

Making Sense of the Pali Sutta:
the Wheel of the Sayings

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A Short History of the Pali Buddhist Canon

The Pali Canon is the oldest surviving record of the teachings of Siddhatta Gautama of India (566-486 B.C.), who came to be known as “the Buddha”. As Gautama taught, his words were submitted to memory by his disciples; after Gautama’s death, a large assembly of senior monks rehearsed the material and established a collection whose authenticity was agreed upon. The collection was passed along orally within the community of monks and nuns, and as members of the community travelled to neighboring kingdoms, the collection was disseminated. The Canon arrived in Ceylon around the 3rd century B.C.; here, around the year 35 B.C., the collection was written down in the dialect in which it had arrived, Pali (“Indian Buddhism”, A.K. Warder, pub. Motilal Barnarsidass, 2nd ed 1980, pg 296, also pg 319-21; date of birth/death, pg 44).

Eventually, copies of the Pali Canon were taken to Burma and Siam. In the nineteenth century, the reigning king of Siam donated an edition to a group of British academics for translation; the Pali Text Society, as the group was called, published the last of the principal Sutta volumes in English in 1959.

Notes on the Usage of Translations

The author quotes from the Sutta translations by the Pali Text Society (see the bibliography for an explanation of the author's reference notation).

The sermon volumes translated by the Pali Text Society belong to the Sthaviravada tradition, and in this tradition the five collections of the sermons are referred to as the five “Nikayas”. However, some of the early schools of Buddhism may not have had a fifth Nikaya; therefore, any reference to “Sutta” (sermon) in this work refers to the four principal Nikayas only (see “Indian Buddhism”, A. K. Warder, pg 202-203).

The teachings were frequently addressed to the order of monks; the word “monks” and the associated masculine pronouns have here been rendered gender-neutral to allow readers of both sexes to read the teaching as though it were addressed to them.

The Pali word “ariya” has been rendered as “ariyan” by some translators, as “noble” by others; almost certainly, the meaning which the modern reader associates with the word “ariyan” is not the meaning which Gautama intended. Where “ariyan” appeared in the translated text, “[noble]” has been inserted (e.g. “Pali Buddhist Texts” by Rune E. A. Johansson, Curzon Press, 2nd ed 1977. pg 26; also, “The Path of the Buddha”, edited by Kenneth W. Morgan, Ronald Press Company. pg 101, essay by U Thittila).

Gautama was addressed as “lord” or “exalted one”; these titles have been replaced by his name, so that what he taught may remain the focus of attention, rather than who he was.

All the sayings quoted were attributed to Gautama, unless otherwise noted.

In this work, material in parenthesis within a quotation has been added by the translator; material in brackets has been added by the author.

“... aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, [a person] wins joy and happiness and something more peaceful than that.”

(MN I 464, Vol 2 pg 137)

A Way to Awakening

When he was thirty, Gautama left home in search of religious insight. He studied under at least two of the famous teachers of his day, and although he mastered what they had to teach, he found his spiritual needs still unsatisfied; he wandered on, and joined a group of five other seekers who were undertaking austerities to reach their goal. Chief among these austerities was fasting, and eventually Gautama found himself close to death, although he had still not found peace of mind; reflecting, he thought to himself (as he later described to the Jain Aggivessana):

“I know that while my father, the Sakyan, was ploughing, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, I entered on the first meditation, which is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought, is born of aloofness, and is rapturous and joyful, and while abiding therein, I thought: ‘Now could this be a way to awakening?’ Then, following on my mindfulness, Aggivissana, there was the consciousness: This is itself the Way to awakening. This occurred to me, Aggivissana: ‘Now, am I afraid of that happiness which is happiness apart from sense-pleasures, apart from unskilled states of mind?’ This occurred to me...: I am not afraid of that happiness which is happiness apart from sense-pleasures, apart from unskilled states of mind.”

(MN 1 246-247, Vol I pg 301)

This was a critical juncture in Gautama's life; he gave up the extreme austerities he had been practicing, took food, and rebuilt his strength. For this he was shunned by his co-religionists, but pursuing his conviction of the nature of “the Way”, he eventually came to “that excellent knowledge and vision” for which he had sought (MN I 163-175, Vol. I pg 207-219).

As a child, Gautama probably did not think of himself as being “aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind”; neither was he likely to think of himself as “entering on the first meditation, which is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought, is born of aloofness, and is rapturous and joyful”. Most likely, these descriptions he learned or coined later. As a child, Gautama experienced a peculiar kind of happiness sitting under a tree while his father did the plowing; as an adult, Gautama realized that the meditation marked by this peculiar happiness was the path to what he was seeking.

“Whatever happiness, whatever joy, Ananda, arises in consequence of these five strands of sense-pleasures, it is called happiness in sense-pleasures.

Whoever, Ananda, should speak thus: ‘This is the highest happiness and joy that creatures experience’—this I cannot allow on [their] part. What is the reason for this? There is, Ananda, another happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness. And what, Ananda, is this other happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness? Here, Ananda, a [person], aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, enters and abides in the first meditation that is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought, is born of aloofness and is rapturous and joyful. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and exquisite than that happiness.”

(MN I 398-399, Vol II pg 67)

The Induction of the First Meditative State

Gautama found the satisfaction he had sought in meditation, and although he gave only a partial exposition of the practice in any given speech, a complete explanation can be pieced together from the entire collection of his lectures.

Gautama implied that the first of the meditative states is present at such time as awareness is extended to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mental states (MN III 136, Vol. III pg 182). Although Gautama explained how awareness might be extended to these four fields, he carefully left open the possibility that awareness extends to these areas automatically if any hindrances to the natural course of attention are overcome. What such hindrances might consist of, and how they might be overcome, must await the introduction of specialized vocabulary in other chapters; meanwhile, the explanation of how awareness may be extended to the four fields as above will be recounted.

With regard to “mindfulness” of the four fields, Gautama always spoke of mindfulness of the body first:

“Mindful... breathe in, mindful... breathe out. Whether... breathing in a long (breath) ... comprehend, ‘I am breathing in a long (breath)’; or whether... breathing out a long (breath), ... comprehend, ‘I am breathing out a long (breath)’; or whether... breathing in a short (breath),... comprehend, ‘I am breathing in a short (breath)’; or whether... breathing out a short (breath)... comprehend ‘I am breathing out a short (breath).”

(MN III, 82-83, Vol III pg 124-125)

The instruction here begins with an awareness of each movement of breath, and proceeds with an awareness of the length as well as the direction of each movement of breath. Gautama continued:

“...Train... , thinking, ‘I will breathe in experiencing the whole body.’ ... Train... , thinking, ‘I will breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ ...Train... , thinking, ‘I will breathe in tranquillising the activity of body.’ ...Train... , thinking, ‘I will breathe out tranquillising the activity of body.’”

(Ibid)

Gautama taught that mindfulness of the body is sufficient when:

“... thinking ‘there is the body’, [one’s] mindfulness is established precisely to the extent necessary just for knowledge, just for remembrance, [and one] fares along independently of and not grasping anything in the world”

(MN I 57, Vol I pg 73)

Having described how awareness might be extended to the body, Gautama went on to describe how awareness might be extended to other areas of experience:

“(Train), thinking, ‘I will breathe in... breathe out experiencing rapture’. (Train), thinking, ‘I will breathe in... out experiencing joy’: (Train), thinking, ‘I will breathe in... breathe out experiencing the activity of thought... tranquillising the activity of thought... experiencing thoughts... rejoicing in thought... concentrating thought... freeing thought’. (Train), thinking, ‘I will breathe in... breathe out beholding impermanence... beholding detachment... beholding stopping... beholding casting away....”

(MN III 82-83, Vol III pg 124-125)

In this description, attention is anchored in the body while awareness is extended to successive experiences. Of these experiences, only “the beholdings” (“beholding impermanence”, etc.) are unique to Gautama’s teachings; their full explanation must await other chapters, yet a preliminary explanation may be given as follows: “beholding impermanence” is recognizing the impermanence of all phenomena; “beholding detachment” is recognizing the lack of any self in what is impermanent; “beholding stopping” is recognizing a cessation of ignorance of what really is; and “beholding casting away” is recognizing an abandonment of conditions associated with ignorance.

Gautama implied that the first of the meditative states is extant when mindfulness is applied to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mental states. The awarenesses of the body tied to inhalation or exhalation (as above), Gautama considered an example of mindfulness of the body. The awarenesses of rapture and joy and of activity of thought tied to inhalation or exhalation, Gautama considered an example of mindfulness of the feelings (rapture and joy, feelings of the body– activity of thought and tranquillizing the activity of thought, feelings of mind). The awarenesses of “experiencing thoughts”, “rejoicing in thought”, “concentrating thought”, and “freeing thought” in conjunction with inhalation or exhalation, Gautama considered an example of mindfulness of the mind; the awarenesses of the beholdings in conjunction with inhalation and exhalation, he considered an example of mindfulness of states of mind.

“Whoever, Ananda, should speak thus: ‘This [the first meditative state] is the highest happiness and joy that creatures experience’—this I cannot allow on [their] part. What is the reason for this? There is, Ananda, another happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness. And what, Ananda, is this other happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness? Here, Ananda, [an individual], by allaying initial and discursive thought, [their] mind inwardly tranquillised and fixed on one point, enters and abides in the second meditation which is devoid of initial and discursive thought, is born of concentration, and is rapturous and joyful. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and joyful than that happiness.

Whoever, Ananda, should speak thus... And what, Ananda, is this other happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness? Here, Ananda, [an individual], by the fading out of rapture, abides with equanimity, attentive and clearly conscious, and [they] experience in [their] person that happiness of which the [noble ones] say: ‘Joyful lives [the one] who has equanimity and is mindful’. And entering on the third meditation [they] abide in it. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and exquisite than that happiness.

Whoever, Ananda, should speak thus... And what, Ananda is the other happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness? Here, Ananda, [an individual], by getting rid of happiness and by getting rid of anguish, by the going down of [their] former pleasures and sorrows, enters and abides in the fourth meditation which has neither anguish nor happiness, and which is entirely purified by equanimity and mindfulness. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and exquisite than that happiness.

(MN I 398-399, Vol II pg 67)

The Initial States

Gautama implied that when awareness is extended to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mental states, the first of the initial meditative states is extant; elsewhere, he implied that when the first of the initial states is extant, willful activity of speech ceases.

