

Beyond the Edge of the Universe

A Steady Path of Mindfulness and Letting Go

By Indu L. Shakya, PhD

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TO MY MOTHER

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A Guide to the Book

The book is an exploration of the intersection between the Buddha's teachings, particularly mindfulness and meditative practices, and modern scientific theories about consciousness, reality, and the universe. It is not a collection of philosophical notes, but rather a rigorously testable treatise on certain aspects of science, training of the mind, and the path of direct experience.

It is divided into three parts, covering a wide range of topics that blend the insights from the Buddhist teachings, particularly those related to mindfulness, meditation, and the experience of *Nibbana*, and their relevance to life and with modern scientific concepts such as quantum mechanics, consciousness, and the nature of reality.

Introduction: Here I introduce the core themes of the book, focusing on the practice of mindfulness, the pursuit of *Nibbana*, and how direct experience through meditation can lead to profound insights into the nature of reality and consciousness.

Emptiness and Parallel Universes: The discussion explores the concept of emptiness as understood in Buddhist philosophy and parallels it with scientific notions such as parallel universes and quantum entanglement. I reflect on my personal meditative experiences that reveal the nature of consciousness and reality as interconnected and impermanent phenomena.

Fallacies of Materialists: I critique the materialist perspective in science, which tends to reduce consciousness to mere physical processes. I support views that consciousness and mind may be more fundamental than matter and that modern science, particularly physics, is reaching its limits in explaining reality. Then I show that beyond all speculations lies a realm of unconditioned that provides ultimate safety from all cosmic conditions.

Buddhist Meditative Practices: I delve into various meditative practices, particularly those taught by the historical Buddha, such as *Jhanas* (some superhuman meditative states) using *Samatha Vipassana* practice tested through the TWIM approach. These practices are presented as pathways to experiencing the true nature of the mind and reality, leading to liberation from suffering. My accounts support

the idea that the other-worldly experiences described in the Pali *Sutta* texts, also quoted by the David Johnson's book '*The Path to Nibbana*' can be replicated by anyone.

Science and Buddha Dhamma: The book bridges some gaps between scientific inquiry and the Buddha's ancient teachings, suggesting that the insights gained through meditation offer a deeper understanding of reality than what is achievable through science alone. I also discuss in an easily accessible way how scientific discoveries, particularly in quantum mechanics, resonate with the Buddhist understanding of interdependence, impermanence and the illusion of a solid, objective reality.

The Path to Nibbana: The concluding sections emphasize the practical—and direct experiential—aspects of mindfulness and meditation as a means to experience *Nibbana*, described as the ultimate state of peace and freedom from the cycles of suffering inherent in existence. It seeks to demonstrate that the value of unconditioned happiness is a remarkable achievement that can be attained in this human life. Some statements and experiences discussed in this topic may require direct understanding from meditative practices, recipes for which are explained in Part II.

Throughout the book, I intertwine personal experiences, particularly in meditation, with philosophical and scientific reflections, arguing for a more integrated understanding of consciousness and reality. The book is dense with references to both ancient Buddhist texts and modern scientific theories, aiming to provide a holistic view of the mind and the experiences of universe.

This book can be used as follows:

Part I can serve as a prelude for general and scientifically-minded readers who may be keen to understand the nature of the mind without losing their investigative spirit. The Chapters are intentionally kept light on technical details to foster open and inclusive discussions. This part can be skipped by readers who are more interested in learning the practices taught by the Buddha, without delving into analysis of scientific concepts.

Part II offers a guide for beginners in meditation, featuring key instructions of the TWIM practice, stories, examples, and accounts from my own experiences. It can help readers assess their own minds

and see what kinds of experiences and progress in meditation they can witness around when. This should help determine whether and how to invest time and effort in learning the TWIM practice. However, note that everyone's mind is different, so individual experiences will likely vary.

Part III is intended for those interested in exploring the deeper dimensions of the mind and the Buddha's teachings. It delves into the reasoning behind the outcomes of practices of deep meditative experiences, which transcend the notions of space, time, and the sensory universe, leading to the realm of the Unconditioned—*Nibbāna*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

*Those of peaceful mind, discerning,
Mindful, given to meditation (Jhana),
Clearly see things rightly
And long not for sensual pleasures.
Those peaceful ones, delighting in diligence,
Who see fear in negligence,
Are incapable of falling away
And are close to Nibbána.*

[Itivuttaka 2.45: Living in Seclusion]

I am beginning this book with a wonderful summary text taken from the *Itivuttaka*, which encapsulates the entirety of the Buddha's teachings. It evokes a warm feeling and a sense of happiness that awaits us as a gift for practicing diligently and remaining calm, composed, and careful in our attitudes. The subjects of this book are *Jhanas* and *Nibbana*, and how we can directly experience these sublime states of happiness. Now, let's delve into more details of the text:

This means that those who know and see the arising of craving directly let go of it right then. These individuals possess a peaceful mind. How does one know and see craving? One should constantly observe the mind and see where it leans when any phenomenon arises in our awareness. This could be a thought, feeling, emotion, sound, idea, imagination, and so on. A mind affected by craving always leans towards liking something or disliking it. It may manifest as a gross movement of the mind or a subtle reaction, or the mind may simply shut off by showing indifference. All these are reactions of the mind that manifest craving towards the things entering its awareness. One lets go of craving not by forcefully suppressing or avoiding them, but by mindfully being aware and simply not keeping attention on them. This is a crucial point. Trying to suppress phenomena through reactions or by force causes craving to grow rather than subside. Then, one observes that there was some subtle

tension or tightness in the mind because of those phenomena. One then relaxes the mind and body by releasing any tension in the body. This covers the attitudes of "Those of peaceful mind, discerning."

Being mindful means having that observation of the mind that is neither too lax nor too energetic. The Buddha gives the simile of holding a quail gently in one's hands. It needs to be held very gently but kept close. Essentially, one needs to have a relaxed attitude but with keen interest in the meditation object. The object of meditation can be mindfulness of loving-kindness, breath, observation of elements, the five aggregates, and so on. Personally, I have been trained in mindfulness of loving-kindness, and I find it to be a very beneficial practice in many ways. But the key lies in the attitude towards the meditation object.

After practicing in this manner for some time, the mind settles in a comfortable and peaceful way. The hindrances do not find any foothold in the mind because we are not paying attention to them and are relaxing any tension or tightness as they arise. It is akin to mud settling in the water of a pond, gradually revealing clear water in front of our awareness. What we see is the mind that is pure and empty of all distractions caused by the hindrances. This state of mind is called *Jhana*. Now, the mind is ready to observe things as they truly are. What is the reality of phenomena? They are not external to our mind; rather, they arise because of the mind reacting to situations. When one realizes this through direct experience, Cessation or *Nirodha* occurs—the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, knowing and seeing *Jhana* is extremely important on this path.

Indeed, if one experiences the happiness that arises from letting go of craving, one will understand exactly what this means. Essentially, the happiness or pleasure from letting go—or from *Jhanas*—is far superior to what we experience from sense pleasures. Why? Because there are no sensual thoughts, no aversion, no excitement, no lustful intentions—all the worldly pursuits containing traces of greed, hatred, and delusion are absent. The mind experiences this otherworldly joy or happiness, which permeates and overflows through every cell of the body. The Buddha and his disciples were nourished by this sublime happiness; hence, they did

not seek sensual happiness and were content living in secluded places and forests.

Now peace has become second nature for these meditators. They do not try to create peace or force themselves to be peaceful. They understand that peace naturally arises when the mind dissociates from phenomena, stops taking things personally, and avoids getting entangled in the mind's attempts to engage with them. They act in ways that maintain a balanced mind, naturally leading to inner peace. They are unwavering in their commitment to maintain this composure, adjusting their energy and practicing the other Awakening factors. They live harmoniously, in alignment with societal norms and nature, always adhering to the five precepts or more. They are acutely aware of personal suffering and remain mindful not to cause pain to anyone, demonstrating love and kindness towards all, including themselves. They understand that any attempt to inflict pain leads to restlessness and remorse, requiring significant effort and time to regain mental composure if deviating from the practice of right effort. They are cautious and mindful in sustaining their practice and continuously purifying their minds.

Those who live mindfully, practicing right effort, and have experienced the results of this path personally, know the Four Noble Truths intimately. When someone enters a state of Cessation (*Nirodha*) and awakens from it, they gain direct insight into the arising of the universe and the world of experiences. They have no doubts about the path leading to truth. The depth of Awakening to this experience deepens with each moment of practice. Essentially, this is what the Buddha conveyed. They have embarked on a gradual journey away from *Samsara* and will inevitably reach the state of *Nibbana* at some point in this life or the next few.

Around the end of 2017, my life took a major turn. I learned that my mother had been suffering from a chronic cough for the past few years, and her condition was worsening due to irreversible lung tissue decay. In late November, I travelled from the UK to Nepal for a few weeks to care for her. It was an emotionally challenging time. She was hoping that I could manage her deteriorating health and provide assurance that her lung condition could be treated. We consulted the

best doctors in Nepal in the hope of finding the right medication. Spending three weeks watching her become increasingly frail and helpless was extremely difficult for me.

She has been my greatest inspiration to seek the path leading to the end of suffering. I had seen her meditate daily and explain the *Suttas*. She used to say that the Dhamma is so profound that we, her children, would not fully grasp its true meaning. Her words propelled me to explore the path of direct experience and the essence of true Dhamma. By then, I had been practicing TWIM for about two years and had undergone some profound experiences. I wished to teach her this practice, but time was running out. Her deteriorating health prevented her from practicing with me.

I gave her the book *'The Path to Nibbana'* by David Johnson. Her English skills were limited, but she made efforts to understand the TWIM method. I explained the 6R technique and the importance of relaxing the mind and body to release craving, which resonated with her. From the book, she grasped the significance of the word 'Relax', which was truly inspiring for me. I wished I had more time to be with her and guide her through all the stages of *Jhanas* using the TWIM approach.

In January 2018, I received a call from Nepal urging me to take the earliest flight possible to see my mother before she passed away. I knew she was struggling due to the latest medication causing dizziness and weakness. She was on a ventilator, and the doctors were doing their best. As I landed at Kathmandu airport, my thoughts were filled with wishes for her comfort and recovery. Deep down, I held onto hope that she might survive this ordeal and eventually find freedom from her suffering, even though I knew it was a wish that kept my spirits up.

Unfortunately, I arrived too late to see her alive. Not a day goes by that I do not think about her. I take solace in the belief that she has found freedom from suffering after leaving this life, guided by the Dhamma that she held dear throughout her life. I recall a *Sutta* where the Buddha told Mahanama¹ that those who have unwavering faith in

¹ Samyutta Nikaya 55.21: Mahānāma

the Dhamma are like ghee that never sinks, a thought that brings me comfort whenever I think of her.

Witnessing death up close made me realize the harsh truths of life. Imagine suddenly discovering you have very little time left due to unforeseen medical conditions. What becomes the most important in such critical moments? Some might say winning a billion-dollar lottery, others might dream of traveling the world or ruling it. Physicists and scientists might hope to teleport or explore the mysteries of the universe. Philosophers might seek answers about our purpose and what lies beyond death.

Perhaps the greatest questions of all time may boil down to this: What drives this life filled with endless experiences of suffering and joy? Is there a lasting happiness and freedom beyond these experiences? These questions have plagued humanity since ancient times.

What if we were told that death is merely a concept, a dream that we unknowingly fabricate, and that we can bring this dream to a complete halt? The existence we live, with its vivid experiences lasting decades for us humans, parallels the dreams we experience nightly.

The Buddha discovered over 2,600 years ago that we live in an incredibly real-looking dream. He left us the means to awaken permanently from this dream and achieve freedom from the miseries we endure life after life. He called this state of Awakening and freedom, which transcends space and time and all feelings, *Nibbana*: a perpetual state of peace, calm, and tranquillity attained through the extinguishing of the fire of craving.

While this may sound too far-fetched and fantastic to take seriously, there are indeed methods that can gradually guide anyone towards Awakening by training the mind in the right way. Often, we become absorbed in the reality of everyday life, focusing on making the most out of our few decades of existence by indulging our senses with whatever pleases them. We pursue the finest tasting foods, the most luxurious cars, holidays in exotic destinations, and other pleasures to satisfy our sensual desires.

But did you know there is a far superior pleasure and happiness that lies beyond these sensory pleasures? What's more, it is

completely free for anyone to experience through simple exercises of training the mind. The Buddha called these experiences *Jhanas*—milestones of spiritual success accompanied by mindfulness and full awareness. They are attained by precisely following the recipe of *Nibbana* that he left for the world to practice and experience. This book will delve deeply into the remarkable developments of modern times to draw conclusions that support my convictions and direct experiences. Perhaps it is time to give these ancient wisdoms extra consideration and see for oneself that they are real and attainable experiences for our ultimate happiness and benefit, rather than pretending we are too busy.

Immediate questions may arise. Someone might say, "What you are talking about is nonsense; there is no happiness outside the realm of our senses." I could not agree more! This non-sensual happiness will not make sense to us until we experience it directly. In fact, we need to let go of all our preconceived ideas and concepts of happiness. Deep within our minds lie layers of mental dispositions that shape our awareness and experiences. We favor certain experiences and avoid those that are disagreeable, almost as if we have no control over them.

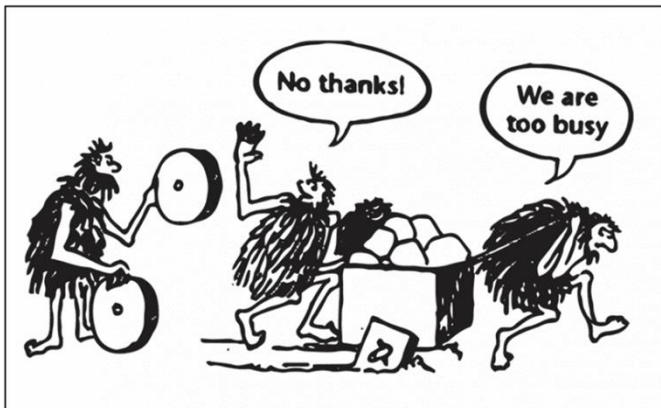


Figure 1: Too busy to explore new solutions to problems.

Deeper than these experiences lie another layer consisting of subtler experiences and attitudes that may challenge our perceptions slightly, but not significantly. These experiences are harder to let go of because we attach a sense of identity to them. We tend to believe

that these attitudes and preferences constitute our personalities or are symbols of our existence and character.

As we unravel these subtler layers of experience, they begin to lose their solidity, revealing more experiences of emptiness. We come to realize that our experiences are composed of constituent parts, like bricks and mortar in a building or composites in construction. These components are held together by a process we generally do not comprehend, yet it operates swiftly to make everything around us appear smooth and real.

Now, questions may arise: What is this thing we call reality, actually? Are solid objects, liquids, and substances around us truly real? What about our bodies, sensations, feelings, thoughts, imaginations, and preferences? Natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology, and cosmology have made significant strides in analyzing the nature of matter that constitutes the objects we perceive.

The course of discoveries in recent years, decades, and centuries has brought us closer to realizing that the reality we ascribe to these objects is not as solid as we once thought in the early Newtonian era. Moreover, the recent developments in quantum physics and the entanglement of phenomena have completely disrupted the predictable and smooth framework of space-time that Newton and Einstein introduced in their theories.

If we review the last few hundred years of development in physics and other natural sciences, we have now reached a point where any scientific discovery may no longer be considered confined to an objective reality unaffected by the presence of a conscious observer. In this book, I will closely examine how we can release ourselves from rigid theories or speculations about consciousness. I will personally explore what it means to be mindful of all mental processes, including consciousness, and how they operate in our human experiences. I will detail techniques that allow our minds to train to such a degree that we can break through to even the subtlest experiences and observe the process of experience itself through the sharpest lens of mindfulness.

Obviously, the terms consciousness, mind, and mindfulness are largely unfamiliar to many proponents of science who believe that science should not be influenced by human factors or subjectivity. It

should be defined by the precise laws of nature that underlie them. This fact is verifiable by many observers, who can arrive at a common conclusion asserting the results of the theories being investigated.

Perhaps the time is now ripe to ask the scientific community what they perceive as the ultimate objectives of all their pursuits? The answers often revolve around maximizing or minimizing certain metrics, such as minimizing energy expenditure for a process or maximizing the area served, and so on. These are always measured, compared, or quantitatively analyzed. If we step back and observe, there seems to be no end in sight to this process. It is an infinite loop where one can never find a state of total satisfaction, perpetual happiness, or complete cessation of desires. Pursuing the exploration of natural sciences solves our immediate problems—there is no denying this fact. But will it bring us long-term happiness? The answer to this question is not found within the domain of science.

This is where this book comes in: to provide descriptions of techniques, practices, paths, and experiences of long-term happiness with freedom of mind that one can personally observe, be assured of the outcomes, and where one can be free of any perplexity irrespective of what they are.

Throughout the book, I will use texts from the Pali Canon translated into English to ensure that my experiences and words can be traced back to these texts, assuring you that these are not merely my creative ideas. The Pali Canon contains the words of the historical Buddha on thousands of occasions throughout his life. They largely convey his messages to his disciples and all practitioners on how all our sufferings can be ended for good. While many of his words appear simple, their meanings run much deeper, and their significance is realized when one directly experiences them in meditative states. These are dimensions of super-human experiences, leading one to remain free from all distractions and entanglements of the mind.

Chapter 2

On Emptiness and Parallel Universes

These are strange terms connected with our experiences. The former is often linked to the state of the universe through the lens of mindfulness—also referred to as the lack of substance and solidity. A term popularized by the sage Nagarjuna, who wrote a philosophical treatise on the original teachings of the historical Buddha concerning the mind, phenomena, and the nature of reality (Kalupahana, 2006). The latter is a more hypothetical concept in science, often connected with perplexing notions like quantum entanglement and the non-local properties of particles (Greene, 2011). Parallel universes have captured the imagination of physicists to address criticisms questioning their stance on objective reality. Like many proponents of science, I used to have dismissive attitudes towards the practices for the development of the mind and direct experience. However, over the years, my experiences and attitudes towards such ideas have changed.

It was September 2021, I sat in meditation one afternoon for around an hour, radiating equanimity in all directions. The mind became bright, light, and fresh. At times, it dimmed and wobbled back and forth. Then I realized that any wobble or fluctuation is just a potential phenomenon caused by the ignorance that these are me or mine. In fact, they are just layers of impurities or extraneous artefacts with which the mind is cluttered or stirred. I recalled the saying of the Buddha: ‘*Manasikaro Sambhava Sabbe Dhamma*²’: Which means all phenomena are potentials that become manifest due to attention, i.e., all phenomena become reality only when they are perceived or originate due to our attention. If there is no attention, these phenomena simply will not arise. I then saw that all perceptions, including material forms, feelings, and consciousness, indeed come about when we are consumed in the flow of the process of dependent origination. With the non-understanding of this as a condition,

² Anguttara Nikaya 10.58: Mūla Sutta

formations come to be. At each contact point, the very start of choice we make in each activity is based on reaction.

These feelings and perceptions arise due to contact that is identified with our experiences. These morph into consciousness at one end and mind-matter (*Nama Rupa* in Pali) at the other. Duality arises. These are just vibrations that arise and pass away so incredibly fast that they manifest to consciousness as something solid, like objects. We know from physics that all atoms and molecules are empty of any substance. They repel each other, giving us a sense of resistance. Therefore, a rock feels solid, a chair supports our weight, and so on. In fact, these sensations continue due to our engagement with these phenomena, i.e., consciousness and mind-matter. The moment consciousness is present, *Nama Rupa* also arises with it.

The Buddha has said on many occasions that one can develop such an ability of mind where one can dive into the earth or pass through walls unhindered³. Matter or elements (*Rupa*) can influence us as long as we take them to be something independent of our perception. When one completely lets go of any notion of these phenomena being separate, there is simply no resistance. There is no feeling, no perception, no consciousness. These four great elements⁴ simply cannot impact the mind, and the vibrations cannot arise. All that remains is voidness and non-contact. No fire, no pressure, no feeling, no material object. These things simply do not touch each other, as if they were two parallel lines that never cross or meet. I have seen this a few times directly and realized that the world is simply an artefact, a by-product of an accident where, from the purity of emptiness, like flotsam on the ocean surface, it appeared due to a deep whirlpool.

In physics, there are notions of parallel universes that are independent and remain untouched. But suddenly, they come into contact like fine membranes touching each other, giving rise to a new universe from time to time (Greene, 2011). This brane theory of membrane-like occurrences of the universe is a concept. But the reality of our experience can also be like this. The moment anything

³ For example, Samyutta Nikaya 16.9: Jhānas and Direct Knowledges

⁴ Earth, water, fire and air in the Buddhist texts

is perceived, the world starts to arise, and all phenomena follow. But before these things occur, there is peace and calm. There is no notion of time, space, or concept. It just remains as an experience, nothing more than that. There is no 'I', no object, just experience. Here is a verse from the *Dhammapada*:"

*“All mental phenomena have mind as
their forerunner; they have mind as their chief;
they are mind-made.”*

[Dhammapada Verse 1: The Story of Cakkhupala]

This mind and mental phenomena sequence is a very important point. All mental phenomena arise and cease simultaneously. Cracking this point can lead us to the Deathless—a state I will explore in more detail later. The mind is truly the most complex architect of all we see around the world today; everything that we have built and imagined is the product of our mind. We have made astonishing discoveries in recent centuries by making deep observations of physical, chemical, and biological phenomena. These discoveries have led to state-of-the-art technologies such as supercomputers, sophisticated software algorithms, stem cells, and many more. In short, by utilizing the mind's abilities to analyze and conceptualize, we have been able to create almost everything we can conceive of.

When it comes to the origination of all phenomena and our experiences, it is widely believed that our minds, thoughts, and perceptions are so haphazard and complex that there is no such thing as science when it comes to studying the human mind. Most people consider such a topic as something beyond normal human capabilities to comprehend. They resort to ideas like a supreme creator or God behind them. Alternatively, some resort to mysticism and supernatural consciousness as the ultimate nature of all creations, including the mind. Direct experience and personal realization of mind and phenomena as a process is something they may never think of as a way out of the mystery of the mind.

The Buddha spent six very difficult years searching for the answers to these questions. He did not accept the ideas of a supreme creator or any mystical experience or strange phenomena in the

nature of reality. He penetrated the truth of our minds' workings with the discovery of the process called '*Patichha Samuppada*' or Dependent Co-arising⁵. He saw with direct experience how his mind gets tangled with all kinds of thoughts, desires, and experiences and found a way to prevent those tangles from ever arising. He saw that this process is so deep and profound that any living being with mundane thoughts and experiences would never discover this truth.

A crude analogy for what the Buddha saw can be given: Imagine someone who is able to catch the photons at the source of light before they even start to travel the path to hit our eyes. He saw that people who are caught by the concepts of sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and thoughts are acting way too late and missing the entire process of dependent co-arising at work. Thus, he considered such ability as being fully awake (*Bodhi*) to reality to the extent that one is so alert and able to avert all kinds of disasters by seeing the root and letting go before they have any chance to manifest.

One can truly appreciate the situation when one sees for oneself through direct experience how the mind leads to the origination of all phenomena. As one progressively attains all the *Jhanas* and *Arupas*—or the formless bases—the images of all subtle activities of the mind become clearer and sharper. At the stage of Neither Perception nor Non-perception (NPNNP), one can observe directly the mind and mental phenomena arising without any distractions for a long time. If one is attentive enough to see the origination, and relaxes the mind right then, one sees immediately how the mental phenomena also cease there and then. This process is amazing to watch during practice through direct experience—how indeed just observing these events without reaction directly leads to unprecedented peace and calm.

Now, such experiences may be largely alien to the vast majority of people. Scientists talk a lot about the universe, how it arose fourteen billion years ago. They think the universe progressively evolved to give rise to nature, beings, and sentience. They consider—by uncovering the deepest extents of the cosmos on one hand and the most fundamental constituents of the particles that make up the

⁵ See Samyutta Nikaya, the Book of Causation

universe—our quest to unravel the nature of reality will be over. They are making progress by discovering things like the origination of the material universe may be purely accidental in that we are lucky to have matter in the universe rather than a complete void in the matter and anti-matter game. The universe is the ultimate free lunch—they say.

In a similar vein, Alan Guth famously said that all matter we see in the universe is actually a by-product of cosmic inflation shortly after the Big Bang⁶. There was nothing to start with, but the process of inflation generated all the matter we see around us, which is the ultimate free lunch—the material universe—that came about without actually investing anything in it.

Let's assume these are true and all matter in the universe may have come for free. The fact that we live in a very precarious place where, at any moment, our existence is subject to cosmic conditions like radiations and supernovae does not make this universe an eternally safe place. The Buddha said there is a much more valuable lunch that is absolutely free⁷ for everyone—that is, we all have a mind—which, when cultivated, leads us to experience happiness that is totally unconditioned. All dependence of mind and body, like being subjected to cosmic conditions or undergoing biological processes, precipitation of embryos, growth and decay—cease forever.

There is a sphere that the mind experiences after being freed from the hooks attached to each sense experience, e.g., visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental. This is the sphere of the Unconditioned. Therefore, there is no notion of loss or gain of objects craved by eyesight, sounds, loss of hearing, loss of taste, loss of pleasure and pain by the body, and thinking or loss of memory. All the stuff that makes up our world will not be there; in their place, there will be an awareness of peace, a sublime experience, the absence of all activities—just an awareness that is still, not subject to decay and death, pleasure and pain, not subject to any illusory appearance and disappearance, and rise and fall. This is what the Buddha called *Nibbāna*—the ultimate counterpart of the universe

⁶ Review: The ultimate free lunch, *New Scientist*, 10 May 1997

⁷ Suttanipata 2.1: Ratana Sutta

with all the miseries we unknowingly create—or the ultimate free lunch.

There are many occasions where the Buddha was continually reminding and encouraging people to practice the path, he has shown which show how much he cared to make himself heard⁸. Obviously, he did not present any precondition or return for giving away the secret of how his path does indeed give us the ultimate freedom and happiness that we all strive for in life. Unfortunately, many people are so obsessed with the gratification of sense pleasures that they cannot even imagine that there is something beyond the five physical senses. They fail to realize that there lies our true happiness: the realm of mind free from all concepts and conditions. Even when one is offered a way to realize such things, immediately a few things strike their minds:

- Is this pleasure and happiness visible here and now to be experienced by all the five senses—i.e., can we enjoy it physically and/or mentally?
- It is a fallacy to even think that such a thing called happiness beyond five senses does exist and we can experience this happiness; if otherwise, how does this compare with all the sense pleasures we know so well?
- In the world of fast foods, fast cars, and access to all the luxuries, is this happiness something that can be possessed within a matter of seconds, a few minutes? We cannot afford time for experiencing something that takes long.

I recall a simile of a tadpole and a toad by Ajahn Brahm from a while back. He uses this example to convince many of his listeners that there is a kind of happiness called *Jhana* that is beyond the senses. The thing is, it takes a lot of practice and training of the mind to master the *Jhanas*, as he teaches using breath and an object called *Nimitta*—a sign of the mind latching onto an object through deep attention. Nevertheless, his direct experience is helpful in calming the skepticism of the vast majority of people who think that sensual

⁸ Majjhima Nikaya 137: Salayatanavibhanga Sutta

pleasure is the only way to happiness. In this book, I will go into much greater detail on how the mind works while experiencing the happiness of all *Jhanas* and *Arupas* without being hooked into any of these experiences. This is a very important aspect called ‘Renunciation’ of the Buddha’s discovery of the ultimate cessation of suffering—*Nibbāna*. He also called it his Awakening to the truths or *Bodhi*.

The Awakening of the Buddha was not just about experiencing the bliss of meditation while being totally unaware of what is happening in the present moment. It was about how he awakened to two of the most profound experiences that transcend all logic and reasoning: a) witnessing the truth of specific conditionality or dependent origination of all phenomena, and b) the state of complete freedom from the universe: the stilling of all formations, destruction of all reactions, dispassion, cessation, and *Nibbāna*⁹.

The process of dependent origination always shows that consciousness is conjoined with *Nama Rupa* (mind-matter for simplicity), and this is a standard formula almost everyone sees in the Pali texts. When it comes to deeper investigations of the links, we have to make use of a few more statements of the Buddha. The first verse in the *Dhammapada* states that the mind is the forerunner of all experiences. He puts the mind first and then the whole universe as the secondary experience, i.e., the mind is primary.

So, it is clear that the mind is the starting point for all our experiences that follow. Most of the time, the mind is in flux and looks for something to interact with—these are experiences and are called mind objects or *Dhammas* in Pali. In particular, the mind interacts with the world due to contact, and mental formations are evident. These are feeling and perception arise due to contact, and they are bound up with the mind¹⁰. Wait. According to the formula of dependent origination¹¹, feeling comes only after contact—doesn’t it? Well, phenomena in our experiences do not necessarily follow one after another in a serial manner that we conceptualize so easily.

⁹ Majjhima Nikaya 26: Ariyapariyesanā Sutta

¹⁰ Majjhima Nikaya 44: Culavedalla Sutta

¹¹ Majjhima Nikaya 38: Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta

The Buddha called this process ‘*Paticca Samuppada*,’ which may be translated more accurately as ‘conditional concurrent arising’ of phenomena. Dependent origination is a translation used by teachers like Bhikkhu Bodhi and many others when Buddhism spread to the West recently. What the Buddha means here is that a multitude of phenomena arise concurrently when certain conditions are met. The mind interacts with feeling at this stage, which gives rise to perception, i.e., naming or trying to make sense of that very feeling, giving rise to conscious awareness. Only now is the feeling cognized as one of the ‘pleasant,’ ‘painful,’ or ‘neither pleasant nor painful’ feelings.

Consciousness is what gives rise to a conscious entity or a subject, i.e., the feeler of the feeling, and the object that is being felt is distinguished, or the notion of ‘I’ or ‘self’ is established. The coming together of the mind and the mind object that is still a rudimentary feeling gives rise to consciousness, which stamps our identity as the first person. The demarcation of internal and external is established by consciousness, and the contact line is drawn, which—like a membrane—is the boundary where the phenomena are noted to occur. Only at that point does the feeling become established as ‘my’ feeling to contrast with the object that caused the feeling to arise. Now, the mind sees the feeling is caused by an object out there, causing craving or reaction to the feeling to occur. In summary, feeling is a very important link in the process of dependent origination that holds the secret to our suffering and happiness. This is where the whole universe seems to go off tangent and invite more and more suffering by reacting to feelings.

Now, the Buddha has said that consciousness is dependently arisen and subject to dependent cessation¹². When that dependence is let go of, consciousness becomes independent as it does not find any support from *Nama Rupa* or mind-matter. Think of consciousness like a virus; it must have a living body (*Nama Rupa*) for it to survive. If it cannot find a *Nama Rupa*, it cannot sustain itself. The cessation of consciousness occurs when, during practice, we let go of all dependence of the mind on mind-objects.

¹² Majjhima Nikaya 38: Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Consciousness and the mind are different things. The mind is one of the six sense bases where consciousness lands. There is a *Sutta* that says the mind in its pure state is luminous and bright¹³. The six consciousnesses are like layers on top of the mind that start to cloud it and also give the illusion as if things manifest. The Buddha called these consciousnesses magicians' tricks which manifest things for those who are untrained in the Dhamma¹⁴. Thus, the mind that is no longer attached to the six consciousnesses is radiant all around (*Sabbato Pabbama*), non-manifestative (*Annidassanam*), and endless (*Anantam*). This state of perfection of the mind from all dependencies is also the pinnacle of wisdom: the complete letting go of all conditioned experiences. The climax of wisdom is experienced by *Arahants* after letting go of all the defilements or fetters of the mind. But we also experience some glimpses of such a mind during TWIM practice (explained later) by the 6R process relaxing the mind and body.

The *Kevada Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya (DN) 11* contains very deep statements by the Buddha about the nature of consciousness that ordinary worldlings are accustomed to and the type of consciousness of an *Arahant*. Consciousness is very much interleaved with our perception of the world and material things. The interrelation between consciousness (*Vinnana*) and Name and Form (*Nama Rupa*) is the deepest point in the process of dependent origination (co-arising). This combination is also called a vortex or whirlpool or tangle (*Vatta*), where we are stuck from beginning-less time.

We cognize the form (material form) or four great elements by mentally formulating a name for each characteristic of forms with the help of the six sense consciousnesses. Craving comes into the picture here too, which stitches form and name while ignoring that consciousness identifies them as two. This is not the big craving that we are generally aware of upon reacting to a feeling, but a very subtle reaction to a form that arises as long as *Sankhara* or tendencies to react to phenomena (also called formations) arise. They feed more and more craving (as greed, hatred, and delusion). Craving continually tilts the

¹³ Anguttara Nikaya 1.49: Luminous

¹⁴ Samyutta Nikaya 22.95: A Lump of Foam

balance to give rise to measurements that define things as long and short, big and small, beautiful and ugly. Perception is like a database against which comparisons are made. Concepts and ideas of things arise due to the process, leading to further actions and reactions. When the mind is free from craving, the six consciousnesses also cease, and along with it, the notions of long and short also cease.

Consciousness is one of the nutriments for the preservation of living beings, and as long as we have the notion of our identity or belief in solidity, the consciousnesses are not freed from their bonds to Name and Form. The Buddha makes us aware that the state of mind where consciousness is freed from Name and Form is where the four great elements find no basis. He is not saying that an objective world does not exist at all but inferring that when the mind is released from consciousnesses established on Name and Form, the notion of immutable form no longer finds any ground. So, the Buddha's answer to the mystery of subject-object existence is: when the six sense consciousnesses cease, all the notions of this duality cease as well. Quantum mechanics has proven this observation to some extent. It supports the idea that matter is a concept that arises only when measurement is made; until then, it is just a potential. This point was a bit too hard to digest even a few decades ago; now the ground for such assertions exists in multiple scientific publications.

We think that the appearance of forms is actually something really existing and well-defined by space and time. That is why a disciple of the Buddha went as far as the end of the galaxy—called the highest Brahma world in Pali texts—to find where form or the physical elements cease, i.e., if there is any boundary¹⁵. But as we know now, space and time are not truly existing things independent of sense consciousnesses. They are there as long as we have the mind pulled towards six sense consciousnesses. Cosmologists are now saying that space may actually be infinite and there may be an infinite number of universes. These kinds of speculations and theories about the universe can go on forever. A wise person does not get involved with such thinking but makes an effort to directly observe that consciousnesses are just reactions to apparent phenomena and see

¹⁵ Samyutta Nikaya 2.26: Rohitassa

how they fit within the reality that is made of the impersonal process of dependent co-arising.

To make the dependence of consciousness and *Nama Rupa* crystal clear, there is a very good example given in a Pali text. This supports my previous example of consciousness being like a virus that needs a body (*Nama Rupa*) to survive.

“Well then, friend, I will make up a simile for you, for some intelligent people here understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile. Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other, so too, with name-and-form as condition, consciousness [comes to be]; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form [comes to be]. With name and- form as condition, the six sense bases [come to be]; with the six sense bases as condition, contact.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. “If, friend, one was to remove one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall, and if one were to remove the other sheaf, the first would fall.

So too, with the cessation of name-and-form comes cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness comes cessation of name-and-form. With the cessation of name-and-form comes cessation of the six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

[Samyutta Nikaya 12.67: The Sheaves of Reeds]

When dependence falls apart, it is not a state of annihilation. It is called the cessation of the dependent arising of all phenomena. This is a state where the cycle by which consciousness lands into *Nama Rupa* or a host body stops, causing a discontinuity in the entire rebirth cycle. Now, does this mean the extinction of the existence of our true self and the loss of our essence as beings? The Buddha says, if we identify ourselves as a combination of body, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, then we lament and suffer the loss; if we don't, the whole notion of suffering goes away. All that ceases is the entire notion of suffering, and there is no lamenting about losing these experiences in the same way we do not lament if someone burns leaves and twigs from a forest, knowing they are clearly not us!

Continuing on this topic of dependency, I shall add some more analytical comments: Bhikkhu Nanananda's book (Ñānānanda, The

Law of Dependent Arising - The Secret of Bondage and Release, 2016) is very illuminating in explaining these terms. He provides excellent examples to clarify the concepts. *Nama Rupa* is said to be born right at our first interaction with material forms. *Nama* consists of feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. These factors give us a notion of the characteristics and perception of form as hard, soft, hot, cold, etc. This is how a non-descript object becomes descript, i.e., we have a concept of a form. However, a form is not something that is a truly existing reality independent of consciousness and *Nama* parts.

Physicists, until the advent of quantum physics, used to consider form just a bunch of atoms, like a building consisting of a lot of Lego blocks. They asserted that atoms are indivisible, indestructible entities that define physical reality, while the mind has no effect on their existence whatsoever. This absolutism of atomic theory is proven to be untenable now as new discoveries reveal that subatomic particles such as electrons and photons do not have a definite location until a sentient observer measures their state, e.g., location, amount of energy, etc. These particles are potentially anywhere and they can do weird things like appearing simultaneously in multiple places or penetrating through barriers (Al-Khalili, 2019). So effectively, both *Nama* and *Rupa* are not material in the strictest sense; they can be called just a form of energy. I am quoting below from Nanananda's book on dependent-arising.

*'Name in 'name and form' is formal name,
Form in 'name and form' is nominal form'*

So, reality is not made up of two completely separate worlds of mind and matter as propounded by Descartes and many recent physicists. Our interaction plays a significant role. We can cognize a form with the help of *Nama* constituents and sense consciousness as the condition. Consciousness and *Nama Rupa* are contingent on each other like two sides of a roof leaning to support each other. Consciousness conditions *Nama Rupa*, and *Nama Rupa* conditions consciousness. We pull one, and the other one falls immediately. Our perception of the world is sustained by this duality between the two and runs like a self-sustaining engine that seems to run as long as the

two balance each other perfectly. All it needed was a spark to set off the engine, and the fuel never runs out until we discover the cause that instigates the two. Like a dog looking at water because it thinks it sees another dog, but actually, because it looks, it sees a dog. Consciousnesses are like that—they reflect *Nama Rupa* and vice versa. This happens so fast that we don't notice the interplay until we train the mind to see these subtle things at a pace the mind can discern more clearly.

The last component in *Nama* is *Manasikara* or attention. It should be translated as the mind's act or trickery. When attention is replaced by attention rooted in wisdom or *Yoniso Manasikara*, the play of the mind is exposed. We can break the dependence by simply letting go of attention to consciousness and *Nama Rupa*. All that is needed is to step out of the way. In the very late stages of meditation, there is a state where the bonds of the mind and mind objects start to weaken. We directly know that a light hint of craving sustains this process. Letting go of craving or any curiosity towards all phenomena will ultimately help us in this process.

When our senses first interact with a form, either through the eye, ear, or other senses, the first thing that occurs is that a corresponding consciousness arises. The eye, ear, etc., are platforms for this interplay or bases for sense contacts. Consciousness always seems to be conjoined with the feeling and perception of *Nama Rupa*. They are latched up like male and female connectors. This is probably the greatest mystery of our existence—as they always arise and cease together.

How can feeling arise before contact when we read from the Pali texts that feeling arises due to contact? Perhaps, we should not take each phenomenon as linear, following one after another chronologically. The only thing latent in our propensity in this whole process of dependent origination is craving. In dependent co-arising, each causal arising is concurrent, so many things can happen at the same time. For example, sense bases (that are platforms for *Nama Rupa*) and contact can arise at the same time that feeling arises too. Whatever we discuss here and try to make sense of intellectually will not help much. So directly seeing these processes is essential. Seeing

a demo in our minds through practice will answer all our questions. I will go into much detail on this in later chapters.

As one continues to observe the mind by repeatedly tranquilizing the body and mind processes while keeping attention on all arising and ceasing phenomena (mind objects), all perceptions of forms appear gross and cause tightness in the mind. So, the Buddha's instruction is not to pay attention to the gross perception of forms and shift the mind's attention to subtler perceptions, that is, the perception of mind and mind objects¹⁶. In the first four *Jhana* stages, the mind attends to the body and feelings as some signs of forms to eventually arrive at the fourth *Jhana*, where even pleasure and pain become gross for the mind. These mental states are also called Formless Realms or *Arupas*. They are characterized by the gradual emptiness of any color, shapes, or forms. The mind can remain observant of any thoughts that arise and pass away while steadying its attention to mind objects like perception and feelings and experiences that are pertinent to the bases of the mind. These are the arising and passing away of awareness of space and consciousness at all six sense doors.

There are only six consciousnesses occurring at six sense contacts—nothing more. There is no room for mysticism. And there is nothing very special about mind-consciousness apart from the five other body sense consciousnesses as far as the process of dependent origination is concerned. In fact, *Majjhima Nikaya (MN) 38* spells this out plainly with a simile of six kinds of fires, each burning in dependence on a certain substance like wood or chaff. Mind consciousness is not more reliable than the other five, so we should not cling to it or consider it as more powerful or weak. If anyone conceives of consciousness as synonymous with ultimate self-awareness, then they need to read what the Buddha says in *Majjhima Nikaya 38*. Only by experiencing the mind devoid of any craving or other defilements—which can be witnessed through the continuous meditation practice of TWIM—can the mystery of consciousness be fully known.

¹⁶ *Majjhima Nikaya 121: Cula Sunnata Sutta*

Another way to look at consciousness is that it is one of the five aggregates which may or may not be affected by our tendencies to latch on. Suffering arises when they are identified as belonging to us. The Buddha's advice is always to remain free and disidentified with the five aggregates. There are more than two hundred *Suttas* on the five aggregates in the *Samyutta Nikaya (SN)*: Section 22 on Five Aggregates. For example, SN 22.95: *A Lump of Foam*, SN 22.238: *The Simile of the Vipers*, SN 22.85: *Yamaka*—true meaning of which go very deep to be completely disenchanted and be free of all dependence on all conditioned consciousness.

One who sees consciousness as part of the impersonal process of dependent origination understands what they really are. This is more than general awareness without any notion involved. Dependent origination has to be understood holistically and seen in real-time by one's experiences through practice. A very sharp lens of mindfulness within the practice consisting of the entire eightfold path is needed to fulfill this goal.

The practice of TWIM consists of letting go of craving for all phenomena of dependent origination, which involves weakening our attention to unwholesome intentions and bringing in wholesome ones instead. In Pali texts, this process is called *Samma Vayama* or Right Effort. The TWIM practice I am uncovering throughout this book is mindfulness of loving-kindness through Right Effort (Vimalaramsi B. , 2015). Here I explore the journey of the Noble Eightfold Path by keeping my mind free of the unwholesome by letting go of all distractions while arousing the feeling of loving-kindness as much as possible. It may surprise many, but using this practice can progress one from an untrained mind to experience all the way from the first *Jhana* to the fourth *Jhana* in just few days.

After the fourth *Jhana*, the practice of mindfulness of loving-kindness turns into that of compassion, joy, and equanimity—also called *Brahmavihara*¹⁷. They lead to Formless or *Arupa* experiences of the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, and the base of nothingness, respectively. After having experienced enough of them and letting them go, one progresses to an experience called

¹⁷ Samyutta Nikaya SN 46.54: Mettam Sutta

the base of neither perception nor non-perception. In summary, there are Four *Jhanas* and Four Formless bases in the domain of the Buddha's path of meditative experiences.

The *Arupas* are called the peaceful abiding by the Buddha¹⁸. They are called so because one experiencing these bases enjoys heightened equanimity to all daily experiences that we otherwise would have reacted too forcefully. One's reactions to phenomena become much calmer by abiding in these bases. It feels as if we have become less burdened with perceptions and notions to experience the progressive stages of peaceful voidness. Personally, I like to give an example of this process by comparing the universe with stars and galaxies with the phenomenon of redshift. I found some images from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey¹⁹ attempting to map the universe. This is based on repeated observations of the cosmos in the night sky to reveal that the farther one explores, the busier the cosmos looks, revealing that supreme voidness at the point of origin where peace and calm are abundant.

A similar observation can also be made about the mind. As I practiced the path of experiencing all tranquil, aware *Jhanas*, I felt that the movement of the mind gradually becomes less and less and eventually comes to a standstill, as if looking back instead of looking far ahead in the cosmos. When I sat experiencing the base of nothingness, I recall the exquisite calm and composure of mind. I could see the mind quieting so much that I could see how far it came all the way from the universe that I left behind. The picture of redshift reminds me of that experience. It is as if I was at the observatory capturing all the distant stars and galaxies where their lights are more redshifted the farther away they are. There was a stillness and peace, and moments of relief like never before from where I observed.

¹⁸ Majjhima Nikaya 8: Sallekha Sutta

¹⁹ <https://sloan.org/programs/research/sloan-digital-sky-survey>

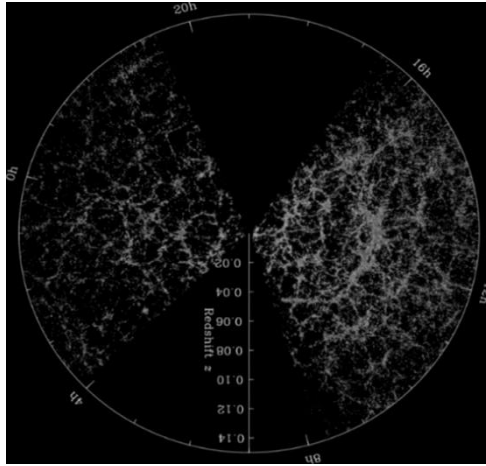


Figure 2: Being an observer of the universe and a point of complete stillness. The state of mind and mindfulness of phenomena can be compared to such a process too.²⁰

The state of stillness and calm after letting go of disturbances is not 'nothing' and cannot be called absolute voidness. Bhante Vimalaramsi—my meditation teacher—used to say it is just nice to be in those quiet states. That is what I say too—just exquisite peace and calm. The practice leads one to find greater peace and freedom from reactions with each step on the Buddha's path.

Voidness is a relative term, which can be stated only in the presence of other states. We can say a glass is empty or void, but by empty, we are referring to it being empty of water, not of everything. The Buddha says that as one progressively refines mindfulness by letting go of grosser disturbances (this can be progressing to higher *Jhanas* or letting go of craving arising at the connection of dependent origination), the mind descends into greater voidness. It can be experienced by witnessing the lightness and relief from letting go of burdens at different stages that we never knew were there before. As we go further, the relief also becomes greater and more sublime.

In the words of the Buddha, he often abided in voidness. It is not an absolute state that is isolated from all other phenomena. At each stage of descent into voidness, there are two sides: One side is peaceful and quiet with much of the grosser activities subsided, and on the other side, there are still activities of the mind that can be seen

²⁰ Image credit: SDSSIII https://www.sdss3.org/science/gallery_sdss_pie2.php

retrospectively. Complete voidness is what the Buddha refers to as the state of *Nibbāna*. Even the Cessation of perception and feeling is not completely void, as there are still some disturbances connected with life and the sense bases.

The descent into complete voidness is another way of arriving at the Unconditioned, so one should continue until there is nothing more to let go of. This is what the Buddha said about the process of letting go and abandoning all perceptions to arrive at the state of the Unconditioned. I will explain the Buddha's words on these states in later chapters of this book, drawing from my direct experiences to uncover as many insights as possible.

Voidness is also a term that modern scientists are discovering, but they find it hard to define in an absolute sense. For example, they thought that empty space was completely void, but this assertion is no longer valid now, given the recent discovery of dark matter and dark energy. The realm of sub-atomic particles and the near-mystical nature of quantum entanglement add more questions to the notion of the solidity of matter in explaining their reality. In the next part, I will explore what is out there in the scientific community to plug gaps in our understanding and if there is an end to the pursuit that seems to ask more and more questions with recent discoveries.

Part I

On Science, Consciousness and Mind

This part of the book aims to bridge some gap between concepts, theories, and philosophies, and the direct experience of introspection of mind. The idea emerged from recognizing a disconnect in public understanding of how science, consciousness, and the Buddha's Dhamma are interconnected. While books by authors like B. Alan Wallace, the Dalai Lama, and Matthieu Ricard bring science and Buddhism closer²¹, they often don't delve deeply into the meditative experiences of *Jhanas*, *Arupas*, and *Nirodha*, which the historical Buddha emphasized as paths to end suffering.

I address this gap by first exploring key developments in physics and cosmology, covering topics like particle physics, quantum mechanics, and general relativity. I summarize the challenges faced by physicists and argue for a broader perspective that includes human experiences. While science has made strides in understanding natural phenomena, I critique the overreach of some scientists who claim it can explain all realities, including consciousness.

I challenge extreme physicalist views and emphasize that the mind's direct experience exists in a separate domain. I acknowledge the progress made by alternative theories such as Biocentrism and Conscious Agents Theory, which challenge established notions of space, time, and matter. Without endorsing these views, I present a direct experiential approach to the mind-body problem and the observation of dependent arising of all phenomena.

The interdependence of phenomena affects how we experience and interact with the world. I argue that by letting go of rigid notions, theories, concepts and adopting a relaxed attitude and attentiveness towards minute experiences of mind, we can free ourselves from suffering. Observing the purified mind reveals that the universe is ultimately our own fabrication, offering a path to deeper understanding and liberation.

²¹ See Bibliography

Chapter 3

Flaws in Materialist Explanations of Human Experience

In December 2023, I recorded a talk on all the meditative experiences that the Buddha describes in the *Majjhima Nikaya 111*, using Sariputta's direct experiences as a reference. I explored all the stages of purification of the mind, leading to a state where the mind remains completely independent. As all dependencies fall away, the mind finds no support, eventually diving into the state of Cessation. I discussed how we can achieve these experiences through the combined practice of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* methods.

I recognize that there are many preliminaries necessary to convince readers of the Buddha's path. It is particularly challenging to convince scientific communities about the nature of the mind and how it relates to the world of sense experiences and groundbreaking discoveries. In Parts Two and Three, I will provide practical methods and delve deeper into the subject matter. Please bear with me if some texts in this part do not immediately make sense.

Here, I step outside the territory of the Buddha's Dhamma (teachings) to explore alternative worldviews, philosophies, and scientific explorations that attempt to answer questions about reality and the nature of our experiences. When discussing reality, it boils down to whether there is truly one way to arrive at a conclusion regarding the truth. Many argue that a rigorous scientific inquiry into the nature of reality is crucial, but does it lead to undeniable truths or more speculation and mental proliferation? Is there an end to this? These are the questions I am addressing here.

I aim to bring forward perspectives on reconciling seemingly contradictory views of the world—from purely materialistic or hard physicalistic perspectives to philosophical, spiritual, and direct experiential perspectives. It's about finding the truth directly and whether we can arrive at a conclusion through any of these paths. I will gradually delve into various topics, starting with scientific fields like physics and cosmology, and then exploring recent developments

by modern thinkers, philosophers, and scientists who challenge traditional views that hard science is the ultimate tool to uncover the truth.

I will discuss figures like Sir Martin Rees, who hosted a popular documentary series on UK television called "*What We Still Don't Know*." It's a thought-provoking series where he asks some fundamental questions. I will also explore the views of recent scientific explorers like Max Tegmark and Sean Carroll, and delve into the work of other scientists challenging the extreme physical, materialistic worldview.

Specifically, I will cover Professor Donald Hoffman's work on the theory of consciousness and his theory that consciousness may be more fundamental than space, time, or matter. I will also consider the views of philosophers/scientists like Bernardo Kastrup, whose analytical idealism has made a good impression on me. These thinkers are getting closer to understanding the root of our mind-body mechanism and the nature of reality.

It's quite a busy agenda, and I hope to cover these topics in an accessible and understandable manner. I will blend my direct experiential understanding with these scientific and philosophical insights. I have a background in understanding scientific concepts, physical phenomena, and the properties of matter, space, and time, and how they relate to our current-day technologies.

Though I have a good understanding of technologies, recently I have started to question where we draw the line in this never-ending quest seeking inventions and discoveries. Are these discoveries making us happier? Science progresses through contributions in scientific journals and conferences, often offering minor improvements. While some researchers make groundbreaking discoveries, most scientific research focuses on tweaking existing methods, techniques and technologies. Only a few scientists challenge established notions around space-time, our perception of reality, and the nature of consciousness, and make discoveries that shake the wider community.

Until the last century, we had an established worldview of space-time from Newton, which Einstein later challenged with his theory of relativity. Now, the foundation of Einstein's general relativity is being questioned, and it may be time to explore beyond the domain of space-time into a higher realm.

It's debatable whether the discovery of a universal consciousness or mind will solve the problem of our reality. But it is interesting to explore these ideas and see how they intersect with direct experiential reality. I have spent the last 8-9 years meditating and exploring the dimensions of direct experience of the mind and its relation to questions about the nature of reality. By letting go of personal emotions, ideas on space-time, form, perceptions, and even consciousness, we can witness the root of all mental proliferation. I will insert these perspectives throughout the exploration.

In 2004, a documentary series called *"What We Still Don't Know"* appeared on Channel 4 in the UK, hosted by Sir Martin Rees from Cambridge University. The series asks profound questions like *"Are We Alone in the Universe?"*, *"Why Are We Here?"*, and *"Are We Real?"*. It challenges traditional views and explores new perspectives from various scholars, scientists, and explorers.

The series supports the idea that science, based on proven methods, is the most credible path to understanding reality. It compares modern scientific discoveries to ancient philosophical and spiritual approaches, suggesting that science is more advanced in answering fundamental questions.

However, it is important to understand that ancient models, like the four great elements in Eastern traditions, are not primitive notions. These elements represent properties of our experiences: solidity, cohesion, heat, and movement. They are not about constituents of matter but about how we perceive and interact with the material world.

The four-element model provides a fundamental framework for understanding our experiences. Modern science, with its discovery of elements and subatomic particles, builds on a reductionism-based framework. However, the complexity of material interactions does not necessarily explain consciousness. Matter and consciousness are different domains, and assuming that scientific exploration can answer all questions about reality is too simplistic.

In summary, while science has made significant progress, it may not be able to answer all questions about our reality, especially those intrinsically related to the mind and consciousness. A broader perspective that includes direct experiential understanding and

alternative worldviews may provide a more comprehensive understanding of our experiences and the nature of reality.

It's not just my view; it's becoming more apparent that many physicists are hitting a dead end with such a rigid materialistic perspective. They are trying to prove that they can build consciousness out of machines or computers using intricate circuitry of digital switches working with electrons. They claim that by building trillions of transistors on a chip they can create consciousness and that this can answer all questions about consciousness, the mind, and our experiences. Science has had more than a hundred years to make this project a reality, but building consciousness from matter has not been successful in any experiment ever conducted. It's humbling to see the efforts of numerous brilliant minds to support a theory that consciousness is just a property of matter, which may soon be lost to oblivion. Well, let's not refute each other's ideas, doctrines, and concepts. The reality is that there are many unanswered questions.

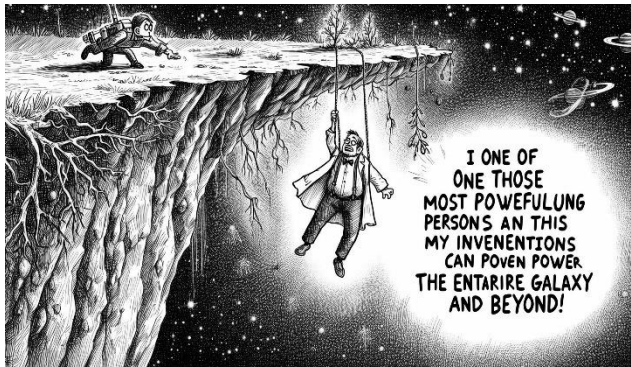


Figure 3: Human tendency to overestimate their abilities while living an extremely fragile life.

Despite many failures, the line of thinking that ignores deeper mind and matter interactions is also becoming a norm, fueling humanity's general direction. The survival of the human race seems guided by these notions: Explorations to keep our activities going, to keep our egos flourishing, and to sustain our self-images. This is often justified by claiming we are making progress and coming closer to reality. That's what scientists and philosophers like to be touted as—foremost explorers at the cutting edge who have been beacons of

hope for humanity. I'm not refuting or saying that is the wrong path or that we shouldn't pursue it. But if we take a step back and see where we get caught; on the path, at what point we went too far; where is our boundary; where in this process of our mind we went beyond our boundaries. I will go through in detail the process of mental proliferation and our direct experiential understanding through the observation of all mental phenomena. It's where we perhaps have gone far, diving into a never-ending loop of conceptual proliferation, and where our ultimate safety and well-being lie. Solution for this issue is not found in the realm of science.

There are realms or states of mind where all mental proliferations and notions come to a complete halt and stop for some time. With the practice of taming the mind, we arrive at a state of complete peace, calm, and composure—an experience devoid of all sorts of concepts and notions. That is also the state of complete voidness, a state of not being conditioned. Letting go of all conditioning, there is a process—a very well-defined process—that takes us back to the origin where we can directly see that there is utmost peace, tranquility, safety, and complete freedom from the universe. That's the dimension I am keen to explore while discussing these scientific explorations and the famous mind-body problem. The mind-body problem has been bothering humanity for hundreds of years. And it is, as most scientists and philosophers realize, the crux of all our dissatisfaction and suffering.

Our dissatisfaction with whatever we are experiencing, all this suffering, is rooted in the mind-body process. We need to go beyond philosophy to unravel the process. What is this reality? Where is that dimension where we get completely disentangled? Where is that state of freedom? These, in my view, are the ultimate questions linked to the mind-body problem. We might explore theories around this and find some new solutions to answer whether it is the body or the mind that is more fundamental, or vice versa. While that may keep us investigating the problem, we might only be trying to satisfy our curiosity. So, we may be trying to solve the problem in a fundamentally wrong manner. In my view and experience, this mind-body problem boils down to where we went off tangent and veered

away from the present moment. It is just realms of concepts and a jungle of conceptual proliferation.

This is the perspective I have. It's not merely a view, but a perspective from direct experience through meditative practice. As I mentioned earlier, this documentary goes into many key discoveries in science that were made to unravel the mysteries of subatomic particles, all the way down to the very basic levels when scientists reduced atoms and molecules to the most fundamental level. That line of inquiry has recently hit a dead end. When scientists smashed subatomic particles in a large hadron collider, they were hoping to find even more fundamental entities that constitute subatomic particles. What happened is that when these scientists broke these subatomic particles and tried to analyze what lies beyond, they ran into a massive problem. They could not characterize all these phenomena of subatomic particles breaking down into more fundamental constituents. They found these particles do not adhere to the rules we are generally accustomed to in terms of the usual notions of locality and unitarity (Al-Khalili, 2019).

I will not go too much into these properties. So, locality means: Say we have some matter and if we bring them together, they interact only if they come into close contact with each other. That is the notion of locality. For example, this hand can only affect the other hand if they come close to each other. So, they say this whole universe is guided by this rule of locality. We can press a button, and only after activating that button does whatever function and movement get activated. Say we want to open a door; we have to press that button. So, it needs close interaction. We cannot press a button here and make something in the Andromeda Galaxy be controlled. So, it has to be local. This is a fundamental property of physics. Another property of physics is unitarity, which states that if we break a particle into pieces, the constituents of that process, when added together, become the whole. For example, if we have a whole apple and break it down, all those pieces must come together to make up that whole.

I have provided very simple examples for unitarity. This property states that any physical matter, including phenomena, must adhere to it. This is the foundation of physics and the basis of the entire universe according to materialists and proponents of physicalism.

However, when matter is broken down into subatomic levels e.g. in large Hadron colliders, at the smallest known particle level, suddenly these particles completely disregard all such notions; they do not adhere to them. These particles do not follow the rules of locality and unitarity, meaning they do not necessarily interact only when they are close, and the constituents do not necessarily come together to form a whole. Interestingly, if a particle is broken into two, they become entangled. Therefore, if they are entangled, we know they are correlated. They remain correlated no matter how far apart they are placed.

What scientists have found is that when these particles are smashed and sent, say for example, one particle to the Andromeda galaxy and another to another galaxy, no matter how far apart they are, they remain entangled. This means they are dependent on each other. This is a ghost-like notion that physics cannot yet answer because it does not fall within the realm of traditional physics. It completely violates the locality principle. This is why I'm saying physics may have hit a dead end in this regard. As far as I know, particle physics doesn't know where to go next and what is the way out of all this confusion.

There are also some fantastic theories about these subatomic particles. One theory suggests that they are not small constituents but rather vibrating strings (Greene, 2011). String theory has been in the limelight and has garnered significant attention over the last 20-30 years. However, recently, string theory may also have hit a dead end; it is not progressing. The theory speculates that we do not observe these particles because they exist beyond the four-dimensional space-time of our physical world. These constituents may exist in higher dimensions, proposing a theory of an 11-dimensional hyperspace²². This is what string theory mathematically suggests. It remains speculative because current physics lacks the means to explore vibrating strings that operate on a scale of 10^{-35} meters and lower. This scale is incredibly small, and it is unlikely that scientific instruments will detect anything at this scale anytime soon.

²² <https://www.space.com/string-theory-11-dimensions-universe.html>

Anyone looking at these theories for empirical evidence through experiments does not buy such claims. They find these theories untenable because we can only construct them as models and concepts. Both these notions and concepts are akin to theories of divine experiences transcending ours into higher dimensions of divinity. We can categorize them similarly due to their lack of practical support. Without empirical evidence to justify and demonstrate them through means, they are as speculative as those hypothetical notions that lack grounding in reality. This is why we don't hear much about String Theory nowadays, and I can appreciate why it hasn't gained wider public attention. It's essentially a nonstarter, if I may say so.

On the other hand, let's now explore another dimension of our experiences beyond a planet like Earth—or any small planet. Scientists have made significant progress in discovering galaxies and clusters of galaxies extending beyond the visible universe. These discoveries have led us to ponder whether this universe is static or evolving. As we delve into 'what is out there,' I have explored an overview of what exists on the smallest possible scale—now let me go beyond.

The groundbreaking work on stars and galaxies done by Edwin Hubble revealed that these galaxies aren't static objects as previously thought. What he discovered is that when he measured a galaxy one day and then the same galaxy the next, he observed that the galaxy had moved significantly farther away, some at speeds exceeding that of light. He then mapped all these galaxies and identified a pattern: galaxies further from us move faster. His conclusion was that the universe is expanding.

Thus, we do not inhabit a static universe where moons, stars, and galaxies are fixed in spacetime positions. This discovery prompted all scientific explorers to revisit their foundational assumptions. Until then, a very static notion prevailed, where particles and matter somewhat remained unchanged in their constitution until they decayed completely. Then, suddenly, the discovery of an expanding universe and galaxies moving away captured the imagination of scientists, leading them to rethink their basic premises.

They began to investigate what causes galaxies and stars to move away from each other. This raised questions about Einstein's General Theory of Relativity and its implications for an expanding universe. Einstein had to introduce a constant to maintain a static universe, a tiny number 10^{-52} square meters, which he added to his equations. Although his original equations hinted at a dynamic universe, he opted for conservatism to avoid discord within the scientific community. Consequently, he introduced so called, a cosmological constant.

Edwin Hubble's discovery abruptly reset our worldview, prompting us to start afresh. Why can't the universe be static? If it's expanding, what is the fate of our universe? This uncertainty has left us in a confused state. If the universe is in motion, what occupies this empty space? It can't just be planets, stars, and galaxies—they occupy very little space in the universe. What does this void of space consist of? Scientists were compelled to introduce the concept of Dark Matter to address this gap because it's immeasurable, invisible, and beyond exploration. We have no means of directly interacting with this entity; it remains a concept, hence the term Dark Matter—a placeholder to fill the void we struggle to understand.

Dark matter doesn't seem to adhere to any rules of physics that prove its existence. There have been inferences about what this dark matter might be in terms of phenomena. Some scientists have used the laws of general relativity to argue that when they don't observe a star in its expected location and instead see it slightly distorted, it must be due to something bending spacetime—concluding that this distortion is caused by dark matter. This theory remains the predominant explanation for dark matter.

This raises intriguing philosophical questions: If these phenomena extend beyond our imagination—beyond our frameworks of the universe, galaxies, stars, and all matter—do they truly exist as immutable objects independent of our perceptions?

This leads us to question whether all these complex theories ultimately boil down to what we perceive. Are we truly living in an existing universe, or is it all just imagination? We lack certainty about whether we live in a confined and well-defined universe, especially when we consider what lies beyond 13 billion light-years away.

Beyond our known universe lies the cosmos, another construct of imagination. This challenges the very concept of space-time, which exists only within our perceptual framework. Attempting to isolate space-time, universe, and cosmos from our experiences yields no meaning. Scientific measurements are inventions to test assumptions and observations, but without someone to perceive and experience them, concepts like space-time and matter lose their grounding.

Even the most extreme phenomena, such as the Big Bang and supernovae, are merely concepts sustained by our imagination. By labeling them in our perception, we create the illusion of existing objects occupying specific locations in the universe. We cannot definitively say that there is a boundary to our universe beyond what we can observe. Even when contemplating the vastness of the heavens and cosmology, these concepts struggle to maintain credibility.

Schrodinger's equations have shown that matter and space-time are potentials until measurements are taken. They lack inherent, solid properties that define their existence as tangible realities. Mathematics and theories serve as tools to shape our imagination until they can be refined by direct experience and correction. Therefore, I won't delve further into this topic.

I believe it's a significant discovery that we're finding there are trillions of other galaxies like our Milky Way. We keep uncovering more and more data to fuel our imagination, that's all I'm going to say on that. Now, let's delve into the question of reality. I'm now touching on the second documentary: "*Are We Real?*" As the name suggests, this is unsettling for some people and scientists who believe in permanence. If we can't define subatomic particles, and if we can't definitively define those large objects in the universe as persisting and objectively true entities, then what is our reality? Are our perceptions revealing a truth different from what's really out there? Are we perceiving reality as it is, or is our perceived reality just imagination?

This is what this documentary aims to explore. Sir Martin Rees, coming from a fundamentally physicalist worldview, marvels at how entities like us, fundamentally composed of atoms and molecules, can ponder and contemplate these same atoms and molecules. He suggests that we are nothing more than collections of atoms and

molecules, which, due to their intricate and unimaginably complex nature, have developed the ability to think, ponder, talk, and conceptualize—all through the complex arrangements of these atoms and molecules. This is his proposal regarding the power inherent in such molecular complexity.

However, modern scientists like Professor Donald Hoffman and Bernardo Kastrup would vehemently refute such premature notions. They find this perspective laughable and even ludicrous in light of recent advancements. Reducing our existence and living experiences to mere collections of molecules and atoms is absurd. Such an approach attempts to characterize experiences in terms of quantities or physical properties, akin to trying to define the universe solely in square feet, square miles, kilograms, and atomic structures. Physicalists attempt to equate the richness of our experiential universe to such primitive parameters, but this approach simply fails to capture the reality—the intricate experiential nature of reality that we perceive. It's like trying to represent our experiences with a two-dimensional image, showing a picture of a tiger and claiming that picture is the tiger itself.

With such assertions, scientists have become somewhat dogmatic, exerting their authority excessively. Since they hold the authoritative position in the realm of science, they may feel they can hold all reasoning about experiences hostage to their own perspectives. However, new ways of critical thinking and a growing audience are challenging this. I understand that challenging established notions may not be well received and could be seen as too radical. Nevertheless, the tide is turning, and increasingly more people are asserting that these rigid physicalist notions fail to adequately explain all experiences.

The documentary also presents an interesting perspective on life through experiments conducted by Professor Conway from Princeton University. A mathematician, he demonstrated that many behaviors mimicking life can be simulated using simple rules. He developed a mathematical model called the "*Game of Life*," where placing just two or three dots and applying basic rules—dots that remain too close suffocate and die, too far apart die from isolation, and those at the right distance mate and reproduce—can generate very complex

organism-like creatures capable of movement and growth²³. This demonstrates that structured dynamism and complex manipulations of matter based on simple rules can mimic living behaviors.

While these examples are intriguing and initially compelling, I fail to see how they can answer the complexities of our subjective experiences, awareness, and the realm of qualia. These attempts to demonstrate that life can emerge from matter, simply by assembling atoms and molecules in a laboratory, raise many questions. They suggest that one day, we might create life from inanimate matter—atoms and molecules coming together to crawl and communicate with us. It's captivating and appeals to communities that value advancements in physical discoveries and exploration, but it paints an incomplete picture.

In my view, these ideas venture into realms where we lack the means to fully comprehend reality. We cannot reduce subjective experiences to molecules and atoms; they belong to entirely separate domains. Are they correlated? Yes, but correlation does not imply creation. We may influence experiences through matter, but experiences themselves reside in the realm of the mind—a domain distinct from matter. While promoting only materialistic propositions and concepts, this documentary dismisses other ideas, such as the anthropic principle, as too speculative. The anthropic principle suggests that our experiences arise from our interactions as humans, not from an objective reality that must define all our experiences. This perspective was considered too simplistic, as it is not supported by theories that can be tested. In this regard, Sean Carroll's latest work goes some way toward reconciling key tenets of physicalism with human experiences and the concept of purpose in life (Carroll, 2016).

My aim is to capture these concepts and notions of reality, not just through scientific theories, philosophies or speculations, but grounded in practical experiences and direct observations of the mind. But before that, I delve into some more interesting notions that are bubbling up recently within the communities of scientists and explorers.

²³ <https://conwaylife.com/>

Chapter 4

On Theories Supporting the Role of Conscious Entities

Having reviewed the shortcomings of materialism in capturing reality, where does this leave us? This is a realm where everyone aspires to lead, and discover new insights to prove superiority. Materialist scientists have had ample opportunities to showcase their theories, by attempting to generate life from inanimate matter. However, this approach did not sit well with communities that began to consider the reverse perspective. They argue that life and living beings, experiencing physics and phenomena, take precedence. Biological processes, compositions, and living entities shape the universe as it is—a viewpoint contrasting to the materialist stance.

This dichotomy resembles the opposing poles of North and South. Momentum within scientific communities has been growing where some assert, "Forget about physics and matter; it's biology that shapes the universe. Creatures like us, with our biological processes and metabolism, define the universe's existence." These are the views of proponents supporting the Anthropic Principle²⁴ and Biocentrism (Lanza & Berman, 2009). They prioritize biology, relegating matter and its phenomena to secondary byproducts of our engagement with them. However, this thinking stretches beyond reasonable observation, making exaggerated claims about the significance of biological processes in shaping reality.

Their argument posits that all these universes exist and are perfectly suited for life. For instance, the temperature is just right for our survival, and other physical properties such as planet size and gravity are conducive to biology. If gravity were slightly different by a fraction, galaxies might not have formed or could have collapsed, rendering life impossible. According to biocentrism, the universe is guided and governed by our existence, not the other way around. This theory outlines seven principles, which I'll delve into in more detail

²⁴<https://web.archive.org/web/20120428004546/http://abyss.uoregon.edu/~js/cosmo/lectures/lec24.html>

later. While I won't delve into endorsing their theories and speculations, I'll contribute direct experiential insights to the mystery of life, providing substance to Biocentrism.

However, biology cannot be considered ultimate or even close to primary in defining all experiences, as it doesn't explain why they occur. Experiences originate from the mind, not from biology. Biology serves as a scaffold, providing basic support for life's activities. It doesn't adhere strictly to atomic-molecular structures like Lego blocks or mechanistic formulas used in factories to produce goods. Biology operates under the laws of nature, possessing a degree of autonomy. This autonomy allows it to evolve without requiring inputs from countless external sources. Imagine a building constructed from millions of bricks and concrete; biology isn't assembled in such a mechanistic fashion.

Objects in the material universe compose biological creatures, yet they do not adhere strictly to mechanistic rules like musical notes; they exhibit a degree of autonomy. They grow organically, maintaining independence within the boundaries of living creatures to evolve into human-like existences naturally. This summary encapsulates the two thought-provoking documentaries aired on Channel 4, addressing profound questions of our time: What we still don't know: whether we are real, and why we are here. Regarding the third question, *Are We Alone in the Universe?* —it would be presumptuous to think that we are the only intelligent beings in the universe, given the probability, the recent data on exoplanets, and moreover, even ancient texts suggest otherwise.

These observations might lead some to conclude, "If we can't control things or manufacture living creatures or experiences, science must be failing." Science, viewed as a success story for over hundreds of years of striving to simplify life through discovery, faces challenges. Despite scientists' efforts, consciousness remains unsolved. They've been unable to create consciousness from inanimate matter, leading some to assert that they were fundamentally mistaken for not heeding God's wisdom. According to the Intelligent Design Theory, the creation of human and animal experiences isn't attributable to science but to a divine creator. Such theory posits that a supreme being infuses consciousness into our

experiences, intertwining consciousness with feelings and perceptions. Proponents argue that science is misguided and that true reality lies elsewhere, beyond our current understanding.

The complexity of the universe suggests a grand cosmic mind is at work, harmoniously synchronizing all beings. This harmony can only stem from a grand framework—a vast network sustaining life. This perspective asserts that we merely play roles in a virtual reality-like game where actions are predetermined, akin to being remote-controlled in a simulation. These codes dictate our speech, our sensory experiences—all preprogrammed by a divine intelligence. Such views underpin the concept of a god or supreme being, transcending biological phenomena to address a complexity beyond conventional scientific understanding.

These arguments can become excessively speculative when individuals become too enamored with concepts and ideas. Rather than getting caught up in these thoughts, I prefer to step back and adopt an objective perspective.

Regardless of the theories, methodologies, or personal investments in them, people often embrace them as their own inventions, promoting their brands and striving for recognition. They stake claims, saying, "I've developed this Theory of Consciousness. See how superior it is! I've achieved what others couldn't, surpassing superficial ideas to reveal reality." This competitive spirit drives scientific inquiry, fostering criticism to refine and improve theories, inching closer to a comprehensive understanding of reality in small, incremental steps. This is the essence of science—objective and non-subjective, capable of authoritatively answering reality.

Science has earned immense credibility, viewing mathematical equations, experiments, and observations as the tools to unlock mysteries and comprehend the experiences we seek to understand. However, it becomes evident that science has its limitations when grappling with our subjective experiences. This isn't to diminish its progress in unveiling hidden patterns in nature, rationalizing processes, and formulating testable algorithms and mechanisms for validation. Science remains the go-to discipline for uncovering truths about the behaviors of subatomic particles and natural phenomena,

an approach unparalleled by spiritual traditions or other speculative realms.

Thus, the success of science has garnered much acclaim. It is deemed the sole vehicle capable of debunking dogma or beliefs steeped in subjectivity or ambiguity. It endeavors to eliminate ambiguity, presenting an indisputable reality that science alone can unearth.

Yet, perhaps science has been overly credited, assuming it can resolve the most challenging mysteries of our experiences. Scientists, by describing nature through mathematical equations, experiments, and observations, aim to capture and explain all facets of understanding. However, this approach appears to falter in addressing such complexities, revealing the limits of science in understanding our subjective experiences.

This conclusion was highlighted in 2023 when the Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded to Anton Zeilinger, Alain Aspect, and J.N. Clauser. Their work demonstrated that the notion of locality, integral to Newtonian and Einsteinian physics, is fundamentally untenable. Locality collapses when applied to subatomic quantum processes (Roger, 2009). Particles, entangled across vast distances, defy locality's principles by instantaneously influencing each other's states²⁵. This discovery, tested experimentally over distances exceeding 100 miles—across two islands in Europe—revealed that these particles disregard spatial and temporal boundaries. The traditional concept of particles occupying specific geographic locations is inherently flawed.

So, they are dependent—though I would hesitate to use the term 'dependent origination.' This arises and simultaneously, this arises; this is *Patichha Samuppada*. So, with the arising of this, this arises; with the ceasing of this, this ceases. We see dependent origination; this is a perfect example of dependent origination. What's happening is that they arise dependently; when this exists, this arises; when this doesn't exist, this ceases. This is exactly what the Buddha described, yes. I understand we can't directly correlate this with what the Buddha said to explain it. These are phenomena we can observe in

²⁵ Quantum teleportation in high dimensions <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1906.09697>

our minds. In our observation of the mind, we don't see particles; we experience them as conscious projections where the notion of space is just a label or some ambient noise. In our experience, we observe impressions as feeling, and immediately with feeling, we observe reactions. More specifically, with feeling, there is perception, and there is consciousness. Isn't that interesting?

So, this property of entanglement—spooky action at a distance—it has been proven that entanglement does hold, and it has consistently been demonstrated in numerous labs. Although, I'm aware that some scientists remain unconvinced by the nuanced outcomes of quantum experiments and believe there must be a deeper underlying reality (Baker, 2018). We don't need to take a side with any particular theory as these are subject to review and change. What I'm saying is that these particles, observed in physical labs, have been seen and documented worldwide. They've been published, and all this evidence exists. Almost everyone is convinced by the latest theory now. However, what is true in our experience doesn't need certification from anyone to accept, "Look, the experiment by Anton Zeilinger says otherwise, you must be wrong." We don't need to submit to such authority.

We might simply say whatever you're saying could be true; your authority remains with you. You can impose that authority on me, and I'd accept that; that's fine. But you can't change or control the observation in my mind, where I observe feeling, and with that feeling, I observe a reaction. I observe contact on a sense door, feel a sensation, and I observe a reaction on that sense door. I see the photons hitting my eye, and immediately with that vision, I perceive it, analyze it, and produce a reaction; all these things happen simultaneously. Space is just a concept. We might call it entanglement; Buddha calls it dependent origination. Simultaneously, one phenomenon arises, immediately linked to that phenomenon is another phenomenon. That's what dependent origination is. It doesn't claim too much about the universe.

The Buddha didn't assert that dependent origination applies to matter or to subatomic particles. Although some Buddhists, like Tibetan Buddhists, are keen on formulating theories from the Buddha's teachings. They want to say, 'Oh, what you've discovered

now, the Buddha did similar things long ago.' They strive to claim, 'Science and Buddhism are converging and describing the nature of reality in very close and accurate ways.' They may assert that the Buddha's approach was highly scientific (Wallace, *Buddhism & Science: Breaking New Ground*, 2003). It's akin to acknowledging the authority of science and seeking to associate with science. But we don't need to submit to the authority of science. Science can be authoritative in its own domain. While it's tempting to explore the correlation between science and Buddhism further, they remain separate domains. The former investigates phenomena without engaging the mind and subjective experience, while the latter explores the mind and the path out of suffering inherent in the experiences.

Having said that, exploring the close association between science and Buddhism isn't a bad idea; it's a useful exercise (Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions: The Unification of Physics and Consciousness*, 2007). What we need to consider is that science and the observation of the mind can remain independent, and they don't need to support each other. Our mind, our experiences, follow a very specific pattern. This pattern is entirely different from the pattern observed in nature. Physics tries to capture this through mathematics, observations, experiments, analyses, and various theories. These are the tools available to science. But for the mind, it doesn't need these sophisticated tools at all. In contrast, we only have mind and our experiences, and we have only the mind and mindfulness at our disposal to address suffering due to phenomena. The Buddha said in many teachings, the realm of the mind is far more extensive and powerful than the world we observe and create around us.

I'll delve into more details later on how we unravel the nature of the mind through sharp, direct observations. Hopefully, this will provide context for why we shouldn't dogmatically assert that science is the only tool for understanding the truth of phenomena. And hopefully, these new perspectives on direct observation of the mind will encourage us to look beyond the tools of science to understand the nature of the mind.

We need to take a step back to see what science is. Science has a blind spot, a significant blind spot—an elephant in the room, if I may

say so. Science is completely oblivious to our inner experiences; scientific studies have alienated the mind and the investigation of the mind because they don't want to associate with something too speculative or unpredictable. They consider the mind too arbitrary, speculative, and beyond the domain of what science should study. Some argue that we shouldn't bring the domain of the mind into the picture because it's too speculative. They believe science shouldn't delve into superstitions, imaginary notions of supernormal phenomena, or higher realities without empirical evidence.

Thus, they tend to keep science away from consciousness, subjectivity, and the domain of the mind. I had a brief look into this, which led me to explore the relationship between science and spiritualism. I wondered why people are so intrigued by examining these domains side by side and what the latest discoveries or insights they are having.

Surprisingly, such ideas are everywhere nowadays—consciousness is certainly a very prominent topic these days. I found it interesting to find many videos on YouTube. One of these is called '*Awakening Mind*' in 2023, where two scientists, Donald Hofman and Rupert Spira, are featured. Rupert is a philosopher who views the mind and consciousness as a path out of our miseries and suffering. Spiritualism is the way to go, and he practices a form of meditation that connects with Vedic philosophies. He talks extensively about the first-person perspective, and Donald Hofman, a neuroscientist, supports a theory of consciousness that transcends matter and physicalism. This movie is about an hour long and is accessible to a general audience. It resonates well with those who don't necessarily support pure religious views but have a healthy skepticism towards blind faith-based approaches. It also appeals to those who are aware of scientific discoveries but are not fully convinced by all of science's conclusions.

This movie is really interesting because it discusses the nature of the mind, delusions that we constantly carry with us, and the idea of taking personal experiences. It supports the notion that consciousness and the mind are closely linked. In a sense, the '*Awakening*' movie suggests that the mind and matter debate, the dualism that considers these as separate entities, causes much suffering. However, there is no such thing as dualism. What's

happening is there's a single, non-dual experience, which aligns well with *Advaita Vedanta* philosophies, where the distinction between the world and oneself is false. This dualism, the separation between the world and us, is the root of suffering. When this duality dissolves into unity, it reveals our eternal essence. It is our undistorted consciousness, our oneness with the universe, and the fulfillment of our life's purpose. All suffering fades away when we become one with the universe, that's the ultimate path to freedom from suffering. That's the summary of the movie for me, or at least the essence that Rupert has experienced deep within himself. Perhaps, that's his reality, as he claims it's how we achieve freedom from suffering and find true happiness.

The movie proposes that giving much credit to the notion of Universal Consciousness as something supreme, the ultimate reality, may be correct. Consciousness is seen as something transcendent of space-time, matter, and all our experiences—feelings, perceptions, notions—that are fabrications, distortions of the ultimate Universal Consciousness, which is non-dual, unmanifested, inherent in every being, and the source of ultimate happiness. That seems to be the ultimate message from him.

