. One of the tenets of Buddhism is that nothing need be accepted just because someone else says it, and even if the Buddha taught it. So we keep searching; while searching we can accept the hypothesis as a working basis.

The second hypothesis is apparently a derivative of the first one. At least some things that seem to exist now are desirable and we can reasonably expect such things to satisfy us, or to be satisfactory once we get them. Once we get them, suppose it gives us satisfaction. After a while due to the law of change even what we thought was satisfactory will change. The change causes dissatisfaction. That is only one possibility.

Another possibility is that once we got the thing sought, we might end up with no satisfaction or even dissatisfaction. This could be due to many reasons. I could have changed, the thing could have changed, or conditions could have changed.

We keep seeking after things inherently because of this feature of unsatisfactoriness. Little satisfactions too are fleeting, thus importing unsatisfactoriness.

The third hypothesis is connected to both the first and second ones. The law of change itself implies that there is no eternal self. We build our identity using our likes and dislikes as we get experiences with the world. The world includes the world within us. We pile up our perceptions in our memory. But our perceptions were in fact created by things in the world. Then we attributed certain qualities to them. So, various stimuli create responses from within on the basis of perceptions. We identify these as ours. Yet, apart from the stimuli, there would be no such perceptions. Hence there is nothing solid, abiding or substantial to call a self.

All that is there is a stream of experiences. Even these cannot be separated entirely as mine or ours. Experiences are shared and conditioned. Further reading in Buddhist psychology can help to increase our understanding of the no-self concept, which is unique to Buddhism.

Chapter (22) *The Four Noble Truths*

The four noble truths enunciated by the Buddha in his very first discourse are treated as the basis of Buddhist philosophy. Interestingly the four truths also embody the three features of existence discussed before, namely, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and the idea of no-self. Stated briefly these four truths are as follows:

- 1 That there is unsatisfactoriness in existence
- 2 That there is a cause for that phenomenon, that being craving
- 3 That there is a cessation of that unsatisfactoriness via the ending of craving
- 4 That there is a way to reach that cessation, also called the noble eight fold path

Unsatisfactoriness is obvious in cases such as birth, ageing, disease and death, having to associate with people who cannot be liked, having to dissociate from people who are liked, generally not getting whatever one wants to get, and the painful experiences of day to day ordinary life. We can say this is unsatisfactoriness caused by visible and tangible, commonly acknowledged suffering.

There are two other categories of unsatisfactoriness. One is that caused by the very fact that a living being and the rest of the world are all conditioned, that is to say a thing or being exists in a particular way as a result of prevailing relevant conditions and these conditions keep changing. The being finds that it is not an abiding entity. It is composed of changing things. The being tries to hold on to itself as an entity, as an entity enjoying whatever it likes to enjoy, but it fails to hold on to itself or whatever was owned. Its body or form, its feelings, sensations, perceptions, other mental formations, and consciousness are all fleeting and are in a state of flux. These aggregates as they are called are discussed in Buddhist psychology. The disillusionment resulting from being unable to hold on to oneself, gives rise to unsatisfactoriness, which is somewhat subtle.

The third type of unsatisfactoriness arises directly from the feature of impermanence of all things. At one moment a being feels happiness, and in the next whatever caused the happiness has gone. That very fact causes a kind of pain and it is also unsatisfactoriness.

When these three types are examined closely, they are really unsatisfactoriness based on the three features of existence, namely, gross pain, no-self and impermanence. The being is not steady, the world is not steady, and therefore there is no basis for steady and continued satisfaction.

If we think that this unsatisfactoriness ought to be eradicated, we should look for its cause, and try to eradicate the cause. The **cause in this case is craving**. As we saw before, the very fact of existence imports unsatisfactoriness. The cause of existence the Buddha taught is craving. We keep seeking or craving for sense pleasures, craving for continued existence and even craving for non-existence. While fleeting pleasures are possible, what predominates is unsatisfactoriness. Craving is not to be treated as a singular cause. Craving is multi-faceted, and craving itself is conditioned by many other factors. In reality the cause of unsatisfactoriness is a complex ever changing matrix of conditionality and craving is an obvious link to that complex.

Delightful experience is not the only thing connected to craving. Things we hate also give rise to craving in that we crave for their absence or annihilation. So both greed and hatred fuels

craving. Craving is like a force or energy stream resulting in the continuation of worldly existence. This inherent force is called Kamma. Craving implies attachment and grasping.

The third noble truth is the **cessation of unsatisfactoriness**. This is attained by the ending of craving. The result is called enlightenment. The Buddha and all other enlightened beings experienced enlightenment and described it. However, it is difficult to explain or understand this idea using worldly experiences. The terms we use are likely to be misleading. The absolute peace, serenity, and happiness in the attainment of enlightenment give some indication of what it enlightenment means. Release from bondage and attachment are other similar words. These are all words of comparison and relativity. Peace for instance is understood against turmoil. Enlightenment is beyond relativity.

Enlightenment is also described as the total shattering of ignorance, stupidity, confusion, delusion and darkness of mind. On the other hand it is also the attainment of absolute wisdom, total knowledge. The very word Buddha signifies wisdom.

The fourth noble truth is that there is a **way to enlightenment**, and the Noble Eight-Fold Path is that way. The path has been discussed in detail elsewhere.

Chapter (23) The No-Self Theory

This is a distinctive pillar in Buddhist philosophy. It has been described briefly as part of the three features of existence. The four noble truths are closely connected to this idea.

All other religions assume the existence of a permanent, substantial entity within every person that had been given by a divine authority called almighty god. That entity commonly called a soul hopefully joins that authority after death to enjoy peace and happiness thereafter. Otherwise that entity is condemned to hell for ever. Hence this entity within a person is also closely connected with the idea of eternity. This life is then understood to be a tiny dot between two eternities. According to Buddhism, this idea of a soul is a false view.

Who created this false view and for what reason? We ourselves have created the idea of a permanent soul within us. Every one of us is gifted with some possessions, at least the body. Some people have a great deal of possessions, properties, businesses, jobs, fame, power, children, parents, relatives, friends and a lot more. What we possess for the time being, we want to possess for ever, we want to own them excluding all others. That is to say that we want to protect what we have from others and from the environment. Hence, the idea of separating ourselves from others arises. At that point we can see the formation of the self or soul concept. The more we crave for things, the more we try to preserve what we have gained, the stronger is our feeling of self.

The question arises as to whether those things we consider as ours exist on a permanent basis and within our control. Firstly, we have already seen that nothing is permanent and secondly our ideas about them keep changing. What is it then that we are trying to hold on to? There is no clear positive answer. Hence, the very idea of ownership is shaky. Therefore the concept of self which created the idea of ownership is also shaky.

Has any one found where the soul is? What are its features? Is it indestructible? Is it everlasting? So many questions need to be answered. We have made assumptions but so far no answers have been found in relation to the existence of a soul.

The idea of a soul serves no useful purpose. All that it does is to create confusion and delusion. We are simply deceiving ourselves. We probably will not lose anything even if we discard the idea of a soul completely. In fact the more we nurture the idea of a soul the more damage do we incur. Our stupidities, idiosyncrasies, lack of happiness and contentment, lack of peace within, our inability to relate well to others can all be reduced if only we can discard this idea of a soul.

Just because I have a name I need not conclude that there is a soul by that name; it is only a name for the convenience of every one. We give names to passing phenomena like fire, water, and air, and also to beings such as animals. We do not attribute souls to any of these.

Science says and it has been proved to some extent that physical body and other physical things are nothing but collections of ongoing processes. The mind is also nothing but a collection of processes such as thinking, attitudes, memories and the like. In this picture there is no room and there is no need for a soul.

In the very first stage of enlightenment, the idea of a soul is dissipated. Then only further spiritual advancement becomes possible.

Chapter (23) Conditionality

Conditionality is an underlying tenet of Buddhist philosophy as it is of modern science. All things are conditioned by other things in a complex ongoing system of causations. There is a law of dependent origination enunciated by the Buddha. The purpose of the law is to help people to understand the unsatisfactoriness of continuing existence, in repeated births and deaths. It is stated as a sequence of links including birth and death. What causes birth, and what causes death? The sequence discloses a link that can be broken by a person with his own effort. This is craving. The following are the links in this law in the standard sequence:

Ignorance

Volitional mental formations

(Rebirth) Consciousness

Mentality and materiality

Sense bases or sense platforms

Contact

Feeling

Perception

Craving

Grasping

Becoming (or birth)

Sickness, old age and death; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Firstly, these twelve links can be re-arranged in many different ways, and there will be as many sequences of conditioning. There can be reversals on the above sequence. Several links can occur together and they can together have a combination of effects. Essentially the above sequence depicts a common observable sequence of causation in regard to a living being.

It will be useful to think how each of these links can or cannot be disabled or destroyed through the study of the Dhamma and through meditation. The link we need to break finally is craving. However, it is more feasible to disable grasping in stages.

It must be noted that there are alternative linkage patterns of causation mentioned in Buddhist texts. The idea of inter-dependencies and the key links are always there in whatever pattern.

Conditioning ceases upon enlightenment.

Chapter (24) Kamma

There is no English equivalent of this Pali word. Volitional activity is sometimes used by writers. Mental activity sometimes, or rather most often, carries a potential result. A wholesome action brings a wholesome result, and an unwholesome action brings an unwholesome result. For example if one is generous one is rewarded with plenty. If one misbehaves, the result is illness. So, every action seems to have a corresponding result in the future. There seems to be a universal law connecting future results with current actions. Our past actions are currently bringing results or they will in the future.

This is known as the law of kamma. It is a particular law of causation that emanates from mentality, but capable of having an impact on both materiality and mentality. To illustrate, if one entertains hatred in one's mind, the consequences can be seen in mental pain as well as in body pain, or even in physical losses, which might indirectly cause pain of mind.

There is a law but there is no law giver. It is regarded as a natural law. There are no agencies managing the enforcement of the law although some might get involved in setting the scene for results.

The law of kamma does not imply fatalism as commonly assumed. Buddhist psychology asserts the importance of free will. Suppose someone is now in a bad way presumably because of past bad actions. Can that person get out of it? Certainly he can, by turning over a new leaf. There might be delays or partial limitations, but the basic fact that man has control of his future, is not compromised at all.

The law of kamma attracts a sense of personal responsibility for one's present condition, at least in part. This is very useful concept in deed. It seems more sensible to take responsibility on ourselves than attribute it to others or to a creator or other powerful being.

This law prompt us to be active and diligent, to pursue good the whole time and to eliminate bad at the same time.

This law is not peculiar to Buddhist thinking, but the particular stand-point of Buddhism is unique. There is no law giver, and there is no need for fatalism.

A question that arises is whether every thing is caused by kamma. Definitely, the answer is an emphatic no. This is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Another point of interest is the timing of results. For instance some actions might bear immediate results and others with a little delay or a great deal of delay. It is too much of detail to discuss here.

Is the result exactly equal to the cause, or is it determined in a particular way? The primary consideration is the intensity of the mental states attaching to the causative thoughts. For instance was the anger intense or was it mild?

It also depends on the conditions prevailing at the time of fruition of the kamma. For instance if one is about to reap a bad result of an earlier action, and it so happened that a mild storm unfortunately became a violent storm, the result might become worse due to the complication.

