

# Thoughts on the Dhamma

By the

*Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw*

**Selected from his discourses**

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## Preface

While the present book was in preparation, its author, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw of Burma, passed away at the age of 78. Thus, unexpectedly—as death so often comes—this publication has turned out to be a memorial issue in honour of one of the outstanding contemporary teachers of Theravada Buddhism, especially in the field of insight meditation (*vipassanā*). It was not long before he passed away that the Venerable Sayādaw had conveyed his consent to a compilation of his thoughts and observations, chiefly on insight meditation.

The selections here presented have been taken from sermons of the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw dealing with various Suttas (Discourses of the Buddha). The sermons had been delivered in the Burmese language and were translated into English by various hands. A set of seven books containing these English translations was published in 1980 by the Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organisation of Rangoon (“Sāsana Yeiktha”), which gave its kind permission for extracts from these books to be reproduced in the present anthology. These selections have been slightly edited, and references to their sources are given after each extract. A short biography of the Venerable Author is also included here.

In issuing this anthology, it is hoped that the sayings will be found instructive and inspiring, and that they will stimulate the reader to take up earnestly the threefold cultivation of morality, meditation, and wisdom, reaching their culmination in liberating insight wisdom.

It was a direct approach to that liberating insight (*vipassanā*) which the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw taught for many decades to a very large number of meditators from East and West. Based on the “Foundations of Mindfulness” (*satipaṭṭhāna*), he devised an effective method of meditative practise, partly derived from tradition and his own teachers, and partly evolved by himself. This method certainly demanded, or led to, a high degree of mental concentration, but did not require the prior attainment of full meditative absorption, the *jhānas*. Yet, as some of the extracts in this book will show, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was fully aware of the great significance of full concentration of mind in the *jhānas*, and he neither discouraged their cultivation nor belittled their value. But as a wise and compassionate teacher, he wanted to help those who, for psychological or environmental reasons, would have been faced with a long and frustrating struggle in their attempts to gain jhānic concentration.

For such a person, the method of direct insight practise could open an access to the core of the Teaching by direct meditative experience. In the course of the diligent practise of that method, there would follow a natural growth of mindfulness and concentration, of inner firmness and calm, which would place the meditator in a better position to attain to the *jhānas*.

In conclusion, the undersigned wishes to express his humble respect to the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, and his deep-felt gratitude for the guidance and inspiration he received from him.

Nyanaponika  
Forest Hermitage  
Kandy, Sri Lanka  
September 1982

# The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

The Venerable U Sobhana Mahāthera, better known as Mahāsi Sayādaw,<sup>1</sup> was born on 29 July 1904 to the peasant proprietors, U Kan Htaw and Daw Shwe Ok at Seikkhun Village, which is about seven miles to the west of the town of Shwebo in Upper Burma, once the capital of the founder of the last Burmese dynasty.

At the age of six he began his studies at a monastic school in his village, and at the age of twelve he was ordained a *samanera* (novice), receiving the name of Sobhana. On reaching the age of twenty, he was ordained a *bhikkhu* on 26 November 1923. He passed the Government Pali Examinations in all the three classes (lower, middle, and highest) in the following three successive years.

In the fourth year of his *bhikkhu* ordination, he proceeded to Mandalay, noted for its pre-eminence in Buddhist studies, where he continued his further education under various monks of high scholastic fame. In the fifth year he went to Moulmein where he took up the work of teaching the Buddhist scriptures at a monastery known as Taung-waing-galay Taik Kyaung.

In the eighth year after his *bhikkhu* ordination, he and another monk left Moulmein equipped with the bare necessities of a *bhikkhu* (i.e., alms-bowl, a set of three robes, etc.), and went in search of a clear and effective method in the practise of meditation. At Thaton he met the well-known Meditation Teacher, the Venerable U Nārada, who is also known as Mingun Jetawun Sayādaw the First. He then placed himself under the guidance of the Sayādaw and at once proceeded with an intensive course of meditation.

He had progressed so well in his practise that he was able to teach the method effectively to his first three disciples in Seikkhun while he was on a visit there in 1938. These three lay disciples, too, made remarkable progress. Inspired by the example of these three, gradually as many as fifty villagers joined the courses of intensive practise.

The Venerable Mahāsi could not stay with the Venerable Mingun Sayādaw as long as he wanted as he was urgently asked to return to the Moulmein monastery. Its aged head monk was gravely ill and passed away not long after the Venerable Mahāsi's return. The Venerable Mahāsi was then asked to take charge of the monastery and to resume teaching the resident monks. During this time he sat for the Pali Lectureship Examination on its first introduction by the Government of Burma. Passing this examination on the first attempt, in 1941 he was awarded the title of Sāsanadhaja Sri Pavara Dhammacariya.

On the event of the Japanese invasion, the authorities gave an evacuation order to those living near Moulmein at the Taung-waing-galay Monastery and its neighbourhood. These places were close to an airfield and hence exposed to air attacks. For the Sayādaw this was a welcome opportunity to return to his native Seikkhun and to devote himself wholeheartedly to his own practise of *vipassanā*-meditation and to the teaching of it to others.

He took residence at a monastery known as Mahā-Si-Kyaung, which was thus called because a drum (Burmese: *si*) of an unusually large (*mahā*) size was housed there. From that monastery, the Sayādaw's popular name, Mahāsi Sayādaw, is derived.

It was during this period, in 1945, that the Sayādaw wrote his great work, *Manual of Vipassanā Meditation*, a comprehensive and authoritative treatise expounding both the doctrinal and the practical aspects of the Satipaṭṭhāna method of meditation. This work of two volumes, comprising 858 pages in print, was written by him in just seven months, while the neighbouring

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<sup>1</sup> The Burmese word *Sayādaw*, meaning "Venerable Teacher," is an honorific term and way of address given to senior or eminent monks.

town of Shwebo was at times subjected to almost daily air attacks. So far, only one chapter of this work, the fifth, has been translated into English and is published under the title *Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages* (Buddhist Publication Society).

It did not take long before the reputation of Mahāsi Sayādaw as an able teacher of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) had spread throughout the Shwebo-Sagaing region and attracted the attention of a prominent and very devout Buddhist layman, Sir U Thwin, who was regarded as Burma's Elder Statesman. It was his wish to promote the inner strength of Buddhism in Burma by setting up a meditation centre to be guided by a meditation teacher of proven virtue and ability. After meeting Mahāsi Sayādaw and listening to a discourse given by him and to the meditation instructions given to nuns in Sagaing, Sir U Thwin was in no doubt that he had found the ideal person he was looking for.

