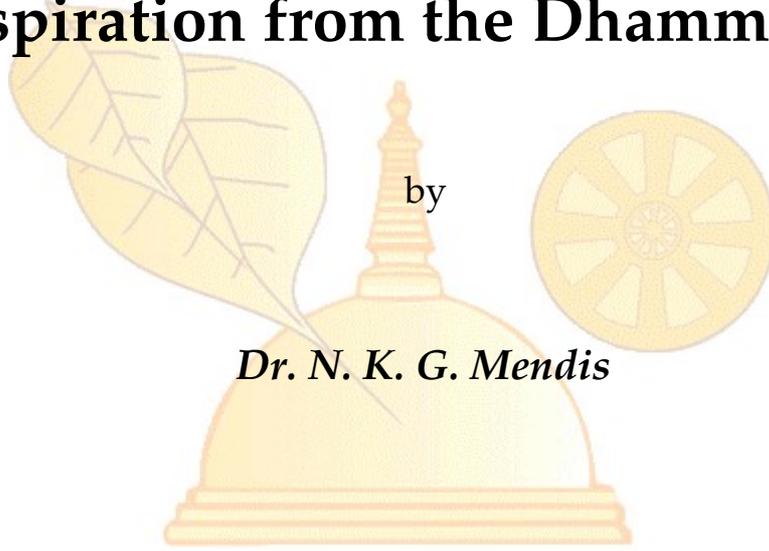


Inspiration from the Dhammapada



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Inspiration from the Dhammapada

Namo Sammāsambuddhassa! Homage to the supremely Enlightened One!
Namo Saddhammassa! Homage to the sublime teaching!
Namo Buddhasaṅghassa! Homage to the Buddha's community of monks!

In the pages that follow it is hoped to draw attention to the inspiration and guidance we can obtain from the Dhammapada as we model our way of living in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path. It is not suggested that actual practice can be replaced by reciting the scriptures, but the scriptures can and do help us by stimulating enthusiasm; also, the scriptures provide material for us to investigate the Dhamma, which investigation is the second factor of enlightenment; furthermore, in times of need when we are being assailed by unwholesome thoughts, we can repel these by recalling relevant portions of the sayings of the Enlightened One.

The Dhammapada is a collection of utterances of the Buddha made at various times to suit different occasions. These utterances were rehearsed at the first council of Arahats, convened three months after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, and took the form of a collection of verses, bearing the name Dhammapada and forming part of the Pali Canon. In that form, which comprises 423 verses in 26 sections, the Dhammapada has come to us through all these years for our guidance.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is also referred to as the mundane path (*lokiya*), when pertaining to those still unliberated. When followed diligently it leads to the supramundane path (*lokuttara*) and the final extinction of suffering. Here we are concerned with the mundane path and the difficulties we may encounter as we tread this path and how we can look to the Dhammapada as a fountain of encouragement. There are eight factors in this path which are traditionally described as belonging to three groups:

1. Wisdom = Right view and right thought.
2. Morality = Right speech, right action and right livelihood.
3. Concentration = Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

When one follows this path one does not go step by step according to the sequence given. If that were the case one would be able to gain wisdom and concentration before morality is established, which is not possible. Morality is an essential prerequisite for concentration which in turn promotes wisdom. In actual fact, as one progresses along this path there is a simultaneous association of the different links in varying degrees.

At this stage it would, perhaps, be relevant to discuss who will want to follow the Noble Eightfold Path and what makes them want to do so.

In a doctrinal talk given by the Buddha to King Pasenadi of Kosala, as recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Buddha classified human beings into four groups:

- I. Born to "darkness" and ending in "darkness."
- II. Born to "darkness" and ending in "light."
- III. Born to "light" and ending in "darkness."

IV. Born to "light" and ending in "light."

This classification is applicable even today and will be so in the future too. We shall use this classification for our discussion without necessarily conforming to the descriptive characteristics of each group as given by the Buddha.

Group I refers to those beings who are born into a miserable environment, perhaps handicapped physically and sometimes mentally, and live in poverty and want. In spite of these conditions, or maybe because of them, not being able to understand the causes of their plight, they commit unwholesome acts by deed, speech and thought and due to this, these unfavourable conditions will continue. These conditions exemplify the manner in which the impersonal law of kamma and vipāka (action and reaction) operates. When the results of unwholesome kamma are exhausted, better conditions will prevail. There is no being, human or divine, who can alter this lawful situation here. All that we, who are not in this group, can do, is to show the greatest amount of compassion, give whatever relief possible, and not make their miseries any worse.

Group II refers to those who are born into unfavourable conditions, both personal and environmental. Due to exhaustion of their unwholesome kamma results, for one reason or the other, good sense prevails and their actions by deed, word and thought are wholesome, and favourable results are experienced even in this existence. Here again it gives some idea as to how the law of kamma operates. It is convincing evidence to give strength to those who are handicapped and stands opposed to a belief in eternal damnation for even one single act of wrong-doing.

