



The Way of the Noble

by

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*Homage to that Blessed One, the Perfect One
the Buddha Supreme!*

The Way of the Noble

“Yea, by my troth this have I seen, no hearsay this,
In one communion bound of holy life
A thousand (saints who had) abandoned death;
Disciples of these too, five hundred yea,
And more, ten hundred, yea, and ten times that
Who all had reached the Stream, the Holy Way.”¹

The title of this essay is the English rendering of the Pāli term *Ariya Magga*—the Noble Way or Path. The *Ariya-Aṭṭhaṅgika-Magga* is the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism, which leads to the state of an *Ariya* or Noble One. The Buddha Dhamma claims no affinity to the word *Āryan* which is used to distinguish a stock of the human species from other stocks of the same species on the basis of colour and race. The Buddha-Dhamma views with disfavour adventitious distinctions, such as the colour or caste of a man, for the satisfying reason that, born of the knowledge of the real nature of phenomenal existence, it embraces in a compassionate oneness all living things in the entire universe with an all pervading loving-kindness.

The word *aryan* comes from the Pāli word *ariya* (*Sanskrit: ārya*) which means pure or noble. The Buddha-Dhamma recognizes one who has cleaned himself of the impurities of mind as noble or pure. In this respect, Lord Buddha is acclaimed as the Greatest *Ariya*. Hence, the Four Eternal Verities which he discovered are called the Four Noble Truths (*ariya sacca*). The disciples of the Buddha who had understood and realized the four Noble Truths are called the Noble Ones (*ariya-puggala*). The word, *ariya*, also means one who sees things as they truly are.² It is only when one sees this psycho-physical (*nāma-rūpa*) combination called a being, as it really is, that he gets an aversion for existence, and is urged to take the “ascent” leading to the Ariyan Way, the exclusive *via sacra* of the Noble Ones.

In this essay I shall confine myself to the first stage of the Ariyan Way—the first stage of the Way that leads to full sanctity—Arahantship. A person who steps on the first stage of the Ariyan Way is also called a Stream-Winner. The Pāli word, *sota*, means a stream. He wins or attains the stream (*sotāpatti*), and is, then, a Stream-Winner (*sotāpanna*). He is taken up the Stream that leads to Nibbāna. He is rewarded with a glimpse of Nibbāna, for the first time, in the ups and downs of his *saṃsāric* existence (the process of repeated births).

This supreme achievement, the initial step to cross over the turbulent waters of the cosmic ocean of births and deaths, demands of the aspirant to the Way a systematic, sustained and

¹ This quotation is from the Brahma Suttas of the Saṃyutta Nikāya VI. 2. 3. Brahma Sahampati visits the Buddha, who was living with the Magadhese at Andhakāvinda. He notices a large assemblage of monks seated in front and on either side of the Buddha. Among them are a large number of *arahants* (saints), and also a numerically larger number of those who have reached “the Stream, the Holy Way”, the subject of this essay.

² It is Insight Wisdom (*vipassanāñāṇa*) that helps to reveal phenomenal existence as it really is: its impermanency (*anicca*), its imperfectness (*dukkha*) and its impersonality (*anattā*).

steadfast preparation anterior to its consummation—a consummation which is possible only by putting forth “human strength, human energy and human striving.”³

What is it that prompts us to embark on this great spiritual adventure on “the sea of the six senses with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and demons (symbolizing its dangers and temptations).⁴ It is suffering (*dukkha*) inherent in life. The Buddha-Dhamma alone, of all religions, positively affirms that life is suffering—life wherever it exists from the highest *Brahma* world to the uttermost hell is suffering. Life in the immeasurable past was suffering and life yet to come will also entail suffering. This is *saṃsāric* suffering (*bhava-dukkha*). The present suffering is visible in so many ways, as physical and mental suffering, as man’s conflict with his environment and as the result of man’s insatiate desire to pamper his “I,” his Ego. We have plenty of evidence in the Buddhist Canon⁵ to establish the suffering inherent in the process of Becoming (*bhava*). Based on this knowledge and on the suffering now being felt, and with implicit confidence (*saddhā*) in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, Buddhists genuinely interested in overcoming suffering embark on this great adventure.

Now, let us discuss the prior preparations that he, we shall call him the pilgrim on the Way, has to make for the purpose of stepping on the Ariyan Way. The Saṅgīti Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya (No. 33) mentions four necessary conditions for Stream entry (*sotāpattiyaṅgaṃ*)

They are:

1. Association with the good (*sappurisa saṃseva*)
2. Hearing the good Teaching (*saddhamma savanaṃ*)
3. Wise reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*)
4. Practice in those things that lead up to the Teaching and its corollaries (*dhammānudhamma paṭipatti*).

