

The Mahā Taṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta

(The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving)

A Meditation Guide



Most Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thera

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Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Mahā Thera

Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Mahā Thero is a revered teacher and is the fourth Abbott and Chief Preceptor of Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya in Sri Lanka. He is well respected for his wide encompassing knowledge of the various meditation techniques, including Tranquility (*Samatha*) as well as the Burmese Insight (*Vipassanā*) methods.

A former graduate of a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science degree from the University of Peradeniya, Kandy, Venerable Dhammajiva was a Chief Executive Officer of a company when he arrived at Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya. Venerable Dhammajīva's spiritual inquiry took shape in his mind whilst he was undertaking his undergraduate degree in 1977. His father's health declined. During this time, he took on the responsibility of nursing and attending to his father's needs. His father's subsequent death left a strong imprint of impermanence and a powerful spiritual urge to inquire into the unsatisfactory nature of life and a desire to renounce worldly life.

Aware of the fruitless pursuit of material enrichment, he left the accomplishments of his lay life to be ordained as a monk. On 16 November 1988, he ordained as a Buddhist monk, adopting the spiritual name, 'Dhammajīva' and in June 1990, received his higher ordination at the Sri Kalyāni Yogashrama Samsthā.

Between 1988 and 1992, he underwent training under the guidance of Most Venerable Mātara Sri Ñānārāma Mahā Thero. During this time, his mentor was Venerable Katukurunde Ñānānanda Mahā Thero. Venerable Dhammajīva fulfilled his duties to his preceptor and teacher as attendant and nurse for the last one and a half years of Venerable Mātara Sri Ñānārāma Mahā Thero's life. The life and

death of Venerable Ñānārāma Mahā Thero mixed with teaching and mutual service, served as a profound instruction in his life as a monk.

After the passing away of his teacher in 1993, Venerable Dhammajīva, travelled to Burma, to train under *Sayadaw U. Panditabhivamsa* at Panditārāma and Hse Main Gone Monastery. Between 1993 and 1996, Venerable Dhammajīva received intense training in *Vipassanā* meditation techniques under the close guidance of *Sayadaw U. Panditābhivamsa*. During Venerable Dhammajīva's time in Myanmar, a fourth language, Burmese was added to his repertoire, which served him well in his translations of some difficult works by the Most Venerable Maha-Si Sayadaw and Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw and later in 2005, as the official translator for Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw in Sri Lanka.

Having successfully completed his training, Venerable Dhammajīva returned to Sri Lanka at the request of the Nissarana Vanaya sangha, where he continued his practice with great vigor in solitude between the years 1996 and 2006. During this time, Venerable Dhammajīva also undertook formal monastic studies in Pāli, Vinaya and Abidhamma while opting to self-study the Sutta Pitaka. His time in solitude resulted in over forty publications on the *Theravāda* Buddhist meditation practice and rare translations of invaluable Burmese meditation manuals to Sinhalese and English.

Editor`s Note

This book is a meditation guide based on a 10-day residential retreat conducted in July 2013 by Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thera, in Fruitland Park, Florida, USA. The book has been compiled and edited to ensure the understanding and use of both beginners and advanced students. English in plain language was used, and headings and sub headings were included for ease of understanding. Pali terms were included to retain the full meaning and flavour of the Buddha Dhamma and a summary of the previous chapter was provided for easy reference and retention of previous material covered.

Many persons contributed to the compilation of this book. Special thanks to Bridgit Agsar for providing a transcript of the recorded talks. Her effort and diligence in ensuring the accuracy of the talks is appreciated. This book was reviewed for accuracy of the Dhamma and Pali terms by Venerable Panadure Chandaratana Thera. I am very grateful for his careful review of the text and patience with all the questions that I asked to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the material. I could not have completed this task without his contribution. Much merit to both of them and the technical staff that recorded the retreat Dhamma talks for their invaluable contribution to this book.

The Mahā Tanhāsankhaya Sutta is a profound and complex discourse that introduces the reader to an accurate understanding of the Buddha's teachings on consciousness. Venerable Dhammajiva Maha Thera has used this complex discourse with great skill and aptitude to introduce the reader to a meditation guide that leads to the Path to Freedom. While the book focuses on gradually reducing desire using the Non-reactional Path of *Ceto vimutti*, he has also introduced the reader to the wise reflection, Not-self Path of *Paññā vimutti*. Therefore, this book serves as a comprehensive meditation guide to all persons.

It is hoped that this book will be of great benefit to persons interested in a comprehensive meditation guide in English. With this goal in mind, this book was compiled and edited with great care, effort, and devotion. Any errors and omissions in the material are due to the inadequacy of the editor. Your forgiveness for any shortcoming is appreciated.

May all Beings be Happy, Peaceful and Contented!

The Editor

August 15 2018

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Consciousness

“And to whom, foolish man,

Do you understand me to have taught the Dhamma like that?

Haven't I, in many ways, said of dependently co-arisen consciousness?

Apart from a requisite condition, there is no coming-into-play of consciousness ...”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta

Overview

The *Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya sutta* was delivered by the Buddha, in Savatti at Anāthapindika's Monastery. This discourse, which is from the *Sutta Pitaka*, was taken from the *Mūla Paṇṇāsaka* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*.

The *Mahā Taṇhācsāṅkhaya sutta* addresses the Buddha's analysis of consciousness (*viññāna*). This discourse was dispensed by the Buddha as the result of an incorrect, pernicious, and destructive view of a monk named Sāti.

The monk Sāti claimed that based on his understanding of the Buddha's teachings, that consciousness was eternal and that it was the same consciousness that passed from one life to the other. He also claimed that the same consciousness passed from young age to middle age and from middle age to old age. Therefore, he professed that consciousness was permanent and eternal.

The Buddha rejected this false view which was professed by some religious teachers during this era and claimed that it was one of the extreme views to be avoided. The monk Sāti who was a contemporary of the Buddha, however, continued to spread his false views by saying that consciousness transmigrated from life to life. Despite the efforts of his colleagues and fellow practitioners to correct the monk Sāti's misconception, he was adamant in his belief and refused to change his views. Finally, his colleagues and fellow practitioners brought the issue to the attention of the Buddha in the form of a petition.

On hearing the petition of the monks, the Buddha brought the monk Sāti to the congregation of monks that had gathered and questioned the monk Sāti by saying, “Are you with this wrong, evil and destructive view that the same consciousness is transmigrating from life to life?” The monk Sāti acknowledged the claim by saying, “Yes. Lord”. The Buddha then questioned the monk Sāti as to his understanding of consciousness. The monk Sāti explained his understanding of consciousness by saying that, consciousness is that which feels and experiences, that which reaps the results of good and evil actions done here and now. When the monk Sāti refused to change his pernicious views, the Buddha challenged him by saying, “To whom foolish man, do you understand me to have taught the Dhamma like that? In many ways I have explained that consciousness is not permanent, it is not eternal, and it is dependent on due cause and dependently arising.” The Buddha then rebuked the monk Sāti by saying “you are misrepresenting me, and you are undermining yourself. Furthermore, the karmic consequences resulting from this wrong view are dangerous and grave. Therefore, it is better to bring up this issue, discuss and rectify the wrong view for all monks gathered.” When the monk Sāti was

rebuked by the Buddha in this manner, he sat silent, his shoulders drooping and his head down at a loss for words¹.

After the Buddha rebuked the monk Sāti's understanding of consciousness he informed him that he should not profess, spread or facilitate this wrong view because it has been rejected by him (the Buddha's description of consciousness and its function is discussed later).

The Two Extremes Rejected by the Buddha

The Buddha, in his very first discourse and thereafter, refuted the two extremes and helped his followers and practitioners to understand the dangers of the two (extreme addiction to sensual pleasures and extreme self-affliction). Instead, he encouraged them to understand and avoid the two extremes and to follow the Middle Path in their practice.

There were also two extreme philosophical views at the time of the Buddha that he rejected because it led to extreme sensual pleasure and extreme self-affliction. The first was the annihilation view. Often you can find reference in the canonical teachings of contemporaries of the Buddha, and previous teachers, who entertained, annihilation theories which led to maximization of sensual pleasures. They claimed that everything ends at death. Therefore, whatever action you perform, however evil, there will be no consequences to the doer as life ends at death. This leads to the maximizing of one's pleasure by whatever means and it is justified by the believers as there is 'nothing or no one' to worry about the consequences. This view of life was known as the

¹ This rebuke may seem harsh. However, Sāti was professing his views and influencing the whole congregation of monks. As this belief would lead to their demise the Buddha was addressing the welfare of all the monks gathered and the monks of future generations. The Monks passed on the Dhamma through memorising and word of mouth. A false view that is core to his teachings would have had serious consequences.

annihilation view as they believed that death results in total destruction. In general, those who believed in the annihilation view were not concerned about moral restraint.

In India, during the time of the Buddha, there were some people who were extremely materialistic. They were adamant about maximizing sensual pleasures. There were people such as some kings and maharajas who were maximizing all the sensuous gratifications, and there were some people chasing behind the kings and the maharajas following their example. Even in modern times, extreme sensual pleasures and materialism is often connected with some form of the annihilation view.

The second was a philosophical view in India that if you accepted any kind of a soul or the core or essence of your life that it would lead to a materialistic view and the maximizing of sensual pleasures. They rejected extreme sensual gratification and felt that any materialism was very destructive. They believed that it resulted in not abiding by moral principles and ethics and the rejection of moral responsibility. Therefore, they rejected it completely and moved to extreme self-affliction. The Buddha refuted this thinking as being painful, ignoble and unprofitable.

There was another fraction of people who believed that spending the whole life on materialism and extreme sensual pleasure was crude and not refined. They also believed that rejecting it completely and moving to self-affliction was unnecessary and not good. They felt that one, who had a better understanding of the true nature of perception, was a more refined person.