Group III refers to those beings who due to past wholesome kamma are born into favourable conditions, both personal and environmental. Perhaps a large proportion of mankind belongs to this group, enjoying normal health, unimpaired faculties and a reasonable standard of living. Some even assume positions of influence and authority over fellow beings. However, they do not know why they are favoured in this manner and, in ignorance of the law of kamma, they commit unwholesome acts by deed, word and thought, and the evil consequences are experienced even in this existence not to speak of future ones. Striking examples are those who seek their pleasure in fox-hunts and big-game safaris, those who seek to increase their wealth by trading in destructive weapons, intoxicating drinks and drugs, and those who abuse their authority and power by inflicting cruelty and hardship on fellow beings.

Group IV refers to a very fortunate class of beings. Their wholesome past kamma has given them favourable conditions. Maintaining the same wholesome trend they act wisely by deed, word and thought. They are assets to humanity anywhere and at all times. The most outstanding example in this group is the Blessed One himself. Since his time there have been many more and some exist even today.

It is expected that those in group II can do with all the help available to follow the Noble Eightfold Path and it is hoped that those in group III will pause for a while in their unwholesome trend, make a sensible appraisal of their favourable conditions and the causes thereof, and will be fortunate enough to come to the teachings of the Enlightened One. They too will then welcome whatever assistance they can get for spiritual advancement. Group IV, as implied above acting wisely, will always heed good advice and continue with their spiritual progress.

Beings come to the Teachings of the Blessed One in different ways

On account of past wholesome kamma a being is born to a family where the environment is conducive to spiritual advancement. The parents will guide the newcomer to the family in accordance with the teachings of the Blessed One; preceptors and good friends are at hand. As a result it is expected that such a person will not deviate easily from the Buddhist way of life. There are those who are born to families where Buddhist principles are alien but they are gifted with that rare intuition which makes them look at the world around them. They see so many facets of life which puzzle them and to which they find no satisfying answers in the doctrines handed down to them by their forebears; so they search elsewhere and are fortunate enough to arrive at the Buddha's doctrine. Such types are increasing in numbers particularly in the traditionally Christian countries.

There are those who "accidentally" come across a book on Buddhism, or happen to listen to a talk on Buddhism or meet someone who is already leading a Buddhist way of life. These encounters spark a gash of insight and they pursue their interest in the doctrine of the Buddha. These are no accidents; nothing happens by accident. It is wholesome kamma result coming into play. There are those who at some stage personally experience the bitter impact of the vicissitudes of life, call a halt to their erratic ways and seek comfort in the teachings of the Buddha.

The purpose of following the Noble Eightfold Path is to attain Nibbāna, which is the cessation of suffering. Most of us will probably not attain this supreme goal in this existence, but if one strives to become a Stream Enterer it will be quite an achievement. A Stream Enterer is one who has entered the first stage of the supramundane path by severing the first three of the ten fetters that bind one down to the repeated rounds of birth, death and re-birth. These three fetters are belief in a self or soul, sceptical doubt and belief in the efficacy of rites and rituals. The Stream Enterer will never be born in the lower planes of existence, will have seven re-births at the most and is destined to full enlightenment. Even if one cannot become a Stream Enterer there are other benefits to be experienced in this life by following the code outlined in the Noble Eightfold path. There will be an increasing measure of contentment and equanimity which will help one to overcome the tribulations of life. Such a person is no danger to any form of sentient life and, in fact, will be an asset to any society. Finally, when death says, "leave everything and come with me," there should be no bewilderment or confusion because one trains oneself to prepare for this moment. However, for many of us householders, especially if the environment is not conducive to a Buddhist way of life, there will be many difficulties as we try to go along this path. These obstacles may be our own personal ones or they may be from outside.

First we shall mention some of the difficulties in a general way and later in relation to the factors of the path and how we can refer these difficulties to quotations from the Dhammapada. By recalling to mind these words of wisdom in the Dhammapada, over and over again at the right time, there is no doubt that we can get much sustenance and encouragement.

Companionship

Traditionally, by Buddhist standards, a good companion is said to "have faith, be virtuous, learned and wise." It is, indeed, very rare in this day and age to find such a companion. The disciple who is earnestly trying to follow the path will have a strong desire to meet and converse with others having the same interests. Dhamma discussions are beneficial and

stimulating. In the Kindred Sayings on Elements (*Dhātu Saṃyutta*) we find the Buddha's discourse on how beings of similar "tastes" flow together and meet together. In today's common parlance we would say "birds of a feather flock together." But, for the householder, keen on spiritual progress, especially in countries where the Buddha Dhamma is not yet established, the opportunity to "flock together" with another of similar interest may arise only rarely. Here we shall make a distinction between a companion and an acquaintance.