The strict position is that the assessment of results of actions belongs to the category of imponderables, at least from the point of view of ordinary beings like ourselves.

Units of kamma will also interfere with one another. For example, a bad kamma could be diminished because of a good kamma that existed before or just being created. That is the reason why Buddha taught diligence that is, to be active on the good side all the time.

Chapter (25) *The Five Great Universal Norms and Their Inter-Actions*

Current events can be attributed to the operation of five different systems of natural laws. These orders or types of processes operating in the mental as well as the physical realms are:

- 1 Physical inorganic order
- 2 Physical organic order
- 3 Kamma order
- 4 Other natural orders
- 5 Mentality order

The very fact that there are five systems shows clearly that kamma does not determine every thing that happens.

The **physical inorganic order** corresponds to what is taught in physical science including physics, chemistry, technology, engineering, geography, geology, astronomy, mathematics and the like. Common examples are rain and wind, lightning, radiation, heat and cold.

The **physical organic order** corresponds to what is taught in botany and zoology, the better part of medicine, birth and death, illnesses, agriculture, gene technology, DNA technology and the like. Common examples are wheat growing from wheat seeds, effect of genetics on family illnesses.

The **kamma order** has been discussed above. The explanation of infant prodigies, so called natural talents, some personal characteristics, character traits and strong tendencies, some great fortunes and misfortunes fall under this category.

Other natural orders cover a miscellaneous group. Natural human values such as the inclination to be good in general, unusual things that sometimes happen apparently not in keeping with other known systems, are examples. The appearance and co-existence of different types of beings who might not conform to the other known norms, super-normal powers unexplained by the other known systems, are also possible candidates suggested by the author.

The **mentality order** corresponds to what is taught in most of Western psychology, Buddhist psychology and other systems dealing with the mind. The way the mind works, the idea of consciousness, unusual powers of the mind, the idea of memory, individuality, the idea of a soul, emotions, mental formations, are some examples. Clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, thought reading, remembering past lives, premonitions, psychic powers, meditation and mind development in general belong to this category.

In passing it is mentioned that the mentality order and the kamma order have some close connections.

Buddhist philosophy and psychology also indicate that the mentality order has the capacity to exercise a significant and deciding control over all the other norms. The attainment of mental powers and the idea of enlightenment are two examples.

Chapter (26) *Buddhist Attitude to the Idea of an Almighty God*

Buddhism does not accept the idea of an almighty god of any form or name. Even the idea of a creator god, maintenance god or destructor god as espoused in Hinduism has no place in Buddhism. In regard to such ideas of god Buddhism differs from all other religions including Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By the same token Buddha did not want to be regarded as god or a messenger of god as some Hindus want us to believe. Some want us to believe that Buddha was a reincarnation of God.

Human history suggests that the idea of god has been created by people who were unable to understand the marvels of nature, natural disasters, and the structure of the universe, were afraid of whoever was behind all these. After all in normal mundane life if something happened we are used to looking for someone who did it. Hence, even in the case of this universe which was hard to comprehend, where there were a lot of things that were frankly frightening to most of us, it was comforting to believe that there was someone up there having his almighty way. What can we do except to pray to him and plead to spare us from the worries he often hands out? That could perhaps explain the origin of God Almighty. The Buddha was emphatic in denying the concept of such a powerful god.

In Buddha's time, there were sacrificial ceremonies on a grand scale, all aimed at appeasing god during difficult periods. He was unequivocally dismissive of such futile practices. He suggested many meaningful alternatives to deal with fear of the unknown.

The Buddha asked people to take responsibility for their actions and the results that follow. No amount of appeasing unseen powers could help them to avoid the consequences of their actions. That in fact is the theory of kamma. Like gravitation, kamma is a natural law; there is no need to create a god to enunciate and enforce that law. Enforcement capability is inbuilt into the law of cause and effect and specifically into the law of kamma.

Kamma itself is not all pervading as there are four other types of natural laws working together side by side. These laws are discussed in a later chapter.

One can ask why these natural laws cannot be treated as God Almighty. First we should ask you 'is that necessary?' Secondly, if that is your preference we can only say 'god help you' as you are creating additional confusion, one more delusion and a problem that will eventually gobble you. In the name of god we can ask the question why people are killing one another in the millions in the name of that very same god.

If that is the thinking in Buddhism, why are there so many references to gods of various descriptions in Buddhist scriptures? Those are different types of beings. We have no reason to assume that the few billions of human we know of, and trillions of animals are the only inhabitants of this universe. In the first place how much of this great universe have we seen or even heard of? It is very little indeed.

Gods mentioned in scriptures and commentaries, just like us are born, live for some time and then they die. Buddhists do not give them power to control the world. There is no doubt these gods have some unusual powers, probably according to their kamma. Even among us there are people who have unusual powers, but even those things vanish after a period of time. When kamma finishes its run time too runs out. Even god is subject to that law just like all of us.

SECTION (4) BASIC BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

Chapter (27) Relevance of Buddhist Psychology

Do we encounter any problems within our minds, and if we do, how can we deal with such problems? The truth is that there are endless problems bothering the mind nearly all the time, and that either we cannot think of suitable solutions to such problems, or we do not know how best to realise such solutions without incurring collateral damage or the import of more problems.

Western psychology is attempting to answer this question, but it will take more time to grow as the subject is only about 100 years old. Buddhist psychology has been around for nearly 2600 years providing solutions to all the common problems confronted by people in relating to others and in understanding themselves. Moreover, the knowledge embodied in Buddhist psychology is based on the super-knowledge developed by the Buddha intuitively on attaining enlightenment.

The history of Buddhism is the history of people who made their daily lives better by learning Buddhist psychology and applying that knowledge to living. It is the history of millions who got over all problems by attaining enlightenment. It is a subject worth studying and applying in our daily lives.

There is however a common complaint that some of the treatises on Buddhist psychology are difficult to read and understand. It is possible that the ancient books were written by highly advanced writers having in mind similarly advanced readers. There are many modern books on Buddhist psychology or at least some aspects of it that are relatively easy to understand. “Basic Buddhist Psychology: the Building Blocks” by Rahu Sarath-Chandra¹, the present author is a book in this category.

If the environment causes us problems, either there is something wrong with it, or we are taking it wrongly. If the temperature in the room seems to be too high, it might be that the settings of the air conditioner are wrong, and we can correct it. If there is no AC and I cannot afford one, then I cannot solve the external problem. Still, I should be able to solve the internal problem occurring in my mind. It is quite possible that someone else in the same room feels that the temperature is alright. In this case my problem is inside my mind and I should be able to solve it without arguing with other people about the level of comfort required by human beings which is very airy fairy.

How can I solve the problem in my mind? Buddhist psychology can provide ample answers that have helped many others before. Let us proceed to get a glimpse of Buddhist psychology.

It must be made clear that Buddhist psychology is a vast subject, and that it is impossible to summarise it in a few chapters as here. Our attempt here is simply to give a glimpse as to the basic contents of the subject, to create enough interest for the reader to take it up later as needs arise and resources permit.

Chapter (28) The Structure of the Mind

The mind is very elusive and we cannot see or hear it any where. How is the mind structured, and what are its main components? For convenience of discussion we can treat the mind as having a core element called consciousness and innumerable peripheral elements called mental states. Thinking is done using both elements through what we call thoughts. Things that we experience are kept recorded in an area of the mind called memory. That is a good enough summary of the components of the mind.

Since mental states are innumerable a selection of 52 commonly found mental states is taken as representative of all mental states. This set is composed of the following:

1. Seven neutral mental states that are always present
2. Six neutral mental states that arise when required
3. Fourteen unwholesome mental states
4. Twenty five wholesome mental states

The core of the mind that is consciousness keeps ticking over with time maybe doing nothing of particular importance except just continuing to live. It is when any of the mental states get energised and impinges on consciousness, that the latter is observed to be active, either on the good side or on the bad side subject to a few exceptions. We become good or bad people depending on which mental states are active most of the time.

A few examples of things that happen around us will help illustrate this point. Suppose a student is studying. Then the mental state of concentration is energised. Suppose he is about to start in a sprint event. Then the mental state of mindfulness is energised as he waits to hear the start signal. If his mother calls him by name, the mental state of attention gets energised. If he gets the smell of food from the kitchen, he might start thinking of eating the food, and then the mental state of greed might get energised. As we look back this series of experiences of a student, it is obvious how his activities or behaviour will change in response to the various mental states that get energised some influencing others. He could easily get disturbed in studies. He can summon the mental state of decision, and move to close the door to prevent the food smell disturbing him. If he had energised the mental state of joy in relation to studies, he will manage the disturbances. If his little sister pushed the door open just for fun he might get angry energising his mental state of hatred. He could have closed the door again calmly and without anger.

To the extent that we learn and understand mental states, we would be able to apply that knowledge so as to manage our mental states without doing foolish things only to regret later. That is the value of learning Buddhist psychology.

In the above example concentration is one of the *seven neutral mental states that are always present*. Some people know how to energise concentration and so succeed in life, while others who do not know fail.

Decision and joy are two mental states belonging to the second category of optional neutral mental states that can be summoned when required.

Greed and hatred belong to the set of unwholesome mental states. Calm belongs to the set of wholesome mental states.

One can ask ‘so what?’ in the belief that these things always have to happen, one way or the other. No it is not so, there is a choice. We can choose what mental states should get energised, and thereby successfully manage our lives. We have to learn how to do that.

The well known fifty two mental states are listed below under the above four categories, the first column in English and the second in Pali.

The seven neutral mental states that are always present in consciousness but can be energised individually by training

1. Contact	Phassa
2. Sensation	Vedana
3. Perception	Sanna
4. Volition	Cetana
5. One-Pointedness	Ekaggata
6. Psychic Life	Nama Jivitindriya
7. Attention	Manasikara

The six neutral mental states that arise when required depending on training

1. Initial application	Vitakka
2. Sustained application	Vicara
3. Decision	Adhimokkha
4. Effort	Viriya
5. Joy	Piti
6. Intent to act	Chanda

The fourteen unwholesome mental states that are controllable through learning and practice

1	Delusion or ignorance (F3)	Moha
2	Shamelessness	Ahirikam
3	Fearlessness (to commit wrong, and the consequences)	Anottappam
4	Restlessness	Uddhacca
5	Attachment or greed (F1)	Lobha
6	Misbelief (holding on to wrong views)	(Miccha) Ditthi
7	Conceit	Mana
8	Hatred (F2)	Dosa
9	Jealousy	Issa
10	Avarice	Macchariya
11	Worry	Kukkucca
12	Sloth	Thina
13	Torpor	Middha
14	Doubt	Vicikiccha

The twenty five wholesome mental states that can be developed through learning and practice

GROUP (A): MENTAL STATES COMMON TO WHOLESOMENESS

1	Confidence	Saddha
2	Mindfulness	Sati
3	Shame	Hiri
4	Fear (dread)	Ottappam
5	Non-attachment (F1)	Alobho
6	Non-hatred (goodwill) (F2)	Adoso
7	Equanimity	Tatramajjhata
8	Tranquillity of mental states	Kayapassaddhi
9	Tranquillity of mind	Cittapassaddhi
10	Lightness of mental states	Kayalahuta
11	Lightness of mind	Cittalahuta
12	Pliancy of mental states	Kayamuduta
13	Pliancy of mind	Cittamuduta
14	Adaptability of mental states	Kayakammannata
15	Adaptability of mind	Cittakammannata
16	Proficiency of mental states	Kayapagunnata
17	Proficiency of mind	Cittapagunnata
18	Rectitude of mental states	Kayaujjukata
19	Rectitude of mind	Cittujjukata

GROUP (B): MENTAL STATES CONNECTED TO TANGIBLE PRACTICE

20	(Mental state of) right speech	Sammavaca
21	(Mental state of) right action	Sammakammanto
22	(Mental state of) right livelihood	Sammaajivo

GROUP (C): MENTAL STATES OF ILLIMITABLES

23	Compassion	Karuna
24	Appreciative joy	Mudita

GROUP (D): MENTAL STATE OF WISDOM

25	Wisdom	Panna
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As to the manner in which these mental states occur, mature or diminish the reader is referred to any good book on Buddhist Psychology. A simple book in this category is 'Basic Buddhist Psychology: The Building Blocks' by Rahu Sarath-Chandra. The common technique of developing the ability to handle these mental states properly is meditation, discussed briefly in later chapters.