These people claimed that they were more refined because they were not grasping to materialism and to extreme sensual gratification and they were not rejecting it totally and depriving themselves of necessities through extreme self-affliction. They even had some understanding of perception and its transient nature. As such they were not forcing their views on others. They even

acknowledged that they were creating, fabricating, and producing thoughts based on their perception. Gradually they started to claim that they were better than the other two kinds of people who were following extreme views. They had negated and overcome desire and clinging to four of the five aggregates.

These people thought that extreme desire for form was crude and not refined, maximizing the pleasures derived of feeling was crude and not refined, desire to promote their own perception was crude and not refined, and being obsessed by fabrications was crude and not refined. They felt that the consciousness was the core aspect of the mind.

This is the belief that the monk Sāti engaged. The way he presented his understanding of consciousness inclines towards this eternalistic view or belief. It is this belief that led to his claim of an eternal soul.

When the Buddha arose to the world, he had to experience these five aggregates of clinging, and see and understand them through experience of reality. With so many views it was important that he proclaimed the true reality of what was behind what we refer to as “the grasping or clinging of beings”. All of them - form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness needed to be experienced. The Buddha proclaimed through experience that they were all impermanent, suffering and not-self. They were all of no substance, rather like a mirage. As this belief of an eternal soul is false, evil, pernicious and detrimental to the progress of the practice, the Buddha took time in this fairly long and complex discourse, to deny and reject the monk Sāti’s claims by using a cross-questioning approach.

The complexity of this discourse can be understood by keeping in mind that essentially, the cross-questioning aims at accomplishing two things at once. It provides a correct understanding of consciousness as a conditioned phenomenon and it shows why the

sort of thinking and views the monk Sāti was trying to facilitate are dangerous, ill-conceived, and detrimental to the progress of the path and Awakening.

The Buddha's Approach – The Middle Path

The Buddha takes advantage of this event to prove and show the folly of this pernicious wrong view and to bring back the rest of the monks to the Middle Path. The Buddha begins by saying there is no such thing as a transmigrating consciousness. He says consciousness arises dependent on particular conditions. Since the constitutional parts of the conditions that give rise to consciousness are ever changing, the resultant consciousness is also transient. As such, there is no continuity of an eternal consciousness. Instead, we have a reciprocal flux that changes based on the changing condition that gives rise to the consciousness.

The Buddha wanted to rectify this mistaken view of the monk Sāti, not so much for the monk Sāti, who was refusing to accept the Buddha's teaching, but for the wellbeing of the whole congregation of monks. Gathering all the monks, the Buddha delivered this complex discourse on how to get rid of this wrong view on consciousness as it was detrimental to one's progress of Awakening.

Approach to Understanding Consciousness

As discussed previously, the *Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya sutta* is primarily related to the right understanding of consciousness. To achieve this, one needs to have a lot of experience and understanding with respect to all of the five aggregates of clinging or grasping (*panca upādāna skhandha*). One begins with a comprehensive analytical understanding of form (*rūpa*) and then move to feelings (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and the fabrications (*saṅkhāra*). Only then can one figure out and understand consciousness (*viññāna*). One can then apply their understanding

and experience of form, feeling, perception, and fabrications to the same nature found in consciousness.

In truth, each and every one of us, like the monk Sāti, is with this wrong notion or understanding of consciousness. Whether we accept it or not, that is why we talk about, “my identity, my name and my family”. We think that it is our duty to maximize benefits for “me, myself, and my soul”. We continuously build and protect our ego. Fortunately, some of us are ready to accept that materialism and the maximizing of pleasure is not the answer to achieving true happiness. Some of us realize that materialism has its own disadvantages and ultimately leads to suffering.

Some of us may be ready to accept that the maximizing of pleasure is necessary in moderation, but that is not for every situation. Maximizing of pleasure may be necessary in the early years of your life when you are developing your skills and potential. However, when you reach middle and old age, you realize that it does not lead to happiness. Also, as you mature your perception of yourself and the world changes. You begin to see and understand how much your perception (*saññā*) has changed towards the views you had before. You see through experience that perception is also transient.

At present, many of you are caught up with your own fabrications (*saṅkhāra*). You are caught up with your achievements, successes and future plans, which are sometimes considered as “me, myself, and my soul”. Each one of us has some clarity and understanding with respect to these five aggregates and some confusion and not knowing.

The Buddha invites us to see the disadvantages of taking the form as me and myself, as it is detrimental to our spiritual progress. It also does not lead to happiness. It is exactly the same disadvantage as taking the consciousness as me and myself. We have to begin by using the available raw material such as form that is easier to

comprehend. Then we can understand consciousness by using a comparative study so as to see and realize it in our meditation. It must not be limited to a theoretical, deductive and inferential understanding. We must also see things as they are, through our mindfulness and concentrated mind. Only then can we have a balanced understanding of consciousness.

Understanding the Changing Consciousness

The Buddha said that consciousness is labeled according to the cause. For example, he said that when visual objects - the shapes and the colors - come and impinge on to the sensitivity of the eye, there is an arising of a consciousness. We call this eye consciousness. Whenever the sound comes and strikes on your ear drum, there is a consciousness arising that is called ear consciousness. Whenever there is an aroma - good or bad - that strikes on your nostrils, then there arises a consciousness known as the nose consciousness. Similarly when the food and drink come in contact with your taste buds, tongue consciousness arises. Any tactile sensation that comes in contact with your body results in body consciousness and mind objects that come in contact with the sense base or faculty of the mind² results in mind consciousness.

The Buddha said that besides this eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness, there is nothing called ‘just or mere’ consciousness. Everything is labeled with a particular causative aspect. The appropriate cause gives rise to the appropriate consciousness whenever there is contact. In other words, whenever the causes change the consciousness also changes.

The Buddha then gave an example for better understanding. He said, “Whenever there is a fire consuming a log, that fire is called a log fire. Whenever the fire is consuming twigs it is called a twig

² Sense base or faculty of the mind referred to as *manayatana* in Pali. The term brain and heart are often interchanged and used by authors.

fire. Whenever it is consuming straw, it is called a straw fire. When it is consuming chaff particles, it is called a chaff fire and when it is consuming cow dung (this is very common in India), it is called a cow dung fire”. The Buddha then asked the monks, if there is anything called a “just or mere” fire? The monks informed the Buddha that there was nothing called a “just or mere” fire. Each and every fire has its own fuel or cause. According to the fuel, the fire is labeled, so there is nothing called a “just or mere” fire. If there is no fuel (cause), then there is no fire.

It is exactly the same with consciousness. When contact occurs, consciousness arises. The consciousness that arises is dependent on what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or recall from memory (identify object and remember details). The appropriate consciousness arises instantaneously but it happens so quickly that you do not realize and cannot identify that each time consciousness arises; your whole attention is with your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or the sense base or faculty of the mind. You are absorbed in and attracted to the particular task so that in general, you cannot recognize the type of consciousness.

Experiencing the Changing Consciousness

In order to challenge yourself, as a personal experiment, observe your consciousness in meditation. The Buddha said that consciousness (*viññāna*) arises ‘then and there’ according to its own cause.

Let us take an example. When you are in walking meditation, you are expected to keep the mindfulness on the body consciousness. You observe the right leg touching the ground, feeling the hardness, stiffness, tension, lightness, heaviness, effortlessness or effort-fullness. Whatever it may be, you know and recognize the body consciousness, or the tactile sensation of the body, or sensitivity of the body when it touches the ground. You also recognize that it changes from right leg to left leg. Let us assume

that you are successful in keeping the attention with the left leg to the right leg, right to the left leg, while you are in the middle area of the walking path and that you can keep track of the feeling with the sensitivity of the body.

Now imagine that you are at the end of the walking path. When you are turning, you see a colourful bird, a beautiful butterfly or a flower. Then, immediately the consciousness changes from body consciousness to the eye consciousness. The tactile sensation of your sensitivity of the body changes without any prior notice to the eye. Eye consciousness arises and you see. Body consciousness ceases to exist. You are carried away by what you are seeing and have not observed and noted that consciousness changed from one cause to the other.

Unless you have this theoretical knowledge and are prepared and mindful, you will not realize the change in consciousness. You may even forget that you are a yogi and that you are supposed to keep the attention on the feet. Instead you try to identify and admire the bird. You may even start thinking and feel sorry that you do not have your camera with you to take a photograph.

It happens so fast that you have to develop the meditation to see how swiftly the consciousness changes from tactile sensation in the feet to the eyes. Similarly, you may be distracted and carried away by a sound or a smell and not realize or observe the change in consciousness. We are citing an example in the walking meditation as the walking meditation is very eventful, but you need to have keen awareness all the time to develop mindfulness and to observe these swift changes in consciousness³.

³ Consciousness changes swiftly from the body to the faculty of the mind to the eye. Then if you are lost in thought it changes again to the faculty of the mind. At this point in our practice we try to observe at least the change from the body to the eye.

What the Buddha claims is that when the causative factors change, the consciousness too changes. It does not leave any trace, or give any prior sign, so it appears continuous. In truth, a completely new and different consciousness has taken the place of the previous consciousness.

You must be aware and mindful to observe the shift in consciousness. First you must keep your attention with the sole of your foot when it is touching the ground. The moment you see a bird or hear a sound you must be aware that consciousness has now changed from the body to the eye or the ear.

You must guard against your mind being lost in thought with the bird (identifying, remembering details and thinking). When you develop ‘then and there’ mindfulness, the attraction of the bird will be reduced. You can no longer entertain further thoughts of the bird. That is the secret behind mindfulness. If you are to entertain the bird, if you want to identify and appreciate the bird, then you have to be ignorant and unmindful of the changing consciousness. Only then can the appreciation of the bird take place. At the beginning, when we are developing mindfulness, we do not integrate that level of perfection in our meditation. It is developed gradually.