A companion is a person with whom one associates frequently, wants to do so and enjoys doing so. On the other hand, an acquaintance is a person whom one knows but with whom there is no degree of intimacy. It is inevitable that in the society in which the householder lives there will be acquaintances. The disciple, keen on making progress on the path, has to exercise caution when there is contact with these acquaintances. Some of them may be strongly motivated by greed, hatred and delusion and an insidious influence is always a possibility. Hence one should say that, if unavoidable, the body may move with them but the mind must be outside their influence. We will have to conduct ourselves in this manner without conceit. Conceit can be overcome by practising loving kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) towards all beings. Therefore, the following two verses from the Dhammapada have to be taken in the context of good companions as defined above, and when we are denied the privilege of meeting such persons, instead of becoming despondent, let us call to mind the following:

Faring along, should one not find
a better or an equal to oneself,
let firmly him pursue a solitary life.
There is with fools no fellowship.¹

Associate not with evil friends,
associate not with mean men.
Associate with good friends,
associate with noble men.²

Reaction of Others

When one has decided to follow this path and is making a diligent effort to do so, the reactions of some with whom one comes in contact could, at the start, have a disturbing influence. As one's practice along the path is progressing, there is likely to be a change in one's demeanour which may become manifest in bodily actions, speech and composure. The bodily actions will be guarded and one will not wish to inflict the slightest harm on the smallest form of sentient life. If mindfulness in relation to the body is being practised, the bodily movements will be under control and purposeful. Speech too will be guarded; it will be truthful and not harsh, but gentle and kind, and there will be no inclination to indulge in gossip, slander or frivolous "small talk." The composure will show a change as one begins to see aspects of life in a different light which will lay bare the general unsatisfactoriness of this world around us. The misfortunes and tragedies that befall fellow beings will have an impact on one as they never did before. These changes in one's personality are not cultivated to give a "holier than thou" impression, but they occur as a natural response when the general pervasiveness of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) dawns on one. But the purpose of following the path is not to go through life with this burden on one's head, but to come to know the real nature of this existence, lay down this burden, and emerge as a victor with a cheerful countenance. This is the priceless reward that awaits anyone

¹ Dhp 61. All translations are by the Venerable Nārada Mahāthera of Vajirārāma, Colombo, Sri Lanka unless indicated otherwise.

² Dhp 78.

who follows the Noble Eightfold Path with diligence. However, at the start, in some instances, the reactions of associates, friends and even members of one's family to these changing attitudes may result in the disciple's being the target of various epithets. On their part they stem from the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, and, on the part of the one who is following the path, they are the results of one's own past unwholesome kamma. Understanding this, it is hoped that the disciple will not be deterred by those temporary obstacles but will forge ahead practising *mettā* and *karuṇā* to all living beings and recalling to mind these verses from the Dhammapada:

Many folk are ill-behaved
but their abuse I shall endure,
as an elephant in battlefield
bears arrows shot from bow.³

From old it has been, Atula—
this is not only of today;
sitting silent, him they blame;
speaking often, him they blame;
they blame him saying little too—
there's no one in the world unblamed.⁴

There never was and never will be
nor at present does exist
a person who is wholly blamed
or one who's wholly praised.⁵

Finding fault

Though this occurs at all levels from the international to the individual, we are concerned here with the person following the path. Criticism may be constructive or destructive. Constructive criticism derives from good motives and is done for the welfare of the person criticised. The Buddha criticised his disciples, sometimes in no uncertain terms, when he found them lapsing into ways not conducive to spiritual advancement. A teacher will criticise a pupil with good intentions and so will a parent a child or one good friend another. A person neglecting his own welfare resents wholesome advice. The disciple following this path should be amenable to correction and accept good advice in the spirit in which it is given. In this context we have two verses:

Let him advise, let him instruct,
and from evil things restrain.
To the good, indeed, he's dear,
but not so pleasing to the bad.⁶

Should one a man of wisdom see,
who points out faults and gives reproof,
as though revealing treasure hidden
one should consort with such a sage,

³ Dhp 320, translated by Phra Khantipálo.

⁴ Dhp 227, translated by Phra Khantipálo.

⁵ Dhp 228.

⁶ Dhp 77.

for while one lives with one like him
better it is and never worse.⁷

Destructive criticism, on the other hand, bears the signs of malice, greed and delusions, all unwholesome. The Buddha has said that one who is always seeking faults in others is a long way from the destruction of his own defilements. Regarding a monk who had this habit the Buddha uttered this verse:

He who looks for others' faults
and is forever irritable,
his corruptions ever grow,
far is he from cankers' end.⁸

Since this habit of finding others' faults with malicious intent is quite prevalent and easy to indulge in, and since the purpose of following the path is to get rid of defilements, when we are tempted to look for faults in others, just for the sake of doing so, it will be salutary to pause for a moment and remember these two verses from the Dhammapada:

Not concerned with faults of others,
what they did or left undone;
but one's own faults should one look at:
what one did or left undone.⁹

Easily seen are faults of others,
though one's own are hardly seen.
So one winnows just like chaff
the faults that other people have.
But yet one's own one likes to hide
just like a cheat a losing throw of dice.¹⁰