1. Association with the good

It will be admitted on all hands that through association with the good, the pilgrim on the Way enriches his mind with all that is wholesome and noble. In the galaxy of the good Lord Buddha shines without a peer. He has passed away, but his Teaching is with us, in its pristine purity, as a living symbol to speak to us of the exceeding rare goodness which permeated His entire vigorous, radiant personality. Here are his own words in support: “Therefore, O Bhikkhus, you to whom the truths I have perceived have been made known by me, having thoroughly made yourselves masters of them, practise them, meditate upon them, and spread them abroad, in order that the pure religion may last long and be perpetuated, in order that it may *continue to be for the good and happiness of the great multitudes, out of pity for the world, to the good and the gain and the weal of gods and men.*”⁶

The Noble Ones who have gained the four stages of Holiness and their respective Fruition (*phala*) are also among the good. Those worldlings who are treading the mundane Noble Eightfold Path with a view to gaining Deliverance come next. Those individuals who have dedicated their lives to ameliorating human suffering such as philanthropists and social service workers are also among the good. The Dhammapada⁷ advises us not to associate with friends who are evil-doers, or friends whose lives are blameworthy; on the other hand, to associate with

³ Saṃyutta Nikāya II 28, 29

⁴ The Basic Position of Sila by Miss I. B. Horner, published by the Bauddha Sāhitya abhā.

⁵ Majjhima Nikāya I 173. Also Saṃyutta Nikāya 15:1; 15:3; 15:13.

⁶ Mahā parinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya Sutta 16.

⁷ Dhammapada v. 78

friends who are good, the best of men. There are two conspicuous characteristics visible in the good, namely, gratitude (*kataññutā*) in its manifestation by word and deed. Lord Buddha gazed steadfastly for seven days at the Bodhi Tree beneath whose shade He gained Supreme Enlightenment.

2. Hearing the Teaching

The benefits gained by hearing the Good Law are so obvious that their recapitulation here seems to me rather superfluous. In the days long gone, the mode of receiving the Dhamma was by hearing. The word, *sāvaka*, meaning a disciple of the Buddha, has its origin in the word *savanaṃ*. The Mahā Mangala Sutta hails the hearing of the Dhamma as a Blessing (*kālena dhamma savanaṃ etaṃ maṅgala muttamaṃ*), and immediately after in the next verse the Sutta proceeds to hail religious discussions (*dhamma sākacchā*) as a Blessing. These twin tasks invariably reinforce and strengthen Confidence, already referred to, which our pilgrim carries as his staff till the goal of the holy life is reached. In modern times there are many books on various aspects of the Buddha-Dhamma. In Buddhist countries the radio is also a very useful medium in the dissemination of the Dhamma. Despite these modern facilities the time honoured custom of hearing the Dhamma, seated cross-legged at the feet of venerable monks, awakens a deep sense of piety and a spiritual exhilaration. The Dhammapada pays this excellent tribute to those who hear the Dhamma: “He who imbibes the Law lives happily; his mind is serene. The wise always rejoice in the Law, well-proclaimed by the Buddha.”⁸

Knowledge of the Dhamma (*pariyatti*) leads to its practice (*paṭipatti*) and practice leads to the realization (*paṭivedha*) of Nibbāna, the end of suffering. Wherefore, “the Dhamma is well-expounded by the Buddha, to be self realized, with immediate fruit, inviting investigation, leading to Nibbāna, to be comprehended by the wise, each for himself.” (*The Mirror of the Dhamma*, Nārada Thera, Wheel Publication 54).

3. Wise Reflection

The Dhamma that has been either heard or read has to be wisely reflected upon, and then acted upon. It is, indeed, a matter for much concern and of much regret that most Buddhists listen to or read the Dhamma as a matter of course and then resign it to oblivion. Thereafter they turn once again to chase after pleasure. Let them wisely reflect on this quotation from the *Sutta Nīpāta*, Verse 62 (Transl. by Lord Chalmers):

“... Be sure
pleasure’s a chain, brief bliss,
short rapture, long drawn woe,
a baited hook for fish.”

Wise Reflection has to be clearly distinguished from Unwise Reflection (*ayoniso-manasikāra*). Wise Reflection functions as a wholesome agent. Says the Buddha, “thus employed, O monks, it leads to the Highest”—the Highest which is the very opposite of the recurrent process of births and deaths. On the other hand, Unwise Reflection does nobody any good. It is the womb which gives birth to unwholesome things. Says the Buddha, “Monks, I have not seen (with the Buddha eye) any single thing which conduces more to the arising of wholesome things that have not yet arisen, and to the expulsion of unwholesome things that have already arisen, than Wise Reflection.” In this context, Wise Reflection shortens the process of Becoming, while Unwise Reflection lengthens this sorrow-fraught process.