The simple mindfulness that you develop in the sitting and breathing meditation, when continued in the walking meditation, will ultimately lead to awareness of the changing consciousness. One day you will understand and observe the consciousness changing with the appropriate causative sense base. At present, you have no controlling power. Consciousness is jumping from one to the other. Not only that, it keeps you so absorbed and engrossed in your new experience that it is undermining your mindfulness and the workings of the swift consciousness. Therefore, we have to have a theoretical understanding, develop a certain amount of awareness and have ‘then and there’ mindfulness. Only then can we have a practical understanding of the transiency of

consciousness. Until then, we are also like the monk Sāti⁴ for we do not see the impermanence, suffering, and not-self of the consciousness.

⁴ It should be noted that the monk Sāti, who was a disciple of the Buddha, had advanced to the point where he could experience the impermanence, suffering and not-self of form, feeling, perception, and fabrications. His folly was his claim that his pernicious view was based on the Buddha's teaching, his stubborn refusal to heed the Buddha's renewed efforts to correct his false view and his insistence on misleading others by proclaiming his false view.

Chapter 2

The Proximate Cause of Consciousness

“Monks do you see that this (aggregate) has come to be?” – “Yes Lord”

“Monks do you see that it comes to be from its nutriment?” – “Yes Lord”

“Monks, do you see that from the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation?” – “Yes Lord”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Chapter One Summary

- The monk Sāti professed a destructive, wrong view about consciousness (*viññāna*). He claimed that consciousness was eternal and that it was the very same consciousness that passed from one life to the other. The Buddha categorically denied this false view and reiterated that consciousness is not permanent and eternal.
- The Buddha also indicated that consciousness arises out of its specific cause or condition. If the causes or conditions are present, then consciousness arises. When the causes or conditions cease to exist, then the already arisen consciousness ceases to exist. The next moment, another set of causes or conditions may come into being and then accordingly a new consciousness arises.
- Even though it arises in a consecutive way, each and every consciousness that arises is unique and has its own name based on its cause (fuel used in fire example). Therefore,

one realizes that consciousness is not an unbroken continuum, but a continuous arising and passing away that is conditioned by the fuel that feeds and sustains it.

- We experimented with observing the changing consciousness in walking meditation.

Dependent Co-Arising

Following the pattern of dependent co-arising, the Buddha first classifies consciousness in terms of the way it arises in dependence on the six sense bases, each of which is dependent on a pair of conditions. For example, the consciousness that arises on your eye during interaction with physical visual objects (form) is known as eye consciousness.

The eye is transient, changeable and of the nature of decay. Forms are transient, changeable and of the nature of decay. Thus this pair which conditions or causes eye consciousness is transient, changing and decaying. Having arisen in dependence on transient, changeable, impermanent factors, how could eye-consciousness be permanent?

The Buddha then took each of the sense bases and extended this line of reasoning to the others. The consciousness that arises in your ear due to contact with sounds, is known as ear consciousness. The ear is transient, changeable and of the nature of decay. Sound (form) is transient, changeable and of the nature of decay. Thus this pair that conditions or causes ear consciousness, is transient, changing and decaying. Having arisen in dependence on transient, changeable, impermanent factors, how could ear-consciousness be permanent?

Similarly, each of the sense bases such as the nose, the tongue, the body, and the sense base of the mind, when coming into contact with form such as aroma, flavour, touch and mind objects gives

rise to the appropriate consciousness. Having arisen in dependence on a pair of transient, changeable, impermanent factors, how could the dependent co-arising of the appropriate consciousness be permanent?

This is how consciousness arises. It comes into being so swiftly that it leads to the misconception of permanence. Therefore, understanding the transient nature of the consciousness without the help of a genius like the “Omniscient One” is impossible. Without the teaching of a Buddha, our mind or our consciousness will never see its own distorted mechanism.

The eye that sees everything in the world cannot see itself. One has to have a mirror to see the eye. Similarly, one who wishes to understand the arising, and the cessation of the consciousness cannot do so by just listening to theoretical or book-knowledge. Neither can one understand it by just rationalizing or deductive knowledge. One needs to experience and see it for oneself. To truly understand the impermanence of consciousness, one needs to have the comprehensive book knowledge by listening/reading (*sutamaya paññā*), the deductive knowledge by analyzing (*cintāmayā paññā*) and the experiential knowledge through practicing (*bhāvanāmayā paññā*).

This is the approach that we are taking with the *Mahā Tanhāsaṅkhaya sutta*. The title of the discourse suggests the possibility of the destruction of craving (*tanhā*) or the eliminating of craving through a comprehensive understanding of consciousness. If we do not understand this possibility, if we are caught up with desire and maximization of sensual pleasure, we will never practice towards understanding the mechanics that underlie the operation of consciousness. With this discourse, we will have a comprehensive and analytical knowledge of consciousness so that we can see how to destroy, or destruct this desire through the understanding of consciousness.

Cross Questioning the Monks to Test their Understanding of Dependent Co-Arising

After giving this briefing, the Buddha asked his congregation of monks if they could see and experience the arising of the five aggregates; form feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness. The monks confirmed by saying “Yes Lord”. This unanimous acknowledgement means that the monks gathered either had a comprehensive theoretical understanding, deductive knowledge, or had experienced the arising and passing away of the five aggregates in meditation.

The Buddha then questioned the monks if they saw the nutriment (fuel) that led to the arising of each of the five aggregates. The monks acknowledged that they could see the nutriment that resulted in the arising of each and every aggregate. The Buddha then asked the monks if they could see that if and when the nutriment ceases to exist, then that the five aggregates cease to exist. The monks acknowledged that they could see that the five aggregates ceased to exist when the nutriment that fed and sustained them ceased to exist.

Then the Buddha, to make a point about cessation, said, “When this nutriment that feeds and sustains the aggregates cease to exist, the five aggregates cease to exist, the phenomenon ceases to exist, the suffering ceases to exist, mental tension, stress and frustration cease to exist”.

Experiencing the Arising of the Nutriment of Consciousness in Meditation

As beginners, we may not be able to see that the arising and passing away of the aggregates is dependent on the arising and passing away of the nutriments that feed and sustain the aggregates. In fact, we may not even have heard of such a process. Therefore, we will also be discussing the nutriments that feed and sustain the

aggregates to ensure that we have a good theoretical knowledge of consciousness.

To begin with, you have to see or experience the arising and passing away of the aggregates by analyzing and observing the aggregates. Then, later when you are mindful, you will see the nutriment (the causative factors or the proximate factor) coming into being. You will then observe that when the nutriment comes into being, the appropriate aggregate comes into being.

Let us take sight and eye consciousness as an example. Eye consciousness comes into being dependent on the eye and the form (e.g., flower) that you are seeing. The light waves come and strike on the sensitivity of the eye and you see the object. When the light waves strike your eye and the nutriment of contact comes into being, you experience a subtle stimulation. It is a very subtle sensation (that you may easily miss) and that is how seeing happens. Similarly, the sound waves come and strike your eardrum, and aromas waft through the air and makes contact with your nose, the food you place in your mouth comes in contact with your taste buds, and an object that may be rough or soft, comes into contact with your skin. The moment there is contact, the experience takes place. Similarly, when any mind objects comes in contact with the sense base of the mind, then mind consciousness arises and identifying, remembering and thinking (constructed thoughts or fabrications) arise.

Experiencing the Arising and Passing Away of the Aggregates in Meditation

How can a beginner yogi come into practice and experience the arising and cessation of the five aggregates? The Buddha dispensed the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthāna sutta*) to help us see the arising and passing away of the five aggregates. He used the tool of mindfulness as the magnifying glass in order to experience this under one's very nose. The five aggregates are

comprised of form, feelings, perception, fabrications, and consciousness.

The Buddha advised us to start with form as it is the material and visible part of the aggregates. The beginner may not be able to understand the mental part as it is very swift, and very subtle. That is why the *Satipatthāna sutta*, starts with the contemplation of body as a body (*kaye kayānupassi viharati*).

Then, using your body as an object of meditation, to see body as it really is as opposed to a form to beautify, the yogi begins meditation. Great effort is required to bring your attention to your body as it is, because our cities, villages, and dwelling places are designed to bring the attention to beautification of the outside of the body. Hair dressing salons, fitness centers, restaurants and shops draw your mind and your attention outwardly. They are all designed to beautify the form. This is the way of the civilized world. With effort you bring the attention from the outside to the inside by selecting your sitting posture and closing your eyes.

Let us assume that we sit in the lotus, half lotus or Burmese style using a small cushion. Immediately, you see how difficult it is to remain still. Make sure that you select a comfortable posture that you can remain in for some time without moving. Then, with time, the body will settle down and maintain its own posture. Bring the attention inward, by closing your eyes. When the eyes are closed, you will notice that the ears become very sensitive. You are now very sensitive to the external sounds. Sounds that you never heard before, like the ticking of a clock, suddenly come into focus. After sometime, even these sounds become commonplace. Then, the attention will be drawn to the body. Slowly bring your attention to the natural rhythm of your breath.

As long as you are whole-heartedly with the breath, you are in the present moment. If your awareness, attentiveness, mindfulness, diligence and vigilance, are totally with the breath, then that is the

maximum that you can do. That is the maximum that the Buddha expects of you. But, you will soon see, that even if we know what is required of us, how difficult it is keep one's attention on the breath. You may be overwhelmed by distractions.

Even though there are no visual objects since your eyes are closed, even though you are in a quiet place where there are no sounds and even though you are not bothered or distracted by smells or tastes and you are dwelling within your own body, you soon realize how much the past memories and the future plans bombard the meditating mind. You realize that getting rid of these distractions as a householder, who has family and work commitments, is a difficult task. Your mind objects change swiftly from one topic to another. Doubt arises in your mind about your ability to concentrate but it can be done with persistent effort and consistency.