Ill will and Anger

In ordinary parlance we say one "bears" ill will and one "shows" anger or "gets" angry. A person could harbour considerable ill will towards fellow beings and this may not be noticeable to others. Some of the most sordid crimes have been committed with a smile on the face. All worldlings have some form of ill will in some kind or the other and in varying degrees. Ill will is one of the five hindrances and one of the "lower" five fetters that tie us to the sensuous world. Ill will is temporarily repressed during the absorptions (the *jhānas*). It is radically and permanently eliminated when the fruits of the supramundane path are attained. At first it is weakened when one becomes a Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmi*) and then disappears for ever when one becomes a Non-Returner (*anāgāmi*). On the other hand, anger is something that manifests itself rather crudely either by bodily action or by speech. It is there for all to observe. If one who is earnestly trying to follow the path unwittingly gives vent to anger, it acts as a setback even for a short time because it disturbs the mental calm one is trying to cultivate and also interferes with progress in meditation. As worldlings we can and should, by being mindful at all times, control and finally put an end to anger overcoming us. The stage at which the anger has to be checked is the moment when the thought of anger arises and before it leads to uncontrolled speech and bodily action. The mere awareness of the arising of the "thought with anger" will,

⁷ Dhp 76, translated by Phra Khantipālo.

⁸ Dhp 253.

⁹ Dhp 50.

¹⁰ Dhp 252.

with regular practice, suffice to make that thought impotent. In this respect the following verse is relevant:

Who can arisen anger curb,
like holding back a chariot:
Him a true charioteer I call—
mere rein-holders are other folk.¹¹

On the other hand, the person who is bent on spiritual advancement, may be accosted by someone who is giving vent to anger. It may be difficult at the start, but it is important not to retaliate with anger. The power of mettā is unlimited and the truth of this can be verified by anyone who earnestly cultivates this sublime virtue. Any attempt to subdue anger with anger will never be successful in the final analysis. In this connection the Buddha uttered the following verse:

Not by hatred, hatred ceases
in this world of tooth and claw.
Love alone from hate releases.
This is an eternal law.¹²

Sensual Temptation

This could be quite a problem for the average person who is making an effort to follow this path. Much effort will be required especially by the householder who is assailed in many ways from all sides by objects designed to titillate the senses. In the scriptural texts five "cords of sensuality" (*kāmaguṇa*) are described. They are visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes and bodily contact. Their existence is known to the sentient being through the respective sense organ. In addition, the mind is taken as the sixth sense organ receiving stimuli from mental objects which may be related to the past, present or future, and may be real or imaginary. Thus there are six sense organs and six kinds of sense objects. Dependent on each sense organ and its appropriate object the relevant consciousness arises. The coming together of these three, i.e. organ, object and consciousness is referred to as contact (*phassa*). Dependent on this contact feeling (*vedanā*) arises. This feeling may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This feeling arises at every single occasion when the three-fold contact occurs. It is a very important event to recognise because it is at this stage that mindfulness must be alert and sensual temptation can be overcome. This feeling arises and perishes in a moment signifying the transitory nature of the process (*anicca*); it is also a purely impersonal process signifying the no-self nature (*anattā*); these two features account for the unsatisfactoriness of what has taken place so far (*dukkha*). This feeling is followed by perception (*saññā*), that is, the being becomes aware of the distinctive marks of the particular object. Since we are here concerned with sensual temptation we shall confine ourselves to pleasant feeling. The worldling who is not conversant with the Buddha doctrine will not recognise the momentariness of the feeling, will be under the wrong impression that it is a "self" that is feeling, and the unsatisfactoriness due to these two features will not be comprehended. There will thus be an erroneous perception of the impermanent as permanent, the no-self as self and the unsatisfactory as satisfactory. In such a case the perception will be followed by thoughts, desires and yearnings. Therefore, when exposed to sensual temptations, perception must conform to reality, which is impermanent, without a self and unsatisfactory. If this is done there will not follow thoughts, desires and the subsequent train of events. There is no doubt that some sense objects produce pleasant feelings, otherwise beings will not seek

¹¹ DhP 222.

¹² DhP 5, translated by Francis Story.

satisfaction in them. There is also no doubt that this satisfaction is not lasting, otherwise beings will not be flitting from one object to another like the monkey in the jungle who grabs hold of one branch with one paw and then releases that after he has grabbed hold of another branch with the other paw. For the disciple intent on spiritual advancement, any yielding to sensual temptation will be a hindrance to progress and may even cause "defeat." The worthlessness of all sensual pleasures, not only in this world, but even in the heavenly existences, is brought out by the following utterances of the Buddha:

Not by a rain of golden coins
can one content in sensual pleasures find.
Desires give pain, but little joy.