All the states of meditation involve a cessation of willful activity; that is to say, volition ceases in the states of meditation, at first with regard to speech, then with regard to the body, and lastly in the direction of consciousness itself. The cessation of volition in consciousness is the culmination of the meditative experience, yet even with the induction of the first meditative state the awareness of the possibility of such a culmination takes place. This is because the happiness of meditation is derived from the experience of activity spontaneously arising and ceasing, and to the extent that any action is willfully brought to pass rather than simply observed to take place, an intuition of the existence of a further state of meditation must follow.

Gautama described four initial meditative states (or “jhanas”) and five subsequent states (with some exceptions; see MN III 162, Vol III 207 on five rupajhanas). The initial states and the further states are of fundamentally different character, so much so that the induction of the further states is never spoken of as proceeding from the initial states (*per se*); nevertheless, a set of nine meditative states is described in order in so many places in the Sutta that there can be no doubt that the further states depend on the initial states in some way, and likewise there can be no doubt that the set of nine represented the complete meditative experience as far as Gautama was concerned.

Gautama continued his description of the initial meditative states with an outline of the induction of the second:

“... fare along contemplating the body in the body, but do not apply yourself to a train of thought connected with the body; fare along contemplating the feelings in the feelings ... the mind in the mind... mental states in mental states, but do not apply yourself to a train of thought connected with mental states. . . . By allaying initial and discursive thought, with the mind subjectively tranquillized and fixed on one point, [one] enters on and abides in the second meditation...”

(MN III 136, Vol III pg 182)

No further explanation was given for the phrase “with the mind... fixed on one point”. Most likely, Gautama intended to describe the mind fixed on what transpires in the present, as opposed to the mind directed toward the future or the past (SN V 155-156, Vol V pg 135-136).

The second meditative state is accompanied by a feeling of rapture and joy; Gautama provided an analogy for the experience:

“... like a pool of water with water welling up within it, but which has no inlet for water from the eastern... western... northern... or southern side, and even if the god does not send down showers upon it from time to time, yet the current of cool water

having welled up from that pool will drench, saturate, permeate, suffuse that pool with cool water. Even so... , drench, saturate, permeate, suffuse this very body with the rapture and joy that are born of concentration...”

(MN III 93, Vol III pg 133)

The third meditative state is characterized as follows:

“... by the fading out of rapture, [one] abides with equanimity, attentive and clearly conscious, and [one] experiences in [one’s] person that happiness of which (it is Said): ‘Joyful lives [the person] who has equanimity and is mindful’.”

(MN I 399, Vol I pg 67)

In another lecture Gautama defined what he meant by “equanimity”; he specified that there are two forms of equanimity, one which belongs to the further meditative states, and one which does not. Since the third meditative state does not belong to the further states, the equanimity which applies is:

“... equanimity in face of multiformity, connected with multiformity... [which is] equanimity among material shapes, among sounds, smells, flavours, touches.”

(MN III 220, Vol III pg 268)

This is equanimity with regard to sensory contacts in the five senses, excluding the sixth sense of the mind.

In his lectures, Gautama often mentioned the five senses apart from the sixth; this was because he saw these senses, apart from the mind, as a primary source of attachment, often referring to them as the “five strands” or the “five bonds”. Gautama described the nature of this bondage in more detail:

‘The untaught manyfolk... knows of no refuge from painful feeling save sensual pleasure. Delighting in that sensual pleasure, the lurking tendency to sensual pleasure fastens on [that person] ... [As such a person lacks understanding], the lurking tendency to ignorance of neutral feeling [also] fastens on [that person].’

(SN IV 208, Vol IV pg 140)

There is, said Gautama, “a refuge from painful feeling apart from sensual ease” which allows for freedom from such tendencies; the likelihood is that he referred to the equanimity of the initial meditative states.

A practice like that described for the second meditative state is described for the third; note that the joy which is the focus of this practice is of a different nature than that “excellent and exquisite” happiness which is intrinsic in meditation (MN I 398-400, Vol I pg 67):

“As in a pond of white...or red...or blue lotuses, some white... or red... or blue lotuses are born in the water, grow up in the water, never rising above the surface but

flourishing beneath it and from their roots to their tips are drenched, saturated, permeated, suffused by cool water; even so, ...drench, saturate, permeate, suffuse this very body with the joy that has no rapture; there is no part of [the] whole body that is not suffused with the joy that has no rapture.”

(MN III 93, Vol III pg 133)

The fourth of the initial meditative states is outlined as follows:

“By getting rid of joy, by getting rid of anguish, by the going down of [one’s] former pleasures and sorrows, [one enters] into and [abides] in the fourth meditation which has neither anguish nor joy, and which is entirely purified by equanimity and mindfulness.”

(MN 1 22, Vol I pg 28)

Gautama did not elaborate on how to get rid of joy to enter the fourth meditation. However, in the context above Gautama speaks of joy and anguish as though they were two sides of the same coin, and while he said nothing about the way going to the ending of joy, he did speak at length about the way going to the ending of anguish.

Anguish may be brought to an end, said Gautama, when the cause of anguish has been distinguished; the cause to which he attested was “grasping after self”, deriving a sense of self from the phenomena of body or mind (MN 1511-512, Vol II pg 190; see also MN 1 185, Vol I pg 231). Phenomena of the body or mind cannot rightly be called one’s own, as Gautama pointed out to the Jain Aggivessana:

“What do you think about this, Aggivessana? When you speak thus: ‘Material shape is my self’, have you power over this material shape of yours (and can say) ‘Let my material shape be thus, Let my material shape be not thus?’ When you speak thus: ‘Feeling ... perception... the habitual tendencies... consciousness is my self: have you power over this feeling ... perception... the habitual tendencies... consciousness of yours (and can say): ‘Let my consciousness be such, let my consciousness not be such?’”

(MN 1 230-232, Vol I pgs 284-286)

“The habitual tendencies” Gautama referred to here were the “tendencies” to exercise will toward sensory contact, one “tendency” for each of the senses (including the sense of mind; SN III 60-61, Vol III pg 53).

Although Gautama refuted any notion of self derived from the phenomena of body and mind, he acknowledged the tendency of individuals to seize upon such a notion, and taught mindfulness of the state of mind which results; in particular, was the state of mind characterized by the grasping of material form, feeling, perception, habitual tendency, or consciousness? Further, by which of the four modes of inference was phenomena grasped: for example, with regard to material form, was the thought “I am this body”, or “I am not this body”, or “I am neither this body nor not this body”, or “I am both this body and not this body”?

Not only did Gautama refute the validity of any notion of self derived from the phenomena of body and mind, but he further stated that any notion of self apart from these phenomena was purely an indulgence; not only could such a thing not be proven one way or another, but the adoption of any such belief distracted the individual from pursuing a verifiable path leading to the ending of anguish. namely the mindfulness of body, of feelings, of mind, and of mental states (indulgence: MN I 426-432, Vol II pg 98-101; the path: MN I 55-56, Vol I pg 71; verifiable: see DN II 100-101, Vol II 108-109).

The description of the fourth meditative state begins with the admonition. “By getting rid of Joy, by getting rid of anguish”. The “getting rid of anguish” appears to follow from mindfulness in the four fields, in particular from mindfulness of the state of mind as above (or as in “the beholdings”, last chapter); perhaps the getting rid of joy takes place at the same time, by the same means.

Gautama described extending the mind of the fourth meditative state with an analogy:

“ ... just as [one] might sit with [one’s] head swathed in a clean cloth so that not a portion of it was not in contact with that clean cloth; even so [one] sits suffusing [one’s] body with purity...”

(AN III 25-26, Vol III pg 19)

The induction of the first three of the four initial meditative states may sometimes take a different form; here is Gautama’s pragmatic counsel “for the direction of mind, and... for the non-direction of mind”:

“As [one] abides in body contemplating body, either some bodily object arises. or bodily discomfort or drowsiness of mind scatters [one’s] thoughts abroad to externals. Thereupon... [one’s] attention should be directed to some pleasurable object of thought. As [one] thus directs it to some pleasurable object of thought. delight springs up in [one’s being]. In [one] thus delighted, arises zest. Full of zest [one’s] body is calmed down. With body so calmed [one] experiences ease. The mind of one at ease is concentrated. [One] thus reflects: The aim on which I set my mind I have attained. Come. let me withdraw my mind (from the pleasurable object of thought). So [one] withdraws [one’s] mind therefrom, and neither starts nor carries on thought-process. Thus [one] is fully conscious: I am without thought initial or sustained. I am inwardly mindful. I am at ease.

Again ... [one] abides contemplating feelings ... mind... [one] abides contemplating mind-states in mind-states... [as before with the body].

Such... is the practice for the direction of mind.

And what... is the practice for the non-direction of mind? [First,] by not directing [one’s] mind to externals, [one] is fully aware: My mind is not directed to externals. Then [one] is fully aware: My mind is not concentrated either on what is before or on what is behind, but it is set free, it is undirected. Then [one] is fully aware: In body contemplating body I abide, ardent, composed and mindful. I am at ease.

And [one] does the same with regard to feelings ... to mind... and mind-states. Thus [one] is fully aware: In mind-states contemplating mind-states I abide, ardent,

composed and mindful. I am at ease.”

(SN V 155-156, Vol V pg 135-136)

“Whoever, Ananda, should speak thus: ‘This [the fourth meditative state] is the highest happiness and joy that creatures experience’-this I cannot allow on [their] part. What is the reason for this? There is, Ananda, another happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness. And what, Ananda, is this other happiness more excellent and exquisite than that happiness? Here, Ananda, a [person], by wholly transcending perceptions of material shapes, by the going down of perceptions due to sensory impressions, by not attending to perceptions of difference, thinking: ‘Ether is unending’, enters and abides in the plane of infinite ether. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and exquisite than that happiness.

...[a person], by wholly transcending the plane of infinite ether and thinking: ‘Consciousness is unending’, enters and abides in the plane of infinite consciousness...
...[a person], by wholly transcending the plane of infinite consciousness, and thinking: ‘There is no thing’, enters and abides in the plane of no-thing...
...[a person], by wholly transcending the plane of no-thing, enters and abides in the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

...[a person], by wholly transcending the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, enters and abides in the stopping of perceiving and feeling. This, Ananda, is the other happiness that is more excellent and exquisite than that happiness.”

