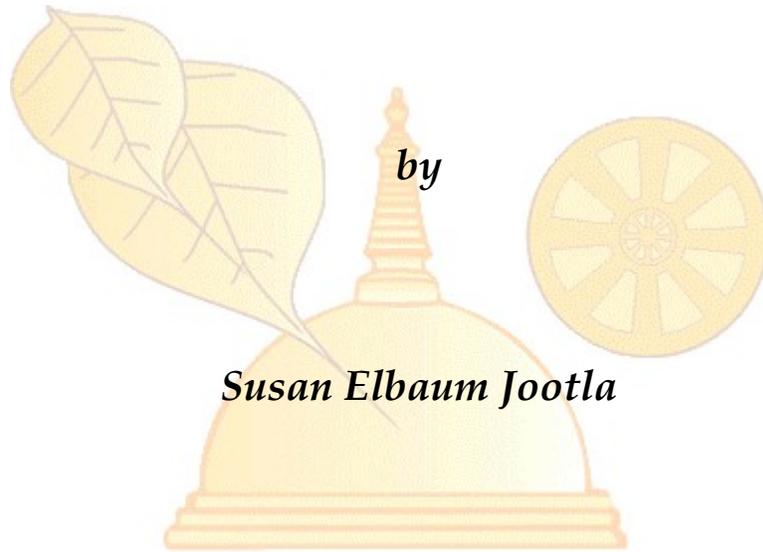


Investigation for Insight



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Preface

We have come into this world at a remarkable time, one of those brief periods when the teachings of a Buddha are readily available. There is his Noble Eightfold Path of wisdom, morality and concentration and specifically the technique of vipassanā meditation by means of which we can train our minds to see the ultimate nature of all phenomena of the world, their transience, unsatisfactoriness and essencelessness. With the development of this detached wisdom, our minds gradually lose their tensions, anguish and lust, and so real peace and happiness can develop.

This article is written in all humility by one who has just begun to walk on the Path, in the spirit of “ehipassiko,” the characteristic of the Dhamma that invites all to come and see and try it. There is yet a long way to travel, but there is no doubt whatsoever that the Path leads to the Goal and so this article is an expression of the mind’s wish to encourage and urge others to undertake for themselves this profoundly beneficial task of eliminating ignorance and craving and so end all suffering.

Susan Elbaum Jootla, Dalhousie

Introduction

All the teachings of the Buddha had one goal—the elimination of all suffering, all grief, misery, pain and anguish. All the kinds of meditation he explained were designed to train the mind of the student to become detached from all the phenomena of the world, within and outside of himself. This is the aim of Buddhist meditation because detachment is the opposite of *taṇhā* or craving and it is this *taṇhā* that is the source of all the sorts of suffering experienced by sentient beings. This desire is very deeply ingrained in our minds because of our ignorance about the real nature of the phenomena of the world. So, vipassanā, insight-meditation techniques of the Buddha, are designed to enable us to penetrate our illusions about the nature of reality which are perpetuated by our inaccurate perception of the world and ourselves. Insight has to be gained into the impermanent, unsatisfactory and essenceless nature of all conditioned phenomena, of everything mental and physical, all of which is the effect of certain causes. Insight is often conceived of as a magical experience suddenly just happening and instantly making all things clear. But, by and large, insight develops slowly and gradually through the careful process of observation, investigation and analysis of phenomena until the ultimate nature that lies behind their apparent, conventional truth is distinctly and indubitably perceived. It is this process known in Pali as *dhammavicaya* (Investigation of Dhamma) and also the closely related one of *yoniso-manasikāra* (systematic attention) which will be examined here. Ledi Sayādaw in his *Bodhipakkhiya Dīpanī*¹ defines *dhammavicaya* as identical with *paññā* (wisdom) and *Sammā Ditṭhi* (Right Understanding of View) and then describes the investigative process with the simile: “Just as cotton seeds are milled, carded, etc., so as to produce cotton wool, the process of repeatedly viewing the five *khandhas* (our personal aggregates of body, perception, feeling, volitions and consciousness) with the functions of *insight knowledge* (*vipassanā ñāṇa*) is called *dhammavicaya*.” First the subjects to be investigated, or the contents of the investigation for insight leading to liberation, will be examined. Then the role of *dhammavicaya* specifically as a part of vipassanā meditation will be discussed. Then will come the role of systematic attention in preventing the arising of the mental hindrances which can block progress in meditation and as one of the basic factors conducive to the growth of wisdom. Finally the way to use investigation of Dhamma with the other Factors of Enlightenment and then with the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path are shown. A well-trained, well-controlled mind is a powerful tool capable of rationally thinking through and continually comprehending the ultimate truths of existence. By developing the mind’s ability to penetratingly and objectively investigate, we are working to free ourselves of all ignorance, and thus of all craving and its resultant suffering.

¹ Translated as *Requisites of Enlightenment* in The Wheel No. 171/174.

Contents of Investigation

Investigation of Dhamma is one of the key factors the development of which can lead us to liberation from all suffering. The Buddha defines this *dhammavicaya* as “searching, investigation, scrutinising, for insight into one’s own personal conditions... and... externals.” *Dhammavicaya* is one of the Seven *Bojjhaṅgas* or Factors of Enlightenment and is usually translated² as “Investigation of Dhamma.” The word “*Dhamma*” has two quite distinct uses and so investigation of it implies both analysis of *the Dhamma*—the essential truths of existence as taught by the Buddha, and analysis of *dhammas*—all things whatsoever. Investigation of the Dhamma must include careful thought leading to a thorough understanding of at least these teachings: the Four Noble Truths, the Three Salient Characteristics of Existence, and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, and some idea of the workings of kamma. When we study the dhammas, we are primarily concerned with determining for ourselves the ultimate nature of our own Five Aggregates, the mind-and-matter phenomenon, with its six sense organs and of the six respective classes of sense objects which are the basis of all consciousness, contact, feeling, perception and mental activities.

When we investigate, the Dhamma, we are trying to thoroughly understand and grasp the significance of the Teachings of the Buddha. These truths are things which he discovered for himself and therefore knew with total certainty. For us to just accept them on faith alone will not be of too much benefit. In the well-known discourse the Buddha gave to the Kālāmas, he said, “Be ye not misled by report or tradition or hearsay... Nor out of respect of the recluse (who holds it). But Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves: ‘These things are unprofitable, these things are blameworthy,’... then indeed do ye reject them... But if at any time ye know for yourselves: ‘These things... when performed and undertaken conduce to profit and happiness,’—then Kālāmas, do ye, having undertaken them, abide therein.”³ And he intended that the Kālāmas treat his words just like those of any other teacher. We must explore the teachings of the Buddha thoroughly, carefully and rationally for ourselves by taking the Four Noble Truths, the Three Salient Characteristics, and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (including Kamma) as working hypotheses which are to be understood and demonstrated to the satisfaction of our own minds. Even if on first contact with these ideas we cannot understand them, we must not for that reason alone reject them out of hand—this kind of attitude will block and prevent all our progress on the Path. After all, it is quite reasonable to assume that there have been people in the world wiser than ourselves and that the Buddha was one of them. Once we have worked even a little on the Path and gained some benefit from it, we know that the Buddha was far wiser than we are as it was he who first taught this means of liberation. So we willingly keep our minds open to explore what he says even if it does not initially make much sense to our limited way of thinking. On the basis of full comprehension of these Truths gained by this balance between an open mind and confidence, liberating wisdom automatically must grow.

² *Kindred Sayings*. (Translation of *Samyutta Nikāya*). 5 vols. Pali Text Society, London. (Quoted as:) K.S., V, p.93.

³ *Gradual Sayings*. (Translation of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*). 5 Vols. Pali Text Society, London. I, p. 173.

1. The Four Noble Truths

The first aspect of the Dhamma to deal with is the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, its Origin, its Cessation and the way leading to the Cessation of Suffering, the central teaching of the Buddha, because “It is through not understanding, not penetrating the Four Noble truths that we have run on, wandered on, this long, long road” of *saṃsāra*, (K.S., V, p. 365).

We must carefully consider the nature of life to determine for ourselves whether it is essentially happy or unhappy, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, full of joy or woe. No matter what we look at—our body, our mind, the external world—if we penetrate the apparent superficial truth of it, we are bound to find that *dukkha* (suffering) predominates vastly over *sukha* (happiness) because all the seemingly pleasant experiences and aspects of life are doomed to fade away and leave behind them the same state of unsatisfiedness that was there before the momentary respite given by the sensual pleasure. If we think about the nature of the body, obviously it *has* to grow old, get sick and ultimately die and at almost no moment from the time of birth do we find ourselves in perfect health; and from then on it is all a downhill battle since death is the only possible outcome of life. If we keep this in mind, how can we say there is lasting satisfaction or happiness in life? Ledi Sayādaw puts it this way in the *Maggaṅga Dīpanī*⁴ “From the time of conception there is not a single moment... when there is no liability to destruction. When actual destruction comes, manifold is the suffering that is experienced.” If we examine our minds, there, too, we see that the vast majority of the time they are in some unhappy state—ranging from mild dissatisfaction through anxiety to downright despair. Only rarely are there moments of joy and to these we react by attempting to cling to them, and that state of desiring, too, is *dukkha*. If we look to the external world that we learn about through our senses and realise how many people are in agony with dread disease, how many sentient beings are preying on one another for food, for sport, for power, how many are dying lonely and helpless—at this very moment—we cannot doubt that *dukkha* predominates. The Buddha summarises the First Noble Truth saying, “Birth is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow is suffering; not to get what one desires is suffering; in short all the five groups of existence are suffering.” (Dīgha Nikāya 22). We have to investigate and see just how it is that all existence is *dukkha*, and one way to do this is to ponder over the “sights” of suffering seen by the Buddha before his Enlightenment, which caused him to leave home and seek the ultimate liberation for Suffering. We would do well to consider an old being, a seriously ill person, and a corpse. Such attention to these will teach us a great deal about both internal and external *dukkha*.

In order to find our way out of all this suffering, we have to be very clear about its cause, and as the Buddha saw it, *taṇhā* (clinging, craving, desire, lust, etc.) is the basic cause of *dukkha*. “From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear,” from all kinds of craving unhappiness comes; from endearment, affection, attachment, lust (as well as from the negative side of it: hatred, aversion, ill will) (Dhp 216). Craving is in itself *dukkha*, and it inevitably leads to more ill in this and in future existences.