Donald Hofman contributes to this line of thinking. He says that space-time, matter, and physicalism have hit a dead end on both sides—on the nano scale of sub-subatomic particles and on the grand scale of the cosmos. Physicists can't explain experiences that span such vast scales, beyond even their best theories, rendering the universe unreal. The universe doesn't seem real when we contemplate what lies beyond all the galaxies, trillions or many more, which are just the visible part of the universe. Therefore, the idea of living in a material universe doesn't hold water because it can't be defined satisfactorily.

Donald Hofman's contribution to the Theory of Consciousness is about placing consciousness above space-time, at least more fundamentally²⁶. He concludes that over these 200-400 years of debates between mind and matter, materialistic proponents have gradually lost ground—quantum mechanics is a good starting point. They may argue they are winning the battle, and proponents of the

²⁶ <https://sites.socsci.uci.edu/~ddhoff/Chapter17Hoffman.pdf>

mind have their own arguments. Those who support the mind argue, 'No matter what physics proves, we can never dismiss the mind.' That's the debate, a state of war, the struggle between mind and matter. Materialistic proponents have recently lost substantial ground because they haven't resolved this debate with propositions that can be reasonably justified, even for the simplest inquiry into our subjective experiences—why simple observations can consistently affect states of matter.

I think these materialistic proponents have bitten off more than they can chew. They should have simply acknowledged that their theories stop at a certain point and that the domain of subjective experience and consciousness is not within their scope. They shouldn't have gone further to claim that physics can explain everything in reality. They've taken on more than they can handle.

That's what some scientists like Professor Donald Hofman and others are challenging: extreme physicalist notions about the nature of our reality. Donald Hofman and his team have argued that giving too much credit to space-time-based models and considering space-time as a fundamental reality is flawed because space-time doesn't hold up when we start studying objects at the Planck scale or below²⁷. When we try to measure an object that is 10^{-33} cm and attempt to characterize it, it can no longer be characterized within the space-time framework. The very notion of measuring that entity or particle is invalidated because we simply run out of the space-time platform. This is due to the collapse of space-time, as the energy required for measurement exponentially exceeds all energies available in the universe. Even if energy were available, limiting such high energy in such a small space-time creates a black hole, thereby destroying the object itself that we are trying to measure. It's as if we are attempting to measure that particular object, but the very laws of physics come into play to undo our efforts, much like trying to measure weight without any apparatus. How can we possibly achieve that? Simply put, we cannot. We need some foundation, but that foundation is now gone.

²⁷ Spacetime is doomed! Introducing Planck scale physics in the classroom
<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1361-6552/acfe54/pdf>

Thus, space-time doesn't hold water when we attempt to measure an object at 10^{-33} centimeter or below. This means that space-time is not the immutable fabric universal to all scales. It's a very delicate scale. For instance, if we want to measure 0.1 gram of matter but our scale only measures in steps of, let's say, 1 gram, then that scale is inadequate. Essentially, the margin of error is one or more orders of magnitude greater than the precision we are striving for. This is why space-time loses its validity at the sub-subatomic level of the Planck scale. On deeper reflection, we realize that the space-time we once thought to be the foundation of our reality is merely a concept. It's not a fundamental property of nature; rather, it crumbles when subjected to rigorous testing.

So, this led us to rethink: if space-time is not fundamental, then what is beyond space-time? Beyond space-time, I want to bring to light some direct experiences of the mind found in the earliest Buddhist texts. The Buddha said that when we move beyond experiences of matter, beyond the perception of matter, we arrive at the experience of space, the emptiness of space. This experience is known as the base of the infinity of space, the domain where beings abide in the base of infinite space. So, this domain is also a perception that our minds can grasp. That's what the Buddha says: it means it's merely a perception; there's nothing immutable even in that space.

The experience of space is just a perception. And the Buddha says that, okay, because it's just a perception, why do we want to hold onto this perception? Perception is our reaction to a phenomenon. Why hold onto space if it's just a notion? We need to let it go. And because it's a fabrication of the mind, we release and relax, and the notion of space also fades away once it ceases. That means it's not a fundamental reality. And what the Buddha says is when we let go of space, it brings us to another reality. It's not the fundamental reality either; it's a relative reality known as the infinity of consciousness. So, beyond space, when we let go of space and it disappears, then all that remains is consciousness. Or consciousness and whatever lies behind consciousness, to be more precise.

Thus, this experience is called the perception of the Base of the infinity of consciousness. So, space—the perception of space—disappears because it's not fundamental. Space is just a creation of

the mind, just a concept. And when we let go of that concept of space, all that's left is the perception of the infinity of consciousness. Notice the word perception. So, what does that mean? It's just a perception that exists. So, this consciousness is also perception. It's not a theory; it's not a theory of consciousness; it's not a theory of space-time; it's not a theory of the mind—it's the direct observation of our experiences.

That is to say, I didn't create this; I didn't create space; I didn't create consciousness. I simply stated what I saw, or rather what the Buddha saw in his observations. And this is exactly what we see when we introspect, when we observe our minds. It's not just me; there are thousands of meditators who know that when we let go of the notion of space, the infinity of space disappears, and it's replaced by the perception of the infinity of consciousness. And that's just a perception. What does that mean? Consciousness itself is just a perception. And when we go even further beyond that, we arrive at the infinity of consciousness. And when we let go of even that infinity of consciousness, then there's the perception of the base of nothingness. And this perception of nothingness is devoid of anything—it's simply an awareness of no things; there's just the mind, but nothing else.

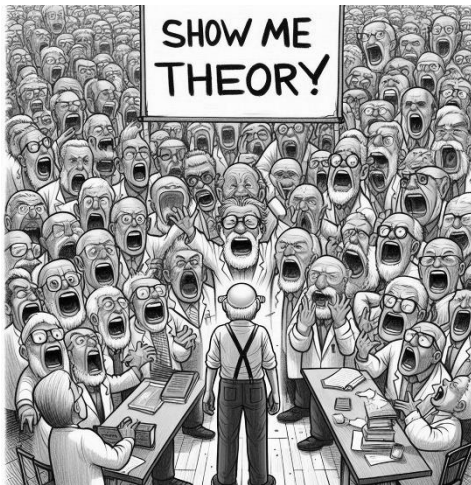


Figure 4: Human obsession with seeking a theory for everything.

Yes, it's just a fleeting experience, merely an experience, but there is nothing beyond it. And even that experience transcends through practice. We understand that this perception, this notion of nothingness—there's a perception attached to nothingness as well. And when we move beyond that, we reach a state of neither perception nor non-perception. Now, the foundation of perception somewhat becomes unstable; that perception no longer holds ground because it's actually a concept, a construct of the mind, a thin veil, perhaps, of our personalization, our ideas, our conceptualizations. So, that's the thin strand of concept that remains at that foundation. We let go of neither perception nor non-perception as well. Then the Buddha says that when we've let go even of this small, unstable perception of neither perception nor non-perception, it means our entire notion of the universe and any reliance on our mental observations, perceptions, imaginations, all collapse. Then whatever experience we had of this universe fades away.

There's nothing to fear or worry about such experiences. These are merely episodes touching the realm of the Unconditioned. There will be complete emptiness, a complete loss of the world for a brief moment. It's not emptiness; it's a total disconnection of perception, feeling, and consciousness from the concept called the world. That means letting go of everything, and when we have let go of everything, all these concepts, that's it. A state of complete and absolute independence from the universe. That's where the Buddha went and returned from. That's what the Buddha's path is about, and that's what I practice, having firsthand experience of all these states.

So, in this context, all I'm saying is that yes, consciousness is more fundamental than space, and consciousness will persist even if we let go of space. But it's a construct of our mind because, as we know, even this idea of space I mentioned is a construct; it's not a true foundation of our reality.

And space, as I mentioned, doesn't hold any real ground even within a simple thought process. If space was a genuine framework of this universe, how could we reconcile the fact that we are living in an infinitely undefinable, unreal universe that continues indefinitely? What solid evidence assures us that we are indeed in a tangible universe? This demonstrates that all the countless galaxies and enigmatic dark matter are simply concepts that arise depending on

our measurements. They do not exist if we do not measure them; they become mere imaginations to satisfy our mind's craving for permanence. Everything beyond our senses—including the concept of 'outside'—is a product of our perception; even the visual universe is a construct of our imagination.

Space can be likened to a lens or an interface, as Professor Donald Hoffman aptly describes space-time as a headset²⁸. This means it's merely a convention, a method for facilitating our daily interactions in a universally understandable manner. This approach helps us navigate complexities like the Planck scale without confusion. We needn't concern ourselves with whether it's say 10^{20} Planck lengths; instead, more generalized measurements like meters, relevant to human scales, give space practical meaning for our everyday activities. Recent experiments such as quantum entanglement and the measurement problem at the Planck scale suggest that space-time as a reality is under question. Further revelations from ongoing scientific experiments highlight the urgent need for a theory capable of refining our understanding of space-time.

This is precisely what Professor Donald Hoffman is endeavoring to develop: a comprehensive Theory of Consciousness where space-time is viewed merely as a derivative. Causally speaking, while I hear phrases like "booting up space-time from consciousness," I find them less convincing. It may be plausible to generate perceptions of space and time from consciousness, but the idea of consciousness as an entity creating space-time as its offspring or product seems untenable to me. Therefore, I have reviewed his two papers—one on the theory of consciousness composed of numerous conscious agents and another on the theory of the fusion of consciousness.

The paper on conscious agents is essentially formulating a principle, providing a scaffold to place this Theory of Consciousness on a theoretical foundation. It proposes a primitive model of conscious agents interacting. The model of a conscious agent shows an agent having perception, taking action, and making decisions. Why these three properties? Why can Consciousness perceive, act,

²⁸ Spacetime is just a headset: An interview with Donald Hoffman
<https://www.essentiafoundation.org/spacetime-is-just-a-headset-an-interview-with-donald-hoffman/seeing/>

and decide? Is this the ultimate model, the most rudimentary model, or an intermediate one until we discover an ultimate model? These are conceptual questions.

A conscious agent is a concept that attempts to establish a framework consisting of a network of trillions of conscious agents capable of simulating complex experiences using agent-building blocks and Markov chain-based interactions. It resembles a vast probability matrix. The Markov chain defines probabilities, and with causal interactions among these conscious agents, we can seemingly recreate all experiences, including space-time. The theory suggests that space-time is merely an experience through which we observe the physical world. If the scaffolding of Consciousness is constructed in a sophisticated manner, it could account for all experiences, including space and time. With a trillion-by-trillion-sized matrix, we can explore countless permutations to explain various experiences.

For instance, by taking the inverse of that matrix, we can alter our perceptions drastically. Multiplying a matrix with its inverse could nullify noise, leading to the loss of interference experiences. Similarly, fusing two consciousnesses with opposite properties could potentially cancel each other out, resulting in no Consciousness remaining. Thus, we can develop mathematical relations of conscious agents to potentially explain phenomena like the different colors or tastes of chocolates, or the bitterness of medicines, by manipulating the values of the Markov chain matrix to generate complex matrices representing these varied experiences.

Using conscious agent theory as a foundation for the experience of space-time, Professor Hoffman is now attempting to integrate it with another theory stemming from the latest developments in physics, based on experimental results from particle collision labs like CERN. Characterizing fundamental particles such as gluons and muons using the space-time model after collision is highly intricate. Simulating their behavior and outcomes through complex mathematics might be simplified using geometrical concepts beyond space-time known as Amplituhedrons²⁹. These multi-dimensional polygons can represent particle interactions as geometrical shapes rather than mathematical equations. Amplituhedrons, with trillions

²⁹ The Amplituhedron <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1312.2007>

of dimensions, could potentially account for all types of particle interactions in space-time, offering a comprehensive and mathematically precise representation of reality. This approach could satisfy those seeking a theory encompassing every possible experience.

Amplituhedrons can be represented as geometrical shapes and sizes, and their properties can be characterized by a concept known as "decorative permutation." Decorative permutation involves manipulating numbers or entries in matrices, akin to shuffling cards but within specific rules. These allowed permutations define the characteristics of amplituhedrons, which correspond to various physical particle interactions observed in life today. This experiment fundamentally links consciousness with space-time and particles at the most basic level³⁰. It's what I've gleaned from Professor Donald Hofman's work, which is truly remarkable, profound, and a bold challenge to prevailing notions of space-time and materialism held by hard materialists who view consciousness merely as a property of matter. This scientific endeavor challenges the dogma that a material universe alone can account for all known experiences, a statement that seems quite absurd.

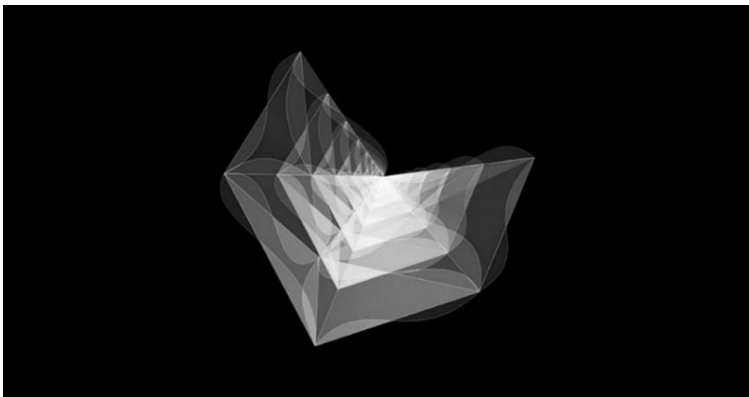


Figure 5: An artistic rendering of an amplituhedron, a geometric structure that is hoped to explain the enigma of quantum phenomena involving subatomic particles.³¹

³⁰ Fusions of Consciousness <https://www.mdpi.com/1099-4300/25/1/129>

³¹ Image credit: Quanta Magazine.

These new theories like amplituhedrons and decorative permutations are advancing science, moving it forward towards a less dogmatic approach. Materialistic views in science have suffered significant setbacks in the past 50 years, failing to progress in multiple directions. Many physicists struggled to reconcile behaviors validated by quantum mechanics—and Einstein was no exception. Despite such challenges, quantum mechanics has repeatedly demonstrated that material particles lack a solid space-time locality; they exist as potentials. Quantum mechanics has shaken the foundations of rigid, deterministic, and static descriptions of particles, atoms, and matter within the framework of space-time. It challenges the notion that matter resembles solid balls or dots suspended in space, akin to Lego pieces—a concept supported by scientists like Max Tegmark (Tegmark, 2014).

Additionally, quantum physics has dismantled the idea that matter and things can be fully characterized by deterministic boundaries of location and time. It has shown that reality is rather probabilistic and shaped by our interactions; we cannot definitively ascertain whether a particle is here or there until we measure it. Only upon measurement does a particle manifest at a specific location; until then, it can exist anywhere. This principle is encapsulated in Schrödinger's equation. Schrödinger posited that there are no vast Lego-like particles; rather, particles exist in a superposition of many waves. He proposed that upon measurement, particles transition into a suspended animation-like state; before measurement, they exist as concepts. The wave-particle duality inherent in physical reality remains a subject of challenge across scientific communities. Some scientists argue that particles persist even in the absence of observation, attempting to remove problematic consciousness-related notions from purely physical phenomena.

Schrödinger recognized that quantum physics and mechanics implied something more fundamental than particles, suggesting that our current model of reality based on particle physics and space-time may soon become untenable. He drew influence from *Vedanta* and other Eastern philosophies, and in his later years, he began to express the view that consciousness is more fundamental than material reality. This perspective supported the quest to understand the mind

beyond mere matter and theoretical constructs, marking a shift towards a more philosophical stance later in his life (Schrodinger, 1956).

Another very interesting notion worth exploring is Biocentrism, which suggests that biological processes and consciousness are necessary for the world and experiences to arise. This idea challenges the reductionist view of reality as merely physical and mechanistic processes, leaving the door open for exploration of mind and consciousness.

Chapter 5

Exploration of Notions of Biocentrism

Biocentrism is an idea proposed by medical scientist Dr. Robert Lanza after years of research into human cells and the genome. He has authored three popular books on the topic: "*Biocentrism*," "*Beyond Biocentrism*," and "*The Grand Biocentric Design*." These books are captivating reads that appeal to a wide audience, attracting considerable press attention as an alternative means to explain the nature of the universe. Biocentrism has been heavily influenced by findings from quantum physics and, more recently, by philosophies such as *Vedanta*. It posits that the universe and its intricate complexities only make sense because conscious biological entities exist to perceive them. According to Biocentrism, biological systems like human beings are at the center of the universe, while matter and all experiences are artifacts of something intrinsically subjective. Lanza argues that some of the deepest mysteries in science, such as the role of the observer in determining the state of particles, can only be explained through Biocentrism.

While Biocentrism includes consciousness within its scope to elucidate subjective and objective phenomena, it does not extend beyond this to encompass the experiential understanding of the interaction between mind, mental phenomena, and material objects. Thus, Biocentrism distinguishes itself from spiritual practices and religious beliefs concerning higher consciousness and divine beings like gods. Lately, it incorporated some insights from Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism on the concepts of consciousness and intelligence beyond the duality of subject and object. However, fundamentally, Biocentrism can be viewed as a fusion of quantum physics and cellular biology—a combination that gives it a unique advantage over many other alternative viewpoints in closely explaining the reality of animate life.

Biocentrism represents a significant idea, offering fresh perspectives that diverge from the dogmatic extreme physicalist view of the world, which reduces the universe to nothing more than a complexity of atoms and molecules. In attempting to unravel the

mystery of life, it posits that life may also be engineered through carefully planned laboratory experiments. Biocentrism covers numerous areas in its quest to answer fundamental questions such as: What is life? Why are we here? Rather than providing an overview of all books on Biocentrism, I will outline its key principles here to provide some of the missing elements that may satisfy our thirst about why we should move beyond these intriguing notions and seek direct experience. It starts with an idea:

There is no separate physical universe outside of life and consciousness. Nothing is real that is not perceived. There was never a time when an external, dumb, physical universe existed, or that life sprang randomly from it at a later date. Space and time exist only as constructs of the mind, as tools of perception. Experiments in which the observer influences the outcome are easily explainable by the interrelatedness of consciousness and the physical universe. Neither nature nor mind is unreal; both are correlative. No position is taken regarding God.

There are seven principles of Biocentrism that I extracted from the books. These are very interesting conclusions which may offer satisfaction to some intellectual curiosity of mind—all good and wonderful, no pun intended—I go further to say that we should not stop there and experience what is really happening in mind.

First Principle of Biocentrism: What we perceive as reality is a process that involves our consciousness. An “external” reality, if it existed, would—by definition—have to exist in space. But this is meaningless, because space and time are not absolute realities but rather tools of the human and animal mind.

This is a good summary of human reality because there simply isn't another way we can relate to all the experiences our minds concoct through our senses without involving consciousness. Consciousness has been touted as something supernatural, an inherently existing feature that defines our reality here and that is the eternal essence of our self, even though our bodies die. However, note that there is much more to our experiences than just consciousness. Understanding how all six consciousnesses arise due

to their causes and conditions will paint a much more comprehensive and less mystical picture.

The assumption underlying this principle is that consciousness defines us and our experiences. It posits that consciousness is our self or identity. However, this may still be a premature assumption. When one develops mindfulness to a refined degree, one can directly see that consciousnesses arise and pass away continually, much like bubbles—and what's more, they arise and pass away without a controller, supernatural awareness, or being behind them.

It generally seems to us that space and time exist independently of our experiences and provide definite coordinates for our experiences. These notions persisted rock-solid until the 19th century due to the highly successful and esteemed work of Newton on gravity and motion. However, this classical and solid notion became untenable when the very foundation of space-time was shaken by Einstein's discovery of the General Theory of Relativity. He proved that the only constant in the universe is the speed of light—even space and time had to become flexible to accommodate his remarkable theory.

However, in light of the latest developments in physics, we cannot state this with certainty. Space is not the fundamental barrier that separates entities from each other. According to quantum physics, in the realm of subatomic particles, electrons once associated can seemingly affect each other's states instantaneously, as if the spaces between them have disappeared. How the barrier of space can be overcome at the human scale—like the idea of teleportation—is so far considered a Stage II impossibility by Prof. Michio Kaku in his book (Kaku, 2008). How this can be made possible is a topic for future study. But fundamentally, if we can create an entangled pair of our body, we should be able to teleport as well. Interestingly, there are accounts of such feats being performed by the Buddha and his disciples on many occasions to impart his teachings to beings in heavenly realms or other parts of the country³². This is mentioned just for reference—unless one wants to practice to directly experience such possibilities.

³² For example, see Udana 8.6: Pátali Village

A very revealing treatise on what the space and matter we see around us truly are is given by the Buddha in his discourses on the elements³³. Here he explains that the notion of space or separateness between us (internal space element) and the world (external space element) arises due to the arising of consciousness. In other words, the moment consciousness arises in the eye, ear, and other sense organs, our mind registers the world as being out there. However, all the sights, sounds, tastes, etc., that we experience are reactions of the mind to impressions of elements with feelings and perceptions. The notions of here or there, in or out, are fabrications of the mind—or functions of consciousness. He advises that one should develop disenchantment and dispassion towards these elements by continually letting go of these mere concepts. The end result is: while the body will last as long as life supports it, the mind has been fully liberated from the body and becomes cool and free from agitation. It's a peculiar state, but nothing close to the annihilation of self that one might think.

Time is not absolute—we all know this very well both personally and scientifically. But time serves as a valuable reference that our minds create to keep track of all experiences. The mind experiences time as a perception of change when it observes all phenomena that are dependently linked together. In fact, time exists in the mind whenever it is preoccupied by distractions, no matter how subtle they may be. When one develops mindfulness to let go of all distractions, the only reality experienced is present moment awareness: All notions of the past and future simply fade away. This state of mind is devoid of all concepts, where all phenomena cease, and along with them, time also ceases. One is able to develop the mind by calming all arising phenomena and being completely free, dissociated, and detached from them.

Later, I will show how our minds construct all experiences through a process that is discrete rather than continuous, in *Chapter 0*:

Chapter 9

Genesis of Material Universe and Contact, and how this can be observed through direct experience in *Chapter 0*

Chapter 16

Exploring the Buddha's Samatha Vipassana Path.

³³ Majjhima Nikaya 140: Dhatuvibhanga Sutta

This domain of experience belongs to the mind—it's not a place like heaven or celestial realms—so having direct meditative experience is essential to understanding it fully.

Second Principle of Biocentrism: Our external and internal perceptions are inextricably intertwined. They are different sides of the same coin and cannot be divorced from one another.

Perception here refers to our conceptions. The role of perception is identification. Perceptions are generally categorized as internal and external: those involving the mind are internal, while those experienced through the five senses are external. External experiences are sometimes referred to as the five faculties or domains, each distinct and non-overlapping in qualities: Sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. However, it's important to note that these faculties can only be experienced when the mind is involved or engaged. For example, one may have their eyes open but fail to see objects if the mind's attention is elsewhere or overwhelmed by other senses. Such situations are common, leaving us unable to comprehend what is happening around us as our attention was completely elsewhere.

Perception is a part of the mind that arises to name or relate to an experience when the mind recognizes a certain feeling from the interaction of body and mind with objects. For perception to arise, feeling must arise. Feeling is the fundamental way the mind experiences objects, which can only be a) painful, b) pleasurable, or c) neither painful nor pleasurable—nothing else. When a feeling arises, the mind attempts to recognize and name it—that process is perception. Perception crystallizes in the mind as a full-blown consciousness of the object after the mind fully engages with it.

Thus, in reality, there are no such things as internal and external perceptions—there is simply perception that arises whenever the mind reacts to a feeling. A study conducted by Professor Donald Hoffman's team, published in the article in *New Scientist* in 3 August 2009: "*Reality: The Greatest Illusion of All*," concluded that external or objective reality can be rather frightening. In truth, reality is created by the mind and presented to it as perceptions—a 'virtual reality' that we become conscious of in order to survive or thrive in adverse conditions. They suggest that anyone perceiving objective reality

without modifications could potentially face extinction as they would struggle to adapt well to the environment.

This raises a fundamental question: Our existence is perpetually preoccupied with desires for gain, the instinct for survival, and is driven by fear of losing these sensory experiences. These reactions are actually the causes of instability in the mind, keeping us caught in various existences from one life to another. The Buddha teaches that there is instability for one who is dependent, but there is no instability for one who is independent or unconditioned³⁴. What he means is that all our feelings, perceptions, concepts, and fears are instabilities or oscillations of the mind, akin to someone suddenly put on a bicycle who doesn't know how to get off—they must keep pedaling forward to stay upright, or risk an immediate fall. However, if they knew how to dismount safely and stand on solid ground, they would never worry or waver, as they wouldn't need external support. We live our lives in constant fear of death or loss of sensory experiences and other concerns; these mind reactions keep us trapped in a cycle, always needing more reactions to survive.

The moment one realizes that these reactions are merely creations of the mind, which is deluded into believing they are necessary for survival, one can completely let go of them. As all reactions cease, with their cessation, fear of death, anxieties, and agitations also cease. This state is not the extinction or annihilation of self, as many people think; rather, it is the state of supreme peace and stability—the Unconditioned, ultimate freedom from all sufferings. Also known as *Nibbāna*—or the extinguishing of all fires—one experiences this state after developing the mind to a sufficient degree and does not have to wait for death to experience this happiness.

Third Principle of Biocentrism: The behaviors of subatomic particles—indeed all particles and objects—are inextricably linked to the presence of an observer. Without the presence of a conscious observer, they at best exist in an undetermined state of probability waves.

One of the greatest problems in science is that Einstein's description of spacetime—the large-scale view using General

³⁴ Udana 8.4: Parinibbāna

Relativity—fundamentally conflicts with Quantum Theory at the very small scale where traditional rules of spacetime break down for subatomic particles. The nature of matter, composed of the same particles, behaves very predictably on cosmic or human scales but exhibits indeterministic, probabilistic, and discrete behavior at the quantum level. This dichotomy remains one of the greatest mysteries in science today.

This mystery deepens with discoveries that subatomic particles violate the principle of locality—the foundation of our existence in the common-sense world—and can exhibit behaviors such as existing in multiple places simultaneously (wave-particle duality) and influencing each other regardless of distance through quantum entanglement. Let’s pause here for a moment to grasp the implications.

This implies that particles do not exist in the strict realist sense of an independently existing world; rather, their existence depends on our sense perceptions under specific conditions: the observer's intention to observe, the functioning of the observer's sense faculties, and the presence of an object within the range of those faculties and attention.

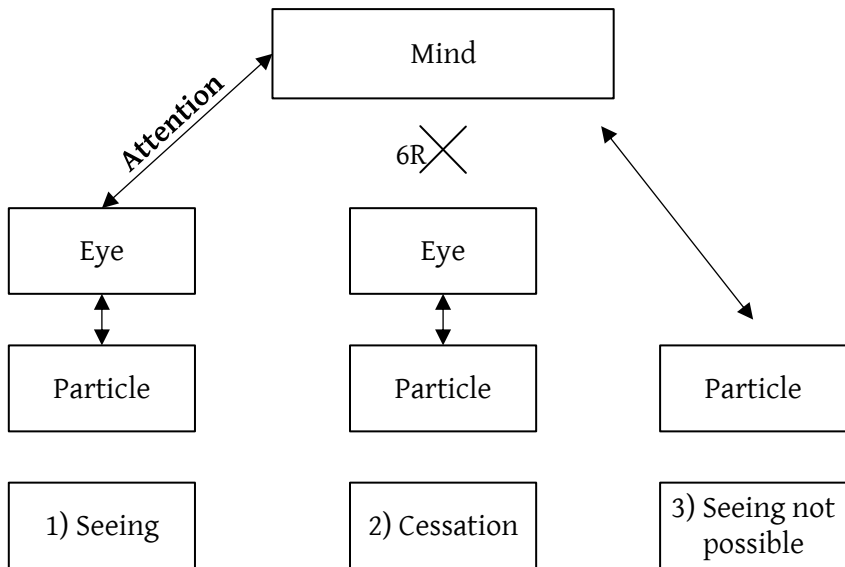


Figure 6: Dependent arising of consciousness and the state of Cessation.

As can be seen from the figure, the observation of particles occurs only in case 1) but not in cases 2) and 3). Case 2) represents the Cessation state, where all arising phenomena cease due to non-reaction (6R). Such states do not result from the annihilation of our so-called self—an observer or the world—but rather from our non-involvement in the process of the arising and passing of phenomena, which can occur both knowingly and unknowingly.

Case 3), or non-seeing, occurs due to lack of sense faculty and /or attention. The difference between Cessation and non-seeing lies in the presence and absence of mindfulness, respectively. Understanding this distinction reveals the secret of Awakening and true liberation.

For a clearer illustration, we can consider how a person without meditative experience perceives the world compared to an accomplished meditator who fully understands the arising and ceasing (prevention) of phenomena; but let's continue to use the ideas of Biocentrism for exploration for now.

Fourth Principle of Biocentrism: Without consciousness, "matter" dwells in an undetermined state of probability. Any universe that could have preceded consciousness only existed in a probability state.

This point is again a reiteration of the previous one. Now the focus is on consciousness rather than on perception. What we call "matter" is generally regarded as the physical and objective reality that exists independently, according to most physicists. There were times in the past two hundred years when particle physicists were marginalized, as they were thought to be wasting time and resources on futile research and missing the bigger picture. Lord Kelvin, who discovered the laws of thermodynamics, touted to have said that physics had reached its peak and that all the important discoveries in physics had already been made, with only polishing the findings left to do³⁵. With the revolution in Quantum physics in the 20th century, this notion of certainty and solidity of matter became fuzzy, as it seems that the fundamental particles that make up all matter cannot be defined within the generic space-time framework.

³⁵ <https://bigthink.com/hard-science/19th-century-physics-kelvin/>

Now let's conduct a thought experiment with the thing we call "matter". Most people know that all knowable matter consists entirely of or from various combinations of the 92 elements naturally found on the planet. These elements reduce to atoms, then to electrons and nuclei made of protons and neutrons. Going beyond the subatomic structures of the elements, it has been understood that particles such as electrons and protons do not exist as solid objects like stacked Legos. The presence of these subatomic particles can only be ascertained by means of observations—in other words, our measurements. These particles only become a reality when our senses can grasp the nature of their presence through some effects which we call our feelings and perceptions. It would be pointless to talk about the existence of matter if our senses cannot make any sense of it; it boils down to how we make sense of it.

Here comes another perspective on matter by means of "elements"—not the 92 elements from the periodic table which have different names that we are largely familiar with—but by means of feelings and perceptions of them. These are called the four great elements in Buddhist texts: earth, water, fire, and air.

These elements should not be taken literally as consisting of these objects, but rather as the properties of them that make up sensation in our bodies. Some elements manifest to our senses as hardness or repelling acts. Now, we know that the matter we are talking about is at least 99.99999% empty; that is, it is extremely unlikely that electrons in our body cells would even come into close contact with the electrons of matter, e.g., walls we are interacting with. But how can it be that, instead of passing through matter as though through the morning fogs of winter, we bounce back or bang our heads so hard against these forms? We know in the Quantum realm that such events occur all the time—an effect we call Quantum Tunnelling (Al-Khalili, 2019). There is a deep implication from this thought experiment: Anyone who is able to develop their mind to cease the feelings that arise may actually overcome the painful feeling that is the outcome of interacting with matter that has solid or earthy properties. This is a very interesting phenomenon that has been observed in the Pali Canon texts where the Buddha says, one who can perfect the art of

serenity of mind by full tranquilisation can achieve mastery, such as penetrating solid barriers like walls or enclosures³⁶.

The four great elements (*Maha Bhuta*) in Pali literally also mean the four great ghosts. Now, this needs a little thought. These elements indeed do not have fixed nomenclatures with which they can be defined with certainty that they remain at the same or different states. These elements are representations in our minds in terms of perceptions of form, which are characterized by four properties: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. In terms of experiences, we may never be able to truly fathom the reality of an objective world in terms of what our perceptions come in contact with. All that we experience are our projections of what is coming into contact with our senses. To dogmatically assert that the physical elements are really out there and come as a bunch of atoms and molecules is too naive and a premature conclusion. Countless results from high-energy particle labs give a very nuanced and illusory nature of particles that do not appear to conform to standard particle physics³⁷.

The particles are our representation of phenomena that are rather probabilistic in nature, behaving very much like waves where they violate fundamental notions of standard physics like locality and unitarity. Experiments with the quantum nature of subatomic particles have revealed that they can borrow particles from complete voids and even from the future and pay them back; that is, they do not have to sum to a total, as we are used to in daily lives—a violation of the law of unitarity. The famous experiments done by Anton Zeilinger et al. with entangled particles have closed off the loop, suspecting the validity of the assertion that spooky action at a distance is possible. The scientific communities postulating the objective reality of matter have lost significant ground in recent years. While the latest experiments have given some support to proponents of ideas like Biocentrism, if we look at the problem of the reality of our experiences, all these debates and pursuits are actually prolonging more and more mental proliferation, leading to more and

³⁶ For example: Samyutta Nikaya 16.9: Jhānas and Direct Knowledges

³⁷ <https://home.cern/science/physics/standard-model>

more unsettledness and suffering. There is a middle path where the ultimate peace, safety, and freedom from all notions can be achieved.

Fifth Principle of Biocentrism: The structure of the universe is explainable only through biocentrism. The universe is fine-tuned for life, which makes perfect sense as life creates the universe, not the other way around. The “universe” is simply the complete spatio-temporal logic of the self.

The notion that the universe is perfectly tuned for life to observe it, and everything is just right for us, has been a puzzle for the vast majority of physicists as well. They are perplexed as to why the constant for gravity is so precise, down to a precision of 10 to the power of 120 zeros, and not otherwise³⁸. This figure dictates the state of our universe, which is evolving to sustain life as we know it, without crushing all creatures or leading to a big freeze where stars become too spaced out if expansion continues even a tiny bit faster. Claiming that only Biocentrism can explain a universe finely tuned for life veers towards asserting the authority of biology over phenomena such as gravity and particle physics. For Biocentrism to remain accurate, it should confine itself to the realm of biology. This way, it can remain somewhat autonomous from the physical phenomena that govern the behavior of inanimate particles and matter, without making excessive claims about the physics of matter and the reality behind the fabric of space-time. Whether we would like to accept it or not, phenomena that give rise to the perception of space-time and matter do exist in their own domains. It would be too presumptuous to claim that the universe exists as it is solely due to perception.

In other words, saying that biology is the primary force governing the physical universe heavily biases toward giving too much authority to biology. This is not really the case. It's like claiming ownership of a process just because one process has a causal effect on another. The two can remain completely disjoint and governed by their own sets of rules. The illusion that one is the primary force for the other is very persistent. Furthermore, Biocentrism cannot and should not claim that all mental processes are byproducts of biology.

³⁸ Fundamental constants: Is the universe fine-tuned for life? From Phys.org

The realm of mind and perception is a completely different domain governed by its own rules. As it will be discussed in Chapter 9, consciousness and perception of the material universe depend only on the coming together of phenomena. Such processes occur because there is a suitable platform ready for them to occur, for example, in humans or other creatures that react to them. However, this does not mean that biological creatures govern the perception of the universe.

Biocentrism should account for the fact that neither the physical universe and natural phenomena nor biological processes can fully account for the rich life experiences characterized by entities like humans or animals. Both communities overlook the fact that there is a thing such as mind and mental processes—like feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention—that, when supported by consciousness, bring all experiences into subjective reality. If we can truly appreciate how these three things come together to sustain what we all call life, then we are a step closer to cracking the tough nut of why there is suffering in this universe and how it can be ended.

Sixth Principle of Biocentrism: Time does not have a real existence outside of animal-sense perception. It is the process by which we perceive changes in the universe.

Time is an invention of humans; we have inherited the mind-body process whereby we cannot control anything as we desire. Time is defined by us as something against which we measure how much we have gained or lost in terms of the gratification of the six senses—agreeableness or its opposite. When we take a step back and observe the mind's reactions to feelings based on contacts with the six senses, notions of agreeableness, disagreeableness, and indifference arise continuously. For those who understand how the mind works, these notions are the fuels that keep us bound to the framework of space-time. They are the means to measure how much we have gained or lost in terms of the assets of the six senses: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts.

When the mind becomes disentangled from these three inevitable tendencies, an experience arises that is completely outside the realm of space-time. In this dimension, there is no gain or loss of sights,

sounds, tastes, touches, smells, or thoughts—these notions vanish completely. Yet, the body and mind become extremely happy and comfortable. This experience is something completely alien to materialist scientists and worldly people. In such experiences, the notion of time fades away; there is simply no need for space and time in this dimension. However, those who are observant of all experiences of the mind will fully understand how the three tendencies can arise again, bringing back the notion of the gratification of the six senses through sense door contacts. When these tendencies return, the notions of space-time and the gain and loss of senses become the new norm. The world arises from the non-world.

The notion of the space-time fabric and its curvature, with the speed of light being the only immutable factor, has been with us since Einstein's development of general relativity. He changed our perception of time by convincing us that time ticks differently depending on how fast we are moving relative to each other. He theoretically showed that time ceases to exist if we were moving at the speed of light—meaning we wouldn't age at all. Obviously, such an event remains fiction today; no one has the ability to travel at such unimaginably high speeds. Even if we could travel at a tenth of that speed, it could potentially slow down the aging process that we all desperately try to avoid.

Even in the realms of physics like gravity, space-time curvatures, and quantum mechanics, the notion of absolute time is not a convincing proposition. It is becoming open to interpretation, much like any other concept. When subatomic particles that are entangled become excited, they instantaneously affect each other's states. For these particles, the notions of relativity and space-time curvature do not exist. This suggests that objects in nature do not adhere to the laws of gravity and space-time as we commonly think, and the boundary of time becomes meaningless in those cases. The usefulness of time only makes sense when we can frame it within a concept or theory. When such notions dissolve, time becomes a completely irrelevant concept. To quote a text from the Buddha: There is a realm where there is no matter, no space, no concepts, no this world, no other world; there is no here and there, no coming and going, no objects. This is a realm of no concepts, no conditions—a state of total

peace and tranquility: freedom from all suffering³⁹. The notion of time becomes real when there is suffering; when there is none, there is no time, and no space.

Seventh Principle of Biocentrism: Space, like time, is not an object or a thing. Space is another form of our animal understanding and does not have an independent reality. We carry space and time around with us like turtles with shells. Thus, there is no absolute self-existing matrix in which physical events occur independent of life.

The notion of space is rather interesting as it has undergone revisions over the past few hundred years. Beforehand, humans used to conceive of space as a dome, an overarching roof beneath which all knowable experiences occur. Newton then introduced space into a precise framework of our reality by formulating the laws of physics around space and time. No one dared to challenge his doctrine of space-time as long as his authority prevailed. Einstein later modified Newton's laws of physics by introducing the notion of relativity and established that the speed of light is the only immutable in the universe. However, he did not shake the foundation of space-time and Newton's laws.

New theories, such as space-time being just a headset, have recently emerged. The concept of space-time as a narrow framework of reality within the grand scheme of consciousness has been proposed by Prof. Donald Hoffman after many years of researching human cognition. His insights into the perceptions of living organisms and their survival through the mechanism of evolution by natural selection led him to believe that beings do not perceive reality as it truly is. If that were the case, we would have become extinct long ago. According to Hoffman, space-time and matter are byproducts of a higher reality more closely related to consciousness, a position contrary to what most physicalist proponents still hold.

A vast majority of people from mystical traditions, and more recently, a small fraction of scientists who have transcended physicalist views of the world, have postulated that consciousness is

³⁹ Udana 8.1: Parinibbana

fundamental. The idea of consciousness generating space-time is gaining wider appeal among some scientists and communities like *Vedanta* philosophers. New theories are now emerging suggesting that space-time and matter may be generated through the manipulation of sequences involving a plurality of conscious agents⁴⁰. It is easy to categorize consciousness as the core of our experiences, from which all subsequent layers of phenomena—including matter, space, and time—can arise. This perspective strongly defines our identity and our place in the universe.

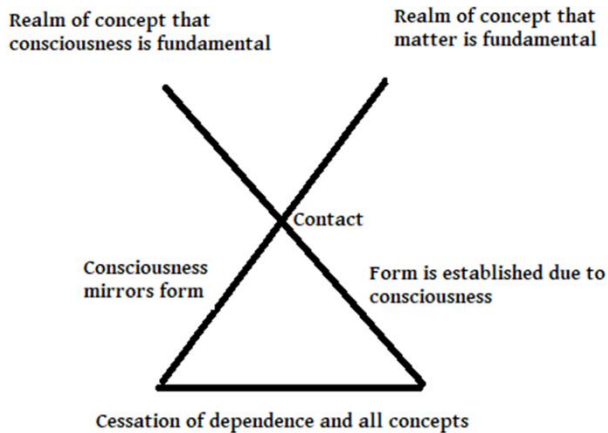


Figure 7: An analogy of two leaning straws can be used to illustrate the situation of the mind vs. matter debates. The phenomenon of contact as part of dependent origination process, and the state of Cessation are also shown.

If consciousness is the root of all phenomena, then where does it stem from? Such ideation can escalate indefinitely to higher and higher levels of consciousness. This is because consciousness, like everything else, must arise from conditions. To assert that consciousness is the ultimate reality is as fallacious as the physicalist notion that particles are the foundations of our realities. The Figure 7 illustrates a crucial point in our experience: Contact. Insight into reality arises when observing the mind and its interactions with the universe in the present moment. We delve into Contact in much greater detail later in this book.

⁴⁰ Fusions of Consciousness, <https://www.mdpi.com/1099-4300/25/1/129>

While new theories of consciousness may help alleviate the dogmatism of extreme physicalist views, there exists a perspective where one can remain independent of all these notions without being tied to either view. This perspective involves directly observing the process of dependent arising and ceasing of all phenomena as just that—a process. Consciousness is merely a part of this process. However, the world seems to be fixated on theories. Do we truly need a theory to see things as they really are?

Chapter 6

Consciousness is Not Fundamental

“Though someone might say: ‘Apart from form, apart from feeling, apart from perception, apart from volitional formations, I will make known the coming and going of consciousness, its passing away and rebirth, its growth, increase, and expansion’—that is impossible.

[Samyutta Nikaya 22.53 Inspired Utterance]

What is our ultimate reality? Many may find Consciousness to be an answer (Chalmers, 1997). Scientists like Professor Donald Hoffman also support this view. Throughout history, whenever human intellect has been pushed to its limits and investigated extensively within conceptual frameworks, it has often converged on Consciousness. As soon as awareness arises, we see, become aware, and are conscious. This happens not only in our sense experiences but also within our minds. This is why Consciousness holds a supreme place in many philosophies and paths of spiritual inquiry. Across spiritual traditions, Consciousness is universally regarded as something supreme and beyond imagination.

If I quote from the Bhagavad-Gita⁴¹, they establish a hierarchy: acknowledging the mind, beyond which lies intellect, and beyond intellect lies what they call Consciousness. Beyond Consciousness, they describe the Soul like *Atman* or *Brahman*—the ultimate reality. This understanding is not merely intellectual; some meditators attain exquisite awareness, experiencing a sense of oneness with the universe, believing this to be ultimate.

Let's consider Consciousness as the fundamental substrate for all other layers of experience. This is what *Advaita Vedanta* and the *Upanishads* suggest. Emotions, perceptions, attachments, feelings, birth, death—all these are seen as disturbances or anomalies to this overarching Consciousness. It remains unaffected, indestructible, ever-present, pervading the essence of the entire universe. Beings may experience joy or suffering, but these are fleeting experiences.

⁴¹ Bhagavadgītā III 42

They believe in a fundamental essence in all beings—the *Atman*. Ultimate liberation, in this belief system, occurs when the individual *Atman* merges with *Brahman*, the overarching awareness governing the universe.

This is deep philosophy, and I won't delve too deeply into it. I don't wish to dwell on something that is conditional or subject to experience—as there's still an idea involved. Instead of satisfying intellectual concerns and queries, I prioritize direct experience. In practice, I observe layers of perceptions, including Consciousness itself as just a perception—a refined experience that doesn't endure or hold water; it dissipates. There is a deeper experience beyond even that. In this sense, Consciousness is just one construct. We don't need to analyze it prematurely or draw early conclusions.

Let's say, okay, this is not merely an intellectual exercise. So, beyond the perceptions of consciousness and nothingness, beyond perception and non-perception, there is the Cessation of perception and feeling, simply called '*Nirodha*', where we know what direct experience says—and in the Buddha's own terms as well. Direct experience reveals that there is no ultimate, all-pervading supreme, completely supernatural Consciousness. The idea that they are experienced dependently is still our imagination; they are mere fabrications.

So, when we practice letting go or '*6R*', and we abandon all concepts to such an extent that we keep releasing anything that comes our way, as the Buddha instructs: keep letting go, keep letting go, don't hold onto anything, then even the subtlest layer of perception must be relinquished. We go beyond Consciousness, far beyond. We realize that even the perception itself can be let go of. Consciousness is intertwined with perception. What happens is that feeling arises, then immediately perception, and with feeling and perception, consciousness is registered. Those who believe in supreme consciousness may assume that the peak of awareness is substrate consciousness—they do not realize that such concepts arise from reactions to feeling and perception. Holding onto such views leads to tendencies for consciousness to cling to conditioned experiences.

Dependency means that without perception, we do not conceive, we are not conscious of it. Without perception, without feeling, consciousness simply cannot sustain itself. It's just a phenomenon; it's just potential. Consciousness is dependent, unstable, vacuous, a very fragile phenomenon with a shallow foundation. Therefore, given the nature of consciousness, there is no need to grasp onto it or regard consciousness as the essence of the universe. When we have let go of perception and feeling, there is no space for consciousness—it falls like a straw.

And this is not philosophy, not science, not theory. This is direct experience, which we realize in our meditative practice. When anyone experiences the Cessation of perception and feeling, they come into contact with the Unconditional element. Everything in this universe, not just the material universe but also the mental universe, is dependently originated—dependent on causes and conditions. Thus, we can examine anything in the universe, any entity, and immediately ask if it has the property of independent existence. The universe is a dependent experience; it does not exist apart from our conceptual constructs.

There is nothing in this universe that can remain independent—not even concepts. We must step outside this universe. I am using 'we' in a loose sense here. We have to let go of this universe to arrive at the state of the Unconditioned. And that's what we do in practice. After letting go of all perceptions, after dropping all perceptions, we step outside the universe—the realm of the conditioned. When we enter the realm of the Unconditioned, we experience that it is void, empty. We make contact with the element of emptiness, directionless-ness, and desirelessness. That is what emerges from the Cessation of perception and feeling—a contact with the Unconditioned.

Upon making contact with the Unconditioned, based on that contact, feeling arises, and we return to feeling. Then, naturally, we return to the domain of the world and begin to react to that feeling. If we react to that feeling, the reaction causes perception, and that perception generates consciousness.

This consciousness persists as long as we have our mind and body to support it. As long as we are alive, that consciousness connects with *Nama Rupa*, or the mind and body, for simplicity. What is *Nama*

Rupa? We have a body and we have feelings, perceptions, and other means of support. These restart the process of consciousness. This is the operating system of our experiences. This is based on dependent origination—the operating system for suffering, if we want to be more technical. The six sense bases arise for consciousness, and contact arises, feeling arises, and so on. This feedback loop begins to self-sustain.

There is no way to end this loop without correct mental development—the Noble Eightfold Path. That is the path to stepping outside this universe into the realm of the Unconditioned. Thus, as we let go of space, time, consciousness, all perceptions, and the realm of the conditioned, we let go of the process. That is the process of letting go, and there is no need for a theory.

I am inclined to create a theory of this process, but I don't need to. The thing is, I didn't invent this. Nobody invented this. The Buddha didn't invent this. It's not an invention; it's just an ongoing process that exists around us without our noticing. This is how our experiences work, and there is no need to develop a theory to describe it or to fit it into an elaborate framework. We are not scientists; we don't need to follow scientific methodologies. Because we are in a different realm of direct experience, we do not need to abide by any authority of the universe. There is no need to adhere to rules like modeling, peer review, proving the validity of results, testing against them, and only then publishing. No, we don't need all that. Everything unfolds in front of our mind and awareness. This is the realm of direct experience.

Now, I am trying to wrap up all these discussions and materials that I aimed to capture to support the path of direct experiential understanding of how the mind works. While I was exploring the work of Donald Hoffman, I found myself drawn to see what has been put forth in that realm by proponents of mind in the mind and matter debates. This led me to the work of Bernardo Kastrup⁴². I thought, 'Okay, let me give his theories a listen.' I do not specifically call it a theory because he's a philosopher, albeit one with a deeply analytical

⁴² 'Why Materialism Is Baloney' and others from https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/4552692.Bernardo_Kastrup

mind. So, I haven't seen his inventions, equations, or models. However, his concept of Analytical Idealism sounded quite rigorous as it appears to be based significantly on a solid foundation. He explains these ideas purely based on the foundation of our experiences, logics, and inferences.

What I found interesting and compelling to hear is that whatever experiences we have, nothing in our experience is material. Anything we experience, whether it's pain—being hit by a brick or pricked by a needle—or experiencing extreme heat or hunger, is all within the mind. There is nothing in our experience that originates from the physical world, no solid entity entering our mind and manipulating our experiences.

Thus, our experiences are completely detached from the domain of physical matter, and no matter how much physical abstraction we use to attempt to create an experience, they always remain fundamentally separate. There is no way to transfer those experiences from one domain to another. For instance, if we simulate a headache by mapping neural activity and creating a mental image, someone might argue that this precisely mimics the neuron contractions causing the headache. We can create a map that generates a mental image, but we cannot claim it equals the headache we experience. They exist in completely separate or orthogonal dimensions.

This argument resonates with me well and has provided some perspectives on what I have written earlier. I have incorporated some of his views into the questions of mind and matter. The experiences also align with what he has said about how the mind and body function. It's not that the body creates the mind; no, the body affects the mind in a way that constructs perceptions within the mind or configures perceptions in a way where the mind's receptors or areas are susceptible to impacts. These are impressions or signals. Then, the mind reacts by generating perceptions or experiences that correspond to, correlate with, and follow up on these impacts.

It's akin to the phenomenon of magnetic induction. If we pass an electric current through one coil, and place another coil nearby with wires wound separately, a current in one wire instantly affects the signal in the other wire. These are completely separate, but changes in

one wire immediately impact the signal in the other. Similarly, the body can impact the mind instantaneously, but they operate in distinct domains. This is how I see it: the mind and body are correlated, but this doesn't imply that our mind resides within the brain. What we experience isn't merely neurons firing and modulating synapses; that's a concept, not a reality. These processes occur within their respective domains—like the activities of our body cells, their mechanisms, decay, damage, or transformations—reflect and induce changes that affect the mind in a manner akin to mutual induction.

There is a strong correlation, but one is not merely a byproduct of the other.

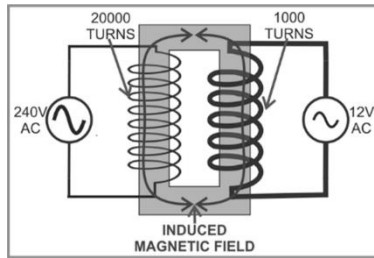


Figure 8: The effects of magnetic fields and signal induction demonstrate how one phenomenon can instantly influence another without the need for substance transportation.

Therefore, the mind is not merely a byproduct of the body or matter. In other words, the mind is not synonymous with the brain, as many scientists may suggest. The brain is predominantly composed of fat and water—it's somewhat naive or premature to think that the brain alone creates consciousness or generates perceptions, feelings, and all other mental phenomena that we constantly experience. Instead, it's our mind's tendency to react to impressions to the body in a distinctive manner, manifesting through feelings, perceptions, and consciousness internally—not controlled by a separate entity.

The relationship between the body and mind can be likened to two slabs supporting each other. One aspect that I find particularly intriguing is how our consciousness and perceptions, as human beings, often lead to a unique accumulation of personal tendencies. We tend to grasp onto our emotions and perceptions, constructing our identity and thereby creating a distinction or separation from others.

Our ego, emotions, and experiences sustain our identity because of this personalization. Bernardo illustrated this with a diagram of a vast expanse of water in his book: *‘Why Materialism Is Baloney’*. When a lake or ocean is undisturbed and calm without ripples, it represents a state of mind where nothing is taken personally—neither emotions nor mental phenomena. When the mind remains tranquil like still water in nature, without grasping, there are no whirlpools or disturbances visible in the currents. However, when individuals begin identifying with currents—such as emotions, feelings, and consciousness—ripples and locations of currents become apparent in the great expanse of water.

These ripples and currents arise because individuals start to identify with them, leading to continuous ripple effects that escalate unchecked. This process of identification shapes our individuality. Bernardo describes this as a dissociative process, akin to what we call life. Life, in essence, may indeed be a dissociative process.

I couldn't agree more. Life seems dissociated from the nature of reality, appearing to rebel against it like a current in constant conflict with still water. This rebellion creates unnecessary suffering through reactions. Any trace of reaction binds us and keeps us in an infinite feedback loop, trapped in a chain reaction—this is the essence of dependent origination in general terms. It operates as an automatic, efficient, self-sustaining engine of the universe. Our experience runs so efficiently that even a fusion reactor might not match its efficiency. Dependent origination recycles everything, processes it, and continually creates new experiences without waste.

In this regard, I found the analogy of water currents to be remarkably fitting. It aligns well with the vortex analogy given by the Buddha⁴³.

The vortex analogy that the Buddha used illustrates a deviation from the norm. He describes this vortex as arising from consciousness and *Nama Rupa*. When consciousness and *Nama Rupa* collide, they generate a vortex that traps us indefinitely in *Samsara* or the universe. Consciousness arises and finds support in a factor called attention, anchoring onto the platform of *Nama Rupa*. *Nama Rupa*, although not

⁴³ Digha Nikaya 15: Mahanidana Sutta

explicitly broken down here, literally means Name and Form. Form refers to the body, i.e., *Rupa*, which encompasses the four Great Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, and Air properties and perceptions). *Nama* includes feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. When *Nama* and *Rupa* come together with consciousness, all phenomena, the universe, and experiences are sustained for countless eons and billions of existences. We have been trapped in this cycle for trillions and trillions of eons.



Figure 9: A deep, calm, formless ocean and the formation of a water current leading to a whirlpool illustrate how the concepts of location, here and there, become established through identification.

This dependent origination operates as a perfectly efficient, 100% self-sustaining engine running purely on a feedback loop; it requires no external source and continually seeks a body to inhabit. Once human existence ends, it may find another human body as a platform, or it may inhabit an animal or any other creature. Consciousness lands into these experiences self-generated by our own attitudes and personalization. We may as well find in elevated experiences to ascend higher realms of existence, but all these experiences are akin to a game of chance, continuing indefinitely. In a sense, it's like changing rooms without ever being able to check out—a "*Hotel California*" situation within this universe.

I've provided several examples, as I find it fascinating to illustrate how repetitive and precarious it is to become ensnared in such a loop. While I haven't delved deeply into the Buddha's Dhamma here, I aimed to offer a keen perspective on where it intersects with reality. A deeper introspection reveals that all experiences ultimately boil

down to this. Rather than viewing this through the lens of religion or philosophy, it's a matter of pure direct experience of the mind—come and see for yourself, as the Buddha advised. Everything he described unfolds naturally in front of our awareness.

We cannot traverse this path without leading a purified, virtuous, and moral life—it's crucial. This framework might lead some to perceive it as overly religious due to refraining from conventional worldly activities. However, maintaining a pure mind, devoid of guilt and remorse, is essential. It allows us to delve deeper into introspection, unraveling the layers of the mind, and progressively letting go of deeper layers. Therefore, upholding a moral life is indispensable. Unfortunately, this is why the scientific community perceives the Buddha's path as a religion. When it comes to the mind, we can't merely investigate it as in a laboratory experiment—regardless of our conduct, we must train and purify our mind to observe its deeper layers. This approach differs significantly from scientific methods; we must cultivate a fertile ground free from unwholesome thoughts, regrets, and pain. Only then can we engage directly in the science of the mind and experience firsthand what the Buddha's path entails.

Chapter 7

Cases for Seeking the Unconditioned Happiness

Let's engage in a thought experiment from a technical viewpoint, as if my two conflicting personas—those of a scientist and a meditator—are conversing:

Argument: This human life is precious. I must make a large number of contributions to the scientific forums, discovering new technologies and methods to improve human life. I cannot selfishly practice meditation to end my own suffering while humanity as a whole is suffering. Therefore, it is better to be a good scientist, doctor, engineer, or inventor. Spiritual development seems like a waste of my valuable time.

Acknowledgement: Understood. We must do more than think of our own happiness. Okay, let's assume we have been very successful. We have discovered a phenomenal idea with the potential to change human lives, such as quantum teleportation or quantum communications using the properties of entangled particles.

Suppose, with the discovery of quantum phenomena, we managed to develop ingenious facilities like unbreakable secure communications. The invention benefits all humanity, but does that mean humanity is happier overall? Have they shed all suffering arising from innate dissatisfaction and obsession with material objects, mere thirsts within humanity?

Reality Check: To think that by discovering groundbreaking ideas and inventing new technologies, we can eliminate human suffering is like chasing a mirage. As soon as a new idea becomes reality, its counterpart—distaste and aversion towards existing conditions and new desires for better, faster, more comfortable alternatives—become inevitable. Understanding this, even at a surface level, reveals the deep paradox of our experiences.

Solution: The moment one realizes that our anticipations and imaginations are insatiable mirages, one can sit back and observe. Here arise all these flows of ideas, concepts, and reactions, but where

do they end? Ah, this thought is now heading in the right direction. We are close to realizing that the solution to the perennial pursuit of ending suffering lies not outside but within the mind. One begins to grasp that there may be a process underlying all these flows.

Feels like déjà vu? Yes, these issues were pondered over 2600 years ago. This lies at the heart of the process called dependent arising of all phenomena.

In today's world, it is increasingly difficult to abstain from engaging in and indulging in sensory pleasures due to countless inventions and sophisticated technologies that enhance our sensory experiences. Human activities are so molded by these amenities that people feel unsettled if they lose access to them even briefly. Attachment to sensory pleasures is not a recent development in human history; even in ancient times, including Vedic times and during the Buddha's lifetime, there were individuals whose life philosophy was centered on enjoying such pleasures, assuming that we have only one life on Earth, and nothing remains after death.

In fact, many people, including some very famous scientists like Stephen Hawking⁴⁴, argued that everything we experience will cease to exist after death, making a case for why we should maximize our life experiences. Such beliefs can lead to attitudes of craving more and more sensory experiences, a lack of compassion for others' welfare, and a fear of death taking away everything we possess. Convincing people that the birth of beings in various realms is the result of their past actions—and that our experience of death does not mean annihilation but rather continuation, possibly involving even more suffering and painful experiences in future existences—was one of the most challenging aspects of the Buddha's efforts to teach the Dhamma. He recognized that the reality of our existence and suffering are not insurmountable problems or phenomena beyond our understanding; there is a way out of this labyrinth of experiences.

With the advent of the Buddha, the world received the Middle Path, which promotes knowledge, vision, and awakening while avoiding the extremes of indulging in sensory pleasures and self-torment. While this approach makes sense for those who believe that

⁴⁴ Heaven 'is a fairy story': This is what Stephen Hawking says, USA Today 14/03/2018

moderation leads to a balanced life without guilt or remorse, those who practice mental development understand that the Middle Path holds much deeper significance. The Noble Eightfold Path is the pathway to ultimate liberation from the world of suffering—a secret tunnel to escape the trap of unfortunate existences. This path offers a recipe for freedom amidst all the calamities and disasters that result from indulging in sensory pleasures, especially for those unaware of the workings of the world of dependently arisen phenomena at the deepest levels.

The reasons why indulging in sensory pleasures is harmful and even dangerous may not be immediately obvious. After all, like most people, I used to wonder what harm I would be doing if I completely immersed myself in pleasures like drinks, luxurious cars, holidays, or extravagant parties.

To delve deeper into why indulging in sensory pleasure is perilous, we need to grasp the principles of *Karma* and Dependent Origination. Our experiences reveal that our minds operate in specific ways that are beyond our control. For instance, as soon as our eyes perceive a beautiful form or an attractive body, our consciousness of sight arises automatically, triggering desires for pleasure that obsess our minds. The Buddha clearly articulated this in the *Majjhima Nikaya 22: Alagaddūpama Sutta*, emphasizing that expecting to indulge in sensory pleasures without succumbing to lust or obsession is wishful thinking.

“Bhikkhus, that one can engage in sensual pleasures without sensual desires, without perceptions of sensual desire, without thoughts of sensual desire—that is impossible.”

[Majjhima Nikaya 22: Alagaddūpama Sutta]

The reality of our universe is that beautiful forms, sounds, and sense objects are indeed very scarce compared to things that are unsightly, harsh, and repulsive. The universe is structured in such a way that it delicately balances to provide all beings with experiences they deserve, not necessarily what they desire. This is known as the universal law of *Karma*, or the moral efficacy of deeds. Whether committing the gravest crimes such as killing family members or

engaging in acts of highest generosity, the Buddha teaches that it is an inevitable fact that the consequences of these actions will manifest someday, whether in this life, in the future, or across many lifetimes (*Majjhima Nikaya 136 Mahākammavibhanga Sutta*). Those who expect to reap short-term benefits through unethical means are deluded, as they cannot deceive the universal law of *Karma*—it is merely wishful thinking.

The universe operates as a perfect simulation of the mathematical relationships of *Karma*, where the actions (left-hand side) and their results (right-hand side) of the equation always balance out. However, *Karma*'s workings are so intricate that one cannot predict exactly when past negative deeds will lead to intensely painful outcomes—whether it's death in a violent accident or a prolonged battle with diseases like cancer. The Buddha's teachings aim to guide us away from this cycle of *Karma* entirely, so we can break free from the perpetual equations of experiencing the pains and pleasures of past *Karma*. The consequences of bad *Karma* are indeed more painful when one pursues a path of sensual pleasures unknowingly, as starkly illustrated by the Buddha in the *Magandhiya Sutta*, using the analogy of a leper attempting to heal his sores and blisters with fire.

“Master Gotama, that fire is now painful to touch, hot, and scorching, and previously too that fire was painful to touch, hot, and scorching. For when that man was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, his faculties were impaired; thus, though the fire was actually painful to touch, he acquired a mistaken perception of it as pleasant.”

“So too, Magandhiya, in the past sensual pleasures were painful to touch, hot, and scorching; in the future sensual pleasures will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and now at present sensual pleasures are painful to touch, hot, and scorching. But these beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, have faculties that are impaired; thus, though sensual pleasures are actually painful to touch, they acquire a mistaken perception of them as pleasant.”

[Majjhima Nikaya 75: Magandhiya Sutta]

Here, the implication is not that the physical act of sensual pleasures itself is dangerous, but rather, it is the inevitable yet non-obvious arising of unwholesome states such as lust, greed, and delusion that pose the true danger. These states inevitably lead to further unwholesome deeds through body, speech, and mind, resulting in bad *Karma*. The game of *Karma* operates in such a way that if one remains fixated on sensual pleasures and loses their human existence, they will likely descend to a lower realm. The painful fire referenced here is the fire of craving, which is the root cause of all unwholesome states and the suffering experienced today. The Buddha uses this as a deterrent to motivate us towards seeking a form of happiness that is not only safe but entirely wholesome, conducive to the practice for the complete cessation of suffering.

He showed us that this happiness, which transcends the pains and pleasures of the five bodily senses, can be experienced by mind with gradually letting go of all desires and perceptions—the *Jhanas*. Attaining the joy and happiness of *Jhanas* marks a significant step in the Noble Eightfold Path that the Buddha encouraged everyone to experience. He refuted prevalent beliefs that happiness can only be attained through painful practices of body and mind. It is crucial to emphasize that the joy and happiness experienced in the *Jhanas* are termed 'spiritual' or 'unworldly' happiness, devoid of unwholesome mental states such as lust, desire, and covetousness that accompany worldly or 'carnal' sensual pleasures. In essence, the happiness and joy found in the *Jhanas* are vastly superior and purer compared to the fleeting happiness gained from indulging in sensual pleasures. While challenging to articulate in words, those who have experienced any of the *Jhanas* can truly appreciate this reality. This is precisely the point the Buddha aimed to convey in the *Magandhiya Sutta*, where certain religious groups accused him of discouraging people from indulging in sensual pleasures and promoting celibacy and moderation. He substantiated his teachings by embodying this example himself first.

“Magandhiya, formerly when I lived the home life, I enjoyed myself, provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure: with forms cognizable by the eye...with sounds cognizable by the ear... with odours cognizable by the nose...with flavours cognizable by the tongue...with tangibles cognizable by the

body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. I had three palaces, one for the rainy season, one for the winter, and one for the summer. I lived in the rains' palace for the four months of the rainy season, enjoying myself with musicians, none of whom were men, and I did not go down to the lower palace.

“On a later occasion, having understood as they actually are the origin, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of sensual pleasures, I abandoned craving for sensual pleasures, I removed fever for sensual pleasures, and I abide without thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace. I see other beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures being devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, burning with fever for sensual pleasures, indulging in sensual pleasures, and I do not envy them, nor do I delight therein. Why is that? Because there is, Māgandiya, a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior, nor do I delight therein.”

[Majjhima Nikaya 75: Magandhiya Sutta]

The statements above about the origination, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape concerning sensual pleasures actually refer to the experience of observing mental phenomena while practicing mindfulness and letting go of unwholesome states. Implicitly, the Buddha is indicating that one begins to unravel how dependently arisen phenomena work and cease by letting go of these states. This process involves experiencing the four *Jhanas*. The *Jhanas* are highly pleasurable states distinct from any worldly experiences and are the rewards for patiently purifying the mind of unwholesome states. One can enter and abide in the *Jhanas* only after letting go of sensual desires and the Five Hindrances. The Buddha showed us the way to experience all four *Jhanas*—First, Second, Third, and Fourth—where one progressively weakens the Five Hindrances and cultivates the Seven Awakening Factors. More on this is covered in Part III of the book.

The loss of these gross sensory feelings does not lead to annihilation or fear; instead, happiness arises from the mind being free of these defiled states. Here is what the Buddha had to say about this process:

“But I teach a doctrine for getting rid of the gross acquired self, whereby defiling mental states disappear and states tending to purification grow strong, and one gains and remains in the purity and perfection of wisdom here and now, having realised and attained it by one’s own super-knowledge. Now, Poṭṭhāpada, you might think: “Perhaps these defiling mental states might disappear..., and one might still be unhappy.” That is not how it should be regarded. If defiling states disappear..., nothing but happiness and delight develops, tranquillity, mindfulness and clear awareness—and that is a happy state.”

[Digha Nikaya 9: Pothapada Sutta]

Now we know the danger of sensual pleasure and why it is so fearful; what kind of happiness should be cultivated then? Here is what the Buddha is saying about *Jhanas*:

“Bhikkhus, there are these five cords of sensual pleasure. What five? Forms cognizable by the eye...sounds cognizable by the ear...odours cognizable by the nose...flavours cognizable by the tongue...tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. These are the five cords of sensual pleasure. Now the pleasure and joy that arise dependent on these five cords of sensual pleasure are called sensual pleasure—a filthy pleasure, a coarse pleasure, an ignoble pleasure. I say of this pleasure that it should not be pursued, that it should not be developed, that it should not be cultivated, and that it should be feared.

“Here, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna... the second jhāna...the third jhāna... the fourth jhāna. This is called the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment. I say of this pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, and that it should not be feared.

[Majjhima Nikaya 139: Aranavibhanga Sutta]

This book will go into a lot of details of *Jhanas* in subsequent chapters. So, I will not explain more details here as I still have many other cases to prove that there are many other valid reasons for seeking such happinesses.

A Taste of the Unconditioned and Grand Futility of the Samsara

The Buddha recapped the state of the world (*Samsara*) to those who have developed his path and seen its futility in a very beautiful simile of some children playing with sandcastles.

“Suppose, Rādhā, some little boys or girls are playing with sand castles. So long as they are not devoid of lust, desire, affection, thirst, passion, and craving for those sand castles, they cherish them, play with them, treasure them, and treat them possessively. But when those little boys or girls lose their lust, desire, affection, thirst, passion, and craving for those sand castles, then they scatter them with their hands and feet, demolish them, shatter them, and put them out of play.

[Samyutta Nikaya 23.2: A Being]

Those who understand the state of the *Samsara* are clearly very intelligent boys and girls as they quickly grasp the world and become disenchanted. But the world is not as simple as a sand castle—I agree. It requires a lot of thought and insight. The entirety of the world can be encapsulated in the experience of the six senses—nothing more. The senses are like Lego pieces or sand particles, the raw materials that form shapes like castles, animals, or anything else of interest. Now, interest is something akin to a glue that binds these particles together to create shapes that captivate us. The key lies in contemplation and finding moments of complete stillness amidst all activities. The world operates like a movie composed of frames. When these frames are revealed, the reality of the movie is also exposed. This is what meditation and *Jhanas* do to our mind. They reveal the true nature of the mind and demonstrate how our reality is merely a composite phenomenon that is inherently empty, yet we are constantly deceived by the mind's movements.

Case for continuation of the world

It is not uncommon to hear voices like these:

- The world has offered me the best tasting dinners, in the most luxurious hotels on paradisiacal beaches of pristine islands; surely it is absurd not to seek such opportunities. Such rarities must be celebrated and pursued.

- The world has given the best voices and music like Beethoven, Beatles, and Jagjit Singh. Such masterpieces are the pinnacle of human arts and ingenuity—why let them go for the sake of some practice leading to cessation of our emotions and care for them?
- I am one of the most renowned scientists in the world, with a Nobel Prize in Physics. My discoveries have helped humanity by providing nuclear energy, which can power billions of homes without resorting to fossil fuels. Surely people like me will make Earth a heaven one day.

All these experiences touch the extremes of our sensory bases. Their value is proportionate to the desire one places on them or how much access one actually has to them. So, there are valid reasons to continue engaging with the world and to strive to make it a better place. But as I mentioned earlier, regardless of how many sublime activities we engage in, the universe remains a ruthless place. We can never escape bad *Karma*, even if we perform infinitely meritorious deeds, as we inevitably get pulled by sensual pleasures at times when craving overwhelms us and lack of mindfulness fails to lead us away from it. The Buddha teaches that even the highest bliss arising from the world is not even the sixteenth part of the bliss from a mind devoid of craving. I know it may not make sense to us now, but direct experience of all the *Jhanas* can make this claim much easier to accept.

It may surprise us to learn that there is an experience where any urge to see tantalizing scenery or the desire to dress impressively fades away. Our previous need for exquisite dinners becomes unnecessary, as there is no such need anymore. The urge to fly at a thousand miles per hour via a private jet over the Caribbean or other exotic places is unnecessary, as there is no desire to escape anywhere. There is no need for a roof to avoid the cold or heat of worldly weather, as there is no discomfort pushing us to seek a luxury apartment. In short, when any sensory excitement and the desire for it vanish; there is no craving for sensual pleasure.

In such a state, we discover an experience called cessation of desire, cessation of feeling, cessation of craving, cessation of mind and body, and cessation of consciousness—but it still constitutes an

experience. It is an experience devoid of any sensation, yet replete with peace, calm, and contentment; a perpetual freedom from fear, death, pain, debacles, and disasters; no more nightmares or frightening experiences that snatch our lives away again and again.

In such a realm, there is simply no need for geniuses who may discover quantum computers with unlimited problem-solving capabilities or perfect fusion reactors providing free, unlimited, clean energy forever. These innovations make sense if we need them; if we don't, they simply do not matter. Those who experience cessation of craving in this very life have already tasted what lies beyond. So, do not take life so seriously.

Science Without Wisdom May be Futile in the Long Runs

Science is a human endeavor with an objective to harness the power of our imagination, deeply observe natural phenomena, to discover new knowledge and applications based on these combinations. The word 'objective' here is key. So far, the objective has always been how to achieve gains in terms of what can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and ideas. All the advancements of science can be attributed to these six senses. A scientist may discover a superconductor that can significantly reduce energy waste due to heat. However, this will not liberate one from the inevitability of illness and death. Science does not provide us with the means to free ourselves from experiencing these states, nor does it offer a certain way out of all human miseries.

Now, let's contrast this with the story of someone who has trained their mind to see things as they truly are in terms of their experiences. Such a person recognizes that their reactions to thoughts, feelings, and ideas fuel further actions that perpetuate endless chains of thoughts, emotions, plans, and ambitions. By observing the mind and letting go of all reactions as they arise, one immediately puts an end to the potential infinite proliferation of these mental activities. In that stillness, they accomplish what needs to be done in each moment. While this may seem like giving up opportunities for worldly gains, such a person achieves something crucial and fundamental: they prevent any future consequences of actions that would have led to gains or losses through the six senses.

If we examine closely, neither science nor the pursuit of worldly gains can free us from the cycle of repeated death, sorrow, and pain that inevitably accompany our existence—the game of life and death itself. However, for someone who has seen the flow of the mind clearly as it arises, the reward may not be visible or measurable in conventional terms, but they have succeeded in transcending the game of life and death. We will delve deeper into this game later on.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, human life is sustained by the delicate balance resulting from the interplay of two interdependent processes: our vital sense faculties, designations (*Nama Rupa*), and sense consciousnesses. These two exist in a continuum, mirroring each other endlessly, fueled by a desire or intention to act. Doing nothing is considered the annihilation of our experiences. This fundamental truth is the deepest conundrum of our existence, referred to as the vortex in Pali texts. It would indeed be a strange idea that our everyday experiences arise from an endless current generated by the convergence of *Nama Rupa* and consciousness.

In the West, a widespread belief persists that with the end of the body and the exhaustion of vitality, what we call the self or individuality also perishes at the moment of death. This belief fosters the notion that one can escape the consequences of deeds with the end of life, and be free from all liabilities, regardless of one's conduct in life. However, there is *Karma*, and no one can escape the consequences of their deeds. Being subject to *Karma* repeatedly is painful and exhausting, whereas liberation from it constitutes ultimate bliss.

What role does mindfulness play in this understanding? Why did only the Buddha emphasize it? What distinguishes it from other spiritual traditions like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and their meditation practices?

These are natural and valid questions anyone can ask. It is easy to dismiss mindfulness and the path of virtue, collectedness, and wisdom taught by the Buddha as futile and incorrect methods. I encourage readers to let go of any preconceived notions, religious biases, and assumptions about various ideas, and instead focus on facts and open-minded attitudes. Let direct experiential understanding of the mind be the yardstick for evaluating which practice is best, to see everything I have said directly for oneself.

Chapter 8

Mindfulness and Vedic Philosophies

“The uninstructed worldling becomes frightened over an unfrightening matter. For this is frightening to the uninstructed worldling: ‘It might not be, and it might not be for me; it will not be, [and] it will not be for me.’ But the instructed noble disciple does not become frightened over an unfrightening matter. For this is not frightening to the noble disciple: ‘It might not be, and it might not be for me; it will not be, [and] it will not be for me.’

[Samyutta Nikaya 22.55: Inspired Utterance]

Now that I have made a compelling case for seeking happiness that is not tied to material things, I will explore other views before delving deep into the realms of the mind and direct experiences. Here, I will cover philosophies widely found in Eastern and specifically Indian landscapes. These philosophies and beliefs are intricately linked with the concept of reality, a term that has remained mysterious and enigmatic, with no definitive conclusions about what Ultimate Reality truly is.

Vedic philosophies are known to humanity as the earliest scriptures attempting to unravel the nature of reality. They are considered utterances of the supreme god, also commonly known as *Brahman*. The *Vedas* largely contain ritualistic hymns related to sacrificial ceremonies and chants for various traditions. Historical evidence suggests that the earliest *Vedas* date back to around 1000-3000 BC. Among the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* are considered the most profound texts concerning the nature of reality, human experiences, and practices for the realization of union with *Brahman*. This Chapter will explore the key tenets of these texts to understand the basis of these thoughts, the practices involved, and how they differ from the path of mindfulness.

Even before the time of the Buddha, Vedic philosophers such as Āṅhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Bhāradvāja, and Aggirasa pondered over the notion of reality. Their names were mentioned by the Buddha in the Pali *Nikāyas*, indicating that these philosophical inquiries existed

perhaps hundreds of years before him, with the rise of human civilizations. Throughout history, people have always been intrigued by the idea of understanding and connecting with Ultimate Reality. The time of the Buddha was no exception, as various philosophies, speculations, and beliefs coexisted.

I wrote this Chapter to share my understanding with a Dhamma friend named Mr. Murali, whose full name I am not aware of. He raised a question regarding the mention of the *Savitti* or *Gayatri Mantra* in Buddhist *Suttas*, particularly in *Majjhima Nikaya 92 Sela Sutta*. In India and Nepal, this *mantra* is well-known as the *Gayatri Mantra*. *Mantras* are hymns that have been chanted for hundreds of years, and this one is derived from the *Rigveda*, one of the earliest Vedic texts. During the time of the Buddha, there were three *Vedas*, and a fourth *Veda* called the *Atharvaveda* was added later.

The Buddha refers to the *Gayatri Mantra* as one of the most revered *mantras* among those who follow Vedic beliefs. He mentions this in the *Sela Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya 92: Sela Sutta*), where he engages in a conversation with a *brahmin*. During this discourse, he provides reference to these *mantras* and their significance in their spiritual practice.

When the Buddha was invited for a meal, as a gesture of gratitude, he mentioned the *Gayatri Mantra* to express his well wishes. The *Gayatri Mantra* consists of three verses and 24 syllables. It is considered to be the beginning of a profound concept, acknowledging the presence of an Ultimate Reality or a universal being that is the supreme creator of the entire universe. One of the significant syllables in this *mantra* is the word "Om," which holds great significance in various Vedic spiritual traditions.

*Om bhūr bhuvah suvah
Tat savitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dhīmahī
Dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt*

[Rigveda 3.62.10]

The *Gayatri Mantra* is a cryptic verse that suggests the existence of a Supreme Being who governs every cell, atom, molecule, and particle in the universe. It is a hymn of praise for the Supreme Creator, often referred to as the Supreme Glory or a source of divine light. By reciting this *mantra*, individuals seek enlightenment and the experience of joy and the glory associated with the Supreme Being.

Indeed, the *Gayatri Mantra* has been interpreted and translated by various philosophers and scholars, each offering their own understanding. Swami Vivekananda's interpretation focuses on meditating on the glory of the Supreme Being who created the universe, seeking enlightenment of the mind. Munir Williams emphasizes meditating on the excellent glory of the divine vivifying sun, seeking enlightenment of understanding. In the Vedic philosophical landscape, light is often seen as a symbol of auspiciousness and supreme knowledge. These interpretations reflect the significance of the *Gayatri Mantra* in Vedic philosophical traditions.

In Buddha's teachings, the emphasis is not on seeking enlightenment through external divine beings or external sources. Instead, the Buddha teaches that the path to enlightenment lies within oneself, through the cultivation of wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness. The practice of meditation in the Dhamma is a means to develop insight and understanding of the true nature of reality, including the nature of the mind itself. It is through direct experience and personal realization that one can attain liberation from suffering. So, while the concept of light and enlightenment may be present in various philosophical traditions, the approach and focus differ in the Buddha's path, emphasizing inner transformation and personal realization.

Followers of this text envision a concept that there is a supreme being, a universal creator that defines all experiences, beings, and everything around us, and encompasses all imagination and notions. Everything is believed to be under the control of that supreme being. This belief is an established view among the followers of what we call Vedic philosophers, predating even the time of the Buddha. In the Indian subcontinent, they were seeking awakening and enlightenment.

However, what they found was just the development of diverse philosophies without a consistent message or a core practice that unifies them.

Thus, they couldn't settle on one particular backbone or a unified practice. They were divided into numerous groups. In the three *Vedas*, there are more than 100 *Upanishads*, which are extracted from the three *Vedas*. The *Vedas* focus more on rituals and practices related to solitude and austerity, while the *Upanishads* are more philosophy-oriented and closer to meditation. They aim for a higher level of realization and understanding of the ultimate reality.

Out of *Upanishads* that are more than 100, around 20 are considered the root (*Mula*) *Upanishads*, which are derived from the *Vedas* like *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Samaveda*. These *Vedas* and *Upanishads* hold a significant place in Vedic literature, being regarded as the ultimate authority. Although I haven't extensively studied them or delved into detailed research, my general understanding is that they represent the culmination of Vedic and Brahminic philosophies. They serve as a profound source of wisdom and knowledge.

It is also referred to as *Vedanta*, and what I've observed as a distinct difference between their philosophies and what the Buddha taught is that the teachings of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* lean towards the concept of a Supreme Being, as exemplified by the *Gayatri Mantra* with the syllable "Om." This *mantra* introduces the idea of an all-pervading creator, and these views were presented in the early *Upanishads*. However, it's important to note that the universal creator mentioned in these texts is referred to as *Brahman*, which is distinct from the Hindu god *Brahma*.

What the early *Upanishads* stated was that *Brahman* is the Ultimate Reality. However, in the later *Upanishads*, there was a slight fuzziness, and they began to contemplate how one could attain liberation if the Ultimate Reality is beyond direct contact. They started to develop the philosophy of Soul or *Atman*, which refers to the smallest, most essential entity within oneself. One could consider it similar to the concept of an atom. *Atman* represents the unbreakable essence within oneself. According to these philosophies, all experiences are composed of this core, which remains unaffected regardless of the

experiences one goes through, such as birth, death, pleasure, pain, happiness, or sorrow.

All those fleeting, impermanent experiences are considered unreal and temporary, while the core of oneself, the *Atman*, remains unaffected by any attained experiences. The concept of *Atman* developed to address this understanding. However, a problem arose for the later *Upanishads* in reconciling these conflicting views on the Ultimate Reality. They had to find a way to unify these perspectives and settle on a single truth. They concluded that there cannot be more than one truth and proposed the idea that the highest realization of inner truth occurs when the *Atman* merges with *Brahman*. This is where the Ultimate Reality lies.