When knowing this, the man who's wise,
not even in celestial joys will pleasure find.
In craving's end he will delight
the perfect Buddha's true disciple.¹³

Doubts (*vicikicchā*)

While attempting to follow the Noble Eightfold Path sceptical doubts may arise in the mind of the disciple. There may be doubts about the teachings of the Buddha, about the past and future, about the conditionality of existence, and whether there is any purpose served by leading a virtuous, wholesome life. These doubts form the fifth of the five mental hindrances to spiritual progress and the second of the ten fetters that bind beings to the wheel of existence. These doubts arise from time to time, in varying degrees, in all worldlings regardless of the faith (*saddhā*) in the threefold gem, because the faith is still shakeable and it becomes unshakeable only when the first stage of the supramundane path is attained. It is only then that sceptical doubt is eliminated for ever. Until we reach this stage we should always be mindful when there is doubt and when doubts are not present. Furthermore, the moment doubt arises it should be mindfully noted. Otherwise a train of unwholesome thoughts will follow. The mere awareness of the arising of doubt, the moment it arises, will dispel the doubt because the awareness thought has now replaced the doubt thought and only one thought can exist at a time. With this practice of mindfulness, supported by wise attention, investigation of reality, noble friendship and suitable conversation, fewer and fewer doubts will arise less and less frequently. The householder in a non-Buddhist environment, where suitable friendship and conversation are not available, can overcome lack of these blessings by resorting to quiet contemplation and reading of the Buddhist texts. If the disciple, living in accordance with Buddhist principles, gets the feeling of being different because all the others around are conducting themselves in ways contrary to the Buddha's teachings, it would, perhaps, help to remember the following verse-

Few are those among all men
who to the Further shore will go.
The rest of mankind truly,
just runs along this hither shore.¹⁴

There may be times when the disciple, who is leading a virtuous way of life in accordance with the path, will experience rather bitterly the vicissitudes of this existence. At the same time the disciple may find others who are not leading wholesome lives being spared these harsh experiences. They are enjoying comforts and are apparently happy. These seeming injustices

¹³ Dhammapada Verses 186 and 187.

¹⁴ DhP 85.

could have a disturbing influence on the disciple in the earlier stages. In situations like this, while cultivating the four sublime virtues of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, one should recall to mind the following two verses which in themselves lend strong support for the belief in kamma and rebirth:

Even an evil-doer meets with good
as long as evil ripens not.
But when that evil bears its fruit
the evil-doer will with the evil meet.¹⁵

Even a good man meets with evil,
as long as goodness ripens not.
But when his goodness bears its fruit,
the good man reaps the good result.¹⁶

At all times when we need encouragement the following verse will provide just that. In this context the word "Bhikkhu" which is the Pali for a monk, is applicable to one who is dedicated to the practice of the Teaching.

He who dwells in Dhamma and delights in it,
on Dhamma thinks again and again.
Remembering the Dhamma well,
such Bhikkhu will not fall sway from Dhamma.¹⁷

Remorse and Regret (*kukkucca*)

In the texts this is described as "repentance over wrong things done and right things neglected." This "uneasiness of conscience" (together with restlessness) forms the fourth of the five mental hindrances to spiritual progress. It is because we did what we should not have done and did not do what we should have that we are still here. Brooding over these deficiencies will, most probably, occur in the early stages. It is understandable but it will interfere with spiritual advancement. Therefore, the sooner we can give up this brooding the better it will be for us. Unlike in other doctrines there is no need for a self-tormenting feeling of guilt nor is it possible in Buddhist practice to seek redemption from "sins" by confession. Any confession of a transgression, according to Buddhist practice, is to serve as a restraint against that transgression being committed again and it is not for absolution. The first of the following two verses tells us that we alone are responsible for our evil actions and defilements and that we alone have to put an end to evil ways and get rid of defilements.

By oneself, indeed, is evil done,
by oneself is one defiled.
by oneself is evil left undone,
by oneself, is one purified.

Pure and impure on oneself depend
no one can purify another.¹⁸

The next verse indicates the results that ensue, even in this existence, when evil ways are abandoned and wholesome ways are cultivated.

¹⁵ Dhp 119.

¹⁶ Dhp 120.

¹⁷ Dhp 364.

¹⁸ Dhp 165.

Whoso with wholesome act
can compensate his evil deeds,
will shine and illumine this world
as does the moon, when free from clouds.¹⁹

Avarice (*macchhariya*)

This is considered as one of the evil passions and it certainly retards spiritual advancement. In the texts five kinds of avarice are mentioned. They are in relation to dwellings, families, gains, recognition and mental things. Two of the three unwholesome roots, namely inborn greed and the delusion of a self, are responsible for avarice. The third, hate, is ready to step in when any threat to these objects of avarice is imminent. When hate enters the scene there could be all kinds of conflicts, from a fight between two villagers to a war between two nations. The fault lies not in any of these objects, but in one's attitude towards them. If one is endowed with material possessions there could be a desire to increase them or, at least, to hold on to them at any cost. If one is born to the so called "super-races" or "high-caste" families there could be some contempt for all the others and in some instances even the basic human rights have been denied to them. If recognition and honour are bestowed on one, it is best if these are graciously received without elation or a feeling of superiority. Regarding mental things, the "closed fist" of the teacher was mentioned by the Buddha. This is the tendency for one with knowledge to hold it back without imparting it to others. Realising that these possessions and positions are the results of one's kamma, liberality must be cultivated and *mettā* and *karuṇā* practised towards all beings. As progress is made along the path and the three characteristics of existence begin to dawn on one, the "important self" begins to shrink and also the possessions and positions which lent themselves to avarice gradually lose their grip. The Buddha has extolled the virtues of liberality. It constitutes the first of the three kinds of meritorious activity, the other two being morality and mental development. In liberality it is the intention and volition that count and not the outward deed. As regards acquiring possessions, fame and honour, the Buddha has uttered this verse:

One way leads to worldly gain,
another to Nibbāna goes.
Clearly comprehending this,
the Bhikkhu, following the Buddha,
should not delight in gain and honour,
but should detachment cultivate.²⁰

Patience (*khanti*)

Most people are impatient. The one who is trying to follow the path may find progress slow and difficult. The rate of spiritual advancement will depend on personal factors and on the environment in which the disciple lives. Regarding personal factors, some have more defilements than others. These have, since time immemorial, been lurking in the subconscious mind, the subliminal life continuum (*bhavaṅga-sota*) and, from time to time, been surfacing to conscious level where they have influenced our volitional actions by thought, word and deed. When they came to the surface they were not recognised as such. After having played their part

¹⁹ Dhp 173.

²⁰ Dhp 75, translated by Phra Khantipālo.

they immediately sank back to their dark recesses awaiting the next opportunity to play their evil role. There are ten such defilements (*kilesas*): greed, hate, delusion, conceit, speculative views, sceptical doubt, mental torpor, restlessness, shamelessness and lack of conscience. When the disciple progresses in meditation and is mindful at all times, the defilements are recognised the moment they reach a conscious level. With repeated recognition of these defilements they lose their malevolent influence. In the initial stages, when we get to know what a considerable amount of defilements we do possess, we may find ourselves getting rather embarrassed or disturbed or even discouraged. However, we do not need to despair but may get fortitude from the following:

By degrees, and from time to time,
little by little let a prudent man
remove the stains from his own mind,
just as a smith the silver purifies.²¹

The environmental factors that can adversely affect spiritual progress are mainly lack of suitable companionship and opportunities for Dhamma discussions; also, getting too involved in worldly affairs can have the same effect. Living a virtuous life is by no means easy, especially for the householder who may have to cope with many distractions. We have to remind ourselves that what is wholesome and is for the welfare of the individual is difficult to practise and maintain. Hence the Buddha said:

Easy to do are things that are bad
and only harmful to oneself.
But good and beneficial acts
are difficult to do, indeed.²²

Attitude to other religions

This is important, especially for the disciple who lives in a non-Buddhist environment. Any argument with followers of other doctrines, on matters of religious differences, is best avoided. It will only hurt their sentiments and foster one's own defilements, like hate and conceit. It is futile to try to thrust down another's throat the Buddha Doctrine. The Dhamma is beyond sophistry and has to be experienced individually "in one's own heart." However, if there is a sincere inquiry about the Doctrine of the Buddha it behoves the disciple to provide what is solicited. If we are inclined to be envious of the prosperity of other religious establishments it is time to remind ourselves of the following verse:

People give according to their faith
and also as it pleases them.
He whom envy makes perturbed
concerning others food and drink,
will not find peace and concentration
be it daytime or at night.²³

From here on, some verses of the Dhammapada will be quoted in reference to the different factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. These factors as stated earlier, are grouped together into three divisions which are morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom or insight (*pañña*).

²¹ Dhp 239.

²² Dhp 163.

²³ Dhp 249.

Morality

This is an essential prerequisite for progress along the path. The disciple will, as progress is made, feel the disturbing effect of even the slightest lapse in *sīla*. Until we have reached the higher stages of spiritual development there will be lapses in *sīla* mostly in speech, less in bodily action. Each of these will be noted mindfully as they occur and every effort made to avoid their repetition. The less frequently these lapses occur the greater the encouragement to continue along the path. For one who is following the path the code of morality extends beyond the five Basic Precepts, namely abstention from killing any living being, taking what is not given, unlawful sexual intercourse, lying and the use of intoxicants. As regards speech, it is not only abstention from uttering falsehoods but also abstention from slander and gossip, harsh words and useless "small talk." It will be noted that the fifth basic precept, namely abstention from the use of intoxicants, is not specifically mentioned in the three factors of the path that comprise *sīla*. This has been taken as an excuse by some who claim to be leading a Buddhist way of life to "take a little drink." But even a little drink leads to moral carelessness and can be habit forming. Rightly has it been said: "First a man takes a drink; then the drink takes a drink; then the drink takes the man." The Buddha has said that right livelihood is abstaining from any livelihood that brings harm to other beings and one of these, he said, is trading in intoxicants. Therefore, nothing more need be said here regarding the necessity to abstain completely from intoxicants if *sīla* is to be perfect. In connection with *sīla* the following verses of the Dhammapada are quoted:

He who living things destroys,
who falsehood speaks,
and takes what is not given,
who to the wives of others goes
and is to alcoholic drinks addicted,
such a one, here in this very world,
the roots of his own welfare kills.