⁸ Ibid. Verse 79

Wise Reflection, with mindfulness keeping guard, brought to perfection by sustained and indefatigable endeavour, leads to mental synthesis, to mental equipoise and "one-pointedness" of mind, the prelude to Insight, which then illumines the pilgrim's vision to see things as they truly are. More of this later. The Dhammapada encourages the pilgrim thus:

"He who dwells in the Law, delights in the Law,
meditates on the Law, reflects on the Law, that
Bhikkhu will never fall away from the true Law."⁹

4. Practice in those things that lead up to the Teaching and its corollaries.

The Buddha-Dhamma, it should be noted here, is not meant for the purpose of exhibiting one's intellectual legerdemain, nor is it for the purpose of displaying one's dialectical skill; nor does it encourage salvation by proxy through prayerful appeals by a sinner to a supernatural being; nor does it preach a vicarious salvation. The Buddha Dhamma is a practice (*paṭipadā*), a gradual practice upon a well-mapped and tested Path, based on the ethical potential of man, for the one and only purpose of crossing over and going beyond the confines of the space-time cosmos. And for the purpose of crossing over, the pilgrim has to walk the Path himself by his own efforts and energy, and without taking a wrong turning. The Buddhas merely show the Way. The Dhammapada, at Verse 276, is quite emphatic on this point:

"Striving should be done by yourselves, the Tathāgatas (Buddhas) are only teachers. The meditative ones who enter the Way are delivered from the bonds of Māra."

The Buddha Dhamma is a discovery. The Buddha Gotama rediscovered the Ancient Path which the Buddhas of the past trod to gain Deliverance. The Ancient Path is the Noble Eightfold Path. "This is the Middle Path, which the Perfect One has discovered, which makes one both to see and to know, and which leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment and to Nibbāna."¹⁰

The Blessed One, on the occasion of sending forth His first mission of sixty Arahants, spoke about the Ancient Path in this manner: "Preach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, and excellent in the end."¹¹ The Dhamma is excellent in the beginning (*ādi kalyāṇa*), which is morality (*sīla*), exhorting to avoid all evil (*sabba-pāpassa akaraṇaṃ*). It is excellent in the middle (*majjhima-kalyatā*), which is concentration (*samādhi*), exhorting to do good (*kusalassa upasampadā*). It is excellent in the end (*pariyosāna-kalyāṇa*), which is wisdom (*paññā*) exhorting to cleanse one's mind (*sacitta-pariyodapanam*). And this is the Ancient Path.

This is the triple division of the Noble Eightfold Path, in which the pilgrim has to train himself anterior to his stepping on the Ariyan Way or winning the Stream. The training is gradual, step by step, "for the attainment of Wisdom does not come at once, but by a gradual training, a gradual working out of cause, a gradual practice (*anupubba-sikkhā, anupubba-kriyā, anupubba-paṭipadā*)."¹²

It would be relevant, at this point, to set side by side the factors of the Noble Path and the triple training in Morality, Concentration and Wisdom:

<i>Factors of the Path</i>	

⁹ Ibid. Verse 364

¹⁰ Saṃyutta Nikāya 46: 2

¹¹ Vinaya Mahāvagga p.10

¹² Majjhima Nikāya I 479

<i>Triple Training</i></td>
</tr>

<tr>
<td valign="MIDDLE">
3. Right Speech (<i>sammā vācā</i>

4. Right Action (<i>sammā kammantā</i>

5. Right Livelihood (<i>sammā ājīva</i></td>
<td width="39%" valign="MIDDLE">
Morality (<i>sīla</i></td>
</tr>

<tr>
<td valign="MIDDLE">6. Right Effort (<i>sammā vāyāma</i>

7. Right Mindfulness (<i>sammā sati</i>

8. Right Concentration (<i>sammā samādhi</i></td>
<td valign="MIDDLE">Concentration (<i>samādhi</i></td>
</tr>

<tr>
<td valign="MIDDLE">1. Right Understanding (<i>sammā
diṭṭhi</i>

2. Right Thought (<i>sammā saṅkappa</i></td>
<td valign="MIDDLE">
Wisdom (<i>pa&entilde;&entilde;ā</i></td>
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The sequence of the Path Factors has been here transposed for indicating that this is the order in which the perfecting of the Noble Eightfold Path has to proceed. Nevertheless, a degree of Right Understanding is indispensable at the very start, for giving the right and cogent motivation for one's endeavour.