(MN I 398-400. Vol II pg 68-69)

The Further States

The equanimity of the initial meditative states is “equanimity in face of multiformity” , which Gautama defines as “equanimity among material shapes, among sounds, smells, flavours, touches.” The first four further meditative states are also marked by equanimity, this being:

“... equanimity in face of uniformity, connected with uniformity. And what... is equanimity in face of uniformity, connected with uniformity? It is... equanimity connected with the plane of infinite ether, connected with the plane of infinite consciousness, connected with the plane of no-thing, connected with the plane of neither-perception-nor-nonperception.”

(MN III 220, Vol III pg 268-269)

These “planes” are precisely the first four further meditative states, so that for anyone who has not experienced the further states, the definition is circular. However, this much can be surmised from the use of the word "uniformity" and from Gautama's acknowledgment that some level of sensory awareness continues through all the meditative states (MN III 109, Vol III pg 152): the equanimity of the further states is no longer equanimity in the face of the multiformity of sensory experience, but rather equanimity in the face of a perceived singularity underlying all sensory experience. Perhaps the modern nomenclature would render this “equanimity with regard to the stream of consciousness”.

The shift from multiformity to uniformity is echoed in the description of the first of the further meditative states:

“... wholly transcending perceptions of material shapes, by the going down of perceptions due to sensory impressions, by not reflecting on the perceptions of multiformity, thinking: ‘Ether [space] is unending’, may [one] enter on and abide in the plane of infinite ether.”

(MN I 41, Vol I pg 53)

The exact meaning of “wholly transcending perceptions of material shapes” is a curious point in the literature of the Sutta. In several places in the Sutta, “the plane of infinite ether” is not offered as the first of the further states, but rather is given as the fourth in a series of eight “deliverances”. The “perceptions of material shapes” which are to be wholly transcended are apparently the perceptions outlined in the first two of these “deliverances”, as can be seen by the description of the first four:

“A man possessed of form sees forms—this is the first stage of deliverance.

Unaware of his own form, he sees forms external to himself—this is the second stage of deliverance.

With the thought, ‘it is well’, he becomes intent—this is the third stage of deliverance.

By passing quite beyond all idea of form, by putting an end to all idea of sensory impact, by paying no attention to the idea of multiformity, [a person], thinking ‘it is all infinite space’, reaches (mentally) and remains in the state of mind in which the

idea of the infinity of space is the only idea that is present—this is the fourth stage of deliverance.”

(DN II 112, Vol II pg 119-120; see also AN I 139-40, Vol I pg 36-37)

In a teaching to his disciple Ananda, Gautama outlines how attachment to the perception of material shape may be overcome and an “emptiness” entered into:

“I, Ananda, do not behold one material shape wherein is delight, wherein is content, but that from its changing and becoming otherwise there will not arise grief, suffering, lamentation, and despair.

But this abiding, Ananda, has been fully awakened to by the Tathagata [literally, “one who has gone beyond”], that is to say, by not attending to any signs, the entering on and abiding in an inward emptiness... Wherefore, Ananda, if [one] should desire: ‘Entering on an inward emptiness, may I dwell therein’, that [person], Ananda, should steady, calm, make one-pointed and concentrate [the] mind precisely on what is inward.

And how, Ananda. does [one] steady, calm, make one-pointed and concentrate [the] mind precisely on what is inward? As to this, Ananda, [the person], aloof from pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, entering on it abides in the first [initial] meditation... the second ... the third... the fourth meditation. Even so, Ananda, does [one] steady, calm, make one pointed, and concentrate [the] mind precisely on what is inward.”

(MN III 111-112, Vol III pg 154-156)

By “not attending to any signs [of the phenomenal world]”, one enters on and abides in “internal emptiness”, and this is elaborated as the induction of the first four meditative states, with special attention to what is inward. Gautama continued his instruction by prescribing attention to external emptiness as well:

“[One] attends to an inward emptiness... [One] attends to an external emptiness. [One] attends to an internal and to an external emptiness.”

(Ibid)

Attendance to external emptiness echoes attention to the external in the four fields of mindfulness:

“Thus [one] fares along contemplating the body in the body internally, or [one] fares along contemplating the body in the body externally, or [one] fares along contemplating the body in the body internally and externally [repeated with regard to the feelings, the mind, mental states].”

(MN 156, Vol I pg 72)

“Externally” is here interpreted by commentators to mean with regard to someone else’s

body, and “internally and externally” to mean now one, now the other, but not both simultaneously.

Gautama continued his discourse on abiding in emptiness by noting that even when the abidings as above are obtained, satisfaction may not necessarily follow. If satisfaction is not experienced, then:

“ ... [One] should steady, calm, make one-pointed and concentrate [the] mind precisely on what is Inward in that earlier sign of concentration itself.”

(MN III 112, Vol III pg 156)

“That earlier sign of concentration itself” probably refers to a characteristic or combination of particulars unique to the given concentration. Whenever a state of concentration is induced, there are particulars of awareness unique to that concentration; furthermore, these particulars tend to remain in some form or another as the concentration is continued. By focusing on what is inward in the characteristic or “Sign” of the concentration, Gautama said, any consciousness of dissatisfaction with “internal and external emptiness” should become consciousness of satisfaction.

The basic description of an internal concentration, an external concentration, and a consciousness of satisfaction actually parallels the description of the first three of the eight “deliverances”. In place of “emptiness”, the first and second of the “deliverances” are concerned with “[seeing] material shapes” (MN III 222, Vol III pg 270); in place of the “consciousness of satisfaction”, the third “deliverance” consists of the thought “it is well”.

A method is prescribed for the induction of the third of the “deliverances” (and the fourth through the sixth), although no mention of the first and second “deliverances” is made:

“[One] dwells, having suffused the first quarter [of the world] with friendliness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; Just so above, below, across; [one] dwells having suffused the whole world everywhere, in every way, with a mind of friendliness that is far-reaching, wide-spread, immeasurable, without enmity, without malevolence. [One] dwells having suffused the first quarter with a mind of compassion... sympathetic joy... equanimity... that is far-reaching, wide-spread, immeasurable, without enmity, without malevolence.”

(MN I 38, Vol I pg 48)

Gautama declared that the heart’s release by goodwill as above has the third “deliverance” as its excellence.

If the third “deliverance” is equally characterized by the “mind of friendliness”, by the thought “it is well”, and by a “consciousness of satisfaction” (with “abiding in internal and external emptiness”), then any of the three methods of induction may be expected to yield the same result; in particular, the method of a “consciousness of satisfaction” must yield the same “mind of friendliness” described above. As previously related, the consciousness of satisfaction” appears to be derived from the induction of the initial meditative states through the internal and external application of mindfulness; the nonmaterial happiness of the initial meditative states, when induced through such internal and external mindfulness, would in fact seem likely to produce a universal “mind of friendliness” (see also MN I

247, Vol I pg 302).

Gautama declared that the heart's release by compassion, realized in the same manner as the heart's release by friendliness, has "the infinity of ether" as its excellence; likewise, the heart's release by sympathetic joy has "the sphere of infinite consciousness" as its excellence, and the heart's release by equanimity has "the sphere wherein nought exists" as its excellence (SN V 118-120, Vol V pg 100-102).

The heart's release by compassion is perhaps the same all over the world; however, the spirit of compassion appears to differ from one culture to another, perhaps even from one religionist to another within the same culture. To understand Gautama's sense of compassion, his insight into the nature of things must be appreciated, particularly his insight into the nature of consciousness. In a dialogue with the monk Sati, the origins of consciousness are laid out, as a contrast to the monk's view:

"[Gautama] spoke thus to the monk Sati, a fisherman's son, as he was sitting down at a respectful distance:

'Is it true, as is said, that a pernicious view like this has accrued to you, Sati: "In so far as I understand [the truth] taught by [Gautama], it is that this consciousness itself runs on, fares on, not another"?'

'Even so do I... understand [the teaching]'

'What is this consciousness, Sati?'

'It is this... that speaks, that feels, that experiences now here, now there, the fruition of deeds that are lovely and that are depraved.'

[Gautama rebukes Sati for his misrepresentation of Gautama's teaching, and continues:] It is because... an appropriate condition arises that consciousness is known by this or that name: if consciousness arises because of eye and material shapes, it is known as visual consciousness; if consciousness arises because of ear and sounds, it is known as auditory consciousness; [so for the nose/smells/olfactory consciousness, tongue/tastes/gustatory consciousness, body/touches/tactile consciousness, mind/mental objects/mental consciousness]. ...As a fire burns because of this or that appropriate condition, by that it is known: if a fire burns because of sticks, it is known as a stick-fire; and if a fire burns because of chips, it is known as a chip-fire; ... and so with regard to grass, cow-dung, chaff, and rubbish."

(MN I 258-259, Vol I pg 313-315)

Consciousness is, in this analysis, a condition which exists in response to sense and sense object. Sense and sense object give rise to the appropriate consciousness; in the absence of sense and sense object, that form of consciousness does not exist.

The logic Gautama used may be stated for any condition necessary and sufficient to another condition: when this condition exists, then that condition comes to be; when this condition ceases, then that condition does not come to be. Gautama utilized this logic extensively, as at the close of his dialogue with Sati in a description of the consequences of enlightened sense contact:

"When [one] has seen a material shape through the eye, [one] does not feel attraction for agreeable material shapes, [one] does not feel repugnance for disagreeable

material shapes; and [one] dwells with mindfulness aroused as to the body... [One] who has thus got rid of compliance and antipathy, whatever feeling [that person] feels-pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant [one] does not delight in that feeling, does not welcome it or persist in cleaving to it. From not delighting in that feeling ... , from not welcoming it, from not persisting in cleaving to it, whatever was delight in those feelings is stopped. From the stopping of [one's] delight is the stopping of grasping; from the stopping of grasping is the stopping of becoming; from the stopping of becoming is the stopping of birth; from the stopping of birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair are stopped. Such is the stopping of this entire mass of anguish [similarly for sound/the ear, scent/the nose, savor/the tongue, touch/the body, mental object/the mind].”

(MN 1270, Vol I pg 323-324)

Here the stopping of one condition is the stopping of all subsequent conditions, including the condition of anguish.