Chapter (29) Perceptions and Memory Affecting Our Lives

The opening paragraphs of the following discussion are either taken from or extracted from '*Basic Buddhist Psychology: The Building Blocks*' by Rahu Sarath-Chandra.

We have seen before that the mind assumes the character of the mental states that predominate at a given time. Of the 52 mental states that were considered there were seven that are always present in the mind or rather in the consciousness. Perception is one of them. It is at position 3 in the list given in chapter 27.

Sensation, which comes just before perception in the list of the seven perpetual mental states, can be treated as an exact representation of an object impacting on one of the six senses. The eye sense would be the easiest to deal with. So, when the person sees an object, the sensation is an exact reflection of the object, assuming that the eyes are functioning properly and that there is enough light.

However, rarely do we see things as they are. As the three things namely, the object, the eye and consciousness occur at the same time, with the eye door and the mind eye door both open, a sensation results. Thus we say that an eye-sense platform or an eye sense base is created. From such a sense platform, many mental activities are performed.

One of these activities is the comparison of similar objects that had been seen before. The similarity might not be hundred or ninety percent, but sometimes much less. It could be that one prominent feature of the two objects is similar. The mind tries to rely on a picture in memory of a similar object in order to understand the current object. The usual result is that the sensation is mixed up with the picture in the memory, and a new third picture is formed in the mind and descends into memory.

Thereafter the person thinks that the third picture is a correct reflection of the object now under consideration. The true reflection is now irrelevant. Theory aside, this can easily be tested in actual experience. It is this third picture that we call perception.

Suppose we remove the object and allow the person to think of his experience. It is quite possible that a little later he would get another comparison, and cause another perception to arise. What are the implications of this phenomenon?

We do not deal with the world as it is, but with the world we believe there is, based on billions of our own perceptions.

We should not rush to the conclusion that perceptions are all harmful all the time. From a short term point of view, some perceptions can be useful. For instance, that the mother is the safest person to rely on is very useful for a child. Even that can be harmful in the long term as for instance, after marriage, at least part of the reliance must move to the spouse.

We can arrive at one useful conclusion at this stage. Assuming that all our words and actions emanate from thoughts in the mind, if we seek success and happiness in life, then we need to manage the mind. Managing perceptions would be a crucial element in effective management of the mind. That assertion will apply regardless of whether perceptions are good or bad in common parlance.

Some techniques of managing perceptions will be briefly introduced later. At this stage we need to examine some ramifications of perceptions, so that we can really see the significance of perceptions in day to day life.

SIGN THEORY OF PERCEPTIONS

Earlier we referred to a perception as a secondary altered replica of an object within the purview of one of the six senses, and we used an object seen by the eye as an example.

When a complex object is considered this is not entirely true. Say the object was fireworks on new-year's eve. The entire event is too much to remember. *Thus we try to keep in memory a kind of summary of the event.* A person might remember it as the *best ever fireworks* he had seen. If he tried to remember the details he would see almost everything good he had seen in all fireworks.

The term 'best ever fireworks' is the perception which the person recollects whenever called upon to do so. This term is in fact a sign attributed to the entire event, a distinguishing mark.

The sign summarises the experience; it has a 'colour', so to say. Next year, if this person went for the same event at the same place, although there might be many enhancements and improvements, he might not enjoy the fireworks as much if the second one 'fell short' of the old perception. The adjective 'best-ever' now deludes his vision and he will argue with everyone else that this year's fire-works was not as good.

A more common case is that of a person meeting another person. For example, when I see a man, if a previous bad encounter with him had left a bad memory in my mind, even if that man appears friendly now, I would not really see that friendliness, because it is the original perception that I see, or at best, the new appearance coloured by the old perception.

In general, old perceptions make it difficult for us to deal with other people, and they will in turn find it difficult to deal with us. We fail to see the person in front of us but instead see someone we had seen before, or we think we had seen before.

The practical implication is that we use the wrong words and actions in communicating with people, and naturally, we do not get good responses from them.

When a series of perceptions of the same type builds up in regard to one person the problem becomes compounded and much worse.

The same can occur in regard to any article or physical thing. That is why people develop strong preferences for certain brands, colours, sizes and so on.

Advertising and other marketing techniques work on this common weakness of the mind. Perceptions are created in the minds of customers who as a result go after particular products even ignoring true facts.

CONDITIONING OF PERCEPTIONS

A perception is created in memory is *partly determined by the surrounding conditions.*

Suppose physical conditions such as whether, ventilation, light, noise, smells, seating comfort, availability of food and water and so on are not to a person's liking, then any perception created in his mind about an object he sees will be affected by the view he has regarding the surrounding conditions. If he dislikes the latter, the perception of the object will also have an element of dislike. It is the same for the other senses.

The person may not be aware of this phenomenon, and so he would hold on to his perception as if he was always right, that he knew the facts and that he formed the correct opinion. A hidden perception manipulates the person.

There is also internal conditioning. If the mind feels hatred at a time it examines a lovable object, the hatred can distort the otherwise pleasant memory. A child who loves the food given to him may reject it because the temperature in the room is too high. The perception of the food is affected by the hatred in the mind, not for the food, but due to the level of discomfort.

There are other factors that affect perceptions.

INTENSITY OF PERCEPTIONS

The intensity of a perception will depend on the intensity of the mental states energised at the time of its formation. It might be any of the mental states listed before. If the mental state of hatred was associated with the perception and the element of hatred was intense, then the perception will also be intense.

If in addition, the mental formation of concentration was highly energised at the same time, the intensity of the perception will get multiplied. If concentration was diminished at the time, then the intensity of the perception might be reduced to that extent.

Some times the mind starts looking at memories of past experiences. Really we are looking at our stored perceptions. Through one memory comes another and we keep brooding over these. That is from one perception the mind jumps to another related one. The perceptions are deceptive, and we tend to believe that our memories relate to reality, well knowing that it is not so.

We tend to re-enact the events recorded in memory, and often we participate actively in the re-enactment through the same or a similar cycle of processes as before. As a result a new perception is developed, which usually has a sharper colour than the first one. *In other words, the perception is intensified for no ostensible reason except our own delusion.*

Imagine I am looking at a perception in my memory. Suppose it is tainted with hatred. The more I look at it, the more the hatred multiples. Hence, a new sharper perception is created in the memory, carrying a greater amount of hatred. The sharper the memory is, it comes to the surface with the slightest provocation, and it keeps haunting me. It more or less dictates to me how I should conduct my affairs. That is how anger, vengeance and the like last for a long time and tend to increase in intensity, holding us with a strong grip. Hence the sixth sense, looking inward at the memory, can do more damage than the other five senses. We can learn methods of managing memory, not allowing it to dictate to us.

We can analyse the following cases and try to explain them in terms of perceptions or other mental states to test our understanding:

1. Some people hate those who belong to other religions or racial groups whilst others do not.
2. There are people who never change their political views in any situation.
3. Two people can rarely agree on a question of beauty.
4. After a film show, one would say that the camera work was not good. Another would say that the acting was poor. Yet another would say that the colours were not good, and the list goes on. They may even have heated arguments about these ideas.
5. A person used to walk every day to the train station, and each time he would meet a disliked person walking the other way. This went on for a long time. As he could not put up with it, he started walking to the bus halt which was much further away.

Chapter (30) Managing Our Perceptions

Most of the material contained in the following discussion is either taken from or extracted from '*Basic Buddhist Psychology: The Building Blocks*' by Rahu Sarath-Chandra.

The general method of managing perceptions begins from knowledge. One needs to know that perceptions are invariably different from sensations. That is to say that our memory of some experience is always different from the reality of that experience, depending on a multitude of conditioning factors. The memory is the memory of the perception and not the memory of the actual experience (sensation). If one cannot understand this, one needs to learn it from a teacher.

Part of the conditioning behind perceptions is generated within oneself. So in effect, we tend to remember what we wanted to remember, rather than the actual experience.

In discussing the methods of managing perceptions the case that is taken up for discussion is a perception based on hatred. Suppose I hate someone. When I remember that person, what comes up is the perception of a person I do not want to be associated with at all. It is one of hatred. There might be some reasons for that hatred. Some of these might be genuine and justifiable, and many others artificial. Some of the artificiality has been created by me, very likely without my knowledge, maybe unconsciously. In other words, I have coloured the perception to the point of bitterness.

One easy step to clear the perception is *to recognise those parts of the hateful perception as were created by me consciously or unconsciously*. That knowledge automatically helps to delete those parts. That knowledge will not dawn on me while I am busy and running around. I need to have a few minutes to think carefully with the aim of decisively dealing with the problem.

Being decisive is all important. If I do not decide to resolve the matter, but start thinking of it when I am free, my mind will run the reel all over many times and the perception of hatred is likely to magnify in this day dream. *The decision to resolve is a must.*

When I keep thinking about the problem with a resolve to make a decision, at some stage I might realise *that I am at least partly responsible for the perception*. In many cases we are. With that realisation, naturally I get a sense of moral shame, for the part I might have played in creating a bitter relationship. It might lead me to see that I was confused or deluded before that realisation. Gradually the increased understanding would cause a reduction in the hateful perception. If that does not happen in one rush, the process of thinking through ought to be calmly repeated.

I can then *proceed to understand the fact that the perception is not useful for me*, and in fact, that it is causing me harm. Why am I suffering because of a wrong done by another (if that assumption is true)? That is the question to ask.

The realisation of futility helps to partly dissolve the perception.

The initial stimulus of the hateful perception in my mind was that person, in whom so many bad attributes were noted (rightly or wrongly). *It is time to realise that even in that person there ought to be some good attributes*. When I keep reflecting on this possibility, I might chance upon some good qualities of that person. After all, that person was not so bad. That clears a part of my troublesome perception.

Associating with good friends and having useful discussions with them, aimed at alleviating difficult mental conditions is helpful on an ongoing basis and is useful in this case too.

If the hatred is still lurking the following and similar reflections should be attempted in quietness, not in a rush but over a period of time.