I make bold to say that the Tipiṭaka or the Three Baskets containing the entirety of the Teaching of the Buddha, is devoted to this triple training. I am fortified in my view in that the Blessed One says, "Just as, O Bhikkhus, the mighty ocean is of one taste, the taste of salt, even so, O Bhikkhus, this Dhamma is of one taste, the taste of Deliverance (*vimutti*)."¹³ And, in the Dhammapada he says, "Following upon this Path you will put an end to suffering."¹⁴

The Dhamma has to be lived in and practised according to the above triple training. There is absolutely no deviation from this training. The mastery of Morality (*sīla*) makes possible the mastery of Concentration (*samādhi*) and this of Wisdom (*paññā*). No skipping of any of the factors is allowed. We are advised not to follow the technique of the jumping frog. There is no short-cut to Nibbāna.

There are no special occasions on which to practise the Dhamma, nor is it confined to the four *poya*¹⁵ days only. The Dhamma is part and parcel of one's life, and is closely associated with oneself. Wherefore, the Buddha says, "Abide with oneself as an island, with oneself as a refuge,

¹³ Udāna p. 67

¹⁴ Dhammapada v. 275

¹⁵ The four phases of a lunar month. The Sinhala term for Uposatha days

abide with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge. Seek not for external refuge.”¹⁶

The pilgrim is warned not to seek external refuge. Why? The Buddha, in conversation with his last convert, Subhadda, told him that it was only in His dispensation that the Noble Eightfold path existed, and hence, the four true *samaṇas*. He further added that other schools of thought did not contain the Noble Eightfold Path and therefore they were devoid of the four true *Samaṇas*.¹⁷

The four *samaṇas* are: (i.) The Stream-Winner (*sotāpanna*), (ii.) the Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmi*), (iii.) the Never-Returner (*anāgāmi*) and (iv.) the Perfect One (*arahant*). These four stages and their respective Fruitions (*phala*) together with Nibbāna are the Nine Transcendental Dhamma (*nava lokuttara dhamma*) which every genuine Buddhist ardently endeavours to consummate ere long.

The pilgrim should always bear in mind the fact that he has taken Refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha in order to gain a clear understanding and perception of the Four Noble Truths: This is Misery. This is the Origin of Misery. This is the Cessation of Misery. This is the Path leading to the cessation of Misery—the Noble Eightfold Path. It is only by the realization of the Four Noble Truths by the pilgrim that he can cry a halt to this incessant turning on the Wheel of Life, and attain the end of suffering.¹⁸

The pilgrim, therefore, is advised not to go off the Path by seeking refuge elsewhere, for in the words of the Buddha, “Men, driven by fear, go to many a refuge—to mountains and forests, to groves, to fanes and trees.”¹⁹ The Buddha in no uncertain terms, assures the pilgrim that in none of them is found a refuge, and that none of them can ever deliver him from the woes of recurrent existence.²⁰

There is one other aspect in the practice of the Dhamma, which to my mind is of paramount importance. I mean the practice of the Dhamma in its spirit and in its letter is of far greater importance than the mere external manifestations of devotion (*bhakti*). I certainly do not frown at the traditional modes of worshipping the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha by visiting temples. The thought processes that run across the mind during these moments of devotion are undoubtedly wholesome (*kusala*). They provide the pilgrim with spiritual nutriment to support him on the Way.

However, these acts of devotion and piety by themselves will not tend to purify his inner being. They are powerless to crush the might of *Māra* (Death). And the successful conquest of *Māra* is the conquest of one’s self through internal purification. “Though one should conquer a million men in the battlefield, yet he, indeed, is the noblest victor who has conquered himself.”²¹ The same idea is again amplified: “One’s own self conquered is better than all other people conquered; not even a god, *Brahma* or *Māra* can change into defeat the victory of a man who has

¹⁶ Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16, D II 108

¹⁷ Another term for Noble disciples.

¹⁸ The *raison d’être* of the Buddhadhamma is the Four Noble Truths. It is only by a clear understanding and perception of the Four Noble Truths that one can call a halt to the process of Becoming.

“By not seeing the Aryan Truths as they really are,
Long is the path that is traversed through many a birth,
When these are grasped, the cause of rebirth is removed,
The root of sorrow is uprooted, and then there is no more birth.”

(Mahā parinibbāna Sutta)

¹⁹ Dhammapada Verse 188

²⁰ Ibid. Verse 189

²¹ Ibid. Verse 103

conquered himself.”²² And this conquest of one’s self is one’s own business. It is achieved by wisdom. The Buddha Dhamma teaches deliverance of mind by Wisdom, and definitely not by following mere tradition, purposeless rites and unreasoning dogma.