And those are the core ideas in the development of the philosophies of what we call *Yoga*. These various yogic philosophies aim to bridge the gap between the universal *Brahman* and the individual self. They are highly regarded in the philosophical landscape of India and held in high esteem. From what I understand, the Buddha was familiar with these philosophies and had knowledge of the three *Vedas*. There are numerous instances where the Buddha addressed Brahmins, acknowledging their expertise in the *Vedas*, grammar, and literature. However, he also pointed out that despite their accumulation of knowledge, their behavior and attitude did not reflect a true understanding of the body, mind, and the practice of inner development⁴⁵.

That's why Buddha dismisses their teachings in a very fundamental way. He points out that despite their extensive knowledge and learning from countless books, their behavior and mindfulness indicate a lack of understanding of how their real-world experiences align with the development of the mind. The Buddha emphasizes that true reality is when theory is put into practice, when one's experiences in body, speech, and mind intersect with mindfulness. This practical application is where the essence of teachings, such as the *Majjhima Nikaya 95: Canki Sutta*, comes into play. In these *Suttas*, Buddha imparts basic lessons on maintaining

⁴⁵ *Majjhima Nikaya 99: Subha Sutta*

mindfulness, which some Brahmins fail to grasp. They struggle to pass the basic test of understanding what true awakening entails.

So, there is a fundamental difference in the definition of Awakening between Vedic philosophies and Buddha's teachings. The latter, as a teaching, stands apart and differs significantly from Vedic philosophies. Although I have not extensively studied numerous texts on Vedic philosophies, including the *Upanishads*, I couldn't find a single definition of mindfulness within them. Despite the large number of pages in these texts, there seems to be a lack of understanding or mention of mindfulness. It is quite surprising considering the prominence and influence of these texts.

Their common way of expressing mindfulness is by saying that being mindful means being aware of whatever we are experiencing or aware of. They understand mindfulness as being aware of our experiences in general. However, the definition of mindfulness in Buddha's teachings goes much deeper. In the *Suttas*, mindfulness is referred to as "*Sati*" which has a more refined and precise meaning. In everyday language, *Sati* can be translated as "clear awareness" or "attention." It implies being fully present and consciously aware of the present moment, understanding what one is doing at a more subtle level.

The understanding in Vedic philosophies for mindfulness is not clear, it may be simply a general awareness or a basic level of attentiveness. However, when we delve into the *Suttas*, the definition of mindfulness becomes much deeper. Mindfulness, at its core, encompasses various aspects, and there are several significant *Suttas* that highlight its importance, such as the *Satipatthana Sutta*, which outlines the four foundations of mindfulness.

These four foundations serve as the basis for attaining full Awakening⁴⁶. As mindfulness develops, the practitioner progressively hones their observational skills, referred to as "*Yonisomanasikara* " or mindful attention of the root. This practice is continuously refined through the elements of relinquishment and relaxation.

⁴⁶ Majjhima Nikaya 10: Satipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22: Mahasatipatthana Sutta

Relinquishment involves letting go of accumulated attachments or distractions that arise within the field of phenomena. Relaxation, on the other hand, refers to releasing any impact or imprint that these phenomena may have on the body and mind. By cultivating these two elements, the observation of the mind sharpens, and mindfulness becomes razor-sharp, eventually transforming into what the Buddha referred to as "*Yonisomanasikara*" or attention directed towards the root of all things.

The term "*Yonisomanasikara*" is a heightened form of the ordinary attention "*Manasikara*," which pertains to normal observation of the mind. When one engages in observation, they observe what is visible, heard, or sensed through the six senses. However, this normal observation does not delve into the root cause analysis. In contrast, "*Yonisomanasikara*" is a solution to the very problem that the Buddha sought to address—the problem of suffering, birth, aging, and death.

In Western countries, the concept of root cause analysis is commonly employed to solve problems by identifying the underlying causes. Similarly, the practice of "*Yonisomanasikara*" goes beyond surface-level observation and delves into the root causes of suffering. It seeks to understand why individuals' attention becomes entangled in the cycle of phenomena and inevitable suffering, and whether there exists a way to transcend it directly without resorting to abstract metaphysics⁴⁷.

The Buddha was the first researcher in this 'lab,' so to speak. He can be considered the first scientist who embarked on inner exploration, conducting his own research and testing within his own mind. This process allowed him to unravel the intricate workings of the mind. '*Yonisomanasikara*' is the sharpening of observational skills to such a fine degree that it exposes the entire spectrum of reality, including the atoms and molecules that make up all our experiences.

During the night of his Awakening, the Buddha delved into the root causes of all the problems and suffering experienced in everyday life. He started to trace them back, step by step. Gradually, he went beyond the experience of pleasure and pain, realizing that there was

⁴⁷ Jurewicz J. Playing with Fire: The pratytyasamutpada from the Perspective of Vedic Thought, <https://archive.org/>

something preceding it. He discovered that contact was the cause of those sensory experiences. If there is no contact with external phenomena, those feelings on sense bases simply won't arise. This can be easily observed in everyday examples. He understood that feelings arise as soon as there is a sense of contact, and when contact is removed, the feeling ceases immediately. This was his approach to understanding the origin of experiences. He concluded that feelings are dependent on contact.

Next, he examined the concept of contact and realized that contact is the meeting of two or more particles of phenomena. He questioned what these particles were. He recognized that as human beings, we all possess six senses: the body, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and mind. These are the internal bases. Then, he explored the external bases and observed that when the eyes encounter colors and forms, the nose encounters smells, and the tongue encounters flavors, respective contacts occur. It became clear to him that contact arises from the coming together of these internal and external sense bases. However, this raised a new problem.

We understand the internal and the external, and there is a coming together that creates contact. That is easy to understand. Now, what is the difference between human beings and inanimate matter? For example, when we strike two bricks together, they also make contact. But what is the fundamental difference between the contact of inanimate matter and the contact experienced by sentient beings? What distinguishes beings with emotions, feelings, and consciousness from inanimate objects? The only factor that sets them apart is consciousness. So, what is this consciousness? This inquiry led to the exploration of the concept of consciousness.

What causes this consciousness to arise? Then, he looked at eye consciousness, how the eye and form come into contact, and the arising of eye consciousness. He demonstrated that consciousness arises when the internal and external bases come together. The occurrence of consciousness is not a mere coincidence; it is not random. It consistently arises whenever there is contact between the eye and form. This is not a statistical or random sampling phenomenon; it is a well-established and easily repeatable pattern.

Consciousness is a regular occurrence resulting from the meeting of the internal and external sense spheres, their conjunction, and the arising of consciousness.

Therefore, consciousness arises only under certain conditions. This is clearly explained in the *Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 28*. In this *Sutta*, known as the *Mahahatipadopama Sutta*, a detailed analysis of the five aggregates is provided. It is stated that consciousness does not arise independently. Rather, it arises when there is a functioning eye and a visible form, and there is a corresponding conscious engagement. In other words, consciousness arises only when there is an internal and external connection. As the Venerable Sariputta said, 'Friend, it is with the eye and visible forms that consciousness arises

'If friend internally the eye is intact but no external forms come into range and there is no corresponding conscious engagement then there is no manifestation of corresponding section of consciousness.'

So, that means we understand that having a good working eye is not enough; we also need to have a basis of form.

So, this is clear: what it's saying is that it's not enough to just have the eyes and form for consciousness to arise; it won't. But then he says, when internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range and there is corresponding conscious engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. Okay, so what we are saying here is that consciousness does not come automatically; it has to be triggered by some element, some engagement.

What is that engagement? That engagement is called *Nama Rupa*. *Nama Rupa* is divided into two parts. *Nama* refers to the naming aspect of external forms, and *Rupa* refers to the physical form composed of the four great elements. Now, let's break down *Nama* into its constituent parts. *Nama* consists of feeling, perception, contact, intention, and attention. These aspects are crucial for the arising of consciousness. We can say that consciousness would only arise if there is a corresponding conscious engagement. This engagement is the *Nama* aspect of *Nama Rupa*. On the other hand, *Rupa* is something that is perceived by the senses, such as the eyes or ears. The internal

aspect is *Nama*, which includes feeling, perception, contact, intention, and attention. Feeling, at this stage, is a subtle notion of the experience. Perception is an attempt to understand the experience. Contact, as mentioned before, is the coming together of the internal and external. The remaining two aspects, intention and attention, are closely related to the activities associated with *karma*, what we call *Sankhara*.

Attention is bound with the element of consciousness. Only if we pay attention does consciousness arise. Now, let's take a step back. What the Buddha discovered was that we can have an eye, and the eye is indirectly in the vicinity of a form. So, the meeting of these two has the potential for union. However, if there is no attention, if we do not pay attention to the coming together of these phenomena, there will be no consciousness. Let's clarify with an example:

So, a driver is driving a lorry on a motorway, and he is extremely tired. All of a sudden, his attention slips for a brief moment, maybe just a few seconds. During that moment, his eyes are open, he is in a seated position, but his consciousness is not fully present. He doesn't see what is on the road, and as a result, he crashes the lorry and falls onto the motorway. In this situation, the eye and the form were present, but consciousness slipped because he was not paying attention. He couldn't perceive or make sense of the phenomena around him because he wasn't attending to them.

That clarifies how in everyday life we can experience moments where consciousness is derailed. We may see something with our eyes, but we are unable to make sense of it. This absence of consciousness occurs because the corresponding conscious engagement, or attention, is not present. This interpretation highlights how *Nama Rupa* influences consciousness. It allows us to understand the causes and conditions that lead to a particular present moment and the preceding phenomena that contributed to it.

That's how the Buddha approached phenomena by conducting a root cause analysis. He recognized that for consciousness to arise, certain elements needed to be present. There had to be contact, feeling, perception, attention, and intention. Intention, in turn, would influence subsequent actions and provide choices for engaging

in activities through body, speech, and mind. These formations or conditioned phenomena would arise accordingly.

Thus, the Buddha discovered that *Nama Rupa*, the combination of feeling, perception, contact, intention, and attention, was the factor that caused consciousness to arise. He then investigated what caused *Nama Rupa* to arise and found that it depended on awareness. Without awareness, these mental and physical phenomena would not arise. It is through awareness or consciousness that one is able to feel, perceive, and make contact with the external world. Awareness acts as the foundation for the arising of *Nama Rupa* and subsequent consciousness.

What the Buddha realized is that consciousness and the mental and physical phenomena of *Nama Rupa* are interconnected in a continuous cycle⁴⁸. They mutually influence each other, like two mirrors reflecting one another. This ongoing cycle perpetuates the world of experiences in which we find ourselves. The experiences of consciousness and the formations that arise from them become the cause for subsequent actions and intentions. This continuous cycle of intention, attention, formations, and consciousness fuels the process of cause and effect, shaping our experiences and actions within the world.

In a discourse by the Buddha in the *Digha Nikaya*, a *Bhikkhu* asks about the cessation of *Nama* and *Rupa* and where the cycle of existence comes to an end⁴⁹. The Buddha explains that when there is a consciousness that does not engage with or depend on *Nama* and *Rupa*, when it is free from their influence and does not find any support in them, this is the state where *Nama* and *Rupa* are completely cut off and cease to leave any traces. This state of consciousness is beyond the realm of *Nama* and *Rupa*, transcending their influence and limitations.

The Buddha called this the unestablished or non-manifestative consciousness. Actually, this is the core of the links of dependent origination. We know that although some may say dependent

⁴⁸ Digha Nikaya 14: Mahapadana Sutta

⁴⁹ Digha Nikaya 11: Kevaddha Sutta

origination is linear and follows a series of chains, where one link follows another like dominoes stacked together, it's not that simple. I mean, the most complicated part of the links of dependent origination is the relationship between consciousness and all the experiences. All these experiences, such as contact, feeling, perception, craving, clinging, and so on, follow one another. Our experiences are entangled by the duality of consciousness and *Nama Rupa*.

I have seen some books, like by Bhikkhu Nananda (Ñanananda, *The Law of Dependent Arising - The Secret of Bondage and Release*, 2016), where he gives an example of a dog looking at another dog walking on a plank over a stream. The dog stays still and starts barking, thinking that there is a dog underneath the wooden plank. But that dog doesn't realize that it's actually looking at its own reflection. It sees a dog underneath, but it's just a reflection. This situation is similar to us, as we often think that the world in front of us is completely independent and fully formed, a fully separate and real reality. But that's not the case. It's because of our engagement with phenomena that they turn into the image of that reality.

So, it's like that dog looking through the plank of wood and seeing its image, and it starts thinking that there is another dog in front of it. This is how our world, with its six senses and our perception of reality, is constructed through the engagement of consciousness and *Nama Rupa* (Nananda, 2012).

Now, how do we demystify and understand our true reality? It's important to note that the exploration of the nature of reality is not unique to Buddhism. Many Vedic philosophers, *Rishis* (seers), and ascetics were also grappling with the same question. They were trying to unravel the mystery of *Brahman*, *Atman*, and other concepts, seeking a realization that there is one Ultimate Reality. They delved into the realm of concepts and the understanding that this Ultimate Reality is all-pervading and unknowable through personal experiences.

Each concept is their own, and obviously, what was missing and what they were not realizing is also subjective and dependently arisen. We can't say whether they are wrong or right in their pursuit. They may be completely right in their own journey, believing that

they have united with their ultimate *Brahman* or *Atman*, and that this union represents their ultimate reality and liberation. If that is their truth, we are happy for them to have arrived at it. We don't need to agree or be afraid of their philosophies or their way of uniting with the Ultimate Reality.

It's something we leave to each individual to decide whether they would embrace such philosophies and realizations or prefer to explore and discover the truth for themselves through direct experience. It's a personal choice to seek awakening and understand what it truly means.

The Buddha did not provide a solution to the question of Ultimate Reality. He regarded such speculations and philosophical debates as completely futile. These distractions kept one away from the reality of the present moment. The Buddha did not waste a single moment delving into those speculations and debates because they would only take one further away from the truth. Those ideas, concepts, and speculations would distract from developing mindfulness. They can be in direct opposition to what the Buddha encouraged us to discover for ourselves. They would steer us away from the practice of remaining present and mindful.

What the Buddha is saying is that we, as human beings, have a unique opportunity to discover the truth. Instead of spending our lives seeking external causes for our experiences and engaging in endless philosophies, the Buddha taught a simple and practical approach. He taught four fundamental aspects of our reality: understanding suffering, understanding its cause, realizing its end, and following the path leading to its cessation. This is what he taught. It's up to us to decide whether we want to explore the vast universe of speculation or focus our precious human existence on understanding these essential truths.

Yes, so the Buddha provided a straightforward answer to questions about the right path and approach to take. He always avoided engaging in speculative views. However, this doesn't mean that the Buddha was evading or trying to dodge them; he was aware of those views. If we want to explore what the Buddha thought or said about speculative views, there is a very good discourse called the

Brahmajala Sutta in the *Digha Nikaya*. It explains that even the philosophies of the *Vedas* can be categorized into one of these sixty-two speculative views. There is nothing that cannot fall into one of these views, whether it is a concept of Universal Consciousness, a universal being, or an all-pervading supreme being.

Consciousness and all other perceptions are in the domain of concepts. What the Buddha says is that there are many spheres of being and countless experiences. All these sorts of experiences and pursuits of supernatural powers or psychic abilities, such as the ability to remember past existences, do not lead to the ultimate truth or solve the fundamental problem of suffering. These speculations and supernormal abilities do not address the issue of being conditioned by what conditions. The Buddha presents his teachings of Dependent Origination in the *Brahmajala Sutta* as the supreme fact connected with reality. I believe that if anyone truly seeks the ultimate reality, they should consider reading this discourse.

If we are after the Ultimate Reality and really want to know what is beyond all these philosophies, speculations, and everything, then I suggest you read this. In the *Brahmajala Sutta Digha Nikaya 1*, the Buddha discusses the last four categories among the sixty-two speculative views. He explains the four *Jhanas*, stating that one will experience them as they progress through the *Jhanas*. For example, in the first *Jhana*, one would let go of hindrances, sense pleasures, and unwholesome states, then enter and abide in the first *Jhana*. This first *Jhana* is characterized by rapture and pleasure born of seclusion from hindrances, as well as happiness born of seclusion—a state of great happiness and joy.

Those beings who experience *Jhanas* and think it is the Ultimate Reality fall into categories 59-62 of those speculative views. What the Buddha is saying is that experiencing *Jhana* does not lead to Awakening. In other words, we can experience *Jhanas*, but they do not lead to liberation from *Samsara*. I should also mention that the Buddha says if we experience a *Jhana* and at the end of our life do not progress any further, there is a certain heaven we will be reborn into.

For those beings who experience the first *Jhana*, it's called the 'Form Realm,' where the lifespan of that being is 100 *Mahakappas*. One

Mahakappa is equivalent to around 10^{21} years⁵⁰, so 100 *Mahakappas* would be 10^{23} years—a remarkably long time. They may experience bliss and think it is the Ultimate Reality, but it is still a speculative view and a delusion caused by their experiences.

Now, this leads to the progression to the next experience, which is the second *Jhana*. In the second *Jhana*, one enters a subtler realm of joy and happiness without thinking and examining thoughts. In the second *Jhana*, there is only rapture and pleasure, without any thinking or examining thoughts. The lifespan of beings in the second *Jhana* is 200 *Mahakappas*. Moving on to the third *Jhana*, the rapture and pleasure cease, and there is only deep happiness within the body, accompanied by strong equanimity. The third *Jhana* has a lifespan of 400 *Mahakappas*. In the fourth *Jhana*, beings experience a lifespan of 500 *Mahakappas*. In this realm, beings have let go of pleasure and pain and abide in equanimity. However, even in the experience of equanimity, there is still a subtle layer of identification or speculation. The realm of these experiences is still bound by speculative views.

So, what is that speculative view? In the *Brahmajala Sutta*, at the very end, all these speculative views are discussed. People who repeatedly experience them do not realize that they are conditioned by feelings. These feelings, in turn, are conditioned by contact—they are constantly contacted by the senses, and as a result, they are swept away by the current of Dependent Origination. Contact serves as a condition for the arising of feelings, and with feelings as a condition, craving arises. With craving as a condition, acquisition arises, also known as *Upadana*. With acquisition as a condition, existence arises. Habitual tendencies emerge from existence, leading to the cycle of taking on a body and undergoing rebirth. Each time one takes rebirth, they have to endure the suffering and pain associated with having a body.

So, what the Buddha is saying is that in order to truly understand the full depth of the links of Dependent Origination and the concept of contact, one must comprehend the Four Noble Truths. Without this understanding, it doesn't matter if one experiences the Four *Jhanas*

⁵⁰ A rough calculation based on the *Samyutta Nikaya* 15.6: The Mustard Seed

or the formless realms such as infinite space or infinite consciousness. Even if beings in those realms live for thousands of *Mahakappas* and experience immense happiness and joy, they will remain trapped in the cycle of conditioned existence. The Buddha provides this recipe for Awakening—freedom from any conditions—emphasizing that experiencing supernatural or supernormal abilities and the bliss that accompanies them is not enough to attain the status of an *Ariya* disciple, representing a noble disciple in the superhuman category who has transcended conditioned existence.

That means those who are *Ariyas* who have completely seen the conditioned reality caused by these links of dependent origination, and have directly experienced and seen that this *seeing* leads to liberation from the cycle of dependent origination. This is the fundamental difference. The distinction lies in the fundamental practice of mindfulness. Some people think that mindfulness is trivial and trivialize it, considering it common and believing they have superior experiences, such as accessing realms of bliss or having supernormal experiences. However, in doing so, they delve into realms far removed from the present moment, losing awareness and becoming completely detached from the reality of the present moment. They mistakenly believe they are superior to those who practice mindfulness.

If we go to India and Nepal, we will encounter *Rishis* and various ascetics residing in caves in the Himalayas. They may claim to be in a state of superhuman or to be God-like beings, infatuated with their own attainment. However, as mentioned earlier, the Buddha was able to observe the behavior of those *Brahmins*, masters of the *Vedas*, and noted how they failed to practice mindfulness and control their anger. They expressed displeasure and reviled the Buddha, displaying their dissatisfaction without even understanding the nature of the five hindrances.

Basically, they were not even familiar with the basic principles of mindfulness of the body. They didn't understand how the body reacts to feelings and how this can lead to displeasure, resulting in unskillful actions of body, speech, and mind. This lack of mindfulness is the underlying issue. I'm presenting this viewpoint without passing

judgment on different philosophies or experiences. Everyone has the freedom to choose the path they believe is right for them.

When it comes to our basic senses as human beings, it boils down to having a sense of morality, calmness, and composure, known as *Samma Samadhi* in Buddhism. It also involves having a vision and understanding derived from direct experience. This is the path that I personally follow, and I don't need to be persuaded by anyone claiming I am right or wrong. It is based on what I have personally observed and experienced. When it comes to different ideas, interpretations, and philosophies, we need to assess them based on our own experiences and how they contribute to our overall well-being. This becomes the criterion for determining whether we are on the right path or not, rather than relying solely on ideas and concepts.

To provide some perspective, I have gleaned this from my reading of various texts, and I will provide some commentary on what I have found from these readings. There is a book that serves as a summary of all the *Upanishads*, titled "*The Realization of the Absolute*" (Krishnannanda, 1947). The Absolute is referred to as *Brahman* in Vedic philosophy

The Absolute is unworldly in the sense that it has not, as the world has, distinctions of space, time and individuality, or name, form and action. Liberation is the possession and experience of unlimited, undivided consciousness of the Bhuma, or the plenitude of existence.

There cannot also be any question in regard to the position of power, rulership, and the like, in the state of the highest liberation. These are all relative notions of individuals. The Ultimate Reality is the Absolute, which is non-dual and, therefore, there is no scope for the operation of an objective power in it. The Absolute itself is Power, not merely an exerciser of power. Power is a separative factor, a means to create duality, which is nullified in the Absolute. The truly liberated one does not feel that he is the lord of anyone else, which notion involves distinction in existence, but he has the Eternal Experience of the Essence of Infinity.

Okay, it sounds quite lofty and fantastic, presenting an amazing type of experience. Essentially, it all comes down to the concept that as soon as there is demarcation and power exercised by someone, phenomena bifurcate into two parts: the creator and the one exercising power. This duality is seen as the source of all problems. By understanding this fact, it seems they lean towards a philosophy of duality. However, when this duality dissolves and the distinction between the two is eliminated, they become unified. There is no longer a distinction between the doer and the deed, the sensor and the sensed, or the experiencer and the experience. They perceive a dissolution of the two sides of experience into one.

This is considered the Ultimate Reality. So, this is the essence and conclusion of the book. It immediately brings to mind the idea of union or some form of unification that transcends duality. It seems to move away from the present moment and engage in the realm of concepts. This is precisely what we refer to as the realm of concepts. It is the concept that there exists an absolute, devoid of any duality. This philosophy represents the true realization of the ultimate from the *Upanishads*.

I find it relevant to show them some passages from the *Sutta* that discuss the Buddha's perspective on these ideas and concepts. The Buddha explains that such thoughts and concepts arise due to one's reaction to feelings. According to the Buddha, it is a very subtle feeling that arises when one imagines these ideas in the mind. However, they fail to realize that this imagination is created when the mind comes into contact with the object of the mind, resulting in the arising of consciousness. This contact gives rise to feelings, which then generate various ideas, concepts, and notions of ultimate reality, non-ultimate reality, duality, union, and other emotions. Ultimately, it all boils down to philosophical discussions.

Even if it is not a philosophy, there are realms where, if one settles into certain ideas and experiences, they may be reborn in various realms. For example, there are four different *Brahma* realms where one attains *Jhanas*, and beyond that, there are *Arupa* realms, such as the base of infinite space and infinite consciousness. One's scope of conceptualization becomes limited in order to enter those realms.

However, those who are bound by the concept of the senses will remain within the realm of sensory existence, which consists of about 16 different sensory existences. What I'm trying to convey is that one must personally test and verify all of this through direct experience. It is up to each individual to determine the approach that ensures they are on the right path. In the Buddhist text, specifically in *Majjhima Nikaya 140*, the Buddha discusses

“The tides of conceiving do not sweep over one who stands upon these [foundations], and when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over him he is called a sage at peace.’ So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

“Bhikkhu, ‘I am’ is a conceiving; ‘I am this’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall not be’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be possessed of form’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be formless’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be percipient’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be non-percipient’ is a conceiving; ‘I shall be neither-percipient-nor-non-percipient’ is a conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a dart. By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not shaken and does not yearn. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born. Not being born, how could he age? Not ageing, how could he die? Not dying, how could he be shaken? Not being shaken, why should he yearn?

So this delves again into exposing all kinds of concepts and what lies beyond them. It means that one must let go of everything, completely releasing all attachments. In the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, the subtlest layer of conceptualization is perception, and even that is relinquished along the path. By letting go of perception and any form of imagination about how things should be, one can experience the Cessation of Perception, Feeling, and Consciousness. At that stage, one realizes that the mind and its objects are not separate entities; they are merely constructs of the mind.

When there is no distinction between the mind and its objects, one does not start to imagine. And when one does not imagine, it means that the concepts of mind and mind objects do not arise. As a result, when they do not arise, the consciousness of the mind ceases. With the cessation of mind consciousness, the notion of consciousness

disappears because it no longer finds any support from the mind. This is how the chain of dependent origination collapses, with the realization that it is just an interplay of the mind. The mind was creating its objects, and due to heedlessness, we were only observing the surface and not the root cause. This is where *Yonisomanasikara* recognizes and acknowledges that the mind and its objects are interconnected, and the mind object is a product of the mind.

So, when one realizes that the mind and mind object are not two separate things, the consciousness of the mind ceases. This cessation happens because the mind consciousness, which distinguishes between the mind and its object, stops. When one understands that it is the mind itself that creates the mind object, the mind consciousness ceases. At this moment, one experiences the Cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness. This is how one reaches the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path. When this experience occurs, awareness of the world and all the senses completely ceases. The mind comes to a complete halt, similar to a river that has been dammed, exposing the depth of the riverbed.

To see what lies beneath a river, one must build a dam high enough to contain a large volume of water and sustain the flow for several days or weeks. If one wants to see what lies beneath the river, one would need to stop the flow of water into the dam by closing the dam gates. As a result, the old riverbed dries up. Through this process, one realizes that there is nothing beneath the river. This analogy illustrates how our everyday experiences are like a continuous flow that we have never had the opportunity to explore the depths of, which is similar to the interplay of dependent origination.

In the practice of the Eightfold Path, we tranquilize all formations, including bodily and mental formations. This is akin to building up the dam, creating a space to store the water. Through this practice, we aim to uncover what lies beneath the surface—the essence of the flow of our sense experiences and how we have been carried away by the relentless stream of dependent origination for countless eons. This chain has never ceased thus far. However, by diligently following the Noble Eightfold Path, we have the opportunity to unravel this process and experience Awakening from our experiences personally. This is the essence of the path we are on.

I'm not attempting to persuade or impose a specific path on anyone. I simply emphasize the importance of directly experiencing and understanding how human experiences function. It is through this direct insight that one can come to realize Awakening as taught by the Buddha. In this conversation, I can only share what I have personally seen, known, and found worthwhile to pursue. I have tried to provide a comprehensive perspective on various aspects.

I discussed Dependent Origination as something that continually shapes our experiences, with the crux of this process lying in contact. It is a very deep and extensive topic that was the subject of the Buddha's Awakening to discover the deathless state. I will provide details of this process that I support through direct meditative experiences. The Buddha said, one can never become a Noble person—one who will surely attain the deathless one day—without understanding this process⁵¹.

⁵¹ Samyutta Nikaya 12.13: Ascetics and Brahmins

Chapter 9

Genesis of Material Universe and Contact

*"There is a tangle within, and a tangle without,
The world is entangled with a tangle.
About that, oh Gotama, I ask you,
Who can disentangle this tangle?"
"Where name and form
As well as resistance and the perception of form
Are completely cut off,
It is there that the tangle gets snapped."*

[Samyutta Nikaya 7.6: The Tangle]

Understanding contact is crucial for experiencing the deathless. The universe, with all its appearances and experiences, can be fully comprehended when contact is understood. Among the various topics essential to understanding the Dhamma, one of the most important for enhancing and expediting our progress in meditation is having an experiential understanding of a component called contact.

In Pali, contact is referred to as "*phassa*," which essentially means touching. In Sanskrit, it is called "*sparsha*," which implies coming together and creating a spark. Contact is a significant phenomenon crucial to unraveling the liberation the Buddha has shown through his teachings contained within the Four Noble Truths.

In the context of the Four Noble Truths, contact falls under the category of the arising of suffering. Examining the first Noble Truth of suffering reveals that suffering is rooted in phenomena we perceive or identify with as ourselves. This arising of suffering is dependent, as the Buddha stated, on contact. In a nutshell, dependent origination, the core of which lies in contact, consists of eleven more components.

While it may sound like an oversimplification or something mystical, we need to understand the links of dependent origination not as a long chain of events that follow one after another, but rather as things that arise simultaneously. For example, millions of

raindrops can fall at the same time. Similarly, when a light turns on, billions and trillions of photons arise simultaneously. These phenomena do not have to occur sequentially. This is precisely what the term means—things arising concurrently.

"*Pratichcha*" means dependent on a causal condition and "*Samuppada*" is simultaneous arising. In contrast to natural phenomena, where things are completely uncorrelated and independent, like photons bouncing from a lamp into our retinas, the Buddha states that the phenomena of our mind lean on each other. Let's consider that there are twelve photons representing the twelve links of dependent origination. In contrast to random and independent physical phenomena, the twelve components of the dependent origination process of the mind are interconnected. They arise together and cease together. This means that if we let go of one link, all the others that depend on that particular link will immediately fall apart. There is no processing time or time limit that we usually associate with such phenomena.

This is a quite counterintuitive state of our mind. I compare it to something that flows based on a very tightly balanced environment. The phenomena of the mind are such that any observation with some bias or inclination can start to oscillate them, creating millions of iterations of those phenomena. These phenomena become unstable and remain in a vibrating state.

In physics, for example, if we go to labs like CERN or other high-impact research centers, we see that they investigate extremely minute particles. They have very delicate instruments with high sensitivity, and any influence from the environment can destabilize the experiments. They must perform their experiments in a very pure environment, as any influence—any atom, any molecule—entering the environment can completely derail the outcomes of their experiments.

Similarly, the mind and the observation of the mind influence its flow in a very similar manner. Any observation, imagination, or concept can oscillate and make the observation and flow of phenomena even more unstable. In circuit theory or any lab experiment, injecting a little millivolt or microvolt of current into a system can excite the system to generate a perfect waveform that can

be controlled to a very fine degree in frequency and magnitude. This is common in labs. Our mind can be in such states. We have inherited these states of mind, which are already in oscillation and bouncing around too much.

What happens is that we are bombarded with all sense experiences, hitting our awareness from six sense doors all the time. Those input signals are hitting our mind and body machine. The perturbation caused by the inputs is likely to continue the oscillation process indefinitely if we are not able to check and find the root cause of this oscillation.

This is an example of our experiences. I am providing a scientific explanation based on an analogy as to why the links of dependent origination are so hard to put a full stop to. The cessation of suffering is a state of extinguishing, or all vibrations coming to a standstill. Say we are trying to switch off the machine and extinguish all sources of oscillation and vibration. But excitement and oscillation for the system are in constant supply. This is the state of the world. I used an example from a physics or electronics lab to illustrate how our mind can be compared to machines that can oscillate indefinitely and stay in an unstable or fluctuating state all the time. If no measures are taken to stabilize them, they can go further and even explode. Our mind can go to that extent, as we have seen in life. Our human life is sustained in a delicate way. We tend to take everything so personally. And things can easily turn from a minor disagreement into a full-blown war and the destruction of a whole nation. Even the Earth can be in peril if we are not careful to tame the mind. This is precisely the root of all phenomena; it all starts with the mind.

I am using a framework for this topic centered around the notion of contact. I will put them in four categories, corresponding to the Four Noble Truths. Contact itself is suffering, which is the first Noble Truth. The cause for the arising of contact is the second Noble Truth. The cessation of contact is the third Noble Truth, and the way leading to cessation is the fourth Noble Truth. I will make this Chapter cover those four aspects of contact so that we can gain some understanding of this matter. I will try to show ways of soothing this process of being caught in the swing of dependent origination and the infinite amount of suffering it can generate.

The key to stopping these phenomena from continuing indefinitely is to understand the link of contact. I will cover several *Suttas* to provide both experiential and theoretical perspectives.

So, the first aspect of contact is its role in the context of suffering. This is from *Udana 3.10*, which is called '*Surveying the World*'. This *Sutta* describes how—after his Awakening on the bank of the Niranjara—the Buddha fully comprehended the links of dependent origination in both the forward and reverse orders. He understood the Four Noble Truths in three aspects and in all twelve permutations. He directly saw, tested, and thoroughly understood them, leaving nothing more for him to do. This was the culmination of his Awakening. He understood that any residual fuel or excitement causing his mind to oscillate had been extinguished. His attachments were destroyed, and he saw that there were no traces or tendencies left in his mind. Everything had been completely extinguished.

The Buddha compared this state to standing apart from the world and the universe, completely independent of it. It's like watching a movie where whatever happens in the movie doesn't influence us. The Buddha saw the universe as an ongoing movie and realized that he had come out of that screen, completely free from being bound to play a role. He was no longer an actor in that movie, and there was no way for him to go back and be a part of it. In *Udana 3.10: 'Surveying the World* , the Buddha says:

*"This anguished world, fully given to contact,
Speaks of a disease as self.
In whatever terms it conceives of,
Even thereby it turns otherwise.
The world, attached to becoming,
Given fully to becoming,
Though becoming otherwise,
Yet delights in becoming.
What it delights in is a fear
What it fears from is a suffering.
But then this holy life is lived for the abandoning of that very becoming."*

These verses carry a very deep meaning, coming from a completely different realm. The first few sentences distinguish the world as being fully given to contact. This means that all the inner turmoil and disasters in the world of experiences are inevitably caused by contact. The world sustains itself through contact, and when we surrender fully to contact, it's like sleepwalking into a wall without realizing it. Contact is like hitting a wall. All phenomena are constantly in flux, and what sustains them is our unawareness or lack of Awakening to the fact that contact is the cause of so much suffering. We are not aware of what is happening to us. It's like animals harming themselves without knowing that their actions are causing harm, such as a monkey scratching a wound and making it worse. We exacerbate our suffering by fueling it and not paying attention to its causes. By relinquishing ourselves to contact, we provide extra fuel to unnecessarily prolong phenomena.

Contact arises from a combination of *Rupa* and *Nama*. *Rupa* literally means appearance and consists of properties often associated with physical matter. In the physical world, these properties include the four great primaries: earth, water, fire, and air elements. These elements have properties of solidity, cohesion, heat, and vibration. They can manifest in various forms, and by manipulating the combination of these elements, we can create countless different elements. Scientists have discovered more than 102 elements so far, but by playing with the configurations of these four primary elements, we can potentially create an infinite number of elements, which translate to acts of manipulating electrons, protons, and neutrons. Physicalists might object to this approach, seeing the four properties as emergent from the composition of atoms and molecules, not the other way around. However, they must consider what experience they can generate out of particular structures of atoms and molecules.

Essentially, those properties are what matter to beings that have sensation, perception, feeling, and so on. It doesn't matter what the matter is composed of, whether it has 200 electrons and 200 protons or any other configuration. We can give it any name we like, but when it comes to understanding and making contact with these elements, we can only make sense of them through the four properties: earth,

water, fire, and air. This is the perspective of Dhamma. Dhamma doesn't differentiate between these lab-created elements like uranium, plutonium, hydrogen, or helium. They all appear to us as appearances, as *Rupa*, with varying degrees of experiences based on these four properties.

When we interact with these elements through contact, we have feeling and perception, the *Rupa* representing the elements, and the labeling aspect, the *Nama*. *Nama* literally means naming and refers to how we label and process experiences of these elements. The components of *Nama* include feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. For example, when we sit down on a chair, we make contact with what feels like a physical object, *Rupa*, which possesses the four properties. Through feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention, we recognize and make sense of the physical object. *Nama* labels and categorizes the elements based on feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention as soft, hard, warm, still, moving, etc.

When *Nama* and *Rupa* come together due to contact, we become aware of an object. Through feeling, we determine whether the experience is pleasant, painful, or neutral. Through perception, we recognize and make sense of the object. Intention arises based on the feeling and perception. Contact with the object is made through the six senses. Attention arises, giving rise to a continuous awareness of the object. This is why contact is at the center of the universe and freedom from it.

The physical elements (*Rupa*) and the understanding of these elements (*Nama*) support the arising of consciousness or awareness of the properties. This is how the process works. When we become aware, the sense of self or perception of self becomes amplified. That process identifies itself as a person in the middle of the universe. It starts with identification with the feeling. We identify with the feeling, which then becomes associated with perception. Consciousness discriminates objects and perceptions, leading to a sense of self versus the world. This fuels subsequent phenomena, starting with craving. Craving generates desire, whether it's a desire for more of what is pleasant or to avoid what is painful. If the feeling is neither pleasant nor painful, it leads to indifference. These three

reactions occur because we have identified with the feeling. Leaning to either side has occurred, i.e., dependence has continued.

So, contact is a crucial point to consider. We can compare it to the saying "where do we draw the line" in our everyday life. Drawing the line means staying within our boundaries and not crossing them. Crossing the line, like crossing a red line, leads to problems and issues. We draw the line in terms of our mind and mental object contact. We need to stay within the boundary of our sense bases, within our part of the fence or line. Contact acts as a border between safety and being out of control, between staying centered within and letting chaos unfold. This is how we should understand contact.

Let me give an example from the *Suttas*. The Buddha says:

*"Be it pleasant or unpleasant,
Or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant,
Inwardly or outwardly,
All what is felt,
Knowing it as 'pain',
Delusive and brittle,
Touch after touch, seeing how it wanes,
That way he grows dispassionate therein,
By the extinction of feeling it is
That a monk becomes hungerless and fully appeased."*

[Sutta Nipata 3.12 (738-739): Dvayatanupassanasutta]

This passage emphasizes how feeling is the cause of escalation and problems. We tend to process feelings and make a case out of them, attaching thoughts to them and seeing how they develop. But feeling is caused by contact. Noble disciples who understand this see that feeling arises due to contact. Contact is just a spark. The Buddha advises us to see feeling as something fragile, like a burst bubble. There's no substance to it, so why do we make it into such a big issue?

The Buddha teaches us to understand feeling as something brittle, not to be attached to whether it is pleasant, painful, or neutral. It's just a sensation, like a mosquito bite or spilling tea on our finger. Don't let it become an emotional feeling. By understanding

feeling as just a sensation, we become free, hunger-less, and fully appeased. This is the essence of the teaching on feeling.

Feeling is brittle and unstable because it depends on contact. Contact occurs when two notions of different properties come together. By nature, contact is unstable and doesn't last long. Feeling is dependent on contact, so it is equally unstable. If there is no contact, there is no feeling. Feeling and contact are interdependent.

We need to see the true nature of contact in this way: whenever anything affects our body and we start to feel pain, we should not make it into a big issue. We should not take it personally but rather see it as a sensation, as something influencing our body which we have no control over. External objects exert pain, and we must accept this reality. This example is mentioned in a *Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, where the Buddha talks about contact as one of the four nutriments. Contact sustains the cycle of dependent origination and continues the suffering indefinitely.

The Buddha gives a profound example: suppose there is a flayed cow⁵². If the cow stands exposed to a wall, creatures dwelling in the wall would nibble at her. If she stands exposed to trees, creatures dwelling in the trees would nibble at her. The same would happen if she stands exposed to water or open air. Whatever the flayed cow stands exposed to, creatures dwelling there would nibble at her. This example shows that contact should be seen as a nutrient that sustains suffering. When contact is fully understood, the three kinds of feeling are also fully understood. At that point, noble disciples have nothing further to do.

The lesson here is that the flayed cow suffers because it exposes its wounds to external factors. The contact invades its body. The problem arises when we let our attention flow outside, engaging with the phenomena perceived through our senses. This inflates the contact and triggers intention, attention, consciousness, and craving, leading to further escalations. That is a persistent illusion that keeps us in the realm of dependent origination. To avoid this, we should observe what is happening within our mind and not let our attention flow outward. As I mentioned earlier, everything in our experiences

⁵² Samyutta Nikaya 12.63: Son's Flesh

is mental—there is nothing physical. This is achieved through the practice of tranquility and insight meditation, which gradually weakens tendencies for outward flow through the six senses and restrains the arising of contact.

By practicing mindfulness of body, feeling, mind, and mind objects, we can check the flow of the sixth sense contacts. The example of the flayed cow illustrates the importance of not submitting to contact and keeping it within ourselves. The practice of the four foundations of mindfulness fortifies our internal state and protects us from straying our attention outward. Instead of looking outward through the senses, we should focus on observing the mind's reaction to phenomena. We should not cross the line of contact and seek external gratification, but rather observe the mind's reaction and relax, preventing it from crossing the boundary at the level of feeling by not reacting.

By stopping our reactions to feelings arising from contact, we remain on the safe side. This is the main message conveyed through the aspect of contact and why it is considered a source of suffering.

Now, I will cover what contact is and its origination. As I mentioned, the origination of contact is dependent on *Nama* and *Rupa*. Contact arises when we engage with *Nama* and *Rupa*, which give rise to consciousness. Together, they form what we call contact. This is how contact comes into being.

The origination of contact is due to attention, known as *Manasikara* in Pali, which means "mind doing the work." Attention causes consciousness to arise. If we lack understanding of phenomena such as contact, feeling, perception, and consciousness, and if we are ignorant of their nature, the process of dependent origination will follow its course. As the Buddha said, contact leads to feeling, feeling leads to perception, perception leads to craving, and craving leads to clinging. We get swept away because we lack attentiveness, allowing the process of dependent origination to take over.

This is why awareness and the ability to spot these phenomena as they arise is crucial. Attention, or *Manasikara*, plays a significant role here. The Buddha has given us the practice of mindfulness, which replaces the indiscriminate observation of phenomena with an understanding of this process. When we understand this process and

recognize that these phenomena are suffering, we can avoid indulging in them. *Yonisomanasikara*—attention rooted in wisdom—helps us refrain from excessive indulgence.

In the early stages of practice, these phenomena may appear jumbled, and we may not discern one from the other. However, as we progress in our practice, we learn to slow down the flow of dependent origination and become more skilled at observing it. Through the practice of the 6R method, mindfulness observes the flow of consciousness and phenomena. Right effort, guided by the knowledge of what is wholesome, aids mindfulness in bringing forth the wholesome and discarding the unwholesome. This leads to a greater sense of balance and a more neutral attitude towards these phenomena.

Instead of perceiving them as personal crises, we see them as a flow that is beyond our control. Rather than fighting with them, we allow them to be. This understanding brings a sense of confidence and lessens the personal impact of these phenomena. As soon as we let them be, we learn that when we let go of the cause for another phenomenon, all dependent phenomena simply do not arise. They remain mere potentials. This is the beauty of the Dhamma: it is immediately effective. By letting go of the cause, we always make progress in our practice, refining our skills to more accurately let go of suffering.

Initially, this practice is not highly skilled. We start by engaging with mindfulness and the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. Mindfulness, guided by right effort and supported by right unification of mind (*Samadhi*), brings the mind to a state of equilibrium. In this state, the mind remains stable, calm, and composed—not due to suppressing agitating phenomena, but by letting go of them—allowing us to observe the micro-events within our mind.

As we continue with the 6R method and the practice of mindfulness meditation, the oscillations and personalizations of phenomena gradually become tamed. Their impact diminishes as we pay less attention to them, recognizing their inherent suffering nature. Engaging with them only leads to their amplification.

Therefore, we practice to let them be without being attentive to them.

Attention plays a crucial role in this process. In our practice, attention is guided by wisdom, which involves understanding and letting go of suffering. Wisdom allows us to replace unwise attention with attention rooted in wisdom (*Yonisomanasikara*). This helps us de-nourish and remove the fuel for these phenomena, preventing them from sustaining further suffering.

At this point, it might be relevant to read a bit of what the Buddha actually says in a *Sutta*. This is from the *Udana*, which I find joyful to read because it contains profound statements from the Buddha describing the nature of his Dhamma. Though these verses are condensed, they carry great weight. This particular *Sutta*, *Udana 4.1: Meghiya*, pertains to mental phenomena that grab our attention and trap us in suffering.

*Trivial thoughts, subtle thoughts,
Mental jerkings that follow one along:
Not understanding these mental thoughts,
One runs back and forth with wandering mind.
But having known these mental thoughts,
The ardent and mindful one restrains them.
An awakened one has entirely abandoned them,
These mental jerkings that follow one along.*

These mental jerkings can take various forms, such as emotions, attachments, anger, or bitter attitudes, especially in the early stages of practice. They shake the mind, disrupting its calmness and causing oscillation and distraction. The Buddha advises us not to flow with them but to abandon them and let them be. The awakened ones are completely unaffected by them, existing in a different dimension where these phenomena have no influence over their minds.

The strength of the mind of an *Arhat* or the Buddha is comparable to a rock that remains unaffected by any wind. This strength is supported by the factor of equanimity, the last factor in the Seven Awakening Factors. Equanimity can be understood as neutrality or detachment, where the mind becomes uninfluenced, like a rock.

Sariputta, for example, often practiced abiding in equanimity and embodied this state, as nothing could sway his mind. In a heightened state of equanimity, such as in the formless realm of nothingness, the mind is nearly impervious to any perception or imagination.

Equanimity minimizes inner contact, and the mind becomes fortified. There is little room for anything to influence it. It weakens the link of contact, eventually leading to its cessation. However, there is still work to be done to completely extinguish contact, particularly in relation to the subtle layer of perception. The concept of contact is known as *phassa*, and equanimity plays a significant role in weakening this link. Gradually, through progression in practice, contact will cease. There is a need to further refine our understanding to completely let contact cease, particularly with regard to the subtlest layer of perception of identification with phenomena.

So far, I have described contact as being of one nature, but it can also be decomposed into two aspects. When there is contact, it is an interaction between *Nama* and *Rupa*. Contact has two dimensions: the perception of form and the process of naming perception. In Pali, these are referred to as *patigha*, meaning friction or resistance, and *adhivācana*, meaning verbal impression. When we make contact with an object, it hits our awareness in these two aspects. We feel a sense of friction or resistance, such as the sensation of touching a solid chair. At the same time, the *Nama* aspect of *Nama Rupa* starts to verbalize and name the experience.

These two aspects of contact combine to give rise to various feelings and perceptions, such as perceiving something as hard, soft, delicious, spicy, or bland. Reactions to them strengthen formations and generate future *Karma*. This is how contact is composed of these two parts.

Now, our objective is to let go of contact and be free from it. As I mentioned earlier, the cessation—or rather prevention, to be more accurate—of contact comes through practice. The practice leading to the cessation of contact is not reacting to the impressions that arise in our minds. Whether we are exposed to the physical world or experiencing a mental dimension, these are both mental phenomena. We don't need to analyze them at a microscopic level. Instead, we treat them as phenomena and do not become associated with them.

I have picked these terms from some *Suttas*. However, when we are in a state of equilibrium and our minds are quiet, peaceful, and still, these phenomena can become clear to us. At that state, we can explore and classify them. But if we are on the path and have not yet reached this level of clarity, it is better to lump them together as one phenomenon and let them be. We continue to practice by bringing forth wholesome qualities, such as loving-kindness and compassion, of the four *Brahmaviharas*. We allow these phenomena to settle on their own, and eventually, they will no longer be able to influence us because we don't feed them with our attention.

The Buddha has given us this guidance. Those who practice should be mindful and try to restrain these phenomena, but those who are fully awakened have completely abandoned them. These phenomena have no power to influence their minds. This leads to the cessation of contact, where, along with contact, feeling and perception also cease. In this state, the whole mass of suffering ceases because craving, clinging, and other factors have been prevented from manifesting.

The state of cessation of contact is where there is no more influence of *Nama* and *Rupa*. When we have refined our equanimity, such as in the fourth *Jhana* or in the state of nothingness, the foundation of contact becomes shaky. There is very little room left for contact to make its way through, but it still manages to come through small openings. To completely stop the flow of contact, we need to practice non-identification. The Buddha mentioned that it can be abandoned. The way to abandon this contact is by not identifying with any of these phenomena. This is the state after developing equanimity to its fullest. The next step is to develop the state of non-identification or *Atamyata*⁵³. As this non-identification grows, any form of association completely fades away. The mind becomes stronger, and the flow of these phenomena becomes very shaky. They crumble and fall apart because they are not getting any fuel from attention.

This process occurs after reaching the state of neither perception nor non-perception. In this state, the practice of the 6Rs—mostly

⁵³ Majjhima Nikaya 137: Salayatana Vibhanga Sutta

using releasing attention and relaxing—becomes automatic, and there is no interest in anything. It is a state of disenchantment where any notion of pleasure, joy, and pain have been let go. In the state of equanimity, there is no attachment to feelings, and they become bland. They don't register in the mind. Gradually, the flow of contact becomes weaker through continuous practice of the 6Rs. The last thread of contact is snapped, and the tangle is cut off.

In *Udana* section one, *Sutta* number 10, the Buddha describes the state of *Nibbāna* and freedom. In that state, water, earth, fire, and air do not find a footing. The form does not get any support because form and name are dependent on each other, and their coming together is called contact. By letting go of attention and not giving attention to these phenomena, consciousness doesn't find a footing in *Nama* and *Rupa*. Consciousness becomes weak, which then weakens *Nama* and *Rupa*. This interdependence causes the phenomena to fall apart like two sheaves of reeds leaning on each other. Attention plays a crucial role in this process as it affects consciousness. When we give attention to these phenomena, they register in our mind.

If we do not pay attention and if we understand by wisdom that they are suffering, then they will not find nourishment. The nourishment is our attention for consciousness to grow. The first nourishment is food, the second is contact, the third is formations, and the fourth is consciousness. We are not fueling them or nourishing them with our attention. When they are not given attention, they gradually become weaker. Consciousness becomes weaker, which then weakens *Nama* and *Rupa*, and so on. It's like removing life support from a patient, and consciousness starts to fall apart until the whole process stops. That is how the cessation of contact occurs. The cessation of contact means the cessation of feeling, the cessation of perception, the cessation of consciousness, and the cessation of all the suffering that follows. All the links dependent on feeling, persistence, craving, clinging, and so on, will completely disappear.

This means we have let go of the root of suffering. Before the arising of the Buddha, the human idea was that suffering was a natural law that would haunt us forever. Another idea was philosophies like non-action to attempt to completely exhaust

Kamma. But the Buddha taught that suffering is dynamic and doesn't stay with us forever. If suffering has a cause, it means there is something keeping it alive, and if we know the causes and conditions, suffering can also expire. That means suffering becomes meaningless. There is no need for its existence. Suffering simply doesn't arise. That is the state of freedom—freedom from agitation, fear, and being subject to the flow of dependent origination. This flow of dependent origination is the ultimate footprint of suffering, the DNA or recipe for suffering. By dismantling this flow of dependent origination, we can put a full stop to the flow that has been running for countless eons. With the practice of the 6Rs, we can gradually put an end to it and achieve liberation. This is the experience of *Nibbāna*.

However, many people, even Buddhists, harbor fear or misunderstandings about *Nibbāna*. They may associate it with extinction or annihilation, seeking instead a concept of persistent happiness. But in contrast, the Buddha's teaching asserts that *Nibbāna* is the removal of experiences and suffering, akin to curing cancer. Clinging to existence, the five aggregates, feeling, perception—these are likened to tumors. *Nibbāna* represents an experience of freedom, a dissociation from the inclinations of the mind, and a complete elimination of tendencies to latch onto objects that cause suffering and pain. The Buddha uses the simile of a beam of light to illustrate what happens if all means for projecting that beam of light are removed⁵⁴. This state is supportless, measureless, and independent. Concepts and notions like happiness and suffering find no grounding there.

This state of Samsara to which people are attached, they think that even being reborn as an animal or a cow dung beetle is still desirable. Even if they were reborn as an ant, they would prefer anything to cling but being freed from all such things. True freedom cannot be compared in terms of existence and non-existence. The state of *Nibbāna* transcends such comparisons. The concept of rebirth is eradicated.

Nibbāna is simply freedom. This life will continue as long as it sustains. When the body expires, the senses and everything else will

⁵⁴ Samyutta Nikaya 12.64: If There is Lust

cease. There is no lamenting over them. It signifies liberation from the cycle of birth and death, from the pain and misery of rebirth. We are no longer part of the equation of birth and death. Such equations simply do not hold in the state of *Nibbāna*. Therefore, it may be challenging to understand the state of r, but it is liberating to be freed from being chained to sensory experiences, from being food for worms, or from enduring the suffering and pain that the universe abundantly provides.

Now, let's move on to the final part, which is the path leading to the cessation of contact. Before doing so, I would like to read a paragraph from the *Udana*, specifically *Udana* section number four, verse number 11, titled "*Quarrels and Disputes*" It addresses the causes of quarrels, disputes, and suffering. The Buddha states that contact is the cause of what is appealing and unappealing. When contact ceases, these do not arise. Whatever is meant by becoming and not becoming, that too is its cause. Therefore, contact is the primary factor that causes quarrels, unhappiness, and suffering. Contact is initiated by *Nama* and *Rupa*, conditioned by *Nama* and *Rupa*.

How can we be free from the influence of form? How can we escape being hit by rocks, earthquakes, and other calamities related to form? It is by letting go of this notion of contact. And how do we let go of contact? It is by reaching a state where one does not participate in perceptions, neither engaging with abnormal perception. It is a state where we let go of all perceptions, yet we are not devoid of perception. This is the state of assetless-ness where touches cannot touch⁵⁵. Essentially the state of *Nibbāna*. And how does one arrive at this state? It is when we have reached the state of non-proliferation, letting go of all perceptions, including feeling. This is what influences our interaction with form. When we achieve the Cessation of perception and feeling, it opens the doorway to a state where we are unaffected by any of the elements—earth, water, fire, air—and yet still perceive. The cessation of becoming and impingements from all elements of the universe is *Nibbāna*. It is extremely challenging to articulate this experience in words; it is something to be experienced, not categorized.

⁵⁵ Suttanipata 4.11: Quarrels and Disputes

What we experience is peace and sublimity, complete stillness, without possessions or any inclination of mind. It is a state free from form, feeling, pain, and pleasure—a realm that is entirely separate from the sensory world.

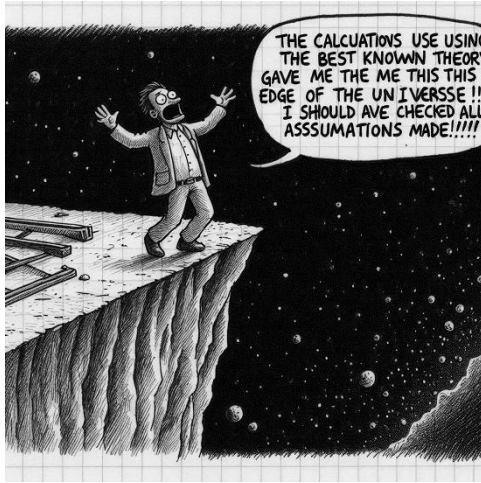


Figure 10: There is no end in sight for all the theories and concepts regarding the location of the universe's edge from a purely physicalist approach.

Now, let's quickly explore the path leading to Cessation. I didn't mention the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and how they guide us to stay within the boundary, which is contact. The *Satipatthana Sutta* teaches us that our boundary is the six sense contacts. If we indulge and go beyond that, we enter the domain of *Mara*. When we contemplate and observe the Four Foundations, which consists of the body, feeling, the mind, and mind objects, we do not stray beyond that boundary. We resist the temptation of *Mara*. By observing the mind, mind objects, body, and feeling, we essentially divert attention away from the five senses and focus on the mind. This is how we remain safe and avoid becoming prey for *Mara*. Indulging in sense pleasures and being influenced by them accumulates *karma*. If we excessively indulge and lose our human life at that moment, there is a possibility of going to hell or being reborn as an animal. *Mara's* influence can trap us in the cycle of *karma*. The six senses are *Mara's* domain, and projecting outwardly invites *Mara* to entangle us in various realms of experience.

To remain safe within these boundaries and avoid *Mara's* influence, we begin by observing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness⁵⁶. This leads us to develop the Seven Factors of Awakening, which stabilize and compose our minds. These factors straighten and converge our minds, guiding us towards the ultimate goal of freedom from all defilements and tendencies that cause suffering. They help us stay on a straight path, avoiding deviations and fluctuations. The path to the state of *Nibbāna* is perfected through cultivating these Seven Awakening Factors.

The journey starts with mindfulness, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness serving as a safety net to prevent us from straying too far. Once we establish ourselves within this boundary, the second factor is *Dhamma-Vicaya*, the observation of phenomena. This involves examining what causes suffering and what leads to its cessation, aiming to release and let go of the escalation of these phenomena. Observing leads to awareness, followed by the factor of Energy. With mindfulness, observation of phenomena, and energy, Joy arises. This Joy, along with other factors, settles into a state of Tranquility, calmness, and composure.

Tranquility is a profoundly peaceful and comfortable state. The joy that arises eventually transforms into tranquility. When the mind is tranquil and calm, it effortlessly remains composed. This state is called *Samadhi*, where the mind stabilizes and stays still. *Samadhi* is perfected through the development of tranquility, joy, and energy. When these factors are cultivated, the mind enters a state of happiness and culminates in the perfection of *Samadhi*, known as *Sama Samadhi* or the Four *Jhanas*.

Within the experience of the Four *Jhanas*, the factor of equanimity arises. It allows us to observe phenomena as they truly are, noticing even the subtlest arising of these phenomena. Cultivating the Seven Factors of Awakening enables us to track our progress. Mindfulness, observation of phenomena, energy, joy, tranquility, *Samadhi* (composure) and *Upekkha* (balance) are all the seven factors that can be observed and checked off as we progress in our practice. Through repeated meditation sessions, the mind suddenly experiences great

⁵⁶ Samyutta Nikaya 47.6: The Hawk

comfort, relaxation, and calmness. When we let go of anxiety, attachment, and concern, and maintain this equilibrium, we do not need to seek *Nibbāna*—*Nibbāna* will come and find us.

This practice eventually bears fruit. It is remarkable how exploring various Dhamma topics together reveals their interconnectedness. The Buddha stated that there are no flaws in the Dhamma. From every angle, the Dhamma is complete, free from patchwork or stitched-together concepts⁵⁷. This gift of the Dhamma is precious, and as human beings, we should be extremely happy to have come into contact with it.

In conclusion, this is the essence of the practice and the essence of Buddha Dhamma. It is a journey that begins with developing joy, tranquility, and equanimity. By letting go of habitual tendencies, the mind becomes unified and free from identification. This is the final part of the practice taught by the Buddha. The *Sutta* that lays out all these practices in a coherent path culminating in the deathless is the *Salayatana Vibhanga Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikaya 137*. The path involves gradual development of refined states such as Joy, Tranquility, *Samadhi*, and Equanimity. It doesn't stop there; rather, it progresses finally towards the state of non-identification. By relying on these qualities, liberation is attained even while living in this dependent universe, achieving ultimate independence.

⁵⁷ Samyutta Nikaya 12.22: The Ten Powers

Part II

On the Path of Direct Experience

This part details my personal journey in discovering and practicing the original teachings of the Buddha, with a focus on meditation and direct experience. The *Jhanas*, the meditative states described by the Buddha, became a central focus for me, as I was after an authentic meditation path. After carefully examining the practices of renowned teachers like Ajahn Brahm, Thanissaro Bhikkhu and many others, I remained skeptical of methods involving one pointed focus on breath or mental images (*Nimittas*) and undue attachment to the bliss of *Jhana* states, recognizing that these did not align with the original *Suttas*.

A turning point came when I encountered Bhante Vimalaramsi's TWIM 6R method, which emphasizes smiling, relaxation, mindfulness, letting go, and cultivating lovingkindness (*Metta*). During a ten-day online retreat in 2017 with David Johnson, I practiced the TWIM method and experienced significant progress, including deep states of joy and calm while moving through the first, second, and third *Jhanas*. Initially struggling with distractions, I applied the 6R method to stabilize the practice and deepen the experience.

By the end of the retreat, I successfully experienced all four *Jhanas*. This strengthened my belief in the effectiveness of the TWIM and 6R methods as being closely aligned with the Buddha's original teachings. Here I also share my personal diaries from 2017-2018, documenting my practices that led to experiencing all the formless realms and Cessation. My accounts support the fact that the experiences described in David Johnson's book *The Path to Nibbana* can be replicated by anyone, while living a normal life, and experience the Cessation of perception and feeling—the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Chapter 10

How the Buddha's Recipe Got Lost?

This Chapter doesn't focus much on meditation or specific experiences but on the fate of the Noble Eightfold Path after Buddha's passing until now. I will cover various meditative states later, such as *Jhanas*, the *Arupas*, Cessation, and other experiences. What I've generally found is that while these terms and experiences are frequent in the Pali *Suttas*, it's challenging to ascertain the original words of the Buddha in today's literature.

There are likely thousands of books on Buddhism worldwide, and many people are writing them. The concept of Buddhism has become so widespread that everyone has their own interpretation of what the Buddha taught. Later traditions have added extraneous information and mixed in other teachings, religions, faiths, and beliefs with the original texts. Now, it's exceedingly difficult to verify whether something truly represents the teachings of the historical Buddha.

So, it's very common for people to struggle to find the authentic words of the Buddha even after decades of searching. As I mentioned, it took me over five years to identify the actual teachings of the Buddha as contained in the Pali *Suttas*. I searched everywhere, reading books by Nagarjuna, the Dalai Lama, Ajahn Brahm, Alan B. Wallace, and many others. I also delved into texts like the Lamrim Chenmo, highly regarded by Tibetan masters and scholars. Exploring these texts and thousands of pages can easily lead one into confusion and entanglements without clear answers. Therefore, finding the Buddha's words isn't straightforward, especially with the influence of later teachings like the Abhidhamma and its various versions across Buddhist traditions.

Initially, I thought that the *Abhidhamma*, held in high esteem, must be the most authentic teaching of the Buddha. I read through the seven books of Abhidhamma from the Pali Text Society, such as Dhammasangani, Vibhanga, Kathavatthu, and Patthana, with their intricate matrices detailing permutations of states of consciousness. I must admit, the Abhidhamma is not easy to grasp. I wondered how the Buddha managed to spread his teachings with such obscure and

arcane words and confusing terminologies. Surely, there must be an easier way? It took me five years to realize that the teachings of the Buddha cannot be so difficult to comprehend.

Then I began exploring further and finally discovered references to the *Nikayas* contained within the Pali Canon. This seemed like a promising place to search for valuable teachings. I started reading those books, perhaps beginning with the *Majjhima Nikaya* 4, the *Bhayabherava Sutta*. Suddenly, I felt a sense of *déjà vu*, as if I were traversing through a jungle or forest filled with fear and dread. What the Buddha articulated resonated deeply—there are experiences of fear and dread in life, and there are ways to overcome them. The Buddha himself had faced and conquered these unwholesome states, eventually attaining the higher states of *Jhanas*. He found a way to resolve these unwholesome states, and his mind became unperturbed, leading him to enter the *Jhanas*.

When I first encountered the term "*Jhanas*," I immediately recognized its significance. Finally, the Buddha is providing some foundational teachings. He explained the first *Jhana*, second *Jhana*, third *Jhana*, and fourth *Jhana*, detailing how he progressed through each and recalled his past lives, among other experiences. It's straightforward to understand: we need to undergo these experiences ourselves. By following these steps, we develop the ability to see past lives, observe the arising and passing away of beings in various realms, and ultimately grasp the Four Noble Truths directly. The *Bhayabherava Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* isn't too difficult to grasp—at least, that was my initial impression...

When I read this, I was deeply motivated. It felt like a *déjà vu*, a true encounter with the Dhamma. After being lost for more than five years, struggling through various Mahayana texts and philosophical treatises held in high regard for their profound and complex nature, I encountered a passage by Prof. Kalupahana. He mentioned how some treat Nagarjuna as if he were a second Buddha, or even greater than the Buddha himself, claiming that Nagarjuna provided a final or supreme vision of the Dhamma that even the historical Buddha did not fully articulate. Such philosophies distort the Buddha's teachings and lead many astray.

I found it difficult to believe in these fictional ideas, concepts, and philosophies, which kept me entangled for years. Encountering the true teachings of the Buddha is challenging—precisely the concern the Buddha himself expressed. I read *Suttas* where he foresaw that in later times, teachers would distort his teachings, adding and subtracting elements that can confuse people and undermine the Dhamma’s integrity. Perhaps this is why the Buddha predicted that his teachings would endure for only 500 years, as we observe today: countless philosophies but few direct experiential paths to understanding what he truly taught.

The Buddha did not propagate Buddhism; that was an invention by some followers centuries afterward, adopting the styles of religious leaders who promoted their own philosophies. As different Buddhist sects arose, Buddhism fragmented into numerous factions, straying from the true teachings of the historical Buddha, which were at risk of being lost. However, practices like the TWIM and 6R method offer a glimmer of hope by aligning with the experiences described in the Pali *Suttas*. These practices provide a pathway—a ladder—to grasp some rare vision of the Dhamma.

In this Chapter, my aim is to explore a few of the Buddha’s words regarding the future, whether through foresight or recollections of past lives and past Buddhas. He foresaw how teachings would diminish over time due to carelessness and modifications to his authentic recipe—the Noble Eightfold Path. Distortions have obscured the complete and perfect Dhamma into something barely recognizable. I have a *Sutta* here from the *Samyutta Nikaya* 20.7 called the Drum Peg. Here, the Buddha states:

Bhikkhus, once in the past the Dasārahas had a kettle drum called the Summoner. When the Summoner became cracked, the Dasārahas inserted another peg. Eventually the time came when the Summoner’s original drumhead had disappeared and only a collection of pegs remained.

“So too, bhikkhus, the same thing will happen with the bhikkhus in the future. When those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, are being recited, they will not be eager to listen to them, nor lend an ear to them, nor apply their minds to understand them; and they will not think those teachings should be studied

and mastered. But when those discourses that are mere poetry composed by poets, beautiful in words and phrases, created by outsiders, spoken by [their] disciples, are being recited, they will be eager to listen to them, will lend an ear to them, will apply their minds to understand them; and they will think those teachings should be studied and mastered. In this way, bhikkhus, those discourses spoken by the Tathāgata that are deep, deep in meaning, supramundane, dealing with emptiness, will disappear.

So, this was the concern the Buddha had. The teachings, though they may appear simple and plain, hold a profound meaning. Only those who have experienced the states described by the Buddha—such as the *Jhanas*—can truly grasp what he was conveying. This is a crucial point to understand. The Buddha's teachings are not mere philosophy, analysis, or a third-person perspective. They are a direct experience of phenomena within the mind: how they arise, cease, and entangle us in what we call the causes of suffering, and how we can release those entanglements. In essence, this aligns with the first of the Four Noble Truths. Whether we label it suffering, craving, or entanglement, the Buddha's teachings aim to completely transcend all forms of conceptual proliferation, engagement, bondage, and attachment. It is not a superficial kind of joy and happiness sought by most people today.

It's interesting to note that the Buddha's teachings stand in stark contrast to conventional wisdom about gains and happiness. Conceptual proliferation and anything that leads to engagement and entanglement are norms in daily life—the very fabric of our existence. These keep us bound and entangled in the cycle of birth and death. However, the Buddha teaches us to relinquish these ties, not identifying or associating with them—actions that lead to the birthless, deathless, unconditioned state.

Understanding of this cannot come without practice. It requires practice in meditation or direct experiential insight. The more sophisticated our lives become, the more intricate the entanglements we create. Recognizing that all fabrications that sustain what we call life are inherently fragile and relinquishment of ties is akin to taking

a red pill⁵⁸. Yet, this process need not be painful; the Buddha offers a joyful, liberating path to those who choose this path. Experiencing the bliss of the *Jhanas* through letting go of distractions clarifies precisely what the Buddha meant.

This is the true essence of the Noble Eightfold Path—a joyful path that most people overlook. The very first step on this path is Right View, or what we might call the noble, supramundane view. What does Right View entail according to the Buddha's teachings? Right View is a prerequisite for embarking on the Noble Eightfold Path. If we start with a distorted or incorrect understanding of Right View, we will already veer off from the complete holy life it leads to.

There are several remarkable *Suttas* dedicated to providing a deep understanding of Right View. They include *Majjhima Nikaya 9*, the *Sammaditthi Sutta*. In this *Sutta*, Sariputta meticulously describes Right View, elucidating how each link of dependent origination embeds the Four Noble Truths. Essentially, Right View boils down to comprehending the Four Noble Truths manifested in all facets of our experiences. This means we don't need to grasp every detail of our experiences intricately; it can be as simple as understanding our daily life's sorrows, lamentations, their causes (addressing the First and Second Noble Truths), letting go of that suffering (the Third Noble Truth), and practicing the path that leads to the cessation of all suffering (the Fourth Noble Truth).

His entire explanation can be summarized briefly as follows: understanding the unwholesome, the root of the unwholesome, the cessation of the unwholesome, and the path leading to the cessation of the unwholesome. If one comprehends this, it means they have attained Right View. The root is greed, hatred, and delusion.

Sariputta focuses here on how the Four Noble Truths can be seen in every experience to fully grasp the Buddha's teachings. This interpretation is profound as it directly illustrates how the teachings can be seen in every phenomenon. He examines all the links of dependent origination and asserts, "Look, we can discern Right View in each and every moment. Even if we miss the feeling, the craving, or the clinging, we can still recognize them in this very life. When we

⁵⁸ Taken from the famous sci-fi film: *The Matrix*

encounter sorrow, pain, and lamentation, if we look deeply, we will discover the Four Noble Truths there and understand them." His final point is crucial: all suffering arises dependently. This means if we relinquish their causes, they can be prevented from arising. This is the essence of Right View as expounded in *Majjhima Nikaya* 9.

Another definition of Right View is provided by the Buddha in response to a question posed by a *Bhikkhu* named Kaccanagotta⁵⁹. He inquired, "Right View, Right View. People speak of Right View. In what way does one arrive at Right View?" The Buddha responds, "Kaccana, this world mostly adheres to two extremes: the existence or the non-existence view." He explains that those who lean towards existence entirely disregard the cessation or the ending of existence. Conversely, those who reject this world see non-existence or annihilation as the world. They view the world as everything disintegrating, everything ceasing. The Buddha further elucidates that those who observe what manifests, what is present in their awareness, often overlook the fact that these things cease and disappear due to conditions.

Entropy, encapsulated in the third law of Thermodynamics, defines the universe. According to this law, everything in the universe begins with order and ends with disorder. In our modern world, which leans towards this theory of entropy, this aligns with the view of the second type as described by the Buddha. There are people who observe the disintegration of the world; they see only the things that are ceasing or disappearing. The Buddha concludes, "By not adhering to these two extremes, the *Tathagata* teaches the Dhamma via the middle." He then elucidates the dependent origination process, illustrating how ignorance conditions formations, formations condition consciousness, and so forth, leading ultimately to aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

Those who perceive solid existence and something permanent out there, akin to existentialists, are only seeing half of the story. They believe the world objectively exists in that manner, but they overlook the ongoing process. They're capturing a snapshot rather

⁵⁹ Samyutta Nikaya 12.15: Kaccānagotta Sutta

than watching the entire movie unfold. Conversely, those inclined towards non-existence lean towards a theory of universal destruction, focusing solely on aspects of decay. However, the Buddha teaches that the world isn't so starkly dualistic; it's nuanced and fuzzy. Phenomena continually arise and cease based on perception, following specific patterns rather than being random.

For instance, *Nama Rupa* (or mentality and materiality) arises due to consciousness, which in turn arises from attention to *Nama Rupa*. This cyclical process perpetuates the creation of more experiences, mirroring the way the world operates. When we perceive phenomena as they truly are—not through preconceptions—we attain Right View.

This Right View, according to the Buddha, offers a completely unbiased and harmonious perspective, paving the way to entering the Noble Eightfold Path. It encompasses impermanence and not-self: phenomena are in constant flux and cannot be claimed as "mine" because they lack permanence. This understanding of impermanence is fundamental to Dhamma—the first characteristic. The second characteristic is not-self; phenomena do not possess inherent identity or ownership. Identifying with them leads inevitably to suffering—the third characteristic.

Ultimately, everything resembles dreams—empty of inherent substance. The world we perceive is merely vibrations or fluctuations of these phenomena. Some later traditions delved deeply into these ideas, adopting them as philosophical constructs rather than experiencing them directly through meditative practice, such as *Jhanas* and direct states of insight.

This is what the Buddha always emphasized—that any experience or teaching he imparted was not meant for us to formulate into philosophy, theory, or marketing material. That was never his intention. Instead, he urged us to see these teachings through direct experience; this is the essence of Right View according to the Buddha. He wanted us to encounter the Dhamma firsthand, not to transform his teachings into abstract principles or doctrines for debate. That was never the purpose of the Dhamma.

Now, how can we be absolutely certain that a teaching attributed to the Buddha is indeed his, coming directly from his mouth and not from later traditions or others? Is there a litmus test we can apply to

authenticate his words? Clearly, the Buddha foresaw this issue—that people would question the authenticity of his teachings. This is where the Pali *Nikayas* play a crucial role. They contain revealing *Suttas* that address this concern. One such example is found in the *Anguttara Nikaya (AN)*, in the Book of Eights, *Sutta* number 53, titled "Just Brief." This *Sutta* provides concise teachings that can help verify the authenticity of the Buddha's words. Let me now read through these key paragraphs briefly.

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Vesālī in the hall with the peaked roof in the Great Wood. Then Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, stood to one side, and said to him: "Bhante, it would be good if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief, so that, having heard the Dhamma from the Blessed One, I might dwell alone, withdrawn, heedful, ardent, and resolute."

"Gotamī, those things of which you might know: 'These things lead (1) to passion, not to dispassion; (2) to bondage, not to detachment; (3) to building up, not to dismantling; (4) to strong desires, not to fewness of desires; (5) to non-contentment, not to contentment; (6) to company, not to solitude; (7) to laziness, not to the arousing of energy; (8) to being difficult to support, not to being easy to support,' you should definitely recognize: 'This is not the Dhamma; this is not the discipline; this is not the teaching of the Teacher.'

So, okay, that's what the Buddha says. What is important to emphasize is how we recognize any of those eight qualities that lead to passion rather than dispassion, bondage rather than detachment, amassing rather than relinquishing, strong desire rather than the relinquishing of desire, non-contentment rather than contentment, seeking company rather than solitude, laziness rather than arousing energy, being difficult to support rather than being easy to support. Any teachings that lean towards these qualities are not the Dhamma because true Dhamma embodies the elements that the Buddha mentioned.

But, Gotamī, those things of which you might know: ‘These things lead (1) to dispassion, not to passion; (2) to detachment, not to bondage; (3) to dismantling, not to building up; (4) to fewness of desires, not to strong desires; (5) to contentment, not to non-contentment; (6) to solitude, not to company; (7) to the arousing of energy, not to laziness; (8) to being easy to support, not to being difficult to support,’ you should definitely recognize: ‘This is the Dhamma; this is the discipline; this is the teaching of the Teacher.’”

So, if we delve into the details of these eight points, the first point is about dispassion, not passion. This means that as we begin to practice the *Jhanas* and progress along the path, we naturally become less attached to our senses and less entangled by anger and emotions. Our pursuit of experiences is guided by the Dhamma, and we do not feel a strong need to cling to all experiences. *Jhanas* arise spontaneously when we release our reactions to sensory experiences.

We can observe that any attachment or strong desires lead us away from peace and calm. They only bring disturbance and turmoil, not a state of perfect equilibrium. When we calm the turbulence of the mind through experiencing *Jhanas*, we see that they arise precisely because we have let go of those reactions. We have relinquished them and allowed them to pass without reacting. This is achieved through dispassion, not through passion. Therefore, if we find ourselves becoming passionate, it indicates that we are engaging with those phenomena, thereby stirring them up and causing them to intensify rather than subside. However, our practice aims at pacifying these phenomena, letting go of them, and cultivating dispassion.

The second point concerns detachment, not bondage. While these concepts are somewhat similar, "detachment" here means not being connected or attached. It implies refraining from trying to possess or own those emotions or attitudes. If we attempt to possess or be possessive of them, it leads to bondage. Instead, we aspire to be free from attachment and possessiveness. Our practice involves being unattached and letting go of any sense of ownership or clinging. Regardless of how attractive or appealing these phenomena may appear, we recognize them as transient and conceptual, continuously releasing our grasp on them.

The third point focuses on dismantling or dispersing these phenomena, not constructing them. This refers specifically to the five aggregates. Often, we mistakenly identify ourselves with these physical, physiological, and mental aspects that constitute the aggregates. However, in our practice, we directly see their impermanent and conditioned nature and to dissolve any attachment or identification with them. Rather than reinforcing them, we let go of the notion of a permanent self or identity associated with them. We acknowledge their arising and ceasing, refraining from clinging.

In essence, it's akin to perpetually constructing the heaps of the five aggregates. These aggregates represent residues from our interaction with these phenomena. We sustain our physical form, nurture our feelings, engage with perceptions, and develop tendencies to repeat these actions, thereby establishing habitual patterns. These are formations, and consciousness delineates what is perceived as external and what is internal or "mine."

Consciousness, referred to as *Vinnana* in Pali, draws this distinction of self. The five aggregates continue to accumulate our experiences and contribute to our distinctiveness or identity. However, in the practice of Dhamma, we aim to discern this continuous construction process and recognize the impermanent and conditioned nature of these aggregates. We comprehend their arising and ceasing, understanding that they do not define an enduring and unchanging self. Through dependent arising, they are constructed based on our attention. By dismantling our attachment to these aggregates and letting go of unwise attention (or *Ayonisomanasikara* as described in the *Sutta*), we can achieve liberation from suffering and attain freedom through dispassion.

And this is what the Buddha teaches – when we begin to identify with the five aggregates, which are merely a collection of phenomena, we start to perceive them as ourselves, and therein lies suffering. Any attachment to these phenomena, saying, "This body is me, this feeling is mine, this perception is me, this consciousness is me, and these formations are me," leads to suffering. Experiencing higher *Jhanas* assures us that letting go of these phenomena leads only to greater ease and comfort. Whenever we start labeling these

phenomena as "me" or "mine," it indicates delusion, assuming ownership where none exists in the universe.

Nothing in this universe remains constant, and we delude ourselves by thinking these things define us. They exist due to undue attention, yet there is nothing within them that we can truly claim ownership of. The moment we begin to identify them as "ourselves," it leads to delusion, and these identifications become sources of suffering. However, with insight one begins to let go and disassemble these aggregates rather than seeing them as consolidated or constructed.

Simply treat them as particles, like kidney beans spilled from an open basket. These aggregates are similar – treat them accordingly. The practice involves recognizing them as composed and constructed rather than accumulating them. Therefore, we should view them as disaggregated, not attempt to construct them through concepts.

The fourth aspect is "fewness of desires," not intense desire. This relates to our aspirations, desires, and concepts, urging us not to fabricate stories from feelings and perceptions or to develop strong cravings for things. These are akin to multiplying concepts, or what we term "*Papañca*" in Pali.

Those who perceive these phenomena realistically view them as scattered particles. However, those who perceive them as solid, unified entities, due to imagination, experience desires and attachments. When we view them as random particles lacking substance, as mere concepts, then desires and attachments dissolve. The inclination to possess diminishes. Otherwise, sensual desires proliferate, and attachments deepen, prompting us to crave more and more. We can observe this truth whenever mindfulness weakens and waves of phenomena overwhelm our minds.

Sensual desires arise as we seek to gratify our five senses because we perceive these phenomena as solid and highly appealing. For instance, when we encounter a beautiful body, hear pleasant music, or taste delicious food, instead of mindfully recognizing their impermanent and transient nature, we solidify them in our minds and engage in fantasies. This results in desires, attachments, and longings. Strong desires arise because we have already indulged excessively in conceptualization. While this may bring temporary

satisfaction, in the long term, it leads to discontentment and suffering as our unbalanced minds ensnare us in episodes and narratives they produce.

The fifth point pertains to devoid of non-contentment. When we refrain from identifying with any of these phenomena or other desires, and we have lost passion for them, they are no longer associated with us. In that moment, we reside in the present moment.

Therefore, when we are fully present, nothing in our awareness is entangled or linked together. We perceive the bare thread of phenomena, realizing that there is no value in building them up. Everything that arises and ceases does so independently. They become interdependent only when we engage with them. Thus, there is no reason to harbor desires or passion. By remaining in the present moment without discontent or non-contentment arising, we discover happiness and joy in accepting things as they truly are. The happiness that arises from letting go is what brings contentment. Therefore, when we practice correctly, we experience contentment rather than discontent.

Moving to number six, it concerns leaning towards company rather than seeking solitude. This might seem counterintuitive and could be one reason why later Buddhist traditions deviated from the Buddha's original teachings. Here, the Buddha suggests that mixing with people, attending parties, and seeking company tends to stir up more desires, ideas, and attachments.

Essentially, the Buddha's Dhamma is not for those who constantly seek companionship, opinions, or external support for enjoyment. When we practice in seclusion, we find happiness from within and do not need to seek it outside ourselves. Engaging in conversations, sharing emotions, or venting dissatisfaction will not lead to inner peace and contentment.

What the Buddha advises is this: "No, monks, do not constantly seek company or remain in crowds. Even when you are in company and cannot be alone, strive to maintain Noble silence. If speech is necessary, inquire about the Dhamma. Seek guidance on practicing, letting go of reactions to phenomena, avoiding attachment, observing the cessation of phenomena, and experiencing higher states of mind. Seek instructions on experiencing the *Jhanas*, letting

go of unwholesome states, and finding the happiness that arises from the *Jhanas*⁶⁰."

This crucial point might have been misunderstood by later Buddhist traditions. They might have thought that the Buddha advised against being in the company of others, whereas the actual teaching emphasizes mindfulness in speech and using it to clarify doubts and seek guidance on the path to liberation. There is abundant joy and happiness in seclusion and letting go.