To realise how this is true, so that we are convinced of the necessity of giving up absolutely all craving, we have to examine the workings of our own mind thoroughly. We must observe how our mind is virtually always engaged in some form of craving or desire—either positively reaching out for some object or obversely trying to push something away—whether the object is gross or subtle. While we are actually craving for some object—be it something as mundane as

⁴ Translated as *The Noble Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained* in The Wheel No. 245/247.

food or as lofty as rebirth among the Brahma gods—we are in a state of mind that is unsatisfied, that is incomplete and longing for completion—this lack of satisfaction, of completeness, is *dukkha*. Then, if we should attain the object, our *taṇhā* does not disappear; it is actually reinforced and more *dukkha* results. Getting what we want may lead to a new object for desire, or to modify the original one to avoid boredom. But satisfying *one* craving does nothing to eliminate the basic mental process of *taṇhā*; in fact more fuel is simply added to its fires when we obtain what is wanted. If the desired state, experience or thing is unobtainable, then a more acute form of *dukkha* results—frustration. And if we consider the feelings associated with the negative form of *taṇhā*, aversion, they are always clearly unhappy, *dukkha*. Thus we can determine for ourselves how *taṇhā* causes all our suffering in this lifetime.

Craving (*taṇhā*) is also the cause of rebirth, and once there is a new life the whole chain of *dukkha* inevitably culminating in death automatically comes into play. Most of us, cannot know the phenomenon of rebirth directly for ourselves as the Buddha did, but we certainly see the logic in it. All kinds of craving, if looked at carefully, turn out to be just different forms or manifestations of the underlying desire to perpetuate our existence. The great power of this force pushing for life does not just vanish at the time of death, but these urgings for renewed existence (*bhava saṅkhāras*) become the cause of rebirth in the appropriate place. Most of these forces in sentient beings are not wholesome, so when most beings die and the life continua take a new form, it is in the Realms of Woe. Thus we can see how *taṇhā* produces a new life with all the *dukkha* that comes along with it. Seeing how much suffering is experienced, all because of craving, surely is strong motivation for us to figure out how to eliminate this *taṇhā*.

The Third Noble Truth says that there *is* a cessation of suffering; and suffering will and must cease when the cause (*taṇhā*) is eliminated. “For who is wholly free from craving there is no grief, whence fear?” (Dhp 216). Any phenomena which arise due to causes and conditions have to pass away when those causes cease to operate. So, if we ponder on it, we must conclude that the vital task for us is to root out all our tendencies to crave; all our desires and aversions irrespective of their objects must be given up if we are to be liberated of *dukkha*. To become utterly detached from every thing, state of mind or experience on any plane of existence, to see that absolutely nothing is worth clinging to: this is the wisdom that must be cultivated by investigating all such phenomena. The insight thus gained will necessarily eliminate all desires and so all *dukkha*.

The Noble Eightfold Path was the means given by the Buddha to gain this liberating wisdom. It is by clearly understanding and following the steps of the Path that we gain the insight that there is nothing worth craving for. As this insight deepens through more and more thought on the subject, *taṇhā* decreases and eventually must disappear, and so we free ourselves of all suffering. The Path is divided into three sections: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). It is through the practice of *sīla* that *samādhi* can develop and through *samādhi*, *paññā*. The eight steps of the Path are all actually to be developed, not consecutively, but at any opportune time as they feed into one another at every stage. (For a detailed discussion of the Path, please see the final section of this paper.) There is a well-known analogy which describes the respective roles of morality, concentration and wisdom, and if we examine the simile carefully, we will come to understand how we must proceed in order to eliminate our *taṇhā*. A thirsty man comes to a pond overgrown with weeds and he wishes to drink the water in the pool. If he pushes the weeds aside with his hands and quickly gets a sip or two from in between them, it is like practising virtue (*sīla*), restraining the gross verbal and bodily actions by very

temporary means. If the man somehow fences off a small area of the pond keeping all the weeds outside the fence, this is like meditative concentration *samādhi* where even unwholesome thoughts disappear for a time, but they are only suppressed and can reappear if the fence breaks down. But if the man uproots every single weed in the pond leaving the water really pure and potable, this is like wisdom (*paññā*). It actually only through wisdom, through constantly seeing things as they really are—changing, unsatisfactory, essenceless—that the subconscious, latent tendencies to craving are totally rooted out, never again to return. By means of careful investigation we can thus understand how the Fourth Noble Truths, the Noble Eight-Fold Path operates, how “Right View, Right Aim, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration if cultivated and made much of, ends in the restraint of lust, ends in the restraint of hatred, ends in the restraint of illusion” (K.S., V, p. 5). Having thoroughly investigated, understood and penetrated these Four Noble Truths, we are bound to eventually put an end to our wanderings in *saṃsāra* and to all our suffering.

2. The Three Signata (*Ti-lakkhaṇa*)

Investigation of Dhamma for full liberation also must include, in addition to the Four Noble Truths, a study of the Three Universal Characteristics or Signata of existence, (*ti-lakkhaṇa*): *anicca*—impermanence, *dukkha*—suffering, and *anattā*—essencelessness. Everything in the universe, mental or physical, inside or outside of us, real or imaginary, that comes into being due to causes and conditions, has these three traits as its nature. And since there is nothing that exists without depending on other things, there is absolutely nothing which we can determine to be permanent, full of happiness only, or having any real substance. We must examine these three truths very carefully to know how thoroughly and totally they apply in all cases. Once there is this deep insight into the nature of reality, detachment and thereby liberation follow.

The first of these to be investigated and in some ways the characteristic that underlies the other two is *anicca*—the utterly transitory, ephemeral, unstable nature of all mental and physical phenomena. On the level of the apparent truth, we know quite well that things change but we have to train ourselves to see how the process of change is going on continually at every instant in everything. How else could the gross conventional alterations like maturing and ageing actually come about? We have to carefully examine all the evidence we can find to comprehend the profundity of the *anicca*-nature of existence. There is nothing which we can think of that would be as we know it conventionally if things were permanently stable. Change is synonymous with life—our bodies could not exist, let alone function, if the elements of which they are made remained constant or unchanged for even a brief time. Our minds could neither feel nor think nor perceive nor be conscious, if the mind were unalterable in nature. Likewise in inanimate objects, change is essential although sometimes less apparent. We must thoroughly investigate this universal trait so that we can get beyond the limited scope of our usual perception which mistakenly takes apparent form for ultimate reality. Because of the incredible rapidity with which both mind and matter alter, we can only occasionally notice that a particular change has come about; we are never able to perceive the continual ongoing process of change which actually makes up existence. Everything is just in a state of flux, always becoming something else, never really stopping to *be* something; all *nāma* (mind) and all *rūpa* (matter) are just a continual series of risings and vanishings following very rapidly one after the other. The ultimate reality of everything is just these vibrations. The importance of really knowing *anicca* is described by the Buddha with the simile of a farmer ploughing his field. “In

the autumn season a ploughman ploughing with a great ploughshare, cuts through the spreading roots as he ploughs, even so, brethren, the perceiving of impermanence, if practised and enlarged, wears out all sensual lust, wears out all ignorance, wears out, tears out all conceit of 'I am'... Just as, brethren, in the autumn season (after the monsoon rains) when the sky is opened up and cleared of clouds, the sun, leaping forth up into the firmament, drives away all darkness from the heavens, and shines and burns and flashes forth; even so, brethren, the perceiving of impermanence, if practised and enlarged, wears out all sensual lust, wears out all lust for the body, all desire for rebirth all ignorance, wears out, tears out all conceit of 'I am'" (K.S., III, p. 132–33).

The characteristic of *dukkha* has been dealt with on the grosser level as the First Noble Truth, in which the suffering of illness, age, of separation from the desired and association with the undesired, in our own minds and bodies and in the external world were considered. But there are many subtle ways in which we can see how life is—and must be—unsatisfying. It has been seen how life is inseparable from change, how without the perpetual process of development and disintegration there would and could be no existence at all. And yet there is the very profound contradiction between this *anicca*-nature of life and our constant desire and wish for stability, for security, for lasting happiness. If a situation is pleasant, we always hope that it will last and try our utmost to make it do so; but all experiences of life are doomed to pass away as everything on which they are based is completely impermanent, changing at every moment. So all our desires (and we are almost never without some form of *taṇhā* in our minds) are bound to be frustrated in the long run; we can never find the durable satisfaction we seek in this world of mind and matter. There is nothing in this universe of *anicca* that has even the potential capability of giving any real happiness because each and every thing is so completely unstable. We have to give careful attention to all the apparently pleasant and happy experiences that come in through the six sense doors (five physical ones and the mind as the sixth), to see whether they really can bring us satisfaction. The Buddha warns: "In him, brethren, who contemplates the enjoyment that there is in all that makes for grasping, (in all the sense pleasures) craving grows... Such is the uprising of this entire mass of ill." If we analyse how we ourselves develop strong *taṇhā*—and in inevitable consequence *dukkha*—when we think about and dwell on our pleasurable experiences, we can come to see how this fearful irony of pain caused by considering pleasure unwisely is all too true. With this understanding, then, we will instead contemplate *dukkha* in these same phenomena because, "In him, brethren, who contemplates the misery that there is in all that makes for grasping, craving ceases... Such is the ceasing of this entire mass of ill." (K.S., II, p. 59). As we are able to comprehend this *dukkha*-nature of everything more and more, naturally the mind will cease to long for that which it knows cannot bring happiness. And so the mind grows detached and moves toward liberation.

The third universal characteristic, *anattā*—essencelessness, soullessness, egolessness—is the teaching unique to the Buddhas; it does not appear in any other religious or philosophical tradition. A complete understanding of *anattā* for and in oneself must be developed before liberation is possible. The Buddha explained this doctrine, so alien to our conventional way of thinking, in many discourses beginning with the second discourse after his Enlightenment.

"Body... feeling... perception, the activities and consciousness (the five aggregates that make up everything there is in a 'being') are not self. If consciousness etc., brethren, were self the consciousness would not be involved in sickness and one could say of consciousness, etc.: 'thus let my consciousness be, thus let my consciousness not be'; but

inasmuch as consciousness is not the self, that is why consciousness is involved in sickness. That is why one cannot (so) say of consciousness.

“Now what think ye brethren. Is body permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Lord.”

“And what is impermanent, is that weal or woe?” “Woe, Lord.”

“Then what is impermanent, woeful, unstable by nature, is it fitting to regard it thus: ‘This is mine; I am this; this is the self of me’?”

“Surely not, Lord.”

“... Therefore, brethren,... every consciousness, etc., what-ever it be, past, future or present, be it inward or outward, gross or subtle, low or high, far or near,—every consciousness, I say, must be regarded as it really is by right insight: ‘this is not mine; this I am not; this is not the self of me.’

“So seeing, brethren, the well-taught Ariyan disciple feels disgust for body, etc. So feeling disgust he is repelled, being repelled he is freed... so that he knows ‘destroyed is rebirth... done is my task.’”