- a. The world is much larger than our little selves
- b. Upon death these considerations (perceptions) might become irrelevant
- c. All of us have to die someday
- d. There is enough space for me to exist alone, without interference
- e. One life-time is not enough to judge somebody
- f. Everything changes
- g. My attitude may change. Other's attitudes may also change
- h. My perception might not be shared by others
- i. The learning and practice of the four divine abodes
- j. Every cause has an effect
- i. This is not the only case of its kind

Depending on the nature of the perception, the above general method will have to be re-worded and even varied to get the best results. Two major variations will be necessary. Firstly in the case of perceptions based on greed, and secondly perceptions based on delusion. These two at least should be tried as exercises.

There are methods to clear the mind of harmful or worthless perceptions. Training in mindfulness meditation is one of these. In developed mindfulness, one should be able to understand what goes on in the mind. The nature of the thoughts that occur, the types of mental states associated with such thoughts, memories, perceptions and the internal silent chatter can be observed.

In this way, the true nature of a perception can be gradually understood, and the steps listed under the general methods will become easy to practice.

Techniques of developing mindfulness are discussed under meditation.

Another excellent technique is practising 'letting go'. We should develop an attitude of letting go of everything gradually. It is easier to start with physical possessions, practising generosity and charity.

Later it can be extended to cover less obvious perceptions such as ideas of fame, reputation and so on.

Chapter (31) Some Implications of the Thought Process

It is not intended to describe the entire thought process in detail in this chapter. For that a reader may refer to 'Basic Buddhist Psychology : the Building Blocks' by Rahu Sarath-Chandra¹. The idea here is to pin point a few implications of the thought process that have a direct bearing on our day to day lives.

PART FINISHED THOUGHTS

A single thought consists of 17 components when it runs its full life term. Sometimes the thought might not progress thus far but stop at any of the components. These are incomplete thoughts but these half baked thoughts can stay in memory for a long time. These can be troublesome. For example, if the thought was about a person I hated, if the thought went through its full run, it is quite possible that I would realise that the hatred is ill-founded and the hatred will have a lesser chance of troubling me in the future. However, if I had gone ahead with the thought to the point of starting to analyse why the hatred had arisen in the first place, and then the thought stopped, the hatred will remain unabated. The accumulation of such unfinished thoughts, create certain tendencies in the mind. If all my unfinished thoughts related to hatred, then the tendency developed is to be always hateful. That is obviously a troublesome tendency.

Such a tendency if allowed to carry on for a long time could develop into a kind of insanity, which is pretty dangerous.

Hence, the practical implication is that we should learn to avoid jumping from one thought to another too quickly, as nothing will have a chance of finishing. In short we should slow down the activity of thinking, and ideally we need to concentrate on one thing at a time.

To cut off a bad thought right at the start can be useful. The reason is that at the beginning a thought progresses without good or bad features. At a certain stage of maturity the good or bad features set in. For instance, when I see a nice car, at the start I will just see it as a nice car. A little later I might start thinking about the owner with a jealous mind. At that point my mental states begin to get 'coloured'. Ideally just before that I should cut off the thought having finished it saying to myself 'I have seen a beautiful car today; that's it'.

If some jealousy crept in, I should think of the futility of jealousy and decide to abandon the jealous filled thought. Then the thought is properly disposed.

In order to handle thoughts in this manner one should develop skills of mindfulness through meditation.

KAMMA IMPLICATIONS OF THE STAGES OF PROGRESS OF A THOUGHT

Buddhist philosophy postulates that actions attract subsequent consequences, comparable and hopefully commensurate subject to other controlling factors. This postulate is usually called the theory of Kamma.

Depending on the progress of a thought, the implications of consequences are different. At the first stage in which good or bad mental states set in the kamma is exhausted during this life. As the thought matures depending on maturity the results might come in any future lifetime or in this very life. When the thought is finishing, the kamma becomes weak and the results will finish in this or the next life.

USEFULNESS IN STUDIES

Mindfulness is the guard advising one when there are too many unrelated thought processes going on in the mind. When I reduce the number, say to one thought process, then, there is concentration. These are two valuable assets for a student as well as a person seeking advancement of mind.

OTHER FEATURES OF THOUGHTS

A few other features of thoughts mentioned in the books are worth noting. Thoughts are faster than anything else, wander all over all alone, jumping around like a monkey. Thoughts are much faster than light and can reach any place in a split second. After having run around, thoughts settle down in a 'cave' created by each individual within the mind. Even in the cave it tends to be active on one or more selected objects. It would be useful to check the nature of the 'cave' in our minds. Is a better cave possible?

IMPLICATIONS OF A MUTITUDE OF THOUGHTS OCCURRING TOGETHER

Imagine hundreds of thoughts are lingering in my mind, some are complicated, serious and intense and some are not. The inter-twining will be very complex and difficult to sort out. This is the sort of thing that happens in restlessness. Each line of thought tries to assume predominance, and they take changing priorities. Just imagine the confusion. Our little developed minds cannot handle this complexity.

In a situation like that, one possibility is that we tentatively give up at some stage and fall into frustration, in which desire and anger are rampant. It is possible that a whole new series of thoughts will come up and the person will be taken on yet another mental trip. There could be encounters with the surroundings, particularly if there are people around. When this process is repeated many times the mind is likely to get exhausted and descend into inaction that is rigidity and inertia (sloth and torpor) as we discussed before.

If the person keeps brooding over the failure to achieve a result through the thought processes, then he could experience a loss of hope of revival, not being able to see which path to take or where to move next.

There could be many other implications of trying to run too many thoughts at one time. Many different mental states could manifest themselves, depending on who is in the immediate surroundings, what is happening around the person and other similar variables.

Whatever happens in these situations we can see an element of delusion, stupidity, ignorance, confusion or simply gross foolishness having a major influence on the behaviour of a person.

TOTAL ABSENCE OF THOUGHTS

One might experience the peace of the total absence of thoughts as such in deep meditation. In such a stage one keeps paying attention to an object such as say breathing without trying to evaluate the action, simply observing it. In this stage the mind does not get polluted and agitated by the influence of bad mental states. For a normal person it is difficult to maintain this position.

SECTION (5) BASIC BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Chapter (32) Preparing for Meditation

Essential Idea of Meditation

Meditation is a subject by itself and it is not intended to make a complete presentation about meditation here. In these chapters an attempt will be made to introduce Buddhist meditation to a person who is presumed to be a newcomer to meditation. Just one technique of Buddhist meditation and simple preparations will be discussed in very simple terms. A person looking for a lot more or much deeper information should read a book specialising in Buddhist meditation.

We have seen before that the untamed mind at best implies a waste of energy and in bad cases might even cause downright disaster. In discussing consciousness, mental states and the senses, it would have been clear that the mind has the nature of seeking after sense objects all the time. It tends to do so with no discipline at all. Hence, like a monkey jumping all over all the time, it wastes its energy and ceases to be resourceful. If one wants to use the mind for a worthwhile purpose then it must be tamed and disciplined.

That is the first purpose of Buddhist meditation. Having tamed it we want to use it for worthwhile purposes. We need to cultivate wholesome mental states and get rid of unwholesome mental states. Even a land must be rendered fit for cultivation before sowing seeds. Even so the mind must be rendered fit for development, cultivation and growth. That is the second purpose of Buddhist meditation. At a higher level we are bound to discover other better purposes, but for now we shall concentrate on the first two purposes, discipline and preparation.

Discipline as a pre-Requisite

Discipline of the mind depends on discipline of the body. Both mind and body can be trained by observing a simple set of rules of conduct. There are many sets of such rules. It is suggested that one needs to follow either the Five Precepts or the Eight Precepts of Livelihood. The five precepts imply a determination to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and intoxicants. Every Buddhist attempts to observe the five precepts, but not everyone adheres to them cleanly, all the time.

The eight precepts of livelihood go a little further. It is a determination to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, spreading slanders, harsh speech, meaningless speech, and wrong livelihood. Meaningless or frivolous speech means talking with no fruitful wholesome purpose, but just talking about all kinds of things to fill time, usually at the expense of other people. Wrong livelihood is one that does not harm oneself or others. Specifically, trades involving human beings, animals for slaughter, poison, weapons, and intoxicants need to be avoided.

One needs to get established in a set of rules of conduct gradually. This itself brings a certain level of peace and contentment. Based on that, one needs to practice a few wholesome actions. Many wholesome actions are listed in the chapter on wholesome mental states. Generosity is one simply wholesome action to practice. Again the practice of some wholesome actions brings more peace, happiness and contentment to the mind. One needs to act with wisdom, rather than irresponsible emotional enthusiasm.

Source of Instruction

At this stage one can decide whether it is the right time to commence formal Buddhist meditation. There is no need to rush as it could lead to mistakes and disillusionment. Slow and steady should be the motto. When one is ready, one needs to learn a little about meditation. If a teacher is available that is good. Otherwise, one can easily get elementary instructions from Buddhist websites such as the following:

www.buddhanet.net

We must remember that the choice of a teacher or other source of instruction, choice of a suitable place and time, choice of frequency, and an arrangement to clear doubts are all important. It is often useful to meditate with a few other people as there can be mutual support and helpful energy as a group. Once essential instructions are learnt, the teacher will step aside and we meditate on our own until a problem needs to be cleared.

Direct Preparation

Usually the sitting or standing posture is chosen for meditation. Subject to personal disabilities, the sitting posture is a full lotus position (not easy at the start especially if not young) or a half lotus position. In the website we have pictures to depict these positions. The spine should be erect but not like an iron bar, the head looking straight and not drooping, but always in way that is natural. Some comfort should be achieved as otherwise body pains come in right at the start. The object of concentration can be selected; one such object, breathing, is described later.

In the standing position it is not practicable to stay for long but it is much easier when you start walking. A starting and finishing point say about 20 to 30 paces apart on reasonably level ground with no obstructions should be selected. While meditating paces are not counted. The object of meditation is the action of walking. The eyes can be set to see about three metres in front on the path.

Chapter (33) Breathing Meditation

What it is

In breathing meditation we try to observe the occurrence of breathing using the touch sense, with the eyes closed either at the start or after a couple of minutes. There are several methods of breathing meditation and the simplest one of these is discussed here. This has been taught by the Buddha in the famous discourse on the establishment in mindfulness, as the very first type of meditation. In this discourse the meditation is looked upon as an insight meditation at a high level. However, in this chapter breathing meditation is looked at as a method of developing mindfulness and concentration only.

In breathing meditation we first try to identify the area between the nose tip and the upper lip which is most sensitive to the air coming in or going out. The exact point or area is not important as it might be different for different individuals. Once we identify the sensitive area, we just keep breathing noting the fact of the breath touching that area when the air comes in and when it goes out. That is the meditation and there is no need to complicate things any further.

Normally when we try to make such an observation we also tend to examine the nature of the breath, for instance is it warm or cold, is it quick or slow, is there a smell and so on. The point is to keep those evaluations aside and simply keep observing the air coming in and going out using the sensitive point as the aid. The moment you try to evaluate the mind starts thinking processes and therefore the mind moves away from the meditation object and runs after various other objects including ideas.