Some might not have appreciated what the Buddha taught. He advocated staying in solitude, being one's own lamp, being one's own island, and examining inner foundations rather than focusing on external matters. The foundation of mindfulness involves observing our body, feelings, mind, and phenomena internally and consistently, rather than getting involved in external activities or mental proliferation.

Therefore, the Buddha advises maintaining solitude, remaining alone, and practicing in this manner to attain peace, calm, joy, and happiness from within.

Number seven pertains to the arousing of energy, not laziness. This directly relates to the practice where some individuals may lean towards enjoyment, laxity, and consuming drinks that induce drowsiness, leading to a generally relaxed attitude.

What the Buddha emphasizes is this: "Do not be lax in your daily life. Be more energetic, and utilize your energy appropriately." Arousing our energy involves striving, also known as the Four Right Efforts or the Four Right Strivings in the 37 Wings of Awakening (*Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma*). Here, the Four Right Strivings guide us to use our energy to cultivate diligence, commitment, and staying on track. We need energy to maintain focus, continuity, and progress in our practice. Therefore, we should avoid slouching or feeling lethargic, where our minds drift and clarity fades. Instead, we must energize ourselves.

Arousing energy is about maintaining awareness without being loose or lax. When we notice any slackening or drifting from our practice, we must be vigilant, alert, and proactive. We use our energy

⁶⁰ Majjhima Nikaya 26: Ariyapariyesanā Sutta

to foster those qualities that may be lacking. Being mindful and dedicated to our practice demands effort and energy, which is what the Buddha encourages here. By sustaining this level of energy and vigilance, we can advance on our spiritual path, cultivating all the necessary qualities for Awakening.

Number eight advises us not to be difficult to support but rather to be easy to support. While this primarily applies to people in monastic traditions, it is equally relevant to practitioners who recognize the futility and vanity of indulging in luxury items. They are not demanding and do not fuss over whether they drink water from a gold cup or a porcelain cup; they simply need water. There is no need to make a fuss over the type of food or drink they consume; the focus is on fulfilling their body's basic needs. They do not demand luxurious or extravagant accommodations; they are content with simple ones. Their lifestyle becomes easier to sustain and manage.

Those who have realized the truth, experienced the Dhamma, and found happiness through practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, see the emptiness of sense pleasures. They are content with very little and can live on a minimal budget because their desires for luxury have vanished. They require only sufficient nourishment to sustain their bodies, recognizing that the body is essential for practicing the Noble Path.

As human beings, we possess all five senses. We require sharp ears to listen to the Dhamma, clear eyes to see, and a healthy body to endure physical discomfort. These faculties should be robust and healthy to progress on the journey towards enlightenment. The body is crucial for practicing the Dhamma and crossing over to the liberation on the other shore.

This encapsulates the essence of the Buddha's teachings, leading us to the peace and calm he demonstrated. He taught that once we attain the state of *Jhana*, we transcend the influence of the controllers of the sensual realms—the *Maras* or beings of the sensual heavens. They cannot reach us; we have closed the door to them. This signifies complete safety and freedom from their influence.

This Dhamma emphasizes the progressive refinement of our understanding of phenomena and the cultivation of detachment to attain complete emptiness and ultimate freedom. Freedom is a broad

and generic term, but when we speak of *Nibbāna*, it is equated with freedom in its fullest sense.

So, what does this freedom entail? Some may wonder... Are we free from what? Are we relinquishing our ability to enjoy Friday night drinks, luxurious hotels, and dinners? It's understood that this is not the aim. They do not wish to renounce such things entirely, fearing that pursuing *Nibbāna* will strip away all sensual pleasures and experiences. They perceive *Nibbāna* as something not worth pursuing because they believe they would lose these comforts and pleasures.

However, the reality is that through meditation, practice, and clear insight, we discover the happiness and joy that arise internally, liberated from all these phenomena. The bliss and contentment that result from being entirely free from feelings, perceptions, and attachments far surpass any sensual pleasure or experience.

In this way, we can liken it to closing the door on any influence from the four great elements. We cease to be affected by materiality, preventing these elements from stirring any perception within us. We then enter a state—I hesitate to call it "another realm," as this might be misleading—where *Nibbāna* signifies freedom from any such impingements or influences. It is complete freedom in every sense. Nothing remains in us or can be influenced by any phenomenon because we are utterly devoid of possessions. There is nothing in the universe that can sway this awareness of safety and security.

The reward for practicing the Dhamma, experiencing the inner happiness of all *Jhanas* on the way, letting go of attachments, and ultimately transcending dependence on all phenomena leads to a happiness culminating in a deathless, condition-less, unshakeable freedom from all sense perceptions. *Jhanas* serve as crucial milestones on this path.

This concludes this Chapter, setting the stage for the next.

Chapter 11

On the Quest for Ultimate Freedom

For the supported there is instability, for the unsupported there is no instability; when there is no instability there is serenity; when there is serenity there is no inclination: when there is no inclination there is no coming-and-going; when there is no coming-and-going there is no de cease-and-uprising; when there is no de cease-and-uprising there is neither “here” nor “beyond” nor “in between the two.” Just this is the end of suffering.

[Udana 8.4: Parinibbana]

I have covered the process of dependent origination—the engine of suffering—and contact, which is at its core. Let me delve further into the application of understanding that gave the Buddha insight into how to forever free oneself from this process. The vast majority of meditators, including many Buddhists, tend to assume that the Buddha practiced some concentration practice to delve deeper and unravel Awakening. However, mindfulness and full awareness by remaining in present are central to the Buddha’s teachings. This should clarify that he found the process of Awakening here and now, in the present moment. He discerned that there was something fundamentally flawed in the prevailing practice of delving deeper and deeper into layers of mind constructs, such as the experience of nothingness.

I was invited to give a Dhamma talk to the Samatha Vipassana Trust in India on Sunday, September 3, 2023, led by Venerable Dhammagavesi and many practitioners of the TWIM 6R method. It was a great opportunity for me to present in this context. With profound gratitude, I accepted the invitation to share my understanding of *Majjhima Nikaya 26: Ariyapariyasana Sutta* or The Noble Search—one of the most profound *Suttas*. I initially thought it would be brief, but it turned out to be 24 pages long when I printed it. Given that most of the audience was familiar with this practice and the teachings of the Buddha, I took the liberty to skip some sections and diverge a bit from the Dhamma. I incorporated elements from my

personal experiences and insights to offer a blended perspective on understanding the teachings better.

This *Sutta* provides a revealing account of the Buddha's Awakening. It is so profound that even the Buddha hesitated, questioning whether he should actually teach it. He realized the enormity of imparting such a teaching to people. Even in the Buddha's time, the idea that suffering could completely cease—*Nirodha*—was unimaginable, a dimension where one can be entirely free from being dragged into pain, misery, and all the aspects of suffering. This state is called '*Ariya*,' meaning beyond humans, something superhuman. '*Pariyasana*' means quest, a drive to seek an experience beyond human imagination. Perhaps even celestial beings like *Devas* find it challenging to conceive that such states exist. Therefore, I saw this as a valuable opportunity to share my insights.

Initially, I had reservations about whether I could articulate my explanation clearly or if there were any shortcomings in my presentation. However, it turned out to be a productive session, albeit a bit longer than some might have preferred, given how much I had to share.

The reason I chose that *Sutta* is because it has a special connection with me. In 2017, I went to Nepal to be with my mother in her final days. She was a great inspiration for my Dhamma practice, and I wanted to offer her words of consolation based on the practical aspects of the Buddha's teachings. While searching for a suitable *Sutta*, I decided on this one to share with her, hoping it would uplift her mind. I don't know for sure, but I felt it was a fitting *Sutta* for that occasion.

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattḥī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

“Then, when it was morning, the Blessed One dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Sāvattḥī for alms. Then a number of bhikkhus went to the venerable Ānanda and said to him: “Friend Ānanda, it is long since we heard a talk on the Dhamma from the Blessed One's own lips. It would be good if we could get to hear such a talk, friend Ānanda.”—“Then let the venerable ones go to the brahmin Rammaka's hermitage. Perhaps you will get to hear a

talk on the Dhamma from the Blessed One's own lips."—"Yes, friend," they replied."

Then, when the Blessed One had wandered for alms in Sāvattthī and had returned from his almsround, after his meal he addressed the venerable Ānanda: "Ānanda, let us go to the Eastern Park, to the Palace of Migāra's Mother, for the day's abiding."—"Yes, venerable sir," the venerable Ānanda" replied. Then the Blessed One went with the venerable Ānanda to the Eastern Park, the Palace of Migāra's Mother, for the day's abiding.

Then, when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from meditation and addressed the venerable Ānanda: "Ānanda, let us go to the Eastern Bathing Place to bathe."—"Yes, venerable sir," the venerable Ānanda replied. Then the Blessed One went with the venerable Ānanda to the Eastern Bathing Place to bathe. When he was finished, he came up out of the water and stood in one robe drying his limbs. Then the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, the brahmin Rammaka's hermitage is nearby. That hermitage is agreeable and delightful. Venerable sir, it would be good if the Blessed One went there out of compassion." The Blessed One consented in silence.

So, Ananda was trying to facilitate a productive Dhamma session, hoping that it would benefit many. This shows that the Buddha didn't always go out to teach, and sometimes people missed his live sermons in person. Perhaps the Buddha was observing the world; he used to spend quite some time in seclusion, reflecting on his own experiences and exploring what help beings might need.

If it's alright, I might skip some points. Then the Buddha went to Ramaka's hermitage, and one thing that the Buddha profoundly respected was the reverence for the Dhamma, which was the one thing he held in highest regard throughout the universe.

Even when the Buddha—the originator and expounder of the Dhamma—was present, he didn't interrupt people when they were discussing the Dhamma. Instead, he gave them the opportunity to explore the Dhamma for themselves and didn't intervene. He patiently waited for the entire hour or two, whatever time was needed, for that discussion to finish, even with his aching back,

because the Dhamma is so important and profound. The Buddha had immense respect for the Dhamma.

Then, when the discussion was finished, the Buddha entered, after knocking the door, and asked them,

“Bhikkhus, for what discussion are you sitting together here now? And what was your discussion that was interrupted?”

“Venerable sir, our discussion on the Dhamma that was interrupted was about the Blessed One himself. Then the Blessed One arrived.”

“Good, bhikkhus. It is fitting for you clansmen who have gone forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness to sit together to discuss the Dhamma. When you gather together, bhikkhus, you should do either of two things: hold discussion on the Dhamma or maintain noble silence.

So, this is something that I believe applies not only to monastics but also to us as householders. Whenever the topic of Dhamma is being discussed, we should ensure that we listen attentively and try to minimize interruptions. We can use that time to reflect on our own experiences. I have experimented extensively with the nature of Dhamma, and what I have found is that even if I know very little about Dhamma, simply speaking or hearing a few words can suddenly deepen my understanding and reveal the profound meanings of Dhamma itself.

Objects like mountains have many dimensions. When we observe them from different angles, we perceive various images. Similarly, Dhamma is multifaceted. Exploring Dhamma from one perspective gives us good insights, and approaching it from another angle can provide a different perspective. These insights can click and unlock some very deep points. The Buddha has mentioned this in some *Suttas* as well: the more we contemplate and discuss Dhamma, the more we become imbued with its essence.

This point is quite significant, which is why I emphasized it. Then the Buddha discusses the two types of quests. It's not an ordinary search, is it? This is a quest. As human beings, we may have an ultimate quest to fulfill. The quest for enlightenment is not uncommon among humans. People with otherworldly aspirations may have goals like exploring and settling on other planets, discovering exoplanets, or

building an interstellar civilization. These are all quests that humans pursue. The question is, how far are we willing to go? Are we content with the quest for our daily sustenance, even just a noonday meal? That might be the quest for those struggling with it. However, many are not satisfied with what they have.

In the case of the Buddha, he was not content with all the achievements of the world. He was seeking something truly fundamental, something radically transformative. This is what the Buddha's quest is all about: finding the perpetual solution to the suffering of sentient beings.

The Buddha explains that there are two types of quests: the Noble quest and the Ignoble quest.

What is the Noble quest? Here, someone who is subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth. Someone who is subject to aging seeks what is also subject to aging. Someone who is subject to sickness seeks what is also subject to sickness. Someone who is subject to death seeks what is subject to death. Someone who is subject to sorrow seeks what is also subject to sorrow. Someone who is subject to defilement seeks what is subject to defilement.

So, basically, people are not moving beyond or outside the loop of these never-ending mini or micro quests that will never satisfy them permanently. It's like reaching for something that we can never truly grasp; we inevitably return to the starting point. Whatever we do, we end up back at square one. He saw the futility of worldly pursuits and the entanglements we create for ourselves in them.

For example, we seek happiness through acquiring possessions or pursuing pleasures such as a satisfying meal. However, in the end, all these achievements lead to sorrow and lamentation because they do not transcend the realm of conditioned existence. They are overshadowed by an overarching dimension where all these quests ultimately fail. So, no matter what we pursue in terms of material acquisitions or aspirations, we have not moved beyond mere accumulation and conceptualizations. We fail to address the root cause: we seek happiness in things that are also sources of suffering. The Buddha says,

“And what may be said to be subject to birth? Wife and children are subject to birth, men and women slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses, and mares, gold and silver are subject to birth. These acquisitions are subject to birth; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them, and utterly committed to them, being himself subject to birth, seeks what it also subject to birth.

So, the key term here is 'acquisition.' In Pali, this is called '*Upadhi*,' and it's a fundamental term directly linked to the Noble quest. What constitutes an acquisition? There is a wide range: in its most basic form, it could be acquiring property, people, a family, or physical beauty. We might enhance our body's appearance or achieve mental calmness, enjoying these states for a while. All of these are acquisitions. Some acquisitions are obvious and material, while others are more subtle. However, they are all impermanent and subject to destruction. The Buddha cautioned that there is a danger in holding onto acquisitions that seem enduring, as we can become ensnared by them. It is wiser to relinquish all acquisitions.

For instance, some of his teachers like Alara Kalama had attained states such as the base of nothingness or neither perception nor non-Perception, which they held onto as acquisitions. These were some of the subtlest acquisitions they could not release—letting go was considered impossible at that time.

This is why the term '*Upadhi*' holds fundamental importance in the *Suttas*. It is not merely an academic concept; it is meant for direct experience. Through practice, we directly see how various experiences clutter our minds—they all constitute forms of acquisitions. Being free from them creates space, freedom, and the bliss of renunciation.

Beyond material possessions, the mind accumulates influences through the stages of *Jhanas* and *Arupas*—these are progressively refined acquisitions that we need to utilize and then transcend. This is the essence of the Noble Eightfold Path: not to discard them outright, but to skillfully utilize them without becoming identified or attached to them. Be independent, be free from them, and use them as tools for liberation. This is the path that Buddha elucidated.

Then, the goal is understanding how one can be liberated from the dangers of birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. I'll skip some parts of the *Sutta* that delve into these aspects.

As mentioned earlier, I'll briefly touch upon some notes I've prepared. The Buddha advises abandoning all acquisitions, but a simple question arises: after letting go of these acquisitions that lead to suffering and lamentation, what comes next? What ensures our liberation from suffering? Naturally, questions like these arose, prompting the Buddha to provide answers.

So, the practice of the Dhamma is not only about identifying the problem; it's also about showing the way to reach the solution. This is encapsulated in the template of the Four Noble Truths: What is suffering? What is its cause? What does the end of suffering look like? It gives a framework and then directs, "Okay, here's the path to follow, a new approach to get there." This framework addresses questions from skeptics, as anyone naturally can ask such questions. We may all recognize the problem, but then what?

Next, the Buddha proceeds to present the solution. Yes, the Buddha then explains,

“And what is the noble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to ageing, having understood the danger in what is subject to ageing, he seeks the unageing supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to sickness, having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, he seeks the unailing supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, he seeks the deathless supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, he seeks the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to defilement, he seeks the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. This is the noble search.

Just one term: *Nibbāna*—an experience encompassing many qualities. It is un-aging, un-ailing, free from death, free from defilement, and free from sorrow and lamentation—all the experiences we naturally seek to transcend. That's what *Nibbāna* represents.

What people may not realize is that our existence, our experiences, are inherently limited. We live our lives believing we are free, in terms of our will and choices, thinking we can do anything. But such assumptions might be presumptuous. It would be unwise to assume complete freedom because we are bound by the constituents of our experience, the five aggregates. These aggregates encompass our experiences and are naturally prone to defilement. In reality, we have no control over these aggregates.

So, if we cannot find assurance from these five aggregates, how can we claim to be truly free? This is the Buddha's message: whatever we are, we inherit these conditions, and they do not obey us. We cannot stop aging, halt the body's decay, or control thoughts and feelings according to our will. These experiences bind us inherently because we lack control over them, unable to make them occur as we wish.

Thus, what the Buddha teaches is that while we live our lives, we are not truly free from these experiences. We lack the freedom to be liberated from them. They lead us in various directions, but we cannot exert our will toward any of these outcomes. The Buddha introduces the existence of a dimension, an experience, where we can be liberated from these constraints, where we can find happiness without being subject to their influence. Experiencing this state is what *Nibbāna* signifies, although it has not yet been fully explained. I will attempt to elaborate on this further.

Next, I will explore some of the experiences the Buddha underwent in his early days after renouncing household life, when he attained profound insights from the most esteemed teachers of his time. Then he says,

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth; being myself subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought what was also subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow,

and defilement. Then I considered thus: 'Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek what is also subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement?'

So, this is the fundamental question he asked. People often do not go beyond this realm of bondage. Whatever they seek ultimately leads to that bondage. So, he sought what is beyond that. Then he says,

Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. Suppose that, being myself subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I seek the unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna.'

So, what is *Nibbāna*? It might sound like something we can never have enough of—all those "happily ever after" things. People often believe that acquiring things will bring them happiness, but that encompasses all the experiences in the world, doesn't it?

Therefore, *Nibbāna* is something we need to go beyond the universe, without needing to escape from wherever we are. But we must let go of all those constructs of the mind. What is that experience where there is no form? And there are no other worldly experiences either; we let go of any concept of them. So, what we are left with is nothing to depend on or take refuge in.

Some people fear this emptiness. Others might be apprehensive, thinking, "Do we really want to lose all experiences? Maybe I can let go of houses or friends, but there's something I must keep." However, the Buddha advises, "Don't hold on to anything. Let everything go." That is the essence—the dimension of there being nothing. It's complete emptiness. This concept may seem unfamiliar, but experiencing it firsthand is crucial because reading the *Suttas* without practical experience can be confusing. Not needing to rely on anything—that's the state.

If I hadn't had practical experiences of what the Buddha was teaching, it might have been quite confusing, and I might have struggled to digest his teachings. Hence, we need assurance that

letting go of even joy, the supreme happiness of *Jhanas*, the refined happiness of infinite space, infinite consciousness and so on—even though they are blissful—is essential. But why let them go? What puzzles people is what remains after abandoning all that. That state is called the Unconditioned, where beyond all these states lies an experience of voidness, emptiness—a state devoid of contact with all mental objects. We are temporarily freed from all experiences, in a state of disassociation called Cessation of perception, sensations, feelings—all experiences cease. If we can remain in that state a bit longer, become familiar with it, we may find the greatest relief ever in that brief gap when awareness itself also disappears.

I cannot predict how long that state will last, but one might feel a deep, profound sleep or the deepest sleep ever experienced—a pristine happiness free from all fear and anxiety, surpassing even the bliss of *Jhanas* or *Arupas*. However, I must emphasize that I am only someone who has had brief glimpses of these experiences. Some experiences remain unconfirmed. I haven't fully completed the path. All I can say is that these moments felt incredibly peaceful and calm, where having no experience itself became a bliss.

The Buddha teaches that diving directly into the dimension of *Nibbāna* brings the highest bliss, supreme security from all bondages. From my limited experiences, it truly felt profound; the experiences of cessation are worth pursuing, even in a transient capacity.

This is the noble quest the Buddha encourages us to follow: be at ease, let go of all experiences we have encountered and utilized. Rest assured, there is an even greater happiness beyond. That's all I wish to convey. Experiencing the relief of losing all experiences brings a fearless, bliss-less experience—assuming we are also disenchanted with all forms of bliss. Whether this experience exists or not, it surpasses all *Jhanas* in that it offers the greatest relief. That's all I can say. Sorry for veering off into these unconventional thoughts. I hope it's useful as a reference. I'll revisit the *Sutta* again.

“Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

So, this actually contradicts some of the stories in India and Nepal that the Buddha escaped home, left his young son and his wife in the middle of the night, not letting anybody know. This *Sutta* says he told everybody, 'I am done with this life; I'm abandoning it. Look, my father and mother, everybody, I've had enough with this life here.' But good stories like above are prevalent in Nepal and India, and such story making do happen a lot.

Having gone forth, bhikkhus, in search of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and said to him: 'Friend Kālāma, I want to lead the holy life in this Dhamma and Discipline.' Āḷāra Kālāma replied: 'The venerable one may stay here. This Dhamma is such that a wise man can soon enter upon and abide in it, realising for himself through direct knowledge his own teacher's doctrine.' I soon quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting and rehearsal of his teaching went, I could speak with knowledge and assurance, and I claimed, 'I know and see'—and there were others who did likewise.

So, this is talking about traditional way of being trained in a teacher's teaching through all these sorts of rituals or what is called 'Sanskara' in Sanskrit, or we can call it in some traditions. But he was after a direct experience.

"I considered: 'It is not through mere faith alone that Āḷāra Kālāma declares: "By realising for myself with direct knowledge, I enter upon and abide in this Dhamma." Certainly, Āḷāra Kālāma abides knowing and seeing this Dhamma.' Then I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and asked him: 'Friend Kālāma, in what way do you declare that by realising for yourself with direct knowledge you enter upon and abide in this Dhamma?' In reply he declared the base of nothingness.

So, this is fundamentally different. Direct experience is completely distinct from reading just the *Suttas*; experiencing them is like comparing apples and oranges. If we have a meditative experience, we find it deeply satisfying. When we revisit the *Suttas* afterward, they provide us with rich insights, allowing us to delve deeper.

Now, the focus is on direct experience. One can grow weary of all these kinds of studies and mere recitations. The desire is to understand the core, to know that experience. Thus, the emphasis is on experiencing it firsthand.

“I considered: ‘Not only Ālāra Kālāma has faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I too have faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Suppose I endeavour to realise the Dhamma that Ālāra Kālāma declares he enters upon and abides in by realising for himself with direct knowledge?’

So, faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—these are the fundamental qualities essential for succeeding in meditation and deepening one's experiences. I believe the element that are missing here are relinquishment and relaxation. Yes, these are key Dhamma principles that the Buddha has imparted to us, which were never tried before his time. It involves those additional elements of letting go and allowing things to be, cultivating fearlessness. It's about stilling the formations, relaxing, allowing things to arise and settle naturally, without interference or intervention in the process, letting them unfold on their own. Attention is crucial here; at the peak of perceptions, the last bit of attention is released.

During our meditation practice, we observe many such phenomena. I would distinguish between Dhamma and *Dhammaa*. Dhamma refers to the teachings, while *Dhammaa* denotes a mind object or phenomenon. Thus, what the Buddha is emphasizing is to let those phenomena be, to refrain from interference and participation, to simply observe and step back. This was the element lacking in Alara Kalama's teaching. Alara Kalama remained attached to the base of nothingness, considering it an achievement (*Upadhi*) and dwelling in it, without realizing the need to step back, to let things be, and to look beyond. This aspect is highlighted by the Buddha later on.

I'm unsure of the exact method Alara Kalama used to attain the base of nothingness, but somehow, he managed to achieve it. Some teachers, like Thích Nhất Hạnh, speculated that *Jhanas* were not teachings of the Buddha, dismissing even the base of nothingness as

unhelpful on the path to *Nibbāna*. There is an assumption by such teachers, focusing solely on mindfulness aspects, that the Buddha also discarded *Jhanas*. On the other hand, teachers like Bodhipaksa argue that the immaterial realms such as the base of nothingness can be entered without experiencing *Jhanas*, suggesting that *Jhanas* are a unique practice introduced by the Buddha. I believe Bodhipaksa⁶¹ is correct, as it is clearly stated in *Anguttara Nikaya 10.42* that the Buddha attained Awakening through *Jhana*.

Later Vedic teachings influenced texts like the *Visuddhimagga*⁶², which presented one-pointed versions of *Jhanas* through practices like *Kasina*. It's possible that the Buddha experimented with some one-pointed methods to swiftly attain the base of nothingness, similar to those practiced by Alara Kalama. A scholarly text detailing how the Buddha adapted a conventional practice leading to the experience of the base of nothingness without rejecting it completely, is detailed by Alexander Wynne in (Wynne, 2009). Let me read further:

"I soon quickly entered upon and abided in that Dhamma by realising for myself with direct knowledge. Then I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and asked him: 'Friend Kālāma, is it in this way that you declare that you enter upon and abide in this Dhamma by realising for yourself with direct knowledge?'—'That is the way, friend.'—'It is in this way, friend, that I also enter upon and abide in this Dhamma by realising for myself with direct knowledge.

So, he entered and abided there, yes, he stayed in that experience—that's it. That's where Alara Kalama stopped. He did not see what is beyond that—perhaps utterly absorbed. He believed that was the ultimate experience, saying, "I have gone as far as I can; this is where I stop. Anything beyond, he thought, 'It might disrupt my perceptions, my beliefs at that time.'" Maybe he clung to some belief that there is an ultimate experience, something like unification with *Brahman*. Such beliefs might have prevented him from going further,

⁶¹ <https://www.wildmind.org/blogs/on-practice/the-buddhas-radical-path-of-jhana>

⁶² <https://puredhamma.net/historical-background/buddhaghosas-visuddhimagga-a-focused-analysis/>

but he halted and remained in nothingness, declaring, 'I will stay here permanently, that's it.'

So, this is what Alara Kalama said.

It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us that we have such a venerable one for our companion in the holy life. So, the Dhamma that I declare I enter upon and abide in by realising for myself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that you enter upon and abide in by realising for yourself with direct knowledge. And the Dhamma that you enter upon and abide in by realising for yourself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that I declare I enter upon and abide in by realising for myself with direct knowledge. So you know the Dhamma that I know and I know the Dhamma that you know. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come, friend, let us now lead this community together.'

So that's it. The Buddha managed to replicate his experience very quickly and then was offered to co-teach with him. Then the Buddha says,

"Thus, Āḷāra Kālāma, my teacher, placed me, his pupil, on an equal footing with himself and awarded me the highest honour. But it occurred to me: 'This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna, but only to reappearance in the base of nothingness. Not being satisfied with that Dhamma, disappointed with it, I left.'

So, this is a very subtle point that many people miss—disenchantment, dispassion, cessation experienced after seeing all *Jhanas*. These are very specific experiences that many practitioners fail to understand. Even some of the Buddhist teachers think that Buddha did not teach *Jhana*. I was reading some talks or books by Thich Nhat Hanh. He believes that pure mindfulness is what Buddha taught, and that all his *Jhanas* and *Arupas* were smuggled from other traditions and inserted into Buddha's teachings. However, there are fundamental misunderstandings that he couldn't abandon.

The Buddha did teach *Jhanas* and *Arupas*, but not as end experiences themselves; rather, as tools, as means to elevate our minds, to free ourselves from coarser mental acquisitions. By

entering the realm of nothingness, we let go of the perception of form, of infinite space, and infinite consciousness. This is a step towards freedom from acquisitions. The Buddha acknowledged this element, but what is missing is our tendency to become attached to these experiences and potentially get absorbed in them.

The Buddha taught that there is something beyond these experiences, which is why his quest did not end at the base of nothingness. The next step in the Buddhist quest is, 'I'm not satisfied with being stuck at the base of nothingness. There is something beyond this experience,' and that element is disenchantment. Disenchantment means losing interest, which manifests in our behavior as we progress on our path. We may lose interest in going out for drinks, engaging in idle chatter, or socializing. This change involves distancing ourselves and becoming more independent, detached from the usual sensual experiences that used to entice us. We begin to see patterns of repetition and ask ourselves, 'What's the point of indulging in this?' We've had enough. This maturing experience leads to the arising of the next stage, dispassion, and ultimately to cessation.

While other teachers were inclined towards accumulating, acquiring, gaining, the Buddha emphasized giving up, relinquishing. This leads to a lightness and freedom that result in peace and direct knowledge.

Furthermore, the Buddha set a high standard. He said, 'I'm not seeking bliss. I'm not seeking tranquility. I'm not seeking these *Arupas*, these supreme kinds of experiences, because experiencing them still involves a condition: 'I'. Experiencing these indicates that there is something beyond them.' This is what the Buddha realized from his own intuition.

Then the Buddha approached another teacher, Uddaka Ramaputta, who was teaching the base of neither perception nor non-perception at that time. It's unclear whether Uddaka Ramaputta had experienced this himself or was teaching based on his father's instructions. He kept the recipe and taught it to others. The Buddha followed the same pattern: 'I have followed rituals and traditions. I have recited all texts and performed all rituals. Now, tell me the essence. How do I attain the Base of Neither Perception-nor Non-

perception?' Like he did with Alara Kalama, the Buddha quickly mastered the recipe to attain this state.

So then, the Buddha underwent a similar experience. He tested and realized that the Base of neither perception nor non-perception was the most sublime experience anyone could undergo. However, he discerned that despite experiencing this state, there still remained subtle perceptions. Even though a significant amount of perception had been relinquished, these subtle perceptions were enough to give rise to the world. At that time, the *Sadhus* (ascetics) were unable to let go of perception completely because they believed that doing so would amount to the annihilation of the self.

They were in a dilemma⁶³ if they remained in full perception, they would endure feelings of sorrow, bodily pain, and mental anguish. Yet, if they dwelled in neither perception nor non-perception, they could let go of these pains most of the time, except for the lingering subtle perceptions they were unwilling to abandon completely. Thus, they declared that abiding in the base of neither perception nor non-perception was the most sublime happiness attainable, believing it to be the boundary of the universe.

However, the Buddha saw that perception itself was something acquired, indicating that he was not free from acquisitions. He saw that even these subtle remnants of acquisition affected the total peace of mind. What the Buddha emphasized was that we can experience bases of equanimity where equanimity is predominant. Even within these states of equanimity, there is the potential for attachment to that equanimity. The highest equanimity one can experience is in the base of nothingness.

In the base of neither perception nor non-perception, there still exists the perception of experiencing equanimity, albeit with less identification. The crucial element that these two teachers could not see was this sense of identification. They were very close to *Nibbāna*, yet there was a barrier they could not transcend. They did not recognize that there was a small opening through which the mind needed to be perfectly still to catch a glimpse of the Unconditioned.

⁶³ Majjhima Nikaya 127: Pañcattaya Sutta

The experience that the Buddha had earlier indicated that there were still lingering perceptions troubling him like shadows, making him realize that these were still conditioned. Perceiving implies the presence of a 'self,' as there is an experience and an experiencer. This realization spurred his quest to let go of anything, no matter how subtle or sublime. Dissatisfied with the lingering perceptions, he continued his search.

Skipping over the six years of struggles practicing under various austere beliefs, the Buddha endured extreme conditions, minimal food, and experimented with severe hardships and pain. He adhered to all prevailing beliefs of that time. Even today, traces of these practices persist in current practices, with the expectation that such hardships will lead to awakening.

Buddha, still in search of what is wholesome and seeking the Supreme Sublime peace, journeyed through the Magadhan country in stages until he eventually arrived at Uruvela in Senanigama. There, he found an agreeable piece of land—a delightful grove with a clear, flowing river, pleasant, smooth banks, and a nearby village suitable for a recluse. He considered this place suitable for his striving, as he was intent on pursuing ascetic practices.

However, he eventually realized that subjecting his body to extreme asceticism was unhelpful. These practices led him towards extreme experiences of non-existence without any insight. The Buddha discarded such practices, realizing that aversion towards existence was also a form of passion and reaction.

There are two types of people: a) those who want to prolong the experience of existence, maintain it, and even grow it, and b) those who want to completely obliterate it, to escape entirely. Both types of experiences manifest strong craving and are unhelpful. This is where the middle way comes into play. We need to strive in a balanced way, supported by a healthy body and mind. The Buddha discovered that the body and mind are interrelated, and a healthy body supports a healthy mind. Understanding this dependence of body and mind is crucial on the Buddha's path.

With this understanding, he found a path that avoids both extremes. We can make use of things we ultimately want to abandon, but we should use them until we reach a specific point—don't

abandon them prematurely. Some people are very attached to maintaining the purity of the body and perform rituals to purify the mind. Many follow extreme forms of vegetarianism or veganism, believing such a lifestyle purifies the mind. However, purification of the mind comes from mindfulness and wholesome actions, not from specific types of food. We use essentials without clinging to superstitions; once we make progress, we can abandon them altogether. The Buddha's middle path is a path of balance that avoids both luxury and asceticism.

Now, moving on to the analogy I was trying to find: consider a spacecraft on a space mission exploring other planets. It starts with a huge, massive rocket carrying ample fuel. As it journeys through empty space, it progressively becomes lighter by shedding fuel tanks in different stages. This parallels the experience of *Nibbāna*; once we have used the fuel, it has served its purpose. It's best to let it go, allowing us to be lighter and progress on our path. Ultimately, the state of *Nibbāna* is letting go of all acquisitions and utilities we have used, allowing them to be released.



Figure 11: Misconceptions about the experience of emptiness as a loss of support from solid objects can be a persistent distraction during sitting practices.

In the emptiness of space, there is no need to worry about falling off precipices or into chasms—there is no gravity pulling us anywhere. This absence of gravitational pull is akin to the sublime peace of *Nibbāna*. That's why I draw this connection with space

exploration. In empty space, without gravitational pull, there is no need for support from Earth or any surface—things simply exist. *Nibbāna* is akin to that state.

Let me find another very good *Sutta*, this one from the *Udana*, called *Parinibbana* 4.

The Buddha recounts that he observed a monk deeply engaged in practice. The monk had let go of all things, allowing the Buddha to explore his mind to see if it was truly free from all dimensions. The Buddha observed that the monk had completely let go, transcending all experiences. In a deeply personal expression of joy, the Buddha said,

"For the supported, there is instability; but for the unsupported, there is no instability."

So, what do "supported" and "unsupported" mean? "Supported" refers to anything we depend on or lean towards. When we rely on an experience, it continues, creating instability because we constantly crave happiness or pleasure. However, for the "unsupported," there is no instability⁶⁴. If our experience is not dependent on seeking happiness or pleasure but arises naturally from abandonment, that is independent happiness.

Thus, if we have let go of that dependency, if we have let go of everything, then there is no need for support.

"When there is no instability, there is serenity. When there is serenity, there is no inclination."

Yes, letting go allows stabilization to occur—there is no "we" in that. But for the sake of language, it's okay to say we are experiencing it. As we let go of all those objects, we progressively become more stable, eventually reaching a state of complete equilibrium—a very refined state where no support is needed. Until then, a finer adjustment is necessary so that serenity involves letting go of even minor inclinations. When there is no inclination, there is no coming and going. Thus, once we have released even the slightest movement

⁶⁴ *Udana* 8.4: *Parinibbana*

of the mind—mental phenomena or mind objects—our tendency towards those objects diminishes because we're not feeding them with attention, thereby ending their arising and passing away. As I mentioned, these Dhamma objects are dependent and thus fade away.

When there is no coming and going, there is no arising.

Therefore, those Dhamma objects will subside because we are not feeding our inclinations towards them; we are not attracted or repelled by them; we are simply maintaining stillness. Consequently, the arising and ceasing also cease.

When there is no arising and ceasing, there is no "here" or "there," nor anything in between.

This marks the culmination of something—a very fundamental experience in the Dhamma. This is the state of *Nibbāna*. It's not imaginary; this is the simplest definition of *Nibbāna*. By not inclining our minds towards anything, we prevent the objects of meditation (*Anapana*) from arising. They naturally subside. When they cease subsiding, the arising and ceasing also subside. As all wave-like oscillations and ripples fade away, conceptualization ceases. This is the state of *Nibbāna*...

One aspect of *Nibbāna*, the state of *Nibbāna* that is experienced, also called *Nispapancā*⁶⁵, is that all forward-going concepts, all wandering explorations, come to a halt. *Nispapancā* signifies that state of isolation from all the types of suffering, all the experiences to which we are bound, also what the Buddha described as whirlpools. Then, by remaining in a state of non-proliferation, of staying where we are without seeking externalities, we attain a steady state. We simply abide without taking any action. This brings about a complete cessation of the proliferation and the arising of all mental acquisitions. These are all contingent on our attitudes, our explorations. We even need to relinquish the inclination to explore.

Now, returning to the *Sutta*. The Buddha recounts the days nearing his Awakening when he found a tranquil place on the banks

⁶⁵ Samyutta Nikaya 43.14: The Taintless

of the river Niranjara, near a pleasant village. Unlike before, he was not seeking distance from the villagers. Previously, he had withdrawn from society, practicing extreme asceticism. He gained insight into the need for balance in life—to maintain a healthy body and a healthy mind. This is crucially important. I always tell anyone I meet, "Practice while you still can." Yes, for practicing this Dhamma, we need a healthy mind and a healthy body. So don't delay this practice until you're 80, when your grandchildren have settled down and have their own families. Start practicing as soon as possible. Don't wait until your body is no longer able to support you. The Buddha realized that a healthy body and mind are necessary to sustain this practice. This practice involves a middle path; we do not abandon all comforts and facilities—we still need them. So, that's the middle part. I recall Delson Armstrong saying, "We use a thorn to remove a thorn causing pain in our body. Once that purpose is served, both can be discarded."

I will now summarize the key points from the *Sutta*. So far, I have covered quite a number of points. What I also wanted to emphasize is how the Buddha's Awakening can be distilled into two breakthroughs. In other words, the essential lesson of this *Sutta* ties the Buddha's Awakening to two truths: the truth of specific conditionality and the state of relinquishing all acquisitions—and the truth of the cessation of all formations and the abandonment of craving; *Nibbāna*. These are the two profoundly deep experiences that the Buddha entered into after emerging from the Cessation of perception and feeling—*Nirodha*. On this path beyond both perception and non-perception lies the phase of disenchantment. When due to the repeated experience, including *Arupas*, we've had enough with that. That will naturally lead us to dispassion, and having that, developing sufficient dispassion will naturally lead to Cessation.

Therefore, we don't need to anticipate Cessation; it occurs naturally when we are sufficiently dispassionate. So even if a person is in the first or second *Jhana*—it doesn't matter. I don't view Cessation as a grand attainment or a supreme experience. I simply sit. When I sit and have a very deep sitting, I lose awareness. Later, I realize that I had moments of blankness, and then understand that was a cessation. Sometimes, it might occur in the second *Jhana*,

maybe in the Fourth, or in the base of infinite space. Thus, I see that these sorts of things can occur whenever we are sufficiently dispassionate. These experiences need to be approached lightly; otherwise, excitement will invade the mind. Once we understand their nature, we should frequently use these experiences to refine our practice, experiencing them and letting them naturally occur. We should develop a 'been there, done that' attitude, and these experiences will manifest naturally. So, it feels like whenever it happens, it happens. I don't know when it will happen, and I have experienced it many times. It might be in the first few minutes, or after half an hour—it just happens.

For some reason, when I started practicing, I went through all these *Jhanas* and *Arupa* stages, and gradually, I became more and more dispassionate about them. Because it's all the same, isn't it? Once we have experienced something, we go there and experience it again. After some time, it's the same thing. We need to develop an attitude where we go there not to bliss out but to see what's there. This is what leads to disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation. These steps are key. However, people often gloss over them too quickly. They don't really grasp what disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation entail. They might say, "Okay, so Buddha discarded neither perception, but look, what did he do again? He's using neither perception again in *Pali Suttas*." "Why is he going through nothingness again?" People miss this point. What is disenchantment? What is dispassion? What is cessation? They generalize it, but these are very specific experiences.

So, that is actually quite a good recipe that I wanted to highlight here. One thing I can add is that when the Buddha was going through the process of nothingness and neither perception nor non-perception in the early days, there was still identification with the experiences. What the Buddha is pointing to is the relinquishment of this identification with those experiences.

Ven. Dhammagavesi: Yeah, and because there's a difference in the impersonality of these things, that leads to dispassion, disenchantment, and cessation. So, that's a very good point. Both states are similar, but this state has a different flavor because of the relinquishment.

Speaker: Yeah, that's exactly it. That's the key element. There was no dispassion, no relinquishment, and no stilling. I mean, I wouldn't say that 'stilling' is unique to the Buddha's teachings, but the combination of relaxation, observation, and the relinquishment of identification is specific. There's a specific term called '*Atamyata*,' or non-identification.

And that is a key point. If we get identified with all these experiences, then the *Sankhara*, the mental formations, of being stuck in that state can lead us to much higher realms where we are stuck with experiences in that realm. If we don't know how to get in and out, we can get stuck. Do we want to get stuck in that realm? Probably not. We don't want to be stuck in those states—however blissful they may be. The Buddha was really after the most ultimate quest: letting go of everything; there's nothing beyond it.

Ven. Dhammagavesi: But the Buddha had to work diligently over many lifetimes to achieve this. It wasn't accomplished in just one lifetime; he dedicated himself across numerous lifetimes to reach this point. Now, we benefit from having a ready-made formula. We don't need to reinvent it; we have it ready for us. That's the advantage of having the Buddha's teachings. I wanted to emphasize this point.

Speaker: Yeah, the Buddha has provided us with guidance. We find ourselves in these conditioned states, and the Buddha has shown us the path to reach beyond them. This is the state of *Nibbāna*, where all these states are still conditioned. We are conditioned by them, and we have this recipe to achieve perfect alignment or disentanglement. That's the state of *Nibbāna*—where we don't identify with any of these aspects; they are simply experiences. Utilizing these experiences to achieve alignment is what I wanted to illustrate. I was searching for practical examples to explain that all these movements of mind we observe are conditioned. Only when we know how to align, can we unlock complete convergence or alignment with reality. Practice unravels itself to complete alignment of experiences, and that's when we begin to understand reality. So, in contrast to a normal Rubik's cube example, the practice of mind needs just the opposite—letting go of all efforts leads to complete alignment.

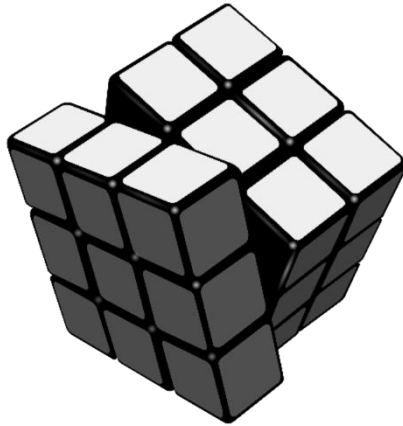


Figure 12: There is a proper process for achieving complete alignment of all facets. Similarly, the mind can attain a state of perfection through practice.

Okay, I think that's clearer now. Then the Buddha discussed these two elements: specific conditionality or dependent origination, and the state of *Nibbāna*. One thing I explored in dependent origination is called 'dependent simultaneous arising.' So, all these phenomena are present before us. I see colors, I hear all these experiences; they arise simultaneously. These experiences are interconnected; they do not follow separate times or spatial domains.

Earlier, what I noted is termed specific conditionality. The Buddha states, "This being, this comes to be. With the arising of this, this arises. With the cessation of this, this ceases. This not being, this does not come to be." With the cessation of this, diseases cease.

In many translations, they use 'this' and 'that,' but actually, it means 'this' and 'this.' Dependent origination transcends the concepts of space and time, here and there, now and then; it goes beyond them. This state arises when we release all notions of 'this' and 'that,' here and there, leading us to the Unconditioned state. Awakening to dependent origination is the realization that even in a single moment, one awakens to a dimension where there is no space, no time, nothing—it's the state of emptiness. That is the Unconditioned state—*Nibbāna*.

Yeah, and I think that covers most of the *Sutta*. Questions may arise, 'How are we going to tread that path?' The Buddha guides us to experience, observe, and let go of all these old mental acquisitions.

We reflect on them, step back, and see them for what they are—conditioned. Then, through reflection, observation, and letting go, we arrive at the Unconditioned state. Yeah, I hope... I don't think I need to read the entire *Sutta*. In the interest of time, I concluded here. This is the sharing of merits we do at the end when engaged in any Dhamma work together:

*May Suffering ones be suffering free
and the fear-struck, fearless be,
May the grieving shed all grief,
and may all beings find relief.
May all beings share this merit
that we have thus acquired,
for the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.
May beings inhabiting Space and Earth,
Devas and Nāgas of mighty power,
share in this merit of ours.
May they long protect the Buddha's Dispensation.
Sādhu, Sādhu, Sādhu.*

Chapter 12

Story of My Meditative Journey

*"Straight ahead, your majesty,
by the foothills of the Himalayas,
is a country consummate
in energy & wealth,
inhabited by Kosalans:
Solar by clan,
Sakyans by birth.
From that lineage I have gone forth,
but not in search of sensual pleasures.
Seeing the danger in sensual pleasures
— and renunciation as rest —
I go to strive.
That's where my heart delights."*

[Suttanipata 3.1: The Going Forth]

On the foothills of the Himalayas, in the sacred garden of Lumbini, is the birthplace of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. Born as a Shakya, I feel privileged to share the affinity and reverence for the Buddha that my family has upheld. I was temporarily ordained as a novice monk at the age of ten. This took place in a monastery in Lumbini, along with my nine cousins from our large family. The memories of those days always bring me inner joy and peace. One way I bring the feeling of loving-kindness into my daily practice is by remembering those ten days I spent in the Lumbini garden, practicing the eight precepts, listening to Dhamma sermons, and generally spending the days in peace, calm, and tranquility. The seeds of Buddha Dhamma were planted in me during those days.

From then on, until 2013, I was a typical young man, too busy trying to figure out what to do and seeking the best out of my life and career. I went to study engineering exploring radio waves and telecommunications in the university. From 1997 to 2008, I focused on developing my academic achievements and research skills,

earning another postgraduate qualification and a PhD in radio technologies from the University of Sussex.

My life took a major turn in 2013, allowing me some time and space to explore the Dhamma. After a few years of intense technology consulting work with organizations like Ofcom, Network Rail, and Virgin Media, it seemed that nature was guiding me to switch to the space industry. I used to live in Worthing by the sea, but I had to drive around three hours every day for work at a Surrey-based company. I did this for almost two years. During that period, I had the perfect opportunity to listen to all the Pali *Suttas* while driving. I listened to MP3 audios made by Venerable Dhammabuddho Mahathero. I managed to listen to almost all the *Suttas* from the four *Nikayas*: *Digha Nikaya*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, *Samyutta Nikaya*, and *Anguttara Nikaya*. This gave me a very good understanding of what the Buddha was teaching. I realized that most people, even in the Buddhist world, were missing the teachings that came directly from the Buddha's words. I knew then that most people only ever manage to hear a few distorted words here and there, but nothing close to what the Buddha had actually said in the Pali *Suttas*.

One question that captivated my mind was: How do I directly experience the *Jhanas* that the Buddha talks about on hundreds of occasions? My inner self was telling me I must find a way to realize the experiences of the successive stages of happiness in *Jhanas* that lead to freedom of mind—but how? I searched the Internet for teachers who could understand the teachings in the *Suttas* and also teach how to experience the *Jhanas*. I still had a very confused mindset about how the *Jhanas*, mindfulness, hindrances, enlightenment factors, and final *Nibbāna* are interrelated. I knew very well that the Buddha was not teaching deep one-pointed concentration-based practices that suppress all hindrances. But there were very few teachers who could really explain how all the Buddha's teachings can be tested in a coherent meditation practice today.

Eventually, I stumbled upon the materials of teachers like Ajahn Brahm, Ajahn Sujato, Chuladasa, Richard Shankman, Shaila Catherine, Sharon Salzberg, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu. I read their books and articles as much as I could to gather their understanding of the *Suttas* and how much they followed them in their practices.

Ajahn Brahm has a very charismatic way of delivering Dhamma talks and captivating new students, who find his stories very convincing and enticing to listen to. I listened to many of his playlists on YouTube from his one- and two-week-long meditation retreats. I read his book on *Jhanas* and *Bliss* too. His summary of meditation experiences of going through all four *Jhanas* gives the impression that getting to experience *Jhanas* is a momentous achievement. His accounts made *Jhanas* sound so blissful that they were terribly addictive and as good as or better than having sex. While such attributes and characteristics of *Jhanas* he experienced may be appealing to some, I felt that he was not experiencing *Jhanas* exactly as the Buddha and his disciples did back in those days. Furthermore, his approach to entering *Jhanas*—by focusing on *Nimittas* after observing that the breath has become sufficiently stabilized—did not feel correct after having listened to so many *Suttas*.

Even though I had some reservations about his methods of meditation, I continued to listen to Ajahn Brahm's talks and read some of his books. There used to be a good collection of his talks from meditation retreats held between 2000 and 2010. I recall his vivid explanations of how matured *Jhanas* can lead to the ability to remember early childhood and past lives. He explained how he remembered those days in exquisite detail, including the smells of his toys and cots. It sounded fantastic to be able to recall so many details from the deep within memory.

He guides listeners on how the process of letting go leads to the gradual disappearance of self and perceptions. He describes the culmination of his practice as the experience of seeing the emperor who has no clothes. He vividly describes the experience of letting go while immersing deeper and deeper into *Jhanas*. At some point, nothing else remains: just the experience that there is nothing, everything disappears completely. The notion of "I" and self disappears, leading to a direct experience of emptiness. Ajahn Brahm is a very articulate and patient speaker, with many tricks and tips to keep listeners captivated. I appreciate his extraordinary flair in presenting Dhamma and his stories beautifully. However, in the back of my mind, I always thought: The Buddha said there would be teachers who are very polished and poetic, who can captivate people

with their teachings, while the original teachings of the Buddha may fall into oblivion.

Then, after having analyzed enough of Ajahn Brahm's teachings, around 2014, I searched for ways to experience *Jhanas* as described in the Pali *Suttas*. I found a talk by Bhante Vimalaramsi called "*Jhanas: Commentaries vs. Suttas*." His talk made a lot of sense to me. He was echoing exactly what the Buddha warned his disciples about in the Pali *Suttas*: that in the future, the teachings might become so different from the original teachings of the Buddha that one would find only a trace of them, akin to a drum having so many pegs inserted over time. Bhante explained that about 1000 years after the Buddha's passing, a Brahmin from India entered the *Sangha*. He was so proficient in Pali that he even thought he was better than his teacher. Eventually, his teacher sent him to Sri Lanka to collect all the commentaries on the Buddha's teachings and compile a text to make them easily available for wider readers. However, Buddhaghosa, coming from Vedic traditions, did not understand the meditation that the Buddha was teaching. He injected many Vedic practices into his book called *Vissudhimagga*. Bhante explained very well how *Visuddhimagga* is a real curse in the Buddha's legacy, leading millions of Buddhist students away from the true teachings of the Buddha and towards Vedic one-pointed type meditation practices.

Bhante's talk: *Jhanas: Commentaries vs. Suttas* was an eye-opener for me. It saved me from losing many years following incorrect practices and getting caught up in the tangles of wrong *Samadhi*, which the Buddha warned about as a real possibility. From 2015 to 2016, I spent two good years listening to everything Bhante had to say and checking each word against the Pali *Suttas*. I realized that he reads only the Pali *Suttas*—about 100 *Suttas* from the *Majjhima Nikaya*, to be precise. This was a big relief for me, but it also meant I extensively and very carefully listened to how he explained the deep meditative experiences of *Jhanas* and *Arupas*, which he validated from the *Sutta* perspectives.

I knew there were many other teachers who also taught how to experience *Jhanas*, but none taught how to experience the Cessation of perception and feeling, or *Nirodha*. Bhante repeatedly emphasized in his talks how he experienced Cessation and how to achieve it. Only

after being fully convinced that he could teach students all the way to experience *Nirodha* did I become committed to contacting him.

Around the summer of 2016, I started sending emails back and forth, asking about people's experiences of *Jhanas* from attending Bhante's meditation retreats. I received many confirmations that his way of teaching the practice is almost immediately effective (as the Buddha says many times). I got a lot of feedback and support from those meditators in the email group. I practiced as I understood from the online sources from the Dhamma Sukha website, figuring out what '6R' is and how to apply the six steps in the practice.

So, I practiced 30 minutes each evening to test if the 6R technique worked or not. I felt that it was definitely different and had some effect, like clearing my mind of thoughts. However, I was relaxing by deeply inhaling and exhaling rather than relaxing my whole body and mind. Sister Khema warned me not to focus too much on the breath and instead allow my mind and body to settle, like a ball dropping to the ground when let go. Eventually, a friend advised me to join an online retreat with Dhamma Sukha teachers before committing to a physical retreat with Bhante himself.

Finally, I signed up for an online retreat with David Johnson in May 2017. It was a perfect opportunity for people like me who could not commit to 10 days off work without expecting tangible outcomes. If I did not experience any significant development of mind, I could simply forget about it. Not having to take time off work was a plus. So, I gave it a go. There was nothing to lose! By committing to practice 2 to 3 hours a day while still going to work and being at home with my family, I was not losing much from the world even though I was retreating from it in a way. David gave me the direction and motivation to progress, which comes from diligent practice rather than the half-hearted practice I used to do at home on my own.

Now, I will go through the exact steps I took in those ten days to progress from being a confused meditator to an experienced one (I was told that after experiencing the fourth *Jhana*, I was qualified to claim this title!).

In the next part of this Chapter, I will detail my progress through the TWIM practices during the ten-day online retreat with David

Johnson. After signing up for the retreat, I was provided with a small TWIM Guide Book and instructed to follow the five precepts:

- a) not to kill or harm living beings on purpose,
- b) not to take what is not given,
- c) not to tell lies or use harsh speech,
- d) to avoid wrong sexual activities,
- e) to abstain from intoxicating the mind.

Additionally, it was customary for retreat participants to take an additional precept of being loving and kind to oneself and all living beings. Each day, I was encouraged to listen to one or two Dhamma talks from the *Majjhima Nikaya* delivered by Bhante⁶⁶.

In the next section, I have included a copy of the exact instructions I received, which the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center sends to all beginners of their online retreats. Each practice session assumes a sitting of 30 minutes or more.

Beginning Lovingkindness Instructions

When you practice the Mindfulness of Lovingkindness meditation, begin by radiating loving and kind feelings to yourself. Remember a time when you were happy. When that happy feeling arises, it is a warm, glowing feeling.

Some of you may complain—we actually do hear this a lot—that we cannot recall any good memories. So, then we ask, “Can you imagine holding a baby and looking into its eyes? Do you feel a loving feeling? When that baby smiles, do you?”

Another idea is to imagine holding a cute little puppy. When you look at the puppy, you naturally want to smile and play with him. The feeling you are creating is a warm, glowing, and sincere feeling radiating from your eyes, your mind, and your heart.

Once you have established this feeling, use this feeling to wish yourself happiness. “Just as I was happy then, may I be happy now.” Continue with phrases like “May I be peaceful,” “May I be happy,” “May I be calm.”

⁶⁶ A large collection is available in the Dhamma Sukha You Tube channel

Do you know what it feels like to be peaceful and calm? Then put that feeling and yourself in the center of your heart and surround yourself with that happy feeling.

When that feeling fade, bring up another phrase to remind you of the feeling. “May I be tranquil,” “May I be content,” “May I be full of joy.” Now give yourself a big “heart hug.” Really and sincerely, wish yourself to be happy! Love yourself and mean it. This feeling is your object of meditation.

Each time the feeling fades, repeat the wish verbally a few times in your mind. Just repeat it enough times to bring up the feeling—do not make it a *mantra*! Saying a phrase over and over will not bring up the feeling you want—the phrase just reminds us to bring the feeling up. When the feeling comes up you drop the phrase.

There are a number of other teachers who focus on just saying the phrases over and over and that doesn’t work. That will just turn it into a concentration practice on the phrase.

Some people visualize easily; others do not. It is not important that you clearly see your object of meditation. Just know it is there. Keep the feeling of yourself in the center of your chest, wrapped in this happy and content feeling.

And, I do mean really feel good! Feel peaceful, or calm, or loving, or gentle, or kind, or giving, or joyful, or clear, or tranquil, or accepting. Be okay sitting and feeling this. It’s okay to feel good, so let yourself be there in the present, just feeling this contentment.

You have nowhere to go; you are on a little vacation from life now. There is nothing to do other than to be happy and radiate that feeling to yourself. Can you do that? Don’t try to be happy. Be happy! Be content. Be at peace—right here, right now. You have my permission to be happy for at least the next thirty minutes!

This is a feeling meditation, but don’t over observe the center of your chest trying to bring up a feeling of Lovingkindness. Don’t force a feeling where there isn’t one. Don’t put the cart before the horse. Smile and feel that smile all through your body. As you say the phrases, bring this feeling up, and it will resonate in your heart area on its own. Sincerely wish yourself happiness. Believe it, and know that you do wish happiness for yourself. Just be with this feeling, know it is there, and smile with it.

There may be some blocks that come up such as saying to yourself, “No, I don’t deserve to be happy like this!” This aversion to your own happiness is a distraction. Distractions will be covered shortly. I will explain the method to deal with them so that you can allow and train yourself to feel real Lovingkindness for a longer period of time.

Later, when you begin feeling this feeling toward others, know that similar blocks may come up and that these are distractions too. There is no reason that others should not be happy as well. The goal is to first accept and allow yourself to be happy and peaceful. It’s okay. Then, since you feel that happiness in your own mind you will be happy to share that feeling with other beings.

Smiling

This is a smiling meditation. The reason that you should smile is because it has been found that when the corners of your mouth go up, so does your mental state. When the corners of your mouth go down, so does your mental state.

Put a little smile on your lips, but also put a smile in your eyes even though your eyes are closed. You’ll notice there can be a lot of tension in the eyes. Put a smile in your mind and, especially, put a smile in your heart.

It can be a mechanical smile at first—eventually, it will turn into a sincere happy feeling. It should be a smile that conveys Lovingkindness. It’s important to believe it! Smile with your lips, smile from your mind, and smile from your heart!

If your mind wanders away twenty-five times in a sitting, and twenty-five times you recognize it, release it, relax, re-smile, and return to your meditation, then you’ve had a good meditation. It definitely might not be a quiet and calm meditation, but it is an active meditation, and that can still be a good meditation!

Every time your mind wanders away and comes back, and you relax and smile, you are developing your ability to see a distraction and let it go. You are improving your Mindfulness, your observation power. As you practice, you will get better at it, and your powers of observation will get stronger.

Hindrances

The Buddha talked about five hindrances to meditation. Hindrances are distractions that will pull you away from your object of meditation—five troublemakers who will surely come calling!

Every distraction is based on at least one of the five hindrances. Often, they come two or three at a time and gang up.

The Five Hindrances are:

1. Sensual Desire: “I like that,” otherwise known as Lustful or Greedy Mind. You will hang onto things that are pleasant and want more. This will cause attachment to pleasant states of mind that have arisen in the past, and desire for pleasant states to arise in the future.
2. Anger, Aversion, Fear: “I don’t like that.” You will want to push away states of mind that you don’t like. Or, you might experience fear or anger over unpleasant or painful feelings that have already arisen. You will try to push away and control anything causing you pain. You will even try to force your mind to experience things in a certain way that you think is right when you actually should just observe what is there. Now, that is really overly controlling!
3. Sloth and Torpor: Dullness and Sleepiness. These will cause lack of effort and determination because you’ve lost interest in your object of meditation. You will experience a mental fog. When you look at it closely, you actually see that it has tightness and tension in it. There is even Craving in sleepiness.
4. Restlessness: With Restlessness you constantly want to move and change, to do something other than what you are doing, to be somewhere other than here. Restlessness can manifest as very tight, unpleasant feelings in the body and mind.
5. Doubt: You are not sure you are following the instructions correctly, or even if this is the right practice. It makes you feel unsure of yourself and may even manifest as a lack of confidence in the Buddha’s teaching or your teacher or both.

When the hindrances arise, your job is neither to like them nor to fight with them. Your job is to accept them, to invite them in, and to “offer them tea”!

Don’t feed them with your attention. Forcing and not liking them to be there just gives them the attention they crave and makes them stronger.

That’s what happens with one-pointed concentration meditation. You force the hindrances away by practicing intense concentration, but as soon as you stop meditating, they come back, sometimes even stronger.

If you just let hindrances, be, turning your attention to something that is wholesome instead, gradually the energy inherent in them will fade away. They will disappear like a fire that runs out of fuel. That’s how you overcome the hindrances for good. The fire just goes out. In Pāli, *Nibbāna* translates as “Ni” or no, and “bana” or fire. No Fire. No Craving. No hindrance.

The 6Rs

Now we are going to give you specific instructions on how to work with the hindrances in the way the Buddha taught.

Imagine, for a moment, the young Bodhisattva resting under the Rose Apple tree as a young boy. He was not serious or tense; he was having fun, watching his father’s festival. Right then he “attained to a pleasant abiding” (*jhāna*) as stated in the *Suttas*. With a light mind, he was able to come to a very tranquil and aware state.

Later, on the eve of his enlightenment, after he had tried every method of meditation and bodily exercise that was known in India at that time, he remembered this state, and he realized that this simple state—this tranquil, aware, and happy state—was the key to attaining Awakening. But how to convey this?

When he was teaching, the Buddha worked largely with uneducated farmers and merchants. He had to have a simple, effective practice that was easy and worked quickly. He had to have a method by which everyone could experience the path and benefits for them-selves easily and immediately. This is how he was able to affect so many people during his lifetime.

Do you want to see clearly? It's easy! Lighten up, have fun exploring, relax, and smile! Relaxing and smiling leads you to a happier, more interesting practice.

That sounds like great advice, but how do you do it? When you have been carried away by a distraction, and you lose your smile, just follow these steps:

1. **Recognize** that mind's attention has drifted away, and that you are lost in thought. You have forgotten what you were doing. You are no longer on your object of meditation.
2. **Release** your attachment to the thought or sensation by letting the distraction be—by not giving it any more attention. Just stop feeding it. Just back away from it.
3. Relax any remaining tension or tightness caused by that distraction.
4. **Re-smile.** Put that smile back on your lips and in your heart. Feel again that happy feeling of Lovingkindness.
5. **Return or redirect.** Gently redirect mind's attention back to the object of meditation, that is, to *Mettā*. Continue with a gentle, collected mind to stay with your object of meditation.
6. **Repeat** this entire practice cycle. Repeat this practice whenever your attention is distracted away from your object of meditation.

We call these the “6Rs.” They are drawn directly from the *Sutta* text as part of Right Effort. The first four ‘R’s are the four right efforts, with the last two ‘R’s to remind you to Return and Repeat as needed.

Notice that you never push anything away. You never try to control anything—trying to control is using Craving to eliminate Craving!

Please don't do the 6Rs for some slight noise in the background or a minor bodily feeling. As long as you are still with your feeling of Lovingkindness, just stay with that feeling and let it deepen. Ignore those slight distractions in the background. As a beginner do the 6Rs only if your attention is completely “gone” from the object.

In the explanation of the Eightfold Path in the *Suttas*, one of the components is Right Effort. Right Effort and the 6Rs are exactly the same things.

What is Right Effort?

1. You notice that an unwholesome state has arisen.
2. You stop paying attention to that unwholesome feeling, letting it be there by itself with no pushing away or holding on to it.
3. You bring up a wholesome feeling.
4. You stay with that wholesome feeling.

The 6Rs just add the Return and Repeat to complete the cycle. You are practicing Right Effort by repeating the 6Rs cycle again and again. You see and experience for yourself what suffering is and how to relieve it.

You notice what causes you to become tense and tight, and then how to reach its cessation by releasing and relaxing and bringing up a wholesome object. You discover how to exercise the direct path to the cessation of suffering. This happens each time you Recognize and Release an arising feeling, Relax, and Re-smile. Notice the Relief.

When you look at the benefits discussed in the *Sutta* about the Dhamma, there is a phrase that says the Dhamma is “immediately effective.” By practicing the 6Rs, you fulfil this statement! When you relax the tension or tightness caused by a distraction, you immediately experience the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering.

In other words, you are purifying the mind by relaxing and letting go of suffering. You see this for yourself.

Then you bring up a wholesome object by smiling, and return mind’s attention back to *Mettā*, which is a wholesome feeling.

You do not have to practice for long periods—months or years—to feel relief. You can see it right after the Relax step of the 6Rs. You notice the moment of a pure mind, free from Craving.

By repeating the 6Rs over and over, depriving the hindrances of attention, their fuel, eventually, you will replace all of the

unwholesome mental habits with wholesome ones. In this way, you bring up only wholesome states and will eventually achieve the cessation of suffering.

To be successful in meditation, you need to develop your mindfulness skill and observation power. Also, keeping up your sense of fun and exploration is important. This helps to improve your mindfulness. The 6Rs training develops these necessary skills.

Sometimes people say this practice is simpler than they thought and have actually complained to the teacher because they want this meditation to be more complicated!

Chapter 13

Progress in Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation

This Chapter is largely based on my diary of key experiences practicing TWIM during 2017-2018. The first stages of progress involved experiencing the four *Jhanas* during a ten-day online retreat with David Johnson from the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center in May 2017. I practiced during my spare time every day and reported the results to him. He assessed my progress, issues, and next steps via email replies. I took his advice and made adjustments the next day, and so on. After the online retreat was over, I continued on the path myself, using David's landmark book, "*The Path to Nibbana*".

Below I have extracted key excerpts from my daily reports to David from the retreat:

Day 1: Getting ready and familiarizing with the TWIM 6R practice.

As I was still getting used to the new routine, I experienced a lot of restlessness and had high expectations for what this practice would lead to. I was obsessed with what the experience of *Jhana* would feel like. Since it was a Saturday, I had plenty of time to sit down and practice as per the given instructions. I believed I needed to be relentless in my pursuit of the clarity and happiness of *Jhana*. I may have had some very brief experiences of *Jhana* before, but I did not understand how they arose or ceased. The difference from my previous sitting practices was that I invested my time and effort to follow the practice 100% without worrying about what my family thought. I remembered to keep smiling all the time as a secret for fast progress. I did my best to stay light and smiling all day.

Nothing interesting happened. I was not expecting any major breakthrough but was also not very optimistic about experiencing all *Jhanas* in the next ten days. I was simply giving it a shot—if I experienced *Jhana*, great; if not, I did not lose anything. I was not

asked to pay a fee in advance, so it was entirely up to me if I felt like giving a donation upon completion.

The online retreat process was very simple. I did not need to attend any interviews or meetings with the teacher. I was free to choose when to sit in practice, managing work and family commitments. I was expected to sit for 3-4 hours per day during the ten days. So, I sat for about one hour in the morning, half an hour in the afternoon, and two hours in the evening. I had to submit a report every day by visiting a website that had a form for each day, asking specific questions related to each practice session, any interesting experiences, challenges blocking progress, and questions for the teacher for any needed clarifications and concerns.

In the next nine sections, I will detail my personal experiences of progress in experiencing all the *Jhanas*, Formless states, and Cessation experiences. This covers my experiences from 2017 to 2018. I may have been an average student, so I managed to experience the four *Jhanas* at the end of the retreat. I was told that some did not make it all the way or experience all the four *Jhanas*. So, it turned out to be a lot more successful than I expected.

First *Jhana*

Sutta Reference:

“Again, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. He makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Just as a skilled bath man or a bath man’s apprentice heaps bath powder in a metal basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water, kneads it till the moisture wets his ball of bath powder, soaks it and pervades it inside and out, yet the ball itself does not ooze; so too, a bhikkhu makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. As he abides thus diligent...That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.

[Majjhima Nikaya 119: Kayagatasati Sutta]

Day 2: Sending Metta to Myself and a Spiritual Friend

David: What was the title of the last talk you watched or listened to?

Indu: "*Majjhima Nikaya 20 - The Removal of Distracting Thoughts.*"

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the *Sutta* this time; it was exactly what I needed for my practice. I didn't know that I could listen to this talk earlier in the day. I enjoy listening to Bhante's talks over and over again. So, if it's okay and if I find the time, I would like to listen to each talk twice or more.

The talk covered many aspects of how we can become entangled with hindrances, which can be a major obstacle in maintaining meditation. Breaking down each distraction into its constituent parts and seeing them as individual processes with no personal attachment seemed to be the key insight I gained this time. For instance, anger can be broken down into heat, pain, and dislike, which are simply feelings and reactions of the mind. These are impersonal processes conditioned by the arising situation. We don't have to respond with anger; instead, we can apply the 6Rs and see it as not ours.

Smiling seems to keep my mind uplifted and happy throughout the entire day. My family seems to have noticed that I was kind and gentle all day. I was able to keep wishing *Metta* to my spiritual friend most of the time, unlike before when I struggled to keep my attention on *Metta* while walking. However, I didn't feel the radiation of *Metta* as strongly as I did during formal sittings. I understand that this requires more practice.

D: Remember, practice is essential, but don't push too hard to intensify the *Metta* feeling. Allow it to naturally infuse things; avoid forcing it. The strength of the feeling isn't as important as your ability to recognize when your mind wanders and to apply the 6Rs to return to the feeling.

I: Around 6 PM, while I was in my garden sending *Metta* to my spiritual friend, my mind became calm, so I decided to sit again. I felt very composed, with only a few minor and weaker distractions arising. I kept applying the 6Rs to all distractions. At around 35 minutes, suddenly I felt a strong, joyful feeling. I became a little confused and tried to relax into it while forgetting to let it be and

continue with my spiritual friend. I noticed that the feeling quickly disappeared, and I couldn't bring back the *Metta* feeling for my spiritual friend. So, I switched to sending *Metta* to myself, with the hope of returning to my friend later. The feelings did not arise as strongly as before, but I was feeling very comfortable and quiet for about 10 minutes. Then I stopped meditating as I lost my meditation object and could not bring it back naturally.

D: Good for you! That joy came about as a result of your applying the 6Rs correctly! This is good progress. Don't apply the 6Rs to the joy; just allow it to be—nothing wrong with experiencing joy. Just make sure you don't start thinking about it and get lost in thought. Let it be there; it's okay to be happy! This is where you are headed!

Now, you can give up any internal verbalizing of the wish. There's no need to say the phrases now; just make the wish and feel the *Metta*. Drop the phrases, especially if they make your mind feel tight when you say them. They are only a reminder when the feeling fades. Now, when it fades, just remember the feeling and bring it back.

I: My mind keeps thinking about what it's like to be in *Jhana*. This thought keeps coming back, and I applied the 6Rs. I have to admit that this thought is probably the strongest of all thoughts that keep me away from sending *Metta* and makes me restless toward the end of my sittings.

D: Yes, you analyzed this correctly—it's a desire and will cause you much suffering, keeping you away from *Jhana* as long as you want it! It's a bit like a cat chasing its tail. You can never attain it by actively chasing it; just stop, and there it is.

I: Also, quite often, after about 20 minutes or so, my mind starts to become dull, and the feeling of *Metta* radiation starts to fade a little.

D: You might be trying too hard here—smile again and relax. Don't push the 6Rs too hard. Only apply the 6Rs if you are no longer in the present moment.

I: I sat at noon for about 50 minutes. I noticed that my mind was less distracted by thoughts, and I felt calmer compared to the morning sitting. Around the 30-minute mark, I felt the need to cough, so I did without any aversion, all while maintaining *Metta* for my spiritual friend. I relaxed, smiled, and returned to the practice. It took about a minute to regain the state of mind I had before the cough.

After a few minutes, my mind started to dull, and the sensation of *Metta* radiation faded slightly. At this point, I began to recall instances when my spiritual friend had been kind and helpful to me, which helped reignite the feeling of *Metta*. Shortly after that, the feeling of *Metta* became stronger, and the radiance of my mind intensified.

How should I treat my image/concept of what it's like to be in *Jhana*? I've heard this term many times, and I'm quite curious about this state, which may be affecting my progress.

D: Apply the 6Rs to it! Understand that it's merely a desire, and desires tend to cause suffering and pull you out of the present. This is entirely normal, especially in the early stages of practice.

I: Toward the end of my evening sitting, I became a bit confused about whether my 6Rs were effective or not. The room I use for meditation has bright light, and I was sitting directly under it. I kept getting caught up in wondering if my mind was alert enough to visualize my spiritual friend smiling and if I could feel *Metta* radiating strongly. Are bright lights conducive to meditation, or should I try a different setting?

D: Well, darkness is not conducive for sure. Bright lighting isn't one way or another; it's up to you to judge. Don't try too hard to visualize your friend smiling; just KNOW they are. Visualization is a small part. What's most important is to stay with the feeling. Seeing the friend smiling is much less important; just feel the *Metta* towards them.

Day 3: Sending Metta to Myself and a Spiritual Friend

D: What was the title of the last talk you watched or listened to?

I: "*Majjhima Nikaya 111 - Anupada Sutta*." I listened to the talk twice today. I gained a lot of information from Bhante on the meditation method that the Buddha was actually teaching. I know that it is the Eightfold Path or mindfulness and full awareness while in *Jhanas*. A meditation object can be the breath or the feeling of *Metta*, but as long as a meditation contains all the folds, it becomes the Buddha's meditation. I have listened to Bhante's talks on the *Anupada Sutta* many times, and it provides a lot of perspective on what to expect as I progress in meditation. I've always had the thought that what the

Buddha taught cannot be absorption *Jhanas*, which can have adverse effects.

D: Yes, they can. There is a new study out that shows many types of meditation that don't use the 6Rs can actually make people crazy or cause them to lose their emotions— not good.

I: I smiled all day today, as far as I could remember, and it seems to have become more and more automatic. Unlike a few days ago, I rarely had any unwholesome thoughts that usually made me angry and discontent. I know that keeping the precepts is definitely helping in this. But smiling seems to make my mind very clear and uncluttered. Noonday sitting for about 40 minutes. I kept sending *Metta* to myself and then to my spiritual friend. After about 20 minutes, my mind became calm and composed. Each step of relaxation was taking me deeper into meditation. I had some thoughts popping in, suggesting that I should expect some joy and deeper calm. I applied the 6Rs to these thoughts as they arose, and I stayed calm. About 30 minutes into my sitting, I became very calm and composed. When I tried to verbalize my wish for my spiritual friend, I noticed some slight headaches. So, I stopped verbalizing the wishes and simply felt the wish for calm, peace, happiness, etc., for my spiritual friend. I experienced another episode of joy, which was subtler. I had quite a few goosebumps, and they kept arising throughout the sitting. I felt very light in my body and mind too.

D: Great job! Very good. And yes, don't verbalize the wish now.

Second *Jhana*

Sutta Reference:

“Again, bhikkhus, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. He makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration. Just as though there were a lake whose waters welled up from below and it had no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and would not be replenished from time to time by showers of rain, then the cool fount of water welling up in the lake would make the cool water drench,

steep, fill, and pervade the lake, so that there would be no part of the whole lake unpervaded by cool water; so too, a bhikkhu makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration. As he abides thus diligent...That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.

[Majjhima Nikaya 119: Kayagatasati Sutta]

I: Evening sitting: After listening to *Majjhima Nikaya 111* twice, I started sitting at 7:15 PM. I felt that experiencing strong joy did not take as long, but I reminded myself not to expect this to happen every time. Every sitting is different, and you never know what will happen, so don't expect or try to control anything. After about 15 minutes, I continually applied the 6Rs to any distractions that arose, although they were not strong. From time to time, I relaxed on purpose to see how much calmer I could get and to ensure there was no subtle craving remaining in the background. I noticed stronger and stronger feelings of joy that lasted much longer this time, perhaps about 20 minutes. I felt as though my feet and hands were not part of my body, and I did not notice any sensory input from them. I found that I could send *Metta* to my spiritual friend very easily and did not notice strong distractions that could knock me out of the intense feelings of joy. I tried verbalizing a wish and noticed a slight tightness around my head.

D: Yes, that is what happens, so there's no need to verbalize.

I: I felt some joy come up in my sitting. It's joy like I have never felt before, more than just a feeling of happiness. I think I still tend to try harder unknowingly and then get stuck. But I felt that I made good progress in meditation, so I will continue practicing and will report problems as they arise.

D: Oh my! You are doing so well already. There's no need to try harder; you are way ahead here. Further effort on your part will not work, so just go with the flow. Keep smiling too.

I: The morning sitting: Within 10 minutes from the start, I heard the background sound of my laptop and suddenly got completely caught up in thoughts about why it had to interfere with my meditation. I felt very strong irritation and could not stop thinking about it despite relaxing a lot. I wasn't sending *Metta* to myself

anymore; I was focused on how to let go of this disturbance. Thoughts kept coming, like I should have turned off the laptop before I sat. After about 10 minutes of applying the 6Rs, I regained some equanimity toward this sound, but I could not completely relax into it. This was probably the hardest experience of distraction that knocked me out of meditation.

D: You learned a lesson: even a simple sound can cause aversion, and you can't control it or make it go away, so don't try! Applying the 6Rs isn't about pushing away the sound; it's about allowing it to be there with equanimity. The sound is only a sound. Why are you angry with that sound? What about other sounds? Why not something else? It's because you are conditioned, and this conditioning is out of "your" control. There is actually no controller, and you can't control anything other than applying the 6Rs, which means allowing, releasing your attention to the sound, relaxing your aversion, and re-smiling, then going back to the object. Allow and accept everything; don't push it away and try to go back. That is concentration suppression, not TWIM. This lesson was a good one!

I: I have some good results, but they indicate a somewhat fuzzy experience compared to what I've read in *Sutta* texts. Do we expect that over time, a definite pattern will emerge regarding my experiences as I progress in meditation? After hearing the *Anupada Sutta*, I am getting a roadmap, but I want to allow my practice to unfold naturally rather than forcing my experience to match this *Sutta*.

D: Just keep going; you are doing very well, way ahead of where others are in this amount of time!

I: What do you suggest my attitude should be toward meditation progress versus expectations?

D: These are just thoughts, and you allow them to apply the 6Rs, which means allowing and accepting. Also, you can't have expectations because you don't know what to expect. Why? Because you've never been there before. Don't expect any sitting to be one way or another because it is likely to be completely different than anything you have experienced so far. *Jhanas* are not fixed things; they are learning steps, and as you learn them, they change and even disappear, getting left behind.

Third Jhana

Sutta Reference:

“Again, bhikkhus, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ He makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a pond of blue or white or red lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water drenches, steeps, fills, and pervades them to their tips and their roots, so that there is no part of all those lotuses unpervaded by cool water; so too, a bhikkhu makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture. As he abides thus diligent...That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.

[Majjhima Nikaya 119: Kayagatasati Sutta]

Day 4:

I: I have listened to this talk, *Majjhima Nikaya 10 Satipatthana Sutta*, twice today—one of the most important *Suttas* by the Buddha that shows what meditators should be doing with all experiences. Having the background of *Majjhima Nikaya 111* yesterday fit nicely within the framework of *Majjhima Nikaya 10* regarding the observation of feelings. As I mentioned yesterday, I kept applying the 6Rs even to small distractions on purpose to see if I would get calmer. Actually, Bhante said here that this is right and can lead to good progress.

D: Yes, your observations are correct. The closer you can see the hindrance arising, the quicker it disappears. If you can see just a painful feeling arise, then the thoughts that follow won't arise at all, and you won't get lost.

Afternoon sitting lasted about 1 hour and 20 minutes. I have developed a habit of smiling all the time and also keeping the feeling of *Metta* for my spiritual friend in my heart as long as I can remember. I sat and gradually started going deeper. Thoughts kept coming about what I should be expecting while in *Jhanas*, but I continually applied

the 6Rs. The frequency of thoughts became less and less. I felt more and more balanced in dealing with distractions. I did feel a shift in the feelings of *Metta* radiating from the center of my chest upwards. I noticed them slightly above. At some points, I could not feel the wish in my chest; instead, I felt my head was radiant, and I saw my mind's attention go up there. Usually, this is where I see my spiritual friend, but this time, my spiritual friend and the feeling of *Metta* were coming together around my head. I relaxed to see if the feeling would go back; it seemed to stay up. What I also noticed is that when I saw distractions and applied the 6Rs, I saw the feeling of *Metta* going back to my chest. So, there was some ping-pong of the feeling of *Metta* between my head and heart. I was very comfortable in my sitting and did not see anything that could derail it. I could have easily continued sitting longer, but then I thought I should try longer sittings after having more similar experiences so I can be sure I am not imagining.

Evening sitting, 50 minutes: I sat right after the walking meditation (order changed this time and it worked nicely). I felt very energetic, and my mind was very bright throughout the sitting. I got deep into meditation within a few minutes. It was becoming more and more solid sitting with very few distractions to shake my mind. My mind was bright and very alert. In about 10 minutes, I started radiating *Metta* to my spiritual friend. I did not feel *Metta* much around the chest area; I noticed the feeling was around the head. Very strange, how could that be? Feeling with the mind. I relaxed several times. Once or twice, I felt a faint feeling of *Metta* around my chest. But as I kept applying the 6Rs, the feeling started to go to my head. I was feeling more and more balanced in mind, and its radiance became much stronger than in previous sittings. I did not lose the sense of my body parts completely, however. As I was sitting cross-legged this time, I felt some pain/discomfort in my leg later. Although I was not that distracted by this physical feeling, I thought that even if I broke the sitting, the experience is reproducible! In typical engineering terms, and with me being an engineer too, I am looking forward to further instructions on what I should be doing next.

D: Yes indeed, when the feeling of *Metta* starts moving up into the head, you just allow that to happen. I am going to change your meditation now as you have advanced to a higher level of progress.

The first exercise is quick, and you can do this in one sitting. It's about breaking down the barriers. As soon as this is done, write me back, and I will give you the next practice, which is, in fact, radiating from your head. But first, follow this link to the next process, with "*****" as the password: Breaking down the Barriers.

I: So far, I have been working with distractions and how to get to deeper stages of mind. I may be doing the 6Rs more than necessary. Maybe I need to be more observant in seeing HOW the process works. Both are correct. Just apply the 6Rs with a little more mindfulness to uncover what happens before what we can see. Plenty happens, but we can't see it at first.