Let go of your daily work, responsibilities, family and friends. You have made effort to come to a meditation retreat and this is time for your own welfare. The Buddha said that instead, we should take the breath as the most important thing in your life, and observe it from one breath to the other, in-breath to out-breath. The air movement represents the air element (*vāyo dhātu*) of form. The air column as it is rubbing against the wall of your nostrils or striking the top of your upper lip represents the earth element (*pathavi dhātu*) of form. When you feel the coolness of the in breath and the gentle warmth of the out breath, it is the fire element (*tejo dhātu*) of form. When you feel moisture or dryness of the breath, it is the liquid or water element (*āpo dhātu*) of form. All four elements that make up form are present in your breath. Observe each as it arises and passes away.

You have to experience this yourself. Sometimes you experience that the rubbing sensation is longer and sometimes it is shorter. Sometimes you feel rubbing sensation as a vibration, sometimes as a very calm wave. Whatever it may be, a discriminating feeling is

there, so that you can verify and identify that now I am with the in-breath, not the out-breath, now I am with the out-breath, not the in-breath. Therefore you have to understand that whenever you experience the breath, there is the aggregate known as feeling that arises. And, then perception or recognition arises; this is the in-breath, not the out-breath, not a sound, not a thought, not a pain. It is perception, based on your past memory and conditioning together with your consciousness that recognizes the in-breath as the in-breath and the out-breath as the out-breath.

This observation is what we call, contemplating of the body as the body (*kayānupassanā*). Even when you use great effort to remain with the breath, the mind is drawn to sensual pleasures and desire. Therefore, the Buddha says, first and foremost, we have to let go of sensual desire (*kāma vastu*). If not once you close your eyes resilient defilements related to desire, hatred and delusion are going to distract you.

At this point you may with effort use the 32 unsatisfactory components of the body or the four elements and their properties to overcome strong lust and desire or loving kindness to overcome anger or deep rooted hatred. However, as soon as you get rid of these sensuous desires or anger, your mind becomes even more agitated just like a fish out of water. When you let your thoughts run free, it is not so disturbing, just as while the fish is in the water, it is calm as it can breathe. This is what happens in the early days of the retreat. Your mind wanders on from one thing to another fantasizing and fabricating. You notice bodily pain, and are disturbed by little sounds. Most of you, maybe even 99% of the people who try meditation, may get discouraged. You may think that this irritation and frustration is a result of meditation. You came to the Meditation Centre to get rid of suffering, but now you are experiencing new suffering!

At the beginning, it does seem like a new kind of suffering and frustration. Where is the promised calm and peace of meditation?

Ultimately, you may get frustrated and hate yourself, everyone, even the whole world. You may feel that you are inferior and hopeless because you cannot be in the present moment. You may even feel like giving up because despite how much effort you put, you cannot keep the awareness in the present moment. Know that you are not alone. This is not your personal problem and it is not due to a character flaw or lack of morality. This is the way it is. This is what you have to experience under your very nose. Knowing that this is normal, without fighting with the distractions, without labeling yourself as inferior, without finding cause to blame, you try to maximize this thought moment, “I am here, now”.

One could also use the method taught by Māhasi Sāyadaw, the great Burmese teacher. If you wish to keep the perception straight and the mindfulness steadfast, note the in-breath as the in-breath, note the out-breath as out-breath so that your perception of the in and out breath will be unwavering. On the other hand if the identifications happen naturally and you know when the in-breath is happening, it is in-breath because of your own verification, and you know when the out-breath is happening that it is the out-breath because you have recognized it as such, just continue to observe the breath. Let the breath come naturally. Do not force it.

Sometimes you may have doubts as to if you are using forced breathing or if it is natural breathing. You can hardly distinguish between the two. At times it is very difficult to distinguish whether you are using forced breathing or not. Sometimes you may be able to see your unconscious volitional involvement of the breath.

At times, when the breath becomes very subtle you may feel like breathing with force in order to make it sharp, gross, or a distinct, in-breath versus out-breath. This is how the unwanted volitional formations of the mind take place. I am not asking you to force breath; I am just citing an example. Let the breath takes its natural course.

The function of the consciousness is to know distinctively that this is in-breath not the out breath. The in-breath and the out-breath are identified and are separated and categorized as internal when it is within the body “mine” and external when it is outside the body “not mine”.

The five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness can never be experienced in one thought moment. At a given thought moment, either you experience the striking sensation of the air, the movement or coolness of the air column, how the mind cognizes it, or perhaps you see how the mind is waiting to do some volitional changes to the breath so as to distinguish or feel it. These things happen in separate thought moments and with deductive knowledge and cognizing you come to understand a single breath.

After some time, when you are observing the breath successfully as the Buddha explained in the *Satipatthāna sutta*, you may notice a long breath and a short breath, or a rough breath and a subtle breath. If the environment is conducive, and the meditation is progressing in the natural way, you may notice that the breath slowly becomes shorter and more subtle.

If you observe the breath of a baby who is sleeping, you can see that the breath becomes slower as they go into a deep sleep. You can also see this when practicing mindfulness on the in-breath and out-breath. When the environment is conducive to the practice, and concentration and mindfulness are strong, the breath becomes very slow, the distractions disappear, and your full attention falls calm and collected on the breath. Then the breath becomes very subtle.

If you are fortunate you may ultimately go into a very subtle point. You may see that there is no air column movement and form (breath) is no longer experienced. Feeling-wise, you cannot determine whether there's an in-breath and out-breath, perception-wise you cannot recognize whether it is an in or out-breath,

volitional-wise you are completely lost, benumbed, and consciousness cannot understand the internal air (air within the body) and external air (air outside the body). You are bound to be lost regarding boundaries. Internal and external air or that which is “me and not me” is lost.

Under such circumstances, if you are fully prepared and are fully aware, you can see no defilements, you can see no tension, you can see no frustration and you can see no suffering. But, our rational mind becomes agitated when it goes to this subtlest point and it creates great turmoil.

The Buddha said that each and every one of the five aggregates has its own nutriment that feeds and sustains it. When the nutriment arises and ceases to exist; the aggregate too arises and ceases to exist. Ultimately the feeling of the breath ceases to exist, but you have not passed away. You know that you are not dead, you are not sleepy, and you are not unconscious. A different kind of an experience is felt. It is difficult to put into words. If you are not prepared you may be afraid and open your eyes as you can no longer feel the breath.

Cross Questioning the Monks to Test their Understanding of Dependent Co-Arising

The Buddha then questioned the monks as follows, “If one does not feel the breath under the light of concentration, mindfulness, vigilance and diligence, is it possible for them to not see or recognize the arising and passing away of the aggregates and nutriments?” The monks agreed that it would be possible for them to overlook and not see the arising and passing away of phenomena under such circumstances. The Buddha then asked the monks, if there is any possibility for one to develop doubts if they do not experience or see that each of the aggregates arises dependent on its own proximate cause (nutriment). The monks unanimously answered, “Yes Lord.” Finally the Buddha asked, “Is there a

chance that they will entertain doubts regarding the process that leads to the end of suffering if they do not see that whenever each and every nutriment ceases to exist, that the appropriate aggregate also ceases to exist?” The monks said, “Yes Lord”.

The Importance of Seeing the Arising and Passing Away of the Nutriment

Unaware of the arising and passing away of the nutriments and the aggregates, you will have doubts. Various theories and views may come into mind. When you do not see the arising and passing way of phenomena from the beginning to the end, you may feel that intelligent design or some external supernatural power is responsible for your creation. You do not know that it is happening due to a certain nutriment, and that when the nutriment ceases to exist, that very thing ceases to exist. You do not know that there is no second person involved.

So long as you believe that mentality/name (*nāma*) or materiality/form (*rūpa*) is everlasting, you will never try to see that it is arising and passing away due to its own proximate cause or nutriment. You will not try to see that when the proximate cause ceases to exist, the aggregate too ceases to exist. You will never even contemplate such a possibility.

Therefore, the Buddha recommends that we do not arrive at a decision and conclude that form is eternal or annihilistic, feeling is eternal or annihilistic, perception, fabrications, or consciousness, is eternal or annihilistic. Instead, he recommends that we see this for ourselves. We see how it arises. We look for the root or proximate cause - the nutriments. We then observe the process when the nutriments arise and cease to exist. We can then have real understanding and see for ourselves.

It is also important to understand the nutriments that feed and sustain each of the five aggregates. If you know, you will try to

observe it. Then maybe you will see a glimpse of the end of suffering, frustration and stress. If you do not know about the nutriments that feed and sustain the five aggregates, knowingly or unknowingly you will continue to supply the nutriments. Unable to see the arising and passing away, you will have endless doubts. You may entertain this theory and that theory, all of which leads to nowhere.

We will discuss these nutriments in detail in the next few chapters. You will then have the theoretical knowledge required to support the practice. You must incorporate this theory into your practice. It is difficult to see the relationship in the early days of our retreat. If you keep on practicing, and if you are successful, you are bound to see the inter-relationship between the nutriments and the aggregates.

Chapter 3

Doubt Can Be Eliminated

“Monks, if you see it as it is with proper wisdom then, doubt is abandoned;

“Are you thus free from doubt that this (the aggregates) has come to be?”

“Yes, lord.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta

Chapter Two Summary

- Consciousness arises (then and there) dependent on its own nutriment. Just as consciousness arises according to its own nutriment, consciousness is sustained by the nutriment and when the nutriment ceases to exist, that particular consciousness also ceases to exist.
- After developing this line of reasoning, the Buddha applied it to all of the five aggregates - the aggregate of form, feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness, which was the reason the Buddha gave this discourse.
- All the monks gathered could see these processes of dependent-co-arising of the nutriment and aggregates, and cessation of both the nutriment and aggregates.
- The monks unanimously agreed that it was possible for one to entertain doubts on the non-eternality (transient nature) of the aggregates if they could not understand or observe the arising and passing away of form, feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness.