In one way simple breathing meditation as described above helps to improve mindfulness. After all we try to be mindful as to the breath. When we breathe in we know that we are breathing in. When we are breathing out we know that we are breathing out. That simple uncomplicated untarnished knowledge is mindfulness as to what goes on in relation to the breath.

In another way, simple breathing meditation amounts to concentration. In a world full of all kinds of objects demanding our attention if we manage to keep our attention on one thing only, namely the occurrence of breathing, then to that extent we do have concentration.

Loss of Meditation Object

It is quite natural that very quickly we might lose concentration and stray on to thinking of other objects or events in the past or the future. Then we lose the object of meditation. We should then note that it has happened and slowly return to the original object, breathing. There should be no anger or annoyance because we know that this happens to everyone at the beginning. As we come back a deep breath helps to attract the mind to breathing as the object. Even if we spend a few minutes straying around it really does not matter provided that we know that we are straying. The return should be natural.

Sounds, people, things, temperature, wind, smells, pain, memories, anxieties, worries and a whole host of factors tend to disturb us in meditation. So be it. That is in fact the challenge to a meditator. We can get over these obstacles gradually.

If it is difficult to come back to the meditation object, one can go into protective meditations. In fact it is recommended that at the start we should do one or two protective meditations. What are these?

Reflecting on the Buddha

Starting with the appearance of a familiar statue of the Buddha, we can gradually think of the qualities of the Buddha such as perfection in purity of character, greatness as a discoverer of the truth, perfection in patience and so on. Firstly, these reflections displace any disturbing thoughts and secondly, the mind becomes wholesome and ready again for development. When the mind is clear we can go back to the original meditation object, namely, breathing.

Reflecting on Loving Kindness

Another method of protection is reflecting on loving kindness. This means extending thoughts of loving kindness to all or if that is too hard to people who are dear to one starting from the dearest ones such as family members. For success one needs to have a ready made line of individuals so that from the dearest to the next and so on, one can proceed gradually to extend loving kindness somewhat smoothly. What exactly is loving kindness? At an elementary level, it is a sincere wish in the mind that others be free from illness, worry, suffering, difficulties and failures, but that they are endowed with peace, contentment, prosperity and happiness. At a higher level it is a wish that all beings are released from all suffering, meaning that they attain enlightenment.

At the first few attempts it will be difficult to make these wishes for one's enemies or disliked persons. That is natural. After developing more understanding of the teaching, these hurdles can be cleared.

Reflecting on the Body

Examining the nature of the body, its composition, its nature, aches and pains and so on also helps in the same way. It easily brings the mind back from disturbing objects.

Reflecting on the Certainty of death

Death is about the only thing that is certain life. Thinking of that simply as a fact without getting upset with the idea, gives rise to a feeling of urgency to come back to the object of meditation as there is very little time to waste.

Other Types of Meditation

It is advisable not to seek after scores of types of meditation as very little will be achieved thereby. It is good to get thoroughly established in simple breathing meditation and get a feel for meditation.

Chapter (34) Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is briefly introduced here as it is useful in breaking the monotony of breathing meditation which is done in a sitting posture. To one who is starting to meditate, posture is a problem and the sitting posture soon becomes painful and therefore a distraction. Some people may in any event need to change posture every now and then simply for health reasons such as the need to keep the circulation system free from constant tension. Elderly people prone to high blood pressure will find it useful to change posture at certain intervals.

Walking meditation at the most elementary level is simply trying to keep attention on the fact of walking, without analysing its features and without going after other objects in the surrounding.

In simple walking meditation the mind established itself on just two facts, firstly that one foot touches the ground and then the foot touches the ground. Other complications such as subdividing each step into three or five parts and concentrating on each part separately is not necessary.

For safety and for practical reasons one also needs to be mindful of the path. This can be done by keeping the eyes generally on the area about three meters in front.

Counting the steps is not helpful. Before starting the starting and finishing points must be selected, say, about twenty paces apart. A flat stretch without obstructions or special features is good. A concrete surface should be avoided as an unexpected fall might cause too much damage.

Just as in breathing your attention is on the knowledge of walking, nothing more. As you place your foot on the ground, you 'know' that the foot has been placed on the ground. Immediately thereafter the mind will switch on to the movement of the other foot and note when it lands on the ground and so on.

The about turn must be handled with care to avoid disturbing the mind. First you have to choose the direction of the turn. Is it clockwise (to the right) or anti-clockwise (to the left)? It is good to choose the one that comes naturally and stick to it as far as possible. Instead of turning by 180 degrees, it is good to turn in three phases of sixty degrees each time. The there are no jerks and the process become standardised and smooth. The idea is that the mind follows the turning just like following the walking. Strictly speaking the action should follow the mind. This needs some training. Before you raise the leg decide to do so. Before you stop decide to stop. Before you turn decide to turn. Then the mind has an activity and does not stray. When walking meditation is done smoothly, the mind is constantly connected to the action as the decision maker.

A natural pace is recommended by the author although some teachers prefer an extremely slow walk or sometimes even a fast walk. It is good not to get involved in all the ramifications regarding walking, at least at the start. What you need is a result. For some walking is the easiest method of developing both concentration and mindfulness. Concentrate on the action and be mindful of the path. Each helps the other. They are not contradictory.

PART (2) TESTS OF LEARNING AND PRACTICE

Chapter (35) EIGHT WORLDLY CONDITIONS AS TESTS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

Having learnt the basics of the teaching, we need to test how far we have advanced as a result of learning and practice. The test suggested here is to examine how you face up to changing fortunes. It is the nature with this world that things keep changing. So, if you feel happy at this time, most probably there will be an unhappy period later.

Just because you have reason to be happy now, you do not have to get infatuated, overjoyed, shout and dance around endlessly. If you do that too much, the moment things turn around the pain is a lot more than normal. On the other hand when you are faced with an unhappy situation if you break down completely, feel totally sad and hopeless, that is also wrong, as ought to know that eventually things have to turn around.

In short, we can hold a balance in either extreme, and remain in equipoise, that is a more economical type of behaviour, a more useful attitude.

In other words, you do not have to be optimistic seeing beauty everywhere all the time, nor a pessimist seeing sadness everywhere all the time. Both look foolish. Life is not a bed of roses nor need it be seen as a crown of thorns. We must see things as they are for what they are. A flower is beautiful and sweet smelling, and that is it. A thorn will hurt if not handles carefully, and again that is it. If the thorn is known as a thorn, we do not have to get a hurtful prick from it. While thorns and flowers are abundant, we still can manage to live in the midst of both, without getting thrown about too much.

At the end of the day review what happened during the day, and see which out of these opposites affected you and how far you were affected:

- 1 Firstly gain and loss
- 2 Secondly fame and defame
- 3 Thirdly praise and blame
- 4 Fourthly happiness and pain of mind

In connection with each of the positives, it is reasonable and useful for an ordinary person to feel a sense of satisfaction. That could help in maintaining both mental and physical health. It is extreme feeling that needs to be observed and shunned.

In regard to the negatives, the mental disturbance is usually damaging to the mind and sometimes to the body. A philosophical attitude to the occurrence of the negatives is very useful. The Buddha recommends words like 'what did I expect things to be?', in a bad situation. I should know that, that is the way with the world.

Unless the negativity is handled wisely, it can create a sense platform from which all kinds of unwholesome mental states could arise, and therefore poor thoughts, words and actions, which in turn are likely to bring back unwelcome responses. Then we tend to multiply our loss or other negativity. That is not what we are looking for.

In business gain and loss follow each other. In public life fame and defame follow each other. In family, at work and in the community we get both praise and blame. Whatever we do we have

to expect some happiness and some unhappiness. Realising these things we learn to remain calm and always mildly satisfied that we have learnt and are practising the Dhamma.

If you do get disturbed a great deal, then further learning, advice and practice, meditation could be required. In a loss learn to tell yourself 'Ah! This one was a loss, and that is it' and then move your attention to whatever else calls for your attention.

The positives take ages to achieve but the negatives take only seconds to land on us. The shock can be absorbed.

When you get defamed reflect on the fact that you might not have been so much maligned as was the Buddha. If such a good person was so maligned, what do you expect from the world? We cannot run away as the other place is no better. Hence we should learn to live like the lotus in the mud that is not polluted by the mud, though it gets nourished by it.

When blame comes we can use it as a teacher. We can frankly think and see that at least a portion of that blame we did deserve. Many cases are like that. If we did not deserve blame at all in a particular case then we note that, that is the nature with people. If we did not retaliate in case of unfair blame, it would have served as an opportunity to practice the quality of patience.

When we get cornered into unhappy situations, we do not blame any one, or get unduly upset, but reflect on the fact that even the unhappiness is transitory.

Indifference is not recommended. The situation must be carefully thought out and a clear decision made as to how one should manage the situation. That amounts to considered equipoise.

Chapter (36) THE FOUR SUBLIME MODES OF LIVING AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE

The four sublime modes of living constitute a very useful frame of reference to help a practitioner to check whether his practice is up to the mark. The four sublime modes are as follows:

- 1 Loving kindness
- 2 Compassion
- 3 Appreciative joy
- 4 Equanimity

LOVING KINDNESS

Loving kindness is equivalent to mentally active non-hatred. Like the other three sublime modes loving kindness should see no limits. It is a positive attitude or mental state in which a person entertains a feeling of goodwill for all, without any barriers at all. The mind is soft in this mental state and implies a friendly disposition. It is moral benevolence.

The main consequence of practising loving kindness is life becomes generally pleasant even in the presence of adverse circumstances particularly adversaries. One can expect a general reduction of mental problems when it is present.

Loving kindness is the sincere wish in one's heart for the good and welfare of all beings. That includes a wish for contentment, good health, freedom from suffering, freedom from enmities, happiness, prosperity, success and so on. The author feels that the ultimate wish included in loving kindness is that all beings be relieved from the bondages caused by greed, hatred and delusion or in clearer words that all beings come to the end of suffering by attaining enlightenment.

As you try to extend loving kindness to all beings, would you pause when you think of a particular person? Then there room to improve. That is reference point it provides.

The culmination of loving kindness is more or less the identification of oneself with all beings. This phenomenon has a far reaching deep meaning. Thus it is an indirect method of reducing one's ego.

One needs to distinguish loving kindness from carnal love. False or misguided loving kindness, devoid of wisdom can turn into carnal love or personal individualised affection. So, personal affection could become an indirect enemy of loving kindness, as it tends to destroy true loving kindness. It is a shift from morality to immorality. It is true that both affection and loving kindness generally keep out hatred at the start. But, personal affection can eventually generate hatred.

COMPASSION

If my heart feels warm at the sight of another afflicted with sorrow, then to that extent I have **compassion**. The chief characteristic of compassion is the wish to alleviate the sufferings of others. The opposite is wickedness, or cruelty. It is extreme cruelty to feel happy about the sufferings of others. Compassion is a mental state and not an action. Actions may follow.

Are grief, weeping, lamenting and wailing indicators of compassion? Or, for one to be compassionate should one feel grief? It is not, as it is an indirect enemy of compassion. When I am in grief at the sight of another's plight, there is no room for compassion, and the latter gets destroyed. It might look strange at first sight but that is how it is.