This morning, I kept applying the 6Rs to any distractions that arose. From time to time, I was thinking about when some strong joy is going to arise. As soon as I noticed these thoughts, I kept relaxing and smiling. I had a much calmer, peaceful, comfortable feeling going on. So I'm still learning to be more patient.

D: The joy in this meditation is much more subtle. Don't expect any cosmic explosions; that happens in other forms. But for many, the joy in this practice is pleasant, sometimes even extreme, but you have already experienced joy coming up. There is another form of joy to come, but again, it is a contentment and strong happiness, so let go of this expectation now.

I: Reading the talk and your TWIM guidebook, there are mentions of specific types of experiences at different stages. Does everyone report all of them, or does it vary from one person to another?

D: Everyone generally reports similar things, and that's how I know what *Jhana* you are in. But there is variation, so sometimes it takes a little intuition to understand.

I: At what stage of meditation do meditators develop the ability to investigate the arising and passing away of the links of dependent origination, e.g., ignorance, formations, *Nama Rupa*?

D: That is coming for you. Let's see what happens.

Notes: Abiding in this *Jhana* is more pleasurable than First and second *Jhana* in that experience is smoother and mind has more balance while the body feels pleasure. While during the online retreat, I had only a short and vague recollection of abiding in this

state—more recently I have developed skills to stay in different *Jhanas* by means of determination and steering of mind accordingly. While previously I had no control over how long and if I could remain in the third *Jhana*; I was experiencing this state for more than 30-45 minutes today—to observe it very closely during the sitting that lasted 70 minutes. I could see that my mind is fully aware of all the surroundings including noises, but my mind did not get pulled into any of those events. The mind has become more stable and solid like a rock—so these external disturbances like breeze—do not have any influence over the mind. Body awareness is still very much present although feelings of pain have largely gone away.

Another very important thing that became clear in this state is that the mind is still vibrating a little with joy and happiness—which do not occur in higher states, e.g., fourth *Jhana* and formless states. This is why the Buddha called the first, second, and third *Jhanas* still the perturbable states, and the fourth *Jhana* and formless states as being the imperturbable.

Fourth *Jhana*

Sutta Reference:

“Again, bhikkhus, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind. Just as though a man were sitting covered from head down with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his whole body not covered by the white cloth; so too, a bhikkhu sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind. As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned; with their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. That too is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness of the body.

[Majjhima Nikaya 119: Kayagatasati Sutta]

Day 5: Breaking down the barriers

I: Afternoon sitting: I started by sending *Metta* to myself for about 10 minutes as usual. The feeling of *Metta* was somewhat rising, although I felt some slight sensations near the chest. Then I began wishing happiness, starting with three more spiritual friends. The feeling of *Metta* was strong, radiating from the head, and I have to say it was quite intense and powerful most of the time. I applied the 6Rs when the feeling faded a little, and then the *Metta* became stronger. After I saw my spiritual friends smiling and happy, I moved on to family, acquaintances, and finally to the people I was not that comfortable with. It took three or four times of going back and forth between each of them and returning to one of the acquaintances. Then I felt much at ease and saw the people in the last group smiling and happy. I don't really have any ill feelings or intentions toward them in general, and I do appreciate what they did for me at times. But our last interaction did not end well. I think this practice of breaking down barriers gave a very strong and intense radiation overall but was not the very peaceful and calm type that I used to feel earlier.

Listened to *Majjhima Nikaya 10 Satipatthana Sutta* PT2. A very helpful talk that delves into the minutest details of how a meditator should regard each experience to understand the process of dependent origination.

Evening Sitting (1 hr 20 minutes): I started this practice today, and I felt it was a little different and somewhat difficult to master. In the first 40 minutes, I focused on settling in and on the six directions. So far, I was used to only focusing on the front direction, so radiating to other directions seemed a bit unbalanced, especially towards the back and down. It felt like the energy from the head was losing some intensity in those directions.

D: That's okay—you're not used to it yet. Energy will always be changing—just go with the flow. You're just beginning. No real comments from me other than to practice and see what develops. Use the 6Rs when your mind starts to tighten or move to something else.

I: After that, I applied the 6Rs a few times to return to the initial feeling of *Metta* radiating from the head without focusing on specific

directions. Then I gradually released the feeling. Again, it wasn't evenly distributed to all directions, but it was starting to spread out. Since this practice is going to be longer, I felt the need to be more comfortable in my upcoming sittings. Towards the end, I had several thoughts on how to achieve greater comfort and eventually ended the sitting.

D: The way to be more comfortable is to apply the 6Rs to thoughts of how to achieve comfort! Try 6Ring the "controller" who wants to control everything. Just direct the mind, smile, and let it flow. If you feel the need to adjust or change something rather than just doing it, try 6Ring that desire to change things. See what happens.

I: I felt I was managing distractions well in the afternoon, as before, and the 6Rs worked effectively until the practice of Breaking Down the Barriers. During the Directions practice, towards the end, I became distracted and ended my sitting due to some discomfort.

It would be very helpful if you could share some of your experiences on how to become familiar with the Directions practice and how others have managed to overcome the challenges of getting used to it and maintaining composure.

D: That's a big question, and ultimately, you're the only one who can answer it, as everyone's experience is a bit different. This is your laboratory, and you're the lead scientist there! I can provide guidance, but I can't make it happen. It's up to you. You'll do fine! You're already ahead of others, so relax and take your time with it!

Day 6

D: Any comments on the talk? *Majjhima Nikaya 38, The Greater Discourse on Destruction of Craving:*

I: It was a very detailed and profound talk about Dependent Origination (DO). I think the talk was well-planned to explore the links of DO. I would have liked more explanations of each point of the *Sutta* texts. However, the whole purpose of this practice is to see through my own observations, so I am quite happy to have listened to the talk.

I generally felt comfortable with the practice. I continued to sharpen my skills in observing the mind's attention and radiating *Metta* in various directions.

Morning sitting (1 hr): I spent the entire hour radiating *Metta* to six directions. I didn't realize that I was spending 10 minutes on each direction, so I had to end the sitting to get on with my day. But I was becoming more at ease with the practice and working with hindrances.

D: Great!

I: I still feel that I may not be completely relaxed and haven't developed enough in my mind to let go of the physical painful feeling that arises after long sittings. I was able to prolong staying with this feeling by applying the 6Rs several times, but I need to develop a calmer attitude.

Today, during my evening sitting, I was dealing with a dull mind. I used the Awakening factors of joy, energy, and stillness to settle my mind on my meditation object. It worked well, and I had a very balanced mind for much longer.

D: Very good, balancing the enlightenment factors.

I: I am a little confused at this stage about how much of my attention I should apply to staying with my meditation object and how much to investigating how subtle distractions arise and applying the 6Rs to them, e.g., contact, sense bases, *Nama Rupa*.

D: This isn't about splitting your awareness. You should be on your object all the time until something arises. Stay alert for things to arise. You'll get this with time.

Day 7

I: *Majjhima Nikaya 148 Chachaka Sutta*: The Six Sets of Six: In this *Sutta*, the Buddha delves into complete length and entirety, exploring all possible details to show us that there is nothing left in our existence that we can declare to be a self. After listening through all the sets and analyses, it became very clear to me that any belief in personality and the special feelings I have about myself are mere illusions. This leads me to wonder if the database of all habitual tendencies we have accumulated over time is what makes us think of ourselves as unique personalities. Even in this sense, we rely on our memory to define ourselves; this is no different from a computer, albeit with an unreliable memory that deteriorates over time!

D: Yes - could we just be robots? Ha ha - something to consider. When one realizes that this could be true, disenchantment starts to set in.

I: I spent the entire hour radiating *Metta* to six directions. I didn't notice that I was spending 10 minutes on each direction, so I had to break the session to go about my day. But I was becoming more at ease with the practice and working with hindrances - no worries.

Evening sitting (1.5 hours): After listening to the *Chachaka Sutta Majjhima Nikaya 148*, my mind became very clear and rid of any dullness I had after the meal. I sat for about 30 minutes already radiating *Metta* in six directions. I was doing okay and catching any distractions as they arose, applying the 6Rs. However, I noticed that my mind wasn't as bright and alert as it used to be when focusing on the spiritual friend. So, I tested what happens if I make a big smile on my face. Immediately after this, I was completely out of the slump with a very bright and alert mind. I gained a strong balance of mind and stayed on my meditation object very easily, without distractions, for a long time.

D: Great :)

Day 8

I: *Majjhima Nikaya 44* on the Noble Eightfold Path: In this talk, Bhante gives very clear explanations of how all eight folds of the path are practiced, with good examples. The Buddha never said that those who practice should use only part of them. For instance, I had heard somewhere that meditators need to practice only five of the eight folds because the other three are part of *Sila* and meditators do not need them. Bhante is probably the only teacher who could explain that all eight folds of the path are integral to meditation and practice in daily life. Meditation is not just sitting; it is an all-the-time practice which has had a great impact on me. This talk gives all the information that we need on how to do that.

D: Very good!

I: I generally felt quite comfortable with the practice. I continued to sharpen my skills in observing the mind's attention and radiating *Metta* in various directions.

Morning sitting (1 hour 10 minutes): I sat very comfortably and was alert to any distractions most of the time. My mind became more radiant as I continued to apply the 6Rs. There was a moment when I experienced a blissful state for a short time. I applied the 6Rs and continued. What I noticed this morning was that I felt *Metta* radiation going out very naturally when I radiated to each of the six directions one by one. However, when I attempted to radiate *Metta* to all directions simultaneously, it did not feel like it was expanding as much.

D: So at this stage, that's okay - sometimes it goes way out, sometimes not at all. It is only my job to be like a candle radiating light and heat. If it goes out, fine. If not, that's okay because it will change as you progress.

I: I was simply observing the mind's attention and letting go of distractions as they arose. I smiled and radiated *Metta*, which mostly remained focused around myself most of the time. I still have not fully developed equanimity towards body pain that arises towards the end of longer sittings.

D: You mean you are not fully enlightened yet? Ha ha! Sit as long as you can and use chairs when needed!

I: In the initial minutes of my sittings, I had some thoughts, but I have developed a habit of letting go of them using the 6Rs almost automatically. Now, it is becoming a question of how quickly I can catch them. I am experimenting with how thoughts arise. Suddenly, some memories come in a flash, and I notice they impact my mind, creating a contact. The mind then reacts to that memory with associated thoughts about that event. I am observing these phenomena quite frequently.

D: Yes, that's right. When you become aware the moment the thought arises, that is contact. Then there is a feeling and images about that contact. Then you may not like it or really like it, which is craving. Then you think about it, which is clinging. Then you form opinions about it, which are habitual tendencies. Then you may do something about it, which is action. These are the links of Dependent Origination.

I: I just wanted to know if what I am doing sounds right to you and how I can keep my practice going in the right direction. I am very

grateful for your daily tips and comments. Would it be okay to ask some questions later?

D: Yes, what you are doing is correct. I don't have much more to comment on because I think you are understanding this. And yes, you can ask questions later. Refer to the other comments above for guidance.

Note: I was informed that the retreat is now over, and I needed to wind down the schedule to prepare for my return to normal daily routines. I didn't want to let go of the new schedule that I was enjoying. So, I thanked David for making such a profound change in my life by guiding me to experience all the *Jhanas*. However, I noticed that my family was feeling a bit impatient because I was not spending as much time with them. They were signaling that it's time to face the reality of managing daily work and family life together.

I had to figure out the rest of the way on my own — the four *Arupas* and Cessation. I brought a book from David Johnson: "*The Path to Nibbana*" (Johnson, 2022). This book was very helpful in assessing my progress while I continued practicing on my own. It is a complete guide for those who—like me—test and see everything for oneself, though at a slow pace.

Base of Infinite Space

Sutta Reference:

“Again, bhikkhus, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with nonattention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite,’ Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of infinite space.

“And the states in the base of infinite space—the perception of the base of infinite space and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus...and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

It was August 2017. I went to Vienna with my family for our summer holiday to explore this beautiful city known for Mozart and his symphonies. While at the hotel, I sat in my morning practice as usual. I found the feeling of *Metta*, which is generally warm, suddenly changed to a cooler and calmer feeling after I had finished radiating *Metta* in all six directions to the universe. I noticed my mind expanding continually for some time. This feeling stayed with me for quite a while, and my perception and feeling of compassion towards the universe grew significantly.

I found this state to be quite soft, cool and peaceful in mind. It was as if my body was suspended in the empty space of the vast universe, with deep expanses all around me. I did not experience any fear; it was just calm and peaceful.

The base of infinite space is the most peaceful and comfortable state among all the experiences I have had so far. The calmness, softness, and the mind filled with the open vast expanse of space balanced all around, heightened my awareness, just being in that space of the mind. There were no disturbances of towns, villages, schools, shops, or offices—just space and mind. Wow.

As with all the *Jhanas* and *Arupas*, the experience of the base of infinite space changes from the initial experience in subsequent sessions. In my case, it took only a few short sessions to progress my practice from the fourth *Jhana* through the base of infinite space to the base of infinite consciousness. I can now describe the experience of this state in much greater detail since I can enter into it when I want while sitting, but it's one of those things that may be good for storytelling; however, there is little value in clinging to those experiences as definitive pointers. I will share more on this experience based on the Dhamma to understand its nature and how not to get stuck in any of these experiences.

Base of Infinite Consciousness

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite,’ Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of infinite consciousness.

“And the states in the base of infinite consciousness—the perception of the base of infinite consciousness and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus:...and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

It was back in October 2017. One evening while sitting, I began to notice that feelings of calmness changed to vibrations and energy. My senses started to perceive subtle flickering. I could hear sounds in finer detail, and they somehow caused disturbances in my mind. Visual senses were also flickering, and I could see the light from the bulb dimming and brightening as if it were being slowly switched off and on. The perception through most of my sense doors was somewhat fragmented. I continued to experience these phenomena throughout the rest of 2017.

In early 2018, one day while sitting as usual, strong equanimity was present throughout. Within a few minutes of starting, I began radiating joy, which lasted for an hour and a half until I was forced to open the door upon hearing my doorbell ring. Thoughts, perceptions, and insights came and went, but my mind remained completely unmoved by these activities. It did not waver even when I engaged in thoughts and analyses about Dhamma teachings. I still noticed subtle flickering at the sense doors, but it was happening at a slower rate. Unlike previous sittings, I did not pay much attention to these phenomena, and my mind remained calm and composed throughout.

By April 2018, I had been sitting almost twice daily for about two hours each session. I sensed all the subtle flickering happening at my eyes, tongue, body, and mind whether walking, sitting, or sleeping. My sense perceptions had somewhat sharpened, and these conscious experiences were impacting my mind, causing subtle disturbances. I hoped these perceptions would subside soon to see what lay ahead, but it seemed they were not going away anytime soon. It was becoming a bit bothersome to experience all these consciousnesses arising and passing. My mind anticipated progressing to the next

stage, but something seemed to be blocking my progress. So, I decided to contact the Dhammasukha mailing group for feedback and advice.

Here was a reply from Sister Khema:

In this situation I am going to advise you to 6 R ALL phenomena that comes up.

Look at it this way.

You are on a path that is moving towards a signless state of Cessation and when moving in that direction it is not a good idea to pay attention to ANY arising phenomena and just stay with quiet observation.

I am not so clear where you are exactly.

But if you are in Nothingness, the advice is to imagine you are the first explore to enter into this land of Nothingness. Your responsibility while there is to just observe "what is the nature of Nothingness" and this scenario has helped many of my students to get through this state and then fall over into the next state.

'So Bubbles', that is the answer.

Now if you are in Infinite Consciousness, and flickering is going on, that is another matter.

If they are happening fast, you just 6R them and keep going with quiet observation. When they slow down and barely come up during a sitting, that is when you then attempt to "just notice" what is in between them and notice how they are happening.

Don't think of what you do as "I have to make this or that do this or that. That leads to suffering.

Instead of thinking about making the flickering stop, view it as the Buddha advised his monks to abandon the hindrance, let it go, ignore it and continue with the quiet observation. OK?

This advice was very helpful. I noticed that at these stages, the boundary between pure observation and paying attention to phenomena or engaging in curious investigation becomes narrower. The former is what was advised, and I absolutely agree it is the right approach. I was reading from the Suttas that emphasize the need to

maintain attention on the meditation object (in my case, focusing on Joy) without being distracted by perceptions of other things, as in the *Majjhima Nikaya 121: Cula Suññata Sutta*.

Now I see that I may have been putting the cart before the horse. I was looking for signs of progress that are often described in talks/books rather than simply practicing WITHOUT any expectations that could lead to a specific outcome. It took me quite a while to realize this!

Base of Nothingness

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of nothingness.

“And the states in the base of nothingness—the perception of the base of nothingness and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus:...and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

Time flies. It is April 2018, and I am now exploring this Base, which is far more sublime. Indeed, this Base is where the mind is most stable and peaceful. I used to sit for around two hours in one session, and the effect of the experience kept me very peaceful and calm every day. The mind does not tend to seek company with others and stays inwardly at ease and content.

In the morning, after breakfast, I sat. I had the day off to look after Anya, my daughter. During the sitting, the feeling of Joy changed to serene peacefulness without any vibrations. I did not perceive Joy pervading the entire cosmos. Instead, the feeling was much calmer. There were a few shifts between restless and slothful meditation, and I kept adjusting my focus on the meditation object, which was radiating the new feeling out. I observed phenomena such as body, feelings, thoughts, and consciousness popping in and out.

In the evening, I sat for an hour. I quickly reached the earlier state. I had strong equanimity, and nothing could shake my mind. I did not perceive anything around me; even the perception of the entire cosmos being pervaded with the feeling of Joy was absent. It was just a balance of mind, shifting between dreamy and active states.

Another morning sitting was filled with experiences of equanimity, shifting between dreamy and active states of mind. I was still testing whether the feeling had traces of joy as earlier or if they were totally different, as described by Bhante. I know for sure the feeling has changed from vibrant joyfulness towards calmer and balanced states.

One evening, I sat in the garden, feeling quite content with the stupa I made for my mother since her passing away in January this year. I felt calm and settled, so I decided to sit for some time before Pray (my wife) would call me for our evening Sunday dinner. I felt very comfortable in mind and body, observing all the sensations from the gentle wind and rain. My mind became radiant from time to time, as if the sun was shining, which I did not expect on such a cloudy and rainy day.

April 16th. Today is Mother's Day in Nepal, but she passed away on January 2018. Unlike previous years, I no longer had her with us. So, I sat with the thought that this sitting would be a wish for welfare and happiness for her, wherever she is reborn. I entered a deep state of equanimity fairly quickly. My mind was intensely bright at the beginning, and some thoughts started arising. I used the 6Rs to release those and adjusted my energy to feel more relaxed. I observed even more peaceful states arising and remained very calm and tranquil. I directly saw these deep states of equanimity as if looking from a hilltop with full mindfulness and clear awareness. I had a thought: this is definitely a superhuman state as described in the *Suttas* by the Buddha. My body was tranquil, and my mind was bright and soft. Insights were arising, and I was verifying the descriptions in the *Suttas* one by one. I had to interrupt my sitting after one hour due to the need to get ready for Monday.

One of the traps I keep falling into during meditation is starting to observe the feeling of breath instead of radiating the feeling of *Metta* or *Brahmavihara*. This causes a slowdown, and I either end up in

sloth and torpor or restlessness. This afternoon, I noticed the moment I was falling into this trap again, and then backed off to observe the feeling of *Brahmavihara* and the radiant mind after using the 6Rs. The meditation was very alert, light, and full of awareness.

It is now May 2018. During these days, I continued my meditation as a normal practice without any excitement or expectations. Each day is just another opportunity to practice, making me more at ease. Lately, I have noticed that I am becoming more at ease in entering states of strong equanimity. It feels as if I am holding onto a very stable platform, and nothing can shake my mind. However, I still need to sharpen my mindfulness to catch exactly when my mind drifts or engages in thinking, which I discover a little later.

Today is May 6th, 2018. Yesterday, all our family members from the UK came to my place to join the inauguration and consecration of the stupa I built in my mother's memory. It was a wonderful sunny day, and Bhante Sumana led the chanting and blessing.

This morning, around 8 am, I sat for meditation by radiating equanimity in six directions. My mind settled very easily, and by the time I was radiating in all directions, my mind was very calm, bright, and tranquil. I observed whatever arose in my mind. What I noticed was that my mind is bright most of the time, but gradually it becomes clouded or covered with shades, and then some images or memories from the past appear. If I am attentive and apply the 6Rs right away, my mind becomes fully radiant again. So, I had the thought that these are arising mind consciousnesses. The moment I start to grasp the form of that consciousness and give it names, it leads to the arising of name and form, which is a concept that arises because I identified with that consciousness. Relaxing right then immediately led to a radiant mind devoid of any such phenomena. I had a wow moment, realizing this was a good insight. I did not continue long, as I thought I would sit again and observe if this insight is consistent or not.

Today is May 7th, 2018. This morning, I sat for almost two hours. As usual, I started by radiating equanimity in six directions for 30 minutes. After that, I began radiating equanimity in all directions simultaneously. I noticed that while my mind was intensely bright, I could see thoughts coming one after another almost incessantly. I realized that maybe I was putting a bit too much energy into

watching my object of meditation. So, I backed off and started infusing a tranquil feeling while radiating equanimity. Immediately, I noticed a subsiding of these thoughts. On another occasion, when my mind was a little restless, I mentally recited the words of the Buddha from *Majjhima Nikaya* 106, the *Anenja Sappaya Sutta*:

“I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, nor is there anything for me with anyone anywhere.”

This brought me equanimity immediately, and I continued with my practice. Similarly, in previous stages, if I encountered any thoughts obsessing my mind, I used to mentally recite an extract from the Buddha's Advice to Rahula (*Majjhima Nikaya* 62):

“Rahula, develop meditation that is like the earth for when you develop meditation that is like the earth any arisen thought or feelings will not invade your mind and remain. Just like people throw clean things dirty things excrement urine blood and earth is not horrified or humiliated by that. So too when you develop meditation like to earth any arisen contact will not invade your mind and remain.”

So, with all five elements including space, I found space to be very helpful when I was experiencing the realm of infinite consciousness to release the mind from being overpowered by strong thoughts.

Today, I am on a work trip to Germany. After taking a flight, I decided to meditate on the plane. My mind settled into a deep state of strong equanimity quickly. Many small thoughts kept coming and going, though I was not attending to any of them. Suddenly, I had an insight: it will be impossible to attain the total cessation of suffering just by experiencing deep concentration where the mind is totally absorbed without a direct understanding of phenomena arising in the mind. In this fully aware state of meditation, the mind is very alert to phenomena but is not obsessed or invaded by any of them. It is like sitting on top of a hill with a panoramic view of everything below, yet with no reaction or excitement to anything seen, heard, sensed, or cognized. It is quite remarkable to know that I have full awareness of myself meditating in this seat with all surroundings, and at the same

time, I perceive another dimension that is totally separate from these worldly activities, where peace and equanimity are very prevalent. I know I am in a deep state of strong equanimity, but at the same time, I have full awareness and can make the decision to stay in or come out of this state anytime I want.

This morning's sitting was one hour as usual. I was not particularly keen on doing anything nor did I have any excitement about anything. I started meditation by radiating equanimity in all directions at the same time. However, I was experiencing all kinds of thoughts coming up and pulling my attention away from my meditation object. I tried various methods to regain the balance of my mind. It took a while. By the time I was settling into my meditation, it was already time to break it. I had discussions with my friends about some big plans, and my mind was still attached to those plans and actions, so calming the mind was still a challenge.

What is actually meant by *Vipassana*, and why without a tranquil mind insight is impossible? *Vipassana* does not actually mean insights as it is widely thought; rather, it means discriminatory observations of perversion or abnormal mental activities that arise in a still mind. With a mind equipped with the knowledge of Buddha Dhamma, these observations lead to insights and ultimately to *Nibbāna*. As to why we can't see those subtle things in normal times when the mind is still humming, I recall the *Sutta* called *Sangarava Sutta* in *Samyutta Nikaya* 46.55. Here, the Buddha says it is impossible to see what's beneath the water if it is muddled by different perturbations (e.g., color, algae, boiling, wind, shade). He compared these to lust, sloth and torpor, hatred, restlessness, and doubt, respectively. I had a direct insight into these statements. Indeed, it is impossible to see those subtle things with an uncalm mind.

Why does even abiding in the base of equanimity not lead to awakening? My mind was exceptionally quiet and calm while I was meditating one day. I saw that I could be in this peaceful and tranquil state for millions or billions of years, experiencing bliss, but I did not see any progress towards the way out to complete liberation of the mind. It felt like I was just sitting stationary in the ocean of calm and equanimity, and that's all. I definitely saw what was missing, and

escape was possible through observations of the mind and figuring out how the mind, as part of the dependent origination process, works.

Difference between consciousness (Vinnana) and wisdom (Panna)—The difference between consciousness (*Vinnana*) and wisdom (*Panna*)—The deepest riddle of our existence, according to the Buddha, is understanding consciousness within the process of phenomena due to dependent origination: how we get trapped in the links of dependent origination that lead to suffering again and again. Literally, consciousness is called *Vinnana* or *Vigyana* in Sanskrit. *Vinnana* means knowledge that discriminates things like red, blue, warm, cold. This in itself is generally considered sufficient, and we rely on consciousness to define our worlds. The Buddha compared consciousness aggregates to a conjurer's or magician's tricks. Why he said that may be extremely hard for many people to accept. I was also baffled by this for a long time and unable to grasp this statement. Now I know why.

Consciousness is a very narrow or only a small subset of knowledge that is attached to the senses. When we understand the Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths and dependent origination, we come to realize that the six sense consciousnesses are like projections of narrow beams of light in the tunnel of darkness of ignorance, and attention is the beam. The teachings include consciousness at very early stages of dependent origination where a person immediately gets trapped into making sense of sense awareness to produce name and form. It is like some children opening a box always presuming there is a gift inside without reflecting on whatever may actually be inside. This is also the case with magician activities. People are enticed or cheated to focus on a small area, excluding much greater activities hidden underneath by the magician. *Panna* or wisdom is consummate knowledge that enables us to see the complete picture of our realities and opens our mind to see the Four Noble Truths and how consciousness sustains the dependent origination of suffering.

It's June 2018 now. I sat one evening around nine. Lately, I have noticed that I am more at ease in overcoming sloth and torpor as I

practice adjusting my energy while radiating equanimity in all directions. I was having sporadic thoughts coming and going. I kept 6R'ing them. When a particular hindrance is hard to let go of, I mentally recited the Buddha's advice to Rahula with the similes of the five elements as in *Majjhima Nikaya* 62. I have found this to be really helpful at this stage and was able to overcome major restlessness very easily about thirty minutes from the start.

After this, I entered a very deep state of calm and equanimity. I saw that my mind was extremely radiant, malleable, and wieldy as described in the *Suttas*. I was very comfortable and saw how my mind gradually settled into this still state.

I can easily compare this to a scientific analogy. The state of mind is a superposition of many individual mind objects or components. Usually, our minds are obsessed by one or more of the five hindrances. During the sitting, the magnitudes of these hindrances were gradually decreasing, and the composite mind was becoming calmer and calmer, as if it were converging towards a point of cessation.

In digital communications, there is a branch called adaptive filter theory, where the radio channel is learned through training signals embedded in transmitted data. Using these signals as references, adaptive filters adjust weights to gradually reduce channel estimation errors and approximate the true channel magnitudes. Over time, the filter achieves nearly perfect precision in estimating the channel and reaches a state of total convergence with the underlying channel. In this steady state, the filter weights become fixed, and further adjustments cease completely. To achieve this state, the filter typically uses a small step size for weight adjustment. Choosing a very small step size can prolong the convergence process, while selecting a large step size can cause overshooting, leading to significant divergence from the underlying channel. This process bears resemblance to adjusting the energy Awakening factor to guide us towards reaching Cessation.

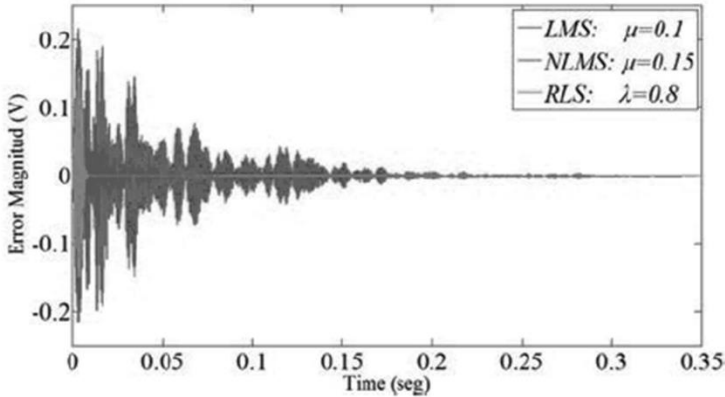


Figure 13: An illustration of fast, medium, and slow convergence to a steady state in filter theory. The stilling of all formations and the mind can follow a similar process.

It's June 2018. One morning, I sat down for meditation after breakfast, which was a change from my usual routine of meditating before breakfast. Typically, I start my mornings with a strong coffee, so my mind was quite active at the beginning of this session. For the first 30 minutes, while radiating equanimity in all six directions, I observed my mind jumping from one thought to another. However, after that initial phase, I experienced a strong feeling of equanimity radiating in all directions simultaneously. My mind became exceptionally alert and agile, and the sense of equanimity I felt resembled the states I used to achieve when reaching the fourth *Jhana* about a year ago. It was almost unshakeable.

While in this state, I suddenly had an insight into my meditation practice and how it compared to absorption concentration⁶⁷ practices. My mind drew a comparison to mobile wireless environments and the design of receivers that can decode information sent through such environments. The insight was that a traditional receiver, which operates effectively only in a static environment with minimal fluctuations (often referred to as a white noise environment), can decode information well under those conditions but fails miserably in dynamic environments where

⁶⁷ The TWIM community use Collectedness instead, as concentration often leans towards one-pointed practices.

fluctuations are present. This failure occurs because the receiver is trained to function under fixed conditions. However, a receiver that is aware of environmental fluctuations can decode information regardless of how much the conditions vary. This analogy perfectly reflected the meditation practice I was engaged in—a practice rooted in mindfulness and full awareness.

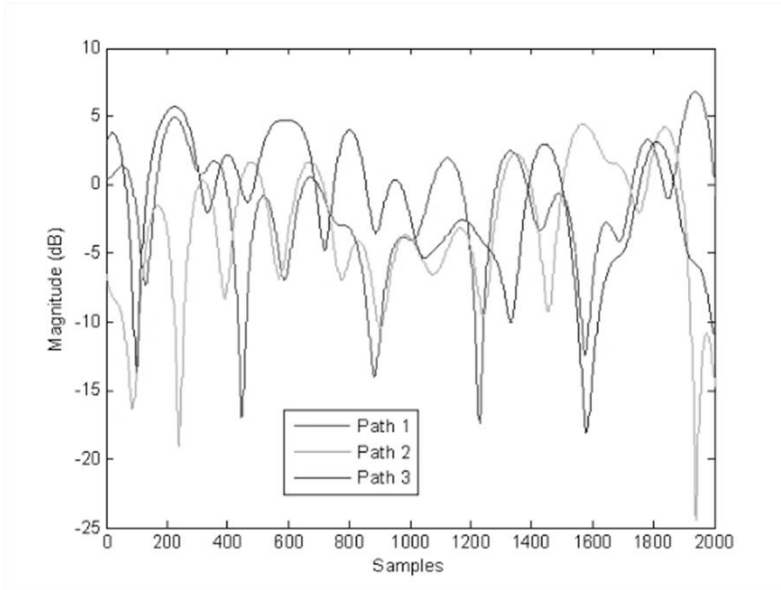


Figure 14: Individual waves (paths) can create deep canyon-like effects. Combining them can mitigate signal loss—much like arousing the Awakening factors to uplift the mind.

The receiver can decode data even when receiving information from a single direction or path. However, the reliability of decoding information significantly improves when it can receive multiple copies of the same information from various paths and coherently combine them. The figure here illustrates how superimposing multiple waveforms can greatly reduce deep canyons like states and create a flatter surface for easier traversal. The Seven Awakening factors act like multiple branches of the receiver, where each contributes proportionally to increasing the reliability of information decoding and mitigating losses caused by environmental factors.

A *Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, specifically in the chapter on Awakening Factors (*Samyutta Nikaya 46.56 Abhaya Sutta*), clearly demonstrates this principle. Here, the Buddha explains how each Awakening factor contributes to understanding things as they truly are, beginning with mindfulness and culminating in equanimity. Prince Abhaya acknowledges the profound help provided by each Awakening factor individually, let alone the synergy when all seven factors are developed.

Furthermore, the meditation experience was precisely as described in the *Suttas*: there was full awareness of the surroundings while the mind remained exceptionally composed and alert, free from wandering thoughts—akin to an arrow poised to hit a target with precise accuracy.

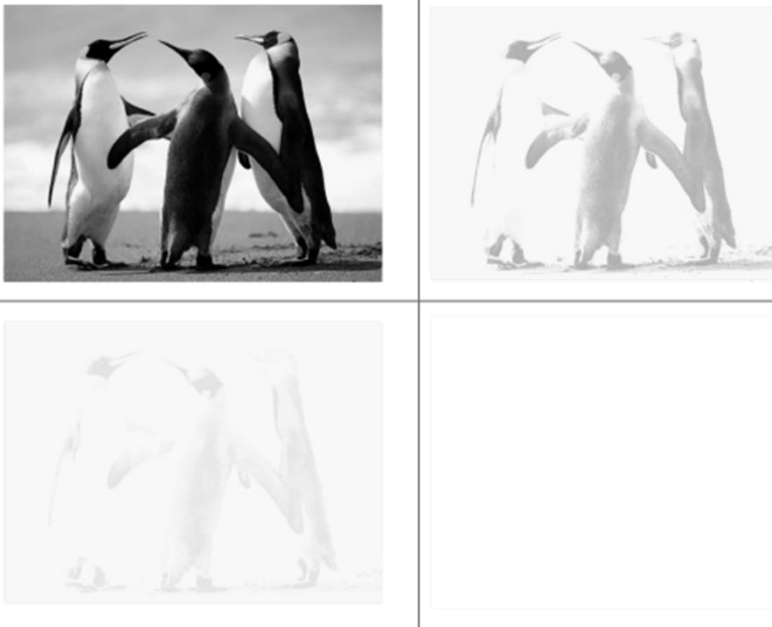


Figure 15 With practice, the luminosity of the mind increases, demystifying the process of consciousness and leading to the culmination of wisdom.

Base of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception. 18. “He emerged mindful from that attainment. Having done so, he contemplated the states that had passed, ceased, and changed, thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: ‘There is an escape beyond,’ and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

It’s almost the end of June 2018. I am feeling more at ease with the state of meditation now. I am able to steady the mind and observe any distractions as they arise. It is much easier to allow the mind to calm down. When it settles, the mind is very radiant and alert. I have found the Buddha's advice to Rahula—to treat any arising thoughts just as the five great elements do—to be extremely powerful in maintaining composure and deepening the mind's balance. As I frequently dwell in this state of deep meditation, which appears to be at the most subtle level between perception and non-perception, I gain more confidence and ease. My perception of the world fades away, and the senses seem to fade as well. Yet the radiant mind remains visible, a sublime state of tranquility and calm that goes deeper and deeper.

I have had some sittings where I could see the mind gradually settling to a very still point with very little movement. It felt very peaceful and tranquil, calmer than when I was radiating equanimity in all directions, for sure. At times, my awareness drifted in and out of dreamy and alert states. Some dreamy states are caused by hindrances, so the moment I relaxed into them, I felt exceptional clarity in my mind. It became more radiant and alert. Another thing I noticed was that my senses were not as fully aware of surroundings as before. This included body feelings, perceptions, and all other aggregates. I could observe how the mind was occupied with new thoughts emerging seemingly from nowhere, and how they arose. I felt like an observer of this play or game between mind and mind objects in slow motion. Sometimes thoughts arose, like "What if I die" while in that state. Well, I had enough awareness that I have nothing

to lose and nothing is mine anyway, so I could see some fear arising, but it did not frighten me at all. "What about the family?" I was reminded again. That is not for me to worry about if this happens. But I was able to let these thoughts go very easily. My mind was in the most sublime state, for sure.

In the past few days, I feel that I have a lot of balance in everyday life. There are no big reactions even to quite stressful situations. I am just aware of what needs to be done and carry on with my work. My mind is alert and equanimous all the time, and it feels like my forehead is beaming equanimity to anything in front of me.

This morning, I sat for 1 hour and 10 minutes. Nowadays, my mind settles very easily and I can enter a state of lower perception very quickly. My mind is clear and alert, but the radiance varies from time to time within the same sitting. I have noticed several semi-aware states, comparable to dreamy states, but with a bright mind and enough awareness to relax any thoughts or mental activities. After each relaxation, my mind goes into a very tranquil state, and I feel a lot of bliss. My awareness of mind objects as they arise is very sharp. I also noticed that all the other consciousnesses are subsided to a bare minimum, although I can notice when they arise—I can see their coming and going. My response to them all is: "This is not me, this I am not, this is not myself."

One afternoon, after a walk, I sat for meditation. It was quite a pleasant experience, and I noticed my mind settling quite quickly. I continually relaxed the mind as any thoughts or reactions to sensations arose. Somewhere in the middle of the sitting, I lost awareness for a few minutes. I wasn't sure if I was aware or not, but after becoming aware of my meditation again, I felt very calm and composed. It was quite a nice experience, very peaceful and tranquil.

It's July 2018. I sat one morning after a somewhat restless night with difficulty sleeping. Mind objects and consciousnesses were arising and passing continually throughout the sitting. I observed them without reaction, relaxing the mind each time attention drifted from its clear, bright state. One significant insight from this sitting was directly seeing that the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and mind that we perceive as the self were slowly

dismantling and breaking apart. There was nothing solid, nothing permanent or stable that I could hold onto.

On another morning, my mind was initially quite active. It settled quickly, though. I noticed my mindfulness was very sharp; it seemed no mental object escaped my awareness. I saw them arising and passing away very clearly, like scenes in a slow-motion movie. Eventually, awareness started to become checkered. I noticed some dream-like states and alternations in awareness of the senses happening in turns. I felt calm and composed, hovering between dreamy and bright states, with the mind completely relaxed and at ease.

I heard loud sirens outside, but my mind was unperturbed. I simply observed the waves arising and ceasing. I didn't go beyond hearing sounds as they actually were—no craving, no clinging. It was amazing!

August 2018—During my sittings, I experienced loss of senses and dreamy states. I saw things that later seemed absurd, like emails stacking up to the sky like Jack and the Beanstalk tree. My body and senses were fading and checkered. Sometimes thoughts arose as if I should have control over them, as if I had lost authority. I noticed a continuous vibration-like sensation, which I continually relaxed into. At times, I observed the vibration slowing down a little. At one point, the vibrations faded, and a bright, calm state arose. I stayed in that state for a moment, but it didn't last long. The body felt as if it consisted only of the head, feet, and corners of the hips—totally disintegrated, yet I could perceive them as a body.

It's September 2018. I sat one morning. After reading many *Suttas* from the Section on *Anapanasati* in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, I truly grasped what *Anapanasati*, the mindfulness of breathing, that the Buddha spoke about, was. It says this method is so effective that it can instantly dispel any ill will or unwholesome states, like rain washing away all dirt and dust. The key to this is to tranquilize on the in-breath and tranquilize on the out-breath. What does tranquilize mean? The Pali word is "*Passambhaya*," meaning to tranquilize, relax, or let go of tension. As Bhante Punnaji said, meditation is not doing something but letting go of doing and just letting things be.

I was amazed at the relief in having a mind devoid of activities. Anything the mind picked up was completely clear to me. I effortlessly let any arising phenomena go, and there was only peace and calm. No suffering at all. I was amazed that I could interrupt the chain of dependent origination by simply relaxing into the arising phenomena. I could see the mind was very bright but slightly cluttered by arising mental objects, like thoughts that started as small patches and grew into images of something I was very attached to. The moment I let them go, there was nothing afterward—just a peaceful and tranquil state.

The mind was detached from all consciousnesses, clear and bright. In this state, I noticed vivid colors and shapes arising and ceasing, as well as some dream-like states, but the mind remained very alert. I hardly felt my body, and sitting was effortless, easily continuing for a few hours.

Had another interesting sitting that passed very quickly. I could feel that I still needed to catch up on sleep and wasn't feeling very fresh. Consequently, my mind wasn't as bright and alert. It didn't sink into sloth and torpor, but I noticed my mind drifting into dreamy states, although the peace and calm were still very pleasant. So, getting enough sleep is crucial for a good meditation session.

Too long with neither perception nor non-perception, but no Cessation? — At this stage, it's tempting to be eager for meditation to progress, feeling like we've come a long way with just a little left to do. As we practice 6R and guide the mind's attention, we closely observe voidness and experience complete peace. Longing for progress can extend this state and lead to restlessness. Also, this state can be confusing; the loss of perception and senses can often be due to sloth and torpor or tiredness. In a single sitting, we may experience dreamy states without mindfulness, as well as very bright and alert NPNNP states arising and passing away. Many other experiences come and go, with no control over anything, akin to watching a lamp flame flicker in the wind. For instance, it's like wanting to skydive but holding onto the airplane door and questioning why it hasn't happened. Let go of any notion of "I" falling away. The waiting must cease; if it happens, let it be, and continue sitting content with what has been achieved so far.

Sometimes, the mind becomes exceptionally quiet and still, as if everything is about to stop completely. Suddenly, the mind tricks us by instilling fear in the form of craving—if all perceptions and feelings stop, the mind itself may die. Only when the mind is ready to accept anything without desire can cessation occur. It's not planned; the mind will naturally reach this state. Developing disenchantment and dispassion towards anything that arises will be the next steps.

November 2018—One thing I've learned over the last few months is that meditation sitting is best when I'm relaxed and have no expectations, particularly on days like Saturday or Sunday morning when I have plenty of time. If I sit with the thought that I have ample time and will have a great experience, my mind often doesn't go deep and struggles with distractions. No matter the method I use to let go of distractions, they keep coming back. I've spent entire sessions just trying to overcome them. I'm learning the hard way that having expectations and longing for a good meditation is a hindrance. Thinking longer sitting times are better than shorter ones is also greed. So, regardless of whether it's thirty minutes or five hours, it's not important. Expecting five-hour sessions to lead to good meditation doesn't work.

My morning sittings usually last about an hour. I typically set a timer, which often becomes a distraction. However, one morning I was calm and relaxed, not trying to achieve anything. The mind wobbled a bit at the start, but for about forty-five minutes, it was very peaceful and tranquil. Any small disturbances arose and passed without causing any movement in the mind. I simply noted their arrival and departure. It was very pleasant and quiet.

In the afternoon, I usually sit for around thirty minutes after a twenty-minute walk. One afternoon, my mind felt very energetic. Strong equanimity pervaded the sitting, and it was a quiet period with no distractions pulling my mind in any direction. It felt solid as a rock, and nothing could shake it. Over the last several days, I've noticed my mind feels blank, without any thoughts or memories. My mind tricks me into thinking, "What if I lose my mind and memories completely?" However, it's simply that my mind is becoming quieter and isn't used to being so still, as it was previously preoccupied with criticizing others, planning, and thinking about how to enjoy things.

On Cessation of Perception, Feeling and Consciousness

"Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither perception- nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling, and having seen with wisdom, his taints are utterly destroyed. To this extent, friend, the Blessed One has spoken of the achievement of an opening amid confinement in a non-provisional sense."

[Anguttara Nikaya 10.42: Confinement]

21 Nov 2018—Sat this afternoon for about thirty-five minutes as usual after lunch and a twenty-minute walk. I felt a bit tired but quite relaxed and wanted to just sit and see what would happen. I found a good balance of mind and entered into an NPNNP state several times. At times, I could hear colleagues in the breakout area talking loudly, and then their voices would fade away, making my experience a bit fuzzy.

Near the end of my sitting, I noticed that my mind went very deep somehow. For a short time, I didn't notice anything. Then my perception and feeling returned gradually, as if starting from zero and gradually returning to normal awareness. My mind saw much grosser vibrations coming and going. My entire body felt these vibrations, which were very pleasant and different from any previous feelings. This experience was by far the most vivid experience of seeing the arising of links, appearing like energetic and vibratory bubbles. I sat there in awe, thinking, "What is this?!" It seems like a major step forward. I'll need to sit more to see if I can feel that again. I was totally unprepared and did not expect such an experience to occur at that time. I barely had more than thirty-five minutes to sit, and I never thought I would experience something like this, especially while at work during my one-hour break. I usually use this secluded spot in a large hall where everyone comes for lunch break. People used to think I just took a nap to recharge.

Anya's birthday was yesterday, and we have been planning a trip to Bournemouth over the weekend as an additional gift for her and for the whole family to enjoy some quality time together. We left home around 9 AM, driving through the M25 motorway. While Pray tuned into her Spotify streams, I listened to songs playing over the

car audio. I still experienced some joy and feelings of freedom from the worldly cycles. Then, I heard the famous song by Narayan Gopal called ‘Tonight what I saw in my dream, I saw myself dying’. While I used to feel a bit upset by the gloomy lyrics of the song before, I now heard the song from a different perspective.

There is dying, but the dying has nothing to do with me. What is dying is a body; I do not see this body as me, myself, or anything. If it dies, what is there for me to lament? This body has already shown signs of giving up, so why should I consider it anything special? I thought about how the singer has a sad attachment to this body, seeing it as himself and dreading its demise. I viewed this in a different light. I realized that my mind and body are totally separate entities. There was nothing surreal about this sense of looking at things. I could only feel relief that there is no body to afflict the mind. My mind seemed totally relieved knowing that this body will one day die, and I will not regret losing it.

As one becomes familiar with being able to enter Cessation, it becomes very clear why the Buddha praised this state so highly as the ultimate step towards the way out of all suffering. In other words, he categorically mentioned in *Anguttara Nikaya* 9.43-51, that when one emerges from Cessation of perception and feeling, one is guaranteed to attain the destruction of taints at some point in life. However, ideas from teachers like Shaila Catherine are heavily influenced by the *Visuddhimagga* and other commentaries, missing the very important point of the Buddha’s teachings. The Cessation of perception and feeling is the culmination, the highest state in the Noble Eightfold Path. The experience of Cessation is nothing to fear or apprehend, as many people, including famous meditation teachers, seem to think.

This state is also preceded by the signless abiding in voidness⁶⁸ that the Buddha himself often temporarily dwelt in during his old age for relief from bodily pain—where one is devoid of all distractions—a state of sublime peace and relief. Unlike the earlier *Jhanas* and formless spheres, in this state, there is no feeling, perception, or consciousness. Most people think it must be a terrifying experience to lose feelings,

⁶⁸ Majjhima Nikaya 121: Culasunnata Sutta

perception, and consciousness. However, experiencing this directly is entirely different. Here lies the utmost relief from all kinds of stress, pain, and sorrow. I have now entered this state many times and can confidently say it is the most worthwhile and sublime experience among all *Jhanas* or formless states.

This state can never be reached by anyone practicing methods of suppressing hindrances through various forms of one-pointed concentration or bare insight practices. This is because one can enter Cessation only when all craving and hindrances are completely let go, leaving no residue at all—like a spacecraft that has come to a complete halt due to the exhaustion of all fuel—a state of the complete end of all activities. The fuel is craving, which in its finest state can manifest as the finest bit of restlessness, excitement, or fear. Only after completely letting go of these very fine states can one enter Cessation.

One enters this state unknowingly and emerges from it unknowingly; there is no control over it. However, when one has mastered the practice of determination to enter and emerge from Cessation, as stated in the *Suttas*⁶⁹, one can at least plan when to experience this state. This does not mean the process is spontaneous and requires no preparation—rather, one must fully cultivate the seven factors conducive to Awakening⁷⁰. These are mindfulness, investigation of experiences, energy, joy, tranquility, stillness, and equanimity. As one progressively calms the tensions arising from mental factors that touch the mind from time to time, one becomes very comfortable in body and mind. Mindfulness, alertness, joy, comfort, and calmness become more refined, and suddenly, all states dissolve. After some time has elapsed, one notices directly how the senses and perceptions gradually return to normal: hearing returns, body sensations restore themselves, as if one has awakened from a dreamless, deep night's sleep.

⁶⁹ Majjhima Nikaya 43: Mahāvedalla Sutta

⁷⁰ Samyutta Nikaya, Bojjhanga Samyutta

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception, Sariputta entered upon and abided in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his taints were destroyed by his seeing with wisdom.

“He emerged mindful from that attainment. Having done so, he recalled the states that had passed, ceased, and changed, thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: ‘There is no escape beyond,’ and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is not.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

Getting used to Cessation

January 2019—Over the past few days, I've really gained a good understanding of how to progress with right effort in letting go of craving. I was able to abide in comfort and calmness, effortlessly letting go of distractions. The method I adopted was simply to take distractions as they arose, letting them be and dropping them without exertion. No energy was wasted—I felt very light in both mind and body. This approach has perhaps been the easiest of all the efforts I've made in my meditation practices so far. From my experiences, I've learned that as one progresses to higher realms, the amount of effort needed diminishes. While in lower *Jhanas* I did not feel any headache or discomfort with the same level of effort, I did experience this when trying harder during NPNNP. Among all the stages, I've spent the longest in the NPNNP state, so I've noticed its diversity in terms of experiences.

These days, I feel that I don't stay in this state for very long and often drift from NPNNP to Cessation. I usually recognize that when the mind becomes very still and collected, its brightness increases significantly. It sometimes feels like observing milk being heated in a pot. Milk generally takes a few minutes to heat up near boiling point. As we watch, it reaches a point where it starts boiling rapidly and evaporates quickly. Anyone wishing to retain the milk in its hot liquid form must exercise extreme caution to cook it fully. I've noticed the

mind reaches a very similar state, and in this crucial moment to maintain composure, if one is not mindful and internally balanced, the mind can easily slip into restlessness or anxiety. I've seen this happen so many times that now I feel I'm getting better at handling such situations. The radiance of mind I've experienced has also grown as I've become more familiar with this practice. The brightness of mind resembles the illumination of the sky with thousands or millions of suns.

5 Feb 2019—We are driving from Kathmandu to Baglung to visit our birth home and other places. It took about 12 hours to get here after driving through Pokhara and rugged roads to Baglung, which were damaged by torrential rains.

We stayed in our cottage home for the night. However, I was unable to sleep all night due to the new location. I continually noticed all sorts of thoughts invading my mind and felt restless. Around 4 AM, I decided to freshen up and sit in meditation. I meditated for about an hour, experiencing NPNNP states back and forth. By the end of my sitting, my mind was free from restlessness, sleepiness, and tiredness. I didn't experience any such feelings throughout the day and felt fresh and alert.

11 Feb 19 - I am in Nepal for 2 weeks to commemorate the first-year anniversary of my mother's death. My meditation practice has become somewhat sporadic, and I haven't had many deep experiences.

Yesterday, I tried sitting just after the morning meal, which consisted of a good portion of rice and curries. I felt a bit drowsy during the sitting, and within 15 minutes, I had to break the sitting due to sloth and torpor.

Later in the afternoon, I sat again and lasted about an hour. Meditating in Nepal is a bit different. Here, I hear background noises of people, cars, bikes, metal workers, dogs and birds almost all the time, so I am used to these sounds. Also, I have been experiencing NPNNP states so many times that I do not sit with any expectations for meditation to go deeper or experience Cessation. Sometime in the middle, I lost perception of anything around me. Gradually, my perception and feeling returned, like the volume of a speaker being

turned up. I noted grosser vibrations of the mind, but due to the background noise, I could not quite see them clearly.

24 Feb 19 - Sat this morning for 1 hr as usual. I was very calm and composed even before the sit and did not have any expectations from the sitting. I found reciting the Buddha's words or the 5 elements on his advice to Rahula at the beginning balanced my mind. I was just observing a clear mind and applying the "6R" method to any distractions. My mind entered and exited the NPNNP states several times, and my mind was very bright and light. I noted a short gap in my awareness again, followed by some gross movement of the mind, and immediately after that, a lot of joy and happiness followed. I kept applying the "6R" method and stayed with my object of meditation with a very balanced mind, hardly impacted by any distracting thoughts.

12 March 2019 - I have not had good sittings in the evenings for a long time. Usually, it seems that my mindfulness weakens due to some sort of tiredness, and I feel sleepy within a short time. This evening, I sat at 20:30 for about 1 hr. My mind was very active for the first 15 minutes or so. I kept relaxing and coming back to observing the clear mind. I did not give up observing the mind and watched it very closely. I observed many kinds of thoughts and feelings arising, trying to grab my attention and fading away by themselves as I continually applied the "6R" method to them. I now understand very well that there is nothing for me to grab onto and consider them to be me or mine at all. Instead, I was amused by such thoughts, which appeared like uninvited visitors causing some nuisance to the mind. My mind remained very balanced after that and went very deep into the NPNNP state. My mind was like a still pond due to the complete subsiding of any thoughts for long periods, and equanimity and stillness pervaded my body and mind, along with some joy and happiness. I clearly saw what the pure mind looks like and was amazed by the experience.

19 May 2019 - Today is Vesak day, a very special day for all who follow the Buddha's teachings. Over the last few days, I have made some adjustments to my practice, and I am blown away by how much better my sittings have been since then. Previously, while sitting, I used to focus only on a bright spot around the forehead part of the

mind and relax there, instead of opening up the whole mind and relaxing. Now I understand why I used to experience headaches and a slow, confused mind. I was not opening up the mind enough and relaxing. I was also very focused on body pain as it arose and couldn't sit for longer. Observing only a small part of the mind eventually led to one-pointed concentration, and this had all the side effects that I was experiencing.

This little adjustment has greatly improved my meditation. The mind was bright and full of energy throughout the sitting. My mindfulness was very good. I experienced that the mind becomes so subtle that all sense experiences are checkered. There is no solid consciousness at all.

12 November 2020 - The Buddha has said that as one practices diligently, the liberation of the mind through the Cessation of perception and feeling can be experienced even while in the first *Jhana*, second *Jhana*, or any of the *Jhanas* or formless attainments. I have practiced meditation so many times now that I recall entering Cessation while abiding in the second *Jhana*, fourth *Jhana*, base of nothingness, and NPNNP. Entering the state of Cessation really happens when there is no prior planning or intention. I have found myself slipping into Cessation particularly during those sittings when I least expect it. Very odd, but true.

On Determinations and Mastery of the *Jhanas*

Around 2019-2020-After having experienced various *Jhana* stages and formless spheres, I have recently been practicing and experimenting with a method to experience any of them at predetermined periods of time. This is a very useful tool to be able to experience and understand more clearly the characteristics and nature of each *Jhana*. A detailed description of the *Jhanas* is given in the *Anupada Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikaya*, where the Buddha states that Sariputta experienced each *Jhana* up to and including the base of nothingness while remaining mindful and fully aware. Previously, when experiencing each of the *Jhanas*, I did not have much control over how long I could sustain them and I didn't know if my experiences were accurate. With the practice of determination, I have

been able to closely observe how the first *Jhana* arises, how it ceases, and gives way to enter the second *Jhana*, and so on.

The practice of determination requires time, patience, and perseverance. Some days the experiences flow smoothly, while other times they do not. I have found that on days when I am more comfortable and well-rested, my practices yield very fruitful results. I can see each *Jhana* very clearly and can remain in them for as long as I intend. Fine-tuning the timing has also improved with each practice session. Initially, if I aimed to emerge from the first *Jhana* in 30 minutes, I might end up staying for 40 minutes or 25 minutes—close, but not achieving the precise timing I aimed for. Nowadays, after daily sittings for nearly two weeks, I can emerge from the *Jhanas* fairly close to the intended time—within a minute of the set duration of say, 30 or 45 minutes.

Today, I wanted to revisit the experience of the fourth *Jhana*, so I determined to emerge from it after 45 minutes during my sitting. I radiated *Metta* to myself for 5 minutes, then for the remaining time, I directed *Metta* towards my spiritual friend, feeling warmth in my chest area. I could sense the shift with feelings of calm and equanimity arising, while the feeling of joy simultaneously subsided. The remained in this experience for the duration I had determined and allowed the mind to stay and kept coming back to it if distractions pulled my attention away. I knew how mind is very powerful in maintaining its own clock, so I did not see a need to perfect this skill anymore.

What I ‘ve Learned

Over the period from 2017 to 2020, I experimented with the TWIM practice and calibrated it with *Sutta* references and descriptions. I understand that keeping notes of specific experiences as definitive guides may be pointless, as things can often turn out differently, a paradox that the Buddha highlighted⁷¹, perpetuating our existence in the conditioned realm. Here are some notes—or perhaps anecdotes—I hope you find useful.

⁷¹ Udana 3.10: Lokavolokana Sutta (Surveying the World)

Keep mental proliferation in check right from the start—I've noticed that when I radiate *Metta* towards people or other living beings, paying more attention to someone triggers many associated memories that instantly divert my focus from the object of meditation. It helps a lot if I adopt a light attitude towards these distractions, simply radiating the feeling without getting entangled in thoughts. I once heard from Bhante Punnaji that *Metta* represents the spreading aspect like the surface of a cube, whereas compassion represents delving into depth to fill the volume—a fitting analogy.

Avoid involvement in identification or duality—When we engage with thoughts, concepts crystallize into the five aggregates, leading to a notion of self or existence that we cling to tenaciously. This creates a dualistic perception of mentality versus materiality, where we identify with mentality as our self and view materiality as external. However, these two are interconnected through consciousness, which projects our sense of self and the world. Craving stitches together name and form with the aid of consciousness, as stated in the *Tissametteyya Sutta* of the *Parayanavaqga* in the *Suttanipata*. When craving is eradicated, the distinction between name and form, form and formless, self and world ceases, leading to the attainment of *Nibbāna* in this very life.

Do not fear the cessation of existence (Bhava Nirodha)—We often fear the idea of extinction associated with *Nibbāna*. For countless eons, we have clung to the body and mind as representing our self. Through the lens of dependent co-arising, we must see that what we consider 'ourselves' is merely a heap of aggregates resulting from craving and clinging, arising due to our limited perception of the world. As we progress in meditation and contemplate cessation, the illusion of our solid existence evaporates, revealing that all that arises is suffering, and all that ceases is the same. Firmly holding onto this perspective eliminates any hindrance, no matter how subtle it may be.

Get adequate sleep to rest the body and mind—Throughout my years of TWIM practice, I've had many instances during sittings where my body and mind weren't fully rested due to insufficient sleep. I typically get 8 hours of sleep daily, which is generally enough to feel comfortable in body and mind in the mornings. However, I've found

that extending my sleep by just a little—say 8 and a half or 9 hours—and then sitting makes a noticeable difference within minutes. In these cases, the mind is exceptionally calm and mellow, effortlessly entering deep states. I don't even need to cultivate feelings of tranquility or peace; the mind remains poised, ready to engage like a devoted servant. One morning, I meditated and experienced the realm of neither perception nor non-perception within a few minutes. Although the mind occasionally wavered and drifted towards mundane thoughts, guiding it back to a collected state was effortless, without any unease or restlessness.

Adhere strictly to all precepts—The five precepts form the foundation of the Buddha's path, crucial for anyone seeking higher spiritual attainments. Even subtle deviations from these guidelines can disrupt advanced practices of the mind. The Buddha's precepts serve as general guidelines to maintain a clear mind free from guilt and remorse, which otherwise hinder meditation.

Some may assume that skilled practitioners in advanced meditation states like higher *Jhanas* and formless states are unaffected by adherence to precepts. However, in the Buddha's teachings on the higher mind, such practices are unequivocally essential and disregarding them can lead to decline in practice. I've had instances where consuming even a small amount of alcohol the previous day directly affected my meditation the next day. My mind became more sensitive, and during normal activities, such drinks caused dullness, lack of mindfulness, and a noticeable loss of mental clarity and sharpness. The effects were particularly pronounced during meditation, manifesting as debilitated brightness and increased drowsiness. It takes several days to restore clarity and agility of mind after such indulgences.

Overcoming Sloth and Torpor—Welcome to the sloth and torpor club! I've long struggled with this issue as well. Here are a few tips I've found helpful:

Meditate in the mornings if possible—From my experience, mornings are when I'm most alert and energetic, making it easier to observe the mind's attention clearly and cultivate energy and joy.

Recognize the subjective/emotional part of the mind that flows with thoughts, feelings, and sensations. We often get caught up in this flow and succumb to feelings of tiredness, boredom, or lack of focus, eventually realizing we've drifted from meditation. At this point, we may feel we've already fallen behind in practice due to lost momentum. However, there's also an objective/non-emotional part of the mind that remains detached from these fluctuations, observing them as they arise and pass away, akin to a vigilant guard at a crossroads. This is the mind emphasized in many *Suttas* on mindfulness. It took me some time to fully grasp this concept, but hopefully, you'll grasp it quicker than I did!

Prioritize walking meditation before sitting—This significantly enhances alertness and energy during meditation, making it easier for joy to arise.

Do not fixate on achieving specific Jhanas—These states naturally unfold as we focus on *Metta*. At this stage, which *Jhana* we enter is inconsequential. Once experienced, there's no doubt that this feeling is far from ordinary.

Summary

I participated in an online retreat with David in 2017, and since then, all my assumptions and doubts about TWIM gradually disappeared.

Nibbāna is not something to be attained like an academic degree. It is a state of change in your personality—that is, the reduction of greed, hatred, and delusion. There is no clear distinction between someone who has not attained *Nibbāna* and someone who has. It is a path of gradual progress towards reducing these three defilements.

Experiencing Cessation was a confirming moment that TWIM does indeed lead to the end of the Noble Eightfold Path. While other teachers may instruct on experiencing all *Jhanas*, for me, experiencing Cessation was the crucial test to determine if the practice is worthwhile. However, experiencing Cessation alone is not sufficient, as I will explain later; there must be a maturation of the process and insight with wisdom. Only then does experiencing Cessation bear fruit in attaining Stream Entry, Once Returning, Non-Returning, and Arahatsip.

I do not consider experiencing Cessation as an attainment on its own. Anyone experiencing such a state must exhibit irreversible traits. The Buddha detailed the nature of a person undergoing 44 transformations in *Majjhima Nikaya 8 Sallekha Sutta*. In essence, these properties include kindness, compassion, noble attitudes, freedom from hindrances, noble virtue, and diligence.

I can confidently say that I am now more kind, considerate, thoughtful, and less prone to anger or bitterness than I was a year ago. This is the true measure of progress on this path.

Part III

On Expositions of the Mind

In this part, I share insights from my direct meditative experiences on key aspects of the Buddha's teachings, including the state of the mind, the five hindrances, the experience of Awakening from conditioned existence, and the states of Cessation and *Nibbāna*. I begin by exploring the mental states of people engaged in various activities, showing how distractions can be managed to achieve a tranquil, aware state from which deeper reflections on the workings of the mind can be made.

I also delve into the Four Noble Truths, providing insights from direct meditative experiences. I explain what it means to awaken from the "Dream of existence" and describe the experience itself. I further elaborate on the Buddha's teachings in his first sermon about the cessation of suffering and a mind free of all mental proliferation. By understanding the Buddha's teachings on dependent origination, one can break free of the flow of this process, leading to the complete cessation of mental proliferation.

A dedicated chapter focuses on the practice leading to *Nirodha*, or the Cessation of perception and feeling—the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path. I explore the practice, the illusions of mind that keep one away from progressing to Cessation and attitude one should adopt to navigate in this path. I use various metaphors and similes to illustrate the vivid experiences encountered when committing to this path, emphasizing why this is one of the most valuable gifts as humans we can attain.

Finally, I conclude this part by referencing numerous *Suttas* where the Buddha explains *Nibbāna*—the Unconditioned state—using everyday language to describe something beyond ordinary experience. Drawing on my personal meditation experiences, I offer interpretations to help understand *Nibbāna*, which is challenging to convey in conventional terms, yet remains central to the path of liberation.

Chapter 14

Seeing Through Hindrances

This Chapter aims to uncover the experiences of those striving on the path amidst various worldly obligations. We all face practical limitations due to household life, along with numerous duties and responsibilities that we must navigate while pursuing success on this path. I am not an exception to this reality. The truth is, we are naturally bound by these practical limitations of household life — our jobs, family responsibilities, and the need to allocate time for practice.

We should not consider Dhamma as a lower priority or a background task that we can simply relegate while continuing with our daily lives. There is a delicate balancing act that we need to perform, and our situations are often trickier than we might prefer. I intend to compile a list of practices, experiences, and strategies for navigating the path within these constraints, aiming for success.

I plan to include significant *Suttas*, supplement the readings with my personal experiences, and share the journeys I have undertaken since around 2017. That's when I began seriously practicing Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation and the 6R technique.

While I consider myself a fairly skilled navigator of this path, I don't take delight in that or feel content even now. It seems that certainty in practice only arrives when we've achieved it. Until then, we must live with these mental acquisitions that often entangle us in various ways.

I would like to share some of those insights and compile whatever I have experienced here to see if it can be of value to you. I'm curious to find out if our experiences align.

I'll be covering some experiences of how we should tread this path, which doesn't appear to be straightforward in the beginning. We might think that practicing and using the 6R method is sufficient, but we are often veiled by our perceptions, experiences, and the daily accumulation of work and life situations, which can clutter our minds. These things can easily hinder our practice from being a

smooth journey. I don't believe I'm the only one facing this, and hopefully, you will find it interesting to hear what I have described.

I was fairly content and happy with my progress in practice and deep experiences. However, in early 2023, I noticed that I do not easily reach a subtle state of mind. I am quite familiar with the practice and have experienced all the states, knowing how to navigate and perform certain practices to sustain any particular state. Somehow, I observe that my mind has taken some turns in recent months, which has led me to wonder whether this is really how we should be practicing and what approaches we should take. Those five hindrances that we are all familiar with seem to have become my companions, shadows.

I would say they have become my competitors, my best friends, my companions for a good part of the last few months. I know I just have to bear with them; there's no need to defeat or overcome them. I don't have to push them away, and I generally find this easy during sitting practices. However, I've noticed that one day might be a good sitting, while another might be bad. At times, my mind is invaded by a state of sloth; other times, it is too excited by some prospects. These are the seesaw-type states that fill my diary with inconsistent sitting practices.

So, what I thought was that it might be a good idea to actually put together some notes and corroborate with the Buddha's advice on those practical challenges. This is so the practical reality of life and the minds of those people who have to continue practicing in such environments can be addressed. The first thing we all might need, if we start navigating this path, is to find Ground Zero—a state of equilibrium, a quiescent point. A point where the mind is very balanced or fully calibrated. And where is that reference point? It can be quite tricky to find out where our mind is heading and where it currently resides. When we understand these states of mind, we can pursue a practice to develop those factors that aid the practice and the goal of Awakening.

Observing the Seven Awakening factors and my awareness of where the mind is and where mindfulness is leading, I found that mindfulness indicates our mind is not settled enough. I can observe the mind, and it tells me it is not on the right footing. I can continue

the practice to cultivate happiness and joy factors, and I will start to add some tranquility. This exercise can reset the mind, bringing it to a balanced reference point. However, in our daily lives, we might get carried away with personalization, and attitudes—be it in the work environment or in life. We might have somehow overstepped or forgotten where the mind slipped. That was one of the things that was quite tricky, and it took some time for me to find the balanced state of mind and how I can start my practice with a mind that is neither too active nor too relaxed, avoiding slothful or dreamy states.

What I see is that if we are busy individuals with many daily tasks, we might easily lose that reference point. So, it might be a good idea to gauge the state of mind where we are and then try to bring the mind to that reference point.

There are several considerations when practicing: the environment should be right and fairly balanced. The sitting position should be comfortable, and there should be adequate lighting in the room. If sitting outside, we need to position ourselves to avoid facing too much brightness. We might want to avoid sitting in overly dark areas.

There are many factors to consider. Yes, these environments, these external factors, do affect the mind, and it is in our interest to choose an environment where we are comfortable and can practice for however long we wish.

My professional career and work environment meant I was dealing with many people and various issues, some of them challenging, and somehow these states seeped into my practice.

What I found was that when I sit down to meditate, I try to let the mind calm itself. However, the mind settles at a particular state where it moves in certain directions. Yet, I still notice the state and magnitude of the mind are influenced by background information from work-life environments.

So, then I thought, 'Okay, what is that?' Then I realized that things like perception of light and environment are important. We have to consider how the mind perceives them to find a sweet spot or a Goldilocks Zone. This thought just came into my mind—is it where the mind is neither too hot nor too cold? The Goldilocks Zone is a concept used by planet hunters looking for signs of life in the galaxy.

NASA and some other space exploration teams are very familiar with it. You might have heard of projects like Kepler, which has found thousands of exoplanets, with some potentially suitable for sustaining life because they fall into the Goldilocks Zone. Similarly, our mind needs a reference point to understand where that Goldilocks Zone is.

If we are trying to locate that Goldilocks Zone to enter *Jhana*, it might be a good idea to start with a sitting practice where we can observe the mind without the impacts of the environment. Just turn off all the lights and observe that empty space of the mind, like a clean slate or a blackboard. Spending a few minutes in that empty space of the mind, we can gradually see that our mind was a bit too agitated in reaction to any mental objects. We can observe the mind calming down and settling to a state where it is neither too excited nor too lethargic. Then we can maintain our practice and apply the right energy or effort. This approach may not apply to everyone or in all cases of mind disturbances, but it's something worth trying.

If we've lost track of the state of equilibrium, simply gauging the state of mind in a quiet setting can be useful for our practice. If we continue with a mind that has accumulated many tendencies without knowing where our mind should be to enter that balanced state of ease, finding this balance is crucial in this practice.

The Buddha teaches that there are many places the mind can get hooked and hindrances can linger even while in the most subtle and sublime states. We can only be completely free of these five hindrances when we have fully followed the path, letting go of any minute traces of phenomena or mental objects. These are some of the subtlest attachments that linger within us. We will not be free of these mental acquisitions simply by entering the stages of *Jhanas*; full liberation is required.

In *Jhanas*, we temporarily let go of these attachments, but they can arise and cease anytime. The practice we follow aims to release all attachments, including those associated with all *Jhanas*. We let go of the first *Jhana*, to arrive at the second, then proceed through to the third, and so on and may suddenly enter Cessation. Entering Cessation is also a temporary freedom from these mental acquisitions. They will be completely eradicated only after achieving

Arahantship. Until then, we continue with this path, which involves hit and miss in our practice. This is one of the points I wanted to share—most of us are in the same boat, and hopefully these insights are useful for you.

I would like to add some words from the Buddha regarding hindrances, disturbances, mental states, and how our practice should be guided.

I will read from the *Suttanipata*, Section 1, *Sutta* 3, called *The Rhinoceros Horn*. It's quite long, but I'll highlight some key points from that *Sutta*. It says,

"Sensual pleasures are colorful, sweet, and delightful, but in their diversity, they agitate the mind. Having seen danger in the strand of sensual pleasure, one should live alone like a rhinoceros horn."

These sensual pleasures are natural to live with, and our approach to them needs a boundary between indulgence and moderation. It's a balance we need to strike with sensual pleasure. The Buddha's path is that middle ground where we can live with these pleasures for the progress of our practice—they are necessary for keeping this body alive, but in moderation so that we can remain comfortable and practice this path with a healthy body and mind.

The point I want to emphasize here is that these sensual pleasures are colorful, delightful, and diverse. This diversity refers to the restless state of mind that engages with all senses, keeping the mind busy and overloaded, making our practice more challenging. We need to let go of reactions to these sensual perceptions so that the mind can enter a unified state based on mindfulness and collectedness.

If we read *Sutta Majjhima Nikaya 111*, it states that upon entering the base of infinite space, we let go of the perception of diversity. We no longer attend to the diversity of sense experiences; instead, we perceive the base of infinity of space there. Even in that space, we still retain the element of perception. The perception of the base of infinite space is where clinging exists. The Buddha explains that although we have let go of all external sense interactions, we have not let go of perception. This perception is also relinquished in practice, at the culmination of the Eightfold Path.

Perception and consciousness are closely linked. When perception is let go of, consciousness is also released. This immediate release of consciousness affects *Nama Rupa*. In the *Nama Rupa*, the first element includes feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. Letting go of perception means letting go of phenomena dependent on perception. This cascades to letting go of consciousness, and subsequently, *Nama Rupa*. This includes letting go of feeling, position, intention, contact, and attention. It's akin to a house of cards collapsing.

Perception is generally viewed as something that arises after feeling. However, I don't necessarily agree; perception is not merely an outgrowth of feeling. It arises alongside feeling, and they can arise and cease together. Perception plays a crucial role, making it essential to let go of.

Perception is a strong attachment because we often associate perceptions with our ego or identity. What we perceive becomes part of our identity. In practice, as we sit and observe, we may realize there is a layer of perception. We can experience the mind perceiving itself. Even this layer of perception doesn't escape mindfulness scrutiny. When we reach a subtle state of neither perception nor non-perception, the veil of perception begins to crumble. Perception, which was tied to our identity and ego, starts to destabilize. All these things must be continually let go of.

The Buddha has provided us with a path, a gradual cessation of all mental acquisitions—sensual, verbal, and mental. These acquisitions and formations are two different aspects of our suffering. The Buddha teaches that suffering arises due to craving, acquisitions, and activities of body, speech, and mind.

Exploring these Pali terms, '*Upadhi*' refers to accumulation or amassing, building up our identity through experiences. '*Sankhara*' refers to activities that propel us forward, like momentum. Think of it like a snowball effect. A small piece of ice starts rolling, accumulating snow, growing larger—it's the momentum (as *Sankhara*) that keeps it going. This momentum is what creates dependent origination.

Dependent origination reveals that phenomena are transient and empty. They lack inherent solidity or permanence. Consciousness,

feeling, perception, and formations are like ghost-like phenomena, not solid or permanent. These phenomena arise due to continuous motion and process—a vibration or oscillation that gives rise to all experiences.

An analogy is the difference between waves and particles in physics. Waves are phenomena without mass or substance, just like consciousness and perceptions. The distinction between waves and particles has blurred with advancements in quantum mechanics over the past century.

When scientists delve deeper into atoms, molecules, and subatomic particles, breaking down these components into their smallest entities, they seek to understand what drives these particles at their core. Suddenly, they grapple with the concept of quantum leaps. Quantum physics reveals that particles do not behave smoothly; they jump abruptly from one state to another. The term 'Quantum' denotes this behavior, where particles can seemingly appear like ghosts—now in one state, and instantly in another. They can traverse distances in no time, challenging the laws of physics regarding space-time and the principle of locality. Recent scientific developments suggest that the boundary between particles and waves has become increasingly blurred, with particles exhibiting wave-like behavior and vice versa.

Dependent origination, therefore, resembles a wave—its motion interconnected with other dependent phenomena. This interconnected motion gives rise to all appearances, forms, and material aspects. Delving into detailed explanations might contradict those in the physical science community who uphold the belief in an objective, independent world. For example, Einstein famously expressed his preference to believe the moon exists even when not observed, asserting its independent existence. However, an alternative perspective suggests that our perception of the moon arises dependent on our act of seeing it. The 'moon' as an object does not exist independently of our perception. This topic can become contentious as it refutes objective reality, and I realize I have digressed from discussing the Dhamma due to my interest in scientific matters. Given my profession, I find these discussions relevant and valuable.

While reading the *Suttanipata 1.3: The Rhinoceros Horn*, I encountered a verse that resonates deeply with me:

*"Like a lion unalarmed among sounds,
like the wind not caught in a net,
untainted like a lotus by water,
one should live alone like a rhinoceros horn."*

These verses carry profound meaning, particularly in the context of meditation practice. Reflecting on Bhante Vimalaramsi's early teachings, he shared a compelling anecdote about meditating amidst the noise of a water pumping machine. While some found the noise disruptive, Bhante observed it simply as sound—just sound. This perspective aligns with the Buddha's teaching, urging us not to become entangled in phenomena. These sounds merely touch our ears and occupy a fleeting moment of our mental awareness, akin to a brief time slot seeking our attention.

The essence lies in our attention. If we find ourselves ensnared by the web of the six senses, we are already immersed in diversity. The Buddha teaches us to let these sounds be, not to be startled by them. Whether an external sound, an internal smell, a lingering taste, or bodily sensations like itching—these are mere perceptions seeking our attention within the mind. When these sensations arise, observe them without chasing their source or feeling an urgency to stop them immediately. Recognize that their emergence in the mind reflects our mental state and activities. Observe where the mind reacts and let go.

This practice begins with the mind. By doing so, the bubbles of distraction burst, revealing their insignificance. It is not an emergency demanding immediate attention. The Buddha guides us, saying, "It's just a sound. Don't be alarmed by it. It's like wind passing through a net." Let the mind navigate through these experiences, akin to wind flowing freely through openings in a net. Allow these occurrences in the mind without attaching to each one. This approach is crucial in meditation practice, especially when such phenomena arise frequently. Familiarity and acceptance of these experiences support methods like the TWIM approach to meditation.

Another beneficial point to consider in our practice is our current state of engagement. Initially, we might practice amidst diverse experiences, engaging with sensual pleasures and the stimuli of the six sense doors. As we progress, we gradually release our reactions to these sensations. This shift leads us into the realm of the mind, where diversity diminishes, and we realize unification through unity. This phase can be described as the mental or formless realm.

Moving forward, we experience stages such as infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. It's crucial to recognize that each stage is reached progressively by letting go of various perceptions. Letting go of the perception of infinite space leads to infinite consciousness, and so forth, until reaching the perception of neither perception nor non-perception.

In this final stage, there remains a residual perception—a faint remnant of perception. At this point, our own perception is greatly diminished. The Buddha emphasizes this in *Sutta*, verse 74:

*"Having abandoned lust, hatred, and delusion,
having sundered the fetters that keep one bound,
not terrified at the extinction of life,
one should live alone like a rhinoceros horn."*

This verse highlights that by relinquishing desire, hatred, and delusion, and breaking free from the bonds that bind us, we experience relief and freedom—not annihilation or suffering. We should not fear *Bhava Nirodha*, the cessation of existence. Instead, we should live independently, akin to a rhinoceros. This verse underscores the importance of not fearing the cessation of life.

At this stage, it's common to perceive that our sense of self, feelings, and perceptions define us. There might be a fear that letting go of these aspects will lead to extinction. The Buddha advises calmly allowing these feelings to pass without attachment. Attachment to these perceptions perpetuates the cycle of existence, known as *Bhava*—a continuous cycle of seeking experiences to uphold our sense of self. This perpetuation is like a self-sustaining Snowball Effect, where any interruption feels catastrophic.

However, it's essential to recognize that even the perception of self-extinction needs to be released. It's another layer of attachment that requires letting go.

It's noteworthy that even accomplished individuals like Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta were unable to release this perception. They clung to their identity associated with these perceptions, fearing loss by letting them go. The Buddha revolutionized this by demonstrating that our entire existence is a mental construct. The collapse of this construct does not result in catastrophe but in the highest bliss of freedom. This realization led to *Nibbāna*.

Nibbāna is characterized by the cessation of all formations and, crucially, the relinquishing of all perceptions. This ultimate state of no perception is what *Nibbāna* signifies—a complete tranquility and peace, the profound stillness of all fabrications and the total release of all acquisitions.

Perceptions, feelings, consciousness—all these are mere acquisitions. The cessation of craving also means the cessation of these acquisitions. By withholding our undue attention from them, we starve these phenomena, leading to their cessation. This is the state of *Nibbāna*. The extinction of craving is what the Buddha refers to as personal cessation and *Nibbāna*.

I believe these shared insights may be valuable. Additionally, I intend to explore the *Suttas* further in the future.

To return to the hindrances, they serve as the bedrock of our practice, influencing the stability of our meditation. Hindrances are inevitable, whether we seek them or not. In previous conversations, I've encountered valuable insights that have proven quite helpful.

In *Sutta Majjhima Nikaya 62*, it is stated that when our mind is overwhelmed by restlessness, sloth, or anxiety, practicing contemplation of the four great elements can be quite helpful. The Buddha recommended this approach. For example, he advised Rahula not to directly engage in the most advanced and sublime practices initially. Towards the end of that *Sutta*, the Buddha instructs Rahula to develop the mind or meditation akin to the Earth element, explaining that by doing so, both agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade the mind. He then progresses to the water, fire, air,

and space elements. Next, he recommends cultivating loving-kindness to counter ill will, which is one of the five hindrances. Following that are practices related to compassion, joy, and equanimity, all helping to counter negative attitudes and emotions. Finally, the Buddha mentions the meditation on *Anapanasati*, which lead to four greatest attainments (*Mahaphalas*)—commonly translated as mindfulness of breathing and other phenomena.

What the Buddha conveys is that after progressing through stages including Equanimity, if we transcend that state and reach a point where only the mind remains, our focus shifts to observing the mind and its interactions with mental objects. This dynamic interaction is akin to a game between the mind and mental objects. The key is to observe the mind. In doing so, we reveal the process whereby the mind and mental objects collaborate, giving rise to perception, formation, and consciousness. Our observation catches this process red-handed, exposing that the mind generates these constructs. This awareness underscores that the mind is the originator behind all phenomena. When the distinction between the mind and its objects fades, the momentum of the mind's consciousness comes to a halt.

Thus, when mind consciousness stops, our perception, consciousness, and awareness of the world come to a halt. This occurs because the continuous flow, the momentum of dependent origination phenomena, encounters disruption. Imagine there's a tiny fuse in a circuit, and the current flowing through the wire suddenly gets interrupted as the fuse blows. Similarly, when that 'fuse' blows within the mind, consciousness stops, perception ceases, and the entire flow of experiences comes to a standstill.

You can also think of it as closing a dam's gate – suddenly, the river has no more water. The mind is responsible for this illusion of experiences, making us believe that there's a distinction between the mind and mental objects. It's like playing a game with a child, showing an object and then hiding it. The mind continuously employs such tricks to keep us trapped in this cycle. Falling for these tricks is the state most of us live in; we inherit this tendency, this acquisition, and are entangled in the mind's game. However, we have the opportunity to break free from this cycle, to liberate ourselves from the mind's elaborate illusions.