- Such doubts could lead to belief in a creator God.

Cross Questioning the Monks to Test their Understanding of Dependent Co-Arising

The Buddha then asked his monks if they would have doubts regarding the non-eternity (transient nature) of consciousness, if they were mindful, sharp, diligent and vigilant to see the arising of form, feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness. The monks agreed that there would be no doubts if they could observe the arising of the five aggregates.

The Buddha then questioned the monks if such a person would be in a position to understand that the aggregates arise dependent on the proximate cause or the nutriment. The monks agreed by saying “Yes Lord”.

If you are vigilant and diligent in observing the very beginning of the process, you are bound to see the root or proximate cause which is the nutriment. The Buddha then confirmed their understanding by cross questioning for a third time by saying, if someone is sharp, vigilant, diligent, and mindful enough to see the beginning and to see the relevant cause, can he or she understand that whenever the relevant cause ceases to exist, that the appropriate aggregate of form, feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness also ceases to exist. The monks answered by saying, “Yes Lord.”

The Buddha then asked, if someone is to see the arising of form and the proximate cause – the nutriment - for form, and if someone is to see that whenever the proximate cause - the nutriment ceases to exist, that form ceases to exist can he or she eliminate and vanquish all his or her doubts? The monks said “Yes Lord.”

The Buddha used a complex method of repeated cross questioning to test the understanding of the congregation of monks because of the importance of the right understanding of consciousness for

liberation. Therefore we will elaborate further on “eliminating doubt” because this is very important for the meditator's progress.

Doubt Can Be Eliminated

This is a complex subject that is a challenge to understand and difficult for the beginner to observe in meditation. Therefore it is only natural that each and every one of you has doubts as to the validity of this assertion. The Buddha encouraged questioning, analysis and examination to eliminate doubt. To begin with, it requires faith in the Buddha's teaching to accept these concepts. This faith should not be a blind or superficial faith. It should be a confidence or faith based on reasoning. After developing this kind of assurance, he or she develops a verifiable faith, conviction or confidence (*okappana saddhā*) through observation of breath.

As discussed in the previous chapter this experience or verifiable knowledge makes a big difference. Some of you are now in a position to eliminate some of the doubts that you have entertained in the past. Through mindfulness and diligence you have reached the point when the feeling of the breath disappears⁵. Your effort and striving has led to a certain spiritual maturity. This is not enlightenment, but you now see the art of how to verify and see for yourself. When it happens, you try to focus with your spiritual qualities. When the spiritual qualities are aligned, you can experience and see for yourself how phenomena occur.

Eliminating Doubt by using Mindfulness to See Things as They Are

As discussed previously, the Buddha recommended that we start our meditation on form in order to reach this stage where you can

⁵ This experience will vary dependent on the person. Some say that they feel lighter, some that they do not feel the body, some that they feel as if they are floating, etc.

eliminate and not entertain doubts. Of course, the whole theory and practice is not limited to form. It also applies to feelings, perception fabrications and consciousness. In fact, this particular discourse starts with the consciousness. However, the easy way for beginners is starting with form. Then you must apply this experience you gained through form to feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness.

Do not expect any miracle. Just keep on practicing. The first instruction is to begin with walking meditation before sitting. Then the mind is mobilized for this kind of training. The second instruction is to begin your sitting meditation with noting or mental labeling of the in-breath as in-breath, and the out-breath as out-breath. The third instruction is for later days of the retreat. When you keep on practicing in this manner, one day, you will come to the state where you can distinguish the in-breath and the out breath. Then you will see the beginning of the in-breath and the out breath. Whenever such clear identification with the primary object - the breath happens, observe the beginning, middle and end of the breath.

Continue alternating between walking meditation and sitting meditation. While in sitting meditation, begin with your breathing in and around the nostrils or the rising and falling of the abdomen as your primary object. Continue mindfulness while you are in walking meditation, feeling the touch of the ground with the right and the left foot as your primary object. Whatever the posture may be, keep your awareness within your body or form with effort and confidence so that you can experience this change under your very nose.

You must be diligent and vigilant. You must try to observe how this breathing arises. You try to see how the in-breath is arising in your perception. Similarly, whenever the out-breath is about to happen, you exert great diligence and vigilance to see how the out-

breath begins. Slowly, you try to understand the very subtle in-breath and very subtle out-breath.

If you have any earlier experiences with this occurrence, you will find it easy to understand what I am saying. It then becomes as interesting as a hobby. When the in-breath happens you try to see the beginning. When the out-breath happens you try to see the beginning. Your mindfulness is sharpening in a very efficient way and your concentration (the one-pointedness) is also completely within the sphere of the in-breath and the out-breath. It is seeking and penetrating into the depth of the subject; the beginning of the in-breath and the beginning of the out-breath.

When a person is sick with a rare disease and goes to the doctor, he does not just prescribe the medication. Medical science goes back to the root cause before coming up with the cure and the appropriate medicine. At times the doctor may even request the lab to take a blood or urine sample, develop a culture and identify the cause of the illness before prescribing the appropriate medicine. The doctor identifies the disease, finds the root cause, the cure, and the appropriate medicine. So does the Ayurveda medicine which was in India at the time of the Buddha.

The Buddha used a similar approach, when he presented the Four Noble Truths. He presented suffering, the root cause for suffering, the emancipation from suffering and the cure (the cause or path), for emancipation. You will be using the breath in a similar manner to eliminate the disease of suffering.

Therefore, going back to the beginning of the in-breath and going back to the beginning of the out-breath is how you will develop and sharpen your mindfulness to see things as they really are. You will be striving to penetrate the primary object – the breath. You are establishing the environment for your mind to be calm and collected and to focus upon the object so that you will develop one-pointedness. If the breath calms to the point of the in-breath and

out-breath merging and being indistinguishable you will experience a change. If you are not prepared in this manner you will only see the gross breath with its distinct individual characteristics.

This is how you establish mindfulness. But you have to practice Breathing Awareness Meditation in a very systematic, gradual way, starting from the gross and going to the subtle. For that you have to understand that it takes time. It is not something that can be done overnight. It is not something that can be achieved with a single breath. It must be a repetitive practice and the qualities you need to succeed are preparedness, diligence, vigilance and persistence.

At the beginning you may feel discouraged. You may feel that this is an impossible task. You are slowly training a section of the brain that has not been used. This takes time, patience and persistence. You are using only about 10% of the capacity of the brain at present. This is what you have been accustomed to. Now you are going against the grain. You are observing the breath not for gain, fame, or for any other worldly pleasure. This is for understanding and seeing things as they are. It is for steadfast mindfulness, steady concentration and penetrating the truth. It is challenging and there are no quick results. Therefore you must be diligent, vigilant, persistent and consistent in your practice.

At times you may feel that everyone else is progressing better than you. But with effort you improve little by little every day. You will begin to notice the subtle improvements. When you reach the point where the feeling of breath disappears, there is definitely a visible acknowledgement of your effort. If you train your mind to see the beginning of the in-breath, this very mindfulness will definitely lead you to see the end of the in-breath. Ultimately you will see that there is a gap or a space each and every time the in-breath ceases and the out-breath starts. Also, there is a gap or space when the out-breath ceases and the in-breath starts. Previously this was

only deduced as inferential knowledge. Now you are slowly penetrating the breath and seeing that which was previously not seen. Some of you may feel a sense of relief and accomplishment when this happens.

You can now see and understand that when you are observing the end of the in-breath that your perception and feeling stops. There is a gap - a black hole of nothingness. To see this gap you must start with the gross breath and go to the subtle breath. When you go to the end of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath and dwell in the gap you realize that despite the mindfulness, the diligence, the concentration, confidence and energy that you exert, that the gap or space is still present.

This is the result of your collective spiritual faculties and your diligence. There is no continuity, but unless you have penetrated the breath and you feel the in-breath gives rise to the out-breath, the out-breath gives rise to the in-breath, the breath appears like a continuous thread. This is because your observation is not complete. There is a gap in between the in and out breath. That gap for the unprepared person is frightening and threatening. You develop a fearful, uncertainty and may start to entertain doubts. It is as if you have fallen into a black hole. However, unless you are sharp and mindful you will not see it. The gap becomes more defined and clear as you develop concentration, diligence and vigilance. You find that with the growing mindfulness that you can explore into this dark matter or dark area of the gap.

You find that the breath represents the whole world, and the whole world is represented by the breath. There is a holographic (three dimensional) connection there. The more you refine the breath the more you refine the mind. You are refining the form of the air column and its movement. You now feel the air movement, as stiffness, tension, expansion or contraction. This is what you feel. With the development of your observation of the breath there is a

subtle, parallel refinement of your feelings, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness.

As you observe the very subtle end of the out-breath and the very subtle beginning of the in-breath, or the very subtle end of the in-breath and the very subtle beginning of the out-breath, and when you see this subtle area of the gap, the breath and the mind also becomes very still and calm. Therefore, even though in the beginning we take form (breath) as the example, the mental parts of the aggregates are also developed at the same time.

The breath is so calm that you cannot perceive the difference between the in-breath and the out-breath. At the beginning you had a lot of distinguishing characteristic, between the in-breath and the out-breath. You see that the in-breath is cooler and the out-breath is warmer, or may be that the in-breath is longer and the out-breath is shorter. Now the individual characteristics of the in-breath and out-breath appear to be merging. Ultimately it appears like a flux. And that flux is not only representing the in-breath and out-breath, you may feel that your very being, your life continuum, or your experience of the present moment, has just become a flux.

As such, it is very boring and monotonous. It is not dramatic and exciting. You may feel sleepy, your head falls forward and you start to nod. You are disinterested in the practice and even feel hate towards the practice. Fearfulness and uncertainty arises and many recognize this as a flaw in one's method of practice or one's own mistake. This is natural if you are not informed and fully prepared for the experience. That lethargy and mis-conception has to be rectified by listening to the Dhamma talks given by your teacher.