—K.S., III, p. 56–60

To develop insight in order to fully comprehend the implications of *anattā* takes a great deal of careful, systematic thought in combination with direct meditative experience. We must try and see that this thing we have habitually for an immeasurably long time called “I” actually has no real existence. This word can only be accurately used as a term of reference for the Five Aggregates—each of which is constantly changing—that go to make up this so-called “being.” Only by investigating all the Five Khandhas in depth and finding them to be void of any essence or substance at all which might correctly be called one’s “self” can we come to fully understand *anattā*.

There are two main ways to come to grips with this doctrine: via *anicca* and via *dukkha*. These two Signata are to some extent manifest as apparent truths as well as being ultimate realities, while *anattā* is the complete opposite of the apparent truth. When we think of ourselves and use “I” or “me” or ‘man’ etc., there is the inherent implication that these words refer to some constant, ongoing being. But we have previously seen that if we carefully investigate—intellectually and by direct observation in *vipassanā* meditation—all the Five Groups that comprise what we customarily consider “I” and all the physical and mental sense organs that are taken as “mine,” that there is no trace of anything even slightly durable in any of them. Ledi Sayādaw explains the relationship between *anicca* and *anattā* by showing how people with untrained minds assume that there is some on-going core or stable essence somewhere in the Five Khandhas and take this substance to be their *atta*, their self or soul. “Those beings who are not able to discern the momentary arisings and dissolutions of the physical and mental phenomena of the five constituent groups of existence and thus are not able to realise the characteristic of *anicca* maintain: ‘the corporeality-group (or sensation, perception, activities or consciousness-group) is the essence and therefore the *atta* of beings.’”⁵ If we wish to take any of these groups as our substance, then we must admit that “I” “decay, die

⁵ *Manuals of Buddhism*. Ledi Sayādaw. Union of Burma Buddha Sasana Council, Rangoon. ‘*Sammā-Ddiṭṭhi Dīpanī*’, p. 91.

and am reborn every moment”; but such an ephemeral “I” is very far from our usual conception of ourselves. If we have carefully considered anicca as it exists in everything internal that could be considered “I,” then we must come to the conclusion that this “I” is nothing but a mistaken idea that has grown from inaccurate perception which has been habitually reinforced for a long, long time. As the truth of anattā becomes clearer, we gradually let go of this “I” and so are closer and closer to Enlightenment, where not the slightest shadow of a trace of this misconception can remain.

If we discern all the mental and physical dukkha we have to undergo in life, we learn about anattā from a different angle. This nāma-rūpa phenomenon is constantly subject to this pain and that anguish, and yet we foolishly insist on calling the body and mind “mine” and assuming that they belong to “me.” But the very idea of possession means that the owner has control of the property; so “I” should be able to keep my body and mind as I want them to be, naturally healthy and happy. As the Buddha stated in the quotation at the start of this section, “Let my body be thus; let it not be thus.” But obviously and undeniably, suffering is felt and cannot be prevented by mere exertion of will or wishing. So, in reality, we have to come to the conclusion that there is no “I” who controls this nāma-rūpa; mind and body are in no way fit to be called “mine.” “The arising of the five constituent groups do not yield to the wishes of anyone.” (SDD, p. 93). Phenomena which are dependent upon specific causes which operate strictly according to their nature from moment to moment cannot be subject to control by any “being” and as we explore it thoroughly, we come to understand how this Five Aggregate phenomenon which we wrongly tend to consider “I” is just such a conditioned and dependent process. And suffering (or pleasure, for that matter) likewise comes about because of certain conditions, chief amongst them being taṇhā. There is no “being” who controls what ultimately happens to these five aggregates.

Being caught in personality belief, (sakkāya-diṭṭhi)—the inability to comprehend anattā—causes tremendous dukkha to creatures on all the planes of existence from the lowest hell to the highest brahma worlds. This great source of suffering must be carefully examined and its workings understood if we are to escape from its powerful, deep-rooted grasp. “Ego-delusion is the foremost of the unwholesome Kamma of old and accompanies beings incessantly. As long as personality belief exists these old unwholesome actions are fiery and full of strength... those beings who harbour within themselves this personality-belief are continually under pressure to descend or directly fall towards the worlds of woe.”⁶ (A of A, p. 50). By thoroughly rooting out, seeing through and letting go of this mistaken conception that there is a real substantial “I,” “all wrong views, evil mental factors and evil Kammās which would lead... to the Lower Worlds will disappear.” (SDD, p. 87). Thus if we can really know our anattā-nature totally, there is no longer any possibility of the extreme dukkha of rebirth in the lower realms of existence and the life continuum will “always remain within the fold of the Buddha’s Dispensation wherever... reborn.” (A of A, p. 52). But if one does not understand the impersonal nature of this five aggregate phenomenon, he will “undoubtedly have to preserve his soul (or self) by entertaining evil thoughts and evil actions as the occasion arises.” (SDD, p. 50) We can see that if we act on the assumption that there is an “I” we are always in the position of attempting to protect and preserve this ‘self’ and thus very much prone to commit unwholesome thoughts, words and deeds in relation to other “beings.” “People are generally concerned with what they consider to

⁶ “The Advantages of Realising the Doctrine of Anatta” by Ledi Sayādaw in *The Three Facts of Existence: III Egolessness*, The Wheel No. 202/204, p. 50. Henceforth: A of A.

be themselves or their own... and their bodily, verbal and mental acts are based on and are conditioned by that concern. So the root of all vice for the foolish concern is 'self' and one's 'own.'" Ledi Sayādaw explains how the belief that there is an "I" causes this continual rebirth with a strong downward tendency with the analogy of a string of beads:

In a string of beads where a great number of beads are strung together by a strong silk thread, if one bead is pulled all the others will follow the one that is pulled. But if the silk thread is cut or removed, pulling one of the beads will not disturb the other beads because there is no longer any attachment between them.

Similarly, a being that possesses personality-belief harbours a strong attachment to the series of Aggregates arisen during past existences... and transforms them into an ego... It is thus that the innumerable unwholesome karmic actions of the past existences which have not yet produced resultants, will accompany that being wherever he may be reborn. These unwholesome actions of the past resemble beads that are strung and bound together by a strong thread.

Beings, however, who clearly perceive the characteristic of Not-self and have rid themselves of personality-belief, will perceive that the bodily and mental Aggregates that arise and disappear even within the short period of one sitting, do so as separate phenomena and not as a closely interlinked continuum. The concept of 'my self' which is like the thread, is no longer present. Those bodily and mental processes appear to them like the beads from which the thread has been removed."

—A of A, pp. 53–54

Thus the dispelling of personality belief removes all the mental factors which might cause one to behave in such a way that would lead to rebirth in the realms of woe as well as cutting off the link of attachment to an "ego" that has kept us connected to all our evil deeds of the past. Even in this present life it is clear if we think about it that sakkāya diṭṭhi (personality-belief) causes us great suffering and its elimination would be of great benefit. For example, "When external or internal dangers are encountered or disease and ailments occur, beings attach themselves to them through such thoughts as, 'I feel pain, I feel hurt,' thus taking a possessive attitude towards them. This becomes an act of bondage that later may obstruct beings from ridding themselves of those diseases... though they are so greatly oppressive" (A of A, p. 56).

However, understanding that it is this erroneous personality-belief that keeps us thinking that there is some ongoing essence or substance in this five aggregate phenomena that can rightly be called "I" will not immediately or automatically prevent the thought of "I" from coming up in the mind as it is a very deeply rooted saṅkhāra that has been built up over a long period of time. Whenever a thought related to "I" does appear, we must mindfully apply the wisdom of anattā we have already gained and realise that "I" is nothing but an idea originating from an incorrect perception of reality. Whenever we notice ourselves thinking of an "I" as one of the aggregates or as related to one of them, we have to consider carefully the thought and reinforce our understanding that "Whatever material object... whatsoever feeling, whatsoever perception, whatsoever activities, whatsoever consciousness... (must be rightly regarded as) 'This is not mine, this I am not; this is not the self of me.'" This process of seeing the ignorance arise and repeatedly applying the Right View to it, gradually wears away even the thoughts of "I," "myself" and "mine." This total elimination of "I"-consciousness which is nothing but a subtle form of conceit, and of this concept of "mine" which is subtle form of

taṇhā, does not happen until Arhantship is reached. But our task is to deepen the comprehension and investigation of anattā to greater and greater depths of insight by means of Vipassanā meditation.

A group of monks once questioned the Venerable Khemaka about anattā and inquired whether he had attained Arhantship. He replied that he was not yet fully liberated because he still had subtle remnants of “I am” in his mind. He said to them:

I see that in these five grasping groups I have got the idea of “I am” yet I do not think that I am this “I am.” Though (one is a non-returner)... yet there remains in him a subtle remnant of the I-conceit, of the I am-desire, of the lurking tendency to think “I am” still not removed from him. Later on he lives contemplating the rise and fall of the five grasping groups seeing thus: “Such is the body, such is the arising of body, such is the ceasing of it. Such is feeling... perception... the activities... consciousness.”

In this way... the subtle remnant of the I am-conceit, of the I am-desire, that lurking tendency to think “I am” which was still not removed from him—that is now removed.

—K.S., III, p. 110

This explanation of Khemaka’s was so clear and profound that as a direct result of his discourse, all the monks who listened to it and Khemaka himself as well, were fully liberated—with no remnants of “I am” remaining. So we would do well to carefully study what this wise monk said about the development of *anattā* so that we can come to understand how by means of this process of carefully observing, clearly experiencing, and thoroughly investigating the rise and fall of the five khandhas we gradually eliminate the gross layers of *Sakkāya Diṭṭhi* and by the same means, more and more refined, ultimately root out even the latent, subconscious tendency to think “I am.”

Investigation into the Three Universal Characteristics—*anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*—is a fundamental requirement for the growth of liberating insight. Once we have thoroughly analysed our own *nāma-rūpa* and also the phenomena of the external world, and completely understood how everything we can conceive of—real or imaginary, mental or physical, internal or external—is totally unstable, incapable of bringing real durable happiness and without any actual substance, detachment must follow and with it freedom from the *dukkha* of existence. The process of gradually overcoming ignorance with wisdom comes through the direct bodily experience of the unsatisfactoriness and essencelessness of this *nāma-rūpa* in vipassanā meditation, combined with careful thought, so that these “experiences” have their full impact on the mind. Once again, it is by investigation in meditation that detachment from the “all” is won—and so too the ultimate peace free from all desire.

3. Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)

The doctrine of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is one of the most profound and far-reaching teachings of the Buddha and as such this law of causality requires very thorough investigation and comprehension by anyone seeking liberation. Without clearly knowing the causal law, the Three Signata and the Four Noble Truths cannot be fully understood with the full insight that leads to dispassion, to Nibbāna. All of these are included within *paṭiccasamuppāda* which demonstrates their relation with each other. The Buddha himself pointed out the great significance of this teaching to Ānanda when Ānanda said that he found

the causal law quite plain. The Buddha admonished him saying, “Say not so, Ānanda, say not so! Deep indeed is this causal law, and deep indeed it appears. It is through not knowing, not understanding, not penetrating, that doctrine, that this generation has become entangled like a ball of string... unable to overpass the doom of the Waste, the Woeful Way, the Downfall, the Constant Faring on.” (K.S., II, p.64) And elsewhere Sāriputta quotes the Exalted One as saying, “Whoever sees conditional genesis sees the Dhamma, whoever see the Dhamma sees conditioned genesis.” (M., I, p. 237)

The general all-encompassing form of the law of Dependent Origination is a very simple statement of cause and effect but is something to which the meditator must give “his mind thoroughly and systematically”; succinctly it states “this being that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; from the ceasing of this that ceases.” (K.S., II, p.45) This is really just another more abstract formulation of the Second and Third Noble Truths—the cause of and the cessation of suffering. The full twelve-link formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is an expansion of these two middle Truths, a full explanation of the process by which suffering is generated and how by the removal of the causes, suffering also comes to cease. Thus in order to understand completely the Four Noble Truths, one must have contemplated on and gained insight into dependent origination as well. Another very important aspect of this doctrine to be understood is how its description of the process of life, the process of becoming, clearly demonstrates how it is totally impersonal manifestation of certain causes, with no “I” or ‘being’ in any way involved in or related to it, *anattā*. Finally, this doctrine enables us to discern just how kamma operates in generating the causes of rebirth.

The list of twelve links in direct order explaining the arising of suffering, is usually described as beginning with the past life, going on to the present life and then to future life (or potential lives.) *Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*—ignorance conditions mental volitions. It is due to the root cause of ignorance (about the ultimate nature of reality) that the mind generates desires, *saṅkhāras*, kamma. *Saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ*—these mental volitions, this kamma of the past, gives rise to the rebirth-linking consciousness which is the first mind moment of the new (present) birth. Note there is no “thing” transmigrating from one life to another, only a process of cause and effect goes on: *Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*—the mind and matter phenomenon (five aggregates) of the present life come to be due to the existence of this rebirth-linking consciousness. Conception has taken place and this *nāma-rūpa* phenomenon continues its processes until death intervenes. *Nāma-rūpa-paccayā salāyatanaṃ*—through mind and matter, the six sense bases are conditioned; with this very start of the new life the five physical sense organs and mind as the sixth come into being. *Salāyatana-paccayā phassa*—throughout the life these six senses are the condition for the arising of contact (with their appropriate objects) which occur from moment to moment. *Phassa-paccayā vedanā*—feeling (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral) is conditioned by sense impression and this feeling rises in relation to contacts at first through one then another sense door, ad infinitum. *Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*—craving arises based on feeling. In terms of practice, this is the most important step of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* as it is at this point that we can learn to turn around the whole process and make it lead to the cessation of suffering.

The other (unnamed) factor which conditions craving along with feeling is ignorance (the same as the first factor)—the inability to see that in reality there is nothing worth craving for, nothing that can actually be held, and no ongoing being truly capable of having its desires satisfied. At this link volition can alter the old habitual sequences and the feeling part of the mind by means of training in the Noble Eightfold Path can be made to condition the arising of

wisdom, and *paññā* will forestall the arising of *taṇhā* (and the whole mass of suffering that is conditioned by this craving). *Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*—craving gives rise to clinging, tenacious desire. Actually, for most of us, the application of wisdom and mindfulness is very rarely such that it can totally prevent the deep habits of *taṇhā* from surfacing after feeling, but what we can do is prevent either of the next two links—*upādāna* and *bhava*—from developing out of the initial spurt of desire. *Upādāna-paccayā bhavo*—conditioned by clinging, becoming arises. Due to the power of the accumulation of *saṅkhāras*, of kamma (*taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava* being simply mental volitions of increasing strength), the very strong kamma which is responsible for the process of becoming arises and it is these *bhava-saṅkhāras* that generate the momentum for a new birth at the appropriate moment. *Bhava-paccayā jāti*—becoming conditions birth in a future life at the dissolution of this present five aggregate phenomenon. If we seriously consider the matter, we can perceive that all desires are just particular manifestations of the will to exist or to continue; and all such craving and clinging are future directed energies whose function is the seeking of fulfilment. This force of kammic energy does not cease with death. Becoming is just the very strong form of desire and it contains sufficient momentum behind it that at the time of death it is the force that makes for a new birth. This energy manifests and a new *nāma-rūpa* begins. Thus once again the start of life is shown to be a completely impersonal, conditioned process working totally irrespective of anyone's wishes, hopes or desires, leading to a phenomena with no essence of "I." This link repeats the second one in the series just in different words. *Jāti-paccaya jarāmaraṇaṃ*—once there is birth there automatically comes to be old age and death and all the other manifold forms of suffering encountered in life—the First Noble Truth. And thus the cycle beginning with our inherited ignorance leads inexorably towards more and more suffering in the future.

The inverse form of the cycle is stated alongside the form above. It is the inverse that demonstrates the Third Noble Truth, how with the cessation of the cause, the effect must cease; so *avijjā nirodha*, *saṅkhāra nirodho* etc.,—when ignorance ceases, no more *saṅkhāras* are generated and carried through all the intervening links, the way of ending all suffering is thus shown.

This is but a very rough sketch of the workings of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* that must be wisely considered and thoroughly elaborated on and then incorporated into the meditator's own thought processes for it to serve him as a means to liberation. Each link has to be investigated in terms of the Four Noble Truths—to understand the factor itself, its arising, its ceasing and the way leading to its cessation (always the Fourth Noble Truth—the Path). The Buddha has Sāriputta explain to him the way the meditator in training who is still a learner, considers things. Sāriputta states: "This has come to be, Lord—thus by right insight he sees as it really is; and seeing it in this way he practises revulsion from it, and that it may fade away and cease. He sees by right Insight continual becoming from a certain sustenance, and that it may fade away and cease. From the ceasing of a certain sustenance that which has come to be is liable to cease—so he sees by right insight as it really is. And seeing that in this way he practises revulsion from that which is liable to cease that it may fade away and cease." The revulsion to be practised in relation to *all* conditioned phenomena, to all things that have arisen dependent on causes, is closely akin to detachment and dispassion. Unlike aversion, revulsion is based on wisdom and developed in relation to all pleasant, unpleasant or neutral experiences. The arahat makes the same observations about the unstable nature of conditioned phenomena, but for him the stage of practicing has passed, and when by right insight, the fully liberated one sees "This has come to be," then "because of revulsion at that which has come to be, because of its fading

away and ceasing he becomes free, grasping at nothing..." (K.S., II, p. 36–37) So the lesson to be learned from the Doctrine of Dependent Origination—as from all the Dhamma—is that nothing that arises due to causes and conditions can possibly provide secure happiness due to its inherent changeability and instability; so there is absolutely nothing on any plane of existence worth developing the slightest interest in or attachment to as all such involvement can only lead to suffering. So detachment and revulsion are the result of a complete understanding of the workings of the causal law—and this is liberation.

In one place, the Buddha actually describes the series of causes leading to liberation itself, beginning with suffering, thus: "What is that which is the cause of liberation? Passionlessness is the answer... and repulsion is causally related to passionlessness... knowledge-and-vision of things as they really are is causally associated with repulsion... concentration is causally associated with knowledge-and-vision... happiness is causally associated with concentration... serenity is causally associated with happiness... rapture is causally associated with serenity... joy is causally associated with rapture... faith is causally associated with joy... And what is the cause of faith? Suffering is the answer. Suffering is causally related with faith." (K.S., II, p. 25–26) The Buddha then continues with the origins of suffering back to ignorance following the usual *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulation backwards, thus showing the whole length of the route—the Path, the Fourth Noble Truth—out of the causal cycle. It is because of the experience of suffering that beings seek a way out and put their faith in the Buddha as a guide and in his teachings as the true method to attain freedom from all ill. Thus the causal cycle proceeds from *dukkha*, the end of the usual twelve-link Dependent Origination formula, through *saddhā* (faith) and all the steps here named to final and total emancipation.

Kamma is one of the basic causes in the cycle of Dependent Origination (in the past life it goes under name *saṅkhāra* and in the present life it encompasses *taṇhā*, *upādāna*, and *bhava*) and a deep investigation of its significance and operation must be made, as, after all, it is through our own wholesome and unwholesome kamma that we are tied down to the infinite cycle of rebirths and it is by means of good kamma that we are able to transcend this universe of kamma, rebirth and *dukkha*.

It is important to remind ourselves and to discover how in our own minds, at every moment we are creating new kammās. When we investigate the thinking process carefully in our meditation, we come to observe that all our thoughts are related to some *taṇhā*, some desire or aversion, some volition. And each moment the kamma we are creating is either beneficial or harmful to us both in the immediate and far distant future; there is not an instant when we are not moulding our future fate. And no matter how good an act of body or speech may seem, it is only a gross manifestation of a mental volition, and if the thought behind it is impure, the kammic effects are in the long run bound to be painful. Hence it is vital to analyse our own minds and then cultivate the beneficial volitions that aid us on the Path to Liberation, otherwise the old habitual tendencies rooted in ignorance are bound to take us to the unhappy realms for rebirth, and once reborn there it is almost impossible to be reborn on the human plane for an extremely long period of time.

But we must also consider that in the ultimate analysis, even good volitions must be given up, as "That which we will, brethren, and that which we intend to do, that wherewithal we are occupied—this becomes an object for the persistence of consciousness," and so anything we think about will become nourishment for a new birth either in the lower or higher realms, depending on the purity of the willing, the intention or the occupation (K.S., II, p. 45). And

ultimately in order to totally eradicate all suffering (even the very subtle *dukkha* that is inherent in the fact that the life span of even the most long-lived Brahma is limited, finite), rebirth must be eliminated—and this means rooting out its causes as explained in the cycle of Dependent Origination.