I believe this step could be quite important. Also, this is an exceptionally delicate stage. If we find ourselves progressing well towards that state of mind where it's profoundly calm and composed, we must allow the mind to be. Even our observation needs to approach with ease. Sometimes, even the slightest observation can feel as if it's disturbing the mind. If we step back just a bit in response, suddenly our mind might go completely blank. There's an extremely refined maneuver we can employ if we've attained such an exquisitely delicate state of mind. It involves finding a balance between two aspects: one is the subtle effort we sometimes also call energy, and the other is gently relaxing the mind. In the *Samyutta Nikaya*, there's a very brief *Sutta* that describes an encounter between *Devata* (heavenly being) and Buddha, where Buddha exemplifies this process.

A *Devata* asks him, 'How did you cross the flood so hard to cross?' and the Buddha responds, 'Look, my friend, when I tried to strive, I was pulled by the current. When I stood still, I drowned. It was by not striving and not staying still that I crossed the flood.' This is the precise point. It's like making a micro-millimeter adjustment; we can't simply move abruptly. We have to make these incredibly tiny adjustments to keep the process going. This gradual progression will eventually guide the mind to exit the universe through a minuscule opening. So, whether we let the mind be or gently guide it, the key is to ensure the mind is moving in the right direction by allowing all to happen by stepping away.

Therefore, the effort required is incredibly minimal, and we simply allow the mind to be. It will naturally exit the universe through that tiny aperture, like a crack in the cosmic expanse. We would emerge through that crack in the say cosmic egg. I'm not sure if I repeated myself too much, but I find that aspect of the experience intriguing—the way we transcend the universe. That's something I like to describe whenever I have the opportunity.

We all understand the importance of the five precepts. These precepts form the fundamental pillars of our practice. We should live by these precepts, making sure not to intentionally violate them. If we intentionally break a precept, it will likely weigh on our conscience because we knowingly transgressed it. On the other hand,

if we inadvertently breach a precept, there's no need to feel remorseful or guilty about it. Intentions are crucial in this matter. What's in our mind holds greater significance than our physical actions. It's not the action of stepping on an insect that's problematic; the issue arises from whether we intended to harm it or if it was an unintentional misstep.

So, that is a key point: whether our mind plays an active role or not. This is one of the *Suttas* in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (*Sutta 56: Upāli Sutta*), where there's a comprehensive discourse on the practice according to the Buddha. He provides robust arguments to counter the teachings of the Niganthas, a sect that came to challenge the Buddha's perspective. He asserted that it's not the physical actions but rather the mental actions that hold greater significance. In this context, let's consider a precept. If our mind is pure, devoid of any intention to harm, steal, or commit any wrongdoing, then we are genuinely living a virtuous life. It's not solely about the external actions, but rather the purity of our intentions.

What I would like to convey is that, as we advance in our practice, it's crucial to be a bit more cautious about what we say. If we have made progress and are seeking further development, then being mindful of our words, especially keeping promises and staying true to what we say, becomes increasingly important. I'd like to share a little of my own perspective. I believe this might resonate with some of my previous discussions. At one point, I mentioned that I intended to create a video about *Majjhima Nikaya 111* in another language. While I did indeed start working on the video, I didn't complete that part. Initially, I stated that I would do it right at the beginning of the video, but then I ended up terminating that video and forgot about it. As time passed, I resumed my meditation practice, but I started to notice agitation in my mind. I questioned why my mind seemed to be jumping around, and I felt a certain sense of unease. Despite feeling fairly comfortable with my ability to enter various *Jhanas* for many years, I couldn't be free of this unsettling feeling. I began to reflect on what might be causing this, asking myself what I had done wrong. It's an interesting situation, and I must admit that my intuition didn't provide an immediate answer.

So, I kept practicing, and I had to accept that sometimes things don't go as planned. If I missed a day, I told myself that it's okay; I can practice tomorrow and see how it goes. If I encountered the same situation, I accepted it and continued on. However, this question lingered in my mind about what might be causing this disturbance. It took me a few weeks, but then it suddenly struck me: I had mentioned that I would create a specific talk in another language, and I hadn't followed through on that commitment. Once I realized this, I immediately started working on that video. Interestingly, this was a turning point for me, and I gained some insights from it. This experience reminded me of how important it is to be mindful of what we say and commit to. Even seemingly small things hold significance, and being truthful and responsible with our words can make a significant difference. It's about aligning our actions with our intentions and cultivating a sense of integrity.

If we have practiced the Dhamma, our attachment to worldly gains such as deceit, cheating, fraud, and acquiring things unlawfully will start to fade away. The temptation to become rich quickly or possess extravagant possessions like a nice car will also diminish. We'll find more contentment in what we have and be satisfied with our accomplishments. Breaking precepts doesn't enhance our contentment; rather, upholding them aligns with our genuine lack of craving. In the past, we may have desired luxury cars and big houses, but now, those desires are less prominent. We become more aware of what truly matters. These changes might be suitable for us, but they might not be the same for others.

The whole purpose of keeping the precepts is to maintain harmony in our interactions with the people we care about. It's best to adhere to them to ensure such harmony. That's why having this harmony is crucial and why the precepts play a vital role in this. They shield us from resentment and ill will from others, fortifying us with goodwill. I view these precepts as a form of protection for myself, safeguarding my interactions.

I went a bit into my personal experiences, which still amuse me. When I recall these things, they make me laugh. These occurrences do happen, especially as I'm not living an ascetic life. I sometimes unintentionally get caught up in these things, and it's okay to forget;

it's fine. We can also offer ourselves forgiveness to make it even more effective.

I mentioned this concept in relation to the mind and mind objects. In Asian countries, specifically in South Asia and Nepal, there are large trees called silk cotton trees. During the hot summer season, these trees produce a very fine and tender type of cotton known as silk cotton. The silk cotton is exceptionally soft and delicate, and it grows on these enormous trees, sometimes reaching heights of 40 to 50 meters.

During the summer, silk cotton trees bear fruit, which initially appears green and then starts to flourish, with flowers turning reddish. As the flowers mature, silk cotton begins to emerge. This lightweight silk cotton, despite coming from the massive tree, starts to float through the air, giving a feeling of weightlessness. We can experience this sense of weightlessness in higher *Jhanas*. These silk cotton fibers, in a way, are similar to mind objects. They emanate from the tree and were once part of it. However, they detach and float away, just like our thoughts and perceptions. We observe them up close, without an iota of identification. It is just amazing. These silk cotton fibers were once part of the tree, much like thoughts were once part of our mind. The distinction between the tree and the silk cotton is only our conceptualization, based on our perceptions and attention—we witness them directly.



Figure 16: Allowing all mental processes to occur by stepping aside and not getting involved leads to a profound ease and freedom of mind, which can be experienced as extreme lightness, joy, and tranquility.

So, let's consider the relationship between the mind and mind objects. I used to marvel at how incredible these trees are, producing such wonderfully soft silk cotton fibers. I would venture into meadows and fields to collect these delicate silk cotton fibers, appreciating their beauty. The process is akin to a mind object – delicate and profound. When we reach a heightened state of mind, having let go of numerous things, the significance of these small mind objects becomes evident.

In this advanced state of mind, we discern that the process of silk cotton unraveling from the tree mirrors the unraveling of mind and mind objects. Witnessing this process initiates a sense of clarity. Our mindset during this experience is to release any form of observation, reaction, or tendency. Allow the unfolding process to occur naturally without interference. As we do this, we notice a dissolution of the notions of self, mind object, and mind itself. All these aspects begin to dissolve, and as we observe this unfolding process, the mind starts to transition into a state of Cessation.

It might just be a metaphor, but it resonates quite well with what I used to perceive during my earlier practices. These are the things I tend to keep in mind – metaphors, examples, and similes. The Buddha has provided us with numerous similes, and I often try to see if I can find anything in nature or our surroundings that can serve as a reference to aid our progress. This approach has been quite effective for me personally. When I experience a particular state of mind, I search for something similar to draw a comparison and keep my mind focused on the right path.

In this context, I often use examples like particles, molecules, or the concept of fine apertures. These comparisons help me retain a mental reference for what needs to be done. When observing the mind, certain patterns or interactions become apparent. I believe that these observations aren't completely detached from the real world – we can still find analogies that make sense. So, consider this as a story that we can relate to. This technique has been one of the valuable ways I've approached my practice.

If we become more observant, we'll notice that our mind tends to be in various states. For instance, we might find ourselves feeling a bit crowded or not entirely at ease. Ideally, the mind should be calm

and solitary. However, it's common for the mind to be entangled with other mental processes, resulting in a sense of partnership within the mind. I often refer to this process as formations, which tend to snowball and complicate the state of the mind.

During our observation, we might perceive our mind not quite settling down. Even though we're aware of our mind's presence, it may not be attaining a state of calmness or composure. This is when we realize that although we intend for the mind to be tranquil, it's still showing signs of restlessness. Even during practices like focusing on our breath, we might find that certain background elements, like the rhythm of our in-breaths and out-breaths or the warmth of our body, persist and hinder the mind from achieving a state of quietude.

If our observation is particularly sharp during this time, we'll notice the background activities occurring within our mind. These bodily formations, such as the rhythm of our breathing (in-breaths and out-breaths), can trigger additional activities that affect the mind. Even though we might have already relaxed verbal formations, we'll realize that bodily formations remain active. This is especially evident when practicing in the *Jhanas* – even in the second, third, or fourth *Jhana*, we'll still sense the body's sensations, like heat or vibrations, intertwining with the mind's activities. This realization allows us to distinguish between the mind itself and the influencing activities of these formations. This observation is valuable.

Gradually, we'll start to discern which factor needs the most attention, and we'll guide the mind toward achieving a sense of equilibrium. This process takes time and practice.

These stages are not something I frequently encounter; generally, I find that the mind and body formations gradually synchronize and reduce their activities, becoming quieter. However, there are times when the mind and body activities are out of balance. In such instances, we can directly perceive this and then decide which factor needs adjustment. We might need to focus on the object of meditation that brings calmness or peacefulness, or we might need to immerse ourselves in the tranquility factor. As we do this, the imbalance will gradually subside.

This process can take a while. If we notice that certain bodily activities are acting up and not subsiding easily, it might even take up

to half an hour or so. This is just the reality of the situation, and dealing with such scenarios is part of the practice.

Hindrances can indeed be challenging and can sometimes catch us off guard. At times, we might feel lucky or overly confident in our ability to handle hindrances. However, it's important not to develop an overestimation that we can effortlessly overcome all hindrances. I have learned to let go of that overconfidence and not hold onto the belief that I can easily manage hindrances. It's an ongoing process of refining this aspect of my practice.

I would like to add another point that might be useful for many of us: the concept of Dhamma. In Buddhism, we often tend to become fixated on it. We strive to amass as much Dhamma as possible, aiming to gather thousands of teachings in our metaphorical basket. We aspire to become experts, curating a vast database of countless tips on how to navigate various situations.

However, excessive accumulation of Dhamma can lead to possessiveness and attachment. If we listen to and collect an excessive amount of Dhamma talks, read excessively, and try to fill our minds with these activities, it can become another form of acquisition. We should recognize that the Buddha's teachings, or Dhamma, are not meant to be treated as mere words or to be excessively consumed. We don't need an overwhelming amount of Dhamma knowledge cluttering our minds. What we truly need is sufficient understanding.

We need not treat them as possessions, nor view them as mere knowledge or expertise, but rather adopt a relaxed attitude. Dhamma is not a tangible thing; it's a process. So, utilize Dhamma to find balance within ourselves. Avoid becoming obsessed with collecting Dhamma, and don't spend an excessive amount of time on it. We don't need to count every minute or worry about missing out if we haven't listened to every talk or excerpt that Buddha has shared. The Buddha's teachings are so rich that regardless of the approach, they all lead to the same destination. Therefore, don't stress over amassing vast knowledge of Dhamma.

Don't overindulge in Dhamma. While I'm unsure if such a term exists, simply regard Dhamma as our guiding companion. Live our life, enjoy music, savor our meals, engage in work, unwind while

watching TV, and partake in all these everyday activities. Dedicate ample time to our daily life matters. Strike a balance; if we find that we haven't fully understood something, it's alright. Dhamma is always there to guide us.

I engage quite extensively in Dhamma research and various related activities, ensuring that my database is replete with a plethora of concepts, ideas, and practices. Yet, at times, I found myself delving too deeply into this pursuit, resulting in an overwhelming load. Recognizing this, I decided to step back and allocate time for relaxation and leisure. It's essential to strike a balance in our engagement with Dhamma. Allocate moments to relish life's pleasures, and in doing so, provide ourselves with the opportunity to foster a deeper practice.

Allowing space and time for the teachings to settle naturally is crucial. By doing so, our practice will become more tranquil and harmonious. This, in essence, reflects my personal journey, a story that underscores the importance of moderation and humility.

Ultimately, the lesson lies in not allowing greed to drive us. There's no need to boast about knowing every *Sutta*, every concept. Adequate understanding is sufficient, and that's perfectly fine.

Yes, having that attitude is very important. Recently, I've been teaching the 6R Method and TWIM practice to some of my close friends and family members. During this process, I had to provide them with an analogy to help them understand the practice better. One of my friends had been practicing a different form of meditation, specifically *Metta* meditation. However, she shared that she hadn't encountered any hindrances during her practice. She mentioned that her mind remained in a state of *Metta* all the time and that she didn't perceive any disturbances. I inquired if her mind became active during other moments when she wasn't meditating, and she confirmed that it did.

I explained to her that this indicated that she had directed her mind to a specific, narrow focus, almost like a tunnel, and had lost awareness of her surroundings. The practice I mentioned tends to lead us away from the reality of the present moment. To address her question of how to ensure the correctness of her practice, I explained

that there's a clear distinction between practicing the Buddha's Dhamma and veering off the right path.

To confirm that one is truly practicing the Buddha's teachings, I emphasized an acid test: the more we let go, abandon, and release, the more the mind tends to find composure. As we shed the layers of attachment and delve into the experience of exquisite mental balance, happiness naturally flourishes. Furthermore, with greater relinquishment, the mind becomes even more robust, solidifying the experience of *Jhana*. In essence, the more willingly we let go, the deeper our practice becomes.

It may appear counterintuitive, particularly for those engaged in concentration type meditation. Often, people assume that accumulating experiences will lead to richer and happier outcomes. However, this notion is misguided. Contrary to the belief that more experiences equate to better outcomes, the essence of Buddha's teachings revolves around letting go. The more we relinquish, shed, and release, the more profound and exquisite our experience of happiness becomes. This is the genuine path that the Buddha illuminated. Such principles resonate with my own practice as well.

So, I would like to conclude here. I tried to offer insights into various aspects of worldly activities and the struggles people face while attempting to overcome hindrances. I am no exception in this journey; I am also navigating this path. It would bring me great satisfaction if my experiences and explanations have been of assistance. If they prove helpful, it would be a successful use of my time and effort.

I want to dedicate the merit of all the work and time I've invested to all beings who are suffering. May they come into direct contact with the good Dhamma and find liberation from their suffering.

Chapter 15

Awakening from the Dream of Existence

‘There comes a time, Vasettha, when, sooner or later after a long period, this universe contracts. At a time of contraction, beings are mostly born in the Abhassara Brahma world. And there they dwell, mindmade, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time. But sooner or later, after a very long period, this universe begins to expand again. At a time of expansion, the beings from the Abhassara Brahma world, having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time.

[Digha Nikaya 27: Agganna Sutta]

An idea for this book arose as a project to collate all aspects of the path I had shared on the YouTube channel "*Realisation of the Unconditioned*" in 2021. Then, in 2023, some audience members requested an explanation of the first discourse by the Buddha—The *Dhammachakkapavatana Sutta*. I considered it a great privilege to speak on such a profound topic. I began collecting notes on related Dhamma topics and terms to make the session more informative. Initially, I felt I might run out of words to explain this *Sutta*, and it could end up being just a mere reading. However, I found that once I started talking, the words flowed effortlessly. They rushed to my mouth, transforming from potential thoughts to recorded talks and texts. It's amazing how two or three hours seem like nothing when I start explaining Dhamma. Here is what I shared on this topic:

This discussion centers on the very first *Sutta* that the Buddha delivered to the five ascetics who were his companions in the quest for Awakening. This *Sutta* is known as *Dhammachakkapavatana Sutta* and is found in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Section 56, *Sutta* 11. It is often referred to as "*Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion*". This discourse delves into how the Buddha comprehended the truth of the cessation of suffering – including the origin, cause, cessation, and the means to cessation of suffering. It outlines the path of practice that leads to this cessation. Allow me to read the *Sutta* and provide further insights. I

will offer commentary to provide a deeper understanding and align the discourse with actual experiences and practices. Additionally, I'll draw insights from various other *Suttas* to highlight specific points included in this discourse.

Thus have I heard. On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There, the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five thus:

“Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.”

Alright, let me pause here for a moment. The discourse addresses the fallacies of two extreme paths – excessive self-mortification and, conversely, indulging excessively in sensual pleasures. These beliefs reflect the attitudes of many people today, often unaware of deeper truths. The Buddha addressed this in a *Sutta* that discusses Right View, shedding light on these matters.

What is this Right View, or rather, the vision of the Middle Way that the Buddha elaborates upon? In the *Samyutta Nikaya*, specifically in the *Nidana Vagga*, the Buddha offers many expositions related to the process of dependent origination. He explains that the *Tathagata* imparts the Dhamma through the Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of absolute existence and non-existence. The Buddha illustrates that the process of dependent origination involves many phenomena linked together through conditions: ignorance as the condition gives rise to formations, formations as conditions give rise to consciousness, and consciousness as a condition to *Nama Rupa*. Similarly, *Nama Rupa* conditions the six sense bases, which, in turn, condition contact, and so forth. This intricate web of interconnected conditions highlights the essence of the Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of absolute existence and non-existence. In essence, the

Buddha says, the world is just a vibration of a multitude of phenomena that transcends notions like things being here, there, or not at all.

So, what is this middle path, this middle way, that goes beyond ordinary worldly logic and reasoning, leading to full Awakening? To provide a practical analogy, consider the Buddha's description of wisdom as being of a penetrative nature. Think of trying to see through a wooden plank or a door. This door or plank is densely opaque, rendering visibility impossible. In this scenario, the notion of penetration becomes essential; we must see through it by piercing through that thick wooden barrier to gain a clear vision beyond it.

This is the understanding we require – we need to penetrate the obstacle to gain the ability to see. The wisdom that the Buddha described and revealed for us to realize ourselves is the knowledge and vision of the middle path. It enables us to see through such obstructions. This ability is referred to as penetrative wisdom, which is exactly what it is – the ability to see beyond these barriers. We need to let go of our concepts and fabrications and see things as they really are.

So, let's delve into what this penetrative wisdom truly means. The Buddha mentions penetrative wisdom many times, but who has actually made an effort to grasp its essence? Now, let's attempt to comprehend this concept. Penetration, in this context, means understanding what obstructs our vision, much like a thick plank of wood that hinders our sight. This plank is so opaque that we cannot see through it. This is where penetrative wisdom comes in – it's akin to a drill at our disposal that bores holes through that obstacle, allowing us to see through the thick veil or door that was once entirely impenetrable. It opens up an aperture, enabling us to see through such barriers.

So, what exactly is this wisdom? This wisdom is about observing reality as it truly is. Our ordinary vision is clouded by ignorance, craving, and other distractions that prevent us from seeing reality in its unadulterated form.

Penetrative wisdom allows us to truly see through the veil that ensnares us in darkness, or dare I say, in a state of blind vision. Thus, the wisdom we need to develop is the ability to discern the

mechanisms that shroud our eyes in thick darkness, obstructing our vision. This darkness, this blinding force, is none other than what we refer to as the process of dependent origination. We are not seeing through the wisdom that illuminates how this intricate process unfolds.

When we comprehend precisely how this process operates, we gain a tool to pierce through the formidable barriers that obstruct our ability to perceive things as they are. Once we understand how ignorance functions, how it leads to the origination of formations, how these formations give rise to consciousness, how consciousness begets *Nama Rupa*, and how *Nama Rupa* triggers the formation of the six sense bases, we begin to unveil the intricate interplay of these elements. The direct experiential is what the Buddha refers to here, not conceptual. He often brings up emptiness, insubstantiality, and the not-self nature of phenomena. When developing his path through experiences of *Jhanas*, these facts become crystal clear.

If we directly observe this process, it leads us to open a pathway that allows us to see through and penetrate the darkness that causes us to suffer repeatedly. When we talk about suffering, or the formula that the Buddha presents as the middle path, we are referring to the penetrative view of how things truly exist. Seeing things exactly as they are—constitutes wisdom. In fact, the Buddha asserts that the Noble way, awakened by a *Tathagata*, gives rise to the vision leading to *Nibbāna*. This way is the Noble Eightfold Path, which encompasses Right View and Right Intention as the knowing aspect. Additionally, the path includes Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Collectedness. The first two factors contribute to *Panna* or wisdom. Then we have three more factors: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. They belong to the category of *Sila* or virtue, which pertains to righteous behavior, conduct, and morality.

The third category is *Samadhi*, which is collectedness or unification of the mind. Within this category, we find Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Collectedness, culminating in a unified mind or *Sama Samadhi* in Pali. They guide us on how to train the mind in order to penetrate the nature of things as they truly are.

In many *Suttas*, the Buddha tells us to experience *Jhanas* so we can see things in their true nature. This *Jhana*, or *Sama Samadhi*, serves as a tool to see things as they truly exist⁷². When we talk about seeing things as they really are, we are essentially unraveling the mechanisms of the mind itself. We don't necessarily need to explore the external world to gain a genuine understanding of reality. The Buddha's path is to unravel the projections that the mind crafts.

What the Buddha is conveying here is that we need not focus our attention on external factors or what lies out there. The truth, the reality, is not to be found outside; it is an inner phenomenon. The reality doesn't exist externally; rather, it resides within. The dynamics are such that external forms, sounds, and other sensory stimuli impact our senses from the outside. Conversely, within us, we possess internal sensory faculties—eyes, ears, skin, tongue, etc.—which function as counterparts to the external sensory stimuli. Between these internal and external sensory elements, there exists an intermediary space where the concept of contact comes into play.

So, contact occurs as soon as any notion of things arises. It's observable that whenever there's a sensation or some form of perception, the impact of that sensation triggers the emergence of consciousness. This consciousness promptly distinguishes and categorizes whatever is perceived within our sensory domain as something external. It simultaneously acknowledges that what we are observing is originating from within. This consciousness is referred to as "*Vinnana*" in Pali, and it serves as a discriminative element. Its function is to establish a demarcation: it designates the perceived entity as external while confirming that what we perceive originates internally⁷³. This process leads to a separation of the senses and the material universe. Once consciousness emerges and executes this distinction, contact and feeling are solidified.

There are many *Sutta* references on how contacts arise on the six sense bases. The Buddha explains that when the eye encounters a form, an "eye consciousness" emerges, and the conjunction of these three—the eye, form, and its corresponding consciousness—leads to

⁷² Samyutta Nikaya 56.1: Samadhi

⁷³ Majjhima Nikaya 140: Dhātuvibhanga Sutta

what is termed "eye contact." Contact arises as a notion when the mind interprets sensory input, prompting consciousness to categorize the perceived object as external and recognizing it as being seen through our eyes. This interplay of phenomena is what is referred to as "consciousness" and "*Nama Rupa*" in the Buddha's teachings. The outgrowth of engaging with the phenomena is the Five Aggregates⁷⁴.

There are many profound discourses by the Buddha on consciousness and *Nama Rupa*⁷⁵, but delving into their details is beyond the scope of this discussion. What I aim to focus on here is the Noble wisdom that operates in the middle. For example, I mentioned that people recognize either what lies outside or what exists within, or they may perceive what is present and what is absent, yet they overlook the inherent nature of phenomena—the constant cycle of arising and ceasing. These cycles of arising and ceasing follow a unique and intricate pattern, forming the mechanism of the law of dependent origination.

That's what the Buddha discovered on the night of his Awakening. What he precisely saw that night was that during the first watch of the night, the Buddha observed the arising of all the phenomena that were leaning on each other. He witnessed how all phenomena arose when the mind was left unruly, allowing attention (also called *Manasikara* or mind's work) to flow. He saw the play of mind through attention that got tamed (*Yonisomanasikara*). This is what the Buddha recounts as his breakthrough on the night of his Awakening. This is described in the *Udana*, in the *Bodhivagga*, specifically in the first *Sutta* called "*Pāthamasam̐Bodhi Sutta*."

Here, the Buddha says that he sat under the Bodhi tree for seven continuous days, experiencing the bliss of liberation. Then, at the end of those seven days, he emerged from that *Samadhi* state and paid well-attentive heed during the first watch of the night to dependent arising in the forward order. With ignorance as the condition, he says, formations arise. With formations as the condition, consciousness arises. With consciousness as the condition, *Nama Rupa* arises. With

⁷⁴ Majjhima Nikaya 148: Mahāsaḷāyatanika Sutta

⁷⁵ Digha Nikaya 15: Mahānidāna Sutta:

Nama Rupa as the condition, the six sense bases arise. With the six sense bases as the condition, contact arises. With contact as the condition, feeling arises. With feeling as the condition, craving arises, and so on.

On the first watch of the night, he observed the arising of the links of dependent origination. On the second watch of the night, he observed the cessation of the links of dependent origination. With the cessation of ignorance, he saw that formations also ceased. With the cessation of formations, he saw that consciousness ceased. With the cessation of consciousness, he saw that *Nama Rupa* ceased, and so on. Here, what is happening is that the links of dependent origination are just potentials, with ignorance being the condition for all the other links, leading to their culmination in suffering instantly.

He states that with birth as a condition, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise. Therefore, suffering arises due to this birth as a condition; all this suffering emerges due to living experiences. So, if we scrutinize it closely, it becomes apparent that the cause of suffering is, in fact, ignorance. If we possess direct knowledge, full awareness, and insight into the truth, and if we are not heedless, suffering doesn't have a chance to arise. This implies that by remaining fully mindful and discerning, suffering can be prevented.

It can be said that ignorance is the root cause of all suffering. Ignorance of what? The process of dependent origination. This is the very realization that the Buddha attained. He spent countless lifetimes searching for the source of suffering⁷⁶, delving into various practices, and enduring years of asceticism, all in an effort to fathom the reality behind suffering. Eventually, he directly saw this truth, and what we observe is that this insight led him to uncover the fundamental nature of existence.

This *Sutta* is actually explaining what constitutes suffering. So, if I read a bit further, it goes on to say,

⁷⁶ Dhammapada Verses 153 and 154

“Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.”

Here, the key point we need to be very clear about is that it's not stating that the five aggregates are suffering. Rather, it is referring to the five aggregates that we accumulate, inherit, and take to be our possession (the Pali word is *Upadana*; Bhikkhu Bodhi uses "clinging"). It is the act of accumulating them that leads to suffering.

There is a *Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikaya* that clearly distinguishes that the five aggregates are not suffering on their own; we have to have the notion of acquiring these five aggregates, and then they will become suffering. Now, to read further, it goes on to say,

“Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.”

So now, the Buddha is saying, "What is the origin of suffering here?" He is saying craving. But when the Buddha, on the night of his Awakening, saw how this suffering is all coming through, he saw the flow of suffering. What he saw was actually the source, the actual fuel of all suffering, is rooted in ignorance. So, ignorance—or not seeing—is actually foremost in bringing all the suffering. What he's saying is that if we do not know what this suffering is or where it is coming from, the not-knowing aspect actually comes first.

That means because the Buddha himself was awakened to the truth of suffering; he was able to precisely pinpoint where the root of suffering is. In fact, what he's saying is that suffering is rooted in ignorance. So, what do we mean by suffering is rooted in ignorance? It's basically saying that this ignorance is something that we have been in, like a veil. We are covered in a veil of darkness of ignorance for many, many years, lifetimes.

I often say again and again, for countless *Mahakappas*, trillions, and quintillions of years. We don't know how many trillions of years

or *Mahakappas* we have spent here in *Samsara*; it's incalculable. So, what is sustaining this constant arising and ceasing is actually ignorance. We don't see things as they really are. It's like we know all of us have seen a fly or some insect stuck in front of clear glass. The insect doesn't know that there is a glass; it just keeps hitting that glass window again and again and again. That small creature will never be able to get out of that glass window and be free; it will always be trapped. This barrier is clear, but there is a substance that won't let it go outside.

So, this ignorance is like that. We think that the world is really like what we see around us, and it's like a clear glass that we look through, but we cannot get out. This ignorance is like the notion of how things are instead of seeing them as they really are. Being clueless and not able to get out and be free of confinements. It's like getting stuck in that room forever. This ignorance is like that. We don't know, though we pretend to do so.

What the Buddha is showing is that there is a way out. We need to penetrate that barrier, and the way to penetrate that barrier is through the Noble Eightfold Path. What is the actual Awakening or what we call the penetration? We need to see this process as it really is. So, there is no way we can be awakened to these Four Noble Truths without understanding the mechanism. And what is the mechanism? The mechanism is the Awakening to the process of dependent arising.

And that's precisely what I read earlier in the first verse of the *Bodhi Vagga* in *Udana*. That's exactly how the Buddha was able to break through the veil of ignorance, penetrate it, and be free from it. He stated that the actual mechanism is that all we need to do is let go of that ignorance by stopping pretending or conceptualizing. Once we let go of ignorance by abandoning notions and concepts and letting the process be, it will block formations. With formations ceased, consciousness ceases, and so on. This is the process. Dependent origination is the universal law, much like the law of gravity or the law of entropy. Although the foundation of physics is undergoing changes, and even concepts like the speed of light are under question now, there may not be any immutable laws in physics.

But this law of dependent origination is indisputable law of our experience as it comes from the direct experience. We understand

that one who observes the arising and ceasing of the links of dependent origination will awaken to the truth that whatever we have been dreaming or sleeping through, for trillions and trillions of years, we haven't even known that there is a way out of all this repeated aging and death, and all this sorrow and lamentation. These are actually all mind-made; they are all fabricated. This is what it all boils down to according to the Buddha's discovery. We are our own worst enemy; we created this mess. Due to this mess, we are stuck in *Samsara* forever, unable to escape its entanglements. Our experiences are constantly subject to arising and ceasing, and this cycle continues.

As I mentioned, these links of dependent origination have the nature of arising and ceasing. In everyday life, we can observe this arising and ceasing everywhere. It doesn't require a very sharp mind or meditation to realize this. Even a small five-year-old child can understand that the body's feeling arises, pain arises, and after some time, with the application of cream or some remedy, it goes away. But there is something that needs to trigger our minds to awaken to this truth of arising and ceasing. I need to stress the point of *Nirodha* here again. It actually means the prevention of phenomena from arising. Ceasing is what almost everybody uses, which can mean going down—*Nirodha* is not going down. *Nirodha* means prevention⁷⁷. Meaning suffering can be prevented from arising!

In a very rudimentary form, one can become *Sotapanna* by simply understanding the fact that anything within our awareness that has the nature of arising due to conditions, by that very fact, can be prevented from arising. Take, for example, the body. The body arises, grows, and decays. This is one cycle of arising and going down. Take feeling; it arises, grows, and disappears. The same pattern applies to perception; it arises, grows, and disappears. Formations arise and disappear. Consciousness arises and disappears. These five aggregates are in a constant cycle of arising and disappearing. But no one seem to realise they arise due to some support—our attention.

So, we need the Buddha to come to Earth and enlighten us about the nature of these phenomena—that they do arise and cease. They have nothing at their core that can sustain them and keep them in a

⁷⁷ Dhammapada Verse 392

state of perpetual rising. There is nothing that can achieve that, not even physics, Einstein, NASA, or any other force. They cannot prevent atoms from decaying; no one has been able to achieve that.

The fundamental fact is that anything that arises must also cease. This is the fundamental truth. What the Buddha says is different. He brings *Nirodha* as a solution to arising and ceasing. *Nirodha* means the prevention of phenomena from arising. Let go of cause—and *Nirodha* is right there. That gives us a glimpse of awakening. I will elaborate on this point further later, as it illustrates how one can attain Awakening to the fundamental level.

Now let me read a bit further. We've covered the origin of suffering and the fact of suffering. The origination of suffering, as the Buddha explains, is due to craving. He states that the second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering, is rooted in craving. Craving leads to renewed existence, marked by delight and seeking satisfaction here and there. This includes craving for sensual pleasure, craving for continued existence, and craving for annihilation. The Buddha emphasizes that craving is the primary source of suffering, and it is through understanding and addressing this craving that we begin to enter the path.

Yes, craving is indeed like a catalyst; it's comparable to a cocktail that infuses various flavors into the world. It's akin to a secret sauce that blends and presents us with these diverse experiences, each with its own unique colors. Here's what's occurring: all the phenomena that surround us—consider, for instance, an average person in the worldly sense. Whenever such an individual encounters something visually pleasing, listens to delightful music, or savors the taste of delicious food, they swiftly become entwined in the sensations generated by the senses. This immediate reaction happens because the sensory experiences ignite a response within the mind, leading to the subsequent process of craving.

Let's consider, for example, a beautiful car. When I see the car, as soon as my eye makes contact with it, here's what occurs: the notion of the eye and the form triggers the emergence of eye consciousness. Initially, consciousness arises, and then, with consciousness as a condition, the coming together of the three elements results in contact. Hence, contact happens between the eye and the car.

Subsequently, with contact as a condition, a feeling arises. This feeling can manifest in one of three states: it might be pleasurable, painful, or neither painful nor pleasurable.

So, one of these three types of feelings immediately arises when consciousness starts to establish itself on a striking notion of something external. If one can identify these feelings and their distinctions, it sheds light on the interconnected process.

If one is able to perceive the emergence of these feelings, what commonly happens is that the individual begins to categorize these experiences. There are three categories: pleasurable, painful, and neither painful nor pleasurable. Almost always, people instinctively place their experiences into one of these three categories. In approximately 99.99% of cases, a person will put the experience into the pleasurable category. For instance, upon seeing that car, the person's mind immediately associates it with pleasure, creating a mental connection between the two.

As soon as the feeling arises, the process of identification commences. Once that feeling emerges, it starts to align with the predetermined categories.

So, what are these three categories? First, there is the feeling that is pleasurable. As soon as this feeling arises and is classified as pleasant, the corresponding craving for that object emerges instantly. This craving is like an arrow directed towards the amassing of sensual pleasure. The Buddha describes it as craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by both delight and lust here and there. When craving arises, it is swiftly followed by what we refer to as "*Upadana*" which means clinging or grasping.

I don't find the term "clinging" very meaningful. We need a practical understanding of what this means in terms of our experience. Instead, we can consider it as an attitude for continuation. To elaborate, when we talk about "*Upadana*," it refers to our act of acquiring, possessing, or owning things. It's about accumulating. When craving arises, we have this "*Upadana*" as a bonus, which gives rise to habits or what we call "existence".

There isn't a direct piece of laboratory evidence to explain how we begin accumulating these five aggregates. The Buddha points out they are stacked due to our engagement with phenomena.

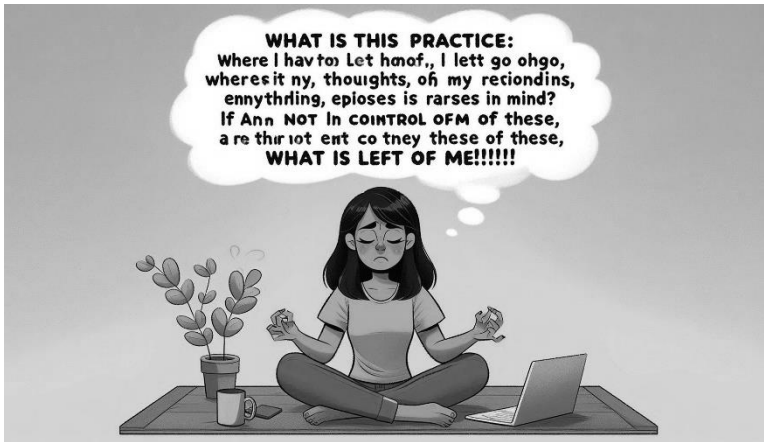


Figure 17: Practice to relinquish everything? What is left of me then?

I've already mentioned earlier about these five aggregates and the notion of acquiring them. These two things are different: one is that the five aggregates on their own are not suffering, but as soon as we have the notion of acquiring those five aggregates, they become suffering. Assuming they are me or mine is a persistent delusion that sustains our ego beliefs. I mentioned this earlier, and there is already a detailed *Sutta* about this⁷⁸.

We acquire the body, feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness into our portfolio and our personality. We renew them, nourish them, and accumulate them. Although we lack a microscope or some tool to measure how many cells we acquire every millisecond or how many trillions of thoughts we accumulate in one second, these are the measurements we are used to in daily life.

Unfortunately, we cannot perform this exact measurement. However, we can make some estimations. We do this all the time, and there is no refuting this. If we look deeply, we can easily confirm that this is the case; it cannot be otherwise. If we did not accumulate this body, if we did not grow ourselves through volition, attachment, and craving, this body would die. Essentially, we keep this body alive through the constant notion of craving for existence and pleasure. In reality, we are fueling our existence by maintaining the body on a

⁷⁸ Majjhima Nikaya 109: Mahāpuṇṇama Sutta

large scale or even on a micro or nanosecond level by providing the fuel for its renewal and growth.

We don't need to check this in a laboratory or conduct biological testing in a university or research labs. We can easily be satisfied that this cannot be refuted, as we can observe and notice these processes occurring in our body. It's something that happens naturally. We fuel this process by consuming nourishing food. In a more obvious way, if there were no craving, we wouldn't eat or take care of our body. Craving is what sustains our lives. Craving gives us a fixation that this body is ours, and thus, we feel the need to protect and care for it.

We need to protect ourselves from enemies or even from our neighbors. People are becoming quite paranoid, feeling the need to protect themselves. This tendency can also go to extremes. This craving is truly universal, and that's the core of the matter—our entire human experience is fueled by craving. In a gross form, this is what the Buddha is conveying: the origin of suffering is craving, wanting things to be a particular way.

Moreover, when the Buddha became awakened on the night of his enlightenment, he saw that there is an underlying factor even for craving, and that's our ignorance or lack of understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This lack of understanding is the root cause of suffering and the impetus for knowing and seeing by oneself.

So, those are the two interpretations that I've derived from both the *Sutta* text and direct experience. This craving, as I mentioned, can manifest in various forms. It can take the shape of intense emotions such as anger, displeasure, and even paranoia, as well as intense lustful intentions. Gradually, these manifestations subside and become less reactive. Observing people's temperaments, we can notice variations. Some individuals tend to get overly excited, while others become easily angered or agitated. On the other hand, some individuals maintain a calm and composed demeanor. These reactions vary significantly depending on the individual.

The amount of craving varies across individuals, influenced by their personalities. This is what we observe in our daily lives. However, craving can become much more subtle, and that's where the practice of *Samma Samadhi* comes into play. The Buddha's path follows a gradual approach, encompassing *Sila*, *Samadhi*, and *Panna*.

Sila involves easing the mind and promoting non-regret and ease, leading to a reduction in impulsiveness. Imagine craving as a wave, with different levels of intensity. For individuals prone to excitability or anger, their cravings' intensity will be much higher than those of more tranquil individuals. Among those who practice meditation and achieve *Samadhi*, the magnitude of cravings diminishes significantly. This is where the essence lies – in taming the mind, taming the process of craving, and gradually letting go of it. Observing the mind devoid of all phenomena is *Panna*.

If we delve into the Buddha's description of *Jhana*, he explains that a monk enters the first *Jhana* when they are quite secluded from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states. This signifies the letting go of gross cravings and hindrances. These hindrances include sensual desire, ill will, restlessness, remorse, doubt, sloth, and torpor. These are the more overt manifestations of craving.

Entering the first *Jhana* initiates the state of *Samadhi*, and this progression culminates in the fourth *Jhana*, where *Samadhi* is at its purest form. This process aids in releasing craving through pure awareness and mastery over the mind. This then brings us to the fourth truth – the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Let me read the *Sutta* again:

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this Noble Eightfold Path that is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right collectedness."

I did mention the division of the Noble Eightfold Path into three stages: *Sila*, *Samadhi*, and *Panna*. When we examine the sequence of the Eightfold Path, we'll notice that the Buddha places Right View and Right Intention at the forefront. These two belong to the category of noble wisdom (*Panna*). Then, there's Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which fall under *Sila* (virtuous conduct). Finally, there's Right *Samadhi*, comprising Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Buddha is essentially emphasizing that although the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path is virtuous conduct, denoted

by *Sila*, he positions Right View and Right Intention, both belonging to *Panna*, at the beginning. This placement raises a question: why is this arrangement significant? Upon closer examination, what the Buddha is implying is that before we embark on any practice, we must have a map. This principle parallels our daily lives; even when traveling, we need a map to guide us. We can't simply hit the road and drive aimlessly. Similarly, the Noble Eightfold Path begins with a map – the Right View. We must know our destination, our purpose. The Right View offers this map, which is why it's an integral part of noble wisdom. This Right View provides a clear overview of where we're headed. It serves as the compass, helping us understand the ultimate goal and the path's culmination.

In essence, the Right View ensures that we have a comprehensive perspective of our journey. Just as we might need to travel east to find the sunrise, the Right View guides us toward our desired destination within the Noble Eightfold Path.

This Right View is meant to convey that our practice is aimed at ending suffering. To achieve this, we must understand what suffering is – without this understanding, there's no way to bring an end to it. Essentially, the Right View emphasizes the need to comprehend the problem before solving it. This principle is fundamental; attempting to resolve an issue without knowing it results in a range of problems. This underscores the truth that knowing the problem is essential for finding the solution.

This is precisely the essence of the Right View – it provides a farsighted perspective. It ensures that as we tread the path, in a month or a few, we'll arrive at our destination: the Cessation of perception and feeling. The Right View acts like a map, guiding us toward the ultimate goal of the Noble Eightfold Path – reaching the Cessation of perception and feeling. It instructs us to aim for this destination, urging us that without understanding and acknowledging the need to reach this point, we cannot traverse the path effectively.

It informs us that we must first release those gross hindrances; we must let go of these hindrances. After entering *Jhana*, we release whatever rapture and *Sukha* there is, that intense type of joy and pleasure emerging from a secluded mind free from hindrances. This

indicates that the intensity of our craving has significantly diminished. However, this alone isn't sufficient; we must continue to progress. In the second *Jhana*, that initial rapture and joy gradually fade, replaced by a degree of equanimity. The second *Jhana* retains a sense of joy and happiness, a serene contentment arising from the abandonment of hindrances.

The happiness of *Jhana* is essentially quite unbelievable at first. When we inquire about the happiness that can arise from meditation, most people, around 99%, tend to be skeptical. They might question whether it's genuinely possible to attain such a profound, joyful, and blissful state from within. People often find it hard to believe that such a pleasurable and joyful condition can actually arise through meditation. If we were to ask them whether they've experienced this happiness through their meditation practice, the majority may likely respond in the negative. This lack of awareness stems from a lack of understanding of how to properly practice and attain the pleasurable and joyful state that results from letting go of craving and releasing hindrances.

What we are gradually accomplishing is a reduction of craving, step by step. Upon entering the first *Jhana*, it can feel like an earthquake within our understanding, shaking our previous notion that attaining such an immensely pleasurable, happy, and blissful state is even possible just by relinquishing our reactionary emotions. This experience is often met with skepticism, as people tend to rely solely on their immediate sensory perceptions and what their eyes can see. The idea that such profound experiences can emerge simply through the act of releasing these emotional reactions might seem far-fetched and unimaginable to many. However, this comprehensive path leads to the cessation of craving, marking a remarkable transformation.

So, the process of working with this system of craving involves letting go of it. We release the very evident manifestations of anger, displeasure, and paranoia through the practice of adopting virtuous behavior. As people tend to become more virtuous, they naturally display increased kindness, helpfulness, and compassion. This positive attitude then creates a conducive environment for experiencing the *Jhanas*. Their state of mind tends to be happier, as

they have managed to shed the burdens of strong and rigid views, along with personality traits that once held them back. Moreover, the Buddha emphasizes that the absence of regret serves as the precondition to achieving a composed mind. Such a mind, once attained, readily enters into the *Jhanas*. The Buddha uses a compelling simile to illustrate this concept.

It's found in the *Samyutta Nikaya 12.23* referred to as the "*Upanisa Sutta: Proximate Cause*". In this *Sutta*, the Buddha uses an analogy. A river originates from the first melting ice sheet in the Himalayas, which feeds into glaciers. These glaciers then flow into streams, collecting more water along the way, eventually forming rivers. Numerous rivers converge, ultimately filling the vast expanse of the ocean. Similarly, someone who cultivates generosity and virtuous behavior naturally progresses towards the ocean of *Nibbāna*. This analogy provides a practical perspective on entering the *Jhanas*, and the Noble Eightfold Path serves as a systematic approach to reaching the state of *Nibbāna*.

But the Noble Eightfold Path is not an exact translation. It's actually called "*Arya Atangiko Magga*." "*Arya*" refers to the superhuman or superior, and "*atangiko*" means eight parts or having eight constituents. It comprises eight distinct components, and we need all eight parts to have the complete path. So, let's take the first part, "Right View," which makes up one-eighth of the entire Noble Eightfold Path. Similarly, "Right Intention" or "Right Thought" forms the second part, and so on for all eight components of the Noble Eightfold Path. That's the essence of "*Arya Atangiko Magga*." It's important to note that "*Arya Atangiko Magga*" means something different than the commonly used "Noble Eightfold Path."

What we need to understand is that all eight aspects must be equally present for this path to be successful. We cannot take away Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood and only focus on the other five parts. It won't work. Just like a car won't function if we remove two wheels, we must have all four wheels for it to work. The Noble Eightfold Path is similar – we can't disregard certain aspects thinking they don't matter. We can see that while practicing deep absorption or concentration without necessarily having a virtuous

mind. If we neglect the full eightfold path, we won't be able to progress towards *Nibbāna*.

We know, even within the Buddhist community, there are people who practice what is called the *Kasina* meditation or other specific practices in a hierarchical manner. They may not fulfill all eight aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, not comprehending that by concentrating solely on one object, they cannot fulfill all eight requirements of the Noble Path. It's crucial to understand these basics correctly. If we fail to grasp these fundamentals, the practice as a whole could become misguided. This is where the danger lies, and the Buddha emphasized this repeatedly. We can have the Right View, but we can also have a wrong view. That means we will be on the wrong track from the start.

As soon as we have the wrong view, it means we have completely missed the essence of the holy life. We become an outsider to this Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, we must possess the Right View to enter this path. What exactly is this Right View? It entails understanding suffering, comprehending the problem. We need to grasp the problem, recognize our intended destination, and understand what the cessation of suffering entails. And to understand that suffering is due to taking as personal the process that is totally impersonal. This map of the Right View serves as our guide to enter the Noble Eightfold Path. This is how I am describing this process.

Now, there are four different pillars...

Let me pause for a moment now. There are certain aspects that need to be further understood in this *Sutta*. The *Sutta* now continues to delve into the Four Noble Truths. Now, let me read the additional aspect of the Buddha's Awakening. Having covered the origin of suffering, which is the first truth, let's move on to the next part where the Buddha expounds further.

“This is the noble truth of suffering’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

“This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

“This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

These are the three frames of understanding of suffering. He divides the Four Noble Truths into three sections. Basically, each of the Four Noble Truths is further subdivided into three categories. The first is the seeing of suffering, the second is the complete understanding of suffering, and the third is the assertion of the full comprehension of suffering. So, in essence, the first aspect involves identifying what suffering is, the second aspect emphasizes the necessity to fully comprehend suffering, and the third aspect confirms that suffering has been fully comprehended. That's the way it's presented.

Then he proceeds to discuss the second Noble Truth.

“This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

“This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

“This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

The second truth is the truth of craving. Yes, craving is the origin of suffering. Then, there is a need for the origin of suffering to be abandoned, and the craving, which is the cause, has to be abandoned. The third truth is that the craving or this origin of suffering has been abandoned. So, this involves understanding craving, the condition for the origin of craving to be abandoned, and whether it has been abandoned or not. Yes, he did abandon it.

Then, he proceeds to the third Noble Truth, which is *Nibbāna* – understanding *Nibbāna*, realizing *Nibbāna*, and confirming whether it has been achieved or not. This is about comprehending whether we

have realized it or not, and it serves as confirmation that we have indeed achieved it. The third one is the confirmation of the goal.

The fourth is the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path for the cessation of suffering. Has it been comprehended? Then developed? The confirmation that it has been developed is the third aspect of the fourth truth. So, we have got the Four Truths times three. That's a total of 12 permutations. That's what the Buddha says...

“So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unshakable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.’”

I cannot comprehend the experience of the Buddha's Awakening experience, but I can infer it from my own experiences. What I understand is this experience is the total and perfect convergence with reality; it's the state of mind where there is no overhead of processing. The mind is completely transparent. When we personally experience cessation, there arises a very strong conviction that this path is the only path. I can provide you with that assurance. When we start to follow the practice of meditation and the Noble Eightfold Path, this path will gradually lead to the cessation of what we call all formations—all inklings of divergence with reality.

Formations, or the word '*Sankhara*,' is a fundamental, very important term to understand. Formations are the immediate link next to ignorance. So, what are these formations called? *Sankharas* are the basis for all the other links, including consciousness, *Nama Rupa*, and all those sorts of things. *Sankhara*, the Pali term itself, means '*San*' means together and '*kara*' means making some action. So, it means to

lead to something. *Sankhara* is referred to as preparation by some, while others like Bhikkhu Bodhi call it 'volitional formation.' There is a varied connotation of this word '*Sankhara*,' including the interpretation by scholars like Rhys Davids like habitual tendencies.

Sankhara is a very, very important term and phenomenon to understand. The Buddha's last words were on *Sankharas*—insisting us to be heedful of their fleeting nature. I've conducted some research on this, and I also have a video discussing *Sankhara* with Delson Armstrong on YouTube. *Sankhara* is closely related to *Karma*, the notion of one's actions or deeds. What happens is that our actions can fall into three types: actions by body, speech, and mind. So, we have what is called '*Vacī Sankhara*,' which is the verbal formation; '*Kāya Sankhara*,' which is the bodily formation; and '*Citta Sankhara*,' which is the mental formation.

This Noble Eightfold Path is, in fact, the gradual cessation of these three formations. This connection may not be immediately apparent in its definition. Where do we see this *Sankhara* in the Noble Eightfold Path? It may not be immediately obvious. However, upon analyzing the path further, its deeper meanings become clear. It starts with the development of virtuous behavior.

If we look at it from the perspective of '*Sila*,' which is virtuous behavior, it generally leads to a more peaceful mind disposition. When a person is virtuous, they are at ease and have mastery over their verbal formations. These verbal formations refer not just to speech but also to our thoughts and intentions. Verbal formations influence our thinking process, making us more thoughtful, deliberate, and considerate. As a result, we become less impulsive. This is a part of the '*Sila*' in the Noble Eightfold Path; the verbal formations fall under the '*Sila*' aspect.

Let's say that when we practice the Noble Eightfold Path and we follow right speech, right action, and right livelihood, it leads to a sense of calmness and inner peace. It also helps cultivate a more virtuous character, reducing intentions of harm and ill will. They lead to the pacification of verbal and bodily formations. This provides us with a solid foundation to enter into calmer meditation states (*Jhana*).

When we practice *Jhana* and enter the first level, our verbal formations, what we call thinking and examining thoughts, are still

experienced. But we can directly see where valves are, that allow them to flow to stop flowing. They will continue to exist in the sense that we may still have thoughts, although they will not be unwholesome. Thoughts involving lust, ill will, or anger, for instance, will be completely absent in the first *Jhana* as those hindrances have dissipated due to letting go. However, in the first *Jhana*, our verbal formations, including subtle thoughts such as thinking and examining, will still be present. But the mind is in charge of their flows.

In the second *Jhana*, our verbal formations begin to subside. This means that our thought processes, analysis, and planning start to diminish. This description of the Noble Eightfold Path is intended to illustrate the interrelationship between the Path and the cessation of formations.

If we examine the links of dependent origination, the ultimate disruptor of this process is the prevention of the building blocks of all formations from arising, or the Cessation of perception and feeling. This cessation of mental formations marks the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path, guiding us towards the attainment of *Nirodha Samapatti*. This achievement aids in our everyday life, shaping our attitudes, and behaviors, and promoting calmness. Increasing such wholesome qualities leads us progressively through the higher *Jhanas*—first to the second, then the third, and finally to the fourth *Jhana*.

In the fourth *Jhana*, we experience the cessation of bodily formations. Any intention or urge to engage in physical actions essentially ceases. Some might mistakenly refer to this as the cessation of breathing, but that's not entirely accurate. Bodily formation also encompasses mental processes or subtle intentions related to bodily actions. Therefore, all formations essentially manifest as mental processes, intentions, or mental imagery.

The fourth *Jhana* does not stop us from breathing, inhaling, or exhaling physically. Instead, it brings a cessation to the mental processes that typically lead to bodily activities or intentions to engage in physical actions. We won't have the inclination or intention to perform gross bodily activities, such as scratching our back or making any other physical movements. Any intention related

to subtle bodily activities will also diminish and cease. This distinction becomes clear with direct understanding of the fourth *Jhana*.

As we progress beyond the fourth *Jhana*, we enter what are known as the formless realms or *Ayatanas*, including the infinite realm of the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither perception nor non-perception. These formless realms further attenuate mental formations, particularly perception. In this transition, we release our attachment to the perception of the body, shifting our focus away from the physical and towards the subtleties of the mind.

In this state, our perception of the body, along with perceptions of objects like houses, trees, cities, and even the Earth, planets, and the solar system, ceases. We are left with a perception of the infinity of space within our mind. Over time, this perception gradually weakens, eventually leading to what is referred to as the descent to voidness. Gross perceptions begin to fade away. Initially, we let go of concepts of large objects such as cars and houses, then move on to smaller objects like chairs. We continue by relinquishing the concept of our own body. As this process unfolds, we find ourselves becoming aware only of the vast expanse of space. Eventually, even that awareness of space diminishes, leaving us with a pure awareness of sense consciousness.

In this intimate experience, we observe how consciousness affects our sense doors. Various sensations arise as our eyes perceive and process visual input, our ears receive auditory signals, and our skin senses tactile information. These are packets of sense consciousness. With the fading away of all these grosser perceptions, a gradual fading process unfolds. Ultimately, we continue to let go. 'Letting go' here means that we no longer identify any experiences hitting our awareness as being a part of ourselves or related to us in any way.

The Buddha often urges us to consistently ask ourselves questions like, 'Is this me? Is this mine? Is this myself?' We keep checking this at the level of awareness and realize that these experiences are not 'me,' not 'mine,' and not 'myself.' We always recognize them as mere

fleeting occurrences. Is it worthwhile to cling onto these fleeting moments? No, we simply let go. We acknowledge, 'This is not me; this is not mine.' It's as if we naturally see the release happening. There's no true satisfaction to be found in these transient phenomena. When we experience the higher *Jhanas*, any form of engagement becomes a burden, as it only weighs us down.

We find joy in lightness, emptiness, and freedom from feelings. Consider this: when we travel with a heavy backpack under the scorching sun, and someone kindly shares the load, taking half off our shoulders, we feel immense relief and happiness due to the reduced burden. Similarly, in our meditation practice as we progress from the first *Jhana* to the second, our load becomes lighter. We feel more comfortable and happier because of the act of letting go. Letting go is not negative; it brings much more happiness than holding onto things, unlike the distress that ordinary people may experience when losing possessions like cars, houses, or property due to attachment. In this discipline, the Noble Eightfold Path, letting go progressively lightens our journey and path.

That's why I say, when we let go of the first *Jhana*, we release that particular rapture and pleasure of the *Jhana*. In letting go of it, we experience an even higher and more sublime sense of peaceful experience. There's no need to lament losing that *Jhana* because by letting it go, we discover even greater happiness. Then we let go of the second *Jhana* as well, reaching an even better, happier feeling. By continuing to let go, we ease our burden and become lighter. Our experiences become much more subtle, and we find greater happiness as we let go of these burdens. That's how it works in the Noble Eightfold Path. It progresses in this manner.

To illustrate this, consider the Apollo moon mission. The rocket is designed with six or seven stages, each with capsules and engines. At the very bottom are the heaviest and most powerful thrusters and fuel tanks. These counteract Earth's strong gravitational pull. As the rocket enters space, it uses this initial power to overcome gravity. Similarly, in our practice, we first let go of coarse worldly sensual pleasures. Once the lowest stage burns out, the rocket exits Earth's orbit and requires less fuel. In the second stage, it sheds the

bottommost part no longer needed. This makes the rocket much lighter, allowing it to travel faster in space and use less fuel. Eventually, each stage burns off fuel, shedding the next stage, becoming even lighter, and requiring less fuel.

This progression continues until it reaches space. Once in space, we observe that gravity, previously necessary for support on Earth, completely disappears. In the emptiness of space, everything remains without needing external support. As the Buddha mentions in the *Udāna* or other Buddhist teachings: 'For supported, there is worry and anxiety because it relies on that support. But for unsupported, there is no anxiety, no burden.' This is where *Nibbāna* comes in. *Nibbāna* is unsupported, unconditioned, and undirected. It requires no support; it exists as a state without conditions⁷⁹.

Ultimately, our aim is to reach a state where we are not bound by Earth's gravity, not dependent on it as an artificial form of support. It's important to realize that the absence of gravity in space doesn't mean falling into an endless abyss. In the vastness of space, gravity is unnecessary; there's no need for that support.

Likewise, *Nibbāna* can be understood similarly. We don't need to cling to false notions like gravity to stay in our chair or on our bed. Concepts such as beds, chairs, houses, or the shade of a tree—all these constructs will fade away in space. We won't need anything. They are all fabricated supports for dependent existence and will vanish when no longer needed. These are all burdens—factors that can lead to the arising of suffering. Maintaining and clinging to them only lead to more rejection, suffering, unhappiness, and pain.

Consider what it would be like not to have a body. While we often think having a body brings happiness, for 99.99% of the time, it is a source of pain. It is the origin of all difficulties and discomforts. Recognizing that having this body is not always a source of happiness is crucial. Only those completely out of touch with reality take this body as a source of pleasure. The Buddha says this body is to be seen as a cancer, a disease, a tumor, a burden. There is nothing about this

⁷⁹ Udāna 8.4: Parinibbāna

body to be happy or delighted about. Now, returning to the *Sutta*, let's examine its final parts.

What the Buddha demonstrates is his experience of unshakable liberation of the mind. This is his final birth. There is no more renewed existence. Essentially, we let go of everything—the body, feelings, personal formations, and consciousness. This means the mind is fully liberated from all those fabrications, all layers of artificial constructs. Now, only the mind remains, free from all these burdens. It has reached the Unconditioned state. This is why it is said 'no more,' indicating that all concepts of birth, death, feeling, craving, and *Nama Rupa* have vanished.

These are all fabrications. When we let go of associations and formations, everything ceases. What the Buddha realized was the cessation of birth, association, existence, craving, feeling, perception, consciousness, and ignorance. What remains is just the mind, fully liberated. There is nothing for it to latch onto. That's it. It's fully freed from all sides. This is what the Blessed One said, delighting the five monks. As this discourse was spoken, the Venerable Kondanna, one of the five monks, dustless, freed, with stainless vision of the Dhamma arose: '*Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*'

Now, as I mentioned at the very beginning, having the dustless, dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma means that Kondanna became a stream-winner, a *Sotapanna*, just by understanding the fact that all that has an origin means that by that very nature, it can also be prevented from arising. We don't need to be in deep meditation to understand this or even be in a *Jhana*.

All we need to understand is that all these five aggregates are in a constant state of arising and ceasing. Because they arose, that means something caused them to arise; if the condition is let go, they stop immediately. We don't need to have that supermundane *Jhana* or formless realm experience. We can see it in our daily life. So, all we need to do is to have the Right View that this experience of arising is suffering, and these arising and ceasing due to perceptions are of such a nature. Once we grasp this understanding with the Right View, it means we are established on the path, in the Dhamma.

Let me read on further...

And when the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth-dwelling devas raised a cry: “

At Bārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.” Having heard the cry of the earth-dwelling devas, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised a cry: “At Bārāṇasī ... this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped ... by anyone in the world.”

Having heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Tāvatiṃsa devas ... the Yāma devas ... the Tusita devas ... the Nimmānaratī devas ... the Paranimmitavasavattī devas ... the devas of Brahmā’s company raised a cry: “At Bārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the brahmā world, and this ten thousandfold world system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: “Koṇḍañña has indeed understood! Koṇḍañña has indeed understood!” In this way the Venerable Koṇḍañña acquired the name “Añña Koṇḍañña—Koṇḍañña Who Has Understood.”

That's it, this is the end of the Sutta. It took us some time to elaborate a bit more on the various aspects, so I hope this has been fruitful. I don't want to take much more time. Thank you very much and have a great practice and a great day.

Chapter 16

Exploring the Buddha's Samatha Vipassana Path

'So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.' Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: *'There is an escape beyond,'* and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

[Majjhima Nikaya 111: Anupada Sutta]

This work was created in response to a Dhamma friend named Ana. She reached out via my YouTube channel in response to one of those videos where I discussed my experience with the *Jhanas*—the complete path from beginning to end. I previously covered this topic in another language, based on the *Majjhima Nikaya 111, Anupada Sutta*. Since I didn't cover it in English, there was a request for me to do so, prompting me to print out this *Sutta*. Here, I will explain it step by step, as it happens for most TWIM practitioners, and I'm no exception.

Now, what exactly is this path? Do we truly understand what the Buddha's path entails and what it does not? This is something we must clarify. After conducting sufficient research, we discover various interpretations even within the Buddhist community regarding what constitutes the Buddha's path. This diversity of opinions, ideas, and concepts can be bewildering.

Many people express spending 10-20 years before finding practices that enable them to experience *Jhana* relatively quickly. If we carefully read all the *Suttas*, it becomes evident that the Buddha and all his disciples considered *Jhanas* as a natural, effortless phenomenon. It's akin to clothing we wear every day—nothing particularly special or otherworldly about the *Jhanas*. However, over time, the practices leading to the experience of *Jhanas*, as described by the Buddha, have faded, and other practices have blended in, bringing different ideas and concepts that distort the path of *Jhana*.

Thus, it should not surprise us when people talk about *Jhanas* in completely different ways. The path of *Jhanas* taught by the Buddha has been elaborated in numerous places in the *Suttas*. However, perhaps the most detailed description of the *Jhanas* is found in *Majjhima Nikaya 111*. This *Sutta* serves as a comprehensive reference for understanding what the *Jhanas* truly entail according to the Buddha's teachings. It's crucial to be thorough and rigorous in learning meditation techniques that conform to the Buddha's way. Cross-referencing information across multiple *Suttas* is essential.

Even the Buddha employed cross-referencing methodology. If he described a specific experience in one *Sutta*, he would often reference it, stating, "I spoke this particular verse on this particular occasion, say in '*Attakatha*'. Here is its meaning." In doing so, the Buddha referred to the section where he had shared that experience and then explained its significance before moving forward. This cross-referencing ensured a solid interlinking of his teachings, preventing practitioners from becoming isolated and blindly following a specific method without connecting it to other related practices.

Therefore, it is important to read *Suttas* discerningly and grasp the key messages of each. Then, cross-reference with other *Suttas* to validate certain teachings, especially those of Buddhist teachers who advocate a one-pointed type of practice, focusing on a particular sign or *Nimitta*. Teachers like Ajahn Brahm, when describing *Jhanas*, follow the practice of allowing *Nimittas* to arise in the mind. As one closes their eyes and intensely focuses the mind on a specific object, such as in-breathing and out-breathing, after sufficient practice, the mind gradually releases awareness of surroundings and begins to visualize a bright, disk-like object, which they call a *Nimitta*. They assert that as this *Nimitta* becomes stronger and brighter, one should release the breath as the meditation object, making the *Nimitta* the primary focus. They describe a progression where one continues focusing on the *Nimitta*, which starts to expand and contract. This adjustment of attention towards the *Nimitta* is how they measure progress.

So, this is what I would say about absorption *Jhana*. It may be termed conventional *Jhana* in a sense that reflects what the majority of people think *Jhana* is. However, this interpretation does not align with what the Buddha taught—he did not teach absorption. But how

do we determine what the Buddha's practice of *Jhana* truly is? For that, we need to synthesize teachings from multiple *Suttas*.

For a good foundation, I suggest reading *Majjhima Nikaya 10*, the *Satipatthana Sutta*. Here, the experience of *Jhanas* is included, but the Buddha leads through the ultimate experience towards full Awakening via the path of mindfulness, where *Jhanas* serve as milestones. The *Four Satipatthana* act as anchors for awareness to settle whenever it drifts. This framework guides our mindful observation, where we observe: a) body, b) feeling, c) mind, and d) mind objects. These four objects of attention strengthen our mindfulness: first by observing the nature of body awareness, then by observing the dependence of body and feeling that arises. Observing feeling naturally leads to observing the mind—the platform of awareness.

The mind serves as a base, akin to the body base where feelings arise dependent on the body. Feelings arise, and the mind, in turn, serves as another base dependent on these feelings, giving rise to mind objects. This interplay forms the framework of *Satipatthana*. Now, where do *Jhanas* fit within these four foundations of mindfulness? *Jhana* occupies a small part within the framework of *Satipatthana*. Which aspect does *Jhana* pertain to? In the Buddha's teaching, *Jhana* pertains specifically to the observation of feeling.

Even within the observation of feeling, there are various categories: worldly joyful feelings, worldly painful feelings, and worldly neutral feelings. Worldly feelings are connected with bodily sensations and our reactions to them. Otherworldly pleasant feelings are the *Jhanas*, arising when our reactions are relinquished. Otherworldly painful feelings include aversions and hindrances—subtle experiences of aversion even during meditation. Otherworldly neutral feelings represent non-reactivity, neutrality, or equanimity. In contrast, worldly neutral feelings maintain some elements of reactivity, staying away from full awareness.

Within the *Satipatthana* framework, *Jhanas* occupy a small fraction. Therefore, *Jhana* is somewhat embedded within the four foundations of mindfulness, not as the anchor of our attention, but as one part among many experiences within the broader framework of mindfulness. This clarifies that in the Buddha's path, the overarching

process and framework for Awakening is not solely focused on *Jhana*. *Jhana* represents a supernormal experience indicating progress beyond worldly experiences, integrated within the overall framework of mindfulness.

Understanding this perspective clarifies that one-pointed, *Nimitta*-based *Jhanas* and other highly focused practices do not fully align with the mindful awareness of experiences—whether worldly or otherworldly, painful or pleasurable. We remain mindful and aware without being bound or constrained by them.

If we can understand this, then we are on the right track. It means the *Jhana* that the Buddha taught is not closed; it's aware, open, and completely mindful. So, this understanding is crucial for entering into the right collectedness (*Samma Samadhi*) or right *Jhana*. Otherwise, if we start following an approach not guided by mindfulness, we might enter the wrong door, possibly leading to a completely different destination. This could result in accumulating *Bhava*—a tendency to be attached to rebirth in such experiences—but it will not lead to full Awakening. I will elaborate on many experiences later.

Some Preliminaries

I generally like to follow a framework when conducting explorations. So, I cover some preliminaries about the idea, the experience, and support them with explanations. I begin with background information and emphasize the importance of stepping back, reflecting, and then determining the right practice to follow.

This is the preliminary I want to cover. Then, I will proceed with the beginning. What is the process now? The state of *Jhana* or whatever we call it, the Eightfold Path—let's ponder a little. The *Suttas* are very concise when it comes to definitions and experiences. They do not spend many words describing the state of *Jhana* or expanding on its richness. There are numerous experiences and interactions within the mind that seem to show great richness within that experience, but the *Suttas* do not delve deeply into *Jhanas*.

I can appreciate why the *Suttas* do not elaborate much. They cannot encapsulate something that is so individualistic, more speculative than factual in terms of the Dhamma. For instance, if

someone experiences blissful states, they might say, "I had a very blissful experience. I was in a heavenly state where I saw a cloud, or I floated across." These are personal experiences. If such descriptions appeared in the *Suttas*, it would lead to debates and discussions, as anyone could claim, "Your description doesn't align with my understanding."

Therefore, many of these things remain somewhat speculative and purely personal experiences. They are influenced by a person's accumulated tendencies, inclinations, traditions, upbringing, and culture. These factors color perceptions, potentially distorting the experience of *Jhana*. This is why the minor details of these experiences cannot be thoroughly explored. Even if someone says, "I saw this particular thing in this *Jhana*," they must be cautious not to overly describe the experience. While different personalities may add their own interpretations when experiencing *Jhana*, there are certain hallmarks of each *Jhana* that apply universally to all individuals who experience them.

The Buddha and his disciples quote these *Jhana* factors in the *Suttas*, committing them to memory within a rigorous framework that upholds the qualities of the Dhamma. These are principles of Dhamma qualities.

Therefore, concerning these personal experiences, the experiences of *Jhana*, I would refrain from excessive description. Even if descriptions are provided, they should be treated as narratives. These narratives may be intriguing or somewhat foreign to us, but the fundamental truth lies in the conditionality, the dependent phenomena, our experiences, our interactions with them, and the mechanics of the mind—these are universal truths consistently experienced by all meditators.

This is my analysis regarding these experiences and how we should ensure their reliability. We have every right to ask the question, "What assures us that we are following the right path of the Buddha?"

In terms of preliminaries, regarding the Buddha's path of entering the higher states of mind, moving beyond the cluttered mind affected by the five hindrances, and the *Jhanas* as experiences that can also be contaminated by these hindrances, the Buddha refers

to them as barriers, confinements preventing us from entering higher states of mind.

Let me cover a very interesting *Sutta* first—called "*Incompetent Cook*" from *Samyutta Nikaya* 47.8. I will not read the full *Sutta*, but I will share some excerpts. The Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook were to present a king or a royal minister with various kinds of curries: sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty, bland.

“That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the sign of his own master’s preference: ‘Today this curry pleased my master, or he reached for this one, or he took a lot of this one, or he spoke in praise of this one; or the sour curry pleased my master today, or he reached for the sour one, or he took a lot of the sour one, or he spoke in praise of the sour one; or the bitter curry ... or the pungent curry ... or the sweet curry ... or the sharp curry ... or the mild curry ... or the salty curry ... or the bland curry pleased my master ... or he spoke in praise of the bland one.’

“That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not gain [gifts of] clothing, wages, and bonuses. For what reason? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the sign of his own master’s preference.

This is quite a typical example. We might have seen some sloppy cooks who just cook but don't know the right timing, the right environment, or how to prepare. If someone doesn't know the right time to practice, the right environment to practice in, and the right preparation, then, no matter what we cook or prepare, it's not going to satisfy the objective. That's what the Buddha is saying. Even if we cook a dish, if someone is not hungry or doesn't like the taste, then, no matter how good the food we made is, it will not satisfy because we simply didn't find the right approach.

The Buddha then mentions that here comes some foolish, incompetent, unskilled individual who dwells contemplating the body in the body ardently, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating the body in the body, his mind does not become concentrated, his corruptions are not abandoned, he does not pick up that sign.

Although some teachers are quick to say that the Buddha is referring to the 'sign' as the *Nimitta*, it's not really about the *Nimitta*. That sign is the object for anchoring attention for bare mindfulness; it doesn't mean that it is a radiant glow that we need to focus on and be glued to. It simply means finding that state of mind where it is slightly settled and more at ease. Has the mind found the entry as soft and spacious awareness? That is the sign. We need to observe: has the mind started to roam around the terrain of the mind, and is it agitated? Has the mind found that entry through an aperture or crack amidst blockers like obsessions, reactions, to enter that higher state of mind or not⁸⁰? Somebody can ruminate around aimlessly for hours, days, or even years and not enter that state of mind because he didn't pick up the sign, that soft, open, spacious entry point to allow the mind to lean into. It's the same in a sitting session too; we can be meditating for many hours and still not be able to enter that higher state if we engage with experiences too much and try to force them.

He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, his mind does not become concentrated, his corruptions are not abandoned, he does not pick up that sign.

[Samyutta Nikaya 47.8: Incompetent Cook]

If I were to give an example, let's say we are going into some bush or forest. If we are not observant, it can be an aimless endeavor, spending many hours without identifying the spot. Maybe we can call it the sweet spot, or I call it the Goldilocks zone, or a zone where the mind is a bit more malleable, a bit softer, and we need to find that entry. When we are practicing, our mind wobbles, and our mind is constantly searching. Now, we need to take a step back and observe where the mind is trying to settle. It wobbles a little bit, and if we take a step back, the mind will gradually settle, and it will start to settle into a dip. There is a depth in the mind where, if we rest in that particular state, it becomes pure, very relaxed, at ease, and calm.

⁸⁰ Anguttara Nikaya 9.42: Confinement

That's where we allow the mind to plunge, but keeping a watchful eye to see what it's doing.

So, that is the entry to the higher state of mind, and that's what we call a mind devoid of all confusion, hindrances, and what we call the *Jhanas*. Therefore, observing the state of mind where the mind takes a step back, lets itself calm, finds its equilibrium, and allows itself to rest and dive into that state of tranquility, calmness, and inner happiness—that's how we need to progress in this practice, not through exertion. It's not about putting too much force into trying to evoke that experience; that would be like putting too much gas in a car, risking a crash. We need a smooth ride, making maneuvers to ensure it perfectly aligns with the reality of the present moment. So, our maneuver is to back off; if the mind is heading in the right direction, back off without exerting too much effort. If the mind becomes sluggish and is already taking a back seat, nudge it a little to ensure progress.

This is a practical example that we are all accustomed to, like driving in a picturesque village or countryside. It can be as enjoyable as that. So, if we are practicing meditation, following the path of mindfulness, being fully aware, then following the path closely is the right approach. For example, someone practicing one-pointed concentration is heading in one direction without even being aware of what is happening in the surroundings. This could lead to incidents like imbalance of mind, and those who persist in this approach may remain trapped in that condition for a long time.

This is the real situation: we need to assess the present moment, the situation, and make the right effort. What does that mean? We practice, and today we managed to achieve a very good and peaceful higher state of *Jhana*. But the same approach may not work tomorrow because, like human beings, tastes can change. Just as someone might not fancy a spicy dish one day and prefers plain food without spices the next, the mind may become completely unsettled if we follow the same approach tomorrow, spending hours without entering the *Jhanas*. Therefore, tomorrow again, we need to observe what the mind is doing. Is it too agitated, too relaxed, too lethargic, or too restless? Then, we adjust our effort accordingly or take a step back.

This means at each practice, at each step, we need to conduct such an assessment—a reality check, as it were. This is what the Buddha is advising: don't blindly enter a state and expect to reach a higher state of mind. We need to consciously assess the present moment.

There is a book by Ajahn Brahm titled "*The Art of Disappearing*" (Brahm, 2011). In it, he describes some experiences that are not supported by the *Suttas*, or they are in concordance with the *Suttas*. I'm not saying that Ajahn Brahm is wrong or right, but we can test his approach against the instructions in the *Suttas*.

Here's a small excerpt from his book:

"When the body disappears, you experience stillness deep inside. It's a Jhana state. In this Jhana state, you are disengaged from the outside world—the five senses have vanished. Sometimes, this state is described as being aloof from the world of the five senses. In fact, it goes beyond aloofness; it is complete disengagement, the complete ending of the world. Once you start to taste the stillness in the mind, it becomes terribly addictive. And that's a good thing because the mind's addiction to stillness is what drives you deeper towards Nibbana. The Buddha actually said that attachment to deep meditation can only lead to the stage of Enlightenment."

He quotes *Digha Nikaya 29, The Pasadika Sutta*, and mentions that we don't need to be concerned or worried about the addiction to letting go. It is part of the pleasure, joy, and freedom of the mind of monastics. It is an addiction that leads to more and more fading away and letting go. The peace of *Nibbāna* increases and pulls us away from the world."

Okay, I think I would neither completely disagree nor completely agree with these few words. First of all, what I want to clarify is that *Jhana* does not entail complete disengagement from the external world. In the Buddha's *Jhanas*, the five senses do not vanish as Ajahn Brahm suggests. They arise, stay, and cease. If they were to disappear completely, as he claims—shutting down seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—then we would be left only with the *Nimitta*. However, this contradicts what the Buddha taught in the *Satipatthana Sutta* and other *Suttas* describing *Jhanas*. According to the Buddha, we observe the body as simply the body, feelings as feelings, and the

mind as the mind. The existence of the body, eye, ear, taste, touch—these are all aspects of the body and the five senses.

In any *Jhana* according to the Buddha's teachings, awareness of the body remains present in our consciousness. These senses arise because external phenomena make contact with internal sense bases. Consciousness arises dependent on these internal and external sense bases. When consciousness and these sense bases meet, contact arises, and from that contact, feelings arise.

If we were to not perceive the feeling of the eye or the hearing of the ear, it would mean we are shutting out all these phenomena. These phenomena are crucial aspects of the Noble Truths: the arising of phenomena, the cessation of phenomena, and the path leading to the cessation of phenomena and complete cessation itself. It is essential to observe their arising and ceasing. If we merely shut them out, if we close the door to them, then we are already outside the domain of the Four Noble Truths.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand in practice what leads to such aloofness. If it is mere aloofness—where there is awareness but complete isolation—this is not what the Buddha taught. We must be absolutely clear that in the Buddha's path, it involves letting all phenomena be as they are and knowing them. They arise, remain, and cease. What the Buddha teaches is not to engage too much or interfere with this process. Instead, we should let it flow naturally. Let phenomena arise and cease. Let them impact our awareness. Let them make contact with our senses. What is crucial is our independence to observe their arising, to let them be, and to naturally subside on their own.

As soon as we begin to push them away, suppress them, or close the door on them, we fail to see how the mind operates. We fail to see the fundamental process of observing conditioned phenomena.

Conditionality, what is that conditionality? It involves sense bases, sense contact, and the phenomena that arise dependent on them. This is the heart of the Four Noble Truths, and seeing this is Awakening. Entering a deep *Jhana* state and detaching from all five senses does not lead to insight into the arising and ceasing of suffering. If we do not understand the arising and ceasing of suffering, how can we understand the Four Noble Truths? And if we

do not understand the Four Noble Truths, how can we attain Awakening?

There are elements of truth in Ajahn Brahm's practice, but it prematurely enters a state without discerning the ultimate goal of the practice. It focuses on seeking bliss. Ajahn Brahm seems to suggest that once you find the bliss of *Jhana*, you should become attached to that bliss and disregard everything else. However, this contradicts what the Buddha taught in countless *Suttas*⁸¹.

Let's be absolutely clear: staying in the *Jhanas* for as long as possible is not the objective of Awakening. We must understand the terrain of the *Jhanas*, the profile of the *Jhana* states, and recognize their unsatisfactory nature. We need to observe how the *Jhanas* settle and explore their various realities. Being observant and skilled in understanding the terrain of these *Jhanas* will mature our insight, leading to what the Buddha describes as disenchantment with the process. Without these three steps—disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation—we cannot attain *Nibbāna*.

So, where do we find this element of disenchantment? Where is the element of dispassion? Where is the element of cessation? The book "*The Art of Disappearing*" seems to focus more on being addicted to the *Jhanas*, immersed in the bliss of *Jhana*. However, this contradicts what the Buddha taught in *Sutta Digha Nikaya* 29. In that passage, the Buddha acknowledges that his disciples dwell in the bliss of *Jhanas*, but as a temporary abiding, not as a permanent refuge. Some teachers misunderstand *Jhanas* as a significant achievement. By becoming absorbed in *Jhana*, we cannot experience *Nibbāna*. We need to awaken. We need to recognize when our mind is struck by the lightning thunderbolt of the Dhamma, shaking our perspectives on the nature of phenomena. Understanding this process, this lightning strike will awaken us. This leads to full Awakening: the realization that the mind breaks free from entanglement with all kinds of phenomena.

When the mind is completely disentangled, we are no longer caught in the cycle of phenomena, including suffering and death. Previously, we were identified with and immersed in these

⁸¹ For example, MN 10, 27, 111, 113, 137, 138 to name a few

phenomena. Now, as the Buddha says, the mind and phenomena are like a snake and its worn-out skin—they simply fall apart⁸². They are completely disentangled, never to be bound together again. This is the freedom of Awakening: never again subject to rebirth, re-death, or any form of repetition.

If we can understand this process, then everything I explain later will hopefully make sense.

The Four *Jhanas*

Majjhima Nikaya 111.

THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvathī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There he addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus."—"Venerable, sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Bhikkhus, Sāriputta is wise; Sāriputta has great wisdom; Sāriputta has wide wisdom; Sāriputta has joyous wisdom; Sāriputta has quick wisdom; Sāriputta has keen wisdom; Sāriputta has penetrative wisdom. During half a month, bhikkhus, Sāriputta gained insight into states one by one as they occurred.

So, this *Sutta* asserts right from the beginning that nothing escaped the mindfulness of Sariputta. His mind was so sharp that every phenomenon, or what we call the mind object (state), did not elude his scrutiny. With razor-sharp awareness, he could discern even the minutest details of his experiences. Generally, we are accustomed to categorizing things into experiences like indifference, pleasure, or pain. When the mind is fortified with wisdom, awareness of phenomena becomes very clear as it is no longer bound to or absorbed in these phenomena.

The state of mind is such that it remains open to all experiences, unaffected by them, and free from reactions. With such a mind, one can closely observe any *Jhana* and its components such as joy, energy, equanimity, and mindfulness. This is what the *Sutta* conveys—that Sariputta was able to analyze these components at an atomic level. That's why the Buddha declares Sariputta as foremost in wisdom. Then the Buddha continues,

⁸² Suttanipata 1.1: The Serpent

“Here, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.”