The first condition in the chain above is delight in a feeling. Elsewhere in the Sutta, “feeling” appears as the sixth condition of a larger chain; the enlarged set is referred to as “conditioned genesis” (MN III 63-64, Vol III pg 107), or “the causal law” (SN II 2, Vol II pg 2):

“Conditioned by ignorance activities come to pass; conditioned by activities consciousness, conditioned by consciousness name-and-shape, conditioned by name-and-shape sense, conditioned by sense contact, conditioned by contact feeling, conditioned by feeling craving, conditioned by craving grasping, conditioned by grasping becoming, conditioned by becoming birth, conditioned by birth old age-and-death, grief, lamenting, suffering, sorrow, despair come to pass. Such is the uprising of this entire mass of ill.”

(SN II 2, Vol II pg 2)

The “activities” are defined as volitive or “determinate” bodily deed, speech, or thought (AN III 415, Vol III pg 294 and SN II 3, Vol II pg 4; the cessation of the activities, meanwhile, is identified with the cessation of speech, the cessation of “inbreathing and outbreathing”, and the cessation of “perception and feeling”, SN IV 217 Vol IV pg 146). “Name-and-shape” is more difficult to make precise from the material in the Sutta; Gautama defined “name” as “feeling, perception, will, contact, and work of mind”, while “shape” was given as “the four great elements [air, fire, earth, and water] and the shape derived from them”. “Name and shape” consisted of the combination of the two (SN II 3, Vol II pg 4). By “the causal law” , with ignorance arises a chain of conditions one after another, the last of which is anguish; with the ceasing of ignorance the chain of conditions ceases, including anguish. This “law” is remarkable for the lack of any agency in the arising and ceasing of conditions; there is no “I” or “me” or “mine” necessary to these events, as Gautama made clear in a conversation with Moliya-Phaggunā:

“who now is it, [Gautama], who feeds on the consciousness sustenance?”

Not a fit question. said [Gautama]. I am not saying [someone] feeds on. If I were saying so, to that the question would be a fit one. But I am not saying so. And I not

saying so, if you were to ask me ‘of what, now... is consciousness the sustenance?’ this were a fit question. And the fit answer to it is: the consciousness sustenance is the cause of renewed becoming, of rebirth in the future. When that is come to pass, is present, the sixfold sense sphere becomes, and conditioned by the sixfold sense-sphere contact becomes.’

‘Who now... exercises contact?’

Not a fit question... I am not saying [someone] exercises contact... if you were to ask thus: ‘Conditioned now by what... is contact?’ this were a fit question. And the answer would be: ‘conditioned by the sixfold sense-sphere is contact; conditioned by contact is feeling.’

‘Who now... is it who feels?’

Not a fit question... [and so on, through: conditioned by feeling is craving, by craving grasping, by grasping becoming, hence the entire mass of ill].”

(SN II 12-13, Vol II pg 9-10)

Of particular significance is the implied lack of agency with regard to willed activity, the second condition in “conditioned genesis”. To use the phraseology of the dialogue above, the question might be put: who is it exercises will in deed, speech, and thought? The answer surely would be that the question is improper; conditioned by ignorance, the exercise of will (in habitual activity) comes to be.

Gautama analyzed volition in action extensively, and he made clear that in his view even well-meant actions with beneficial results are subject to the causal law:

“Where there have been deeds... personal weal and woe arise in consequence of the will there was in the deeds. Where there has been speech-where there has been thought, personal weal and woe arise in consequence of the will there was in the speech-in the thought.

Either we of ourselves... plan those planned deeds conditioned by ignorance, whence so caused arises personal weal and woe, or others plan those planned deeds that we do conditioned by ignorance, whence so conditioned arises personal weal and woe. Either they are done deliberately, or we do them unwittingly. Thence both ways arises personal weal and woe. So also is it where there has been speech, where there has been thought. Either we plan, speaking, thinking deliberately, or others plan, so that we speak, think unwittingly. Thence arises personal weal and woe. In these six cases ignorance is followed after.

But from the utter fading away and cessation of ignorance... those deeds are not, whence so conditioned arises personal weal and woe. Neither is that speech, nor that thought... as occasion they are not. that so conditioned there might arise personal weal and woe.”

(SN II 37-41, Vol II pg 31-32)

The spirit of compassion born of this insight may well be said to have a different flavor than that born of Western philosophy and religion, for in this viewpoint even the action willed according to the best of intentions is not without a residue of suffering, and only when the condition of ignorance ceases does freedom from the genesis of suffering really ex-

ist.

The compassion which induces the first of the further states is, however, not solely dependent on insight into conditioned genesis for its awakening. Gautama experienced the first three further meditative states prior to his enlightenment (and therefore prior to his insight into the causal law), as did others of his day (MN I 165-166, Vol I pg 209-210), and the three further states represent the “excellence of the heart’s release” through the extension of compassion, the “excellence of the heart’s release” through sympathetic joy, and the “excellence of the heart’s release” through equanimity respectively (SN V 118-120, Vol V pg 101-102). Familiarity with the last of the initial meditative states likely predisposes a practitioner to compassion, because the exercise of determinate action with regard to the body ceases (the “cessation of in-breathing and out-breathing”, SN IV 217, Vol IV pg 146; activity of body ceases, SN IV 293, SN IV 201). The notion “I am the doer, mine is the doer” with regard to the body comes to be abandoned (MN III 18-19, Vol III pg 68), any and all determinate (volitive) action in in-breathing or out-breathing ceases, and a release from the suffering occasioned by such action is realized. The spirit of this release must surely underlie the compassion extended in the attainment of the first of the “excellences” of the heart’s release, “the infinity of ether”.

The sympathetic joy which is extended in the attainment of “the sphere of infinite consciousness” is perhaps along the lines of the joy connected with renunciation:

“When one has known the impermanency of material shapes themselves, their alteration, disappearance and arrest, and thinks -Formerly as well as now all these material shapes are impermanent, painful, liable to alteration,’ from seeing this thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom, joy arises [repeated for impermanency of sounds, smells, flavours, touches, and mental states].”

(MN III 217-219, Vol III pg 265-268)

However, the joy connected with renunciation has a natural counterpart of sorrow:

“When one has known the impermanency of material shapes themselves, their alteration, disappearance and arrest, and thinks ‘Formerly as well as now all these material shapes are impermanent, painful, liable to alteration,’ from seeing this thus as it really is by means of perfect Wisdom, [one] evinces a desire for the incomparable Deliverances, thinking, “‘When can I, entering on abide in that plane which the [noble], now entering on, are abiding in?’ Thus, from evincing a desire for the incomparable Deliverances sorrow arises as a result of the desire. Sorrow such as this is called sorrow connected with renunciation [repeated for sounds, smells, flavours, touches, and mental states].”

(Ibid)

The sorrow connected with renunciation is overcome “because of and by means of” the joy associated with renunciation, and both are overcome “because of and by means of” the equanimity:

“When one has known the impermanency of material shapes themselves... of

sounds themselves ... of smells themselves... of flavours themselves... of touches themselves... of mental states themselves. their alteration, disappearance and arrest, and thinks, 'Formerly as well as now all these mental states are impermanent, painful, liable to alteration,' from seeing this thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom, equanimity arises. Equanimity such as this goes further than mental state. Therefore it is called equanimity connected with renunciation."

(Ibid)

By the heart's release through equanimity, "the sphere wherein nought exists" is realized, also translated as "the plane of no-thing". Gautama did not elaborate on this attainment, yet something more of the nature of the meditation can be deduced from a conversation he had with the wanderer Udayin, in which the relationship between consciousness and the body is described:

"Udayin, as an emerald jewel, of all good qualities, might be strung on a thread, blue-green or yellow or red or white or orange coloured; and a [person] with vision, having put it in [their] hand, might reflect; 'this emerald jewel... is strung on a thread, blue-green... or orange-coloured'-even so, Udayin, a course has been pointed out by me for disciples, practising which disciples of mine know thus: This body of mine... is of a nature to be constantly rubbed away... and scattered, but this consciousness is fastened there, bound there...."

(MN II 17, Vol II pg 217; see also AN IV 304-305, Vol IV pg 202-203)

The analogy to a thread, in conjunction with the previous description of consciousness as properly six dependent consciousnesses, gives an image of successive instances of consciousness which take place of a necessity as long as the body exists. "The sphere wherein nought exists" appears to concern the perception of the underlying necessity in each of these instances of consciousness; in a sense this necessity is the only real thing. while the manifestations of this necessity as consciousness are like reflections, or shadows. Therefore:

" ... thinking 'There is not anything', [one] enters on and abides in the plane of no-thing."

(MN 1 297, Vol I 358)

Gautama did not differentiate the induction of "the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception" in particular.

"The stopping of perception and feeling", elsewhere referred to as "the concentration of mind that is signless" (MN III 108, Vol III pg 151), consists in the cessation of determinate thought in actions of consciousness. This consummation of the meditative states is obtained from "the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception" as follows:

"Because of lack of desire, ...by means of lack of desire, get rid of and transcend

that equanimity in face of uniformity. connected with uniformity. Thus is the getting rid of it, thus is its transcending.”

(MN III 220, Vol III pg 269)

Gautama provided a perspective on the entire meditative experience when he cited the response of the “bad” and the “good” persons to meditative attainment:

“[the bad person] reflects thus: ‘I am an acquirer of the attainment of the first meditation, but these [others] are not acquirers of the attainment of the first meditation.’ [Such a person] then exalts [him or her self] for that attainment of the first meditation and disparages others... But a good [person] reflects thus: ‘Lack of desire even for the attainment of the first meditation has been spoken of by [Gautama]; for whatever (one) imagines it to be, it is otherwise” [Similarly for the second, third, and fourth initial meditative states, and for the attainments of the first four further meditative states].

And again ... a good [person], by passing quite beyond the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, enters on and abides in the stopping of perception and feeling; and when [such a person] has seen by means of wisdom [their] cankers are caused to be destroyed. And... this [person] does not imagine [him or her self] to be aught or anywhere or in anything.”

(MN III 42-45, Vol III pg 92-94)

“...What do you think about this, reverend Jain: Is King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha, without moving his body, without uttering a word, able to stay experiencing nothing but happiness for seven nights and days?”

“No, your reverence.”

“What do you think about this, reverend Jain: Is King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha, without moving his body, without uttering a word, able to stay experiencing nothing but happiness for six nights and days, for five, for four, for three, for two nights and days, for one night and day?”