Turn wherever you will, the Buddhist texts insist on the inner purification of the being. And this inner purification is only possible through external ethical behaviour or moral conduct (*sīla*). The Dhamma provides a number of precepts²³ or moral observances or pledges which a lay person takes upon himself to promote his moral wellbeing. These precepts are not commands. Their observance is left to the individual with himself as tribunal, on the assumption that their observance is good for himself, as well as to the society of which he is a member, and in regard to our pilgrim the observance of the precepts is the initial step of his training.

The pilgrim, having established himself well and truly on Morality, now proceeds to train his mind—the fickle and restless mind. As he has already controlled the sense-doors which provide nutriment to the mind, he will find his task not so difficult. His task is to purge the mind of all impure states by employing the four great efforts,²⁴ so that the mind can be tranquillized²⁵ and stabilised to hold on to one object, and exclude all other objects that enter his mental periphery.

This done, the pilgrim enters upon the third stage of his training to gain Insight-Wisdom (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), which is the sole monopoly of the Buddha-Dhamma. This helps him to penetrate phenomenal existence, which then presents him with Reality or the true nature of all existence—its impermanency (*anicca*), its imperfectness (*dukkha*) and its impersonality (*anattā*). He has thus completed the triple training which could be summed up as the training of his body’s actions, the training of his mind and the acquisition of Insight-Wisdom.

This triple training has yet another important aspect which deserves to be mentioned here. It is an aspect which is a natural growth and it synchronizes with the training. I have in mind the

²² Ibid. Verse 105

²³ While admitting that the monastic rules (*pātimokkha*) are more exacting and demanding so far as monks are concerned, however, the fact remains that the precepts laid down by the Buddha for monk or layman have one underlying motive behind them, namely, the successful walk on the way resulting in the purification of vision. The initial step to gain this all too important vision is morality (*sīla*) consisting in purity of body’s actions, in purity of speech and in purity of living.

Those who criticize the negative aspects of the precepts should be told of the dynamics of the Dhamma. For example the Buddhadhamma breathes the spirit of loving kindness and compassion toward all living beings; the spirit of charity (*dāna*) instead of stealing; the spirit of chastity instead of unbridled passion; the spirit of reconciliation instead of slander; the spirit of truth instead of lying etc. It should be noted that the ten unwholesome actions (*dasaakusala kamma patha*) have their corresponding wholesome actions (*dasa kusala kamma patha*).

²⁴ The Four Great Efforts are (i) the Effort to avoid the arising of evil, unwholesome things that have not yet arisen, (ii) the Effort to overcome the evil, unwholesome things that have already arisen, (iii) the Effort to arouse wholesome things that have not yet arisen, (iv) the Effort to maintain the wholesome things that have already arisen, and to bring them to growth, to maturity and to perfection.

²⁵ It is by employing the technique called Mental Development (*bhāvanā*) that mental tranquility is produced. Mental tranquility is the precursor to the development of Wisdom (*paññābhāvanā*) or clear Insight (*vipassanābhāvanā*). For further information please read Chapter 4 of *Fundamentals of Buddhism* by the late Venerable Nāṇatiloka Mahā Thera.

Seven Stages of Purity²⁶ contained in the Rathavināta Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya)²⁷ which is illustrated by the simile of a grand state drive laid out in seven stages. I do not propose to dwell on this *Sutta* here, but I shall draw from it relevant matter in the course of developing this essay.

There is one more significant matter which I should touch upon before I close this fourth condition preparatory to the pilgrim's "Ascent." I am referring to the Nine Great Insight Knowledges (*nava mahā vipassanā ñāṇa*), each of which is a fundamental asset in the development of the pilgrim's mind leading up to Maturity Knowledge (*gotrabhū ñāṇa*), at which point he gains Purity of Insight into the four Paths of Holiness (*ñāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*).

Let us now follow the pilgrim on the Way. He has arrived at Right Concentration on the mundane Path. With mind tranquilised and stabilised and with one-pointedness of mind, known as "attainment" Concentration (*appanā-samādhi*), he penetrates this fathom-long body and perceives the three characteristics already mentioned above, characteristics common to all compounds (*saṅkhāras*). Furthermore, wherever he turns, he sees these three characteristics everywhere, throughout the entire universe.

Engaged in this deep contemplation on the evanescent nature of all phenomena, a day arrives when the pilgrim notices an aura (*obhāsa*) radiating from his body. His whole personality is permeated with a joy and happiness never before felt by him. While in this ecstatic state he may believe that he has attained enlightenment. However, a little while later, his mind clears itself and he realizes through Purity of Insight regarding the right and wrong path (*maggāmagga-ñāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*) the distinction between the mundane Noble Eightfold Path of the worldling and the supra-mundane Noble Eightfold Path of the Noble One.