In 1947 the Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organisation<sup>2</sup> was founded in Rangoon with Sir U Thwin as its first President and with its object the furthering of the study (*pariyatti*) and practise (*paṭipatti*) of Buddhism. In 1948 Sir U Thwin donated five acres of land at Kokine, Rangoon, to the organisation for the erection of a meditation centre. It is on this site that the present *Thathana* (or *Sāsana*) *Yeiktha*, i.e., "Buddhist Retreat," is situated, which now, however, covers an area of twenty acres, with a large number of buildings.

In 1949, the then Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, and Sir U Thwin requested that the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw come to Rangoon and give training in meditation practise. On 4 December 1949, the Sayādaw introduced the first group of 25 meditators into the methodical practise of *vipassanā*-meditation. Within a few years of the Sayādaw's arrival in Rangoon, similar meditation centres sprang up all over Burma, until they numbered over one hundred. In neighbouring Theravada countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka such centres were also established in which the same method was taught and practised. According to a 1972 census, the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Burma and abroad) had passed the figure of seven hundred thousands. In the East and in several Western countries as well, *vipassanā*-courses continue to be conducted.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council (Chatta Saṅgāyana) held at Rangoon for two years, culminating in the year 2500 Buddhist Era (1956), the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw had an important role. He was one of the final editors of the canonical texts, which were recited and thereby approved, in the sessions of the council. Further, he was the questioner (*pucchaka*)—that is, he had to ask the questions concerning the respective canonical texts that were to be recited. They were then answered by an erudite monk with a phenomenal power of memory, by the name of Venerable Vicittasārabhivaṃsa. To appreciate fully the importance of these roles, it may be mentioned that at the First Council held one hundred days after the passing away of the Buddha, it was the Venerable Mahā Kassapa who put forth those introductory questions which were then answered by the venerable Upāli and the Venerable Ānanda.

After the recital of the canonical scriptures, the Tipiṭaka, had been completed at the Sixth Council, it was decided to continue with a rehearsal of the ancient commentaries and sub-commentaries, preceded by critical editing and scrutiny. In that large task, too, the Sayādaw took prominent part.

In the midst of all of these tasks, he was also a prolific and scholarly writer. He authored more than 70 writings and translations, mostly in Burmese, with a few in the Pali language. One of these deserves to be singled out: his Burmese translation of the commentary to the *Visuddhimagga* (*Visuddhimagga Mahā-Ṭīkā*), which, in two large volumes of the Pali original, is even more voluminous than the work commented upon, and presents many difficulties,

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<sup>2</sup> That is, Organisation for Promoting the Buddhist Religion.

linguistically and in its contents. In 1957 Mahāsi Sayādaw was awarded the title of Agga-Mahā-Paṇḍita.

Yet even all of this did not exhaust the Sayādaw's remarkable capacity for work in the cause of the Buddha-Dhamma. He undertook several travels abroad. The first two of his tours were in preparation for the Sixth Council, but were likewise used for preaching and teaching:

Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (1952); India and Sri Lanka (1953, 1959); Japan (1957); Indonesia (1959); America, Hawaii, England, Continental Europe (1979); England, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand (1980); Nepal, India (1981).

In the midst of all these manifold and strenuous activities, he never neglected his own meditative life which had enabled him to give wise guidance to those instructed by him. His outstanding vigour of body and mind and his deep dedication to the Dhamma sustained him through a life of 78 years.

On 14 August 1982, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw succumbed to a sudden and severe heart attack which he had suffered the night before. Yet on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, he had still given an introductory explanation to a group of new meditators.

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was one of the very rare personalities in whom there was a balanced and high development of both profound erudition linked with a keen intellect, and deep and advanced meditative experience. He was also able to teach effectively both Buddhist thought and Buddhist practise.

His long career of teaching through the spoken and printed word had a beneficial impact on many hundreds of thousands in the East and in the West. His personal stature and his life's work rank him among the great figures of contemporary Buddhism.

Writings of the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw in English Translation (Selection):

*The Progress of Insight through the Stages of Purification, With the Pali Text* (1)

*Practical Insight Meditation. Basic and Progressive Stages* (1)

*Practical Vipassanā Meditational Exercises* (2)

*Purpose of Practising Kammatṭhāna Meditation* (2)

*The Wheel of Dhamma* (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) (2)

(1) Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

(2) Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organisation, 16 Sāsana Yeiktha Road, Rangoon, Burma.

# The Dhamma

## *One Truth*

Indeed, truth must be one and indivisible. This must be borne in mind. Nowadays, when Buddha-dhamma is being disseminated, there should be only one basis of teaching relating to the Middle Way or the Eightfold Path: the practise of morality, concentration, and acquisition of profound knowledge, and the Four Noble Truths. But if one were preaching that the aims and objects of Buddhism can be achieved without recourse to the actual practise of the Dhamma, we should understand that such a one has strayed from the Path.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *The Need for Practise*

In these days there have cropped up misstatements running counter to what the Buddha actually taught. Knowledge, it is said, is accomplishment; and there is no need for anyone to practise Dhamma once knowledge has been attained. Such a statement virtually amounts to the rejection of the practise of the Dhamma, to the exclusion of the Noble Eightfold Path. But in point of fact, the Noble Eightfold Path is to be constantly practised, for it is a set of disciplines to be cultivated (*bhāvetabba*) which can generate the power to gain insight into the nature of the Path. Without effort, nothing comes up naturally. And yet there is a school of thought which wrongly suggests that making an effort itself is *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness, and that therefore, it should not be indulged in. In the face of such dogma who will be prepared to take the trouble of meditating upon the Noble Eightfold Path and practise its tenets? If there is no one to practise this Dhamma, how can its light shine within him? And in the absence of any insight into the nature of the Path, how can one eliminate defilements and attain Nibbānic peace?

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *The Path in Three Stages*

Good Buddhists are in the habit of wishing for realisation and attainment of Nibbāna whenever they accomplish any meritorious deed. The *summum bonum* will not, of course, be attained immediately by their mere wishing. It will be attained only in one of the higher planes which they will reach by virtue of their good deeds; and then only if they actually practise developing the Eightfold Path. So, why wait till a future existence? Why not start now and work for liberation in this very life?