“No, your reverence.”

“But I, reverend Jain, am able, without moving my body, without uttering a word, to stay experiencing nothing but happiness for one night and day. I, reverend Jain, am able, without moving my body, without uttering a word, to stay experiencing nothing but happiness for two nights and days,, for three, four, five, six, for seven nights and days.”

(MN I 94, Vol I pg 123-124)

The Wheel of the Sayings

Gautama occasionally summarized the entirety of what he had taught, or "explained", in four truths:

“And what has been explained by me... ? ‘This is anguish’ has been explained by me. ‘This is the arising of anguish’ has been explained by me... ‘This is the stopping of anguish’ has been explained by me. ‘This is the course leading to the stopping of anguish’ has been explained by me. And why... has this been explained by me? It is because it is connected with the goal, is fundamental to the [holy-]faring, and conduces to turning away from, to dispassion, stopping, calming, super-knowledge, awakening, and nibbana. Therefore it has been explained by me.”

(MN I 431, Vol II pg 101)

The first of these truths, “this is anguish”, was expounded as:

“Birth is anguish, old age and decay, sickness, death, sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair are anguish. Not to get what one desires is anguish. In short, the five groups based on grasping are anguish.”

(AN I 176, Vol I pg 160; Pali “dukkha”: “anguish” in MN, “Ill” in AN original above)

“The five groups” in this passage are the five categories of phenomena met with previously in the discussion of “grasping after self”. The terms “birth”, “old age and decay”, “sickness”, and “death” appear at first to refer to the familiar events, yet the summary of anguish as “in short, the five groups” suggests that the terms could also refer to aspects of the states of mind which follow grasping. As an aspect of a particular state of mind, “birth”, “old age and decay”, “sickness”, and “death” would be cut off in the abandonment of grasping; the resulting state of mind (or even state of being) could be said to be “the unborn”, the “unaging”, and so forth:

“So I, ... being liable to birth because of self, having known the peril in what is liable to birth, seeking the unborn, the uttermost security from the bonds–nibbana–won the unborn, the uttermost security from the bonds–nibbana; being liable to ageing because of self, having known the peril in what is liable to ageing, seeking the unageing, the uttermost security from the bonds–nibbana–won the unageing, the uttermost security from the bonds; being liable to decay... won the undecaying; ...liable to dying... won the undying; ... liable to sorrow... won the unsorrowing... ; liable to stain because of self, having known the peril in what is liable to stain, seeking the stainless, the uttermost security from the bonds–nibbana–won the stainless, the uttermost security from the bonds–nibbana. Knowledge and Vision arose in me: unshakable is freedom for me, this is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.”

(MN I 167, Vol I pg 211)

Certainly, Gautama used the words “birth”, “ageing”, “sickness”, and “dying” to refer to

conditions which may be extant; he viewed the question of who or what may be born (or age, or die) as improper, as a question which could not be framed within the boundaries of reasoning based on experience. He was adamant in his assertion of the limits of his own teaching in this regard, as in this response to a question about “what self do deeds affect”:

“Then a reasoning arose in the mind of a certain monk thus: ‘It is said, sir, that material shape is not self, feeling is not self, perception is not self, the habitual tendencies are not self, consciousness is not self. Then what self do deeds affect that are done by not-self?’

Then [Gautama], knowing by mind the reasoning in the mind of this monk, addressed the monks, saying: This situation exists, monks, when some foolish man here, not knowing, ignorant, with his mind in the grip of craving, may deem to go beyond the Teacher’s instruction thus: ‘It is said, sir, that material shape is not self... consciousness is not self. Then what self do deeds affect that are done by not-self?’ You, monks, have been trained by me (to look for) conditions now here, now there, in these things and in those.”

(MN III 19, Vol III pg 68-69)

Conditions such as “birth”, “old age”, and “dying” are to be looked for “now here, now there, in these things and in those”. Whenever and wherever such conditions are found, anguish exists; the recognition “this is anguish” is the realization of the first of the four truths.

The second of the truths Gautama taught was the truth of the arising of anguish; this was precisely the declension of the causal law, “conditioned by ignorance... is the arising of the whole mass of anguish”.

Similarly, the third of the truths was the cessation of anguish, again by the causal law: “from the utter fading out and ending of ignorance comes the ending... of this whole mass of anguish”.

The fourth truth, the course leading to the stopping of anguish, was described as “the [noble] right concentration with the causal associations, with the accompaniments”; this was given as:

“Right view, right purpose, right speech, right action, right mode of livelihood, right endeavor, right mindfulness. Whatever one-pointedness of mind... is accompanied by these seven components, this is called the [noble] right concentration with the causal associations and the accompaniments.”

(MN III 71, Vol III pg 114; SN V 17, Vol V pg 19)

The “way going to the ending of anguish” therefore consisted of an abiding in concentration, caused by or accompanied by right view, right purpose, right speech, right action, right mode of livelihood, right endeavor, and right mindfulness.

Noteworthy is the phrase “one-pointedness of mind”, which describes a trait of all the meditative (concentrative) states. There is some indication that Gautama returned to an abiding in the meditative states as a matter of course:

“When a Tathagata is teaching dharma [the natural law] to others it is for the sake of general instruction. And I... at the close of such a talk, steady, calm, make one-pointed and concentrate my mind subjectively in that first characteristic of concentration in which I ever constantly abide.”

(MN I 249, Vol I pg 303)

“Concentrate my mind subjectively in that first characteristic of concentration” probably refers to “making self-surrender [one’s] object of thought” (SN V 199-200, Vol V pg 175-176).

The definition of right view depends in part on the definition of wrong view; the definition of wrong view was given as follows:

“There is no (result of) gift ... no (result of) offering ... no (result of) sacrifice; there is no fruit or ripening of deeds well done or ill done; there is not this world, there is not a world beyond; there is no (benefit from serving) mother and father; there are no beings of spontaneous uprising; there are not in the world recluses and brahmans... who are faring rightly, proceeding rightly, and who proclaim this world and the world beyond having realized them by their own super-knowledge.”

(MN III 71-78, Vol III pg 113-121)

“Beings of spontaneous uprising” appears to be a reference to fairy-like beings that spring into existence without parents (several classes of fairy-like beings were believed to exist in Vedic folklore; see notes, SN III 249, Vol III pg 197).

Right view, said Gautama, is twofold. First, there is the right view which is exactly the opposite of wrong view; this, however, is the view “that has cankers, that is on the side of merit, that ripens unto cleaving (to new birth)”. The right view which is “[noble], supermundane, cankerless and a component of the way” is:

“Whatever ... is wisdom, the cardinal faculty of wisdom, the power of wisdom, the component of enlightenment which is investigation into things, the right view that is a component of the Way in one who, by developing the [noble] Way, is of [noble] thought, conversant with the [noble] Way—this... is a right view that is [noble], cankerless, supermundane, a component of the Way.”

(Ibid)

Wisdom was described in the Sutta as composed of at least six parts:

“... these six things are parts of wisdom. What six? The idea of impermanence, the idea of the ill [anguish] in impermanence, the idea of not-self in ill, the idea of renunciation, of dispassion, of ending.”

(AN III 333-334, Vol III pg 235)

“Impermanence”, “the ill in impermanence” and “the idea of not-self in ill” constitute re-

finements of the idea expressed when Gautama questioned the Jain Aggivessana: "... have you power over this material shape of yours (and can say), Let my material shape be thus. let my material shape be not thus?" Material shape and the other constituents of being are impermanent, and what is impermanent is associated with anguish, not to be regarded as self:

"What do you think about this, monks? Is material shape permanent or impermanent?"
'Impermanent, revered sir.'

'But is what is impermanent painful or is it pleasant?'

'Painful, revered sir.'

'And is it right to regard that which is impermanent, suffering (ill), liable to change, as "This is mine, this am I, this is my self"?'

'No, revered sir (similarly for feeling, perception, the habitual tendencies, and consciousness).'"

(MN III 19-20, Vol III pg 69)

By implication the fourth part of wisdom, "the idea of renunciation", is the acknowledgement and relinquishment of any identification of self with the five groups of phenomena; this "renunciation" leads to "dispassion", or a cessation of craving, and thereby to the "ending" of conditions which give rise to anguish.

"The cardinal faculty of wisdom", "the power of wisdom", and "the component of enlightenment" which are mentioned in the definition of the supermundane right view are elements of "the five faculties", "the five powers", and "the seven links in awakening", respectively. These collections are themselves not part of the eight-fold way; rather, they are said to "go to development and fulfilment" as the way is being developed (MN III 289, Vol III pg 338). An accounting of these collections, as well as of other collections associated with the way, will be given at the close of this chapter.

In the discourse on "right concentration with the causal associations, with the accompaniments", right mindfulness and right endeavor are only defined by association with right view, right purpose, right speech, right action, and right livelihood, as here with regard to right view:

"Whoever makes endeavor for the riddance of wrong view, for the attainment of right view, that is his right endeavor. Mindful, [one] gets rid of wrong view; mindful, entering on right view, [one] abides in it. This is... right mindfulness. Thus these three things circle round and follow after right view, that is to say: right view, right endeavor, right mindfulness."

(MN III 71-78, Vol III pg 113-121)

Right purpose follows from right view:

"As to this... right view comes first. And how... does right view come first? If one comprehends that wrong purpose is wrong purpose and comprehends that right purpose is right purpose, that is... right view. And what... is wrong purpose? Purpose for sense-pleasures, purpose for ill-will, purpose for harming. This... is wrong purpose. And what... is right purpose? Now I... say that right purpose is twofold. There is... the right purpose that has cankers, is on the side of merit, and ripens unto

cleaving (to new birth). There is... the right purpose which is [noble], cankerless, supermundane, a factor of the Way. And what... is the purpose which is on the side of merit, and ripens unto cleaving? Purpose for renunciation, purpose for non-ill-will, purpose for non-harming. This... is right purpose that... ripens unto cleaving. And what... is the right purpose that is [noble], cankerless, supermundane, a component of the Way? Whatever... is reasoning, initial thought, purpose, an activity of speech through the complete focussing and application of the mind in one who, by developing the [noble] Way, is of [noble] thought, of cankerless thought, and is conversant with the [noble] Way—this... is right purpose that is [noble], cankerless, supermundane, a component of the Way.”