Perceiving the Right Path, the pilgrim pursues his contemplation on the three characteristics, with added zeal and vigour. This confers upon him Purity of Insight into the Path of Progress (*paṭipadā-ñāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*). At this point the pilgrim obtains, step by step, a clearer and more comprehensive knowledge of his progress on the Path heading for the ariyan way. This knowledge is nine-fold as I have already mentioned. I shall give here a bare summary without which the reader will fail to understand the gradual evolution of the pilgrim's mind to the supra-mundane.

The pilgrim, who has perceived the arising and passing away of all conditioned things, takes hold of the passing away of things, which is more conspicuous than their arising. He directs his mind to the dissolution (*bhaṅga*) of things and perceives that both mind and matter which make up the so-called being are a constant flux, not remaining the same for two consecutive seconds. This knowledge of the dissolution of things creates in his mind a fear, a terror (*bhaya*) for the five aggregates of existence. This knowledge that views existence with fear leads him to grasp the misery and vanity (*ādinavā-ñāṇa*) of existence. This knowledge leads to aversion, to disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), which, in turn, leads to the will for deliverance from existence (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*). Thus willed, he proceeds to develop the three characteristics of the impermanency, the imperfectness and the impersonality of all things (*paṭisankhā-ñāṇa*). This knowledge results in an attitude of neither attachment nor aversion to the things of the world—he looks at everything with complete equanimity (*saṅkhārūpekkhā-ñāṇa*).

²⁶ The Seven Stages of Purity are (i) Purity of Morality (*sīlavissuddhi*), (ii) Purity of Mind (*cittavisuddhi*), (iii) Purity of Views (*diṭṭhivissuddhi*), (iv) Purity consisting in overcoming all doubts (*kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi*), (v) Purity of Insight regarding the Right and Wrong Path (*maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhi*), (vi) Purity of Insight regarding the Path of Progress (*paṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhi*) and (vii) Purity of Insight into the Four Paths of Holiness (*ñāṇadassanavisuddhi*).

²⁷ Cankerless. It is by totally destroying the Cankers (*āsava*), also called the floods (*ogha*), that the *anāgāmin* attains the state of an Arahant. Vide: *The Four Cankers*, Bodhi Leaf No. 34, by the present writer.

Arriving at this point of his spiritual culture, the pilgrim takes one of the three characteristics of existence, whichever appeals to him most, and begins to develop it to the utmost degree. He is gradually drawn towards the stream (*sota*), and prepares to take the plunge, for he knows that at any moment the Path will reveal itself. He tightens his grip on the particular characteristic he has chosen, and awaits the event. Behold! His mind-door alerts and a *javana* (impulsion) thought process runs thus:

1	2	3	4	5	6 & 7
<i>parikamma</i> (preliminary)	<i>upacāra</i> (access)	<i>anuloma</i> (adaptation)	<i>gotrabhu</i> (maturity)	<i>magga</i> (path)	<i>phala</i> (fruit) (knowledge)

The pilgrim has now arrived on the Ariyan Way, having taken the “ascent” with the knowledge associated with Purity into the Four Paths of Holiness *nāṇadassana-visuddhi*). He is now no more a worldling (*puthujjana*). He has transcended the mundane consciousness (*lokiya citta*) and has gained the supra-mundane consciousness (*lokuttara citta*). He has entered the Stream. He is a Stream-Winner (*sotāpanna*) and is taken up the Stream to Nibbāna. He is a Noble One (*ariya puggala*). He gets a glimpse of Nibbāna, for the first time in the ups and downs of his *saṃsāric* existence. The Stream Winner becomes conscious of Fruition (*phala*) immediately after, with no interval between (*samādhim-ānantarikaññānam-āhu*), the Path and the Fruition of Stream-entry.

Our pilgrim, if he fails to attain Nibbāna in this life itself, will be born seven times at the most, and never an eighth time. He will not be born in the four states of woe. He will not commit the five weighty (*garuka*) crimes, namely: (i) parricide, (ii) matricide, (iii) killing an *arahant*, (iv) shedding blood from the Buddha’s body and (v) causing a schism in the Saṅgha.

Our pilgrim, on entering the Stream, breaks the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind him to the Wheel of Life.