*Discourse on "The Wheel of Dhamma"*

## *Putting Knowledge into Practise*

According to the Buddha, knowledge relating to the Noble Path transports one to the stage where all suffering or unsatisfactoriness ceases. But it must always be borne in mind that the Path offers salvation only to those who actually practise it.

In your travels a vehicle takes you to your destination while those who stand by it are left behind. Knowledge about the Noble Path is like that vehicle. If you ride in it, you will be

conveyed to your destination; and if you merely stand by it, you will be left behind. Those who desire to be liberated from all sufferings should use that vehicle. That is to say they should use knowledge they gained for practical purposes. The most important task for you while you are born into this Buddha Sāsana is to practise Dhamma so that you reach Nibbāna, where all sufferings cease.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## ***The True Faith***

The theory of rejection of *kamma* is gradually gaining more favourable attention because people's greed (*lobha*) is increasing and their hankering after sensual pleasures is making a corresponding increase. Nowadays, there are some who are of the opinion that if one avoids evil deeds, one will not achieve any useful purpose. That view leads people to these false faiths.

The ignorance of *kamma* and its effect that is becoming rife now, is the result of overwhelming greed (*lobha*) superimposed by delusion (*moha*).

The Buddha himself realised this and so he urged people to make efforts to reduce the volume of greed and delusion. Faithful disciples will follow the Buddha's directions and try to reach realisation through meditation practise, and thus free themselves from these false faiths. They come to realise that the *kamma* of the previous existences had made them what they are in the present existence, and the *kamma* of the present existence, if not yet free of craving (*taṇhā*), will determine the state of the next existence. Thus, they confirm their belief in the true faith.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## ***The Deities' Dissatisfaction***

Do not have the impression that if one becomes a celestial being owing to one's good deeds, one gets to a place where every wish is fulfilled and one does not need to have any more wishes; that is, one would be satisfied to the full. No being is ever satisfied with what has been given, and will always ask for more. To get more, further efforts have to be made, and suffering ensues from these efforts.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## ***The Great Pity***

Men are just living their lives without being actually aware of the slow and gradual deterioration of their bodies and the onset of disease of one kind or another till at the last moment when nothing can be done to cure the disease, death is at hand. Then only do they realise the sad fact.

The same pattern applies to man's next existence; the gradual deterioration of the body, the onset of old age and disease, and the eventual death. This the Buddha perceived. He surveyed millions of ailing beings and dying beings, and the sorrows of those who are near and dear to them, and a great pity arose in him. "Millions upon millions" is the current term, but in reality the number is countless. If the history of a being's existences were to be illustrated pictorially, the pictures so depicted would fill the entire surface of the earth, and more space would be needed. The pictures of the being's birth, old age, illness, and death were perceived by the Buddha who felt a great pity for that being; that was how the great pity, or *mahā karuṇā*, arose in him.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*



## *Slavery*

The Buddha saw that all beings were slaves of lust and greed, and that moved him to great pity. Living beings serve their lust and greed even at the risk of their lives. They go out in search of the things their lust or greed urges them, and risk their lives to get them. They have to work daily for all their lives to satisfy their lust and greed, and after death, and in the next existence, too, they remain slaves of the same master, craving (*taṇhā*). There is no period of rest for them.

In this world a slave may remain a slave only during his lifetime, but a slave of lust has an unending term of servitude till the time of salvation when he becomes an Arahāt and thus ends his wandering through *saṃsāra*.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *Listening to the Dhamma*

To attain realisation of the Dhamma while listening to a sermon, one must have a settled mind, for it is only through concentrated attention with a settled mind that one can attain *samādhi*, (concentration), and only *samādhi* can still the mind for insight. If the mind wanders during the sermon over domestic, economic, and other secular affairs, *samādhi* will not be attained. If anxiety sets in, it is all for the worse. If distraction and anxiety crop up, the essence of the Dhamma will slip, and as *samādhi* is lacking, there will be no insight, and if one cannot attain insight for *vipassanā*, how can one attain realisation of the Kamma? Concentrated attention while listening to a sermon is, therefore, an important factor.

The listener must listen carefully, with full mental involvement, and the words of the Dhamma must be adhered to in practise. If one attends to a sermon in this way, one's mind will be calm and absorbed in the sermon; one will be free from interference, and thus attain purity of mind.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *Self*

There are three different views of the ego or self. The first is the belief in self as the soul-entity. The second is the view of self based on conceit and pride. The third is the self as a conventional term for the first person singular as distinct from other persons. The self or "I" implicit in "I walk" has nothing to do with illusion or conceit. It is a term of common usage that is to be found in the sayings of the Buddha and Arahats.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

# The Burden of the Aggregates

## *The Burden*

1. What is the heavy burden? The khandhas<sup>3</sup> are the heavy burden.
2. Who accepts the heavy burden? Taṇhā, craving, accepts the heavy burden.
3. What is meant by throwing down the burden? Annihilation of taṇhā is throwing down the burden.
4. Heavy is the burden of the five khandhas.
5. Acceptance of the burden is suffering; rejection of the burden is conducive to happiness.
6. When craving is uprooted from its very foundation, no desires arise. An old burden having been laid aside, no new burden can be imposed.
7. Then, one enters Nibbāna, the abode of eternal peace.

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

## *How heavy the Burden is!*

How heavy the burden is! When a man is conceived in his mother's womb, the five aggregates appertaining to him have to be cared for. The mother has to give him all necessary protection so that he may be safely born to develop well into a human being. She has to be careful in her daily pursuits, in her diet, in her sleep, etc. If the mother happens to be a Buddhist, she will perform meritorious deeds on behalf of the child to be born.

When the child is at last born, it cannot take care of itself. It is looked after by its mother and the elders. It has to be fed with mother's milk. It has to be bathed, cleansed, and clothed. It has to be carried from place to place. It takes at least two or three persons to look after and bring up this tiny burden of the five *khandhas*.

When a man comes of age, he will have to look after himself. He will have to feed himself two or three times a day. If he likes good food, he will have to make special efforts to get it. He must make himself clean, bathe himself, clothe himself. To tone up his body, he will have to do some daily exercise. He must do everything himself. When he feels hot, he cools himself and when he feels cold, he warms himself up. He has to be careful to keep up his health and well-being. When he takes a walk, he sees that he does not stumble. When he travels, he sees that he meets no danger. In spite of all these precautions, he may fall sick at times, and will have to take medicinal treatment. It is a great burden to tend to the welfare of his *khandhas*, the five aggregates of psycho-physical phenomena.