Some argue that unless one does something to help those who are in sorrow, then the *compassion is not translated into action, and so there is no true compassion*. This is not true either. Compassion being a mental state, the moment it occurs in the mind, it is there. Any action that follows is a sequel to that mental state but not a necessary pre-condition.

Like loving kindness there is no limit to compassion. It is unbounded and all encompassing when fully developed. That is to say you cannot have compassion for some and not for the others. This is where you can test your practice against the frame of reference.

APPRECIATIVE JOY

This is the mental state that enables one to feel joyous when another person is happy, successful, healthy, lucky, and so on. It is a congratulatory attitude. It is not just sympathy or mere acknowledgement. It is also called sympathetic joy. This latter term can be a little misleading.

The chief characteristic of appreciative joy is happy acquiescence or joining in another person's feeling of satisfaction. Its opposite is jealousy. It helps to discard dislike.

On the other hand suppose one goes over the board and exultation results, then the appreciative joy might get destroyed. Though of the same kind, one mental state here can destroy the other.

This mental state *can be tested* in cases where I fail and my enemy succeeds in the very thing I failed in. It is not enough to get joyous when my close friend wins a lottery. Hence appreciative joy can be used as a frame of reference for right practice.

EQUANIMITY

Equanimity is the mental state that enables the mind to stay in a balanced middle position without getting swayed by sense objects. It enables one to view things impartially for instance with neither hatred nor attachment in a situation in which most people grasp one or the other.

Equanimity helps to reduce and eliminate both attachment and aversion. It will also result from the reduction of attachment and aversion. Its direct opposite is passion implying involving mental states.

Unintelligent indifference can destroy equanimity. People tend to mix up indifference with equanimity. Just not caring about any thing is not equanimity. One needs to care about things going on, assess their implications and then decide to stay undisturbed. When you fail to stay in the middle, then it is a test of the level of practice.

Harsh neutrality is not equanimity. It does not connote ignoring, or being irresponsible, or not doing one's duty. It is deliberate choice made intellectually and ethically. It refers to both mental states and consciousness at the same time.

PART (3) AVOIDING DEGENERATION

Chapter (37) DEVELOPING PROTECTIONS TO DEAL WITH Waning RIGHT EFFORT

ASSOCIATION WITH GOOD FRIENDS

The most powerful protection against waning practice is the association with good friends. Good friends are described in many discourses. The main characteristic of a good friend is that such a person is already practising and is very likely to provide a trigger for a friend to come back to practice. The natural formation of groups of people who practice regularly is for this reason.

It is important to understand what makes a good friend. According to one discourse on good friends (mitta sutta), a good friend:

- Gives what is difficult to give
- Does what is difficult to do
- Endures what is difficult to endure

Another similar discourse describes a good friend's action:

- Showing the correct way
- Keeps the friend on the correct path
- Keeps the friend interested in the path
- Makes it a happy experience for the friend

In the discourse to Sigalovada, the following are listed as the qualities of good friends:

- Generosity
- Courteous speech
- Promoting the good of the friend
- Equality
- Truthfulness

A noble friend will also behave in the following manner:

- Protect the friend when he is heedless
- Protect his property when he is heedless
- Become a refuge when he is afraid
- Not forsake him when he is in danger
- Be considerate to the friend's progeny

The search for noble friends can be very elusive. The correct idea is for your-self to live as a noble friend. If you do so, others are likely to reflect your qualities and gradually become noble friends themselves. Even if they do not respond positively, that is a secondary matter and one need not pay too much attention to that. In the discourse on the results of being a good friend the Buddha lists the following practical advantages:

- 1 When travelling away from home, the person is assured of food in plenty and also good company
- 2 The person is received with honour wherever he goes
- 3 Thieves stay away, the government cannot harass him, and enemies are subdued
- 4 He returns home with a mind free of conflicts, people talk about his great qualities in public, and he shines among his relatives.
- 5 He treats others well and is treated well by others. He respects others and is respected by others. People speak in praise of him and so he acquires majesty.
- 6 One who honours his friends is honoured by them. One who worships noble friends such as the Buddha and his disciples, themselves are worshipped by others and also acquire fame.
- 7 Just as the burning fire shines, the noble friend shines bright with wealth, retinue and comforts. He shines like a deity. The powers that be look on him with grace and kindness.
- 8 The noble friend's animals and land are productive. He is gifted with children.
- 9 The noble friend saves him-self from disaster should he by chance lose his balance on a rock, a tree or other support.
- 10 Just as a fig tree with its well grown root system cannot be toppled by the wind, in the same way, a noble friend cannot be crushed or thrown about by enemies.

Evil associates must be carefully and politely avoided. The following would help to identify evil associates:

Drinking
Going about on the streets during late hours
Given to social life and clubs
Given to gambling
Associating with other evil friends
Lazy
Misdirecting others
Deceiving others
Having criminal propensity

When he is asked about his weaknesses, he is silent or says little. When he is asked about another's faults, he talks a lot and would volunteer information that was never sought. When asked about the good qualities of another, he does not hear, or he would say little, but when asked his own good qualities he talk a lot, and say what was never asked by any one.

He frightens others unduly, about the future, and quotes selections from the past to make his case. He always tries to come to his own agenda and he wants to achieve regardless of what the other wants.

An evil friend offers everything by words but nothing in deeds.

REFLECTING ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE BUDDHA

The second most powerful protection against waning practice is reflecting on the attributes of the Buddha. It is similar to the idea of associating with good friends, but it operates at a conceptual level to begin with. The conceptual experience can be gradually transformed into a real experience by trying to emulate the Buddha at least in a small way. In other words we treat an attribute of the Buddha as an ideal and try to approximate to that ideal as much as we can.

The attributes of the Buddha are infinite, so we select a few that are famous, and well explained. The oft repeated nine attributes of the Buddha are mentioned here in very brief terms. Firstly the Buddha is considered as *the most fortunate one* to have attained what he did out of billions of beings. He was unassailable and immensely powerful. He brought good fortune to so many by teaching to them what he had discovered. When I reflect on this fact, I get the urge, confidence and courage to defend and develop my practice.

Secondly, the Buddha was so *pure in conduct and character*, his mind was devoid of all impurities, and was filled with limitless wholesomeness.

Thirdly, the Buddha *attained the unique status of Buddhahood with his own effort*, under his own guidance, with no teacher or teachings to guide him. That kind and scale of effort was unprecedented, exemplary and encouraging.

Fourthly, the Buddha possessed a whole *range of unique types of knowledge, and a similar spectrum of self conduct*, which encourages anyone following him.

Fifthly, he had on his own *gone the right way*, had crossed the river, had left the bank in which bondage was the way of things and gone to the other bank in which freedom was the hallmark. He showed that it was possible and easier under his guidance. This is encouraging to us.

Sixthly, the Buddha possessed *full knowledge of the world* and he taught knowing what he did, devoid of all ignorance. That encourages us to take his guidance.

Seventhly, the Buddha had the unique unsurpassed *ability to discipline human beings* who could not be tamed by state or any other power on earth. The story of Angulimala was one illustration of this attribute. It encourages us to tame ourselves in the Buddha's way.

Eighthly, the Buddha was *a teacher for all beings whether human or heavenly*. He was accepted as such by countless powerful beings. That encourages me to continue to follow him as my teacher.

Ninthly, the Buddha was reputed as *the wisest one*, the one who saw the truth about the world, the one who discovered the way to control the world, rather than allow oneself to be controlled by whatever the world dictated. That encourages me to seek the sort of wisdom he attained, and with his guidance to make it easier.

Reflections on the Buddha (Buddhanussati) will be easier to practice, if one begins from the physical appearance of the Buddha with the aid of an appealing statue or picture of the Buddha, or at a shrine.

Reflecting on the attributes of the Buddha and the other three reflections that follow are particularly powerful in protecting ones ability to meditate.

REFLECTING ON THE NATURE OF THE BODY

The third most powerful protection against waning practice is reflecting on the nature of the body, in particular on the fact that decay is proceeding right from birth until death helps to avoid waning in practice. The body is composed of a range of material things.

The *first analysis is that there are four types of components, solid, fluid, heat and gas*, the latter often interpreted as motion. When we think of any part of the body, we can see one of these four types. A tooth is solid, urine is fluid, temperature implies heat, and the air that we breathe all the time is gas. So, the body is not a whole but is composed of four types of matter and energy. Further reflection shows that these are again composed of small particles like cells, molecules and even atoms and sub-atomic particles. All these are in a state of change and flux. Nothing exists unchanged for more than an instant. The body therefore is not a constant unit, but rather the appearance of a multitude of flows or changes. This change leads gradually to decay, disease, old age and finally to death. There is little to be identified as myself. There is nothing permanent at all. What we think we cherish now may will be loathsome soon. Observing the nature of change and lack of a concrete self prompts us back to practice.

The *second type of analysis* is by thirty two standard components of the body, such as bones, hair, nails, teeth and so on to blood and urine. Again the same observations and thinking helps one back to practice.

There are several other types of analysis taught in connection with mindfulness meditation. All these help us to understand the three features everything that exists, namely that, they are not permanent, they do not give lasting satisfaction, and they are devoid of substance (like a soul or concrete self). Initial observations prompts us back to practice and further observation and deep reflection help us in insight meditation leading to enlightenment.

Reflecting on the body leads to reflecting on the likely incidence of sickness and death as a certainty and it helps to arrest waning practice.

REFLECTING ON THE NATURE OF THE MIND

The fourth most powerful protection against waning practice is reflecting on the nature of the mind. The mind just cannot stay in one position and it keeps running around. It seems to be happy at one moment, and in the next moment it is unhappy. There is pleasure now and immediately after there is pain. For a moment it is energetic and then it falls into sloth and torpor. It is clean and wholesome now to be unclean and unwholesome later. Rarely is the mind settled and satisfied. Observing the nature of the mind brings to focus the need to discipline the mind and that brings us back to practice.

REFLECTING ON THE NATURE OF CONDITIONING

The fifth most powerful protection against waning practice is reflecting on the nature of all things that are conditioned by other things, which means everything that we can sense around us, that is everything in the world.

Examining things around us physical or mental, again we see the absence of permanence, absence of satisfaction and the absence of substance. We can see an endless array of inter-related processes, some conditioning others, and being conditioned by still others. This vision again prompts us to practice.

Chapter (38) BEING JOYOUS AT THE GENEROSITY OF OTHERS

It does not cost a cent to be happy and joyous at the generosity of others. One does not have to contribute anything in material of money, or any other resources either.

This quality is a derivative from the third of the four types of divine conduct, namely, Sympathetic Joy (Mudita). A person who has Mudita feels joyous when another person does well. This joy can occur when someone looks at the practice of generosity of another.

Generosity can cover all types of showing consideration, such as voluntary sharing, allowing others space and time.

Generosity in a wider sense can be seen operating around us all the time. All we need to do is to observe these, and feel a sense of joy.

When this practiced for a long time, your own practice never gets eroded, weakened or dried up. It is very simple to grasp and practice. It is specially suited for times when circumstances give you little opportunity to practice directly.

It also has the advantage of prompting you to practice generosity yourself when the time comes, and your practice is revived.

Chapter (39) BEING HAPPY TO SEE GOOD MANNERS AND DISCIPLINE PRACTISED BY OTHERS

This again is derived from sympathetic joy. There are plenty of people around us who observe good manners and people who are disciplined.