They are:

1. Self-Illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). This is the belief that there exists in the individual a permanent, stable and an abiding entity called a soul.²⁸ The Buddha dismissed the soul-theory as untenable in the light of His minute analysis of the five aggregates which make up the so-called individual.
2. Doubts (*vicikicchā*). They are doubts in regard to (i) the Buddha, (ii) the Dhamma, (iii) the Sangha, (iv) the monastic rules of conduct, (v) the past, (vi) the future, (vii) both the past and future (leading to *kamma* and *vipāka*) and (viii) Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).
3. The belief in the efficacy of ceremonies and rites (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*). This is the view held by ascetics and *brahmins* that purification can be gained by rules of moral conduct or by rites or by both rules of moral conduct and rites.

Although it was my intention to follow the pilgrim up to the moment he stepped upon the Ariyan Way, I now feel that I should follow him as he graduates through the remaining three stages of the Path of Holiness. Accordingly I shall briefly provide the reader with the basic information regarding his further progress on the Path.

The noble pilgrim, encouraged by a glimpse of Nibbāna, renews his contemplation on the three characteristics again and again. He also reviews the Seven Stages of Purity. In the fifth thought moment of the supra-mundane (*javana*) thought-process he attains the state of a Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmi*). Thereby he neutralizes the force of seven births assigned to a Stream-

²⁸ The Dhammasaṅgaṇī lists twenty soul-theories. Also see: *The Truth of Anattā* by Dr. Malalasekera (The Wheel publication No. 94)

Winner and limits it to one birth only, i.e. within the sense sphere. He gets a vision of Nibbāna in its Fruition consciousness (*magga-phala*). He attenuates or weakens the fourth and fifth fetters, namely, sense-desires (*kāma-rāga*) and ill will (*patigha*), two powerful fetters that had bound him to existence from a beginningless past.

Thereafter, the noble pilgrim, now a Once-Returner, develops as before the contemplation on the three characteristics and reviews the Seven Stages of Purity. In the supra-mundane thought-process at the fifth thought moment, he gains the state of a Never-Returner (*anāgāmi*). He destroys the force present in a Once-Returner of being born once. As a Never-Returner he destroys completely the fetters of sense-desires and ill will. Hence, he does not return to this planet nor does he seek a celestial abode. If he fails to attain Nibbāna in this life, he is reborn in the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*), a special reserve for *Anāgāmis*. There he attains full sanctity (*arahathood*), and on passing from there is reborn no more.

Our noble pilgrim, as before, pursues his contemplation and reviews the Seven Purities. At the fifth moment of the supra-mundane thought-process, cankerless²⁹ he attains the supreme goal of the Holy Life, that of a Perfect One (Arahant). A Perfect One totally eradicates the five higher Fetters of (i) the desire for the Form World (*rūpa-rāga*), (ii) the desire for the Formless World (*arūpa-rāga*), (iii) conceit (*māna*), (iv) restlessness (*uddhacca*) and (v) ignorance (*avijjā*). Our noble pilgrim now comprehends, “Destroyed is birth, done is what was to be done, and there is no more of being such or such.”

I have now to make a few observations regarding the Stream Winner, who is, in fact, the theme of this Essay. As I indicated earlier, the fifth supra-mundane *javana* thought-moment is the Path-consciousness (*magga-citta*), and the two succeeding thought-moments, the sixth and the seventh are the Stream-entry Fruition-consciousness (*sotāpatti-phala-citta*). It is during this infinitesimally short period of time that a Stream-Winner gets a glimpse of Nibbāna.

At the moment when the pilgrim wins the Stream he comprehends the Four Noble Truths: This is Suffering; This is the Origin of Suffering; This is the Cessation of Suffering; This is the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. This knowledge concerning the Four Noble Truths helps him to steer clear of the rocks and shoals—that is, the numerous views (*diṭṭhi*) which he comes across on the Stream.

1. The knowledge of Suffering (*dukkha-ñāṇa*) helps him to steer clear of the views: (i) the view of an abiding self or soul and (ii) the view that the aggregates are lasting, beautiful, pleasurable, and self.
2. The knowledge of the Origin of Suffering (*dukkha samudaya-ñāṇa*) steers him clear of (i) the view that there is no birth after death (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*), (ii) that there is a Creator God and (iii) the view that everything comes into being spontaneously without a cause (*ahetuka-vāda*).
3. The knowledge of the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-ñāṇa*) steers him clear of, (i) the view of Eternalism (*sassata-diṭṭhi*), (ii) the view that the Realm of Neither Perception nor non-Perception is Nibbāna and (iii) that the sphere of beings devoid of consciousness (*asaññā-satta*) is Nibbāna.
4. The knowledge of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-patipadā-ñāṇa*) steers him clear of (i) the view that there is no effect (*vipāka*) in giving (alms), nor reward for good deeds nor punishment for evil deeds (*akiriya-diṭṭhi*), (ii) that there is neither this world nor a world beyond, there is no moral obligation toward father and mother and that in this world there are no recluses or *Brahmins* of virtuous conduct, who

²⁹ It is by totally destroying the cankers (*āsava*), also called the floods (*ogha*), that the *Anāgāmi* attains the state of an Arahant. See *The Four Cankers* – Bodhi Leaves No. B. 34 by the present writer.

with wisdom revealed and proclaimed the true nature of things (*natthika-vāda*) and (iii) the view that eternal happiness can be had by following either self-indulgence or self-mortification.