The first *Jhana* represents a state of temporary freedom from hindrances while refraining from indulging in sensual pleasures. The rapture and pleasure experienced in *Jhanas* differ significantly from sensual pleasures. In *Majjhima Nikaya 10 Satipattahana Sutta*, it describes this joy of *Jhana* as unworldly (*nirāmiṣaṃ sukhaṃ*). Many Buddhist practicers completely ignore this point saying the *Satipattahana Sutta* does not mention *Jhana* at all. But the term *nirāmiṣaṃ sukhaṃ* means the *Jhanas*, is made very clear in:

“And what, bhikkhus, is unworldly happiness (nirāmiṣaṃ sukhaṃ)? Here, bhikkhus, secluded from sensual pleasures ... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna ... the second jhāna.... With the fading away as well of rapture, he dwells equanimous and, mindful and clearly comprehending, he experiences happiness with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the noble ones declare: ‘He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.’ This is called unworldly happiness.

[Samyutta Nikaya 36.31: Unworldly (Niramisa) Sutta]

So if we don't clearly understand this experience, how can we know how to enter and abide in that state? That's why entering into *Jhana* is a deliberate practice and investigation of the terrain. When I first started practicing, entering into the *Jhanas* was less stable, here and there, so I liken this experience to learning any new skill that we are just beginning to master.

For example, we might not know how to drive a car. Without knowing how to operate it, we cannot make even a small journey. As we learn, we might struggle with pressing the gas too hard, forgetting to press the clutch, or failing to hit the brake when the car speeds up. All these controls and knobs are there to help us navigate smoothly and stay on the highway of the *Jhanas*. We need to start with easy roads.

We all begin in a state of confusion. What makes it confusing is that we are so accustomed to indulging in sense pleasures—listening

to music, eating food, and entertaining sensual thoughts and plans. These distractions pull the mind in all directions, making it difficult to find internal composure.

That's what *Jhana* is—it's the mind finding composure to remain in a state where it can let go of confusion and diversity, arriving at a steadier state of mind. We start by gently letting go of all sense attractions; we allow them to settle naturally. We neither try to forget them nor suppress them; we simply let them be. Our attention then focuses on the wholesome mind that arises from letting go of hindrances.

The best and quickest way to attain the higher state of *Jhana* is to guide the mind towards something wholesome, as in Right Effort. We let go of unwholesome things and sense pleasures. By not paying attention to them, we naturally see these unwholesome states fade away. Instead, we direct our attention towards something wholesome.

What is a wholesome state that we can cultivate and devote more time to? We allow the mind to dwell more on qualities like loving-kindness or the antidote of ill-will.

This is the essence of the practice that we follow. Personally, I haven't practiced mindfulness of breathing extensively. I've only done many short sessions on it. However, after not seeing benefits even after many years, I've been practicing mindfulness of loving-kindness.

In this practice, we begin by generating warm feelings of loving-kindness towards ourselves for 10-15 minutes. We sincerely wish for our own happiness and well-being, mentally saying things like: "May I be extremely kind, generous, patient, compassionate towards all beings. May I be a good human being, a good father, a good son, and so on."

If we start to bring these thoughts gently into our primary focus and pay full attention to feeling of these loving and kind thoughts, whenever distractions arise and pull our attention away from the feeling of loving-kindness, we don't suppress them or force them away. When distractions arise, we let them be. We release our attention from unwholesome thoughts, ideas, or distractions. We drop them, let them go. We simply observe whatever arises without

getting carried away or upset. We accept the reality of our mind's engagement and recognize that such interactions may bring a slight unease within the mind and body.

We may not initially notice that unease. That's why we need to release our attention without trying to investigate. Once we've done that, once we've pulled the string out, we've already lessened its impact. Then, we need to relax the mind and body. Relaxing the mind and body means letting them settle by doing nothing. We know that simply letting the mind and body be as they are, without exerting any effort, brings ease. Just relax any tension and tightness in our body and mind by loosening the grip of any muscles and corners of the body. Calm down, relax, and observe an open and spacious mind like a clear blue sky.

This invigorates the mind, adding freshness to it. After recognizing, releasing, and relaxing, we bring a gentle smile to our mind and heart. This is quite important because smiling is a practice that keeps us from taking everything personally. Our minds tend to gravitate towards seriousness and becoming overly attached, concerned, and worrying unnecessarily about things.

So, smiling brings a sense of ease and alleviates stages of sadness and gloom in the mind. It blossoms the mind, preventing it from sinking into negativity. Smiling is crucial to prevent the mind from becoming mired in negativity. As Bhante Vimalaramsi used to say, smiling is vital to uplift our mind to a wholesome and sublime state. Recognize the unwholesome state, release our attention, relax our mind and body, and then smile to return to a mind of loving-kindness, compassion, generosity, and gratitude.

After smiling, we need to return to our meditation object, which could be wishes such as "May I be a great human being, a good teacher, husband, father, or an extremely generous supporter of charitable organizations." Bringing up these wholesome qualities increases our mind's attention towards the bright parts, reducing the dark parts by not paying attention to them. That's the core of the Buddha's teachings.

Thus, the effect of these two activities—allowing distractions to be without interfering or engaging with them, and cultivating a wholesome state—can lead to the fastest progress in entering *Jhana*,

at least in my experience. It didn't take me more than two or three days to enter into a *Jhana*. Some very smart and skilled meditators can achieve the first or second stage of Awakening in just a matter of days. While I may not be one of them, I find satisfaction in my ability to experience *Jhana* in a short period.

As the Buddha emphasizes, we attain this state by secluding ourselves, not paying attention to unwholesome sensual thoughts and ill will—the five hindrances. We're not practicing to build walls; instead, we're building bridges and allowing these states to come in. As the Buddha says, phenomena are just potentials; they arise due to attention (*Manasikara*). By not paying attention to them, they naturally fade away. Our strategy is not to suppress them but to allow them to arise and fade away by themselves.

This approach stands in strong contrast to other practitioners who focus on the *Nimitta*, suppress the five senses, and immerse themselves in bliss, locking themselves into that state for extended periods.

So, we are not part of a group that gets locked into the bliss of a *Jhana* state. Even if a *Jhana* arises, we understand it's just a small part of the bigger picture, sitting in a corner. In this *Jhana*, there is open awareness, the body and mind are happy, and we can experience all surroundings while still being aware of the *Jhana*. However, we are not bound to it. Instead, we pay attention not to the *Jhana* experience itself, but to cultivating a mind of loving-kindness. We continue to nurture loving-kindness for ourselves or our spiritual friend, thereby increasing the state of wholesome mind and abandoning the unwholesome state by letting go. We let the *Jhana* be as it is, keeping it in the background without interfering or becoming involved. The *Jhana* will persist for as long as it wants to, and there's no need to worry about its appearance or disappearance. Just allow it to come and go naturally. By letting it be and letting it go, we contribute to its stability.

Therefore, those *Jhanas* will become stronger, more stable, more sublime, and more exquisite if we allow them to be. We simply let them do as they please, and our experience of happiness will grow and intensify. That's why we say don't worry about when these

experiences arise; don't try to grasp them. Just let them be, and they will become even more sublime. Now, let me read more.

“And the states in the first jhāna—the applied thought, the sustained thought, the rapture, the pleasure, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: ‘There is an escape beyond,’ and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

Okay, I mean, I've read quite a few things here, so there is so much richness in *Jhana* when one is open. If we experience a *Jhana* by suppressing all the hindrances and the five senses, we will not gain these insights. We will not be able to perceive the contact; we will not discern the arising of feeling; we will not understand perception, formation, and mind – those five aggregates. Sariputta saw that; he observed the phenomena of dependent origination in a basic form.

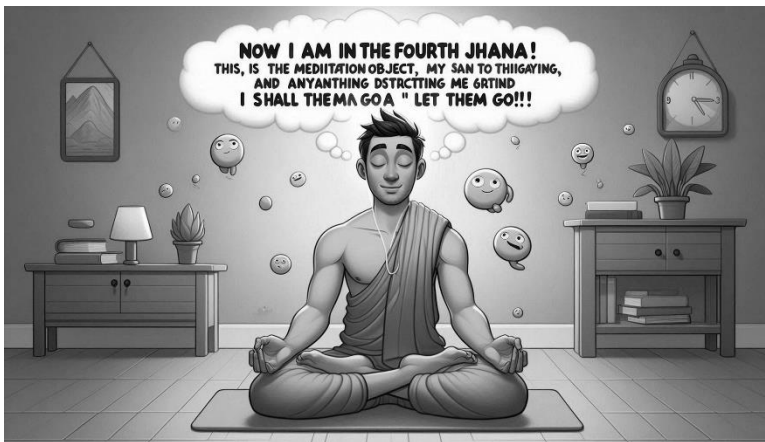


Figure 18: Taking the outcomes of practice, such as the joy of a *Jhana*, and using them as the meditation object instead of the original object (e.g., *Metta*) is a very common tendency of the mind.

So, what he's saying is that he observed, in the first *Jhana*, the applied thought and sustained thought and all phenomena. What happens is when we let the mind focus on some wholesome state and let go of unwholesome states, our practice supports the wholesome. This cultivation of the wholesome and the abandonment of the unwholesome synergize the mind. If we can sustain this effort beyond just one or two minutes, then we can unlock the *Jhana* experience. Our usual states of mind and interactions typically don't allow us to stay with wholesome thoughts or intentions even for one second; they become very fragile and fleeting. If we can manage to sustain our wholesome thoughts for about a minute, the Buddha says it's not devoid of *Jhana*, as in *Anguttara Nikaya*⁸³. If we can maintain our mindfulness of loving-kindness for one minute, guaranteed, we will enter *Jhana*. That one minute is significant.

But our normal mind is very weak, and it can be influenced by many storms of thoughts and emotions. Our mind is really weak in the beginning, and if we can sustain focus on a wholesome object for even 10 or 15 seconds, then we have begun to strengthen our mind. Then, gradually, instead of diverging, the mind starts to unify. It gravitates towards centering around loving-kindness. The mind starts to become integrated, and it no longer scatters to eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind objects and thoughts. All those tendencies diminish, and the mind begins to settle on one wholesome thought – unrelenting loving-kindness. It begins to consolidate these aspects, making the mind more radiant, open, and less scattered. This is what is meant by the unification of mind.

When we observe that the mind is gradually entering this unified state, then we notice it has fewer distractions and is in a pure wholesome state. Due to this purity, the Buddha referred to sense pleasures as base or filthy pleasures⁸⁴. We notice that if we simply allow the mind to relax, without expending too much energy in trying to suppress those hindrances, remaining calm and composed, we start to see that our attention becomes sharper. Feelings arise based on conditions, and there's no need to worry about what those

⁸³ *Anguttara Nikaya* 9.42: *Velāma*

⁸⁴ *Majjhima Nikaya* 139: *Araṇavibhanga Sutta*

conditions are. Feelings arise due to contact, and that's all we need to know. Contact is the trigger that sparks feeling, and we recognize that it's due to contact.

So, when we experience that feeling and notice that it persists, and there's a slightly prolonged experience of that feeling, we understand that not only is there a feeling, but there is also a somewhat sustained experience of that feeling. Whenever there is a feeling, tied to that feeling is an associated experience, which is perception. Perception and formations are our inclinations to generate *Kamma* (or *Karma* in Sanskrit). This is why even experiencing *Jhana* with an attitude of inclination and identification can generate *Kamma*, which can sustain dependent origination.

Also, let's say we hear a sound. There's a sound, and we have an inclination to act upon it—that's the formation. Whether we decide to listen to the sound, continue listening a bit longer, or perhaps ignore it, or even shut the door. These are intentions tied to our feelings. We can observe that our mind and body are always geared towards doing something, responding to every event. That inclination is what formation is—all the activities we are inclined to engage in. Intention fuels formation, and then we begin to pay attention to what comes next. That's where attention—'me'—is involved. I heard the sound; now I need to do something. We pay attention to that and then plan.

This is how we understand phenomena at work, seeing the accumulation of the five aggregates due to dependent origination being sustained. We shouldn't treat them as mystical or mysterious events completely outside our daily experience. They are very simple experiences, yet profound. The Buddha states that the scale and extent of these phenomena cover the entire spectrum of our experience, whether it's the tiniest micro-events or the grand scale of cosmic explosions like the Big Bang and trillions of eons and cosmic cycles⁸⁵. They all fall under phenomena in the mind—the interactions between mind and body, what we call the five aggregates or the links of dependent origination, the law of conditionality. These experiences do occur on both micro and macro scales, from billions

⁸⁵ Digha Nikaya 15: Mahānidāna Sutta

of light-years to nanoseconds, down to the Planck time, which is around 10^{-44} second—if we were to be scientific.

That's why dependent origination is the secret of the universe. If we've directly seen this process, being aware of this mechanism is what awakens us. We've fully exposed the show, seen the process, and disentangled from it, never to be ensnared again. Awakening means breaking bonds, unbinding from identification. That's what stream entry is about—becoming an Ariya or an outsider of the Samsaric chain. Stream entry (*Sotapanna*) is that tiny opening amidst confinement, as we've entered the flow of Dhamma. We've detached from the Samsaric journey, as some teachers describe it as taking a slow boat out of *Samsara*⁸⁶. The experience of Awakening doesn't need to be profound or incomprehensible. The descriptions can be simplified—all we need to understand is that these phenomena depend on us; we fuel them, nourish them through our attention and engagement. The entire teaching of the Buddha is about disassociation, freedom, and independence from this flow. Once we've taken a step back, become disassociated, insights arise—that's the experience. Sariputta clearly saw the five aggregates and all the *Jhana* factors.

So, what are the *Jhana* factors? They vary—e.g. *Piti* rapture and pleasure for the first and second *Jhana* while *Sukha* for the Third. Now, the *Jhana* factors are accompanied by zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention. In any *Jhana*, zeal is present—a sense of keen interest. Decision means we commit to continue practicing or step out at will. Because of zeal and decision, we invest our time in that wholesome state, automatically gaining energy. We become free from sluggishness temporarily. In the *Jhana* state, sluggishness dissipates. Our mind becomes energized, with sharper mindfulness. We hear and perceive things more clearly, heightening our awareness even further. Our mind remains steady, with equanimity—not reacting outwardly or inwardly. It's balanced in the middle, staying in equilibrium. That's equanimity, encompassing all the *Jhana* factors. Our attention remains unwavering, so we stay with our meditation object comfortably and

⁸⁶ Venerable Dhammavuddho <https://vbgnet.org/>

effortlessly, without requiring much effort. Our awareness becomes stronger. That's all. Sariputta could see all of this clearly, and I would say that is spot on.

When we begin practicing, we don't need to worry about identifying each factor specifically; we simply recognize that these states exist. What we clearly notice are the rapture and pleasure that arise from seclusion. That's all we observe. When these states arise for the first time, it can be mind-blowing. It's because we are accustomed to being in a confused state of mind, restless, and filled with worldly expectations. We never imagined that the mind could enter such an otherworldly state. How could such a transformation occur from the same mind that was so agitated just a few moments ago? It's astonishing. When I first experienced this, it was truly revelatory. I realized that even I could achieve this. Then, I developed a strong conviction in the *Suttas*, understanding them experientially. What the Buddha is describing is simply a process—he's showing how the mind operates. There's nothing mysterious about these *Jhana* states; they arise as naturally as letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome. It's easy to be swept away by these simple teachings, which is what I believe the Buddha conveyed in all his teachings. However, I didn't fully grasp this before.

People often find it easy to dismiss these experiences—simply letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating a wholesome state can lead to such a sublime experience. Living harmoniously is the foundation of all *Jhana* practices. The key lies in sustaining wholesome thoughts for a short period—those few minutes make all the difference between worldly states and *Jhana*.

“Again, bhikkhus, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, Sāriputta entered and abided in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration.

So, in the second *Jhana*, our practice revolves around letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome—repeating this process continuously. By doing so, we naturally abandon coarser experiences, moving towards what I call the Global Optimum. In

science, physics, or mathematics, we encounter concepts like local and global optima. *Nibbāna* represents our global optimum, where all states converge, while the *Jhanas* are local optima. With ease, we observe the deepening experiences of the mind as it goes deeper and deeper.

Transitioning from a confused worldly state to various *Jhana* states through the same practice is all that's required. Just let go of the unwholesome, cultivate the wholesome—repeat. This is the Buddha's path, a straightforward recipe. Our task is to practice diligently; this will naturally propel us from the first *Jhana* to the second, from the second to the third, and so forth. It's all about practicing consistently; there's no need to alter our approach when transitioning from one *Jhana* to the next—it's a rinse and repeat process. However, magically, the experience evolves from the first *Jhana* to the second and beyond. There's no need for adjustments in our practice.

When the mind settles into a state of ease and comfort, our focus should be on letting go of anything that causes discomfort in the mind and body—this means relaxing. If verbalizing our thoughts makes us uncomfortable, let go of verbalization. In the next stage, if overthinking causes discomfort, let go of excessive thinking and simply abide in the feeling, and so on.

So, the fundamental rule in this process is simple: continue with anything that brings comfort to our mind and body. Let go of anything that causes discomfort—that's the key. In the second *Jhana*, which the Buddha describes as having qualities like self-confidence and singleness of mind without applying sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.

Previously, even with applied and sustained thought, we had to exert effort. We engaged in verbalization and expended energy, which now needs to be released. This means letting go of any subtle verbalizations. For instance, instead of saying "May I be a kind human being," simply bring to mind qualities like kindness, composure, happiness, generosity, bliss, ease, and compassion—just a momentary thought, not the entire thought process. This will alleviate discomfort and tension in the mind, leading us into the second *Jhana*.

In the second *Jhana*, since we've abandoned applied and sustained thought, there's no need to verbalize phrases like "May I be happy." Just let go of that intentional layer and focus on the feeling alone. Stay with that feeling. Self-confidence is a distinct factor in the second *Jhana*.

So, what is self-confidence in the second *Jhana*? It's the conviction, the reassurance that I'm on the right path. There's no need to worry. If we experience doubt or lack confidence in any situation, dwelling in the second *Jhana* provides a balanced mind. Spending even half an hour in the second *Jhana* when feeling uncertain or anxious in the present moment can dispel worries, anxiety, and mental unrest. We become composed, and our confidence grows. Self-confidence in the second *Jhana* means having the conviction that everything is okay, and there's no need for concern. That's a characteristic of the second *Jhana*.

Other factors in the second *Jhana* include rapture, pleasure, and the unification of mind. As mentioned earlier, while the first *Jhana* features rapture and pleasure, the second *Jhana* emphasizes greater unification of mind and self-confidence. Our mental stability increases, excitement diminishes slightly, and peace and tranquility prevail.

In the second *Jhana*, we experience less excitement but more composure—a finer state of mind. Therefore, the second *Jhana* is somewhat more peaceful and composed, with reduced excitement and heightened composure. Moreover, there's a greater sense of self-confidence and the belief that we can handle any situation. Regarding the five aggregates—feeling, contact, perception, formation, and consciousness—and the factors of zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention, they are also present in the second *Jhana*. This provides a framework for the Buddha's path, where these factors manifest in all the *Jhanas*.

‘—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a

mind rid of barriers. He understood: 'There is an escape beyond,' and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.'

This is quite an interesting experience. It's akin to seeing the sky on a clear night without any clouds. When we observe such a pristine sky, we feel a sense of extreme clarity. There are no traces of clouds; everything is just present. We reside fully in the present moment, unattached to any experiences that simply unfold before us. We do not react to them; they merely exist. We are completely immersed in the present moment.

That's the essence of this experience—being fully present without being swayed in any direction, completely immersed as if the universe unfolds before us. We are independent; there's nothing binding us. We are entirely disentangled, free from any coarse interactions. It's like two sides of a road that never converge, or two sides of a river where we stand on one bank while the other remains distant. That's the independence we observe. All these phenomena exist, yet they do not affect us. This is how we maintain a sense of freedom and clarity.

Now, regarding the second *Jhana*, here's what the Buddha says:

"Again, bhikkhus, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, Sāriputta entered and abided in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration."

Moving on to the third *Jhana*, it involves bodily pleasure, known in Pali as *Sukha*. In the first and second *Jhanas*, there is *Piti*—a joyful excitement. In the third *Jhana*, this excitement completely dissipates, replaced by profound comfort and tranquil calm throughout the body. It's akin to the body being completely immersed in water, where every part experiences this soothing pleasure.

The Buddha compared the first *Jhana* to joy permeating the body like a sponge saturated with water, leaving no part untouched. Similarly, the second *Jhana* is likened to a still lake filled to the brim, where no part of the lakebed remains dry. In the third *Jhana*, this comfort pervades the entire body, bringing deep contentment and

ease. If there's one word to describe the third *Jhana*, it's *Sukha*—bodily comfort.

In the third *Jhana*, bodily comfort increases, and equanimity becomes rock-solid. The mind remains steady and undisturbed. The Buddha and his disciples frequently dwelled in these serene abiding of the *Jhanas*, as mentioned in numerous *Suttas*. When asked, the Buddha affirmed his abidance in these peaceful states, including emptiness and the formless realms (*Arupas*).

Through practice and maturation, one can enter and exit these states at will. For instance, one can determine to exit the third *Jhana* after 15 minutes and subsequently move into the base of infinite space. It's akin to instructing the mind: "Mind, guide me out of the state of nothingness in 15 minutes," and the mind effortlessly facilitates the experience, much like changing channels on a TV or radio with a remote control.

That's how flexible and malleable the mind is in such states. The third *Jhana* is characterized by supreme comfort in the body and strong equanimity, alongside other factors. Let me read it out:

“And the states in the third jhāna—equanimity, pleasure, mindfulness, full awareness, and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: ... and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.”

Yes, the third *Jhana* is not the end of the path because we continually cultivate the wholesome and release the unwholesome, progressing all the time. Sometimes we may experience the third *Jhana*, and within five minutes, move on to the fourth *Jhana*. It can happen in split moments—we skip from the second *Jhana* to the fourth, catching only a fleeting glimpse of the *Jhanas*. This happens to many, and there's no need to worry about why. We can reflect and revisit later. That's why I say becoming familiar with the process is key. Once skilled, we can intentionally

re-experience any previous state. We can experience all permutations, experimenting freely.

Therefore, if we have skipped past some *Jhanas* without fully experiencing them, we can return to them. There will be times when we can revisit and experience them intimately. It's a matter of mastering these experiences. In the early stages, we may have only glimpsed them here and there. With more experience, we realize our initial experiences were somewhat basic and fleeting. We begin to appreciate the richness of *Jhana*. Sariputta often did this. For Ariya disciples and perfected ones, the experience is vastly different—they encounter everything in its purest form, without any tendencies cluttering the experience. As skill develops, experiences stabilize. Those Ariyas can remain in any *Jhana* in any sitting, delving into the finest nuances of experience.

“Again, bhikkhus, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.”

As we progress on the path, pleasure and pain become transient sensations, short-lived in their impact. We come to see that pleasure and pain are coarser experiences compared to the equanimity of the fourth *Jhana*—a state neither painful nor pleasant. In the fourth *Jhana*, all waves of pleasure, pain, joy, and bodily comfort settle. The mind finds ease in equanimity, with less interaction with the senses. It can feel as though the body has dissolved. When joy and happiness are relinquished, the mind feels unburdened, purified by the absence of these mental activities. The mind becomes clearer, devoid of distractions or disturbances—this is the purity of mindfulness in the fourth *Jhana*.

So, the fourth *Jhana* provides a very strong balance of the mind. We feel that our mind becomes fearless, strong, extremely attentive, and clear. It achieves such exquisite balance that

nothing in this world can make us emotional. Any horror, scream, fear, doom and gloom, or any disasters we can think of will not shake our state of mind. They appear insignificant, like children's toys. Our mind becomes so balanced; it becomes like a rock, and nothing can shake that foundation. That is the state of the fourth *Jhana*. The fourth *Jhana* is also characterized by strong equanimity, a feeling neither painful nor pleasant, and mental unconcern due to tranquility. It is a state of exquisite calm and composure, and the mind remains unshaken. It feels like all winds and vibrations have come to a complete standstill.

So, it may feel like a state of calm after a storm or something similar. It's a state of very balanced mind, complete stillness. Let me read the text:

“And the states in the fourth jhāna—equanimity, the neither painful-nor-pleasant feeling, mental unconcern due to tranquility, purity of mindfulness, and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus... and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.”

The Four Arupas and Cessation

The four *Jhanas* that the Buddha mentioned are called *Samma Samadhi* or the right unification of mind, something that is in perfect harmony with the universe and all the nature of reality. *Samma Samadhi* means being fully in tune with this nature. It signifies no ripples, no scattering of mind—just unified. After the fourth *Jhana*, the practice takes a turn. We are practicing mindfulness of loving-kindness, and we know it does not lead us all the way to *Nibbāna*. The mindfulness of loving-kindness is a vehicle toward *Nibbāna* as our destination. This vehicle of loving-kindness eventually says, "I'm sorry, I cannot take you all the way to *Nibbāna*. My destination is just the fourth *Jhana*; that's where my journey ends. So, I have to let you go, and you have to take another ride through the vehicle of

mindfulness of compassion." So, we move from the fourth *Jhana* and find another way.

That's how we need to bid farewell to loving-kindness and embark on another journey with compassion. The Buddha said loving-kindness leads us only to the fourth *Jhana*⁸⁷; that is its limit. After that, we practice sending feelings of loving-kindness in all directions and across the entire universe. It doesn't take long to practice these directions: five minutes each for forward, right-hand side, back, left-hand side, up, and down, totaling 30 minutes. Then, after 30 minutes, we radiate this feeling of loving-kindness to the entire universe, unconditionally giving it to all beings inhabiting it⁸⁸.

So, when we have radiated that feeling without any bounds, letting it go as far as it will reach, then if we continue practicing, eventually the stream of loving-kindness will disappear, and it will automatically switch to the feeling of compassion. So, I just used a metaphor, saying that now loving-kindness will say goodbye. It does say goodbye, and it will give us access to the feeling of compassion. So, we don't have to do anything; we just need to radiate the feeling, whatever we have in our mind, and let it flow in all directions. By the time we are radiating the feeling of loving-kindness into the entire universe, the feeling of loving-kindness would have gone up, as if we are radiating from our head. It will be very clear the feeling is not in our heart; it's just going upwards, through our entire body, and we are radiating as if our whole body is luminous. It's like we are a candle. In this practice, all we need to do is let the feeling flow in all directions.

We can read the *Suttas* like the *Suttanipata 1.8: Karaniya Metta Sutta*, where the Buddha instructs how we should send these feelings. We are simply following the Buddha's instructions to send the feeling of loving-kindness to each direction and then all six directions simultaneously. And when we have perfected that, then we automatically become attuned to the base of infinity of space. Let me read that again:

⁸⁷ Samyutta Nikaya 46.54: Accompanied by Lovingkindness

⁸⁸ Please refer to the book '*The Path to Nibbana*' by David Johnson for exact instructions

“Again, bhikkhus, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with nonattention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite,’ Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of infinite space.”

Now, here, completely surmounting the perception (grosser) of form. So, perception of form is the concept. There are two important concepts here. One is perception, which is our interpretation or opinion of form. Form refers to our visual, auditory, gustatory, and other sensory representations. These perceptions create imagery in our mind.

We do not pay attention to these perceptions of forms. Our mind is detached from these sensory perceptions and our reactions to them—not detached from the senses themselves, but we are not focused on these five sensory perceptions. Our attention is on the perception of the mind. What is the mind perceiving? The mind is perceiving that all forms have disappeared. We have let go of our attention to forms, and all that remains is this boundless space.

So what is form? Form refers to our experience of the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. These combinations give us visual, auditory, and other sensory perceptions. Once we let go of perceptions of form, we arrive at the perception of the formless. The very first base of the formless is the perception of the base of infinite space. This perception does not involve forms; it perceives what is not there. It turns away from forms, and what remains is the perception of infinite space.

Thus, the Buddha's path is a gradual emptying of perceptions so that we gradually become free of all perceptions.

I shall say, initially, we perceive form. We perceive light, the body, sound, and smell—all presented to us through the four great elements that make up the body and the external world. Now, having let go of those perceptions of form by not paying attention to them, when they disappear from our perception and from our mind-body mechanism, all that remains is contact with the feeling of infinity of space. The feeling of infinity of space arises due to that contact. It's just a perception. What happens is that the mind makes contact with the base of infinity of space, and from that contact arises the feeling of

the base of infinity of space. This feeling includes the perception of the base of infinity of space as a bonus because we have turned away from form and identified that which is devoid of form—a formless experience. This is due to the contact between the mind and the base of infinity of space. This process is called the gradual emptying of the mind from impressions of those coarser bases—namely, form and the five sense bases.

It's a process of lightening the mind, freeing it from all those coarser perceptions by reducing attention. When we let go of those perceptions, we experience a very peaceful and cool sensation—the infinity of space. Compared to the four *Jhanas*, it feels very peaceful, cool, composed, calm, and spacious. We might feel like suspended in emptiness, the vastness of space. The quality of the mind is pristine, and we directly experience the absence of ill will—freed from impurity. Our mind becomes very soft and composed, and in this state, it feels cooler and more spacious. That's all I will say about this. We could describe it further, but I don't want to elaborate too much on this experience as it could turn into mere stories if described in excessively.

I had a brief experience when I first encountered the base of infinity of space. It was quite vivid. I was in a hotel in Vienna, Austria, and suddenly, after 20-25 minutes of sitting while radiating *Metta* to all six directions, all feelings of *Metta* vanished. It felt as though I was not sitting but floating, as if the floor, roof, and walls had disappeared, leaving me completely suspended in space. Beings can remain in this perception for a long time. They are perceiving this sublime base unlike us, who perceive light, form, sound, taste, pain, and pleasure. The practice here is to let the perception of infinity of space be, not identifying with it, and instead, focus on radiating the cool feeling of compassion to all beings in all directions. That's it. Whenever the mind remains fixated on any experience, we apply the 6Rs to release it. Independence from experiences is indeed a great relief on this path. So, we just continue.

These perceptions can be seen as distractions or milestones, at the very least, they mark progress on the path. We are not stuck in any of these experiences; we are always progressing. In all these experiences, what we are doing is letting go of the unwholesome and

nurturing the wholesome. When the mind engages and becomes entangled with thoughts, perceptions, ideas, concepts, opinions, we let those processes be without engaging with them because anything not the object of our meditation is a distraction. We continually let go of these distractions and cultivate wholesome feelings—compassion, joy, equanimity. These are progressively more wholesome objects of attention. They arise naturally; all we do is create the causes and conditions for them to arise. This is how we continually progress on this path. This is called the 6R—or right effort. The approach is simple: as soon as the mind begins to engage or wander, we let that process be, step aside, and do not identify with it.

So, by applying the 6Rs, we free ourselves from getting stuck, become independent, and disentangle ourselves. That's the process. All we need to do is apply the 6Rs to our engagement in the process and bring awareness to stay with the object of our meditation, which is the feeling of compassion, and radiate that feeling to the entire universe in all directions.

Eventually, the feeling of compassion, or the vehicle of compassion, fades away as it exhausts its capacity to lead us further. It bids farewell to the mind, saying: "I'm sorry, but my journey ends here. I've brought you all the way to the base of infinity of space. My vehicle cannot take you to the higher bases or the state of *Nibbāna*. You need to switch to the vehicle called *Mudita*, or the feeling of contentment and joy."

So, we find ourselves aware that the feeling of compassion is no longer present. All we did was radiate that feeling to all six directions simultaneously, after spending 5 minutes radiating it in each direction. Once we've completed this for about 30 minutes, we then radiate compassion to all six directions simultaneously.

With continued practice and applying the 6Rs when our mind wanders, the feeling of compassion also transforms. Gradually, our mind begins to perceive the base of infinity of consciousness.

We start to feel that our mind has entered another dimension. The feeling of compassion shifts to a feeling of contentment, satisfaction, and pure happiness. This happiness isn't tied to anyone else's happiness; it's an inner happiness of contentment and ease. This state is called *Mudita*—independent joy.

With the arising of the state of *Mudita*, suddenly our feeling of compassion changes and vanishes. As this experience strengthens, we begin to discern individual sensory fragments more clearly. Our awareness of the body's reactions to sensory contacts becomes more acute; we notice slight interruptions in our hearing and gaps in our vision. It's as if the mind has become more sensitive; our perception and sensitivity at the mind's base have become refined, picking up on the perception of the base of infinity of consciousness. We begin to experience the quantized nature of reality.

The solidity of our perception becomes shattered, or shall I say, we start to perceive the discrete and composite nature of all these experiences. This heightened awareness reveals that all sensory contacts, feelings, perceptions, and processes impose a burden on the mind. Through mindful observation, we recognize these perceptions as forms of agitation.

Yes, there will be joy; we will experience the feeling of *Mudita*, which brings joy and deep contentment. We will have no jealousy, no tendencies of the mind to envy others' success, and any traces of these impurities will gradually decompose and dissipate.

The relationship between perceiving the base of infinity of consciousness and radiating the feeling of *Mudita* can be tricky. We must be mindful of the mind's tendency to mistake the experience of the former as the goal, instead of continuing to radiate *Mudita*.

Staying with *Mudita*, our attitudes toward jealousy, envy, and harboring such feelings diminish. If we can remain in the base of infinity of consciousness for a substantial period, it will significantly reduce feelings of jealousy and envy. For those prone to jealousy and unable to tolerate others' success, this practice of residing in the base of infinity of consciousness or cultivating *Mudita* joy is the remedy. These are impurities of the mind, and practicing the mindfulness of *Four Brahmaviharas* gradually aligns us more harmoniously with the universe and all living beings.

Initially, we become kind, loving, and welcoming, wishing for their well-being. Gradually, depending on our progress, we move to the state of compassion, where we not only wish for their well-being but also seek to alleviate their pain and suffering, refraining from any action with body, speech, or mind that could cause harm or suffering.

This path becomes much more peaceful, and we feel more in harmony with others.

Then we progress to the feeling of *Mudita*. *Mudita* is the antidote for jealousy and envy. Then the Buddha said,

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing,’ Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of nothingness.

Because we are practicing the 6Rs, we engage in wholesome activity, cultivate the feeling of *Mudita*, and let go of all distractions and perceptions that try to grab our attention and keep us in that base. Continuously practicing the 6Rs will eventually lead our mind to completely let go of those perceptions and transition into the awareness of the base of nothingness. The feeling of *Mudita* we radiate will change into the feeling of Equanimity. It's a transformation, akin to a caterpillar turning into a butterfly—the feeling of *Mudita* evolves into the feeling of equanimity.

The mind becomes happier and more at ease to radiate the feeling of equanimity as it becomes free of coarser perceptions. Thus, equanimity becomes the focal point for the mind, and we radiate it to each of the six directions, and eventually to all directions. We don't need to force it; it naturally arises. All we need to do is allow it to flow in all directions, one by one and simultaneously in all six directions.

This is the perception of the base of nothingness—an experience of emptiness where only the mind and perception exist. It feels as though we have become completely free from the universe. All the galaxies, stars, and lights that were previously perceived are now absent. It's like looking back in time, perhaps 14 billion years ago, and seeing how far we've come since then. Reflecting on this journey, we traverse through all those lights, noise, clusters of galaxies, stars, and other objects, using those experiences to propel us to this point.

We didn't halt or get stuck in any of those states; we've made a long journey to reach this base of nothingness. It's like taking a moment to rest and contemplate how far we've come in this universe. We've gone through so much. It's akin to taking a sigh of relief and looking back on the past. This is how I remember my days (in 2018)

experiencing this base: observing all those coarse perceptions that no longer exist. Now, I'm free of those perceptions and experiencing exquisite calm and composure. My mind is devoid of any disturbances, and here I am, experiencing this state.

We may feel relieved, resting in that equanimity—the feeling of peace, calmness, and composure. It's just the mind and the experience, nothing else. It might seem like we could stay in this experience for eternity. The conventions of space-time and the universe disappear, leaving only the experience of the mind and the base—nothing else. It's profoundly peaceful, perhaps akin to a blank, clean blackboard with awareness resting upon it. We can remain in this state for a long time, half an hour, 45 minutes, without any trace of disturbance. It's incredibly peaceful, and whenever something arises in the mind, we practice the 6Rs. This strengthens our stability even further.

The perception of the base of nothingness is characterized by a very stable mind, although different experiences may arise around that base. In my case, when I began experiencing it in 2018, initially, it felt somewhat unstable, a bit inconsistent. The mind could easily tip into states of restlessness or sloth and torpor. It was as though I needed to constantly adjust my focus—sometimes sharpening my observation, other times blurring it and stepping back, akin to adjusting a camera lens—to maintain that calm and composed state of mind. As I progressed and became more familiar with it, these fluctuations lessened, and the exquisite calmness of the base of nothingness grew stronger.

The base of nothingness is quite intriguing, depending on what one seeks—whether it's activity, joy, or emptiness. In this state, the latter prevails, where the mind finds peace and ease in the absence of any activity—a state of pure tranquility.

Some people may feel bored and not want to spend too much time in this state, but it's truly a beneficial state to be in. I believe every moment spent here is worthwhile. This provides a strong foundation for preparing to delve into Cessation. If we can remain in this base of nothingness for a good period with a neutral attitude, the mind can enter Cessation at any time. In my case, I spent a considerable amount of time here (weeks). Then I proceeded further.

Suddenly, even the feeling of equanimity—I was radiating that feeling of equanimity—became exhausted. My energy completely drained. Even with all my effort, I couldn't generate the feeling of equanimity anymore. I reached a dead end; that was it. No more feeling of equanimity. That marks the end of the journey through the *Brahmaviharas*. At this stage, all four *Brahmaviharas* bid farewell. "Okay, goodbye. You have graduated from our university. Now, it's up to you to continue further, but unfortunately, we cannot take you there." We find ourselves in a state of subtle experiences that we have yet to comprehend.

This base of nothingness provides a very solid ground for the mind to remain undisturbed by any conceptualizations or personal attachments. It truly serves as a training ground, or I should say, a base camp, to embark on the investigation of subtle mental phenomena. Now, even the feeling of equanimity disappears; there's nothing left. All the energy, all the perceptions have been exhausted. There's no feeling, no loving-kindness left, no joy, and no rapture. All four *Brahmaviharas* have completely dissipated. Now, there's nothing in the mind to radiate.

After the *Brahmaviharas*, the Buddha teaches that the meditation path he taught us is *Anapanasati* (see *Majjhima Nikaya 62: Maharahulovada Sutta*). I would argue that *Anapanasati* should not be simply called "*mindfulness of breathing*." This practice is the complete path leading to cessation and the four ultimate fruits or *Mahaphalas* (see *Samyutta Nikaya 54.8 The Simile of the Lamp*). At this stage, we are not observing the breath because the breath itself is so subtle—it would just be another distraction. *Anapanasati*, at this stage, is mindfulness of what remains after abandoning all coarser perceptions.

If we consider the framework of *Satipatthana* (*Majjhima Nikaya 10*), we have mindfulness of the body, which also encompasses mindfulness of breathing. Mindfulness of feeling involves being aware of the pleasures of *Jhanas*, and mindfulness of mind is what is termed as being aware of the *Arūpās*: the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, and the base of nothingness. These are the objects of observation in the third foundation. Mindfulness of mind objects (Dhammas), the fourth foundation, is still referred to as

Anapanasati. In using *Anapanasati*, we practice mindfulness of phenomena (mind objects) here. The mind is too subtle to observe the body, feeling, and mind bases.

This marks the beginning of the base of neither perception nor non-perception. We are still practicing the four foundations of mindfulness, but primarily focusing on mindfulness of mind objects. Let me read it again:

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

“He emerged mindful from that attainment. Having done so, he contemplated the states that had passed, ceased, and changed, thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: ‘There is an escape beyond,’ and with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.

So, in the mindfulness practice, in the base of neither perception nor non-perception, there are subtle interactions between the mind and mind objects. If we refer to the paragraph on the base of nothingness, the Buddha states that the states of contact, feeling, perception, formations, and mind-consciousness, these are still present in the base of nothingness, but in the base of neither perception nor non-perception, those of contact, feeling, perception, formations, and mind, and other factors, are not present.

In this state, the observation focuses on the mind and mind objects. In essence, in this state, *Anapanasati* process involves observing both the mind itself and its objects. You may have heard of the double-slit experiment. Scientists studying subatomic particles observed peculiar behaviors: when they did not observe the particles, the same particle appeared to pass through both slits simultaneously and generated an interference pattern on the screen. However, when they closely observed individual particles at each slit, the particles always passed through only one slit at a time, not both. Thus, the act

of observation influenced the process, and the particles behaved like physical matter, fixed in terms of location and directionality.

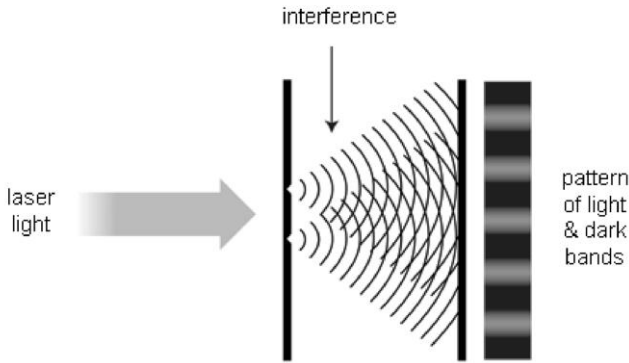


Figure 19: An illustration of the famous double-slit experiment, which challenges the notion of the world as merely a collection of particles and objective reality.

Similar to a double-slit experiment, at this stage, any involvement of the mind, such as observation, can impede the flow of mind and its nature. The Buddha called this mental proliferation. We need to step out of the way. Although the mind and mind objects are generally seen as separate, in this process, we find the mind is observing the mind object. It's like I am looking at myself and identifying with the process.

As the Buddha said in the *Dhammapada*, "*Mind is the forerunner of all mind objects (Dhammas); mind objects are produced by the mind.*" In this process, we allow the mind and mind object to remain without interfering; the unfolding game of how mind and mind objects arise becomes clear. Here, the finest concept—mind consciousness ceases—leading to Cessation.

In *Majjhima Nikaya 148 Chachaka Sutta*, the Buddha discusses all sets of six sense contacts. In the sixth set of six, the Buddha states: Dependent on mind and mind object, mind consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is mind contact. With mind contact as a condition, there is mind feeling. With mind feeling as a condition, there is mind craving in terms of underlying tendencies. If one delights in that and clings to it, then suffering is inevitable.

The Buddha also said that if one does not delight in that and does not cling to it, then the underlying tendency to remain in craving

does not arise. Our objective is neither attachment nor detachment; we simply allow this process to unfold. Dispassion arises naturally. Observing the mind and mind objects reveals that there is no separate mind and mind object; the mind creates the mind object, so in reality, they are not two separate things. It is the mind that generates mind consciousness through the mind object. This is the ultimate insight into Buddha Dhamma—all links of dependent origination are rooted in the mind, which initiates all these phenomena.

Our mindfulness involves observing how this process functions throughout. When the time is right, we let go of observation through dispassion to unlock Cessation. When we realize that the mind and mind objects are essentially the same thing, suddenly mind consciousness becomes merely a concept. It is not an entity; it is just a projection because our attention was not sharp enough.

Observing this process without any notion, just clear observation, renders mind consciousness unnecessary; it simply fades away. Without mind consciousness, there is no mind feeling. Without mind feeling, there is no mind perception or craving. We can see the interdependence of consciousness and *Nama Rupa* (feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention). Then, all the processes known as the six-sense contacts cease due to letting go of craving.

By craving, we mean any engagement that interferes with the process. Cessation occurs because there is no hint of craving; craving could not manifest because there is no feeling. There is no feeling because there is no contact, and there is no contact because there is no consciousness. Thus, all these fabrications unravel before us—it was merely a play of the mind, fabricating all that unfolds.

This is a very vivid type of observation. I will go through some examples later in the Chapter titled "*Practice Leading to Nirodha*." At that particular state near Cessation, our observation becomes quite sharp. In the beginning, it's just a mind and mind object process, the creation of premature experiences like broken images, or thoughts. We will see those very rudimentary flowerings of mind objects. The mind is bubbling with those mind objects, but they are somewhat fragmented and incomplete. It often reminds me of something very familiar, like *déjà vu*. It appears very dreamy, as if I could have seen it before. Then, it's gone; we gradually return to observing our mind.

When we try to see what is happening, we see it like glass starting to smash and just falling apart. We are out of that nursery of mind and mind object processes, where the process goes through vivid, colorful types of experiences, and we see concepts arising, but those are very crude.

It's like we might have seen some corners of the universe being like a nursery for all the stars and galaxy formations. We can see how those galaxies and stars are formed through dust particles, heat, and gravity. The base of neither perception nor non-perception is like a nursery of the mind and mind objects—how things called thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are becoming full-blown phenomena or mind objects. As we become more equipped with this understanding, this process unfolds much quicker, and we can experience cessation faster than having to spend a lot of time on that base. Because we understand the mind mechanism, it is a realization that we are causing ourselves to be trapped in this chain of mind and mind object. In a way, we are prisoners of this mind and mind object process, potentially keeping us chained in it forever. This practice is an opportunity to break free of this chain.

Yes, it sounds simple but it is quite tricky in practice. There will be many hits and misses. "Oh, I just missed this time. Maybe there is something I could try to nail it..." and thoughts... The mind becomes a bit impatient at points, wanting to see the crossing over to cessation occur. It will have expectations, some planning, and all those things, trying to game it. And those are the very things that the mind has fabricated that we were not aware of; the Buddha's words for this are *Mano Maya*. It literally means spells of the mind.

After that, the approach is to understand that this is the interplay of mind and mind object. We may be fooled into chasing the shadow that the mind creates. That's why the Buddha said to use the tool of attention wisely. These mind objects are just products of our attention—the fabrications of the mind.

Having this conviction of the Buddha's words and theoretical understanding will calm the mind, making it unagitated and accepting that, "Okay, all these activities that we do with the mind are only going to oscillate, only shake this mind to generate more and more mind objects." So, the best thing to do at that time is to let the

mind be, not be involved at all. Just take a step back and let the process unfold. The mind will not be supported by our fuel of attention. Because we let go of attention, the mind will not find support from mind object, and the bridge for mind consciousness will fall apart. And that's when Cessation occurs.

At that time, there will be a blank in our awareness, not knowing that the mind was falling into Cessation until contact with mind objects arises again. It probably took some time, and then the entire universe arises in front of our awareness. Let me read again:

“Again, bhikkhus, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his taints were destroyed by his seeing with wisdom.

How do we surmount this experience? This pertains to perception. The need to understand that base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, where we perceive that there is a nursery of formation of the mind and mind object into two entities, is very rudimentary. Although it is a rather vague and fragile state, it is quite stubbornly persistent. It is just that, we had no way of realizing that it is all fabrication. Somewhat, that process got the fuel of attention from the notion 'I, me, mine,' from time immemorial till now. We were always trapped in that never-ending loop of mind and mind object, forming this chain of phenomena and not realizing that the process got spiced up due to our tiny engagement.

If there is no mind consciousness, the consciousness for sight, sound, and all other consciousnesses are also affected; they will also fall apart because the bridge of mind consciousness has fallen. This is clarified by Sariputta in *Majjhima Nikaya 43: Mahavedalla Sutta*. It's the mind that partakes in experiences of all sense consciousnesses. That means we are cut off from the entire universe. The edge of the physical universe is a concept, an illusion. It is a fallacy of people who are obsessed by the notion of matter and space. This is the only way we step out of the universe—by knowing where the end of the universe lies.

The dimension of time is another concept. There is no absolute time; all that is apparent is the experience of pleasure and pain, birth and death. The process has been running for trillions and trillions of eons—trying to measure the beginning of time is as fallacious as trying to find the end of space. The Buddha said that all that matters is whether we have seen the process and exited the loop or not. With Cessation, it's as if the fuse is now blown from the current or river of dependent origination. Thus, when we emerge from Cessation, we are shaken to the core. It is a temporary phenomenon; but those who have walked the path will be permanently impacted—never to be patched back into the chained process of *Samsara* again. That is what the Awakening shown by the Buddha is all about.

Now, it is common that there might also be some angst, some reaction to Cessation—or fear of the unknown. Some people might have the notion, "What is this experience? Will I cease to exist if my consciousness goes away? Will I regain my consciousness or senses after Cessation?" These things may worry some. As far as I know, Cessation is just a temporary event in our awareness—nothing is lost or gained. Even if we want it to last, it won't; the reality is completely otherwise. As long as we have not relinquished our will to live, those consciousnesses will patch up again. We are wired to be conscious—only through practice can we remain in Cessation for certain durations. The mind will remain in that Cessation state for as long as the battery for its sustenance is charged. That is what we can do with a purified life with wholesome intention and determination, and prepare all the causes and conditions in the sitting session. Cessation will last for a few seconds or whatever time programmed by intention, and consciousness will sprout after the timer expires.

What happens after that is, because there was just emptiness, there was nothing. I may compare it to the Big Bang—what was before that? It's just a state of no universe, and we are bringing forth the universe. So, what comes first? First comes the emptiness; there was nothing. And from the emptiness, all phenomena and the concept of matter arise. Dependent on the six sense bases and emptiness, contact will arise. That emptiness contact is touching a particular base or dimension. It is the dimension of *Nibbāna*, and we have touched the *Nibbāna* element. And when we emerge from that, we see

contact with that emptiness arose. And that contact is void of anything; it is void of self; it is void of craving. It is also non-directed contact because it's not shaking; it's just completely still. And it is what is called objectless contact. So, that is the three contacts. And from that state of non-universe—because it made contact with the six-sense bases—now the universe arises.

So, what arises with contact is feeling. With feeling, perception arises, and from perception, conception arises. From conception, *Nama Rupa* arises, and from name-and-form, consciousness on the six bases arises. From the six bases, contact arises, and so on. These phenomena arise in parallel, not one after another. The loop starts, and the engine of dependent origination begins to run. What was before that? I think we can call this the 'Singularity'—or a state of exception that none of the software codes in the universe can handle. From the contract with Singularity, all diversity arises, the universe arises. So, the state of *Nibbāna* is that state of Singularity where it's void of all conditions; it's just contactless and independent. I like to call this the only 'Un-made'—everything else in this universe is 'Made'.

And that is like a key to break free from the universe. This is possible only with the right practice, with non-engagement, non-entanglement, and complete letting go. We facilitate the process by gradually cutting off all the bonds, ligaments, and tendons with this universe. Eventually, the process happens when the mind finds a tiny ford or aperture to contact with the element of Nibbana—emptiness, un-directedness, and desirelessness. Seeing that process, seeing it come back in front of our mind, our eyes, and seeing the universe and suffering come into view is Awakening to the link of dependent origination—the Buddha called it liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom.

So, that is what is called seeing with wisdom. And what is that wisdom? What Venerable Sariputta saw was the genesis of the process behind suffering. This is how the universe arises, and what he saw was the inherent arising of suffering there. Before the arising of suffering, he already saw the cessation of suffering because by letting go and staying on the path, he was able to enter the Cessation of perception and feeling—the recipe for the end of suffering. He didn't see it; but he entered the state which can only be known after coming

back. But then he came back, and he saw the arising of suffering. And because he knew and used the right path, he also saw the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Because he had made contact with the Unconditioned element that was free from the process of suffering, he also saw what the state of cessation of suffering—the third Noble Truth—was. He realized the Four Noble Truths completely, and that realization is seeing with wisdom.

Sariputta became an *Arahant* after that. We may not be as gifted as him to destroy all ten fetters that chain us in the conditioned realm. But partial success is what happens to most of us—in gradual steps because we are not as purified. We have not undergone all the purifications to the extent Venerable Sariputta did. The people who make fast progress in breaking all fetters are those who have gone through many experiences of the world, matured and have developed utter dispassion towards them.

“He emerged mindful from that attainment. Having done so, he recalled the states that had passed, ceased, and changed, thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: ‘There is no escape beyond,’ and with the cultivation of that[attainment], he confirmed that there is not.

“Bhikkhus, rightly speaking, were it to be said of anyone: ‘He has attained mastery and perfection in noble virtue, attained mastery and perfection in noble concentration, attained mastery and perfection in noble wisdom, attained mastery and perfection in noble deliverance,’ it is of Sāriputta indeed that rightly speaking this should be said.

“Bhikkhus, rightly speaking, were it to be said of anyone: ‘He is the son of the Blessed One, born of his breast, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, an heir in the Dhamma, not an heir in material things,’ it is of Sāriputta indeed that rightly speaking this should be said.

“Bhikkhus, the matchless Wheel of the Dhamma set rolling by the Tathāgata is kept rolling rightly by Sāriputta.”

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Okay, I have come to the end of the *Sutta*. So, it provides a complete map of this path, and no other *Sutta* gives as much detail as the *Anupada Sutta* regarding all these factors and the minute experiences of this path. However, some teachers argue that this *Anupada Sutta* was later inserted into the Pali Canon (Sujato & Brahmali, 2014). They claim it's not in the list of those early *Suttas* because it's absent in the Chinese *Agamas*. They argue that its use of flowery language and the Buddha's excessive praise of Sariputta are not natural. Some teachers of absorption *Jhana* go as far as discrediting *Majjhima Nikaya 111* because it does not support their approach of one-pointed focus and hindrance suppression (Brasington, 2015). But it resonates well with many other Pali *Suttas*—*Majjhima Nikaya 10, 19, 113, 118, 138*, just to name a few. Many meditators in the tradition of TWIM have experienced it down to the last detail, and I have not experienced any state differently.

Thus, this *Sutta* is indeed a gift with such clarity and exposition. I think I have covered it quite thoroughly; I hope it has been of value to you. I may have missed some specific experiences, and I wouldn't want to add too much from my own experiences. I spent a good amount of time, maybe 8 or 9 months, observing neither-perception-nor-non-perception, which was quite an interesting experience. While I was in this state for such a long time, the experience of Cessation occurred unexpectedly at first. I wasn't anticipating all these occurrences, but they happened to my surprise.

We may hear that we need to sit for 6 or 8 hours to experience cessation, but no, it can occur even if we sit for half an hour, 45 minutes. We just need to have the right attitude, the right approach, and no expectations. Be like an impersonal observer, devoid of any personality—be like a rock, be like the wind, be like the four great elements. Let go of everything, don't hold onto any personality, and cessation can occur anytime.

Cessation can occur whenever the mind is in a well-balanced state while experiencing *Jhanas*; there's no other outcome than cessation. It's like a fruit that, when ripe, has no other destiny than to fall to the Earth. Cessation is inevitable if our mind is on the right path. All we need to do is practice and exert right effort. It's the path of letting go; it's the path of freedom. This path contradicts worldly conventions

that demand exertion and achievement. All the teachings of the Buddha can be summed up in one word: letting go. If we continue letting go, that's the key—Cessation is right there.

Okay, I hope this has been useful to you, and I would like to share all the merit of this Dhamma work with all beings suffering. May they be freed from suffering and attain ultimate cessation of suffering in this very life. Thank you.

Chapter 17

Practice Leading to Nirodha

‘Potṭhāpada, from the moment when a monk has gained this controlled perception, he proceeds from stage to stage till he reaches the limit of perception. When he has reached the limit of perception it occurs to him: “Mental activity is worse for me, lack of mental activity is better. If I were to think and imagine, these perceptions [that I have attained] would cease, and coarser perceptions would arise in me.

Suppose I were not to think or imagine?” So he neither thinks nor imagines. And then, in him, just these perceptions arise, but other, coarser perceptions do not arise. He attains cessation. And that, Potṭhapāda, is the way in which the cessation of perception is brought about by successive steps.

[Digha Nikaya 9: Potthapada Sutta]

Among all the works in this book, this one holds a special place for me. After experiencing Cessation in 2018, I conducted a series of Q&A sessions with Delson Armstrong to share my experiences and gain his deep insights. I learned about Delson’s extraordinary experiences in 2020, and I was thrilled to discover how much further the practice of TWIM can take us. Hearing about Delson’s deeper experiences was amazing. I have posted all our calls on the YouTube channel "*Realisation of the Unconditioned.*" These calls received many comments and reactions from Dhamma listeners. In one of the calls, I was asked to explain in detail the mechanics behind Cessation and the practice leading to this experience.

This Chapter is about the preliminaries, attitudes, and methods for experiencing the state of the Cessation of perception and feeling, as I have seen and understood it. In Pali, it's called "*Sanna Vedahita Nirodha,*" literally translated. It is also commonly translated as "*Nirodha Sampatti,*" where "*Nirodha*" means cessation and "*Sampatti*" means fruition or maturation. This state occurs at the very end of the path taught by the Buddha. The Buddha has elaborated on all the states of his path, describing how one progresses from the first *Jhana* to the second, third, fourth *Jhana*, and beyond. After the fourth *Jhana*,

one progresses through the bases of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. Finally, one experiences what is called the Cessation of perception and feeling.

To break it down, perception and feeling are called mental formations, or *Sankharas*. There are bodily *Sankharas*, which mainly refer to the forces or activities that keep our bodily faculties and processes active. The *Suttas* associate this with the process of inbreathing and outbreathing. On the other hand, mental formations include perception and feeling, while verbal formations include thinking and examining processes.

The experience of the Cessation of perception and feeling is described in several *Suttas*, such as *Majjhima Nikaya 44*, *Majjhima Nikaya 111*, and *Digha Nikaya 9*. The Buddha explains that his path involves the gradual cessation of all formations, more precisely the tranquilization or calming of all formations. This is achieved by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. When one sits in a meditative posture, being mindful and silent, hindrances do arise. However, they are not fed with attention, and any tension in the body and mind is stilled through practice.

I have described the experiences through the practice known as mindfulness of loving-kindness and the 6R method, which allows all experiences to unravel, leading to all states, including cessation. By practicing the 6R steps, one remains steady on the path. Its function is to step out of the way to allow nature to unfold and not get caught up in any experience—be it a sense of attachment or aversion. Initially, the coarse experiences of sense gratifications and hindrances are not attended to. Since they fall away due to non-reaction, one can experience the unworldly happiness of *Jhanas*, specifically the first *Jhana*.

In the first *Jhana*, as described by the Buddha, there is a state of tranquility, happiness, rapture (*Piti*), joy, a bright mind, and comfortable abiding. However, in the first *Jhana*, there are still subtle verbal formations that remain active and have not completely subsided. It is in the second *Jhana* that these verbal formations fully subside. With the TWIM practice, one lets go of the verbalizing aspect of the wish for loving-kindness and just radiates the warm loving

feeling. This eases tension and tightness in the mind and body that we could not previously observe in the first *Jhana*. At the level of the fourth *Jhana*, the bodily formations cease and subside. The perception aspect of the mind becomes subtler and subtler with each *Jhana* experience. Ultimately, in the state of *Nirodha*, or Cessation of perception and feeling, the mental formations also come to a complete end.

This gradual process of letting go of tension and tightness allows us to experience utmost relief from all phenomena—*Nirodha*—which is the goal of the practice.

The complete path leading to the Cessation of perception and feeling is elaborated in great detail in the *Majjhima Nikaya*, *Sutta* number 111, where Sariputta serves as an example. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha describes the various *Jhana* and *Arupa* states that Sariputta goes through, starting from the first *Jhana* and progressing all the way to the Cessation of perception and feeling.

When one enters the Cessation of perception and feeling, all awareness of the world and consciousness comes to a complete stop briefly. It is as if the mind enters a state of suspension, where there is no perception, no feeling, and no consciousness. This can be seen as the ultimate voidness or cessation of all bodily and mental activities, or arriving at the root point from which all phenomena arise.

The purpose of this Chapter is to delve into the process of how experiencing the Cessation of perception and feeling comes about in stages and to explore its significance in our lives and our pursuit of Awakening. While this state may be unfamiliar to many people, I will do my best to explain the steps involved in progressing to *Nirodha* based on my own understanding and experiences. My intention is to provide general guidance and assistance to those who are striving to experience this state themselves. The work in previous chapters should also help with understanding the complete path and the place of cessation.

And obviously, the value of Cessation cannot be overstated. This is the most sublime and important state of the Noble Eightfold Path. Anyone who is striving to experience *Nibbāna* cannot attain it without experiencing the Cessation of perception and feeling. It is not something that one can experience easily without understanding the

mind, phenomena, and the process. It takes time, effort, and a graduated approach. It's not something we can rush to attain. And this is not something we can just experience by completely relaxing and not engaging in any activity. There are two aspects that come into play that propel one toward the cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness: the element of exertion and the element of relaxation.

I find it relevant to quote some excerpts from the *Suttas* to support this fact. This is in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the very first *Sutta* in the first book of the *Nikaya* called *Devata Samyutta*. In the very first *Sutta* of this book, there is an encounter between the Buddha and a *Devata*—a heavenly being. The *Devata* asks the Buddha, "How did you cross the flood? What did you do? How did you manage to cross a flood so hard to cross?" The Buddha responds, saying, "Look, my friend, here is what I did. When I tried to strive, I was swept away by the flood. When I tried to stand still, I was drowned. But by not striving and also not staying still, I crossed the flood." Now, this is a very subtle point, I would say, a very refined state. We cannot overpower ourselves by striving hard, and we cannot remain passive and hope that everything will come to us. So, we need to balance these two aspects of practice, progressing a little by doing very little striving, but also not doing much striving to allow for some resting in that state. This balance is achieved through observations and insights. This is how the Buddha says he crossed the flood.

Obviously, this is not referring to a literal flood but rather to the world of the six senses. This world of the six senses is so deeply ingrained in our experience that it holds us tightly. We cannot escape it as long as we identify with these senses, feelings, and perceptions. Yet there is an experience beyond these sense perceptions. To completely free oneself from the world of the six senses or from *Samsara*, one must progress through multiple stages of freedom. There is a gradual but very specific process that needs to be followed to be free from these six senses, which the Buddha describes as the flood. This flood can also be termed existence or behavioral tendencies—*Bhava*. *Bhava* is like a thread or link that conditions consciousness to gravitate towards particular experiences, leading us to subsequent existences, rebirth, suffering, and death. *Bhava* is

analogous to the diversity of seeds that shape our experiences and drop us into different realms.

So, that is a very perplexing situation that even the greatest seers could not avoid. And that is something that the Buddha had been able to transcend and arrive at what we call the Unconditioned state. So, what is the Unconditioned? First, what we need to understand is what is meant by conditioned and what is the Unconditioned. The ultimate source of conditioning or the formula or the DNA that the Buddha discovered is our reactions to phenomena, which follow a rule to keep us in the conditioned realm. The process of conditioning is what the Buddha calls "*Paticca Samuppada*," or dependent origination. This is not a very precise translation. It should be called "Dependent simultaneous arising."

It states that the things that arise do not occur subsequently or serially. Based on a condition, multiple things can arise at the same time. "*Samuppada*" means arising together or arising at the same time. For example, if a feeling arises, simultaneously with the feeling, craving arises, clinging arises, and being arises. All these things follow immediately. There is no gap—not even a millisecond, microsecond, nanosecond, or picosecond. This is a very counterintuitive state that one cannot understand just by reading a text. In texts, there has to be an order of words; they have to be ordered in a way that one can read. But in practice, it is a completely different experience.

The purpose of this Chapter is to help understand this state of *Nirodha*, why it is so profound and important, and what we can do to facilitate the mind to arrive at this state. I have already mentioned how this state can be experienced through the practice of TWIM using mindfulness of loving-kindness. If you haven't done this practice, I recommend reading the instructions and steps of the path in Part II of this book. They explain how to experience all the *Jhanas* and formless states through the *Samatha Vipassana* approach that the Buddha taught. I am making an effort here to cover practices and steps leading to the state of *Nirodha* and to share some of my direct understandings and insights with anyone who finds it beneficial.

Before I proceed further, I would like to provide a reliable *Sutta* reference that directly addresses what the Buddha himself said about reaching the state of cessation. After conducting some research, I

found a good reference in the *Pothapada Sutta* in the *Digha Nikaya*. This *Sutta* primarily discusses consciousness. During the time of the Buddha, consciousness was often regarded as a mystical state beyond human comprehension, with some people speculating that a supreme being injected consciousness into humans, giving them life. According to these speculations, when the supreme being removed consciousness, the human would be dead, as all consciousness would cease to exist under the control of the supreme being.

The same question about the mystery of consciousness was posed to the Buddha. However, the Buddha did not entertain such speculations and mysticism in his teachings. He emphasized direct experience and the gradual steps of attaining and experiencing various states. According to the Buddha, there is nothing inherently special about consciousness. In response to the question about the successive stages of cessation of consciousness, the Buddha enlightens and shares his own direct experience and understanding with Pothapada, explaining his path and approach.

And what the Buddha explains is that there is a fully aware practice that involves learning from perceptions, known as "*Saka-saṅṅī*" or the ability to steer perceptions. This practice gradually allows one to release coarser perceptions and experience more subtle ones. The Buddha describes his path, starting with the practice of generosity, which leads to virtuous conduct. Through virtuous conduct, one's mind becomes calm and collected, enabling entry into the subtle states of *Jhana*. As one develops the ability to enter *Jhana*, they gradually let go of coarser perceptions, leading to the experience of more subtle ones. This is how the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path guides us through different *Jhanas* by stilling mental formations. In the first *Jhana*, verbal formations are the coarsest and subside in the second *Jhana*. By continuing to let go and tranquilize mental activities, one progresses further.

One experiences states of increasingly refined perceptions and gradually progresses towards what is known as the peak of perceptions. It's like climbing a mountain and reaching the summit where there is nothing else to climb. This peak of perceptions means experiencing neither perception nor non-perception; the way out is the abandonment of all perceptions. At this point, one realizes that

even the subtlest activities of the mind can be a barrier. Engaging in any form of perception would only give rise to coarser perceptions, but no finer perceptions would be experienced. Essentially, this state represents a point where there is nothing. In this state, one understands that any mental activities can only lead downhill; there is no way to move upward.

What one needs to do is let go of all mental activities. All intentions and planning must cease. The Buddha says that when one reaches the limit of perception, it occurs to us that mental activity is worse, while the lack of mental activity is better. If we were to think and imagine, the acquired subtler perceptions would cease, and coarser perceptions would arise. So, one chooses not to think or imagine. By doing so, only those subtle perceptions remain, while other coarser perceptions do not arise. One experiences cessation. Essentially, we let go of all perceptions, allow all mental activities to settle by themselves, and bring the mind to such a standstill that suddenly everything, including perception, completely ceases. This is the state of Cessation of perception and feeling, where there is a blank—total disappearance. The mind is devoid of feeling, perception, and awareness; it simply stops due to lack of support.

This is a point of origination or root (*Yoni*) that the Buddha discovered, similar to backtracking from the ocean and trying to reach the source of all the waters that flow into the ocean. One can backtrack all the way, following the streams, rivers, glaciers, and mountains, until reaching the top, only to find nothing. It's like tracing the route or the origin of all activities and arriving at emptiness, where there is nothing. This emptiness signifies the cessation of all formations—the state of Cessation of perception and feeling is the cessation of mental formations. As we discussed earlier, the verbal and bodily formations have already been let go of in the second and fourth *Jhanas*, respectively. This is what the Buddha has to say about how one can experience Cessation, although there aren't a lot of details.

Therefore, one needs to understand what the Buddha means when he says that mental activity is worse for me, lack of mental activity is better. He is referring to a highly refined state where even neither perception nor non-perception eventually becomes coarse.

In this state, the mind is almost 99.99% blank, completely empty. Occasionally, there may arise some random thoughts or a vague type of perception, like a dreamy or fleeting awareness. It can appear as a flicker. This is an extremely subtle state, and individuals may have various experiences along the path. In my own experiences, when I used to experience this state of neither perception nor non-perception in the early days, I used to see random colors and vivid shapes. They felt familiar, as if I had seen them before, but they would quickly vanish.

Once we begin identifying certain images or thoughts arising, we are already out of that state. At that point, we can return to the practice of relaxation and the 6R method, gradually leading us back to that mental state where we may again experience some loss of awareness. The mind becomes very quiet, and these flashes may occur. However, it's important to note that this state only occurs for a small percentage of the time. We may sit for two hours and nothing happens, as if we are just observing the mind for any occasional arising and ceasing.

The practice that leads us to this state goes beyond the scope of *Brahmavihara*, such as loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. It involves leaving behind all four *Brahmaviharas* and practicing mindfulness of the rising and ceasing of phenomena—*Anapanasati*. I want to clarify that this practice is not limited to mindfulness of breathing; it encompasses the arising and ceasing of many things. *Anapanasati*, which is mindfulness of these arising and ceasing states, leads us towards the experience of neither perception nor non-perception. We continue to observe the mind for any subtle arising of these states, letting go of even that which eventually leads us to the Cessation of perception and feeling.

Moving forward, this is a very refined state where one is letting go of the world and all its activities—a complete surrender of control. The formations or *Sankharas*, which I would refer to as activities, serve as the seed for all *karma* or actions. Now, let's discuss how this process of cessation comes about. We have the Buddha's words about mental activities, and perception here is key. What we can say is that perception already involves a sense of self. If there were only feeling without perception, there would be no sense of self or mind. It is only

when perception arises that personalization occurs. Therefore, the Cessation of perception and feeling is about letting go of any personal identification or attachment to phenomena that only grow in shape and size with any act.

In other words, according to the Buddha, the exact term for this is what we call "*Atamyata*" or non-identification. Whatever arises and ceases, there is no "me," no "mine," and nothing within. Any time we start to identify or label them as "me" or "mine," identification or self-reflection occurs. This is the genesis of suffering. The five aggregates, which are affected by craving and clinging, are called identity. This is explained in the *Culavedalla Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* 44. It is a discourse between Visaka and his former wife Bhikkhuni Dhammadina about the notion of identity, and she explains that it is the notion of acquisition of the five aggregates that constitutes identity or the idea of a self.

Many people question what it means to say "five aggregates affected by clinging" as it may not make immediate sense. The translation can indeed be vague. A more appropriate understanding is that it refers to the accumulation of these five aggregates. When we acquire or accumulate the body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, and identify them as part of our acquisition, they become identity or a fetter called *Sakkaya Ditthi*. This clinging or accumulation of the aggregates is what leads to suffering. It is important to note that these aggregates are not substantial or solid entities but rather phenomena or events, as explained in the links of dependent origination. They are transient and constantly arising and ceasing. Trying to own or acquire them is a persistent delusion. I would say that these are just events that provide a clearer understanding as they arise in our mind due to our projection.

Even the four elements and *Nama Rupa* (mind-body) can be seen as forms of awareness rather than solid entities. Everything happens in the mind; the concept of matter and the external world is just our projection. This may seem contradictory to physics, but there are aspects of the quantum realm that scientists have yet to fully explore, where they cannot find substantial material forms even in atoms and molecules. Everything that appears is composed of projections, feelings, and perceptions—also called consciousness—there is

nothing else. Both spirituality and physics suggest that the material world, including form, may simply be a collection of phenomena characterized by energies or perceptions, lacking solidity.

When something strikes our body or we hit a wall, table, or chair, we perceive it as if there is a solid object. However, what we are saying here is that it's the contact, perception, and the subsequent process of dependent origination that create all these experiences. We experience the world and material forms because we are entangled in the process of dependent origination from the very outset. Therefore, if one can let go and reach the Cessation of perception and feeling, these experiences also subside. This is a dimension free of contacts, as the cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness is where both mentality and materiality cease.

Perception and feeling—which are mental formations—are the ultimate imprint of the world that we leave behind when we experience the Cessation of perception and feeling. With that experience, the world ceases, sensory experiences cease, and consciousness stops. Essentially, all dependent phenomena like birth and suffering also come to an end.

Now, what is this state of Cessation of perception and feeling? It is not yet the state of *Nibbāna*, but rather a temporary or fleeting glimpse of what one can expect *Nibbāna* to be like, in terms of all sense impingements.

What is special about such a state? Well, there are various *Sutta* references where meditators who have experienced the cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness were unaware of anything, even if there were worldly debacles surrounding them. For example, there are accounts of fires burning entire villages, yet those who were in the state of cessation remained completely safe. I'm not suggesting that the Cessation of perception and feeling will protect us from worldly disasters. It's just that there are records of individuals in this state being unaffected by such calamities⁸⁹. Even the Buddha himself had an experience of staying in this cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness, as described in the *Digha Nikaya 16 Mahaparinibbana Sutta*. He remained unaffected by all sorts of external

⁸⁹ Majjhima Nikaya 50: Māratajjanīya Sutta

disturbances. Everything was happening around, with many animals being struck by lightning, but the Buddha remained completely safe and unaware of the world.

This state is what the Buddha experienced. While some refer to it as the Cessation of perception and feeling, others identify it as the *Arahat's* fruition experience—a state of experiencing *Nibbāna* and the cessation of craving while still living in the world. There are subtle differences between the Cessation of perception and feeling and the cessation of craving—the state of *Nibbāna*. However, for our understanding here, the Cessation of perception and feeling signifies a complete detachment from the world for the duration of this experience, as if one is dead—but cessation is different in that one comes back to the world with sense faculties completely invigorated. This is what *Majjhima Nikaya 43: Mahavedalla Sutta* says.

“Friend, in the case of one who is dead, who has completed his time, his bodily formations have ceased and subsided, his verbal formations have ceased and subsided, his mental formations have ceased and subsided, his vitality is exhausted, his heat has been dissipated, and his faculties are fully broken up. In the case of a bhikkhu who has entered upon the cessation of perception and feeling, his bodily formations have ceased and subsided, his verbal formations have ceased and subsided, his mental formations have ceased and subsided, but his vitality is not exhausted, his heat has not been dissipated, and his faculties become exceptionally clear. This is the difference between one who is dead, who has completed his time, and a bhikkhu who has entered upon the cessation of perception and feeling.”

And how does one experience *Nirodha*—the end of the Noble Eightfold Path? It is through a good attitude and dedicated practice. We should not take this lightly because it is the doorway to *Nibbāna*. Experiencing the Cessation of perception and feeling by way of stilling all formations is highly significant. The Buddha explains in the *Anguttara Nikaya Book of Nines*, “*In this Very Life*” (*Sutta* number 51), what he had to say about it.

“Again, friend, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling, and having seen with wisdom, his taints

are utterly destroyed. To this extent, friend, the Blessed One has spoken of Nibbāna in this very life in a non-provisional sense.”

So, what is meant by provisional and non-provisional? Non-provisional means absolute certainty. Those who have attained the cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness and seen the Four Noble Truths upon emerging are the ones who have definitely experienced *Nibbāna* in this very life. There are four degrees of such experience: *Sotapanna*, *Sakadagami*, *Anagami* and *Arahat* (also called *Mahaphalas*). This certainty is attributed only to those who have experienced the Cessation of perception and feeling—they have understood what stilling all formations means. That's what non-provisional means. On the other hand, all the *Jhanas* (first, second, third, fourth) and *Arupas* (formless states) are termed provisional by the Buddha. This means that attaining *Nibbāna* is not guaranteed by experiencing those *Jhanas* and *Arupas*. However, if we experience the Cessation of perception and feeling through relaxation of all reactions, it means that we are guaranteed to experience *Nibbāna*—one of the four *Mahaphalas* (Great Fruits)—in this life. There is no other way. It's like hitting the jackpot.

This is the value of experiencing Cessation, which means we have crossed over; we are safe. Now we have crossed the flood, or the ocean. That's it, we are no longer subjected to all these debacles and sufferings (at most after a few worldly existences) like worldly people are. It means we have entered the stream that culminates in the deathless, as the Buddha says. We have attained stream-entry (*Sotapanna*) at least. This is a very profound experience. There is nothing else in this world that can give us as much relief as the experience of the Cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness. This is how valuable it is, and one should value it in that sense.

But I have seen some references where teachers consider cessation unbeneficial. For example, in a book called '*Focused and Fearless*' by Shaila Catherine, she mentions that we can experience all the *Jhanas*, but she does not actually recommend experiencing Cessation of perception and feeling (Catherine, 2008). She strongly advises anyone to stay away from it. This is a misguided approach by some teachers. They can be so misguided that they think Cessation of perception and feeling is not worth pursuing. And they completely

miss the point of what the Buddha Dhamma is all about. It is quite sad that such teachers do not acknowledge the importance of this state, which is the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path. By using expressions like calling it a state of suspended animation or a dead end, deeming it useless, they disregard the teachings of the Buddha and give it a negative connotation.

Obviously, anyone who has experienced Cessation would strongly disagree. To put it mildly, this is complete nonsense. Why would anyone not want to experience the Cessation of perception and feeling if one has learned the teachings of the Buddha? I do understand why these people are averse to it—they simply don't understand the *Suttas*, the nature of formations, and the process of *Nibbāna*. They fail to grasp the significance of stilling all formations, relinquishing all acquisitions, destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, and the state of *Nibbāna*.

That is how the Buddha described the process of *Nibbāna*, and the stage of cessation is the key to it. It serves as the doorway to *Nibbāna*. Yet many Buddhist teachers show complete disregard for this process. I strongly object to such teachers who try to dissuade people from experiencing cessation. Now, the important thing to note is that this state is not easily experienced. It doesn't occur easily or quickly, and one can remain in the lower states, such as neither perception or nothingness, for years without experiencing cessation. I have seen and heard this in many places.

So, this may sound a bit counterintuitive as to why one cannot enter this Cessation despite experiencing the earlier states. The key to experiencing Cessation is there can be a very subtle attachment, like a thin thread that still lingers, keeping us from leaping into Cessation. This attachment is a very fine clinging to the experiences of the world and mind. It's like standing at the shore, hesitating to take a deep dive. We may lack the courage or be hesitant in some way.

Now, how can one experience this cessation? It's like observing young people or children sitting on the fence or by the pool, hesitating to dive into the water. They may just dip their feet in, lacking the courage to take a deep dive into the cold or warm water. It can be as small as that, a hesitation or fear of uncertainty. The same can apply to experiencing cessation. We can remain in the state of

neither perception nor non-perception for years without progressing if we hold on to experiences. It may feel like we're just a stone's throw away from Cessation, yet one is unable to experience it. Some people may imagine that if perception, feeling, and consciousness cease, there will be nothing left, that the whole sense of self will vanish. Such fear or apprehension can hinder progress towards the Cessation of perception and feeling.

On the other hand, some people might be too eager, having spent a long time in the state of neither perception nor non-perception, anticipating the experience of Cessation to occur. They may feel it approaching, but it quickly flashes and disappears, and they find themselves back in the perturbed awareness of the six senses. The Buddha said it's like chasing a mirage. This is what happens to many who dwell in the state of neither perception nor non-perception and continue to remain perturbed by experiences. So, why is it so tricky? Why is it so elusive?



Figure 20: Anticipation for an exit from the universe to Nibbana can be a very subtle distraction for advanced meditators.

Now, the key to entering Cessation is allowing the mind to do as it pleases by stepping out completely. During the state of neither perception nor non-perception, we are acutely aware of all the mental phenomena that arise and cease. Our mindfulness is very sharp at that time. However, any attempt to grasp or look forward to what will happen is the very thing that will prevent us from progressing further. Although it is a small step, there is something that will counteract our efforts, just like trying to defy gravity

without enough force. Anticipations, tendencies, and notions will drag us down, preventing us from breaking free from the gravitational pull and venturing beyond the orbit of the earth.

Let's say Cessation is like going out of the orbit of this Earth. Earth represents our world of the six senses, and we are trying to break free from its orbit. However, we haven't let go of all the elements we are carrying, which burden and push us back towards the Earth. It's because we haven't let go enough and still hold notions and anticipations. This can be very subtle. In many retreats that people attend, such as 10-day retreats, they may go through this process every year. They may find themselves in neither perception nor non-perception, but they are still not progressing. They may start questioning themselves, wondering what is wrong with them. It is these anticipations and similar factors that actually prevent them from experiencing Cessation.

Now, how do we deal with that? What should be our attitude and approach to experiencing Cessation? It's something we cannot plan or achieve just by flicking a switch. It arises through practice and preparation, without intentionally trying to experience it. A few people I've spoken to or read about have shared that they experienced Cessation at times when they least expected it. We might sit down, rub our hands together, and set a timeframe of three, four, or five hours, expecting to experience it. It's not going to happen like that. Just setting a timer and passing time won't lead to Cessation. The process of Cessation occurs when all the Awakening factors are in complete balance. One has already experienced neither perception nor non-perception and has established a track record of calming the mind and balancing the factors of joy, tranquillity, equanimity, and energy.

As the Buddha says in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, we need to observe the state of our mind—whether it is restless, lethargic, or overly excited—and determine which Awakening factors need to be balanced. He has identified three factors for different states: tranquillity, collectedness (*Samadhi*), and equanimity for a mind that is restless, worried, or anxious. These three factors serve as soothing elements that bring balance to the mind. On the other hand, there are three uplifting factors: energy, joy, and investigation of phenomena (*Dhammaa*).

These factors provide a boost to the mind. When combined with mindfulness, these seven factors work together to propel us towards the state of Cessation of perception and feeling—like reaching a global optimum state.

Balancing these seven factors requires observation and small adjustments at any stage. It can be tricky and requires constant development. It is recommended to sit more often, focusing on the quality of sitting rather than the number of hours. We need to observe how at ease the mind is. We may experience different states depending on the time of day. In the morning, we might feel restless and overly energetic, while in the evening, we may feel lethargic and lacking energy. It's possible that sitting in the morning leads to restlessness, while sitting in the evening is affected by sloth and doubt.

To overcome these challenges, one can actively work with the environment to propel the mind towards a balanced state. Naturally, the mind tends to lean towards certain states at different times of the day. Our effort should be to choose a time when we are neither overly energetic nor too lethargic. Personally, I have found midday to be the perfect time to observe the mind and prepare for experiencing deep states. In this way, we facilitate the practice to naturally enter a balanced state where the Awakening factors come into balance without much effort. Mindfulness remains at the center, observing the presence of joy, energy, alertness, comfort in both body and mind, and a sense of equanimity. It feels incredibly comfortable.

And this is the best time to take a deep dive and progress towards Cessation. The way it comes about is that we have no control over anything at all. The mind will do what it likes to do. It will naturally head in a certain direction, relaxing itself. Even if there are moments of restlessness during meditation, be ready to experience their settling without trying to control any of those factors. Treat it as if there is no controller, as if we are not in the driver's seat. Someone else is driving our mind. Just adopt an easy attitude, similar to how people accept boarding a plane. Some may have fears, but generally, they trust the experienced pilot to handle the flight. There is nothing they can do about it. If the plane crashes, so be it. In that sense, what can we do to stop it?