From Matter to Energy and from Energy to Matter

I can cite another example to illustrate this. When you are changing the channels on the TV and you select a channel that you do not have access to, the screen is covered in little white dots and there

is an irritating sound. Whenever you tune into the active channel the picture comes into focus and you see the figures of males, females, animals and scenery such as rivers and trees. The sound too is understandable and pleasant.

For how many minutes can you look at the dots? Whenever the screen is just dots, you feel bored and annoyed. You quickly tune into a channel that you can watch. But, what you may not understand is that every male and female appearing in the screen and all the scenery that you see are made up of dots. These too are a collection of dots that together make a pleasing picture.

What the Buddha does is, to use mindfulness to change the picture to the dots. Whenever the channel is going to make a picture, it tells a story and you can see the natural characteristics of the in-breath and out-breath. Whenever the in-breath and out-breath merge to form the common characteristics of the “dots”, you cannot see the individual distinct nature of the in-breath and out-breath. Instead it is just a flux.

I took the in-breath and out-breath as the example. Exactly the same thing happens, whatever you choose as the primary object. Even if you started with the rising and falling of the chest or abdomen, the same thing will happen.

You can also observe this in the walking meditation. If the walking is very smooth and effortless you will feel and observe the same effect. Once you develop this kind of a merging with the object effortlessly in the walking meditation, you can see that the same merging can happen in your day-to-day activities. You must be all alone, doing your work wholeheartedly, and then the same flux, the same merging can happen. Whenever this happens, you know that this flux can give rise to individual objects, but the individual objects can again reduce back to the flux.

If you have not experienced this and do not know what is happening, you may think that there is a God and a super natural

power and believe in intelligent design. You may even believe that he is omnipotent and omnipresent. However, once you experience this flux you see instead a universal law, energy can collapse into matter and matter can be energized back into waves of energy. This can happen at the very start, at the outset of the in-breath, or at the very end of the in-breath before the out breath starts.

Usually our mind is not sharp, mindful, diligent and vigilant. It only sees already arisen objects such as the already arisen in-breath and already arisen out-breath. Similarly you can only see already arisen pleasurable and painful feeling, perceptions, fabrications and consciousness. This already arisen consciousness, does not allow you to see its conception or cessation.

The Buddha showed you the secret of this natural universal law. If you wish to see this for yourself do not jump from the tip of an iceberg to the tip of another iceberg. Instead, select one iceberg and know that you are on the tip of the iceberg and slowly come down to the water level and submerge. That is where perception is going to take place. Do not limit your mindfulness only to the perceivable area.

Penetrating the Subconscious

Mindfulness has the potential and character to go deep down into the subconscious. This requires an almost irrational and radical level of preparedness. When you reach this point there is a transition. It is somewhat challenging because it threatens your life continuum, personality and your likings and disliking. It also threatens your eternal and annihilistic view of consciousness. Whether you like it or not, it is going to reveal that there is a universal law or principle in operation.

You can be a neutral observer only if you are a very good meditator. Otherwise you will be carried away by the already arisen in-breath and out-breath. You will only experience already

arisen emotions, feelings, perceptions, and ultimately you form your views and your worldview based on that. But, the majority of the path is hidden from your view and unexplained. Unseen and unknown there is a huge area in which you can entertain doubts and false views.

In the last 200 years we accepted the findings of the repeatable experience and verifiable experience through the senses, or through various equipment and technology. But, when you go to the beginning of the in-breath or end of the in-breath, you see that your senses become invalid. They are useless as if benumbed. This is a new experience. You develop something akin to a sixth sense.

You take another direction when you see the very beginning of the in-breath and very beginning of the out-breath. Your seeing and impingement from the visual objects then become immaterial. It is not easy to explain in words because you cannot categorize it as a science. It is not seen with the carnal eye or any of the five senses that we usually use for verification. You cannot categorize it as seeing, hearing, smelling tasting or touching because you now challenge even the very touch of the in-breath and the inception of the in-breath.

Ultimately you lose the connection to the body, the eye, ear, nose and tongue, but the experience that you are having is a very solid and real one. However, if you try to communicate this to others they will say you are a mystic or just plain crazy. They may even claim that you are hallucinating.

You have de-conditioned your mind through mindfulness and concentration, to see things as they are. That is why you see and experience in this manner. People will question as to why others cannot see and experience what you have. The Buddha claimed that, if you follow the instructions with confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, (spiritual faculties) each and every person can do it. But you have to go against the grain;

you have to forego sensual pleasures. You have to doubt the validity of the knowledge you gain through the senses. You are not going to deny it or to hate it. Instead you have doubts now as to the validity of the sensual experience. Only then can you go into this new experience.

The modern world depends mainly on science. If only science is used, there is room for doubt and miscommunication. That is why misunderstandings and wars take place. However, when you go to the sign-less communication, then you see the Dhamma, “real” Truth, or Universal Laws that are in operation. You have experienced or “seen” it for yourself.

The Buddha never found fault with the entertaining of doubts. But he said that doubts can consume everything including your effort, time and earnings. The world is full of misunderstanding, miscommunication and wars, because we know only the expressed, labeled and perceived knowledge. We are never ready to go to the unexpressed, unperceived and unknown areas. Even if we do experience the unseen, we feel it's a mistake and doubt our experience. We do not know how to interpret our experiencers.

You have to understand that all the perceivable area, the gross area, is just the tip of the iceberg. You have to go back to the source. When you go back to the source it is an exploration, into the depth of the subject. It is a deep, plunging down to the depths of the subject and the deeper you go the more you realize how superficial your knowledge was before. You realize how much doubt will be entertained if you know only the tip of the ice burg or the crest of the wave. Therefore, doubt is a must in this world for all of us that do not see things as they really are. But you must have confidence and work diligently to eliminate this doubt.

The Universal Law of Cause and Effect

As you penetrate deeper into the breath and when your mindfulness and concentration are unwavering, you find that each and every start of a phenomenon has its own causative factor. When these causes arise, the effect follows. If the causes arise, you cannot prevent the effect. Therefore, to prevent the effect, you have to eliminate the cause.

Let us use the example of eye consciousness. If the visual object is present (e.g., a flower) If the sensitivity of the eye is present (eye is functioning), and the light waves make contact with the eye (light is present and eye is focused towards the flower so that nothing is blocking the line of contact), no one can stop the arising of eye consciousness. Similarly if sound is present (a bell is rung) and the sensitivity of the ear drum is present (ear is functioning properly) and contact occurs between the sound waves and ear drum (nothing is blocking the line of contact of sound waves) ear consciousness will arise and the sound will be heard. No one can prevent ear consciousness from arising. This applies to all of the sense bases. And, each and every one is verifiable by sharpening the spiritual faculties of confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

There is no God that created the five aggregates (*panca skhandha*). There is no permanent soul or self (*atta*). There is no omniscient original source (*paramatta*). And, there is no life source (*jīvattha*). Your best choice is to be an Insight Meditation Practitioner (*Vipassanā yogi*), and see for yourself. Observe the current reality as it is happening.

This seeing for yourself should eliminate your doubts and answer your questions. Even though we define mindfulness as “I am here, now”, this clearance of doubt is not limited to just “here”. It is applicable to the whole world. It is not just limited to “now”. It is

also applicable to the past and the future. It is not limited to “just me or I”. It is applicable to all living beings.

When you go to the root cause, and see for yourself you can see that each and everything has its own causative factor. When the causative factor arises, the effect happens. When the causative factor disintegrates, the effect disappears.

Therefore, all tension, frustrations and disappointments are within you. They are the effect or the manifestation of a cause. There is no “second person” causing you pain and mental anguish. The day you see this truth you will never find fault with others. You will never find fault with yesterday or tomorrow. You will never find fault with other places or people.

This is the way that you can become omnipotent and omnipresent. You know these things are happening within. You are observing jealousy, anger and hatred happening within you now but earlier you used to find fault with other people, other places, and other times. The more you understand, the more you see the arising of the causes. You also see that once the cause has arisen, the result or effect will take place. No-one can stop it, and whenever the causes disintegrate the result or effect is no more.

For example, whenever the bees get together, we call it a hive. When the bees are spread all over we don't call it a hive even though the bees are still alive and present. The moment the bees are scattered, then the name “hive” disappears.

Similarly, when form, feelings, perception, fabrications, and consciousness are together as one mass, we call it a being. But when you observe each and every one of the aggregates and understand (either directly or through analysis and deduction), then you can see that this so called being, “I am,” is an agglomeration (mass or collection of changing aggregates).

At present all of this may be just theory. You may have great doubts as to its validity. We have to entertain doubts and find the answers. The Buddha encouraged questioning, analysis and examination to eliminate doubt. But at some point you need to have confidence to practice and see for yourself. You have to experiment and find the method that is right for you. If not you will be trying a little bit of this and a little bit of that but not enough of any method to see results. You will spend a lot of money going from retreat to retreat and teacher to teacher. You will always be trying. You have to strive with diligence and be vigilant. This requires great confidence and effort.

The Purpose of Life – Experiencing the Current Reality through Mindfulness

Most of you are just living in the past or the future. But if you feel it is worthwhile, if you have confidence in the method you can live in the present moment. Otherwise you are continuously entertaining doubts and your very living and vitality is being undermined.

Therefore, instead of seeking your satisfaction and contentment outside, why don't you take some time to explore the present moment? The more you penetrate the present moment the more you see the Buddha Nature (*Bodhi Citta*). Then you will experience satisfaction and see contentment in another way. We do it in a gradual way, day by day, so that we can explain that gradation in terms of mindfulness.

I am happy to explain this concept with mindfulness. But some of you may complain that it is not the complete story. My assurance to you is that if you start this journey with mindfulness, definitely other qualities like concentration, wisdom, energy, and confidence, will also develop. Mindfulness will lead you. Therefore, start with mindfulness, it has magical powers.