When this is observed, it is additionally useful to note related occurrences, such as smiles and reciprocation in response to the practice of good manners. The benefits derived from being disciplined. A good example of the latter is how disciplined people have good health even when they are pretty old.

Overall these observations, which cost nothing helps you to avoid going down in your practice.

It also will provide triggers to get you back into practice especially in regard to manners, discipline, and morality in general.

Chapter (40) PRACTISING MEDITATION FOR WORLDLY SUCCESS

Meditation is necessary for a happy and successful life even if one is not deeply interested in spirituality. Hence meditation can be learnt and practised for a variety of worldly purposes. A few of these purposes are mentioned here.

A student young or old will benefit immensely from the practice of calming meditation and the development of concentration and mindfulness. Devoid of meditation, the amount of time and the energy required for studies will be greater, and more than that the ease of recall at an examination or for an application will be very limited. Even bright and capable students can benefit from meditation by saving time and resources for other purposes.

Some books on methods of study include instructions for meditation for a beginner.

At work and in the community, development of the mind through meditation helps a person to discover the reasons for poor performance and for poor relations with other associates. For people who tend to have feelings of dislike and anger that affect relations, loving kindness meditation is specially recommended. That helps to smooth relations that are rough.

Where a professional such as a physician, psychologist, counsellor or therapist, needs to avoid getting involved with a client, certain types of meditation help to strengthen the mind of the professional. In some cases where the client experiences certain types of mental conditions, self development of the professional through meditation could help in understanding the client's problems and also in designing remedial action.

Certain types of jobs require a high level of calm, concentration or mindfulness, and meditation could be very helpful. Air traffic controllers, investigators, pilots are some examples.

Above all a pleasant family life, genuine popularity, peace and happiness in the community are all enhanced by practising loving kindness meditation on a regular basis. Here are some specific benefits of practising loving kindness meditation enumerated by the Buddha in the discourse on the results of practising loving kindness meditation:

- 1 Such a person sleeps well
- 2 Such a person wakes up well
- 3 Does not see frightening dreams
- 4 Others see the person as pleasant company
- 5 Becomes pleasant to non-human beings
- 6 Such a person is protected by the deities
- 7 Protected from fire, poison, and injury
- 8 Develops ability to gather thoughts very easily
- 9 Facial appearance becomes bright and appealing
- 10 Dies undeluded with wisdom in the fore of the mind
- 11 If the person is not enlightened, then birth in a pure heaven is very likely

The reader must practice loving kindness meditation and observe the changes that take place in one-self and in the people around. That is the best way of understanding the value of loving kindness meditation. Most problems in human relations in the family, at work and in the community get gradually dissolved when loving kindness meditation is regularly practised.

Chapter (41) OBSERVING WITH JOY THOSE WHO HAVE RENOUNCED HOUSEHOLD LIFE

Unlike lay people, monks and nuns of nearly all traditions live a life of renunciation. They normally give up their wealth, property, job, family, business and other interests that tie us in household life as the time they take the robes. Normally we would think that they live a miserable life as they have no possessions. On the contrary, many monks and nuns are very happy to live a simple life in their monasteries.

Visiting a monastery and talking to monks and nuns in regard to the teaching are helpful subject to limitations. The fact that there are limitations to the practice of individuals needs to be understood before associating with the Sangha.

Chapter (42) AVOIDING THE TEN DEMERITORIOUS ACTIONS

The following ten actions are discerned as the ten de-meritorious actions in countries such as Sri Lanka but apparently not universally recognised as such. It is interesting to note that the first nine actions are in fact effectively included in the eight precepts of livelihood; it is assumed that consuming intoxicants is impliedly included in the latter.

Killing and hurting
Stealing
Sexual misconduct
Telling lies
Consuming intoxicants
Spreading slanders
Harsh speech
Frivolous speech
Wrong livelihood
Holding false views

Chapter (43) AVOIDING THE EIGHTEEN FACTORS OF DOWNFALL

A set of factors that cause the degeneration or downfall of a person are enumerated in the discourse on the factors of downfall (Parabhava Sutta). There is a short introduction and twenty five stanzas in this discourse. Eighteen such factors are listed in twelve of the stanzas the other stanzas being complementary to the affirmative ones. The factors are grouped into twelve sets:

1 The first factor is that a person who hates the teaching tends to degenerate. The word teaching probably has a wide connotation here in that wholesome teachings in all systems of belief can be included. The Buddha commended wholesome teachings in other religions that were known during his lifetime. The stanza also adds that it is very easy to see the difference of such a person from good ones.

2 The second factor of degeneration is that vicious people are dear to the person, he likes their ways, and that he seeks no delight with virtuous people.

3 The third is a composite statement covering three factors. The first is that being lazy, being sleepy and being devoid of energy causes degeneration. The second aspect is being fond of boon companions. The third is being irritable.

4 The fourth is that a person who does not support his father and mother who are weak and old, despite being prosperous himself, degenerates.

5 The next factor is that a person who deceives with a lie, a Brahmin (religious persons so recognised at the time of the Buddha), a monk or other mendicant. A mendicant here implies a person who has given up every thing in search of spirituality and depends on the charity of others. An important feature of this factor is that it does not mention Buddhist monks and nuns. Similar persons in other religions too are held in respect by Buddhists.

6 The next factor implies a miserly person who while possessing a lot of property, money and food enjoys rich food, all alone. He does not share with others.

7 The next factor encompasses snobbery. A person being proud of his birth, wealth and clan, despises his own relatives (who do not have riches).

8 The next set has four very important factors that are obviously relevant in modern society. The first is addiction to women, meaning over indulgence in indiscriminate relationships.

The second factor is addiction to liquor meaning all intoxicants and drugs as known in today's world.

The third factor is addiction to gambling.

The fourth is a person who is given to squandering whatever he earns.

9 The next person subject to degeneration is one who is not contented with his own wife, and is seen among courtesans and the wives of others. This factor can be extended to cover both sexes.

10 The next person subject to degeneration is one who has passed his youth, and brings a very beautiful young wife. He does not sleep for jealousy towards the wife.

11 The next person is one who places in authority, an intemperate, spendthrift woman or man, impliedly in relation to his wealth and affairs.

12 A person who is born in a warrior (or ruling class, royalty) but has slender means, and entertains vast (political) ambition, desires a kingdom for him-self, tends to degenerate. The wording is not intended to cover only royal family members as known today. It applies to politicians of today. It can be extended to cover individuals who do not have the qualifications to hold positions of power but yet pursue such ambitions.

In general readers should notice that the wording of the factors might not exactly fit the real social make up of today's world. We need to understand the principles involved in each statement and see how they apply in modern society in different countries.

Chapter (44) AVOIDING EVIL ASSOCIATES

This has been effectively discussed before under good friends. However a few aspects of bad friends can be mentioned here.

Chapter (45) AVOIDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUBJECTIVE STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

In our discussions on the noble eight fold path it was discerned that in one way we all follow the path but at different and varying levels. For instance in relation to being truthful many would say that believe that they are truthful. Is that true at all times and in all situations? Probably it is not true. What happens is that at a given time each of us has a certain standard of practice in a particular matter, but that might not be the highest standard. Generally we are not aware of the shortfall in our standards, and sometimes we deceive ourselves to believe that our standards are at the highest level.

Unless we have the sincerity to review our standards every now and then and try to improve on them, we are bound to limit ourselves to existing standards for a pretty long time. Hence one needs to take care not to believe that our private standards are the highest possible.

One way of checking level of our private standards is to treat the Buddha as the ideal standard and see how far below we stand. Reasonable effort must be applied to raise our standards, but using wisdom that effort must be duly balanced.

Chapter (46)

AVOIDING THE DANGER OF IMAGINING AND CLAIMING SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENTS REGARDING ONESELF

As we progress spiritually, at times there is a tendency to check how much we have achieved. There is no harm in doing this to the extent that it prompts us to improve further. However, if we try to compare our attainments with those of others, that might lead to negativities. The last thing we need is to add to our ego, and feel that we are better than others and that they stand condemned.

It is even worse to claim that we have attained one or other stage of enlightenment as that might amount to demanding respect from others. Suppose the claim is not true, then we are guilty of deception. What we attain is ours and we do not have to proclaim it, especially when we are never sure of it.

All we need to do is to keep on practising. Practising itself can be treated as the attainment and in fact continued practice is a consequence of attainments. The Buddha himself (having attained such a lofty level of spirituality) sometimes say that he liked the practice, or the way he practised. If that was the case with the Buddha, it surely must be true for lesser people.

In other words, depending on what we attain, the way we live (the way we practice) improves, and after certain attainments, that improvement is sustained with hardly any effort. Have we come to that or do we tend to fall away when confronted with a disturbance? That is the test.

PART (3) ENHANCEMENT OF PRACTICE

Chapter (47) CREATING AND ENVIRONMENT THAT TRIGGERS RIGHT EFFORT

Waning practice is often caused or enhanced by the wrong environment. So, we need to change our environment or if that is not possible, move out of it. We need an environment which is conducive to practice and is full of factors that are capable of triggering practice.

We live many environments of different scales and impact at the same time or may be at different times. The family is an environment, the school, college or place of work, place of sports, the community, personal relations, the professional grouping, the current religion or other system of belief, place of religious practice, personal income and wealth, personal health, personal associates, administration, economy and politics of the country or region, level of prosperity, peace, level of health of the community, business environment, businesses, all can constitute units of environment.

This idea is embodied in one of the teachings in the discourse on blessings. It says that to live in the right place (*patirupadesa vaso ca*) is a blessing. The term used is appropriate place and it can be extended to cover the more encompassing term environment.

We have already seen the need for triggers whether internal or external, so that we get onto or revive our practice. If practice is waning, then one inference is that helpful triggers are sparse or non-existent in the prevailing environment.

If the *family environment* is full of covetousness, hatred or stupidity, we should try to change it cautiously. If that is impossible, like in a crime-oriented family, one needs to move out of the family. Wrong triggers are too many in such an environment. One needs to think carefully and seek advice before making such a decision. One needs to be honest to oneself and act wisely and slowly in this type of situation.

The *work environment* might involve similar negativities. Alternatively, work associates, work practices and relations with the boss may provide wrong triggers. The author has learnt the hard way that most work environments are like this. What is the fun in changing jobs? Several solutions are possible. Firstly, as all things change, the situation might change, so one needs to be a little patient. Secondly, while one maintains good working relations with others, one could try to live safely and insulated (not isolated) in the hostile environment. Going all out to change things might create more negative triggers. A third possibility is that one may need to move out every few years for good reasons, thus changing environment in any event.

The *community environment* has similar features and similar solutions. It is not necessary to move house, but one can choose to live independently while maintaining reasonable relations with others. It is much easier to control or abandon than the family or work situation.

In general *substituting duties for emotions* is an effective way of changing the environment to enable practice. For instance in a family situation where a child is running wild and a parent is emotionally involved in it, the parent cannot practice. However, if one decides to do one's duty and makes the experience less emotional, the environment is likely to improve. Even at work or in the community, similar solutions can be applied.