Know this, you worthy man:
hard to control are evil thoughts;
let not greed and wickedness
drag you down to misery.²⁴

Concentration

The three factors of the path that are grouped together under this heading, namely right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, are related to development of the mind. In order to develop the mind it is first necessary to know the mind, then how it can be protected, and then how it can be used for spiritual advancement. There are many verses in the Dhammapada which describe the nature of the mind. It is described as being fickle, fluttering, subtle, faring far and wide, hard to understand since it goes where it pleases, as it pleases and when it pleases, hard to check, and extremely swift. Two verses are quoted below to illustrate some of these qualities of the mind:

This flickering, wayward mind, is hard
to bring under control and guard.

²⁴ Dhammapada Verses 246, 247 & 248.

The wise man straightens, just as do
skilled fletchers make their arrows true.²⁵

The mind is hard to know and very subtle;
it settles where it pleases.
Let the wise man guard the mind:
a guarded mind brings happiness.²⁶

The three links grouped under right concentration not only support each other, but also, one is more or less a precondition for the other two. Right effort is right mental effort, not physical. It is effort to prevent the arising of unarisen and to dispel arisen unwholesome thoughts, and to promote the arising of unarisen and to maintain and develop to maturity arisen wholesome thoughts. If there is no right effort directed towards these aims the mind could be occupied with unwholesome thoughts and it will not be possible to practise right mindfulness nor will it be possible to lead the mind to tranquillity. Right mindfulness comprises the four contemplations: body, feelings, states of consciousness and mind-objects. These four contemplations cover the five aggregates and the practice leads to insight into the three characteristics of existence. Without right mindfulness it is not possible to practise right effort as mindfulness is necessary to know whether the thoughts arisen, or not arisen, are wholesome or not, and whether they are acting as hindrances or not. Right mindfulness is also necessary to develop tranquillity because before tranquillity can be attained it is necessary to get rid of disturbing thoughts by bare attention, which is mindfulness. Right concentration is *samādhi*. This means fixing the mind on a single object. This may be for a brief moment or it may be for a prolonged period of time. In the Noble Eightfold Path, right concentration refers to the four absorptions (the *jhānas*). These are attained by fixing the mind on a single object over a prolonged period of time. However, to practise right effort and right mindfulness also, concentration is required as it is necessary to fix the mind on that particular object for a brief moment otherwise the object will not be noticed. The interdependence of these three links may, therefore, be summarised as follows:

1. Right effort: Needed for right mindfulness and right concentration.
2. Right mindfulness: Needed for right effort and right concentration.
3. Right concentration: Needed for right effort and right mindfulness.

Mental development is of two kinds: development of tranquillity and development of insight. Both are extolled in the texts and in relation to these two end results of *bhāvanā* (mind development) the following two verses are respectively quoted:

Superhuman is the bliss of him
who, with his mind at peace,
has entered a secluded place,
and insight into Dhamma wins.

When he then fully comprehends
the rise and fall of the five groups,
he wins to rapture and to joy—
the deathless, this, for those who understand.²⁷

²⁵ Dhp 33, translated by Francis Story.

²⁶ Dhp 36.

²⁷ Dhammapada Verses 373 and 374.

Wisdom

Wisdom is also called insight and comprises right view or right understanding and right thoughts.

Right view is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, that is, the universality of suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. This understanding will be gained only by one who goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. This is clearly stated in the following two verses:

Who to the Buddha and the Dhamma
and to the Sangha goes for refuge,
sees with right knowledge
the fourfold teaching of the Noble Truths.²⁸

He sees the suffering and its cause,
where suffering is overcome,
and sees the Eightfold Path
which to the stilling of all suffering leads.²⁹

Right thoughts pertain to thoughts free from sensuous desires, free from ill will and free from cruelty.

Sensuous desires

There will be a growing realisation of the futility of trying to obtain any worthwhile or enduring satisfaction from attempting to hold on to any object whatsoever, be it animate or inanimate, because there is inevitable separation, sooner or later, of subject and object. The firmer the grasping, which is motivated by none other than selfish craving, the greater the suffering when the separation occurs. There is also a less obvious suffering when trying to get that object in the fear of not getting it and when holding on to it the fear of losing it. As worldlings we are always trying to hold on to something. If we can only make that hold less gluey then the inevitable separation will be less traumatic either when we part company from that object or the object leaves us. It is also true that if one does not have this grasping tendency there will be a greater appreciation of the object, purely on account of its own inherent properties rather than on the misguided notion that the object is one's very own possession. The Enlightened One and the Arahants, who had utterly destroyed the roots of craving, did however, not live like computers. The Buddha appreciated the beauties of the countryside and often commented on it as he did with Vesāli, for example. Knowing that his Parinibbāna was to be in three months he turned to gaze at Vesāli and told the Venerable Ānanda: "This will be the Perfect One's last sight of Vesāli." The Buddha admired and extolled the virtues of his disciples. Yet, when the Venerable Ānanda informed the Buddha that the Venerable Sāriputta had finally attained Nibbāna the Buddha did not show lament or sorrow but said "How could it be that what is born, come to being, formed and bound to fall, should not fall?" Five verses in the Dhammapada, 212 to 216, illustrate the grief and fear that spring from endearment, affection, attachment, lust and craving. One is reproduced here:

From attachment springs grief,
from attachment springs fear.