Particularly for the Western mind this infinite samsāric cycle of rebirth has to be thought about quite thoroughly before our understanding of it can influence our behaviour, making us act on the basis of a very long-term view. “Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, the faring on of beings cloaked in ignorance, tied to craving... For many a long day, brethren, have ye experienced death of mother, of son, of daughter, have ye experienced the ruin of kinfolk, the calamity of disease. Greater is the flood of tears shed by you crying and weeping of one and all these as ye fare on, run on this many a long day, united with the undesirable, sundered from the desirable, than are the waters in the four seas. (Because) incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on.” (K.S., II, p. 120)

Ledi Sayādaw reminds us that, “Lack of wholesome kamma will lead to the lower worlds where one has to suffer grievously. Fearing such suffering, one has to perform wholesome kamma which can lead one to be reborn as man or deva in the existences to come.” (*Manuals of Buddhism*, p. 227, *Maggaṅga Dīpanī*). One important aspect of Right View which as to be investigated relates to kamma. We have to know for ourselves that “Only the wholesome and unwholesome actions of beings are the origin of their wanderings in many a becoming or world cycle”; and that only these actions “are their real refuge wherever they may wander” (*Maggaṅga Dīpanī*, p. 221). There is nothing very strange in this idea of kamma being the one thing that endures (while always being influenced and altered by present mental volitions), carrying over from one life to the next. If we ponder over the matter, we see that just as a moral cause and effect works within this life to only some extent, the effects of many kammās can only show up in future lives; so over an infinite span of lives *kusala* (wholesome) kammās ultimately must bring good results and *akusala* (unwholesome) kammās bring unhappy states. As we study the cycle of Dependent Origination it clearly shows that there is no entity or ongoing being involved anywhere in all these births, deaths and rebirths, but only past kamma manifesting in a five aggregate phenomenon which changes every moment and which in turn continues to generate new kamma leading to new births, in a process that evolves endlessly from moment to moment.

As seen above, it is of vital importance to investigate thoroughly the causal law and kamma in order for full insight into the nature of existence to develop, for some causes lie behind the arising of absolutely everything. “Whether any... mental or physical phenomena arises, the arising of any thing whatsoever is dependent on conditions, and without condition, nothing can ever arise or enter into existence.”⁷ It is only through giving systematic thought to the twelve factors and the connections between them in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* cycle that we can introduce the appropriate causes to make this law cease operating. And only thus can we bring to an end the process of rebirth and its attendant suffering, by substituting wisdom for ignorance when feeling arises—and so prevent the development of *taṇhā* which would inexorably lead to rebirth. Most important of all to train the mind in wisdom is to understand clearly how completely impersonally and automatically moment to moment every link in the cycle operates;

⁷ *Buddhist Dictionary, Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* Nyanatiloka. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. p. 135.

the sequence goes on strictly as a matter of cause and effect with no room for, no need for, any “I” to explain the continual rise and fall of *nāma-rūpa*.

In this religion, brethren, a pondering brother ponders: ‘This diverse and manifold ill that arises in the world as old age and death—what is this ill based on, how comes it to pass?... What being there does old age-and-death come to be? What not being there does old age-and-death not come to be?’ He pondering comes to know that this... is based on birth... He comes to know old age-and-death, he comes to know its arising, he comes to know its ceasing and he comes to know the way going to its ceasing.

—K.S., II, p. 56–57

He ponders similarly on all the other factors in the Dependent Origination and thus he is called a “brother who has wholly practised for the complete destroying of ill.” Full comprehension through very careful analysis of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* must make us detached, must make us see that there is nothing which really corresponds to the word “I,” and must make us learn to cease creating *saṅkhāras* by willing actions. Once we cease to create any more *kamma* of any kind, the other links in the cycle must automatically fall away. And the Buddha ends this discourse emphatically referring to this process of breaking the causal chain saying, “Believe me, brethren, be convinced of this, be ye without doubt herein, without hesitation just this is the end of *Dukkha!*”

4. The Five Aggregates (*Khandha*)

Dhammavicaya in addition to the definition used in the previous three sections of investigation of the Dhamma, may also be interpreted as meaning investigation of dhammas, of all things, all phenomena, mental or physical, real or imaginary, conditioned or unconditioned. In this connection the most important things to be examined are perhaps, first the five *khandhas* or aggregates that make one life continuum, one *nāma-rūpa*, a “person”: and second the six sense doors—five physical ones and the mind, and their corresponding six categories of sense objects.

We have to examine the aggregate of body and four of the mind—perception, feeling, mental volitions and consciousness—that in combination make up this thing we have been calling “I,” very thoroughly and deeply in order to see how ultimately there is nothing lasting, satisfying or which deserves to be considered “myself” in any of them; to know how all that we associate with “me” is just *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, and to understand how these aggregates arise to pass away. The *khandhas* are the basic components which make up what we perceive of as an individual. But each of these aggregates in itself has no essence; each is merely a process of continual minute momentary risings and fallings.

Viññāṇa is consciousness, just the process or faculty of knowing, or awareness, that arises immediately upon the coming together of any sense organ and its respective object. *Saññā* is perception or recognition of the object, defining it by associating it with past memories. *Vedanā* is the feeling that arises as an immediate result of contact when the internal and external sense bases get together and the appropriate consciousness comes into being. *Vedanā* can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling of body or of mind. *Sañkhāra* is mental volitions or activities; the thinking process of the mind is the facet of *nāma* governed by this *khandha*. The past mind-moment with its consciousness, feeling, perception and volition is the condition for the arising of the next, but there is nothing of any of those four mental components (nor anything outside of them) that continues over from one instant to the next. The body aggregate, too, is utterly

impermanent and insubstantial, just like any other form of matter, living or inorganic. All matter is made up of the infinitely small *kalāpas* (sub-atomic particles or vibrations) which come to be and vanish at only a slightly slower rate than the mind, but still so extremely quickly that we get the illusion of continuity, unity and substance where these do not actually exist.

The Buddha tells the monks the importance of such examination of the aggregates thus: “So soon, brethren, as beings thoroughly understand, as they really are the satisfaction as such, the misery as such, the way of escape as such in these five factors of grasping (the aggregates) then, brethren, beings do remain aloof, detached... with barriers of the mind done away with.” (K.S., III, p. 30) Once we intellectually realise that none of the *khandhas* can rightly be called “mine,” then we are faced with the urgent task of rooting out, eliminating this aspect of personality belief from our minds, of becoming truly aloof and detached. The Buddha described this work thus: “What is not of you, brethren, put it away. Putting it away will be for your profit and welfare. And what, brethren, is not of you? Body... feeling... perception... the activities, consciousness is not of you. Put it away.” (K.S., III, p. 231–2). Putting away or giving up or letting go of what we incorrectly think of as “mine” is a gradual and long term process. In fact, not only is this process of investigating and giving systematic attention to the *anicca, dukkha, anattā* nature of the aggregates the work of the beginner, the same thing is done by beings at any stage along the way, even by the fully-liberated ones. “The grasping groups, friend Koṭṭhita,” says the great disciple of the Buddha, Sāriputta, “are the conditions which should be pondered with method by a virtuous brother, as being impermanent, sick, as a boil, as a dart, as pain, as ill-health, as alien, as transitory, empty and soulless... It is possible for a virtuous brother so pondering with method... to realise the fruits of stream winning... of once returning... of never returning... of arahatship... For the arahat, friend, there is nothing further to be done... Nevertheless, these things, if practised and enlarged conduce to a happy existence and self-possession even in this present life” for him. (K.S., III, p. 143)

Very frequently the Buddha refers to the five aggregates or groups of existence as the *upādānakkhandha* or grasped-at groups, aggregates (as objects) of clinging, etc. It is worthwhile to contemplate why he considered these components of life so inseparable from *taṇhā* and *upādāna* that he actually called them clinging-aggregates. First of all, these aggregates only come into being because of *taṇhā*; through craving and clinging the past *saṅkhāras* gave rise to the present birth, the current *nāmarūpa* which is precisely the same as these five grasped-at groups. What has its cause in clinging must have clinging as its very core. Secondly, these aggregates are the means by which we are *conscious* of and *perceive* through the six sense doors; an impression is then *felt* and as a result of this process the input leads to mental *volitions* as well as to actions of *body* directed by some *taṇhā* to gain, grasp at, cling to something. Thirdly, and most important, it is just these five constituent groups that we tend to cling to most tenaciously, convinced that they are “I” and “mine.” We have already looked into this misperception of reality and by means of a strong simile the Buddha illustrated the danger in such clinging to any of the aggregates or seeing in them any security:

Suppose... a mountain torrent... rising from afar, swift-flowing, and on both its banks are growing grasses overhanging the stream;... and a man is swept away by that stream and clutches at the grasses, but they might break away and owing to that he might come by his destruction.

Even so, brethren, the untaught manyfolk... regard the body as the self, or the self as having body, or the body as being in the self, or the self as being in the body. Then the body breaks away, and owing to that they come by their destruction.

And so with feeling, perception, the activities... consciousness.

—K.S., III, p. 116

We also subject ourselves to tremendous suffering because we “are possessed by this idea” that the body belongs to “me” for, when the body or any of the aggregates “alters and changes, owing to the unstable nature of the body, then sorrow and grief, woe, lamentation and despair arise” if these changes are not what we wanted (K.S., III, p. 3).

Only by completely investigating the ultimate reality of these five aggregates will we see that they are incapable of giving satisfaction and so not worth grasping at, that actually they are so unstable that holding onto them is impossible, and there is no one who can cling anyhow (as the ‘self’ arises and vanishes every moment and so cannot possibly continue to possess anything for any period of time). So, in order to attain liberation, one must attain insight into these five aggregates so that the necessary dispassion arises, for “by not thoroughly knowing, by not understanding, by not being detached from, by not renouncing body (and the other khandhas) one is unfit for the destruction of suffering... But, brethren, by thoroughly knowing (them)... one is fit for the destruction of suffering” (K.S., III, p. 26).

5. The Sense Bases (*Āyatana*)

The investigative process also must be applied to the internal and external sense bases (*āyatana*), so that the pleasure and misery in them, their cause and cessation, and their *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* nature is fully comprehended. Only with this insight are we able to let go of our attachments to, desire for, and clinging to, the eye and visible objects, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and things tangible, the mind and mental objects. One must especially learn how the mind operates as just another sense organ, whose field is all the perceptions and thoughts that have occurred in the past, in order to dissociate the workings of the mind from the “I” notion. In his third sermon, the Buddha stated, “The all is on fire” and the nature of this conflagration must be seen and understood before it can be extinguished and freedom gained from it. “The eye, brethren, is on fire, objects are on fire, eye-consciousness... eye contact... that weal or woe or neutral state experienced, which arises owing to eye-contact (*vedanā*, feeling);... that also is on fire... On fire with the blaze of lust, the blaze of ill will, the blaze of infatuation, the blaze of birth, decay and death, sorrow... ,” (K.S., IV, p. 10) and so are tongue and mind-related phenomena—and by extrapolation those coming from the other senses as well.