(Ibid)

The definitions of right endeavor and right mindfulness were expanded after the above definition of right purpose:

“Whoever makes endeavor for the riddance of wrong purpose, for the attainment of right purpose, that is... right endeavor. Mindful, [one] gets rid of wrong purpose; mindful, entering on right purpose [one] abides in it. That is... right mindfulness. Thus these three things circle round and follow after right purpose, that is to say: right view, right endeavor, right mindfulness.”

(Ibid)

The description of wrong and right speech is similar to the preceding descriptions, except that here the difference between right speech “that has cankers” and right speech which is “a component of the way” appears negligible:

“As to this... right view comes first. And how... does right view come first? If one comprehends that wrong speech is wrong speech and comprehends that right speech is right speech, that is... right view. And what... is wrong speech? Lying, slanderous speech, harsh speech, and gossiping. This... is wrong speech. And what... is right speech? Now I... say that right speech is twofold. There is... the right speech that... ripens unto cleaving (to new birth). There is... the right speech that is... a component of the Way. And what... is the right speech that... ripens unto cleaving (to new birth)? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from slanderous speech... harsh speech... gossiping. This... is the right speech that... ripens unto cleaving (to new birth).

And what... is the right speech that is... a component of the Way? Whatever... is abstention from, refraining from, avoidance of, restraint from the four ways of bad speech in one who, by developing the [noble] Way is of [noble] thought, of cankerless thought, and is conversant with the Way—this... is right speech that is... a component of the Way.”

(Ibid)

The two varieties of right speech seem identical; perhaps the difference is in how the ab-

stention, refrainment, avoidance, and restraint takes place in connection with concentration (see MN I 119-123, Vol I pg 153-156).

As before with regard to right purpose, the endeavor for the riddance of wrong speech and the attainment of right speech is cited as right endeavor, mindfulness is cited as the means to get rid of wrong speech and to abide in right speech, and the three “components” of right view, right endeavor, and right mindfulness are said to circle round and follow after right speech.

Right action is described in exactly the same manner as right speech: wrong action consists of “onslaught on creatures, taking what has not been given, wrong enjoyment among the sense pleasures”; right action that “ripens unto cleaving” is abstaining from onslaught on creatures, abstaining from taking what has not been given, abstaining from wrong enjoyment among the sense pleasures; right action that is a component of the way is “whatever... is abstention from, refraining from, avoidance of, restraint from the three ways of bad conduct in body in one who... is conversant with the Way...”. Likewise, wrong livelihood is “trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling, rapacity for gain upon gain”, right livelihood that “ripens unto cleaving” is “by getting rid of wrong mode of livelihood, [one] earns [a] living by right mode of livelihood”, and right livelihood that is a component of the way is “whatever... is abstention from, refraining from, avoidance of, restraint from wrong mode of livelihood in one who ... is conversant with the Way..... As with right speech, both right action and right livelihood are preceded by right view, and further define right endeavor and right mindfulness.

The teaching on “right concentration with the causal conditions, with the accompaniments” continued with the ordering of the “conditions and accompaniments”, and the addition of two further accompaniments:

“As to this... right view comes first. And how ... does right view come first? Right purpose... proceeds from right view, right speech proceeds from right purpose; right action proceeds from right speech; right mode of livelihood proceeds from right action; right endeavor proceeds from right mode of livelihood; right mindfulness proceeds from right endeavor; right concentration proceeds from right mindfulness; right knowledge proceeds from right concentration; right freedom proceeds from right knowledge. In this way the learner’s course is possessed of eight components, the perfected one’s of ten components.”

(Ibid)

This, then, was “the course leading to the stopping of anguish”, the fourth of the four truths which Gautama considered worth teaching. An additional interpretation of “the eight-fold way” is offered in another discourse:

“But (anyone) ... knowing and seeing eye as it really is, knowing and seeing material shapes... visual consciousness... impact on the eye as it really is, and knowing, seeing as it really is the experience, whether pleasant, painful, or neither painful nor pleasant, that arises conditioned by impact on the eye, is not attached to the eye nor to material shapes nor to visual consciousness nor to impact on the eye; and that experience, whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that arises conditioned by impact on the eye-neither to that is [such a one] attached.

While [such a one], observing the peril, is not attached, bound, or infatuated, the five groups of grasping go on to future diminution. And [such a person's] craving, which is connected with again-becoming, accompanied by attachment and delight, finding its pleasure here and there, decreases [within]. And [such a person's] physical anxieties decrease, and mental anxieties decrease, and bodily torments... and mental torments... and bodily fevers decrease, and mental fevers decrease. [Such a person] experiences happiness of body and happiness of mind.

Whatever is the view of what really is, that is for [such a person] right view; whatever is aspiration for what really is, that is for [such a person] right aspiration; whatever is endeavour for what really is, that is for [such a person] right endeavor; whatever is mindfulness of what really is, that is for [such a person] right mindfulness; whatever is concentration on what really is, that is for [such a person] right concentration. And [such a person's] past acts of body, acts of speech and mode of livelihood have been well purified. So does this [noble] eightfold Way go onto development and fulfillment in [such a person]. While this [noble] eightfold Way is being developed by [such a person] thus the four arousings of mindfulness also go on to development and fulfillment, and the four right efforts ... and the four bases of psychic power... and the five controlling faculties ... and the five powers... and the seven links in awakening go on to development and fulfillment. And in [such a person], these two things occur simultaneously: calm and insight [repeated for each of the other five senses].”

(MN III 288-289, Vol III pg 337-338)

The four arousings of mindfulness referred to are with respect to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mental states. The four efforts are:

“Herein, [one] puts forth desire (to do), makes an effort, begins to strive, applies [one's] mind, lays hold of [one's] mind to prevent the arising of ill, unprofitable states not yet arisen. As to ill, unprofitable states that have arisen, [one] puts forth desire to destroy them. As to profitable states that have not yet arisen, [one] puts forth desire for their arising. As to profitable states that have already arisen, [one] puts forth desire, makes an effort, begins to strive, applies [one's] mind, lays hold of [one's] mind for their continuance, for their non-confusion, for their more-becoming, increase, culture, and fulfillment...”

(SN V 9, Vol V pg 8)

The four psychic bases are nurtured as follows:

“[One] cultivates the basis of psychic power that is possessed of concentration of intention with activities of striving; [one] cultivates the basis of psychic power that is possessed of concentration of energy with activities of striving; [one] cultivates the basis of psychic power that is possessed of concentration of consciousness with activities of striving; [one] cultivates the basis of psychic power that is possessed of concentration of investigation with activities of striving...”

The four psychic bases apparently concern heart-felt intent, energy, consciousness, and investigation, all directed toward awakening; these “bases” are within the individual, and their satisfaction has the urgency of a necessity of life (see “The Requisites of Enlightenment”, Ledi Sayadaw, Buddhist Publication Society, The Wheel Publication #171/174, 1971, pgs 72-75 ; see also SN V 263, Vol V pg 235).

The five controlling faculties are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and insight (wisdom), as follows:

“ ... of what sort... is the controlling power of faith? Herein ... [one] has faith. (One) has faith in the Tathagata’s Wisdom thus: [the Tathagata] it is, the Exalted One, Arahant [awakened being] ... teacher of devas and [humankind], an Enlightened One, an Exalted One. This... is called ‘the controlling faculty of faith’.

And of what sort... is the controlling power of energy?

It is that energy one lays hold of in practising the four [right] efforts. This... is called the ‘controlling power of energy’.

And of what sort... is the controlling power of mindfulness?

It is that mindfulness one lays hold of in practising the four stations [applications] of mindfulness. This... is called the ‘controlling power of mindfulness’. And of what sort... is the controlling power of concentration? Herein... , making self-surrender [one’s] object of thought, [one] lays hold of concentration, lays hold of one-pointedness of mind. This... is called ‘the controlling power of concentration’.

And of what sort... is the controlling power of insight? Herein... [one] has insight thus; [one] is possessed of insight for tracing out the rise and fall of things, insight that is [noble], penetrating, going on to the utter destruction of Ill.”

(SN V 199-200, Vol V pg 175-176)

The controlling faculties may have been so-named for their usefulness in establishing and nurturing mental states favorable to awakening (see “Prerequisites of Enlightenment”, pg 78). The five powers are exactly the five controlling faculties, each described with the appendage:

“ ... based on seclusion, on dispassion, on cessation, which ends in self-surrender.”

(SN V 249, Vol V pg 223)

If the “controlling faculties” nurture favorable mental states, the “powers” reputedly dispel adverse mental states (see “Prerequisites of Enlightenment”, pg 92).

The seven links in awakening are also referred to as the seven limbs of wisdom, or as the “wings of wisdom” (DN III 97. Vol III pg 93; for the correlation see DN III 106, Vol III pg 101). The complete list of the “seven links” begins with a mention of the four applications of mindfulness:

“And how... when the four applications of mindfulness have been developed, how when they have been made much of, do they bring to fulfillment the seven links in

awakening? At the time ... when [a person] is faring along contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly conscious (of it), mindful (of it) so as to control the covetousness and dejection in the world, at that time unmuddled mindfulness is aroused in [that person]. At the time ... when unmuddled mindfulness is aroused in [that person], at that time the link in awakening that is mindfulness is stirred up in [that person]; at that time [that person] develops the link in awakening that is mindfulness; at that time the link in awakening that is mindfulness comes to fulfilment of development in [that person]. [That person], faring along mindful thus, examines, inquires into, brings this thing forward for investigation by means of wisdom. At the time ... when a [person], faring along mindful thus, examines, inquires into, brings this thing forward for investigation by means of Wisdom, at that time the link in awakening that is investigation into things is stirred up in [that person; the link is developed; the link comes to fulfilment of development]. At the time... when unsluggish energy is stirred up in a [person] who is examining, inquiring into, bringing this thing forward for investigation by means of wisdom, at that time the link in awakening that is energy is stirred up in the [person; the link is developed; the link comes to fulfilment of development]. At the time... when unsullied rapture arises in the [person] of stirred up energy, at that time the link in awakening that is rapture is stirred up in [the person; the link is developed; the link comes to fulfilment of development]. The body of one whose mind is rapturous is tranquillised and thought is tranquillised. At the time... when both the body of a [person] whose mind is rapturous is tranquillised and thought is tranquillised, at that time the link in awakening that is tranquillity is stirred up in [the person; the link is developed; the link comes to fulfilment of development]. The thought of one whose body is tranquil and at ease is concentrated. At the time... when thought is concentrated in a [person] whose body is tranquil and at ease, at that time the link in awakening that is concentration is stirred up in [the person; the link is developed; the link comes to fulfilment of development]. [The person] is one who looks on with proper care at the thought concentrated thus. At the time... when a [person] looks on with proper care at the thought concentrated thus, at that time the link in awakening that is equanimity is stirred up in the [person]; at that time the [person] develops the link in awakening that is equanimity; at that time the link in awakening that is equanimity comes to fulfilment of development in that [person].