The greatest burden for a living being is to fend for itself. In the case of human beings, some have to work for a living starting from the age of twelve or thirteen, and for that purpose they have to be educated. Some can get only an elementary schooling and so they can get employment only as menials. Those who can get a good education are profitably employed in higher positions; but then they have to work day in and day out without any break.

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<sup>3</sup> *Khandha*: The five "groups (of existence)" or "groups of clinging"; alternative renderings: Aggregates, categories of clinging's objects. The five are: the material body, feeling, perception, mental formations (including volitions), and consciousness.

But those who were born into this world with past good *kamma* do not feel the burden. A man born with the best *kamma* has been fed and clothed since childhood by his parents who gave him the best education as he came of age. Even when he grows to be a man they continue to give him all support to raise him up into a man of position who can fulfil his desires and wants. Such a fortunate man may not know how heavy the burden of life is.

Those whose past *kamma* is not good never know affluence. As children they know only hunger, not being able to eat what they would like to eat or dress in a way that they would like to dress. Now that they have grown up, they are just trying to keep their body and soul together. Some do not even have their daily quota of rice ready for the table. Some have to get up early to pound rice for cooking. Some do not even have that rice; and so they have to borrow some from their neighbours. If you want to know more about this life, go to poor men's quarters and make enquiries yourself.

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

## ***Carrying the Heavy Burden***

This body, one of the *khandhas*, is a heavy burden. Serving it means carrying the heavy burden. When we feed and clothe it, we are carrying the burden. That means we are servants to the aggregate of matter (*rūpakkhandha*). Having fed and clothed the body, we must also see to it that it is sound and happy both in the physical and psychological sense. This is serving the aggregate of feeling (*vedanākkhandha*). Again, we must see that this body experiences good sights and sounds. This is concerned with consciousness. Therefore we are serving the aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*).

These three burdens are quite obvious. Rūpakkhandha says: "Feed me well. Give me what I like to eat; if not, I shall make myself ill or weak. Or, worse still, I shall make myself die!" Then we shall have to try to please it.

Then vedanākkhandha also says: "Give me pleasurable sensations; if not, I shall make myself painful and regretful. Or, worse still, I shall make myself die!" Then we shall have to hanker after pleasurable sensations to serve its needs.

Then viññāṇakkhandha also says: "Give me good sights. Give me good sounds. I want pleasant sense-objects. Find them for me; if not, I shall make myself unhappy and frightful. Eventually I shall make myself die!" Then we shall have to do its biddings.

It is as if all these three *khandhas* are perpetually threatening us. So we cannot help complying with their demands; and this compliance is a great burden on us.

The aggregate of volitional activities (*saṅkhārakkhandha*) is another burden. Life demands that we satisfy our daily needs and desires and for that satisfaction we have to be active. We must be working all the time. This round of human activities gets encouragement from our volition prompted by desire. These activities make threatening demand on us daily, indicating that, if they are not met, trouble and even death would ensue. When human desires remain unfulfilled, they resort to crime. How heavy the burden of the *saṅkhāras* rests upon us! It is because we cannot carry this load well upon our shoulders that we get demoralised into committing sin that brings shame upon us. Criminal offences are committed mostly because we cannot carry the burden of *saṅkhārakkhandha* well. When criminals die, they may fall into the nether world of intense suffering or they may be reborn as hungry ghosts or animals. Even when they are reborn as human beings, their evil actions will follow in their wake and punish them. They may be short-lived; they may be oppressed with disease all the time; they may face

poverty and starvation; they may be friendless; they may be always living in danger or in troublesome surroundings.

The aggregate of perception (*saññākkhandha*) is also a great burden; because it is with perception that you train your faculties like memory to be able to retain knowledge and wisdom which can discern good from bad and reject from your mind unwholesome things produced by unpleasant sense-objects. If the demands of the mind for pleasant sense-objects are not met, it will take up only evil, which does nobody any good. Regrets and anxieties arise because we cannot shoulder the burden of *saññākkhandha* well.

For all these reasons the Buddha declared the five aggregates of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*) a heavy burden.

We carry the burden of our *khandhas* not for a short time, not for a minute, not for an hour, not for a day, not for a year, not for one life, not for one world, not for one aeon. We carry the burden from the beginning of *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirths, which is infinite. It has no beginning. And there is no way of knowing when it will end. Its finality can be reached only with the extermination of the defilements of the mind (*kilesa*), as we get to the stage of the path of the Noble Ones (*arahatta magga*).

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

# Ethics

## *The Light of Dhamma*

Virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, and paññā*) can lead one to the Path. Yet some assert that it is not necessary to observe the rules of morality if they are convinced of the teachings. It is often put forward by such protagonists that they have invented simplified or easy methods for their followers. How strange! It cannot be denied that, in Buddha's times, there were instances of intelligent and mature individuals who at once saw the light of Dhamma the moment they heard the Buddha's sermons. Of course geniuses exist like the *ugghaṭitaññū* who can at once grasp the meaning of the Four Noble Truths after a brief exposition, or the *vipaṅcitaññū* who can realise the Truth after a wider exposition. In Buddha's times such individuals gained the light of knowledge while listening to the Buddha's teachings without appreciable endeavour. But when it comes to an ordinary *neyya* individual who has to be guided for the gradual realisation of Truth, even the Buddha may not be able to let him see the light of Dhamma all at once. So, the following verse of the canonical Dhammapada, stanza 276, as taught by Buddha, should serve one as a reminder. In an expanded paraphrase:

You should strive for the annihilation of all potentials of defilements. Tathāgatas can only show you the way. You yourself must practise meditation on the objects for *samatha* (concentration) and *vipassanā* (meditation). Only then will you be liberated from the bonds of defilements that destroy what is wholesome and moral.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *Keeping the Precepts*

Noble Ones who have attained the first stage of sainthood, the *ariyas*, adore the five precepts. They do not want to break them; they are always anxious not to break the *sīla*. They observe the precepts not because they are afraid that others would censure them, but because they want to keep their minds in purity, and purity of mind can be achieved only by observance of the five precepts. Not only during this life, but in all future existences they do not want to fail in keeping the precepts. They may not know that they have become stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*) in their previous existence, but they do know that they must observe the five precepts fully and with no fault.