So this attitude should always be there. We are not in the driver's seat; we are letting the mind do whatever it likes. Just let the mind do whatever it likes. This isn't me; nothing that happens is me. If the mind wants to go into Cessation, let it be. I don't care. This is the attitude we need to develop when we sit in meditation to experience this Cessation. Just go with the flow and see what happens. There's nothing we can do about it. It's not about us or ours. There's nothing in this world that truly belongs to me. So why should we try to influence or control this flow in any way? Nothing we do will lead to anything. Just let it be. This attitude brings true relaxation. Be carefree. Don't worry or take things too seriously. Just let it be and be in that moment. At the same time, don't become too lax.

We don't want to just relax and expect things to suddenly cease. It won't work like that. We have to take baby steps and observe the mind. Give it a little bit of energy. It doesn't need much, but the energy factor has to be there. We need to be alert and observant, but without any attitude of trying to control or influence what is happening. Let go of all notions and expectations. There's nothing exciting or special that's going to happen. It's like watching a movie. No matter what the story is—whether it's a horror movie or an emotional one—we treat them all the same way. It's just a movie. Whatever happens, we are fully aware of the reality that none of it is a part of us. So why worry or get involved in that movie?

In the same way, whatever events come to our awareness, they are not us. It has nothing to do with us. It's just like watching a movie that is happening in another dimension. We are not in that world. It's as if we are in a parallel universe. Whatever is happening in the mind should be treated like a parallel universe. It has nothing to do with us. Just let it be. This is the attitude we develop, and it will bring about a strong sense of equanimity and what the Buddha called non-identification. We are not identifying with any of these arising and ceasing phenomena. They are not us. We have grown tired of them, lost all fascination. This is what non-identification is all about. All these five aggregates arise and cease, but there is no 'me' in any of them. So why should they be taken personally? Just treat anything that arises as if we are a spectator, observing it come and go.

So, that's the thing we need to focus on. We need to observe what is happening without any sense of excitement, joy, or laxity. Just be present without a sense of self. Whatever is unfolding, there is nothing familiar or unfamiliar about it. We have never seen or heard it before. Our attitude towards it should simply be to watch and let it be. This is the attitude we need to develop.

I'll give an example: the Buddha also mentioned in some *Suttas* that among the Licchavis there were skilled archers who could shoot an arrow through a small keyhole hundreds of meters away. Venerable Ananda acknowledged their expertise in archery. Then the Buddha asked Ananda, 'What do you think, Ananda, someone who can shoot an arrow through a keyhole or someone who can split a hair into seven pieces from afar, is more skilled⁹⁰?' Ananda agreed that the latter is far more difficult to achieve.

Then the Buddha said, those who attain Cessation or those who are practicing the Buddha's path to the finest details are even more refined than those skilled individuals who can split a hair into seven pieces from a distance of say tens of meters. What I'm trying to convey is that when approaching Cessation, we can observe our mind gradually moving towards something, like a tiny aperture appearing. Any attempt to see or move the mind around it will absolutely miss passing through the aperture, and the opportunity will be lost. At that moment, we should refrain from trying to steer or disrupt the flow of the mind, which should remain in perfect equilibrium and just relinquish any control.

Maintaining that equilibrium and allowing the mind to remain in that extremely subtle state is crucial. Any form of excitement, anxiety, or anticipation can steer the mind away from its perfectly settled state, disturbing the calmness that has been achieved. When the mind settles and all disturbances have subsided, sudden anticipation can cause a disruption, undoing all the progress that has been made. This is not a one-time occurrence; we will encounter such experiences many times as we continue our practice. With more practice, we become more familiar with the movements of the mind. We realize that by conserving energy, calming the mind, and

⁹⁰ Samyutta Nikaya 56.45 The Hair

cultivating a sense of joy, we can remain unattached and unconcerned. We observe that everything falls into place naturally, and we feel that we are heading in the right direction.

At times, the mind becomes extremely bright and luminous. It becomes an intensely vivid experience. However, such experiences can also disrupt progress towards the state of Cessation, as there is still some sense of striving to attain it. Just when we feel that it's approaching, that it's almost within reach, it may flash and disappear. It's akin to boiling milk. When I was young, my mother would always tell me not to let my mind wander even for a few seconds while boiling milk, lest it evaporate entirely. Now I understand she was right— in a profound way.

When boiling milk, certain physics take over—it begins to boil. If we let the heat continue even for a moment longer than necessary, the milk evaporates, leaving only burnt remnants in the pan. However, if we observe carefully and stop the heat at the precise moment, the milk sustains a boiling point. We can adjust the heat so that it maintains that delicate state, neither burnt nor simply liquid. This parallels what happens when approaching the state of Cessation. We need to make subtle adjustments to allow the mind to settle naturally into that state. Experiencing Cessation is similar—the sense of 'me' disappears. If we know how to make those precise adjustments, we can guide the mind to experience it effortlessly, without a sense of effort or striving.

The first experience of Cessation often occurs unexpectedly. For example, while walking on the road, we may stumble upon a stone that we hadn't noticed before. This stumble metaphorically represents stumbling into Cessation. However, as mentioned earlier, with more time spent in the state of neither perception, we may experience subtle dream-like states or a loss of perception. We may not be fully aware of what is happening, but our mindfulness is still present, observing something. This state becomes more familiar and comfortable with prolonged practice. We become skilled and confident with this state, continuing to practice neither perception.

Eventually, we develop a fine balance in observing the mind. However, the mind is very sneaky and can slip away many times. There are moments when we think, "Today is a good day for me. I

think I'm going to experience Cessation." Yet, it doesn't happen, leading to disappointment. The next day, we try again, hoping for a different outcome, but once again, Cessation does not occur. We try every day, analyzing what we may have done wrong or what we could have done differently. However, the more we try, the more elusive Cessation becomes. It's a paradoxical situation. Trying alone does not yield results. It's not about trying, but about preparing and doing. It's about setting the right conditions that will lead us to Cessation.

So, don't try to prepare; just do the work and see how it goes. I know it can be tricky, but I would suggest making some preparations and then giving it a try. It's like throwing pebbles into a pond and observing what happens. Just give it a shot, let it be, and observe the results. It's similar to the concept of knocking a mango off a tree with a branch lying on the ground. We don't anticipate retrieving the branch; we simply focus on dislodging the mango. If the mango falls, great. If we lose the branch or the object used to knock it down, it doesn't matter. We develop a natural tendency to let things go. With that attitude, the experience of Cessation can become a reality and yield results fairly quickly.

Yeah, I know these words may not provide complete assurance, but they highlight the paradoxes and illusions of the mind. The more we want something, the more it seems to elude us. The Buddha has said in a few places that whatever we conceive, it turns out to be the opposite. The act of conceiving or imagining is precisely what we need to let go of in order to experience what is known as the conceptless state. It's counterintuitive, but that's how it works.

And it's not just an intellectual understanding; it requires taking certain actions. It's like cooking something and tasting it—no matter how much people describe the taste, it's always different from actually experiencing it. The same applies to what we need to experience in the mind. Sometimes words fall short and cannot adequately describe or capture the experience. However, we can still have a plan or strategy to sit in meditation in a way that makes it easier or more conducive to experiencing Cessation. That's what I'm trying to convey in this conversation. This is how we gradually come to understand the paradox and break through it.

As the Buddha says in the *Pothapada Sutta*, the experience of *Jhanas* involves a coarser perception that gradually ceases with each higher *Jhana* stage. As we progress to higher *Jhanas*, perception becomes finer and finer until only the subtlest perception remains. This process of refinement is akin to removing all dependencies of the mind, with the ultimate goal being a state of asset-lessness or non-identification. Cessation refers to the state of not identifying with anything that arises and ceases, allowing the experience to occur naturally.

I would like to mention a helpful practice called determination practice. As we become comfortable with experiencing the *Jhanas*, this practice helps stabilize and train the mind to stay in a specific state. While we understand that we cannot make the *Jhanas* last for a specific duration, determination practice involves lightly instructing the mind to remain in a particular *Jhana* for a set period of time. For example, we can instruct the mind to sustain the first *Jhana* for 30 minutes. It's important to approach this practice with a light attitude, simply giving the instruction to the mind. By doing so, the mind aligns with our determination and remains in the chosen *Jhana* for as long as we have determined.

If we want to remain in a particular *Jhana* for a specific duration—whether it's 15 seconds, 15 minutes, or half an hour—we can set an intention before starting our meditation session. For example, we might say, "It's 9:00 AM in the morning, and I will emerge from the second *Jhana* exactly at the 35-minute mark." Then we begin our practice. The mind will naturally align itself and bring about the experience of the second *Jhana*. We can observe how the mind signals us as we approach the 35-minute mark.

We will notice it nearing almost 35 minutes, and there might be a subtle shift or sensation in the mind indicating that the time is up. We can develop a determination practice for all the *Jhanas*, including the first, second, third, and fourth *Jhana*, as well as the *Arupa* states of infinite space, infinite consciousness, base of nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. We can instruct our mind to sustain any of these states for a specific amount of time. All we need to do is tell our mind, "This is the time I have, and I will emerge from this state after this duration. Show me whatever you can." Then, we

leave the rest to the mind. It will manage the timer and guide us through these states. All we need to do is practice TWIM, 6R, and step aside when the mind grasps onto anything.

After practicing this determination for some time, the mind will naturally become comfortable and act as an extremely faithful servant, understanding and following the instructions given to it. It's not us commanding, but rather the mind being instructed. Give clear instructions to the mind that you are requesting this experience, and kindly ask it to fulfill this request. It's similar to a scenario in a restaurant where there is a menu and the food is being ordered. There is no customer, just clear instructions being given, and the mind will prepare and deliver that experience at the specified time. This determination practice is extremely helpful in preparing us to experience Cessation as well.

While many teachers recommend practicing determination after attaining the stages of *Sotapanna* or *Sakadagami*, I don't see any harm in practicing determination if we have a good balance of mind and are adept at sitting and practicing. This practice of determination can actually propel us toward Cessation more quickly. There have been cases where individuals have spent many years and attended numerous 10-day retreats without experiencing Cessation. This is often due to lingering notions, anticipation, eagerness, or inquiries that keep them in the state of neither perception nor non-perception, hindering progression towards Cessation. Practicing determination can be helpful in overcoming these obstacles and using intention wisely to set the course.

So, if we are skilled in practicing this determination in all the *Jhanas*, we can also experiment by saying, "Okay, mind, I want to see what happens after this state of neither perception. I'll leave it up to you. Show me whatever you can. I will continue to let go." Allow the mind to program itself and show us what it has in store.

This approach acknowledges that we are not in the driver's seat. We are not controlling the mind; we are simply allowing it to perform its functions. We are like someone clicking a button to run a command—whatever happens is like a black box. We don't need to know the details; the mind will self-regulate and do its best to bring about the requested experience. So, there isn't much more we can do

about it, and this process will unfold naturally. This is how I see this unfolding, and it can be a deeply rewarding experience to witness directly.

It might happen that we stumble upon Cessation for the first time, and that's it. The mind completely lets go of everything and stops engaging with all formations. Now, the mind is in a state of complete stillness and remains in that state for however long it can or has been programmed to. We have no control over the duration; it stays in the Cessation state for whatever period it can manage. If we are at the first attainment of *Sotapanna*, which occurs when someone glimpses *Nibbāna* through experiencing *Nirodha* and upon returning, we will observe exactly how the mind operates.

The pattern or DNA of the mind unravels itself. With ignorance as a condition, formations arise. With formations as a condition, consciousness arises. With consciousness as a condition, name and form arise. With name and form as a condition, the six sense bases arise, and so on. According to what is stated in the texts, these phenomena appear within awareness. At the first stage of Awakening as a *Sotapanna*, these may manifest just as some vibrations or bundles of energy in the mind. The mind has made contact with the *Nibbāna* element, the realm of the Unconditioned. We have seen it like a flash of lightning and realized it is empty and completely free of any tendencies.

There are three types of contact: emptiness contact, undirected contact, and desirelessness contact⁹¹. This contact with the *Nibbāna* element will occur, and when we emerge from it, we will witness the arising of the links of dependent origination for the first time. It is a vivid experience, like something shaky or vibrating. It feels very significant, as if something major has happened in our life. It's almost unbelievable. This will be our first encounter with the stream of Dhamma. The Cessation of the finest formations—perception and feeling—leads us to what is called stream entry. At this stage, we are still novices in the sport, just tasting the initial flavor of success. We haven't had enough time to even observe it; we merely touched it and moved away.

⁹¹ Majjhima Nikaya 44: Cūḷavedalla Sutta

There was nothing we could describe because as soon as we tried to see it, it was gone. The contact had occurred, but we weren't trained enough to stay in the awakened state. We touched it and moved away because our feelings and perceptions prevented us from seeing it clearly. This is how the experience occurs for the first time. The notion of identification arises and prevents us from clearly seeing the links of dependent origination. Similar to practicing *Jhanas* or the formless realms, the experience of Cessation is a state we can enter and return from through training. Through practice, we establish a track record and become familiar with how to experience it. We have developed our mind to achieve balance in all situations, chosen the right time, and taken the necessary steps to tranquilize the activities of our mind and body. All the Awakening factors have been balanced, leading us to a state where we are not aware of anything; the mind goes blank as the faculty by which it experiences the world has stopped.

As we continue this practice, it also becomes integrated into our daily life. We don't consider Cessation to be a big deal because as we test it, it fades away. The mind simply enters this state, and we don't know how long it lasts; it could be a few seconds or longer. All we know is that we come out of it, and the world arises along with our awareness from an empty state. There was nothing—no perception, no consciousness. All six senses were completely absent, and now they gradually return. It's like watching a movie that emerges from a blank screen—the images gradually form from complete emptiness, and after a certain time, the full picture emerges. Emerging from Cessation will not be an abrupt appearance out of nowhere; it will be a gradual process.

We will hear tiny, tiny sounds, and those sounds will gradually increase to normal volume or level. After we emerge from Cessation, the senses will return to exactly where they were before. The emergence occurs in very fine, gradual steps. This is how the experience of coming out of Cessation feels initially. It's a perfecting of the art of sitting without any expectations. As I mentioned earlier, it marks a great achievement in human existence, as the ocean of suffering has been let go and will never arise again. Experiencing Cessation in this way also means we have glimpsed *Nibbāna* and are

heading towards it in a definitive sense. That's it. It's a definitive state. We will attain *Nibbāna* in this very life. It is the most sublime state of practice on the Buddha's path, the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path.

This can be attained by anyone. It doesn't require rigorous training or great effort. We can experience Cessation in as little as 10-15 minutes or half an hour. However, initially, it may take longer to develop enough dispassion to experience this. As time goes on, we can experience Cessation within minutes or few tens of minutes. It's all about following the right path and mastering the art of sitting in practice following the Noble Eightfold Path.

Chapter 18

Where is Nibbana?

*“There is, meditators, that realm wherein there is neither earth,
nor water, nor fire, nor air;
neither the realm of infinity of space,
nor that of infinity of consciousness, nor that of nothingness,
nor that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,
wherein is neither this world, nor a world beyond, nor moon, nor sun.
There, meditators, I declare is no coming, no going, no stopping,
no passing away and no arising.
It is not established, it continues not, it has no object.
This indeed is the end of suffering.”*

[Udana 8.1: Parinibbána]

This Chapter is based on a work I did based on a YouTube Dhamma talk in November 2023. I thought it would be a good idea to create some notes around the experience of the Third Noble Truth, which is the cessation of all suffering. I have covered a lot on the analysis of suffering, the process, and the mechanisms around how suffering comes about. I have already done an extensive analysis of the links of dependent origination, which is central to the notion of suffering—the Buddha's Awakening and his unique discovery.

Before the Buddha, people couldn't even contemplate that suffering could be made extinct through practice. Most believed that suffering was an inherent part of our existence. However, the Buddha proved it is optional and revealed the conditional nature of reality and a happiness that is free of all conditions. Today, we accept pain, anguish, jealousy, and many other tendencies as human nature, believing there is nothing we can do about it. Conventional wisdom considers accepting this as insight.

The Buddha's discovery challenged this notion. If we accept that suffering is all there is in life, then what is happiness? Is it just a fleeting experience that we can never truly possess? Are we doomed

to be immersed in suffering, catching only brief glimpses of happiness, while suffering constantly looms over us?

The Buddha's quest was to find a happiness not subject to any conditions in the universe. I have covered the Buddha's quest in Chapter 11. I gave a Dhamma talk for friends in Asia who are very active in practicing and teaching the Dhamma. I had the opportunity to present my thoughts and experiences around the Buddha's Noble Quest as detailed in the *Majjhima Nikaya 26 Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*.

In this Chapter, instead of focusing on analyses of phenomena, suffering, and other familiar topics, I am dedicating it to some basic questions: What is *Nibbāna*? What is this all about?

We have been given a general understanding of *Nibbāna* as an experience beyond description and imagination. It's true that the experience of *Nibbāna* is beyond the realm of logic and reasoning. I understand that trying to explain *Nibbāna* with words does not fully capture the subtleties of the Dhamma.

However, there is a burning question among millions who know that *Nibbāna* is a great achievement and a worthwhile objective for humans. There is a lack of understanding and firsthand experience of what it truly is. If I can fill a bit of this void with my explanation and understanding, I will consider this attempt successful.

So, I will try to explain "What is *Nibbāna*? Where is *Nibbāna*?"

The template for this work focuses on four subtopics of the *Nibbāna* element. We can consider *Nibbāna* as a dimension or a realm, also called an "Ayatana," or base. It is also called an element or "Dhatu," and can be as simple as the end of suffering, the everyday understanding of the Third Noble Truth or the cessation of suffering.

First, I'll explore the search for *Nibbāna*, the drive, and the factors that lead humans to seek the path to experiencing *Nibbāna*.

Second, I'll discuss the end of suffering. What do we mean by the end of suffering? How can we gain a deeper, experiential understanding of what this end of suffering is all about?

Third, I'll cover the actual practice, the path the Buddha has given us, detailing the milestones we progressively see ourselves reaching as we traverse this path, finally arriving at that state. I will add my personal experiences, understanding, and analysis to provide perspective on what this path truly is. This will be aimed at those with

some experiential understanding as well as those who are completely new to this path.

My explanations may be received differently depending on the readers' level of experiential understanding. Some may resonate well with those on the same plateau or in a similar field as I am, while others might find it completely alien or hard to accept. I'll try to cover both perspectives, hoping it will be useful in both ways.

Finally, I will explain the experience and essence of this state. I would like to relate the experience of *Nibbāna* to just one word: relief. I equate the state of *Nibbāna* with the greatest relief we have ever had. Let's not expand this experience in terms of happiness, pleasure, joy, or pain. Let's focus on one particular experience, and that experience is relief. This word sums up all my experiences and practice, and I would like to confine my explanation of *Nibbāna* to this word: relief.

So, without any further introduction, I will delve into this topic. What is the search for *Nibbāna*? First of all, this is an extraordinary search. There is a *Sutta*, where the Buddha said that people will be driven to find the end of suffering when they experience a lot of suffering. They will either go crazy due to the overwhelming amount of suffering and engage in activities to suppress or evade it temporarily, or they will take a step back and reflect, "What is this suffering?" These contemplative individuals understand that the quest to alleviate suffering through pleasure and temporary gratification is a futile and never-ending pursuit that will not lead to long-term happiness.

Those who take the second path realize there is another way beyond seeking pleasure and gratification. They follow some form of spiritualism, engage in meditation, and similar activities to calm the mind. This approach was prevalent during the Buddha's time and is even more prevalent today. It involves calming the mind, following the path of tranquility to eliminate agitation and distractions. People achieve this through soothing music, creating a tranquil setting away from the crowd, and engaging in meditative experiences where they suppress hindrances and mental proliferation by focusing their attention on a particular object, and diverting their mind away from distractions, believing they can eliminate suffering.

In this context, I want to highlight the Buddha's novel contribution to the world, which can be seen as follows: If the Buddha had to justify his contribution, it wouldn't be about suppressing mental activities at all. Some Buddhist teachers believe that suppression of hindrances, thoughts, and concepts is what the Buddha taught, but his contribution to the humanity in ending suffering is the complete letting go and pacification of all these mental activities, including not engaging with hindrances or any other mental states.

Even the term pacification or tranquilization can be confusing to some. What I want to clarify is that his approach of pacification isn't an active or first-person activity. The exact word used by the Buddha is "*Pasambhaya*⁹²," which means pacification. By its very nature, pacification signifies that it is not an active process, and there are no first-person activities involved.

Pacification involves removing the "I" or the first-person attitude, allowing the process to unfold naturally, and letting it calm itself. It's akin to releasing gas from a car, where instead of trying to increase tranquility actively, we bring tranquility by letting go, relaxing, and stepping away. This is what "*Pasambhaya*" means.

The unique contribution of the Buddha is called "*Sabbe Sankhara Samatho*⁹³," or the pacification or soothing of all formations. He showed the *Samatha* (stillness) and *Vipassana* (clear observation) path for the freedom of the mind. While they may seem like separate practices, they actually come together as a unified process. It's not about practicing *Samatha* and *Vipassana* separately at different times; the Buddha's practice involves both *Samatha* and *Vipassana* working together. I once used an example in a workshop in Nepal, comparing it to a roof with two sides supporting each other. The combination of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* can penetrate subtler truths not by working independently but by working synergistically.

The term "synergy" is useful here; it's like 1 + 1 equals more than two, or we can say 1 + 1 equals 3. This means it's more than just the sum of the two. When we combine *Samatha* and *Vipassana* in such a

⁹² Majjhima Nikaya 10: Satipatthana Sutta

⁹³ Anguttara Nikaya 9.36: *Jhana*

way that they support each other, it pierces the matter and goes beyond the usual expectation of $1 + 1$ equals 2^{94} .

This is how I describe the Buddha's unique and original discovery that unlocked the state of *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is not something millions or billions of light-years away; it's right in front of us. The state of *Nibbāna* is tucked beneath each of our experiences.

This dimension is somehow not visible to us because we are always looking at the wrong thing. It's as if we're looking at the universe through glasses that filter out the state of *Nibbāna*. Instead of seeing *Nibbāna* as it is, we see a filtered, colored version that is entirely different. If we could just tweak that filter a bit, *Nibbāna* would be right in front of us, like looking through clear glass. Essentially, we're seeing through something that obscures this experience. If we know what is blocking this vision, *Nibbāna* is right in front of us.

Like any discovery or advancement in science or the material universe, such as nuclear energy, the recipe for *Nibbāna* remains obscured until a Buddha unravels it. Nuclear energy has been with us since time immemorial. Every atom and molecule have the potential to generate an immense amount of power, yet we were burning firewood and coal, probably burning trillions of molecules and atoms to generate just one joule of energy.

However, nuclear energy has existed from the beginning of this universe. Even more potent is the fusion of electrons and protons. By fusing two hydrogen atoms to form helium, limitless energy can be generated. Some people may believe that unlocking this energy will bring ultimate happiness.

Scientists are good at exploring deep natural phenomena to unlock material outcomes that we humans desire in terms of seeing, hearing, and experiencing through senses. All the inventions and discoveries provide us with artifacts that please our senses. However, the Buddha's discovery is that we don't need all these sensory experiences to find ultimate happiness. This is what I'm trying to cover in this discussion.

⁹⁴ See for example: Samyutta Nikaya 45.9: The Spike

Finding the original words of the Buddha is not easy today. Over the 2600 years since his time, there has been a proliferation of ideas and concepts about what the Buddha taught. Even within the Buddhist community, including Mahayana, Theravada, and others, it is challenging to find the words spoken by the historical Buddha. They have expanded his teachings so much that it is difficult to discern exactly what he said.

I searched for many years, until someone mentioned the *Nikayas* to me. These words caught my attention. I thought, "Let me find out what's in those books, like the *Majjhima Nikaya*." I was blown away because those texts talk about direct experiences without any philosophies. In the *Suttas*, we never find philosophies; they are pure, like hardwood. They explain what the mind and experience are all about. Every word of the Buddha is focused on direct experiences.

I listened to the majority of the *Suttas*, and one thing that struck me was that the Buddha talks about the four *Jhanas*. He also discusses the *Arupas*, dependent origination, the five aggregates, and the Seven Factors of Awakening. These terms make sense because they are mentioned repeatedly. The Buddha's discovery can actually be summed up in very few words: conditioned experiences, the arising and cessation of the five aggregates, and how suffering can be completely let go.

If we can understand how phenomena arise dependently, we can also understand that they can cease, or be prevented from arising—to be more accurate. This sums up all the teachings of the Buddha—suffering is a phenomenon that can be completely prevented. That's how I delved into the teachings of the Buddha and understood them in a direct experiential way. It's about quenching our thirst, which the Buddha unraveled as the recipe for quenching. Thirst—or craving in general—is what we're all experiencing in this world. We encounter many philosophies, ideas, and concepts, but they will never quench our thirst. Quenching the thirst is to personally, directly experience the state of quenching—*Nibbāna*. In Pali, it's called "*Tanha*," which means thirst.

I used to be very philosophical many years ago. I listened to eclectic music and searched for latest discoveries of other corners of the universe, looking for life on other planets and speculating about

parallel universes and multiverses. I was immersed in that dimension of the never-ending loop of concepts, ideas, and seeing people refuting each other's ideas and claims.

Human experiences are often about proving that one is better than others. But in the Dhamma, it's about letting go of all that comparison, measurement, and conceit. The Buddha's discovery is that there is an end to all these concepts. When we let go of all the concepts, we find the greatest peace, the end of suffering. Letting go of concepts is the greatest relief.

I will read quite a few of the *Suttas* around the topic of *Nibbāna*. I have shared my confused state of many years back, around 2014-2015, and how I started to understand the *Suttas* after a while. I was looking for ways to directly experience what is being spoken of in the *Suttas*. Now, many years later, when I look back 10 years, I feel much less desperate. I've moved beyond the notions of suffering and feel safer to know that there is a way out of all suffering. The world appears completely different when one truly sees the depth of the Dhamma.

People who don't have firsthand experience of meditation may not agree. They might say, "What are we doing with meditation? I'm not seeing any new benefit from it." But if we meditate correctly, by letting go of all conceit and personalization, it's not about what we gain; it's more about what we abandon. We abandon insecurity, fear, unease, and anguish. That is what the Buddha's practice is all about. It's not about amassing experiences; it's about letting go of all experiences, leading to emptiness, independence, and freedom.

The Buddha says this universe is going one way, and he is going the opposite way. Whatever people in this universe think is happiness, in his teachings, leads to suffering. And whatever they say is suffering, that is happiness. This is the exact opposite because the universe considers gaining as happiness, but in the Buddha's path, losing is happiness. This is how I would describe how different we are from the worldly pursuit. It may seem strange, but hopefully, those who have experienced it agree with what I am saying. There may be people who ask questions like: What is beyond all these worldly pleasures and happiness? Can we ever achieve freedom that is not subject to life and death experiences?

There is an experience. We cannot measure or describe the state of *Nibbāna* using conditioned phenomena and experiences. We can only experience that state. I would use one word for that: relief. I would describe all experiences as either relief or non-relief. The state of *Nibbāna* is relief, and everything else falls into the other bucket. All these experiences, whether they are of *Jhanas*, *Arupas*, or worldly joy and happiness like holidays or nice cars, can be categorized as either relief or non-relief.

What I mean by relief and non-relief is that the state of *Nibbāna* is the ultimate relief from being conditioned. It is not conditioned by any experiences, not confined to any particular time and space. It is devoid of and completely free from all the notions we are accustomed to. I often give an example of a toad and a turtle in a pond.

There was a turtle and a toad in a pond. One day the turtle somehow went to the forest. When the turtle came back, the toad asked, "Where did you go? I didn't see you all day." The turtle said, "I went to the forest. It's a completely different place, nothing like what we see here." The toad replied, "What you're saying is completely nonsense. There is no such thing as a forest. What you're saying makes no sense at all." The state of *Nibbāna* can be like that for worldly people. The experience of relief is incomprehensible and cannot be described through the senses. The state of *Nibbāna* is beyond the senses; it's just a different experience.

I could go on like this for a long time, but let me read some of the profound words from the Buddha to bring some context. I will pick some *Suttas* from the *Udana*, *Suttanipata*. The *Udana* contains some of the most profound experiences that the Buddha found joy in describing. With them, we can get a glimpse or a deeper understanding of what made the Buddha utter them with joy when talking about the state of *Nibbāna*. Although it is hard to describe, it is an experience that he wanted to convey to inspire us to practice.

Actually, the Buddha did want to convey that the state of *Nibbāna* is an extraordinary experience that inspires joy, even when one attempts to describe it. This one—truly a masterpiece—here in *Udana* 8.1 the Buddha says,

*“There is, meditators, that realm wherein there is neither earth,
nor water, nor fire, nor air;
neither the realm of infinity of space,
nor that of infinity of consciousness, nor that of nothingness,
nor that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,
wherein is neither this world, nor a world beyond, nor moon, nor sun.
There, meditators, I declare is no coming, no going, no stopping,
no passing away and no arising.
It is not established, it continues not, it has no object.
This indeed is the end of suffering.”*

We can write millions of words about the experience captured in these few verses. So, what is this state of *Nibbāna*? The Buddha describes it as a realm, base, dimension, or *Ayatana* in Pali. *Nibbāna* is a dimension. Here, "dimension" does not necessarily mean it has the qualities of length, breadth, and height, which are the three dimensions we are accustomed to. It can also refer to an experiential dimension. The Buddha is saying that there is an experience where there are no four great elements. This is the state of being liberated from all kinds of materiality.

Materiality becomes a reality only when there is a mental counterpart, which we call "*Nama Rupa*." *Nama Rupa* and consciousness, when they come together, result in the emergence of the world. The world and observer arise with *Nama Rupa* and consciousness. When we break down *Nama Rupa*, "*Rupa*" represents the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. "*Nama*" encompasses feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. *Nama Rupa* signifies a description of experiences that register in our minds in terms of those four properties: solidity, cohesion, heat, and vibration. These are how the four great elements manifest in our experiences, and the mind interprets them in terms of these properties. When these phenomena come into contact with feeling, perception, intention, and attention—the *Nama* aspects—things manifest and turn into experiences.

We experience these four great elements through the faculties of feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention. When there is contact, for example, when our sense bases come into contact with

these four great elements, then dependent on that contact, feeling arises. With feeling as a condition, what arises is perception. When there is perception, we start to tag those experiences. Feeling gives rise to perception, indicating that this is something nameable. In fact, perception is called "*Sanna*" in Pali, which means "*Sangya*" or "Name" in English. So, perception is a process of giving a name.

Perception gives us an understanding, such as, "Okay, this experience has the property of heat; it feels hot." This understanding comes from the feeling. With feeling, perception associates that experience with previous experiences of heat. Otherwise, heat might be completely unknown because the mind has not experienced it before. Once the mind registers this particular phenomenon as "heat," perception has performed its function.

Immediately following perception, there arises the inquiry: "What is this?" This inquiry is known as "*Vinnana*" or consciousness. When there's a feeling and perception, consciousness comes into the picture immediately. Feeling and perception support consciousness, and consciousness solidifies the experience. At this point, we have an identification of "me" versus the experience.

After identification, we have intention. Intention drives activities, motivating us to pursue or avoid the identified experience. It's like recognizing that something is hot and feeling the need to address it immediately. This intention can manifest in various activities involving the body, speech, and mind.

Intention plays a key role in generating what is called "*Sankhara*." All these phenomena are interconnected, like a single fabric. Intention, followed by attention, drives further engagement with these phenomena. Attention fuels the subsequent prolonging of this engagement. It's like tilting the balance either towards pursuing the object or staying away from it. This balance tends to flip from one side to the other in the human mind, and this tendency is what we call "craving."

The mind is always in a state of fluctuation, either leaning toward pleasure or avoiding pain. It can never achieve perfect equilibrium unless there is mental development. Without this development, we fall into the trap of constantly juggling between these two aspects of our experiences, whether they are pleasurable or painful. This constant fluctuation creates an urge and desire to engage more or to

distance ourselves from these experiences, fueling the cycle of what is known as "*Bhava*," or the seed for the continuation of *Samsara*.

We prolong our experiences by consistently falling into these two buckets—either pursuing or avoiding. This is the state of mind that people find themselves in when they haven't learned how to recognize and remain unaffected by feelings and perceptions.

Now, let's discuss the state where there are no four great elements. The four great elements represent a dimension of materiality, something external to our mind and body. On the other side, there exists another dimension, the state of mind characterized by the perception of the base of infinity of space and so on. The mind processes these four great elements as perceptions of form. They give rise to appearances in terms of shape, size, temperature, and other attributes. This is what we refer to as "*Rupa*" which literally means appearance.

On the flip side, we have experiences in terms of forms, which can be classified into "Form" and "Formless" realms. The state of *Nibbāna* transcends both realms. The formless realms include perceptions related to the base of infinity of space, infinity of consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. These are all bases of perception, inherently tied to the mind and its objects, where there is no physical aspect and experiences occur purely in the realm of the mind and its objects.



Figure 21: Attempts by scholars without meditative experience to describe Nibbana as a place in the universe can prove to be futile.

Nibbāna doesn't fit into the categories of "this world" or "the other world." It can't be classified as part of Earth or any other exoplanet. We might liken "the other world" to a place where life exists, like a living planet around the nearest neighbor of the Sun, Alpha Centauri, but *Nibbāna* transcends all such categorizations.

It's neither this world nor the other world in terms of experiences. It's not this world, and it's not even the *Jhanas* or *Arupas*. It doesn't fall into any of those categories. It's neither Sun nor Moon, meaning it's not physical. All these experiences come and go, arise and cease. *Nibbāna* does not exhibit coming and going like worldly experiences do. Arising and ceasing, we all know that phenomena arise and cease—including *Jhanas* and *Arupas*. But for a mind at total peace, these are just vibrations, a jolt, an aberration, some disturbance. Let's say there is a very still lake; the state of *Nibbāna* is like that—a still lake with no ripples. The ripples are all phenomena.

When we talk about feeling, perception, intention, contact, and attention, these are all ripples that oscillate the serene state of the mind that is in perfect balance. *Nibbāna* is devoid of all these ripples.

Nibbāna has three properties: It is unestablished, unmoving, and supportless⁹⁵. In Pali, these are *Apatitthitam*, *Appavattam*, *Anarammanam*. "*Patitthitam*" means it is established, and the prefix "A" means negative; i.e. it is unestablished; it doesn't need to land anywhere. "*Appavattam*" means it's not moving; it's not shaking; it stays still. "*Anarammanam*" means that it doesn't need any support; it is not dependent. These three distinct properties of *Nibbāna* all point to the same thing: the mind is completely still, devoid of all oscillation. When we arrive at the state where all layers have been completely removed, it becomes completely empty and devoid of all artifacts. This state embodies all three properties: it is unestablished, it doesn't shake, and it is supportless.

I understand that describing such a profound experience is challenging, and even words and grammar in various forms of literature are insufficient to fully convey it. I have no way of fully explaining what this experience is all about, and I must admit that I'm not claiming to know all the aspects of the state of *Nibbāna*. My descriptions are based on what I've seen and experienced. I can

⁹⁵ Udana 8.1: Parinibbāna

estimate what it must be like, but I cannot fully convey the complete experience in words. It is quite tricky, and I acknowledge that it is challenging to articulate. All I can say is that it is an incredibly valuable experience, and any form of explanation to the world is a bonus.

There are likely many other meditators who have glimpsed the state of *Nibbāna* and have described it in different terms and described different experiences. However, I thought that since I am undertaking this as a personal project, I can perhaps tick some of those boxes for anyone who might find them helpful and inspire them to search for such an experience. If I can raise some questions or spark curiosity in others to explore this path further, I will be extremely delighted and satisfied. However, I would like to emphasize that the state of *Nibbāna* should not be viewed in the same way as worldly acquisitions or worldly happiness achieved through accumulating experiences. Instead, we should consider it from a completely different perspective, as if we are changing the lens through which we view the world.

Let's flip the coin and consider *Nibbāna* from the perspective of happiness. It is the ultimate happiness, where we are free from fear, pain, death, and other worldly suffering. We are liberated from the perpetual fluctuation between pleasure and pain, which disturbs the balance of the mind. We are no longer subject to the destiny of suffering that feeling entails.

So, we will never be subject to being affected by feeling. Being freed from this, I believe, is the most sublime happiness. That's what I would like to convey here—and it is also found in a *Sutta* where Sariputta uses this expression to describe *Nibbāna*.⁹⁶

Another great *Sutta* about the experience of *Nibbāna* is in the *Udana* 1.10, the *Bahiya Sutta*. It describes exactly what the Buddha says about the experience of Bahiya, a wanderer who attained the state of *Nibbāna* within a few minutes of meeting the Buddha. So, what is this state? In the *Sutta*, it says that if one simply lets go of any movement, any shaking of experiences, and allows them to drop when they arise by getting out of their way, just that is the end of suffering—*Nibbāna*.

⁹⁶ Anguttara Nikaya 9.34: Nibbana Sutta

What the Buddha says is simply this: in seeing, there is just seeing; in hearing, just hearing; and in tasting, just tasting. When the notion of "you" is not there, you are neither here nor there, nor in between. That is simply the end of suffering. This means that all the sensations and experiences of the universe have been there since time immemorial—don't instigate them, just drop any involvement. When they enter conscious awareness, they begin to create ripples. Being conscious means supporting phenomena. All we need to do is step aside and allow these phenomena to flow. When we are not there to interfere, they become still. There is nothing there; it becomes like a vast expanse of water. The state of *Nibbāna* is just like that.

A brief explanation of the state of *Nibbāna* by the Buddha—it's just a process. There's no need for involvement, interference, or engagement. Just let the phenomena flow, and because of non-association and non-involvement, these phenomena will settle and disappear for good. They will never arise again when the experience ripens. That's the state that the Buddha describes. And Bahiya understood it. He dropped all the notions and saw that thunderbolt, that glimpse of *Nibbāna*. His mind was very ripe, and all fetters and bonds were ready to be broken. We can compare it to a fuse—when there's a current passing through a fuse, and for Bahiya, the fuse was blown, never to be patched up again. Then, he had an accident and died. The Buddha said to the Bhikkhus, "Look, he's one of your companions in the Holy life." The Buddha delighted in seeing this state, saying:

*Where neither water nor yet earth
Nor fire nor air gain a foothold,
There gleam no stars, no sun sheds light,
There shines no moon, yet there no darkness reigns.
When a sage, a brahmin, has come to know this
For himself through his own wisdom,
Then he is freed from form and formless.
Freed from pleasure and from pain.*

I talked about form and formless realms. The four great elements and sense experiences are related to the form realm, whereas the formless realm is where there is just the mind and its objects. In the form realm, there is no sensuality; it's just the experience of form without active engagement with sensuality.

The form realm transcends this universe. When the contraction and dissolution of this universe occur, beings spontaneously appear in the Abhassara Brahma Realm— a form (*Rupa*) realm. They are not subject to the contraction and dissolution of the universe. We don't need to worry about what happens after a big crunch when the universe contracts, fearing that everyone will perish. Beings who have not let go of craving will appear in that form realm when the universe contracts. During one cycle of contraction of the universe, there is no life here. When the universe starts to expand again, beings will reappear. This is in the *Digha Nikaya 27: Aganna Sutta, On Knowledge of the Beginning*. The Buddha says that beings will remain trapped in this cycle indefinitely until they find a way out of *Samsara*. They are like prisoners of this universe. Even if this universe dissolves, they will migrate to another prison, which is the form realm, and then return to this universe once again.

In some sense, beings are like debtors who have not paid their debt, always subject to being transferred from one place to another, from the universe to the form realm, and from the form realm to the formless realm, and so on. They are constantly being transferred because they have not settled their account with the universe for good.

The formless (*Arupa*) realm is another side, another dimension where beings have suppressed all experiences of feeling, and perception of the four great elements. Due to this suppression and separation from physical experiences, they have entered the realm of the mind, where they may remain for many eons. This universe, the *Rupa*, and *Arupa* realms are abundant with beings, always full of visitors. We are the visitors, but we don't hold a card to choose which realm to visit and exit. Our destiny is chosen by our deeds and experiences.

What propels us from one realm to another? It's the current of dependent origination. Dependent origination sweeps all beings from one realm to another because we didn't see through these conditioned experiences and got carried away. We didn't see how the process works, creating a never-ending loop that sustains *Samsara*.

So, I hope this provides some words of security and assurance that not being subject to the destiny of becoming prisoners of our destiny is real happiness, as that is the ultimate freedom. Our greatest security and safety lie not in those form realms, formless realms, or in the sensual universe. All these experiences, all these dimensions, are conditioned, and because of this conditioning, we are always subject to pleasure, pain, suffering, and other phenomena that impinge on our experiences.

Because of the inherent nature of these phenomena, we cannot avoid suffering. Pleasure and pain, although pleasure is seen as a form of happiness, are essentially the same. The Buddha said that pleasure is just a temporary evasion of reality⁹⁷. It's like a veil, and pleasure and pain are two sides of the same coin, as Bhante Vimalaramsi used to say.

All there is are just fleeting phenomena. What we can say with absolute certainty is that any pleasure is conditioned by contact. One tweak of contact, and we go from pleasurable feeling to painful, and from painful to pleasurable, instantly. We can test this ourselves by trying different things with our body, and we can bring about different experiences. If we cross a certain limit, we go from pleasure to pain and from pain to pleasure. Actually, if we look back, pleasure and pain are just vibrations conditioned by contact.

Now, what is this experience of freedom then? There is no form, no formless, no world, no sun, no moon. What is that experience? It's the experience of being freed from all kinds of sense impingement, or as I said, being devoid of feeling. So, we will never be subject to pleasure and pain.

This is the greatest happiness. The one word that describes it is the state where we are never contacted through sense bases by sense

⁹⁷ Samyutta Nikaya 36.5: Should Be Seen

objects. Imagine never being cut by a blade, never being chopped by a sword, never being burned in a fire, never freezing in cold temperatures or being stranded in the Arctic, or falling off a cliff. Look at that relief.

We are never subject to these kinds of destinies, so we never have to worry about being dismissed from a job, falling from a cliff, being swept away by a flood, being crushed by an earthquake, or dealing with any disasters. We never need to worry about what food we need to eat because all our needs are gone. There's no hunger, no discomfort. We don't need to find any of these things. All these needs will go away. If there is no need, why worry about driving a car, going on holiday, or finding all these things?

In the state of *Nibbāna*, all needs and prerequisites vanish. That's it—no more conditioning. That is the greatest happiness.

We should understand the state of *Nibbāna* in this way. *Nibbāna* is free from all forms and formlessness and is not subject to space and time. We are not subject to the time domain, the space domain, or any fabrications. None of these fabrications can find footing in the state of the Unconditioned. They are all conditioned experiences. Time is a conditioned experience, space is a conditioned experience, the form realm is a conditioned experience, and the formless realm is a conditioned experience. When all those conditioned experiences go away, all conditions, needs, requirements, and prerequisites are already gone. We are never subject to any conditioned experiences, as they only find support when there is an asset. But *Nibbāna* is assetless—an experience-less experience.

The Buddha talked about this in one *Dhammapada* verse, explaining what this experience is. In verse 3 of *Sutta* number 348, Buddha addresses a person named Ugasena, who was an acrobat performing daring acts on a bamboo pole. The Buddha said to him: "Now you are in a very precarious position. If you just let go of any concerns about what has passed and refrain from pursuing what is yet to come, don't dwell on the past or focus on the future, and even let go of considerations about what lies in between, then, if you remain in the present." We can think of it as a dimensionless state. The Buddha is saying there is a state not confined to any specific

space or time. When we've let go of everything, all that remains is this dimensionless experience, and that dimensionless experience is the ultimate happiness. When we momentarily realize and release everything, we unlock the exit from this universe to the realm of the Unconditioned.

So, what this *Sutta* is saying is that there is a state where the mind is released in every way. The mind is released from the present, the past, the future, from before and after, from the middle, up and down, from everywhere; it's released from all directions. All the layers have been removed, leaving it completely empty and in a perfectly still state, which is the state referred to as "*Nibbāna*." In this state, the mind never returns to birth and decay.

This means that birth and decay are outcomes and fabrications of those layers—layers of perception, contact, consciousness, and so on. These phenomena arise when we engage with them. If we do not engage, they do not arise. It's similar to concepts in physics, particularly in particle physics, regarding the role of the observer.

For example, there is a particle, and that particle remains a particle if an observer is present. However, when no observer is there, that particle can appear as a wave. The particle can manifest anywhere until observed. These things occur based on observation. What I'm saying is that if we become an observer, phenomena become a reality. Without an observer, there is no manifestation of a wave-like phenomenon or particle.

To clarify, I may want to discuss the double-slit experiment, where particles appear both like waves and particles depending on whether there is an observer. If I let go of the role of the observer, I should not witness any of these phenomena. There should be no appearance of interference patterns in the double-slit experiment if the concept of an observer is let go. This is akin to what the Buddha is teaching: when we let go of the notion of an observer, all the things we perceive as arising will simply disappear, as they are just potential.

In the state of *Nibbāna*, there is no observation, no particle, and no wave; all of them have ceased because we didn't engage in observation. Interestingly, on the Buddha's path, we begin the

process with observation—the *Four Satipatthana*—where we observe the mind, body, and mind objects, as well as the dependence of the body and feelings and mind with its objects. We embark on this path through observation. However, when the time is right, we let go of observation, including the first-person perspective.

I believe this provides a good sense of what the path to *Nibbāna* entails. It may appear quite intricate for an untrained mind and not something we can fully comprehend by accumulating preconceived notions, concepts, or ideas. Instead, we should think of *Nibbāna* in terms of abandoning and disassociation. This is why Buddha describes *Nibbāna* using negatives. If we were to describe *Nibbāna* in positive terms, it would be what it's all about in the world, wouldn't it? Accumulating happiness and properties.

However, this is not what *Nibbāna* is about. *Nibbāna* is about giving up, relinquishing, and being free. That's why the state of *Nibbāna* is described in negatives. This doesn't mean that when we abandon or disassociate, the process of not being associated is a state of annihilation, destruction, or loss. Not being bound, not needing any support, and being dimensionless is a profound happiness.

A good testament to this is when we let go of the coarser happiness of the senses and even the first *Jhana*, we arrive at the higher happiness of the second *Jhana*. If we were to cling to the first *Jhana*, we would never have the chance to reach the second *Jhana*. This path involves distancing ourselves from accumulation by progressively abandoning and letting go of experiences. Thus, we experience even higher happiness.

We successively let go of all coarser happiness and arrive at even more refined, exquisite, and stable happiness. This includes tranquility, joy, happiness, calmness, and equanimity, all of which become more and more steady. *Nibbāna* represents the perfect, steady state of mind, a state characterized by the complete stillness of the mind.

Now, let's delve into the third topic: the path. I touched upon the *Jhana* experience earlier. What is *Jhana*? Ten years ago, I had only heard the word *Jhana*, and it truly fascinated me. Even the word *Jhana* itself had a special resonance. When I first encountered it, it was a

profound moment. The first discourse I read or listened to about *Jhana* was in *Majjhima Nikaya* 4. In this discourse, the Buddha describes the four *Jhanas* and his own path. He talks about how he let go of all worldly activities, went to the forest, and secluded himself, seeking happiness and peace of mind. Tired of worldly engagements, he wanted to distance himself from the world and ventured into the deepest forests in search of inner peace. The Buddha's discussion of these four *Jhanas* intrigued me greatly, and I felt a strong connection to the experience. It truly resonated with me like a *deja vu*.

The Buddha describes how he became enlightened using *Jhanas* skillfully. He was very descriptive and open about it. He didn't hide or keep the method to himself. He openly shared it with the world, explaining that this is how he experienced *Nibbāna* using the path of *Jhanas*. He provided a step-by-step guide, starting with reaching the first *Jhana*. By letting go of sense pleasures and unwholesome states, one progresses to the second, third, and fourth *Jhanas*. These *Jhanas* are associated with a state of fearlessness and freedom from anxiety and dread. *Nibbāna* is synonymous with the state of no fear.

The Buddha describes *Jhanas* as temporary liberations from sensory experiences and the five hindrances. These *Jhanas* arise when the mind is sufficiently pure and involve the cessation of hindrances and the arising of specific *Jhana* factors.

Some meditation teachers describe *Jhanas* as states of supreme bliss, viewing them as a supreme and completely otherworldly experience to be treasured. However, the Buddha's description of *Jhana* is that it is a superhuman state, beyond the state of being human, but it is a temporary, arising and ceasing phenomenon. *Jhana* arises when other phenomena have ceased. What has ceased is our reaction and craving towards the deviations of our mind, the flip-flopping towards coarser pleasures. By letting them be and not interfering with the process of all phenomena, we remain fairly balanced, and the flip-flopping reduces to a vibration. Now, we are not so much into pleasure and pain; we have just remained a little bit calmer. That is a dimension outside the sensual world. It's not complete happiness, but *Jhana* is still a coarser type of dimension on the path to *Nibbāna* because we have not completely let go of

phenomena, never to arise again, as those underlying tendencies have not been uprooted. Our mind is still not 100% immaculately pure.

Because those underlying tendencies are still latent in our experiences, we fall into the first *Jhana*, which is the coarsest type of otherworldly happiness. We have just leaped from the world of senses to the first otherworldly platform. But our purification of the mind propelled us only enough to land there. Then we shed more of those underlying tendencies and some reactions to pleasures and pains. With each *Jhana*, our underlying tendency to feelings subsides. Our attitude towards pleasure and pain becomes less in the second *Jhana*; we do not get excited about pleasure and pain. The happiness from *Jhana* is a bit more stable. In the third *Jhana*, we let go of rapturous joy (*Piti*) completely; we are left with what is called *Sukha*. *Sukha* is free of rapture and excited joy, but there is still some subtle flip-flopping of the mind. In other words, in the third *Jhana*, we let go of that excitement and remain with the happiness and comfort of the body.

The third *Jhana* is also described by the Buddha as the pleasure of the body. In the fourth *Jhana*, we let go of both pleasure and pain, so our attention is not pulled by them. We see that this path ultimately leads to *Nibbāna*, which is a state of not being subject to the sway of pleasure and pain at all. In the first *Jhana*, we still experience pleasure and joy while having let go of pain. In the second and third *Jhanas*, our attachment to feelings diminishes further. In the fourth *Jhana*, we have relinquished both pleasure and pain, but we are still affected by them. In the state of *Nibbāna*, however, we are completely free from their influence.

This is how we can understand the *Jhanas* as a preparation for freedom from feeling. We cannot eliminate feeling by suppressing it entirely or by becoming overly attached to it. There are two types of attitudes towards *Jhana* experiences:

Those who experience *Jhana* and wish to enhance it further by immersing themselves in it develop a tendency to be reborn in that realm. If one lacks understanding of the Buddha's teachings and becomes attached to these *Jhanas*, striving to master them, they may be reborn in that realm without comprehending the freedom of

Nibbāna. It is important to note that lifespans of beings in these *Jhanas* are extremely long yet limited in duration: a hundred *Mahakappas* for the first *Jhana*, two hundred for the second, and so forth. These experiences are more refined and sublime, with corresponding subtler *Sankharas*. The mind attains an elevated state because it has been kept free from hindrances.

One can attain these states by suppressing the mind or by letting go of unwholesome states, such as refraining from harming living beings—the five precepts. By maintaining these precepts, one can more easily attain the happiness of the *Jhanas*. However, *Jhanas* are like plateaus for meditators; if they do not progress beyond these plateaus, they may remain in these experiences for many *Mahakappas* after their current life, followed by a precipitous descent. The higher one ascends in the *Jhanas*, the greater the potential fall. Even in these exclusive realms, the potential for lower rebirths persists if one does not understand how to be liberated from all conditioned experiences, including the *Jhanas*.

Therefore, understanding these underlying tendencies is crucial. If one identifies strongly with the *Jhanas* and views them as personal possessions, one is likely to remain in that plateau of *Jhana* for an extended period. The Buddha's teachings describe *Jhana* as arising and ceasing, simply a conditioned phenomenon. In the *Suttas*, the Buddha advises not to take delight in these *Jhanas* or to identify with them personally. Simply experience the *Jhanas*, let go of them, and continue on the path.

We need not become attached to *Jhanas* like we might to external gratifications—sense pleasures. Even though we have let go of the pleasure and joy of sense experiences, we should not become attached to or overly excited about the *Jhanas*. Instead, experience them without personal identification, allowing them to arise and cease naturally. If a *Jhana* arises, let it be; if it ceases, let it be. Just observe without becoming overly attached. The more we identify with the *Jhanas*, the more we will chase after them, potentially leading to restlessness or the need to suppress hindrances through other means.

Our attitude towards *Jhanas* should be similar to our approach to all distractions—just knowing them for what they are: temporary, dependently originated phenomena. They arise because we have let go of our attachment to sense pleasures. If we remain attached to sense pleasures, the *Jhanas* will not comply with our desires. Through my own experimentation with the nature of *Jhanas*, I have come to the realization: "What's the point of being attached to *Jhanas*?" They are simply one of the five aggregates, devoid of any substantial essence to identify with.

Isn't it? It's just a feeling. Yeah, this feeling isn't me; it's just one of those arising and ceasing, one of those five aggregates. We should treat those *Jhanas* and experiences as one of those aggregates. That's what the Buddha always insisted upon. The Buddha isn't saying that *Jhana* isn't useful; *Jhana* is useful. Don't identify with it, and don't expend too much effort trying to master *Jhana*. We don't need to master *Jhanas*; that's not the objective. We just need to use them. It's like needing to cross a river; we just need a boat. Whether it's a steamer, a gondola, or a luxury boat doesn't matter. We simply need to cross the river by any means, and that's what counts. It doesn't matter how we cross the river, be it by a royal carriage or anything else; it's inconsequential.

The benefit of not being attached to *Jhana*, backing off, and letting *Jhana* be, being relaxed, is that the more at ease we are with *Jhana* and just let it be, the more exquisite the experience of *Jhana* becomes. The more effort we put into gaining *Jhana*, the less stable and flakier it becomes. Well, that's a bit counterintuitive. That's not how many people generally describe or experience *Jhanas*. But this is what the Buddha's approach to *Jhana* is all about. Don't worry if the experience of *Jhana* isn't solid; if it's coming and going, that's good. We're being mindful; just check the boxes that we've been more mindful rather than being obsessed with *Jhana*.

So, being observant of going in and out of *Jhana* is even better in terms of our practice. Just back off a little bit, and that will nicely lead to the next *Jhana*. Each *Jhana* has experiences tied to it, and the more we let go, the finer the perception we arrive at. *Jhanas* come as a spectrum of perceptions. I mean, all those four *Jhanas* and *Arupas* are

in front of us all the time. They aren't waiting to come and present themselves to us. It's just our mind switches from one perception to another. By sufficiently backing off by some amount, a particular *Jhana* becomes manifest. So, all the *Jhanas* are in front of us; it's just our perception that's ready to pick them up or not, whether our perception is sharper or blurrier at a given time. That's how we switch from one *Jhana* to another. It's like seeing seven or nine different strands of colors when using a prism. By adjusting its position, we can extract certain colors. It's similar. When the supporting conditions are right, those *Jhanas* will manifest in front of us; they appear to pop out of nowhere.

That's what the Buddha implies—those *Jhanas* as finer perceptions beyond sense perceptions. Like switching a lens to see from red to amber and so on. That's how we navigate the full spectrum of *Jhana*. These are like the colors of the light spectrum, with red representing the lowest frequency and blue indicating the highest frequency. We can consider the first *Jhana* as the lowest frequency *Jhana*, and the highest frequency *Jhanas* are the fourth *Jhana* and *Arupas*, which act as another filter on top of the fourth *Jhana*.

That's one way to look at the Buddha's approach to *Jhanas*. He used other similes, such as shadows—one disappears for another to arise—but essentially that's what he said about *Jhanas*. Let me contextualize this with a practical example we see today. These experiences occur because as our perception and mindfulness become sharper, allowing us to discern finer perceptions like colors and higher frequencies. It's akin to adjusting an old-fashioned radio tuner—changing frequencies from Magic FM to Heart FM by turning the knob. Similarly, *Jhanas* are like radio channels; if we can adjust our perceptions, we can access different *Jhana* states (See *Digha Nikaya 9: Pothapada Sutta*).

So, that's what the Buddha is saying—these are all there, different spectrums of experiences, once we've had enough of them and become disenchanted. It's like when kids play in a sandbox—they're very fond of it at first, but then they get fed up and stop caring about

it. It's the same with these *Jhanas*; they're just feelings. We do some practice, that feeling arises, we tinker with that feeling, and it ceases.

These *Jhanas* teach a valuable lesson—our subtle identification with these experiences brings them about. Our identification makes these experiences grow. However, if we don't identify with these experiences, they will cease. This state of Cessation—*Nirodha*—occurs anytime we don't identify with any of those *Jhanas*.

Therefore, it doesn't matter if we are in the first *Jhana*, second *Jhana*, third *Jhana*, or fourth *Jhana*. If we haven't identified with any of those *Jhanas*, then deep insight into reality is right there. It's just next to each *Jhana*; flip the *Jhana* to the other side and look at the empty and hollow nature of that *Jhana*. Insight is right there. The key note though is: insight does not arise with just any mind, like those invaded by normal worldly sense perceptions.

While we may not gain these insights initially, we have to keep letting go and leapfrog from the coarser happiness of lower *Jhanas* to the higher ones. That's how we make progress with insight. Once we become experienced meditators and if we experience them repeatedly, these insights will arise frequently. They will unravel the deceptive nature of *Jhanas* as well. They are deceptive simply because they are conditioned.

The only experience that is non-deceptive, not conditioned, and available to us all the time is the state of *Nibbāna*. Therefore, we don't need to worry about losing *Nibbāna* like other things in the universe. What if I lose *Nibbāna*? Will I ever gain it back? All those concerns are just concepts and they will go away forever.

That's one of the things I wanted to emphasize here. I'm trying to provide some perspective on *Nibbāna*, although I'm not sure how helpful it will be to you. What I'm saying is, don't make a big deal out of *Jhana*. *Jhanas*, although important, are just experiences. If we're in the early stages, I suggest going through all the *Jhanas*, experiencing them, and playing with them to understand how they arise and cease. Observing their conditioned nature with an easy and relaxed attitude is essential.

The real deep insight doesn't lie in the *Jhana* experience itself. What we need to see is the dimension of how they arise and cease.

That is insight into conditioned experiences. Don't get caught up in the bliss of *Jhana* or how long we can stay in that bliss. If we approach it with the attitude of trying to maintain *Jhana* for as long as possible, it will delay our progress toward the state of *Nibbāna*—the Unconditioned.

In normal daily life, we find it challenging to explain the happiness of *Jhana*. However, each *Jhana* has distinct characteristics that become clear through practice. Thus, understanding them may not be as difficult as understanding the state of *Nibbāna*.

Speaking of the state of *Nibbāna*, whenever we have a good sitting—whether a long or short meditation session—it doesn't matter. If we approach our sitting with an easy attitude and a fresh, open-minded perspective, simply sitting down and observing whatever happens without any sense of identification, we can make good progress in a short time.

I mentioned that from any *Jhana*, we can experience Cessation. It feels like a very smooth and subtle experience. In the *Udana*, it actually refers to the state of *Nibbāna*, described as ghee or butter melting on its own without leaving any residue. If we've ever burned a lamp made of pure, well-refined ghee or butter, it doesn't leave any artifacts or burnt carbon residue. It's just pure ghee burning, and nothing is left behind.

So, it's a very exquisite and fine state where the relief is unprecedented. It feels like butter melting, like ghee in a lamp, just disappearing, being beyond all sensations. This very fine, exquisite experience is what the state of *Nibbāna* is described as in those examples.

In the *Udana*, there is a *Sutta*⁹⁸ about a monk named Dabba Malaputta who was an *Arahant*. When he was ready to pass away, he asked the Buddha, "Bhante, I would like to pass on to the final passing away. With your permission, I would like to relinquish this experience." The Buddha simply said, "Okay, do as you see fit." Using his great psychic abilities, the monk entered *Samadhi* and levitated through space. He experienced a state where the four great elements

⁹⁸ *Udana* 8.8: Dabba

of his body, even the ashes, disappeared. It's like when matter and antimatter collide—nothing remains. Somehow, he manipulated the four great elements; they collided like matter and antimatter. It's possible that he generated antimatter, and not even ashes remained from the fire. He extinguished without even needing his body to be cremated. That's the exquisite state, described as a fire extinguishing without residue, like a lamp of pure ghee that leaves no fumes. The state of *Nibbāna* is like that—just the most sublime fading away.

I hope that describes the path sufficiently. I explained the states of *Jhanas*, and the *Arupas* are not much different. The *Arupas* are what the Buddha considers a peaceful abiding. So, while *Jhanas* are pleasant abiding characterized by the pleasure of the body, joy, and happiness, the *Arupas*—such as infinite space and infinite consciousness—lead to a deeper calm and peace of mind. The balance of the mind is profound in the state of *Arupas*.

One thing I find quite useful, especially in practicing the four *Brahmaviharas*, is after radiating *Metta* to the six directions in the realm of infinite space. We radiate *Metta* one direction at a time, then to all six directions simultaneously, letting whatever arises in our mind continue. For instance, after sharing and radiating the feeling of *Metta*, we may suddenly feel a shift—a warm feeling transforms into a cool, calm sensation. This cool or calm type of *Metta* changes naturally into compassion. Progressively, compassion also changes similarly. We radiate compassion, and without doing anything, it morphs into *Mudita*—a feeling of sympathetic joy. We just continue radiating to all six directions and let whatever arises unfold naturally.

We do not make them happen; they simply arise. The process of letting go occurred such that our perception picked up that spectrum, enabling us to feel that particular frequency or color spectrum, or whatever we might call it, because our mind became ready to perceive it. Sometimes, when we are in the realm of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and so on, we require more tranquility and equanimity and less joy. Therefore, what will happen is that our mind will sense that even feelings of compassion, joy, and equanimity tend to create tension in the mind, and we will feel that our mind is not at ease. Simply add a little tranquility when we are

radiating compassion or experiencing *Mudita* (joy) or Equanimity; we need to soften them by adding a bit of tranquility. I believe tranquility is the best among the seven factors. The Buddha mentions this in the *Metta Sahagata Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikaya* 45.54, where we integrate these Seven Awakening factors with each of the *Brahmaviharas*.

In my personal experience, I noticed that my mind was somewhat rigid, so I used tranquility with equanimity. I radiated equanimity to all six directions, and if I felt discomfort and tension in my mind, I combined equanimity with tranquility, which made it much easier. We can maintain our meditation object for much longer periods while radiating equanimity. If we feel that our meditation is not progressing smoothly, simply incorporate the factor of calmness, the factor of peacefulness, because these are states of mind where we should experience peace and calm. Just as a reference, I'm not sure how your mind works, but if you feel it tightening, adjust your equanimity or your experience of the *Brahmaviharas* by including one or more of the Seven Awakening factors. I think it's best to use tranquility or *Samadhi*; it varies, but tranquility tends to yield much quicker and better results. All we need to discern is whether our mind is at ease. Once our mind reaches sublime ease, Cessation can occur at any time.

Therefore, I suggest progressing through the first *Jhana*, second *Jhana*, third *Jhana*, fourth *Jhana* by practicing *Metta*, *Karuna*, and so on. Progress with them as we move forward. If at any stage we find our mind struggling or becoming agitated, simply introduce tranquility—tranquility with the first *Jhana*, tranquility with the second *Jhana*, even with *Metta* in the first, second, third, and fourth. When radiating *Metta*, a touch of tranquility can smooth out any unease, making our path even smoother. This has been my experience, and I hope it will apply to you as well. This is all I have to say in terms of the path.

I've already mentioned that we shouldn't make a big deal out of any *Jhana*. Just let them be, step back, allow them to be. This is how we make significant progress. We will know we've made progress when our ease and comfort become much more exquisite, making our practice more effortless. The acid test of our practice is that the more effortless it becomes, the more successful it is. Therefore, don't exert

any effort. Our practice should flow effortlessly; we shouldn't exert any effort at all. Ideally, it should flow smoothly, like a pebble sinking and moving towards *Nibbāna*. If we find ourselves exerting effort, it indicates that something is not quite right.

So, this means we need to step back, let go, and maintain some distance. Just add more of that calmness factor. These insights come from trial and error, from the story of my life; it's been all about these things. These experiences have taught me valuable lessons, and I'm just trying to capture them here. If you find them useful, keep them as tips in your basket.

And I think that's how I would like to sum up. The state of *Nibbāna* is ultimate emptiness. There is nothing there; we experience it by letting go of everything.

So, I would like to add a final thought. I briefly discussed the insatiable drive behind all our pursuits. We were not content with living in a small house; we sought a larger one. Simple foods like bread and sandwiches didn't satisfy us; we craved exquisite dinners at fancy hotels. Our usual seaside resorts no longer sufficed; we yearned for exotic destinations like the Maldives and the Caribbean. Riding buses and trains became insufficient; we aspired to charter planes or use private jets. These examples illustrate that our desires have no bounds; they become increasingly refined. The sharper our senses become, the more discerning we are about our desires, and the more effort we expend on worldly pursuits.

We can only attain such sensory experiences by exerting more effort, by earning more. This perpetual drive inevitably leads us to surpass the boundaries of our moral life. It becomes unavoidable that in our pursuit of luxuries to meet heightened needs, our quest becomes even more challenging. We resort to various tactics to fulfill all our desires. That's why I mentioned that desire resides in the mind. It's a fleeting craving that amplifies until we're driven to chase these dreams and do whatever it takes to satisfy our mind's urges. However, if our mind settles and we let go of that craving, suddenly all these desires, ambitions, and luxuries lose their urgency. We no longer need these refined sensory experiences; we're content with whatever is offered or available to us.

Therefore, achieving a balanced mind and maintaining relaxation and calmness toward the arising of phenomena renders all these pursuits meaningless. If we're content with any facilities available to us, whether we stay in a five-star hotel or a bed and breakfast, we have fulfilled our needs, and that's what matters. Whether we drink from a gold cup or a porcelain cup, it's all the same – we've quenched our thirst, and that's what counts.

That's how we recognize a quenched state of mind. When the mind is satisfied, everything settles, and we find greater happiness in the present moment. When we ultimately experience *Nibbāna*, we have severed all ties with the universe. Everything attainable in this universe becomes insignificant because we no longer require the universe. We have completely freed ourselves from it.

Perhaps someday, scientists will master fusion reactors for clean energy, and cars will run solely on fusion power. Maybe then these achievements will drive human pursuits. What I'm saying is, if we see the freedom apart from the universe, we do not lament in letting go of it.

When we have experienced and arrived at the state of the Unconditioned, all these things simply do not matter. Whether there is a genius on Earth who can explore the entire galaxy, develop nuclear fusion reactors, or create quantum computers, why would we need quantum computers? What would we use them for? Our needs have vanished. In the state of *Nibbāna*, all needs, ambitions, cravings, desires, and consciousness have completely disappeared. There is no need at all, and we are content all the time. There is no desire, no craving, no consciousness, and no formations. All these conditioned phenomena have subsided completely.

That's how we know the experience personally. The Buddha said there is the ultimate free lunch, and that free lunch is the state of *Nibbāna*. It's a free lunch; we don't need to pay a single penny to experience it. There is no ticket to buy to enter the state of *Nibbāna*. This is the ultimate free lunch available to us all the time. This opportunity comes once in a lifetime. If we can find and appreciate this opportunity, we should take it. Should we seize this opportunity

or ignore it and pursue other opportunities that will never quench our thirst?

This is the choice we have, and all I'm saying is that as human beings, we have arrived at this sublime path where we can experience this. All we need to do is follow the path, go straight, and let go of any attachments. Don't identify with anything at all, and *Nibbāna* is right there in front of us. All we need to do is change our perspective, let things unfold, and *Nibbāna* arises before us.

So, we shouldn't take life so seriously. When we realize this fact, the importance of life and clinging to life diminishes. I believe it's been a long discussion, and I would like to conclude the exploration here, leaving some for future.

All I want to say is that for all beings in the universe who are suffering and unable to find a way out, may they find happiness. May all humans and all beings ultimately find a way to let go of suffering and take delight in this Dhamma that the Buddha has expounded. Thank you very much, and have a nice day.

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Glossary

General Terms

- **Advaita Vedanta:** A non-dualistic Hindu philosophy that teaches the oneness of the individual soul (Atman) and ultimate reality (Brahman), emphasizing that the perceived separation between self and universe is an illusion (maya).
- **Anton Zeilinger:** Austrian physicist awarded the Nobel Prize for his work on quantum entanglement.
- **Bernardo Kastrup:** Philosopher known for advocating idealism, the idea that consciousness is the fundamental nature of reality.
- **Big Bang:** The prevailing theory of the origin of the universe, suggesting it began from a singularity around 13.8 billion years ago.
- **Biocentrism:** Theory proposed by Robert Lanza, suggesting life and consciousness are central to the universe's existence.
- **Black Hole:** A region of space where gravity is so strong that not even light can escape.
- **Brahman:** In Hinduism, the ultimate reality. It is not a primary concept in TWIM or Buddhist teachings but is referenced in some *Suttas*.
- **CERN:** European Organization for Nuclear Research, known for its Large Hadron Collider and research in particle physics.
- **Conscious Agents Theory:** Donald Hoffman's theory that reality emerges from networks of conscious agents interacting with each other.
- **Dark Matter:** Hypothetical form of matter that makes up most of the universe's mass but does not emit light.
- **Decorative Permutations:** Mathematical concept referring to distinct arrangements of objects where order matters.
- **Donald Hoffman:** Cognitive scientist known for his theory that perception constructs rather than reveals reality.

- **Edwin Hubble:** Astronomer who discovered the universe is expanding, leading to the Big Bang theory.
- **Einstein (Albert):** Physicist famous for developing the theory of relativity, revolutionizing physics.
- **Entropy:** A measure of disorder or randomness in a system, often related to the second law of thermodynamics.
- **Game of Life:** A cellular automaton simulation created by mathematician John Conway, showing how complex patterns arise from simple rules.
- **General Theory of Relativity:** Einstein's theory describing gravity as the curvature of spacetime caused by mass.
- **Goldilocks Zone:** The habitable zone around a star where conditions are "just right" for life to exist.
- **Intelligent Design Theory:** The idea that certain features of the universe and life are best explained by an intelligent cause.
- **Locality:** Principle that objects are only directly influenced by their immediate surroundings, questioned by quantum entanglement.
- **Martin Rees:** British cosmologist and astrophysicist known for his work on the universe's structure and future.
- **Non-duality:** Philosophical and spiritual concept that all distinctions (e.g., subject and object) are ultimately illusory.
- **Parallel Universes:** Hypothesis that multiple, possibly infinite universes exist with different conditions and realities.
- **Physicalism:** The philosophical view that everything can be explained by physical processes and phenomena.
- **Planck Scale:** The smallest measurable size, where quantum gravity effects dominate, around 10^{-35} meters.
- **Quantum Entanglement:** Phenomenon where particles remain connected, so the state of one affects the other, regardless of distance.
- **Quantum Mechanics:** The branch of physics dealing with the behavior of particles on atomic and subatomic scales.

- **Quantum Tunneling:** Quantum phenomenon where particles pass through barriers that would be insurmountable in classical physics.
- **Robert Lanza:** Scientist known for the biocentrism theory, placing consciousness at the center of the universe.
- **Rupert Spira:** Philosopher and spiritual teacher, advocate of non-duality and the belief in universal consciousness.
- **Schrödinger (Erwin):** Physicist known for his contributions to quantum mechanics, especially Schrödinger's cat thought experiment.
- **Spooky Action at a Distance:** Einstein's term for quantum entanglement, where particles appear to affect each other instantaneously over large distances.
- **String Theory:** Theoretical framework proposing that the fundamental particles are one-dimensional "strings" rather than point particles.
- **Unitarity:** The principle in quantum mechanics that probabilities of all possible outcomes always add up to 1.
- **Universal Consciousness:** The idea that a universal, shared consciousness underlies all of existence.
- **Upanishads:** Ancient Indian texts that form the philosophical basis for Hinduism, focusing on spirituality and metaphysics.
- **Veda:** A collection of ancient sacred texts in Hinduism, containing hymns, rituals, and spiritual knowledge.
- **Vedanta:** A school of Hindu philosophy that emphasizes the unity of the individual soul (*Atman*) with the ultimate reality (*Brahman*).
- **Yoga:** A spiritual, mental, and physical practice originating in ancient India, aimed at attaining self-realization.

Buddhist Terms

- **6R:** A core technique in TWIM—Recognize, Release, Relax, Re-Smile, Return, and Repeat. It helps in letting go of distractions during meditation.
- **Abhidhamma:** A section of the Buddhist scriptures that offers a detailed and systematic analysis of the mind and phenomena. The Abhidhamma Pitaka is one of the three divisions of the Tipitaka (Pali Canon).
- **Ajahn Brahm:** Buddhist monk and meditation teacher known for his teachings on mindfulness and meditation.
- **Anapanasati:** Mindfulness of breathing. In TWIM, the focus is on gently observing the breath without forcing concentration.
- **Anupada Sutta:** A discourse that describes the gradual development of a meditator's progress through successive levels of *Jhana*.
- **Arahant:** In Buddhism, an Arahant is someone who has attained full enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*Samsara*). An Arahant has eradicated all defilements such as greed, hatred, and delusion, and has realized *Nibbana*.
- **Ariya:** Noble ones; those who have attained stages of enlightenment.
- **Arupa:** Formless realms of meditation, reached in the later stages of *Jhana* practice. These realms include the bases of Infinite Space, Consciousness, Nothingness, and Neither perception nor non-perception.
- **Awakening:** Attaining *Nibbana*, the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, where all defilements and suffering are fully eradicated.
- **Base of Infinite Space:** The first formless attainment in which one transcends physical perception and enters the perception of Infinite Space.
- **Base of Infinity of Consciousness:** A formless meditative state focused on boundless consciousness.

- **Base of Neither Perception nor Non-perception:** A very subtle meditative state where perception is so faint that it is neither fully present nor absent.
- **Base of Nothingness:** A meditative state focused on the perception of Nothingness, beyond all form.
- **Bhante Vimalaramsi:** A meditation teacher and founder of TWIM. He emphasizes mindfulness through a relaxed and joyful practice using the 6R process.
- **Bhikkhu:** A fully ordained Buddhist monk who has renounced worldly life to follow the monastic discipline and dedicate themselves to the path of spiritual practice.
- **Bhikkhu Nanananda:** A well-known Buddhist monk and scholar who extensively taught on Dependent Origination and *Nibbana*.
- **Brahmaviharas:** The four sublime states of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, central to TWIM practice.
- **Brahmin:** The priestly class in Hindu society, often mentioned in the Pali Canon as figures of authority who interacted with the Buddha.
- **Cessation (Nirodha):** The complete cessation of suffering, which is the goal of the Four Noble Truths.
- **Craving (Tanha):** The root of suffering, according to the Buddha's teachings. In TWIM, craving is let go using the 6Rs.
- **David Johnson:** An author and teacher of TWIM, known for "*The Path to Nibbana*", a key text on TWIM teachings.
- **Delson Armstrong:** A modern teacher using TWIM and author of *A Mind Without Craving*, contributing to the understanding of Dependent Origination and *Nibbana* through his personal experiences and writings.
- **Dependent Origination (Paticca Samuppada):** The principle explaining how suffering arises due to ignorance, craving, and clinging, and how it ceases through the cessation of these factors.
- **Dhamma:** The teachings of the Buddha, which point to the nature of reality and the path to liberation.

- **Disenchantment (Nibbida):** A stage of insight where one becomes disillusioned with the conditioned world, leading to dispassion.
- **Dispassion (Viraga):** A fading away of attachment and craving, leading to liberation.
- **Emptiness (Sunyata):** The realization that all phenomena are dependent, devoid of intrinsic self or identity.
- **Energy Awakening Factor (Viriya):** One of the Seven Factors of Awakening, involving persistence and effort in meditation.
- **Equanimity:** A balanced state of mind, free from emotional reactions. It is developed through the practice of meditation and becomes prominent in the fourth *Jhana* and higher.
- **First Jhana:** The initial stage of meditative happiness characterized by joy and physical ease.
- **Five Aggregates:** The components of the self: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.
- **Five Hindrances:** Mental states that hinder meditation: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt.
- **Five Precepts:** The basic ethical guidelines in Buddhism: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxicants.
- **Formless Realms (Arupa-loka):** Realms attained through advanced meditation, beyond physical form.
- **Fourth Jhana:** The highest form based meditative happiness, characterized by pure equanimity and mindfulness.
- **Jhana:** Absorbed states of meditative concentration as per many Buddhist teachers. However, TWIM teaches that *Jhanas* are states of joy and tranquility experienced naturally without force, through observing the mind and applying the 6Rs.
- **Jhana Factors:** The mental qualities that arise in *Jhana*: applied thought, sustained thought, joy, happiness, and unification of mind.

- **Karma (Kamma):** The law of moral cause and effect, where intentional actions influence future experiences.
- **Karuna:** Compassion. The desire to alleviate the suffering of others. *Karuna* naturally arises after *Metta*, as one becomes sensitive to the suffering of others and wishes to ease it.
- **Kasina:** A visual object used as a meditation aid in other forms of Buddhist meditation; not emphasized in TWIM.
- **Lumbini:** The birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, located in modern-day Nepal.
- **Luminous Mind:** A concept in Buddhism referring to the mind's inherently pure and radiant nature.
- **Mahakappa:** A great eon or cosmic cycle. It represents an incredibly long period of time required for the arising, development, and eventual dissolution of a world system. They have durations in the order of trillion trillion years.
- **Mara:** In Buddhism, *Mara* symbolizes temptation, desire, and the obstacles to enlightenment. Often referred to as the "Evil One," *Mara* represents the distractions and hindrances that prevent individuals from achieving liberation (*Nibbana*).
- **Metta:** Loving-kindness or benevolence. It is the wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering. In TWIM, *Metta* is the starting point of the *Brahmaviharas*, cultivating a heart of goodwill towards oneself and others.
- **Mindfulness (Sati):** Observing the movements of mind's attention from moment to moment, central to both TWIM and general Buddhist practice.
- **Mudita:** Sympathetic joy. The ability to feel happiness and joy in the success and well-being of others. Practicing *Mudita* allows one to cultivate joy without jealousy or envy.
- **Nagarjuna:** Indian philosopher and founder of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism, known for his doctrine of emptiness.
- **Nama Rupa:** Mind and body, referring to the mental and physical aspects of existence.

- **Nibbana:** The ultimate goal of Buddhist practice—freedom from suffering and the cycle of rebirth.
- **Nigantha:** A term used in early Buddhist texts to refer to followers of Jainism. The most prominent Nigantha during the Buddha's time was **Nigantha Nataputta**, known as Mahavira, the founder of Jainism.
- **Nimitta:** A mental sign, often a visual image, experienced during deep concentration in meditation. It is not a focus in TWIM, as TWIM emphasizes awareness of mind's movement rather than visual phenomena.
- **Nirodha (Samapatti):** A state of Cessation of perception and feeling, experienced by very advanced meditators.
- **Non-identification:** Not taking any phenomenon personally, an insight developed through the practice.
- **Pali:** An ancient language of Indian subcontinent in which the early Buddhist scriptures, including the Tipitaka, are written.
- **Paticca Samuppada:** See Dependent Origination.
- **Right Effort:** The practice of cultivating wholesome states of mind while letting go of unwholesome states.
- **Right View:** Understanding reality according to the Buddha's teachings, particularly the Four Noble Truths.
- **Sakadagami:** The second stage of enlightenment, known as a "once-returner." They are destined to be reborn only once more in the human realm before attaining full enlightenment (Arahantship).
- **Samadhi:** Collectedness or concentration, a key factor in both serenity and insight practices.
- **Samatha and Vipassana:** Tranquility and insight, two complementary aspects of meditation.
- **Samsara:** The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, perpetuated by ignorance and craving.
- **Sangha:** The community of Buddhist practitioners, traditionally referring to the monastic order of monks and nuns. It can also

include lay followers who support and practice the Buddha's teachings.

- **Sariputta:** One of the Buddha's chief disciples, known for his deep wisdom.
- **Sati:** Mindfulness, the continuous awareness of mind's movement.
- **Second Jhana:** A deeper meditative happiness where applied and sustained thought cease, leaving only joy (*pīti*) and happiness (*Sukha*) as the mind becomes more unified and focused in stillness.
- **Sister Khema:** A senior student and assistant teacher at Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center.
- **Sotapanna:** The first stage of enlightenment in Buddhism, also known as a "stream-enterer." A *Sotapanna* has eradicated the first three of the ten fetters and is guaranteed to attain full enlightenment in no more than seven lifetimes, never being reborn in lower realms.
- **Sutta:** A discourse or sermon given by the Buddha or his close disciples, forming part of the Buddhist scriptures. The *Suttas* are preserved in the Sutta Pitaka, one of the three sections of the Tipitaka (the Pali Canon).
- **Tathagata:** A title the Buddha used for himself, meaning "one who has thus gone" or "thus come," signifying someone who has attained full enlightenment and transcended samsara.
- **Thích Nhất Hạnh:** Vietnamese Buddhist monk, peace activist, and proponent of mindfulness practice.
- **Third Jhana:** A more refined state of meditative happiness where joy fades, and only happiness and equanimity remain. It is characterized by a deep sense of contentment and tranquility.
- **TWIM:** Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, emphasizing a relaxed, joyful practice that integrates mindfulness and loving-kindness.

Glossary

- **Upekkha:** Equanimity. A balanced, detached, and serene state of mind that remains unmoved by both pleasure and pain. *Upekkha* is the culmination of the *Brahmaviharas*.
- **Venerable Dhammagavesi:** A TWIM teacher associated with teaching the Dhamma in Asia.
- **Visuddhimagga:** A Theravada Buddhist text that outlines the path to purification and enlightenment.
- **Yonisomanasikara:** Wise or appropriate attention, seeing things as they really are.