The six internal sense organs (*salāyatana*) and their corresponding objects have a crucial role in the present lifetime phase of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Consciousness, *viññāṇa*, is not permanent or abiding; instead it arises and ceases every moment, and it is the coming together of one of the sense organs and its respective object that causes the arising of a moment of consciousness. Thus every consciousness is eye-consciousness, or ear-consciousness, or nose- or tongue- or body- or mind-consciousness, depending on which sense organ at that instant has met its object. The cycle of causality continues on from there: “Owing to eye and objects arises eye-consciousness. The coming together of the three is contact. Dependent on contact is feeling. Dependent on feeling is craving... grasping... becoming. Dependent on becoming is rebirth,

decay and death, sorrow and grief... This is the arising of the world.” (K. S. , IV, p.33). From thus analysing the genesis of existence (the “world”) and of *dukkha* (as it is more often formulated) we can understand the absolutely impersonal nature of the arising of consciousness, as well as the germinal role in creating *saṅkhāras* played by the internal and external sense bases.

Consciousness, or mind, is analogous to the proverbial monkey constantly on the move high up in the trees in the jungle, always grasping at something or the other. Similarly with the mind, at each and every mind-moment when awake, consciousness must be connected with one or another of the sense doors; there is no underlying substratum of consciousness that endures through time, but only momentary clutching after sights, grabbing for sounds, clinging to smells, holding on to tastes, attachment to tangibles or (and often most predominantly) hanging onto mind objects. It is because the sense organs and their objects inherently contain the danger of tempting us to create craving (*taṇhā*) and an urge to renewed existence (*bhava-saṅkhāra*) that the Buddha frequently warned the monks about keeping the sense doors well guarded, since the external objects cannot be eliminated. By means of ongoing mindfulness, rooted in insight into the true nature of all the phenomena that appear at the sense doors, it is necessary to observe how craving starts to rear its head (as it inevitably will, due to the old completely automatic mental conditioning) once contact and feeling have taken place, and not allow the desire to take over the mind and becomes a strong rebirth producing force. If we do not keep watch over our senses and reactions attentively, we are like the fish attracted by the well-baited hook on the line held by the fisherman. “Just as a fisherman, brethren, casts a baited hook in some deep pool of water, and some fish greedy for the bait, gulps it down and thus... comes to destruction,—even so, brethren, there are these six hooks in the world, to the sorrow of beings... objects cognizable by the eye inciting to lust... If a brother delights therein, persists in clinging to them, such a one is called ‘hook-swallower’... is come to destruction.” (K.S., IV, p. 99) And of course the other hooks to be wary of in the world are alluring sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mental objects. If we give careful, systematic attention to these external sense objects as we meet them, we cannot help but realise that the pain of swallowing the hooks by clinging to the sense objects far outweighs the possible momentary pleasure of tasting the bait.

The basic aim of investigating the sense organs is the same as for the aggregates—to see how thoroughly they are *anicca* and *Dukkha* and so to cease to cling to them as “I” and “mine.” “A brother beholds no trace of the self nor what pertains to the self in the six-fold sense sphere. So beholding, he is attached to nothing in the world. Unattached he is not troubled. Untroubled he is of himself utterly set free” (K.S., IV, p. 104).

The specific subjects in the Dhamma that must be investigated for insight have in this section been given initial exploration. The task is to turn these thoughts and ideas into real wisdom, so that the whole course of the life becomes oriented to and aimed at liberation. We must learn to keep before us at all the time the ultimate nature of all dhammas—all phenomena of any conceivable kind that can enter consciousness—so that the gross perceptual illusion or hallucination of the apparent truth loses its strength and the ignorance it fosters vanishes and with it all craving. We have to analyse completely this body-and-mind and all the external phenomena that appear from time to time at the six sense doors until the pleasure and misery in them are understood, until the causes of their arising and ceasing are comprehended, until their ultimately impermanent, unsatisfactory, conditioned and essenceless nature is clearly known. This is done by means of careful investigation in meditation of these dhammas along the lines

of the Four Noble Truths, the Three Signata of Existence, and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. With this insight fully developed there can be no clinging or craving, no ill will or aversion, and ultimately one becomes “independent, unattached to anything in the world,” and so with all its causes uprooted, liberation from all suffering is achieved.

Investigation in Meditation

There are a number of other aspects of Dhamma Investigation that have to be examined now that the contents of such exploration have been discussed. The very basic and essential relationship between investigative thinking and insight meditation, how the two are required to support each other and send the meditator’s mind to its goal of ending all possibility of dukkha, is the appropriate one to deal with first.

For investigation of Dhamma to lead to liberating insight it must be combined with and done in the course of insight meditation. It is just through investigation and wise consideration of phenomena that insight into their ultimate nature develops. At the time of the Buddha there were people who became fully Enlightened in just a few moments of time, but even for them some sort of thought process had to go on. But these individuals had accumulated such a vast store of *pāramīs*—accumulated good acts and mental dispositions of the past—that the liberating wisdom came with nearly instantaneous impact. While just a Bodhisatta, the Buddha went back to the first jhāna, a deep absorption (after having mastered seven still deeper, more profound concentrative states)—which includes thinking—when he sat under the Bodhi Tree with the final and total determination to become fully liberated. “Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I thought: This world has fallen into a slough for it is born, ages and dies, it passes away and reappears, and yet knows no escape from this suffering. When will an escape from this suffering be described? I thought: what is there when ageing and death come to be? What is their necessary condition? Then with ordered attention I came to understand... birth is a necessary condition for them.” And so as he exerted the utmost effort to become a Buddha, a fully self-liberated being, he proceeded carefully thinking through all the links of the cycle of Dependent Origination in both directions. “I thought: This is the path to enlightenment that I have now reached... that is how there is a cessation to this whole aggregate mass of suffering. ‘The cessation, the cessation’ such was the insight, the knowledge, the understanding, the vision, the light, that arose in me about ideas not heard of before.”⁸

Also to gain the full understanding of the khandhas at this crucial juncture of this life, the Bodhisatta used careful intellectual consideration. “I thought: in the case of material form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness what is the gratification, what is the danger, what the escape? Then I thought: In the case of each the bodily pleasure and mental joy that arise in dependence on these things (the five categories) are the gratification; the fact that these things are all impermanent, painful and subject to change is the danger; the disciplining and abandoning of desire and lust for them is the escape.”⁹

⁸ “The Life of the Buddha,” Nāṇamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, pp. 25, 27 quoting from *Samyutta Nikāya*, XII, 65.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 28.

These quotations show how vital wise investigative thinking was to the Buddha himself in his meditations while moving towards his Enlightenment and so must we, too, carefully combine the thought process and meditation to liberate ourselves from suffering.

The long quotation given in the section on investigating the khandhas shows how it is the process of pondering deeply on things that brings us dispassion towards them all, and so to the stages of Enlightenment. So insight, clarity of vision into the ultimate nature of reality, *bhāvanā-māya-paññā*, (wisdom born of meditation) the personal direct knowledge that bears concrete fruit in our behaviour in life, is really based on careful thinking so that the apparent truths are seen through and no longer allowed to delude us by colouring and covering up the real nature of our minds and bodies and of the external world.

This liberating insight can, however, only develop if the investigating is done by a person who meditates regularly. Meditation provides us with the relatively concrete evidence of personal experience to guarantee the validity of our more abstract thinking. There are times when meditation consists of just observing, in a very one-pointed manner, the rise and fall of the sensations (*vedanā*) caused by the subtle biochemical changes going on in the body. But there are other occasions either when thinking is going on quite strongly or when there is a tendency to sloth and torpor, and at these times it is very beneficial to do Dhamma investigation. When the mind is busy thinking, it is always involved in ignorance, always full of clinging or aversion, always dwelling in the past or future because this is the nature of the conditioning that it has gotten from the past. By this kind of thinking we are creating “heaps and heaps” of unwholesome mental volitions, *saṅkhāras*, *akusala kamma*, which are bound to bear fruit in some sort of *dukkha* in the future. If instead we apply the mind in a systematic way to thinking about Dhamma, trying to eliminate craving, trying to see through to the ultimate realities of phenomena, we are creating very powerful good kamma for ourselves which has to lead us toward liberation. At the same time, this kind of consideration clarifies in our minds the fundamental truths of Buddha Dhamma that we have read or heard previously so that they become fully comprehensible and meaningful. Thus carefully directed thought, while sitting in vipassanā meditation, is a vital tool for the rooting out of all our ignorance and for contrasting the path to emancipation.

Also investigation is important to practise strenuously when there is a tendency to a daydreaming, lazy kind of meditation, when the hindrances of sloth and torpor are attacking. The Buddha told the monks, “... at such time, monks, as the mind is sluggish, then is the season for cultivating the limb of wisdom that is Norm-investigation, the season for cultivating the limb of wisdom that is energy, the season for cultivating the limb of wisdom that is zest. Why so? Because, monks, the sluggish mind is easily raised up by such conditions.” (K.S., V, p. 96) By energetically applying the mind to trying to understand more thoroughly than before the Four Noble Truths or another important aspect of Dhamma, the mind will be directed and stimulated. When this happens, the tendency of the mind to drift must disappear and zest for meditation and the clarity of mind which is crucial to real understanding return.

Thus to use investigation in meditation is to apply Right Thought, one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. Obviously, analytical thinking takes places in relation to Dhamma outside of meditation as well—when listening to discourses or when doing Dhamma reading, for example. But for the information gained from outside to become truly meaningful to us, for it to become our own “wisdom-born-of-meditation” (*bhāvanā-māya-paññā*), for this information to influence how we live our lives, it must be thoroughly thought through while we are actually

sitting in meditation. At such times the mind is much more concentrated and subtle than usual and as the hindrances to concentration and insight (i.e., doubt, excitement and restlessness, sloth and torpor, greed, and ill will) are at a fairly low level, the mind is much more pliable and fit to assimilate pure Dhamma thoughts. As we increase our understanding and wisdom through meditative investigation, we decrease our ignorance, and as ignorance diminishes we are loosening the bondage of our suffering and becoming more and more free of craving (*taṇhā*).

Systematic Attention and Control of the Hindrances

Another important role played by investigation is in preventing the arising of all the hindrances that tend to block our progress now and again. It is by means of analytical thought, systematic attention, *yoniso-manasikāra*, that we can keep the hindrances under control. In this process the two Enlightenment Factors of investigation and mindfulness are employed, as it takes careful thought in combination with continuous awareness to keep control of the mind. “And what, monks, is no food for the arising of sensual lust not yet arisen?” The Buddha answers his own question saying that sensual lust is kept from growing by “systematic attention” to “the repulsive feature of things.” To counter the hindrance of ill will, systematic attention must be given to *mettā*, the quality of unbounded loving kindness. To deal with sloth and torpor, systematic attention must be applied to “the element of putting forth effort, the element of exertion, the element of striving.” Against excitement, one must apply systematic attention to tranquillity of mind. To still doubt, one must give systematic attention to Dhamma, or in the Buddha’s words, to “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” (K.S. V, p. 88).