Suppose one is obstructed by the *current religion* and it would be very damaging to change the religion. One solution is not to change the religion as such but to engage in new practice without creating too much of disharmony. It is very personal decision and great care is needed in this matter. For instance if one wants to practice Buddhist meditation in place of say Christian contemplation meditation, one can do that without making an issue out of it. Similarly, one can avoid killing or hurting without making a noise as to the reason for such conduct. In fact noisy practice of Buddha's teachings is unlikely to be good practice.

Suppose one is connected to *a particular temple or centre*, but it is not conducive to good practice. One can adjust oneself to get the best out of the particular centre, and enhance the practice by oneself, using books, websites, courses and consultations.

What about personal wealth and income? Unless one chooses to be a monk or nun, one needs wealth and income to live. We should not mix up the ideas of the Sangha community with those of the lay community. Just because monks are not supposed to have property, lay persons need not give up all their income, wealth and property. That is a mix up. A lay person can always keep an eye on regular income, and a reasonable amount of wealth, to get over a bad period. There is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with running business, so long as it does not harm others. In fact *an assurance of livelihood is helpful* to practice. However one should not get obsessed with income, money and wealth.

Reasonable action to *protect one's wealth and the exercise* of reasonable care in spending are also helpful for practice.

A healthy environment is conducive to practice. Prevalence of diseases, and being unduly exposed to infections and other illnesses, tends to divert attention to health issues. To be afraid of sickness or to be obsessed with one's health, are also not helpful. After all, sickness is a feature of existence and there is no place on earth free from illnesses. Wisdom must be applied to get the right balance.

The choice of country, region, town and place for living is vitally important. There are places where killing of animals, exploitation, gambling, prostitution, burglary, bribery and dishonesty are rampant. Then there are places where there are riots, wars, rebellions, and violent political activities. At some places, continual floods and fires, tornados, tsunamis, famines and the like are commonplace. There is blatant intolerance regarding religion, race and other differences in some places. *So, these situations are not conducive to practice.*

Even a prosperous society or group that treats money and wealth as the end all and be all of all that is desirable needs to be avoided.

Chapter (48) OBSERVING THE RELEVANCE OF THE 39 BLESSINGS

The discourse on the factors of blessing (Maha Mangala Sutta) gives a list of thirty nine factors (sometimes counted differently) that help to make one's life happy and meaningful. It is aimed at lay people. In Theravada countries most people can recite the entire discourse in Pali. The Sangha chant this discourse in most cases of chanting scriptures, in monasteries and in households, as well as on auspicious occasions.

The introduction to the discourse says that the Buddha gave this discourse at the invitation of a heavenly being who stated that beings in the heavens and beings in the human plane are all interested to know what things would bless them in household life.

Briefly stated the blessings are as follows:

- 1 Not to associate with 'fools'
- 2 To associate with the 'wise'
- 3 Honouring those worthy of honour

- 4 To reside in suitable locality
- 5 To have done meritorious action in the past
- 6 To set oneself in the right path

- 7 Vast learning
- 8 Perfection in handicraft
- 9 Well trained in discipline
- 10 Having pleasant speech

- 11 To support the mother and the father
- 12 To look after children
- 13 To have a peaceful occupation

- 14 Liberality
- 15 Righteous conduct
- 16 Looking after relatives
- 17 To be blameless in actions

- 18 To cease and to abstain from evil
- 19 Forbearance in regard to intoxicants
- 20 Being steadfast in virtues

- 21 Being reverent
- 22 Humility
- 23 Contentment
- 24 Being grateful
- 25 Opportune hearing of the Dhamma

- 26 Patience
- 27 Obedience
- 28 The sight of ascetics
- 29 Discussing the Dhamma at due seasons

- 30 Self control

- 31 Holy (pure) life
- 32 Perception of the noble truths
- 33 Realisation of enlightenment

- 34 Having a mind that does not flutter upon contact with worldly contingencies
- 35 Living in a state without sorrow
- 36 Being stainless
- 37 Being secure

- 38 Being invincible
- 39 Always moving with happiness

Each of the above groupings correspond to one stanza in the discourse.

Chapter (49) OBSERVING THE RELEVANCE OF THE 15 COMMENDED SKILLS

This list of fifteen (sometimes counted differently) skills, is taken from another discourse included in the most common types of chanting. It is the discourse on loving kindness (Metta Sutta).

The background story to the discourse says that the Buddha gave this discourse when a group of monks who retired to the forest for meditation got frightened because of disturbances created by heavenly and other beings that inhabited the forest. These beings had resented the presence of the monks who were more virtuous and had to be respected by them.

The idea of the discourse was to elaborate on the way one should practice loving kindness meditation. It was expected that as the monks extended loving kindness to the other beings, those beings would get over their resentment.

However, the Buddha enumerates these skills to guide the monks to get established in loving kindness meditation. In short as these skills are developed, a person can become a skilful meditator.

The skills are briefly stated as follows:

- 1 Efficiency
- 2 Being upright
- 3 Being perfectly upright
- 4 Obedient
- 5 Gentle
- 6 Humble
- 7 Contented
- 8 Easily supportable
- 9 Having only a few duties to do
- 10 Having a right livelihood
- 11 Being controlled in the senses
- 12 Being discreet
- 13 Not being impudent
- 14 Not being greedily attached to families
- 15 Not even committing any slight wrong considered as censurable by wise people

Chapter (50) DEVELOPING THE TEN PERFECTIONS

A person who aspires to become a Buddha, and in fact a person who aspires to become enlightened, or going further anyone who seriously practices the Buddha's teachings, need to develop a set of factors called the ten perfections. In some Mahayana schools these are listed as fifteen factors but the concepts are no different. These are listed below.

- 1 Generosity
- 2 Morality
- 3 Renunciation
- 4 Wisdom
- 5 Effort
- 6 Patience
- 7 Truthfulness
- 8 Determination
- 9 Loving kindness
- 10 Equanimity

All these other than patience, truthfulness and determination have been examined in some detail in earlier chapters. The practice of patience helps us to minimise jumping into conclusions, speech or actions that are rooted in greed, hatred and delusion, only to regret later. Patience here does not mean patience for one minute but rather continuing patience against all kinds of difficult situations.

Truthfulness was discussed before as a positive in the practice of right speech as meant by the noble eight fold path.

Determination saves us from giving up practice in the face of difficult circumstances.

Chapter (51) DEVELOPING THE TEN TYPES OF MERITORIOUS ACTIONS

These are as follows:

- 1 Generosity
- 2 Morality
- 3 Mind Development
- 4 Reverence towards those to be revered
- 5 Being of service to the sick and the disabled
- 6 Transference of merits
- 7 Rejoicing in other's merits
- 8 Learning the Dhamma
- 9 Teaching the Dhamma
- 10 Straightening one's views

Chapter (52) DEVELOPING THE SEVEN FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

In a way the ten enlightenment factors are relevant in higher practice when a being is getting closer to enlightenment. However, to the extent that our wisdom and attainments allow at least some of these are relevant to everyone both in the mundane sphere and at the heights of spiritual practice. The following are the ten enlightenment factors as enumerated in the discourses on the enlightenment factors (e.g. Maha Kassapathera Bojjhanga Sutta):

- 1 Mindfulness
- 2 Investigation of the teaching
- 3 Mental effort
- 4 Joy
- 5 Happiness
- 6 Concentration
- 7 Equanimity

Chapter (53) DEVELOPING THE TEN USEFUL PERCEPTIONS

We have discussed before, the impact of perceptions on our lives and in particular the harm caused by crooked perceptions that disable us in seeing things as they really are. Such perceptions are distorted and give us a wrong picture of everything that we experience. The result is that our greed, hatred and delusion keep growing and cause us more and more misery. As a result our family life, community life and work life become rugged and unpleasant. Many people just do not see the way out.

The way out has been discussed in earlier sections. Here we take one more step regarding perceptions. We can develop wholesome perceptions that actually guide us upward towards a happy worldly life, a successful spiritual life and lead to enlightenment.

Again one could argue that the ten wholesome perceptions are a little beyond ordinary people. However, to the extent that our wisdom and attainments allow, at least some of these are relevant to everyone both in the mundane sphere and at the heights of spiritual practice equally well. The following are the ten wholesome perceptions as enumerated in the admonition to Venerable Ananda for the benefit of the ailing Venerable Girimananda (see Girimananda Sutta):

- 1 Impermanence
- 2 Substancelessness
- 3 Loathesomeness of body parts
- 4 Exposure of the body to a multitude of sufferings
- 5 Rejection of thoughts of sensuous desires, repulsions, harm and violence, and all unskilful actions
- 6 Non-grasping, rejection of all defilements, calming of mental fabrications, destruction of desires
- 7 Rejection of all attachments
- 8 Release from the world of attachments
- 9 Rejection of all mental fabrications
- 10 Mindfulness of breathing

The author suggests the following clarification of the above perceptions to help a beginner who might get baffled about the terms used, the flow of ideas and the ultimate meaning and value of the entire concept behind the ten useful perceptions. The reader can use mindfulness of breathing to note the development of the other perceptions in small increments. The development of each perception leads to the enhancement of the other perceptions and would also make breathing meditation more and more effective. This meditation is not an end in itself but it is a vehicle to move upwards by strengthening these perceptions. Here are the corresponding ten clarifications.

1 Noting the inherent nature of change in every thing around us and noting that it is impossible to find exceptions to this rule in the world we experience. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

2 Noting that in the ultimate analysis, there is no solid, separable, identifiable, permanent entity that we can call a self, a soul within each one of us. It looks more like a flow of interacting complex processes. All physical and mental phenomena too seem to have this property. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

3 Noting that the parts of the body looked at separately are loathsome. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

4 Noting that the body and its parts are subject to ailments that cause suffering. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

5 Using the above four perceptions, we reduce the chances of greed and hatred arising in the mind. The tendency to harm other beings and the tendency to commit wrongful or unskillful actions with the mind, with the spoken word and with the actions of the body, are reduced. The value of such reduction can be built up as a perception. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

6 This leads us to noticing the arising of unskillful thoughts and the connected mental fabrications. We then develop the ability to calm such tendencies without getting attached to them and without pursuing them. This helps in reducing desire and attachment. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

7 We then develop the ability to reject any and all attachments. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

8 The result is a complete release from this world of attachments. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

9 A result of such release is that there is no room for new mental fabrications. Even as relevant situations arise, fabrications are totally rejected. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

10 The development of all of the nine perceptions enumerated above is facilitated and enabled by the practice of breathing mindfully. This power of breathing meditation must be noted and understood. With continuing observation, gradually we develop this perception in our minds.

A reader might wonder whether this type of practice is within the capabilities of a lay person, an ordinary householder, in contra-distinction to a dedicated practitioner such as a monk. The author firmly believes that anyone can develop these perceptions slowly and gradually in small increments.

Another question is what benefits will accrue to a lay practitioner. In summary, the immediate result (not even postponed by five minutes) is a higher level of genuine happiness, a feeling of peace and very likely improved health or at least a new attitude to poor health. The joy arising from the initial experience renders the next step easy and attractive.

PART (4) GUIDE TO BUDDHIST LITERATURE

[Please see Buddhanet.net or other websites on Buddhism]

APPENDIX (1) THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHIA

[Please see Wikipedia or other websites on the subject]

THE END