...When the seven links in awakening are developed thus, are made much of thus, they bring to fulfilment freedom through knowledge.”

(MN III 85-88, Vol III pg 127-129)

Establishment in the four fields or applications of mindfulness is cited as a prerequisite to the development of the links of awakening. Given the development of the four applications, renewed mindfulness of the body may serve to arouse “unmuddled mindfulness” in all four fields; with the fulfilment of development of this mindfulness, the “investigation into things” cited in the definition of supermundane right view is stirred up, and subsequently the rest of the links in awakening.

The four arousings of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of psychic power, the five controlling faculties, the five powers, and the seven links in awakening accompany the eight-fold (or ten-fold) path, and come to development and fulfilment as the realization

of this fourth of the truths is developed.

The four truths, “this is anguish”, “this is the arising of anguish”, “this is the stopping of anguish”, and “this is the course leading to the stopping of anguish”, appear to have represented a functional statement of the complete teaching, as far as Gautama was concerned (MN I 431, Vol II pg 101). As to the complete teaching, Gautama offered one further piece of advice, by means of an analogy:

“ ... as a (person) going along a highway might see a great stretch of water, the hither bank dangerous and frightening, the further bank secure, not frightening, but if there were not a boat for crossing by or a bridge across for going from the not-beyond to the beyond, this might occur to [such a person]: ‘This is a great stretch of water... Suppose that I, having collected grass, sticks, branches and foliage, and having tied a raft, depending on that raft, and striving with hands and feet, should cross over safely to the beyond?’ Then, having collected grass, sticks, branches and foliage, and having tied a raft, depending on that raft and striving with ... hands and feet, [that person] might cross over safely to the beyond. To [such a person], crossed over, gone beyond, this might occur: ‘Now, this raft has been very useful to me. I, depending on this raft, and striving with my hands and feet, crossed over safely to the beyond. Suppose now that I, having put this raft on my head, or having lifted it on to my shoulders, should proceed as I desire?’ What do you think about this...? If that [person] does this, is [that person] doing what should be done?

(The assembly replies ‘no’ to Gautama.)

What should that [person] do, in order to do what should be done with that raft? In this case... it might occur to that [person] who has crossed over, gone beyond: ‘Now, this raft has been very useful to me. Depending on this raft and striving with my hands and feet, I have crossed over safely to the beyond. Suppose now that I, having beached this raft on dry ground or having submerged it under the water, should proceed as I desire?’ In doing this... that [person] would be doing what should be done with that raft. Even so... [the law is] taught by me for crossing over, not for retaining. You,... by understanding the Parable of the Raft, should get rid of even (right) mental objects, all the more of wrong ones.”

(MN I 134-135, Vol I pg 173-174)

“But, [Gautama], what is the condition, what the cause of not knowing and not seeing? How do not knowing and not seeing have a condition and a cause?”

“At such time, prince, as one dwells with heart possessed and overwhelmed by sensual lust, and knows not, sees not in very truth any refuge from sensual lust that has arisen, –this, prince, is the cause of not knowing, of not seeing. Thus not knowing, not seeing have a condition, a cause.”

“Then again, prince, at such time as one dwells with heart possessed by malevolence... by sloth and torpor... by excitement and flurry... by doubt and wavering, and knows not, sees not in very truth any refuge therefrom, –this, prince, is the condition, this is the cause of not knowing, of not seeing. Thus, prince, not knowing and not seeing have a condition, have a cause.”

“What, [Gautama] is this method of teaching called?”

“These, prince, are called –‘the hindrances’”.

(SN V 127, Vol V pg 108)

The Prerequisites

The prerequisites to meditation might be expected to appear before the description of the practice of meditation; they have instead been placed here, afterwards for two reasons. The first is Gautama's account of the incident in his childhood where he experienced the first meditative state; he made no mention in this account of any attention to the prerequisites, and this lack of a mention suggests that the prerequisites need not always be consciously addressed in the induction of meditation. The second reason the prerequisites have been placed here is the difficulty of the explanation of “the five hindrances”, one of the categories of the prerequisites, in the absence of the vocabulary developed in the discussion of meditation. This difficulty of explanation suggests that the practice associated with the hindrances may be of significance only to those who have already experienced something of meditation.

Here are the essentials of Gautama's list of the prerequisites to meditation:

“...be moral...

...be guarded as to the doors of the sense-organs. Having seen a material shape with the eye be not entranced by the general appearance, be not entranced by the detail...[likewise having heard a sound with the ear... smelt a smell with the nose... savoured a taste with the tongue... felt a touch with the body]. Having cognised a mental state with the mind, be not entranced by the general appearance. be not entranced with the detail.

...be moderate in eating...

...abide intent on vigilance...

...be possessed of mindfulness and clear consciousness...

...after the meal, [sit] down cross-legged, holding the back erect, [and make] mindfulness rise up... getting rid of coveting for the world, [dwell] with a mind devoid of coveting, [purify] the mind of coveting. By getting rid of the taint of ill-will, [dwell] benevolent in mind, compassionate for the welfare of all creatures and beings, [purify] the mind of ill-will. By getting rid of sloth and torpor, [dwell] devoid of sloth and torpor; perceiving the light, mindful, clearly conscious, [purify] the mind of sloth and torpor. By getting rid of restlessness and worry, [dwell] calmly; the mind subjectively tranquillised, [purify] the mind of restlessness and worry. By getting rid of doubt, [dwell] doubt-crossed, unperplexed as to the states that are skilled, [purify] the mind of doubt...by getting rid of these five hindrances which are defilements of the mind and weakening to intuitive wisdom, [dwell] contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly conscious (of it), mindful (of it) so as to control the covetousness and dejection in the world. [As with the body, fare] along contemplating the feelings ... the mind... the mental states in the mental states, ardent, clearly conscious (of them), mindful (of them) so as to control the covetousness and dejection in the world.”

(MN III 134-136, Vol III pgs 180-182)

The aspirant is advised, first, to behave conscientiously; second, to monitor the six senses; third, to be circumspect regarding diet; fourth, to be “vigilant” [with regard to the obstructive mental states of lust, hatred, and illusion (ibid, and SN V 56-57, Vol V pgs

45-46)]; fifth, to be mindful and clearly conscious (of actions); and, sixth and finally, to get rid of five particular states of mind, referred to collectively as “the hindrances”. This is the preparation for meditation, although Gautama implied in his closing sentences that by getting rid of the hindrances, thought is automatically applied and sustained in the four applications of mindfulness; as has been discussed, when thought is applied and sustained in this manner, the first of the initial meditative states is extant.

Gautama spoke of how the hindrances arise and how they are disposed to cease in another teaching. In this teaching, the first hindrance was rendered “sensual lust”, rather than “covetousness”, as above; regardless of the interpretation of the hindrance, the analysis is the same:

“ ...I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of sensual lust, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its more-becoming and increase, as the feature of beauty (in things).

In (one) who pays not systematic attention to the feature of beauty, sensual lust, if not already arisen, arises: or, if already arisen, is liable to more-becoming and increase. ...I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of sensual lust, if not already arisen: or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as the feature of ugliness (in things). In (one) who gives systematic attention to the feature of ugliness (in things) sensual lust, if not already arisen, arises not: or, if arisen, it is abandoned.”

(AN I 3, Vol I pg 2-3)

Gautama left the practice of “systematic attention to the feature of beauty” unexpanded; as to “systematic attention to the feature of ugliness”, he outlined a practice of contemplation of “the unattractive”, and he expounded on a systematic attention to “the repugnant feature of things” (SN V 104-105, Vol V pg 88, “the repulsive feature” and the first hindrance).

The contemplation of “the unattractive” (“the unlovely” of SN V 319-322, Vol V pg 283) appears to have been part of a chain of seven contemplations, or “thoughts”, which Gautama said conduced to “plumbing the deathless”; the seven were:

“The thought of the unattractive, of death, of the cloying of food, of all-world discontent, of impermanence, of ill therein, of no self in ill.”

(AN IV 45, Vol IV pg 27)

This series of “thoughts” moves from “the unattractive” to “all-world discontent”, then to “impermanence”, and finally to the recognition that what is impermanent is not self and thereby the attainment of detachment.

The systematic attention to “the repugnant feature of things” commences with consciousness of “repugnance for what is not repugnant”; this is possible because all things have an innate repulsiveness, when viewed with an eye toward their impermanence:

“Impermanent... are compounded things. Unstable... are compounded things. Insecure... are compounded things. So.... be ye dissatisfied with all things of this world,

be ye repelled by them, be ye utterly free from them!”

(AN IV 99, Vol IV pg 64)

The systematic attention to “the repugnant feature of things” was expounded in full as follows:

“Wherefore... if a [person] should desire: May I dwell conscious of repugnance for what is not repugnant... May I dwell unconscious of repugnance for what is repugnant... May I dwell conscious of repugnance both for what is not repugnant and for what is... Both for what is repugnant and what is not, may I dwell unconscious of repugnance,—[such a person must give strict attention to... intent concentration on in-breathing and out-breathing].

If [such a person] should desire: Rejecting alike what is non-repugnant and what is repugnant, may I dwell indifferent, mindful, and composed,—[such a person] must do likewise.”

(SN V 316-317. Vol V pg 281)

“Intent concentration on in-breathing and out-breathing” consisted of the entire set of awarenesses quoted in the chapter “The Induction of the First Meditative State”. Guatama’s analysis of how the hindrances arise and how they are disposed to cease continued with the analysis of “malevolence”:

“...I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of malevolence, if not already arisen, or if arisen, to cause its more-becoming and increase, as the repulsive feature (of things).