These five great hindrances to concentration, to meditation, to living the Dhamma life are all quite familiar habits to us. But we can develop the tools to prevent their arising and to control them when they do come up. And chief amongst these is the application of systematic attention to the external situations that stimulate the sensual lust, the ill will, the sloth and torpor, the excitement and the doubt that lie latent in our minds, and to the internal negative tendencies themselves. Thus when it is seen that with wisdom these hindrances are ultimately nothing but irrelevant and inappropriate deep-rooted, habitual mental reactions to impermanent, unsatisfactory and essenceless phenomena, the hindrances must lose strength and gradually disappear, leaving behind a pure mind.

Investigation Conduces to Insight

Investigation of Dhamma is one of the four factors which the Buddha frequently describes as conducing “to growth in wisdom, to acquiring insight, to growth of insight, the increase of insight.” The four elements involved are: “Association with good men (following after the good), hearing *Saddhamma* (the Good Norm), thorough work of mind (systematic attention to Dhamma), and behaviour in accordance with Dhamma (living in accordance with the precepts of the Norm).” When the Buddha spoke, of course, the good man to associate oneself with was specifically the Tathāgata himself and his arahat disciples, all fully liberated beings. Today we

do not have this opportunity, but we certainly can choose our associates from amongst those who are on the Path and who are striving to gain wisdom. If we associate with the foolish, we are wasting our time and tempting ourselves unnecessarily, making our task of self-purification all the more difficult. But if we spend time with other strivers, we will reinforce our own motivation and also perhaps get some direct help or encouragement in times of need. As for the second factor, only rarely do we get the opportunity to actually “hear” the Dhamma and then of course not directly from the Fully Enlightened One. But when we take a meditation course, this purpose is served by the teacher’s discourses which are designed to inform us of and elucidate to us the fundamentals of the Dhamma. Naturally this opportunity, too, is limited, and to supplement live Dhamma teachings regularly, we have to do some reading both of the direct words of the Buddha as preserved in the translated Pali texts, and also of what later meditators have written about him and his teachings. Without this beneficial material for our minds to thoroughly think about, to consider wisely, to give systematic attention to, we are apt to find our meditation getting into ruts which become so habitual as to lose their impact on our minds—and on how we live our lives as well. On the other hand, reading Dhamma as an intellectual pastime without combining it with meditation and trying to make what we read our own wisdom which can influence our life patterns, is a complete waste of time. But if we are associating with a Sangha (the community of those walking on the Noble Eightfold Path), if we are learning the basics of Dhamma and carefully and persistently applying our minds to it, then our behaviour cannot help but reflect the wisdom we are so gaining. Thus these four factors must “if cultivated and made much of, conduce to realising the fruits of stream-winning... of once-returning, of non-returning and of arahatship” (K.S. V, p. 351).

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Investigation of Dhamma, *dhammavicaya*, usually the second in the list of the seven Factors of Enlightenment, has a unique place amongst these limbs of wisdom whose function is to purify and train the mind and to “conduce to downright revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to full comprehension, to wisdom, to Nibbāna.” (K.S., V, p. 69) Thinking over the Buddha’s teachings is the very basis for the development of these seven factors, as described in the following quotation:

When a monk ... remembers and turns over in his mind that teaching of the Norm, it is then that the limb of wisdom which is mindfulness is established in that monk;... Thus, he, dwelling mindful, with full recognition investigates and applies insight to that teaching of the Norm and comes to close scrutiny of it.

Now, monks, at such a time as a monk, dwelling thus mindful, with full recognition investigates and applies insight to that teaching of the Norm, then it is that limb of wisdom which is Norm-investigation that, as he comes to close scrutiny of it, by his culture of it, it comes to perfection.

—(K.S., V, p.6)

Clearly, from the Buddha’s description of the cultivation of the two limbs of wisdom of mindfulness and investigation, they are closely tied up with each other; certainly neither can be perfected without the help of the other. But thinking about the Norm is the most basic feature involved in the development of these seven Bojjhaḍgas because it is the original motivator

behind their development. That is why the Buddha placed it at the very beginning of his description of the seven as well as in its regular spot as the second factor, *dhammavicaya*.

Mindfulness is a vital skill to develop, for without mindfully observing one's mind and body to see the defilements as they tend to creep in, it is impossible to purify oneself. But without some degree of understanding of the ultimate facts of existence (anicca, dukkha and anattā and the relationship between taṇhā and dukkha particularly), the practice of "bare attention" (sati) would probably be futile. Just watching what is going on at the gross level of bodily action is unlikely in and of itself to take us to that deep insight that automatically begins to rid our minds of greed, hatred and delusion, the roots of taṇhā and hence of dukkha. Only if our minds are also carefully at work to try and delve into the ultimate realities is mindfulness, constant watchfulness, guaranteed to bear fruit. The Buddha describes this when he defines "the cultivation of a station of mindfulness. Herein a monk dwells contemplating the rise of things in body. He so dwells contemplating the fall of things in body,... and also in feeling, mind and mind-states." (K.S. V, p. 160) In other words, it is by the consideration of the anicca (and by extrapolation, the dukkha and anattā nature as well) of the body, the feelings, the mind and the mind-states that mindfulness is actually developed.

On the other hand, investigation alone also tends to be sterile, a merely intellectual knowledge. Only by continuing meditative mindfulness and observation of whatever comes into the mind via any of the six sense doors, can we put into practice our understanding of Dhamma. The Pali phrase "yoniso manasikāra" combines the two factors of mindfulness and investigation in itself, although the stress seems to be on the latter. Yoniso manasikāra is translated as systematic attention or wise consideration. Systematically, mindfully, with full awareness, one considers the Dhamma; one thinks about the matter at hand until its apparent nature has been penetrated and the ultimate truth is clear. Once the wisdom is gained and the mindfulness of the ultimate reality of the body, feelings, mind and mental states (the Four Stations of Mindfulness) is constant, then it is only a matter of effort, of energy (the third Enlightenment Factor) of just patiently and persistently doing the work—the results of these conditions (detachment leading to liberation) must come about automatically.

This energy is the Enlightenment Factor which follows *dhammavicaya*. "As with full recognition he investigates and applies insight to that Norm-teaching, then unshaken energy is established in him" (K.S., V, p. 56). On the basis of understanding the utter suffering of existence we become so convinced of the need to escape from the perpetual rounds of saṃsāra, that we are completely willing to put out all the effort needed to do so. Knowing that we are doing what has to be done brings us pīti, the next limb of wisdom. Pīti is pure joy or pleasurable interest or zest—it is the positive feeling that arises from knowing we have the technique for eliminating our suffering which sustains us further, encouraging us to continue to apply that method wholeheartedly. Tranquillity of mind and body, the next limb, develops, with pīti; with the elimination of doubt a deep sense of peace of mind based on wisdom comes about. When one has thought about life very carefully and knows that there is nothing in the world worth getting the least bit involved with or attached to, then the mind runs after objects less and less and tends to settle down and get well concentrated (the sixth factor), as no possible phenomena at any of the six sense doors appear worthwhile for it to try and grasp onto. This pure concentration as it is rooted in insight and allows insight to grow more and more, makes the mind balanced and calm, and so equanimity (the final limb of wisdom) grows. This is not bored, mundane callousness, but an equanimity that is rooted in clear thought and deep

understanding which has made it apparent that there can be absolutely nothing, mental or physical, anywhere on any plane of existence, past, present or future, worth reacting to or getting involved with.

Thus it is that the Buddha declared, “As a matter concerning one’s own self, monks, I see no other single factor so potent for the arising of the seven limbs of wisdom as systematic attention. Of a monk who is possessed of systematic attention we may expect that he will cultivate, that he will make much of the seven limbs of wisdom,” and developing these seven Enlightenment Factors is precisely developing liberation from suffering. (K. S., V, pp 34–5) Hence, careful investigation, persistently pursued is the root cause of, as well as the route to, wisdom in all its facets.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha states that it is this same factor of systematic attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) that brings one onto the Noble Eightfold Path, the Fourth Noble Truth, which leads to the cessation of all suffering.

Just as the dawn, monks, is the forerunner, the harbinger of the sun, even so possession of systematic thought, monks, is, the forerunner, the harbinger, of the arising of the Ariyan Eightfold Way.

Of a monk who is possessed of systematic thought, it may be expected that he will cultivate, that he will make much of the Ariyan Eightfold Way. And how monks, does a monk so possessed make much of the Ariyan Eightfold Way?

Herein a monk cultivates right view, that is based on seclusion, that is based on dispassion, on cessation, that ends in self-surrender, and he makes much of it... He cultivates right aim (thought), right speech, right action, right living (livelihood), right effort, right mindfulness, he cultivates and makes much of right concentration that is based on seclusion, on dispassion, on cessation, that ends in self-surrender.

—K.S., V, p. 27

The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three sections: the first is *Paññā* (wisdom) and includes the first two factors of *sammā-dīp̄phi* (Right View or Understanding) and *sammā-saḍkappa* (Right Thought); second is *sīla* (morality) which includes *sammā-vācā* (Right Speech), *sammā-kammanta* (Right Action) and *sammā-ājīva* (Right Livelihood); the third division is *samādhi* (concentration) including the final three elements of the Path—*sammā-vāyāma* (Right Effort), *sammā-sati* (Right Mindfulness) and *sammā-samādhi* (Right Concentration). Investigation is important to each group. Although it is virtually identical with the *paññā* section of the Path, the faculty of reasoned contemplation has significant role to play in the development of both *sīla* and *samādhi*, and *samādhi* and *sīla* in turn both support investigation.

Careful investigation of the apparent truth must enable us to break through the barriers of our conditioned, coloured and unclear perception of things until we thoroughly penetrate and clearly comprehend their ultimate truth. This is *vipassanā*—insight; this is *paññā*—Right Understanding and Right Thought, wisdom. As the Buddha shows us in a simile, all perception is as unsubstantial and essenceless as a mirage. “Just as if, brethren, in the last month of the dry season at high noontide there should be a mirage and a keen-sighted man should observe it and

look close into the nature of it, so observing it he would find it to be without essence.” (K.S., III, p. 119) If we accept the information we get about the world both internal and external from our sense organs automatically without carefully examining it, we are bound to act on the basis of the mirage of ignorance as all the past thinking that influences the perception—and so the feeling and reaction which come along with it—was based on the inaccurate assumptions of permanence, beauty, happiness and self. But once we begin to develop Right View, we come to see gradually how in actual fact nothing lasts, nothing can really be called beautiful (since everything is always changing, undergoing corruption and decay), nothing can really bring us satisfaction and there is no essence in any of the apparently solid objects, beings or mental phenomena of the universe. And we come to understand that there can only be the conditioned processes of becoming that arise and cease strictly and solely in accordance with the appropriate conditions. Right Thought is a vital means to the attainment of this Right Understanding or View; and investigation of truth is one and the same with Right Thought.