Sometimes one comes across a person who has never since his infancy done any evil deed such as killing or stealing. He was not given any particular instructions by his parents, but he knows by himself what is an evil deed and refrains from it. He has kept his virtue pure since his childhood. Maybe he had achieved a special insight of the Dhamma in his previous existence. There are also instances of persons who, though born of non-Buddhist parents have come to the East to practise meditation. Maybe such persons have had some practise of observance of the Buddha's Dhamma in their previous existences. These are interesting instances, and their cases must be evaluated in accord with the extent and depth of their study and practise of the Dhamma.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *On Kindness and Charity*

All human behaviour resulting from the practise, in deed, in word, and in thought, of loving kindness shall be rendered memorable throughout one's life.

Where love, compassion, and respect pervade human society, there shall one find enduring unity.

Acts of charity inspired by loving kindness live long in human memory, generating love and respect among mankind, thus laying foundations for the unity of the whole world.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

### *Ill will*

Ill will (*vyāpāda*) is one of the five hindrances on the holy path. It is like a disease that creates distaste for good food and makes the sick man listless and apathetic. Ill will makes us irritable, bad-tempered and suspicious. We do not trust even our friend who is on good terms with the man we dislike. A man who has ill will should regard himself as suffering from a disease. Unless it is treated promptly, it may gain ground and lead to death. Likewise, the effect of unrestrained ill will may be disastrous, as is evident in the newspaper reports of violent crimes.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

### *Killing in Self-defence*

Once, a writer said in one of the journals that a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) will not kill others, but if anyone comes to kill him, he will kill his attacker. That writer declared that he made that statement after a research of the nature of the human mind.

That is ridiculous. I just wonder whose mind he had made a research of, and how he could do that. He must have made a research of his own mind. He might have thought he was a *sotāpanna*. He might have asked himself if he would allow the attacker to kill him when he had an effective weapon to return the attack by way of defence, and it might have been his own answer that he would attack the attacker first. From his personal attitude he obtained the conclusions which he expressed in his article. According to the tenets of Buddhism, this is a ridiculous statement.

The very fact that one thinks one can and should retaliate if attacked, proves that one is not a stream-enterer, for according to Buddhist tenets, the person entertaining such a notion is a mere *puthujjana*, an ordinary worldling, definitely not a stream-enterer. A real *sotāpanna* would not kill even a flea or a bug, not to say a human being. This fact must be remembered once and for all.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

# Concentration

## *The Need for Concentration*

There are some teachers who instruct their audience to keep their minds free and relaxed instead of concentrating on meditation points because concentration, they say, restricts the mind. This is in contravention of the Buddha's instructions although it assumes an appearance of the Buddha's teachings. If, according to these teachers, the mind is set free, it will surely indulge in fond thoughts and may even revel in sensual pleasures.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *Samādhi*

Some are saying that *samādhi*—concentration of mind—is not necessary, that if one just ponders upon the two wisdom factors of the Eightfold Path, namely, Right Understanding (*sammādiṭṭhi*) and Right Thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*), there is no need to make a note of arising and vanishing. This is a skipping of the area of *samādhi*. *Jhāna-samādhi* is indeed the best to attain, but failing that, one should acquire momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), which is equivalent to access-concentration. Otherwise, it is not real insight-wisdom. So said the Buddha:

“Bhikkhus, try to acquire *samādhi*. A bhikkhu who has a stable mind knows the truth. What is ‘knowing the truth?’ It is knowing that the eye (*cakkhu*) is non-permanent, that visual form (*rūpa*) is non-permanent, and that visual consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇa*) is non-permanent.”

So it is clear that without *samādhi* one cannot acquire *vipassanā*-knowledge and attain the knowledge of the supramundane Paths and Fruits (*maggaphala-nāṇa*). One can, therefore, decide that knowledge outside of *samādhi* is not *vipassanā*-knowledge, and that without *vipassanā*-knowledge one cannot attain Nibbāna.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *Becoming and Dissolution*

A bubble bursts soon after it has been formed. A mirage conjures up an image of reality which disappears on close examination. There is absolutely no substance in either of them. This is common knowledge. As we know their true nature, so also must we know the true nature of the phenomena. When a meditator acquires knowledge of concentration through the observance of the dissolution of the aggregates (*khandha*), he will discover that the known object and the knowing mind are all in a state of flux, now appearing, now vanishing. They are transitory. There is no essence or substance worthy to be named “mine” in them. They signify only the processes of becoming and dissolution.

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

# Meditation

## *Instructions to the Meditator*

To develop mindfulness and gain insight-knowledge, the following points must be borne in mind:

1. Recognise correctly all physical behaviour as it arises.
2. Recognise correctly all mental behaviour as it arises.
3. Recognise every feeling, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent, as it arises.
4. Know, with an analytical mind, every mental object as it arises.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *Knowledge Deepens Through Practise*

If the Path is practised to gain direct personal experience, it is usual that knowledge deepens as time goes on.

*Discourse on The Wheel of Dhamma*

## *Initial Doubt*

Some people who have never meditated may have some doubt, and no wonder! For only seeing is believing, and their scepticism is due to their lack of experience. I myself was a sceptic at one time. I did not then like the Satipaṭṭhāna method as it makes no mention of *nāma, rūpa, anicca, anattā* and so forth. But the Sayādaw who taught the method was a learned monk, and so I decided to give it a trial. At first I made little progress because I still had a lingering doubt about the method which, in my view, had nothing to do with ultimate reality.

It was only later on when I had followed the method seriously that its significance dawned on me. I realised then that it is the best method of meditation since it calls for attentiveness to everything that is to be known, leaving no room for absent-mindedness. So the Buddha describes the Satipaṭṭhāna method as the only way: *Ekāyano-maggo*.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

## *A Very Effective Remedy*

If you suffer from ill health or disease, and if you have no other remedy to alleviate the pain and suffering, the meditation practise upon the suffering of illness can give at least some relief if it cannot give you a complete cure. If the pain and suffering remain in your body, the meditation practise can render relief to your mind. But if you are angry or irritated by the physical suffering, your mind will suffer, too. The Buddha compared this dual suffering to being pierced by two thorns at the same time.

Let us say a man has a thorn in his flesh, and he tries to extract the thorn by piercing another thorn into his flesh. The second thorn breaks into the flesh without being able to extract the first thorn. Then the man suffers the pain from two thorns at the same time. So also, the person who



cannot make a note of the physical pain in a meditation manner suffers both physical and mental pain. But if he can ponder well upon the physical pain, he will suffer only that pain, and will not suffer mental pain.