To summarize you have to begin by isolating one thing (the breath). Then go deep and penetrate the breath. Then you can see the arising of phenomena and the proximate cause for the phenomena. You can also see that whenever the proximate cause ceases to exist, the phenomenon also ceases to exist. This is applicable not only to the consciousness, it applies to all the five aggregates and ultimately it applies to everything in the world. It applies to every matter in the world, animate and inanimate (living or not-living).

No longer is our exploration limited to “I am here, now” even though it is the starting point. Ultimately you diversify to the whole universe so that religious-wise, spiritual-wise and wisdom-wise it is verifiable and justifiable. That is what we have to do. This is called the primary task of a person who is interested in the well-being of oneself. This is the purpose of life.

Chapter 4

The Dhamma is for Crossing Over (Awakening) not Grasping

“Monks, purified and bright as this view is, if you adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand that the Dhamma has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?”

“No, Lord.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Chapter Three Summary

- We discussed how you penetrate deep into the breath to experience the Universal Law of Cause and Effect. We also learned how to experience the current reality and its characteristics and learned about the purpose of life. However, at present, most of what we learned may be just theory.
- The Buddha said that if you are to really understand whether this consciousness is permanent and eternal, or if it arises and ceases to exist dependent on its nutriment, you have to verify and see it for yourself. If not it is just an opinion or view.
- Whenever one is on a quest in search of the best method of practice, you need to move from one teacher to another, from one meditation retreat to another, looking for the most suitable method for yourself. As long as you are searching

and trying out new teachers and new methods, you will just be trying. You will not commit and strive with effort and diligence.

- When you come to know that this is the method that is most suitable and appropriate for you, then the striving starts. However, you must have a certain amount of confidence and clarity in the chosen method in order to strive. Otherwise, you will not commit to the practice. This is one of the basic things one has to understand about the practice. It is only when you start striving that you come to know at least if the method you strived for is the right or wrong method for you. Then you have the first-hand experience to make an informed decision. Therefore, from trying to striving is a long way.
- The Buddha said, one has to see the beginning and the ending or the arising and the passing away of the aggregates and the nutriments. If all you can see is the middle you will not see the full picture. You may form a false opinion or view with incomplete information. Therefore, you have to select a method without delay and start striving diligently.

Venerable Assaji's Advice to Upatissa

At the time of the Buddha, there were two good friends from wealthy families by the name of Upatissa (Venerable Mahā Sariputta) and Kolita (Venerable Mahā Moggallāna). Disenchanted with sensual pleasures they decided to give up their life of luxury and take the holy life of ascetics in search of Truth. The friends began their search under the guidance of Sanjaya a famous teacher and soon mastered his teachings. They soon realized that they had not found the Truth they were seeking. Upatissa and Kolita decided to seek other teachers and learn their doctrine in search of the Truth. The friends parted after deciding

that they would come back and teach the other, if either of them realized the enlightenment they were seeking.

Upatissa was still searching for a teacher when he saw a monk seeking alms for his noonday meal. The serenity and bearing of the monk impressed Upatissa. Thinking that he should not disturb the monk until after his meal, Upatissa followed him back to the forest grove where he dwelled. He then asked the monk under whom he had studied and if he could teach the doctrine of his Master. The monk who impressed Upatissa was none other than Venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples of the Buddha. Venerable Assaji informed Upatissa that he was himself a new disciple of the fully enlightened Buddha. He said that he would teach the Master's doctrine, but that being new to the doctrine he would have to be brief.

Upatissa requested that he teach whatever he knew. Venerable Assaji then said:

“Of those things that arise from a cause

The Tathāgata (Buddha) has told the cause

And also what their cessation is.

This is the Doctrine of the Buddha.”

On hearing the first two lines of these four lines the spiritually advanced Upatissa attained the first stage of sainthood, *Sottāpanna*. After inquiring as to where the Buddha dwelt, he then went back to inform Kolita that he had found the Master who would teach them the path to deliverance.

This is exactly what the Buddha said in the *Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya sutta*. He said that you needed to see the cause and the cessation to remove all doubt regarding the non-eternal nature of consciousness. Whether you take consciousness, fabricated formation, perception, feeling or form as the subject to observe,

you have to see the beginning - the arising of the aggregate and the cessation. Observing the already arisen aggregate will not give you the full picture. When you patiently observe the arising the middle and the cessation of the aggregates, you will have no doubts as to the non-eternal nature of consciousness.

The Dhamma is like a Raft for Crossing Over. It is not to be grasped.

After giving this very profound teaching to the monks gathered, the Buddha said,

“Monks, purified and bright as this view is, if you adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand that the Dhamma has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?”

“No, Lord.”

“This teaching is not for cherishing as a bright and purified theory, or to grasp as mine. That means you are not really making use of it. This teaching is just like a raft. It is to cross over to the other side. After crossing over you let it go, you do not carry it over your head.”

Just as you leave the raft on the other shore because the raft is only useful while you are crossing the water and has no use on the dry land, so must you use this Dhamma in a practical way, to cross over to the other shore. You should not hold onto it and grasp it.

This is a good message to those in the USA because presently Buddhism in America is mostly a business endeavor. Whenever Americans come to know a little Dhamma, they make a commodity of it to make money. They try to market it for healing or therapeutic effects. Then the value of Dhamma is only assessed as a therapeutic or healing value -- this is very dangerous. They are not

using it to cross over to the other shore. Instead they are using it to make money.

Even though I am taking the USA as an example, this behavior is not unique to the West. Even in Sri Lanka and traditional Buddhist countries where the True Teaching is available and freely given, everyone tries to add it to their possessions. They try to use it as a point to show off their knowledge. It becomes just conceit or an ego trip. Once you have the knowledge it is very difficult to remain simple and humble because our natural way of thinking is maximization of pleasure and power.

When you are striving with effort and practicing wholeheartedly, the Dhamma is definitely going to produce verifiable results. Therefore when you are advancing in the Dhamma, you must be very humble. Try to understand that the Dhamma is not to be used as one of your possessions to build your image or your ego. Instead incorporate it in your practice and your day-to-day activities. Incorporate it in your society and your political, economic and social interactions.

If you are going to restrict it to limited application like healing and the therapeutic benefits, your moral training will be challenged, your concentration training will be hampered, your wisdom will wane and ultimately you will stagnate and rotate in the same place just like a whirlpool.

Therefore, when you are practicing wholeheartedly, remember the Buddha's words to his monks. "Monks, I have expressed this teaching as a raft just to cross over and not for the purpose of grasping." This is the difference between worldly knowledge and the teachings of the Buddha.

There are some who have a string of academic and professional titles behind their name on their letterhead. They boast and grasp tight to their degrees telling all that this is me, this is mine. They build and boost their ego based on their qualifications. The more

knowledge and degrees they have, the tighter is their grasp. The Buddha's teaching is not the same as worldly knowledge. It is not the same as it is not for the purpose of power or boosting one's ego.

The Dhamma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. It is brilliant and luminous. It too has great appeal that makes you want to claim that it is me, mine and it is for myself. Therefore, whenever we are associating with good friends, when we are listening to the Dhamma and when we are practicing, we must be aware of this danger. The Dhamma is like raft. It is only for crossing over. It is not for grasping as me or mine.

This is what happened to the monk Sāti. He had an unverified, wrong view that was rejected by the Buddha. Unable to see and verify the truth of impermanence, Sāti chose to proclaim his view as fact.

All of us face this danger. Therefore, you should be self-critical and should question even your own experience. You should practice and see for yourself, not once or twice but many times. Verify again and again to make sure you are not drifting towards extremes. Always keep your balance and use the middle path.

Application of the Experience with Form to Other Aggregates

As per the discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthāna sutta*) we started with form (the breath). Once your mindfulness and concentration have matured, you proceed by applying your advancing mindfulness to feeling. Feelings also have their own origin, their middle and end. When you have a feeling that is pleasurable or painful, your mind usually sees only the middle part. We never see the inception; we never see the beginning of the pleasurable or painful feeling because our mind has not yet matured. It is not sensitive enough to observe the beginning and the end.

With the maturing of the mindfulness, you can direct the mind towards the early part of the pleasurable or painful feeling. Then you realize that like form, that you can explore deep and penetrate feelings. You can also observe the other mental conditions such as perception, fabricated thoughts and consciousness. They too are exactly the same as form. Therefore, each and every one of the aggregates is an object that can be used for one's meditation. But in order to develop the mind and mindfulness, we start with form and then move to feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness. The Buddha dispensed the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in this orderly manner for ease of understanding and practice.

Whatever may be the effect of each of the aggregates, if you go back to the cause, you will observe a similarity. Whether it is form, feeling, perception, fabrications or consciousness, everything arises as a result of the nutriments. There is universality in the root cause or inception as far as the nutriments are concerned.

After this important teaching of not grasping even to the Dhamma, the Buddha led the monks to see the proximate causes or the nutriments for each of the aggregates. The nutriments are the basic reason for any phenomena to arise. Whether you go to the source, such as the in-breath and out-breath, rising and falling of your abdomen or a physical action, like walking meditation, you look for the proximate cause or the nutriment.

The Four Nutriments

The Buddha, with his omniscient knowledge declared, that there are only four nutriments responsible for the arising of the five aggregates of form, feelings, perception, fabrications, and consciousness.

The Buddha said,

“Monks, there are these four nutriments, for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those to be born. Which four?

Physical food, gross or refined as the first,

Contact as the second,

Mental Volition the third and

Consciousness the fourth.”

Physical Nutriment both Gross and Subtle

The first and foremost is very common and easy to understand. It is physical food or nutriments that may be gross such as solid and liquid food or subtle such as air (the breath).