“Whatsoever there is of thinking, considering, reasoning, thought, ratiocination, application... the mind being holy, being turned away from the world, and conjoined with the path, the holy path being pursued” is called Right Thought (Majjhima Nikāya, 117). Right Thought is also specifically, and on the more mundane level, thinking that is free from ill will or cruelty and thinking relating to renunciation of greed and lust. Right Understanding grows deeper and deeper the more thoroughly we investigate the essentials of Buddha Dhamma. As we apply our minds to them, the Three Salient Characteristics of Existence, the nature of wholesome and unwholesome Kamma, the Doctrine of Dependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths all become more meaningful to us and we comprehend more clearly how they explain the phenomena of existence and the way out of all suffering. “He understands what is worthy of consideration... He considers the worthy... What suffering is he wisely considers; what the origin of suffering is, he wisely considers, what the extinction of suffering is he wisely considers, what the path that leads to the extinction of suffering is, he wisely considers.” (Majjhima Nikāya, 2) And thus wisely considering, we come to act on the basis of such thought; with such purified deeds of body, speech and mind we are bringing ourselves nearer and nearer to the cessation of all suffering.

Sīla is morality; in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path it refers specifically to Right Speech, Action and Mode of Livelihood. However, there are many broader kinds of *sīla*—from the Five Precepts every lay disciple tries to live by to the 227 rules for monks. The culmination of *sīla* is the culmination of the Path—perfect purity of bodily and verbal action rooted in similarly cleansed mental volition; when the mind can no longer develop *taṇhā* for any object whatsoever, then it is completely pure and totally free from all suffering. We may keep the *sīla* precepts rather mechanically, by tradition, or automatically reciting the Five Precepts at the start of a meditation course and this may for a time seem to serve our purpose. But if such morality is not based on Right Understanding, it will be very weak when put under duress by adverse conditions. Unless we have thought through and understood the drastic kammic results, in future lives as well as in this one, that we must expect from breaking *sīla*, we may well be tempted to lie for our own gain, to earn our livelihood by some means involving subterfuge or dishonesty, or to take something that actually belongs to someone else. An understanding of the fact that “Only the wholesome and unwholesome volitional actions (*kamma*) done by beings are their own properties that always accompany them, wherever they may wander in many a becoming,” (*Subha-sutta* quoted in Ledi Sayādaw, *Manuals of Buddhism* p. 75, *Sammā-ditṭhi Dīpanī*) will greatly strengthen one’s resolve to abstain from doing

unwholesome deeds, of body, speech and most importantly mind. Clearly understanding the Path and how *sīla* relates to the other sections is also a great support for keeping the moral code. *Sīla* makes up the preliminary steps in self-purification. If we indulge in intoxicants or sexual misconduct (e.g., adultery) or break the other three precepts, we cannot hope to gain concentration or wisdom. This is because it is the nature of such behaviour that it keeps the mind distracted, either over-excited or very dull. But if we keep our morality pure on this gross level of bodily and verbal actions, then we are able to undertake the task of mental concentration and purification which is the work of *samādhi* and *paññā*. *Samādhi* by concentrating the mind, suppresses, and *paññā*. Right View and Understanding, roots out the causes of all our unwholesome mental volitions. With ignorance thus eliminated, free from *taṇhā*-related thoughts, we automatically keep perfect *sīla* of body and speech. Working on these principles of Dhamma in our minds so that we really comprehend both the results of our immoral actions and the importance of keeping *sīla* as the basis for progress on the Path will make our *sīla* much stronger and less likely to break no matter what provocative situation may crop up.

The three final elements of the Path make up the concentration group. They are effort, mindfulness and concentration. Strenuous, tireless effort is required if we are to be able to apply our minds sufficiently to penetrate through the apparent truths of life and really understand the ultimate realities. Without some understanding and careful thinking we will not be able to clearly distinguish those unwholesome states of mind that effort must be put forth in order to eliminate from the wholesome ones which must be cultivated with similarly great energy. Unless these distinctions are known, the effort cannot be Right Effort which is the Path factor. “A monk puts forth desire, makes an effort, begins to strive, applies his mind, lays hold of his mind to prevent the arising of ill unprofitable states not yet arisen. As to all unprofitable states that have arisen, he puts forth desire to destroy them. As to profitable states that have not yet arisen, he puts forth desire for their arising.] As to the profitable states that have already arisen, he puts forth desire, makes an effort, begins to strive, applies his mind, lays hold of his mind for their continuance, for the non-confusion, for their more-becoming, increase, culture and fulfilment. That, monks, is called ‘right effort’” (K.S., V, p. 8). Hence effort strengthens and supports thorough, deep investigation, and conversely, investigation leads to the understanding of how effort is to be correctly applied.

As has already been discussed at some length, there is a very close link between mindfulness and investigation; they are totally interdependent and it is often impossible in practice to distinguish them from each other at any given moment. The four stations of mindfulness—of body, of feelings, of mind, and of mental objects—are to be cultivated by means of contemplating on, thinking through their *anicca* (and also *dukkha* and *anattā*) nature. “A monk dwells contemplating the rise of things in body. He dwells contemplating the fall of things in body; he dwells contemplating both the rise and fall of things in body; and in feelings, in mind, in mind-objects, ardent, composed and mindful by having restrained coveting and dejection with regard to the world... This, monks, is called ‘the cultivation of a station of mindfulness’” (K.S., V, p. 160). Mindfulness of the body must include a well thought out understanding of its transient nature, of the inevitability of its decay and death—*anicca*; of its unsatisfactoriness as, ultimately, we cannot control its fate as it brings with it the myriad forms of physical suffering—*dukkha*; and of the fact that it cannot rightly be considered “I” or “mine” since we cannot control its changes or make it remain as we wish to—*anattā*. The specific exercises in mindfulness of the body (such as on the breath or the thirty-two parts of the body) if practised

for insight not just for concentration, must include such contemplation on the essential nature of the body.

The same kind of thought is required for the proper cultivation of (*vedanānupassanā*) contemplation of feelings, contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*) and contemplation of mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*). The Buddha told a group of elder monks to instruct the novices in this fashion: “In feelings do ye abide contemplating feelings (as transient) ardent, composed, one-pointed, of tranquil mind, calmed down, of concentrated mind, for insight into feelings as they really are. In mind... for insight into mind as it really is. In mind-states... for insight into mind-states as they really are” (K.S., V, p. 123). This means that feelings, mind and mind objects are to be observed and considered most carefully, concentratedly and objectively in order to gain true insight into their ultimately unstable nature. In *vedanānupassanā* (the particular technique taught by S. N. Goenka *et al*), it is the combination of the meditative experience of *feeling*, the subtle changing sensations, produced in the body by its bio-chemical processes which reflect the changing *mind-states*, with Right Thought about the ultimate nature of all the five aggregates that can free us of all our ignorance and so of our *taṇhā* and *dukkha*. The experience of free flow—feeling the sensations throughout the body in one sweep or all at one time (the sensations which are continually being produced by the changing *kalāpas*, the subatomic particles of which the whole mass of the body is composed)—alone, without understanding the far-reaching significance of these sensations, can be just like any other experience, a thing of passing interest that has no substantive effect on our lives. Similarly infertile will be mere intellectualising about ultimate realities without any direct way of knowing them within our own five aggregate phenomena through mindful meditation. Careful analysis and rational thinking must also be applied mindfully, in an ongoing way, to the activity of the *mind* and to the objects of thought. Thus in order to carry the four stations of mindfulness to their goal, the transiency, unsatisfactoriness and essencelessness of these phenomena must be comprehended.

On the other hand, without one-pointed concentration investigation will be shallow and unable to penetrate through the conventions of the apparent truths we perceive because the mind will not be able to remain on one subject long enough. Concentration cannot be powerful if the mind is constantly intrigued by and grasps at the thoughts that come and go; and only when we understand how useless and *dukkha*-ridden is everything in the mind, will it become detached and disinterested and so naturally tend to stay put on the chosen salutary object.

Thus we see how investigative Dhamma thinking is an integral part of the development of Right Thought and Right Understanding, how careful contemplation strengthens morality, how *sīla* allows *dhammavicaya* to deepen, how careful consideration shows where effort is to be applied, the ultimate significance of the objects of mindfulness, which enables concentration to grow, and conversely how the development of these three elements of the *samādhi* section of the Path contributes to the deepening and widening scope of Dhamma investigation. So, once we begin to develop systematic attention, we are starting to walk on the Path, the Fourth Noble Truth set out by the Buddha, the Way which enables us to develop a mind which is totally detached and at peace, free from ignorance, from craving, and so from suffering. *Dhammavicaya*—Right Thought—supports us at all stages and all aspects of the Path and developments of the other Path factors similarly contributes to the growth of investigation of Dhamma.

Conclusion

Dhammavicaya-investigation of reality—is one of the most important tools to be used by the meditator seeking liberating insight and freedom from *dukkha*, suffering, as has here been shown. By means of careful investigation in meditation we are able to penetrate the apparent truths and come to full realisation of the ultimate nature of the phenomena of existence. So by keen thinking in the course of Vipassanā meditation we come to understand thoroughly how our own five aggregates and all the external mental and material universe (*nāma-rūpa*) perceived by the senses, are utterly transient, arising and passing away at every moment as the causes that produced them do likewise. Because every dhamma is so unstable, the five aggregates can never bring true happiness but only *dukkha*, as such changing and unsatisfactory phenomena are utterly essenceless and not worth clinging to, not to be taken as “I” or “mine.” As we seriously consider all this and also investigate the cause-and-effect nature of all life processes and contemplate the Noble Truths of Dukkha, its Cause, its Cessation and the Way leading to its Cessation, while persevering in our meditation, craving (*taṇhā*) must weaken and detachment, liberation must develop. And as the other Enlightenment and Path Factors are also brought to perfection with the support of *dhammavicaya*—complete freedom from all future birth and so of future suffering is attained.

Our good tendencies from the past have put us in the exceedingly fortunate position of being born as human beings during the time of a Buddha’s dispensation, and they have brought us into contact with this incomparable jewel, the Dhamma. So now is the time to exert and strengthen our present mental volition towards liberation. To free ourselves from *dukkha*, we must strive to experience and investigate, to realise and understand, the ultimate truths of existence. With this insight, this wisdom, the mind becomes utterly detached, and since it is completely independent of all the world’s changing, unsatisfactory and essenceless phenomena, there is absolute Peace and Freedom.

May all beings be Happy!

May all beings be Peaceful!

May all beings be Liberated!

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