This kind of suffering—only physical pain—is like that suffered by the Buddha and Arahats, for they, too, suffer physical pain. They suffer from ill-effects of heat and cold, insect bites, and other kinds of discomfort. Though they suffer from the physical *dukkha*, their minds remain stable, so they do not suffer mental pain. The meditation method is a very effective remedy for physical pain and suffering.

*Discourse on Lokadhammā*

## ***Depression***

We should keep in mind the law of *kamma*—the Buddha’s teaching that everything happens according to one’s actions—and bear our misfortunes calmly. The best remedy in a crisis is the practise of *samatha* or *vipassanā*. If sorrow, grief, or depression afflicts us, during meditation hours such unwholesome states of consciousness must be noted and removed. The Buddha describes the Satipaṭṭhāna method as the only way to get over grief and end all suffering. So long as we keep ourselves mindful according to Satipaṭṭhāna teaching, we never feel depressed, and if depression arises, it passes away when we focus our attention on it.

*Discourse on the Sakkapañha Sutta*

## ***Despair***

Some meditators are disheartened because of their weak concentration at the outset, but as a result, some redouble their effort and attain unusual insights. So the meditator may benefit by his despair at this stage. According to the commentaries, we should welcome the despair that results from non-fulfilment of desire in connection with renunciation, meditation, reflection, and *jhāna*.

Sorrow is wholesome when it arises from frustration over any effort to promote one’s spiritual life, such as the effort to join the holy order, the effort to attain insight, and so forth. We should welcome such sorrow for it may spur effort and lead to progress on the Path. It is not, however, to be sought deliberately. The best thing is to have wholesome joy in the search for enlightenment.

*Discourse on the Sakkapañha Sutta*

## ***Strenuous Effort***

Strenuous, relentless efforts in meditation practises for achievement of concentration and insight should not be misconceived as a form of self-torture. Leaving aside meditation practises, even the keeping of the moral precepts which may entail some physical discomfort and abstention, is not to be regarded as a practise of self-mortification.

In the practise of concentration and insight meditation, patience and self-control (*khantī-samvara*) play an important role; they are important factors for the successful practise of both. Therefore unpleasant physical discomfort should be borne with patience. The self-control practised thus is not self-mortification, inasmuch as its goal is not the afflicting and enduring of pain but one’s progress in virtue, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*) as enjoined by the Buddha.

*Discourse on “The Wheel of Dhamma”*

## *How to Avoid the Two Extremes*

Of the five sense objects—namely, sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—those objects which would not violate observance of the precepts or which would be helpful to the practise of Dhamma may be made use of. Eating food which should be normally eaten, wearing clothes which should be normally worn, contributes to easeful practise of Dhamma, thus avoiding the extreme austerity of self-mortification.

Necessary material goods such as food, clothing, medicine, and shelter should be used, accompanied either by reflective contemplation or the practise of concentration or insight-meditation. Every time contact is made with the five sense objects, they should be noted as objects of insight-meditation. By adopting a reflective mood or by noting these sense objects as objects of insight-meditation, partaking of necessary food, clothing, etc., does not develop into enjoying them with delight or pleasure, thereby avoiding the other extreme of indulgence in sensuous pleasures. The Blessed one declared, therefore, that “Having avoided these two extremes (parts, practises), I have come to understand the Middle Path.”

*Discourse on The Wheel of Dhamma*

## *Purity of Mind*

You have purity of mind when you are mindful. It is a mistake to think that one can attain it only when one enters meditative absorption (*jhāna*). Purity of mind based on *jhāna* is due to the continuous stream of *jhānic* consciousness. Purity of mind through *vipassanā* is the purity that emerges at the moment of attaining insight. Both kinds of consciousness are alike in respect to purity of mind and freedom from hindrances.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

# Insight Meditation

## *Insight Knowledge*

Insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*) is attained by observing the actions of mind-and-body (*nāma-rūpa*) in the state of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anattā*). It is not attained simply by casual observation, but by in-depth observation of the actions as they are happening, without leaving any one of them unobserved. Thus the observation should be on all actions such as seeing, hearing, smelling, eating, etc., as they are happening and without failing to observe any single action.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## *A Flash of Lightning*

Watch a flash of lightning. If you watch it at the moment lightning strikes, you will see it for yourself. If you are imagining in your mind as to how lightning strikes before or after the event, you may not be regarded as having seen the flash of lightning. So try to know things for yourself by actual observation of things as they happen.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *No Ordinary Teaching*

Beware of those who assert that *vipassanā* (insight-meditation) is unnecessary or superfluous. Such statements are not conducive to the practise of insight-meditation, without which our Buddhasāsana would be like any ordinary teaching.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *The Qualities for Success*

It is impossible to do anything without faith or conviction. You will practise mindfulness only if you believe that it will help to develop insight-knowledge. But faith in itself will not do. You need, too, a strong will and unrelenting effort to attain the path and Nibbāna. Possession of these qualities is essential to success in the practise of mindfulness and for gaining security in the abode of the Noble.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

## *The Three Feelings in Vipassanā*

The main object of *vipassanā* practise is to seek and cultivate the equanimity that is bound up with "equanimity about formations" (*saṅkhārupekkhā*) insight. To this end we should avoid sensuous joy and seek wholesome joy in good deeds and contemplation. Likewise we should welcome wholesome sorrow stemming from frustration on the holy path and avoid unwholesome sorrow. In the same way we should avoid unwholesome equanimity of the sensual world and seek wholesome equanimity of the holy path.

We should concentrate on wholesome joy, wholesome sorrow, and wholesome equanimity. For the cultivation of these wholesome states of consciousness means the elimination of their negative, unwholesome counterparts.

We should also eliminate wholesome sorrow through wholesome joy. This means that if we are depressed because of the failure to make much progress on the holy path, we must overcome the depression by exerting effort for *vipassanā*-insight. Likewise, wholesome joy must be rejected through wholesome equanimity.

Thus “equanimity about formations” (*saṅkhārupekkhā*) insight with joy or with equanimity is only a step removed from the holy path and fruition.

*Discourse on the Sakkapañha Sutta*

## ***Intrinsic Knowledge***

Here we are not concerned with mere perception but with insight-knowledge which can be gained only through actual practise. When you personally watch people going through a gate, you will notice for yourself their goings and comings; you need not depend on others to know at second-hand that they are going in and out of the gate. In the same way if you yourself watch and note the six sense-doors, the eye-door, the ear-door, etc., you will actually see how *nāma* and *rūpa* arise and pass away without resorting to the process of reflecting.