In (one) who pays not systematic attention to the repulsive feature, malevolence, if not already arisen, arises: or, if arisen, it is liable to more-becoming and increase. ...I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of malevolence, if not already arisen: or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as the heart’s release through amity. In (one) who gives systematic attention to amity which releases the heart, malevolence, if not already arisen, arises not: or, if arisen, it is abandoned.”

(AN I 3, Vol I pg 2-4)

The “systematic attention to amity” probably referred to the extension of a mind of friendliness, as was discussed in a previous chapter. Of the remainder of Gautama’s analysis of the hindrances, only the portion concerned with “doubt-and-wavering” disclosed new particulars, as follows:

“...I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of doubt-and-wavering, if not already arisen: or, if arisen, to cause its more-becoming and increase, as unsystematic attention.

In (one) who gives not systematic attention arises doubt-and-wavering, if not already arisen: or, if arisen, it is liable to more-becoming and increase.

...I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of doubt-and-wavering, if not already arisen: or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as systematic attention.”

(Ibid)

In this treatment of “doubt-and-wavering”. Gautama spoke of systematic attention without reference to any object of attention; such an object was, however, offered up in a sermon entitled “No Food for the Hindrances”:

“There are... things good and things bad, things blameworthy and things not blameworthy, things mean and things exalted, things that are constituent parts of darkness and light. Systematic attention thereto, if made much of, is no food for the arising of doubt and wavering not yet arisen, or for the more-becoming and growth thereof, if already arisen.”

(SN V 105-106, Vol V pg 89)

In the description of the fifth hindrance quoted at the start of this chapter, the practitioner was advised to be “unperplexed as to the states that are skilled” in order to abandon the hindrance; however, “the states that are skilled” were never explicitly listed in the Sutta. Certain things “on the side of skill” were specified; these were the ten components of the “perfected one’s” course (right view through right freedom), and also “... those various skilled things conditioned by [the ten components]”. Each of the ten components had one associated set of “various skilled things”; thus, said Gautama:

“... there are twenty (components) on the side of skill

(MN III 77. Vol III pg 120)

“The states that are skilled” apparently belong to the sets of “various skilled things” of the twenty.

In the quotation at the start of this chapter, Gautama implied that the five hindrances must be overcome in order for the four applications of mindfulness to be present. However, in at least one instance Gautama described an approach to mindfulness without mention of the hindrances: in this teaching, Gautama spoke of “control of the sense faculties” and “completion of the three virtuous habits (of body, speech, and mind)”:

“Control of the sense faculties..., if cultivated and made much of, completes the three virtuous habits. But how cultivated and how made much of... do they complete the three virtuous habits?

Herein.... seeing a delightful object with the eye. [one] does not hanker for it, does not thrill thereat, does not develop lust for it. [One’s] body is unmoved; [one’s] mind is unmoved, inwardly well established and released. If with the eye [one] behold an object repulsive, [one] is not shocked thereat, [one’s] mind is not unsettled or depressed or resentful because of that, but [one’s] body is unmoved, [one’s] mind is unmoved, inwardly well established and released [likewise for sound/ear, scent/nose,

savour/tongue, contact/touch, mind-state/mind].

Now, ... since on seeing an object with the eye. whether objects are delightful or repulsive, [one's] body is unmoved, [one's] mind is unmoved, but inwardly well established and released [similarly for the other sense-objects and senses],-restraint of faculties thus cultivated, thus made much of, completes the three virtuous habits [of body, speech, and mind].

And how cultivatedhow made much of, do the three virtuous habits complete the four [applications] of mindfulness? Herein....by abandoning vicious habit of body, [one] cultivates virtuous habit of body. Abandoning vicious habit of speech, [one] cultivates virtuous habit of speech. Abandoning vicious habit of mind, [one] cultivates virtuous habit of mind. Thus cultivated....thus made much of, the three virtuous habits complete the four [applications] of mindfulness.

(SN V 72-74. Vol V pgs 60-63)

Gautama continued with a description of how. when the four applications of mindfulness are cultivated and “made much of”, they bring to completion the seven limbs of wisdom, and of how the seven limbs of wisdom, when cultivated and “made much of”, bring to completion “release by knowledge”.

“Whatever ... is material shape, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, mean or excellent, or whatever is far or near, [a person], thinking of all this material shape as ‘This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self’, sees it thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom. Whatever is feeling ... perception... the habitual tendencies... whatever is consciousness, past, future or present... [that person], thinking of all this consciousness as ‘This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self’, sees it thus as it really is by means of perfect wisdom. [For one] knowing thus, seeing thus, there are no latent conceits that ‘I am the doer, mine is the doer’ in regard to this consciousness-informed body.”

(MN III 18-19, Vol III pg 68)

Cessation, Knowledge, and Freedom

At least two of the disciples were called upon to distinguish the condition of a person in the final meditative state from the condition of a corpse; Gautama himself was never presented with such a comparison (MN I 296, Vol I pg 356; SN IV 294, Vol IV pg 202, DN II 156, Vol II pg 174; however, see also MN I 244-245, Vol I pg 299). The comparison the disciples made was probably intended to clarify the meaning of “the ceasing of action”, or “the ceasing of the activities”.

Gautama used the word “action” in a special sense:

“...I say that determinate thought is action. When one determines, one acts by deed, word, or thought.”

(AN III 415, Vol III pg 294)

Determinate or volitive thought is action, and results in deed, word, or thought; acts of such a nature have as a consequence personal weal and woe, as was recounted in an earlier chapter (SN II 37-41, Vol II pg 31-32, in “The Further States”).

“The ceasing of action” likewise refers to a special instance of the ceasing of action:

“And what... is the ceasing of action? That ceasing of action by body, speech, and mind, by which one contacts freedom,—that is called ‘the ceasing of action’.”

(SN IV 145, iv pg 85)

The ceasing of determinate thought and of consequent “acts by deed, word, or thought” is attended by freedom from personal weal and woe (SN II 37-41, Vol II pg 31-32); if this is the “freedom” Gautama referred to, then “the ceasing of action” is the ceasing of volitive action “by body, speech, and mind”.

As Gautama continued the above teaching on “the ceasing of action”, he identified the way leading to “the ceasing of action” as the eightfold way. Elsewhere, right concentration (MN III 252, Vol III pg 299) and the meditative states are together cited as synonymous with “the ceasing of the activities” (the ceasing of volitive action by speech, body, and mind):

“...I have seen that the ceasing of the activities is gradual. When one has attained the first trance [first meditative state], speech has ceased. When one has attained the second trance, thought initial and sustained has ceased. When one has attained the third trance, zest has ceased. When one has attained the fourth trance, in-breathing and outbreathing have ceased. When one has attained the realm of infinite space, perception of objects has ceased. When one has attained the realm of infinite consciousness, perception of the realm of infinite space has ceased. When one has attained the realm of nothingness, the perception of the realm of infinite consciousness has ceased. When one has attained the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the perception of the realm of nothingness has ceased. Both perception and feeling have ceased when one has attained the cessation of perception and feeling.”

(SN IV 217, Vol IV pg 146)

Apparantly, the cessation of inbreathing and outbreathing is identically the cessation of volitive “action” of the body, and the cessation of perception and feeling is identically the cessation of volitive “action” of the mind.

Gautama identified a particular knowledge and a particular freedom in connection with the cessation of perception and feeling; presumably, these are the knowledge and the freedom which form the ninth and tenth components of the course of a “perfected one”:

“...[an individual], not attending to the perception of the plane of no-thing, not attending to the perception of the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, attends to solitude grounded on the concentration of mind that is signless. [Their] mind is satisfied with, pleased with, set on and freed in the concentration of mind that is signless. [They] comprehend thus, ‘This concentration of mind that is signless is effected and thought out. But whatever is effected and thought out, that is impermanent, it is liable to stopping.’ When [the individual] knows this thus, sees this thus, [their] mind is freed from the canker of sense-pleasures and [their] mind is freed from the canker of becoming and [their] mind is freed from the canker of ignorance. In freedom is the knowledge that [one] is freed and [one] comprehends: “Destroyed is birth, brought to a close the [holy]-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or so’. [They] comprehend thus: “The disturbances there might be resulting from the canker of sense-pleasures do not exist here; the disturbances there might be resulting from the canker of becoming do not exist here; the disturbances there might be resulting from the canker of ignorance do not exist here. And there is only this degree of disturbance, that is to say the six sensory fields that, conditioned by life, are grounded on this body itself.”

(MN III 108-109, Vol III pg 151-152)

Thus, right knowledge is based on first-hand experience of the impermanence of all that may be “effected and thought out”, and right freedom is freedom from the three cankers of “sense-pleasures”, “becoming”, and “ignorance”.

" ... those who are novices, not long gone forth (from home), late-comers into this Norm and Discipline,—such... should be roused and admonished for, and established in, the cultivation of the four stations of mindfulness. Of what four and how? (Ye should say this:)

‘Come ye, friends, do ye abide in body contemplating body (as transient), ardent, composed and one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, for insight into body as it really is.

In feelings do ye abide contemplating feelings (as transient), ardent, ...for insight into feelings as they really are. In mind do ye abide contemplating mind (as transient), ardent, ...for insight into mind as it really is.

In mind-states do ye abide contemplating mind states (as transient), ardent, composed, one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, for insight into mind-states as they really are.’

[Those] who are imperfect, who have not attained their goal, who abide aspiring for the peace from bondage unsurpassed,—they also abide in body contemplating body (as transient), ardent, composed, one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, for the comprehension of body... So also do they abide ... for the comprehension of feelings, of mind, and of mind-states.

[Those] who are Arahants. destroyers of the [cankers], who have lived the life, done what was to be done, who have removed the burden, who have won their highest good, who have utterly destroyed the fetters of becoming, who by perfect knowledge have become free,—they also abide in body contemplating body (as transient), ardent, composed, one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, with respect to body being released.

So also in feelings, they are released from feelings... and in mind, they are released.

In mind-states they abide contemplating mind-states (as transient), ardent, composed, one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, in respect of mind-states they are released.”

(SN V 144, Vol V pg 123-124)

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The titles of the sutta volumes are abbreviated in the text, “MN” for Majjhima-Nikaya, “AN” for Anguttara-Nikaya, “SN” for Sanyutta-Nikaya, and “DN” for Digha-Nikaya, followed by the Pali volume and chapter (as near as this author could determine), followed by the volume and page in the Pali Text Society's translation.

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