The knowledge of winning the Stream (*sotāpatti-ñāṇa*) is spoken in terms of “all that is bound to arise is bound to cease,” or, in other words, whatever is born must die (*uppāda vaya dhammino*). This realistic view of the transience of all compound things is best illustrated in the tragic story of the young mother Kisā Gotamī which is found in the commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya. Almost demented at the loss of her first-born baby boy, she ran along the streets of Sāvatti crying, “Give me medicine for my son.” A kindly person directed her to the Buddha, who sensing the spiritual maturity in her, sent her on a mission to fetch a few grains of mustard from any house where no one had ever died. She failed to obtain the grains of mustard in the manner instructed by the Buddha. While returning to the Buddha, it suddenly dawned upon her that her son was not the only one that death has overcome, and that that was a law common to all mankind. She then took her dead child to the charnel ground.

When she stood before the Buddha, he gently asked her, “Gotami, did you get the tiny grains of mustard seed?” “Done, Reverend Sir, is the business of the mustard seed.” She had gained the knowledge of Stream-entry.

The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (mentioned earlier) speaks of four qualities or accomplishments found in a Stream-Winner (*sotāpannassa-aṅgāni*). They are born of an unshakable confidence (*aveccapasāda*) in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. He has realized (i) that the Buddha is indeed that Blessed One, Worthy, Fully Enlightened, endowed with knowledge and virtue, Well gone, Knower of the three worlds, Incomparable Charioteer of Beings to be tamed, Guide of gods and men, the Enlightened Lord.

He has realized (ii) that the Dhamma is well-expounded by the Lord, is visible, immediate, inviting to come and behold, leading to Deliverance and to be understood through experience by the wise.

He has realized (iii) that the Saṅgha is on the Path to final happiness, on the straight Path, on the Path of wisdom, on the Path of correct living, has attained the four Paths (of holiness) and their fruitions, is worthy of offerings brought from afar, is worthy of hospitality, of gifts, is worthy of reverence, is an incomparable field of merit to the world.

He is also conscious of the fact that (iv) the Stream-Winner is possessed of the purest virtue, (*ariyakantehi-sīlehi-samannāgato-hoti*) leading to supra-mundane concentration.

What, then, is this purest virtue? It is virtue that is unbroken and continuous at the beginning, the middle and the end, and wherein the precepts are not broken at any point, but are observed throughout in their natural order; it is a virtue where the precepts are not broken here and there; it is a virtue free from craving; it is a virtue praised highly by the wise; it is a virtue unadulterated by desire and false views; it is a virtue that induces neighbourhood (*upacāra*) and attainment (*appanā*) concentration.

As I conclude this Essay, I must repeat, with all the emphasis at my command, that inner purification is productive of greater good than evanescent material possessions or temporary celestial comforts. For, as the Blessed One says,

“Better than absolute sovereignty over the earth,
better than going to heaven,
better than lordship over all the worlds is the
Fruit of a Stream-Winner.”³⁰

³⁰ Dhammapada v 178

Everyone should ask oneself the question: What is the meaning of life? To the materialist who worships at the altar of Hedonism, the meaning of life is, "Eat, drink and enjoy, for tomorrow we die". To the Buddhist, who understands the Law of Causality, "he who sees uprising by way of cause sees Dhamma; he who sees Dhamma sees uprising by way of cause" (*yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passati, yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati*).³¹ To him the meaning of life is to gain Insight and see himself as he really is. To this end he treads the Noble Eightfold Path as taught by the Shower of the Way. Insight rewards him with entry into the Stream. May you with stirred up energy, with human strength and with determined zeal, strive to gain the Stream here and now.

With this fervent and sincere appeal we dedicate this essay to our readers. If in the perusal of it they obtain the inspiration and earnestness to embark on this great spiritual adventure possible to man, we can then have the satisfaction of knowing that our labours have been worthwhile, and by that they are fully compensated.

"Great is the goal that the man of
stirred up energy, remote from evil,
unfavourable things, can make perfect."

(Saṃyutta Nikāya II 29)

³¹ Majjhima Nikāya I 190-191

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