²⁸ Dhp 190.

²⁹ Dhp 191.

For him wholly attachment-free
there is neither grief nor fear.³⁰

Ill will

As has been mentioned earlier, ill will is given up completely only when the third stage of the supramundane path is attained. However, as one follows the Noble Eightfold Path an understanding of the toxicity of harbouring ill will towards any sentient being begins to grow and this poison is gradually removed from the system. The less ill will one feels towards fellow beings the easier will be the conscience and the smoother the journey we have to make. The Buddha was able to say the following about himself and his disciples who had reached spiritual advancement:

Ah! Happily we dwell, from hatred free
amid the hating, free from hate are we!³¹

Cruelty

Thoughts of being cruel in any way to any form of sentient life will fade away as one follows the path. In this world today there is a considerable amount of cruelty inflicted on humans and non-humans. We hear about the gruesome tortures practised on political prisoners; we are aware of the pain and suffering animals have to undergo for the purpose of scientific investigations; we are told how tender seal pups are clubbed on the head and skinned even before they are dead. There are also other not-so-obvious forms of cruelty like keeping animals in captivity for the purpose of exhibiting them to satisfy man's curiosity, or compelling them to perform acts not at all natural to them for the purpose of satisfying man's thirst for excitement. The disciple knows that every sentient being has its own right to live without fear of pain or of death. Hence these two verses:

All tremble before violence,
all are afraid of death.
Comparing others with oneself,
kill not, nor cause to kill!³²

Whoso, desiring happiness himself,
inflicts on beings harm
who likewise happiness desire,
will gain no happiness in after-life.³³

It is hoped that by reproducing these verses from the Dhammapada and relating them to specific situations, readers will appreciate the beauty, the practicality and the timelessness of the Buddha's utterances. They are not about fanciful and imaginary ideas. What was uttered more than 2500 years ago is applicable without any change even today and will be so in the future too. There has been no need, with the passage of time, to give different twists to suit the changing attitudes of man and to conform with the results of scientific research. In fact, changing scientific ideas are beginning to conform with what the Buddha said so many years ago. There is a trend to talk of "Western Buddhism" and "Scientific Buddhism." There is no

³⁰ Dhp 214.

³¹ Dhp 197. (F. St.)

³² Dhp 129.

³³ Dhp 131.

need for this. What the Buddha taught is applicable, without alteration, universally. Science will have to catch up with the Buddha Doctrine. Any attempt to treat the Dhamma as a cold abstract philosophy must fail because there is a thread of loving kindness, compassion and altruistic joy running through the whole Doctrine. What we should do is have confidence which is "reasoned and rooted in understanding." With this confidence and the other four spiritual faculties, namely energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, we should try to attain to at least the Stage of Stream Entry. The following verse explains why this should be done:

Better than being the earth's sole ruler,
better than going to heavenly realms,
better than lordship of all the worlds,
is the fruition of the Stream-Winner's state.³⁴

We have to bear constantly in mind that Māra, the personification of evil and passion, is lurking round the corner, in various guises, waiting for an opportunity to catch us in his snare. For six years Māra shadowed the Bodhisatta trying to prevent his attainment of enlightenment. Even after enlightenment Māra followed the Buddha looking for any weakness, but in vain. Therefore, it is not surprising that we worldlings can be easy prey to Māra unless we are forever mindful of the wiles of Māra and his three daughters, namely *taṇhā* (craving), *arati* (discontent) and *rāga* (passion). Regarding Māra and *taṇhā* the following verse is quoted:

This I say to you: Good luck to you,
to all who are assembled here!
Dig up the root of craving
like the sweet root of Bīrana!
Let not, like the flood a reed,
Māra break you again, again!³⁵

³⁴ Dhṃ 178.

³⁵ Dhṃ 337.

Acknowledgements

The translations of the Dhammapada verses included here, are mostly based on those of the Venerable Nārada Mahāthera of Vajirārāma. Colombo, Sri Lanka. Some changes, however, have been made in them, but not such as to affect the meaning. A few verses have been taken, or adapted, from the translations by Francis Story and Phra Khantipālo. The translations by the latter appeared under the title *The Dhammapada: The Path of the Truth*. This book includes two introductory essays which are recommended to the reader as they present valuable additional material on the topic.

For the expositions given here, grateful use has been made of the following two books: *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, by Ven. Piyadassi Mahāthera and "*Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*," by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera (Both issued by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy).

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