Take another example. Place a mirror at the roadside. All pedestrians and vehicles will be reflected in the mirror in their true nature. If you watch and note them, you will see them as they really are. In the same way if you watch and note with mindfulness all that appears at the six sense-doors, you will notice the sense-objects (which have no consciousness) arising while the mind (the subject that possesses the consciousness) is taking cognizance of such arising. Then both the object and the subject pass away. Then this process is renewed. The meditator will then come to realise that this is the phenomenon of *nāma* and *rūpa* arising and passing away. Consciousness and corporeality are, after all, not everlasting. They are not permanent. They are suffering. They are unsubstantial.

When you note the working of *nāma* and *rūpa*, you will come to know their true nature. Having known their true nature, what remains there to be thought of and considered? So one does not get at the nature of things by merely thinking about *nāma* and *rūpa*, without actually noting how they arise and pass away. Having come face to face with them, are you going to argue their existence? And it does not stand to reason if one merely recites, “Arising! Passing away!” without actually noting the actual process. The knowledge acquired by this method of thinking or reciting is not intrinsic but mere second-hand knowledge gained through books.

The essence of insight-meditation, therefore, is to note personally all *dhammas* and phenomena as they occur.

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

## ***The Knower and the Known***

When a *vipassanā* meditator’s insight-meditation becomes strengthened, Right Thoughts direct his mind to the realities of the sense-objects on which he concentrates; eventually he will get Right Views. All this happens in this way. As one begins to reach the stage of mindfulness and subsequently of purity of mind, one will be able to distinguish the knowing mind from the object known. For instance, when one is meditating on the rising and falling of the abdominal wall, one may be able to distinguish the phenomenon of rising and falling from the mind that

knows it. In much the same way, in the process of walking, one may notice that the act of raising the foot, extending forward, and putting it down is different from the mind motivating the movement. In this way *nāma*, the knower, can be distinguished from *rūpa*, the known. This can be effected without any preconception. One recognises the phenomena without giving any thought to them. In other words, recognition is spontaneous.

As the power of concentration of the meditator gains strength, and his wisdom gets sharpened thereby, he will come to realise the fact that his knees bend because he wishes them to bend. He walks because he wants to. He sees because he has eyes to see, and the object to be seen is there. He hears because he has ears to hear, and the object to be heard is there. He enjoys life because his *kamma* is favourable. In this way he is enabled to distinguish between cause and effect with reference to every phenomenon that takes place.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## ***Empirical Knowledge***

Our main object is to attain insight-knowledge, which is accessible only through empirical approach. Through experience, the meditator observes the distinction between mind and matter, and he realises the impermanence of every thing. Experience may be followed by explanation on the part of the teacher, but not the other way around. For real knowledge has nothing to do with preconceived notions but is based on personal experience. The empirical knowledge acquired by the meditator is distinct and clear. In the course of his practise he comes to see nothing except the vanishing of everything. This is called *bhaṅga-ñāna*, knowledge of dissolution, which he learns to understand neither from scriptures nor a teacher, but from experience. As he keeps on meditating, he becomes more and more mindful until his mindfulness becomes perfect at the last stage on the Noble Path.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

## ***Conviction in Anicca***

When the realities of *nāma* and *rūpa* are known, the meditator will realise that things come into being only to pass away. "*Hutvā abhāvato aniccaṃ,*" the Commentaries say. "Having become, things cease to exist; and that is impermanence." Only when he can appreciate the realities of this nature of origination and cessation, will he gain conviction as to the impermanence of existence.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## ***The Law of Impermanence***

Once you are convinced of the law of impermanence, your mind will be detached from the idea of permanence. When you reach that stage, ignorance will be dispelled from your mind. Then you will be able to get away from *saṅkhāra*, or volitional formations, which constitute *kamma* that produces rebirth. Now you see a flash of Nibbāna.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *Ego-Belief*

Believers in the Dhamma who have acquired some knowledge about the fundamentals relating to *nāma*, *rūpa*, *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (egolessness, insubstantiality), should take up the practise of insight-meditation. It involves noting mind and matter in a state of flux at the six sense-doors in accordance with instructions relating to the establishment of mindfulness, *satipaṭṭhāna*. Note what the eyes see; note what ears hear; note what the nose smells; note what the tongue tastes; note what the body contacts; note what the mind thinks; and then you will come to know all that is to be known in accordance with the degree of perfection you have acquired.

As a meditator practises mindfulness, his power of concentration will become strengthened and his mind purified. Then he will be able to distinguish the *nāma*, or the mind that knows, and the *rūpa*, or body that is known. Then he will come to realise the absence of the thing called *atta* or self, or "I." Repeated noting will lead him on to the knowledge of the causes and effects of *nāma* and *rūpa*. In the end, the idea of self will be utterly destroyed. Before the practise of mindfulness he might be wondering if a self existed in the past, and is still existing at the present moment, and will exist in the future. After the *vipassanā*-practise all such doubts will be resolved as the true nature of the phenomena is understood.

As the meditator continues noting, he will find that the sense-objects, together with the consciousness directed at them, vanish. They are all impermanent. They just arise and pass away of their own accord. What is not permanent is not satisfactory. Nothing is substantial. Then, what is there to cling to as "I" or "Mine"? All phenomena are in a state of flux, now arising, now passing away. Contemplating on these matters, one can, by the conviction of one's own experience, do away with the idea of *attā*.

Some would like to think that noting merely the arising and passing away of *nāma* or *rūpa* is not enough. They would prefer to speculate at some length on what *nāma* or *rūpa* or the phenomena are. Such speculations are not based on self-acquired knowledge gained through actual practise, but on hearsay or book-knowledge. Insight-knowledge is perceptual and not intellectual.

*Discourse on the Bhara Sutta*

## *Self-Discovery*

The five aggregates of grasping must be learned well. You do not learn them by rote. You learn them by actual experience and practise. You must try to realise yourself the phenomena of arising and passing away of mind (*nāma*) and body (*rūpa*). *Vipassanā* means the insight you gain through your own inquiry and effort. Only after self-discovery as a result of meditation will all doubts about the non-existence of self or ego be dispelled. Then only can it be said with certainty that there is none which can be called an entity, and that what appears to be an entity is, after all, an aggregate of mental and bodily processes. As you become illumined with this realisation, you will come to understand the law of cause and effect. As you continue to meditate on this causality, you will encounter the state of flux, or the constant arising and passing away of mind (*nāma*) and body (*rūpa*), which, after all, are not permanent.

*Discourse on "To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path"*

## *The Path Factors in Vipassanā*

A meditator has to note and observe every object that appears to him via the six sense-doors. This he does with an effort; and that is the Right Effort. Then he has to keep his mind on what he has noted so as to be aware of it. And that is the Right Mindfulness. As he has to be mindful, his mind will have to be fixed or concentrated on the object. And that is the Right Concentration. These three constituents of the Path (*magga*)—Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration—are grouped under the heading of concentration (*samādhi*); they are the *samādhi magga*. Then there is the process of thinking out what existence really is, which is classified as Right Thinking or Right Thought. As a result of this right thinking, we have the Right View. These two are grouped under the heading of wisdom (*paññā*); they are the *paññā magga*. All these five in the *samādhi* and *paññā* sections are together classified as *karaka magga*, or the activators, which combine their efforts in the process of simultaneously noting and knowing.

Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood constitute the section on virtue; they are the *sīla magga*, which may generally be deemed to have been fulfilled before the meditator takes up insight-meditation. During the period of meditation, these three *sīla magga* (path-factors of virtue) remain unpolluted; in fact they get more and more purified as time goes on. With these three in this group added to the five in the previous groups, we have the eight Path factors as appearing in *vipassanā* (and hence called *vipassanā-magga*) on which we are to meditate.

Again, in the development of insight meditation, basic qualities of the elementary Path (*mūla-magga*) must be fulfilled. Of them, the first and foremost is the firm conviction that beings are the responsible “owners of their actions” (*kammasakata-sammādiṭṭhi*), a view well established in the law of *kamma*. Only when a meditator has absolute faith in this law of action and its consequences, can he practise *vipassanā*. He must believe that the result of carrying out *vipassanā* or meditation exercises can lead him to the Path, to its fruition and finally to Nibbāna. It is only with this faith that he will be able to exert Right Effort.

*Discourse on “To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path”*

### *Mindful Perception Leads to Detachment*

“In the seen there should be only the seen; in the heard only the heard; in the sensed only the sensed; in the cognized only the cognized.” This was the Buddha’s instruction to Māluṅkyaputta and Bāhiya.<sup>4</sup>

One must note what is seen as seen and no more. That is the general idea. For meditation practise, however, one must note the beginning of any object or sense as it is in the process of happening. If one could concentrate on each phenomenon distinctly and separately, one would not feel any attachment or desire, and thus craving (*taṇhā*) is gotten rid of.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

### *The Unseen and the Seen*

When the Buddha was about to give instructions to Māluṅkyaputta Bhikkhu, he asked:

“Māluṅkyaputta, do you have any desire for the appearances that you have never seen, or those that you are not in the act of seeing, or those that you never expect to see?”

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<sup>4</sup> Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, SN 35:95; Udāna I, 10.

“No, sir, that is impossible,” replied the bhikkhu.<sup>5</sup>

Now if I were to ask you the same question as the Buddha put to Māluṅkyaputta Bhikkhu, you would give the same answer as he did. You would not have any feeling of love or hatred for a person whom you never expect to see, would you? Now there are many such people in so many villages, towns, cities, and countries, and you would never have any feeling of love or of hatred for them. You wouldn’t have any attachment desire or lust for them.

Defilements do not arise from the unperceived. This point should be noted.

As for the things seen, however, defilements arise both in the act of seeing and after having seen because a mental picture is retained in the memory and on reflection or recall, defilements would recur. These cherished memories are stored up in the archives of the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), as deeply rooted memories. It is necessary to root these out by means of *vipassanā*.

*Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta*

## **Warning**

When the knowledge of investigating the aggregates as composite, and thus as unsubstantial, works, the meditator becomes fully convinced of the truth of the Dhamma relating to the three marks of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, on the contemplation of which he can further follow the trend of knowledge about the arising and passing away of *nāma* and *rūpa*. This is the stage when he attains *udayabbaya-ñāṇa*, the knowledge of arising and passing away. At this stage he will see a radiance in his mind. He will feel highly exultant. His awareness will be extraordinary. There will be nothing of which he fails to take notice. His mind is sharpened, and his memory becomes clear. Strong faith will be established. He will be joyous both physically and spiritually. This state surpasses description. But, if at this stage one becomes attached to such pleasurable mental states, they will become precursors to defilements of the mind, and be obstacles to further mental development. Joy, in a way, is no doubt a support to the meditator in his efforts to gain more strength and determination to strive further for higher goals until he reaches his destination, namely, mature *vipassanā*-knowledge. So he is warned just to note the mental state of joy as it occurs, and then to dismiss it altogether to gain insight.

*Discourse on “To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path”*

## **Eliminating the Unwanted**

Every moment of mindfulness means the gradual destruction of latent defilements. It is somewhat like cutting away a piece of wood with a small axe, every stroke helping to get rid of the unwanted fragments of wood.

*Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta*

## **Penetrative Insight**

*Nāma* and *rūpa*, or the truth of suffering, is seen as impermanent, as suffering, or as non-self. Every time they are seen thus, there is no chance for craving to make their appearance. Thus there is liberation from craving and clinging. It is called knowing the Truth of Origination by abandonment (*pahānabhīsamaya*), though not by realisation.

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<sup>5</sup> Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, SN 35:95.



Every time *rūpa* and *nāma* become subjected to his awareness, the meditator is free from ignorance (*avijjā*) that could lead him to the wrong path. Being thus free from *avijjā*, he is free from the ills of *saṅkhāra-viññāna*. This is a temporary cessation of ills (*tadaṅga-nirodha-sacca*). This temporary cessation of ills is realised by *vipassanā* at every instance of noting, but not as its object of contemplation.

Things hidden behind heavy curtains or thick walls become visible when these barriers are shattered asunder or windows are opened out. Likewise the Four Noble Truths are kept hidden behind *avijjā*, which takes note of that which is wrong but covers up that which is right. By developing the Eightfold Path through meditation exercises, Truths which were not known before become apparent through *vipassanā*-knowledge, the knowledge of the Noble Path. *Avijjā* has been penetrated, and the Noble Truths become known by means of penetrative insight.

*Discourse on "The Wheel of Dhamma"*