Usually in food science we categorize food into carbohydrates, fats, sugars, and proteins. Food is also categorized as animal products (meat, fish, eggs, milk, ... etc.), plants (vegetables, fruits, yams, grains, ...etc.), water and air. The Buddha said that this is the first type of nutriment required for beings to arise and be sustained. Therefore, the first nutriment is a universal truth that all can see.

Each and every living being bases their life on food. Human beings are not the exception. All animals require food, drink and air to live. In fact, even human beings are considered as physical nutriment because wild animals eat human flesh. If there is no nutriment in our blood we will faint or go into a coma. Therefore we all require a certain amount of nutriment in the blood in order to sustain the body. I think that all can understand the first nutriment of gross and subtle food.

Contact as Nutriment

The second one is contact. This is somewhat philosophical and a very deep-reaching phenomenon. We took examples and introduced the nutriment of contact in the previous chapter. We will go deeper in this chapter.

You mindfully observe how consciousness arises and realize that in addition to the eye and the object being viewed such as a flower, that it requires the contact of the light waves with the eye, for eye consciousness to arise so that you can see the flower. If a person stands between your eye and the flower and blocks the contact of the light waves with your eye, you will not see the flower. Similarly if the source of light is shut off and the room is dark, you will not see the flower. For eye consciousness to arise there must be contact.

You can then extend the nutriment of contact to the other sense bases. You need the contact of the sound waves on your ear drum to hear sound. You need the contact of the aroma of the flower on your nostrils to smell. Similarly you need the contact of the tongue with the flavor of the food to taste and, your fingers need contact with the petals of the flower to feel the texture and softness of the petals.

We have five sense bases in form, and the sense base or faculty of the mind. Contact is required for the appropriate consciousness to arise so that you can see, hear, smell, taste, feel or identify, remember/think. If you cannot thin-slice the time, you may assume that at a given time you can see, hear, smell, touch, taste and cognize at the same time. But this is not the truth.

Examining the Characteristics of Consciousness

Consciousness is similar to a computer that is programmed one logical step at a time. The changes happen so swiftly that you do not see the sequencing, but this does not mean that it is all

happening at one point in time. It is happening sequentially. The one that takes precedent at any given point is based on the nutriment of contact. If you are going to become a contemplator, a listener, a taster, or a person who smells or touches an object is all determined by the order of contact. If you are very mindful you will see, that at any given time only one consciousness arises. And this is dependent on the appropriate contact that occurs.

If you are cognizing, in that thought moment you cannot hear, there is no smelling, no tasting, and no tactile sensation. If you are seeing in that moment you are 100% with the visual object. Consciousness changes so fast, that you perceive a continuum. In the very next moment you may be hearing or smelling. Whatever it may be, when one operation is taking place, the others cannot happen. To simplify, we can say that a huge amount of sense impingements are coming in, but the consciousness cannot grasp everything at one time. It will select and the appropriate consciousness will arise based on the choice of contact.

There is a selection or screening that is taking place that you may not be aware of; a filtering based on choice. It is similar to when you go before a huge buffet table. You know you cannot eat all the food laid out on the table. It is far too much. You have to select carefully one at a time and take what you prefer. What you select are the ones that you will finally get to taste, when there is contact with your tongue. These are the ones that you will smell when the aroma makes contact with your nostrils, and what you can see on your plate before you eat.

The world is like a big buffet table. At a given time, one particular sense impingement has been selected. The selection happens through contact. So, even though a lot of impingements are there, only through contact is the choice made.

Therefore, if you do not go back to the source and see how the contact is being chosen, you will be unaware of this selection

taking place. You will also be unaware that when you have selected one that in that moment you have rejected many others.

Examining the Workings of Consciousness

Let us take the example of vision. If you are going to select seeing, you are rejecting hearing, smelling, tasting and touch. In the book, *Power of Mindfulness*, Venerable Nyanaponika, said, that we are unaware of this selection and we do not know that what we have rejected is the majority and that it is gone forever. You have no chance to experience it. To understand this phenomenon, you have to have choice-less awareness. Just observe and do not try to select one sense impingement over another. You have to understand that our mind is habitually selecting one thing over many. Once the contact takes place, it will not allow you to see that in selecting one, you are rejecting many.

Knowing this, if you wish to experience it and see for yourself, you have to develop mindfulness that leads to choice-less awareness. This is a very difficult task because natural selection is an aspect of our evolution. We are constantly rushing to select something, and whatever we select we justify and we cherish it so much that we completely forget about what we have rejected. Ultimately, we make a whole story out of what we have selected, and the Buddha said it is only one-fifth of the total phenomena; you base your understanding dependent on what you have selected. Let's say, what you touched, but you failed to understand that by selecting one (touch) you are rejecting four other senses.

Many of you may be aware of the story of the elephant and the blind men. They were each led to a different part of the elephant and asked to describe it through touch. Touching the trunk of the elephant one man described it as a snake. Touching the leg one man described it as a trunk of a tree. Touching the bushy end of the tail it was described as a brush. Touching the ear it was described as a large fan. In rejecting the other senses they each had an

incomplete picture. However, they fought with each other, while claiming that they were each telling the truth.

This contact is very decisive. It is filtering our experience and influencing our decision making. But we are not aware of this. Once the contact happens, you give your reasoning and justify it. The Buddha said instead, go back to the contact as much as possible and observe the selection criteria. The selection criteria are your desires and conceit. The selection criterion is also (believe it or not) justification of your ego.

Whatever the contact, it is going to satisfy your desire, conceit, or your egoistic ideas. Knowing this and having this theoretical understanding, mindfully observe the breath so that you can see for yourself. You will then see how little control and power you have.

We will use the walking meditation as an example to make this clear. When walking, you will observe that mindfulness is stronger in the middle area of the path. When you reach the end you are changing the posture from walking to standing and turning. This tends to be a distraction, especially for a beginner. As a result, while you can mindfully observe the touch of the right foot and left foot on the ground and feel its texture (softness or hardness), warmth or cold... etc. when you come to the end your mind tends to wonder. You are often distracted by sound, seeing or thinking.

Knowing this, if you can go to the end and maintain your already developed mindfulness, then when you come to the middle area, your mindfulness will be stronger. While you are observing the feet and the sensation of the feet touching the ground you may notice that there are some background thoughts, or perhaps some sounds, or sensations in the other parts of the body.

When this happens, you diligently maintain your mindfulness on the touch of your right and left foot but you are also aware that a lot of other objects are there at the periphery. You know that if you start thinking that you have to forego awareness of the touch of

your left foot and right foot. So you keep your mindfulness on your feet and let the thinking remain in the back ground. If you let go of your feet and focus on your thinking, then immediately you become a thinker. Similarly if you listen to the sound of birds and let go the sensation of touch on your feet, then immediately you become a listener.

It is a challenge for a beginner to remain with the primary object of the feet. All of a sudden, without prior notice, the mind jumps into thinking, listening, or pain in your leg or back even though you wish to keep it with your feet. This is very discouraging and disheartening to the meditator.

Be diligent and keep your focus on the primary object. Then you can keep the other sounds, pain and thoughts in the background. If you let them take over, your primary object will be nullified and gone. If that happens, you know that you are no longer focused on the contact with the right foot and the left foot. You are now walking like a puppet, and thinking has taken the place of the primary object.

You left your job, your family and loved ones and spent so much time and money, and you are still thinking. You did not come here to think. You can think equally well back at home. You can see that you have no control, no executive powers and no governing powers. You are implementing some other agenda against your will. Contact is one of the nutriments. It is one of the causative factors. You have given up the power of contact of the foot with the ground and selected the contact of hearing, seeing or identifying, remembering/thinking⁶.

⁶ Thinking or constructed/fabricated thoughts does not happen in a vacuum. It is dependent on memories, which in turn is dependent on things you have seen, heard, smelled, tasted or felt.

Whatever contact that you gave priority to becomes your new experience. All the others become nullified and invalid. They are no longer recognized as an experience or phenomena.

The experienced *Vipassanā yogi*, can see how the nutriment of contact is working while experiencing the primary object. The decision to select a new contact is not done ahead of time. It is decided then and there. When a decision is made it is based on the strongest craving. It happens swiftly and drags you with it and takes you for a ride. After the change in contact is made you enjoy, cherish and justify the decision. But when the change happens, you are bewildered. You had no forewarning. You did not even know that you had made a choice and let go of the primary object in favour of something more exciting and interesting. You realize that a change has been made only later.

You need to be aware that even when you are with the primary object that others are there waiting at the doorstep to take over. The moment you are unmindful, and you give the opportunity, the breath is no longer the primary object. Instead, you will be thinking or listening or possibly even alternating between listening to the song of a bird and thinking about it.

Mastering Physical Nutriment & Contact as Nutriment

Therefore, in order to take the situation under your control and master the situation, the Buddha suggested that we should go deep into the primary object until the breath is very subtle while in the midst of thinking, hearing, and all the other distractions. Keep focused as much as possible with the very subtle breath without paying heed to the distractions. If you can, you will experience no distractions.

The breath has disappeared. Maybe at the peripheral level some little signal indicates that you are living. At the peripheral level the

subtle breath and the sound waves are there. Thoughts are there and indications are there that you are not dead, you are not sleeping, and you are not unconscious. But the mind does not select a single one of these subtle distractions. It is completely independent of the primary object and external objects. Contact has not taken place as yet. The contact either can select thinking or sounds or pain or you can start forced breathing and get the gross breathing back. However, nothing has manifested at the present moment. Everything remains as a potential or a possibility. In that moment you are not biased. You have not selected anything. Therefore the mind is in a pure, original and primordial form. (*pabhassaramidam bhikkhave cittam*).

When this happens for the first time you may feel lost. You can see that impingements are there, but contact has not taken place as yet. There is an uncertainty a vacuum. In the past you always hooked up with one of the possibilities. Whatever contact you selected is the consciousness that arises. Body consciousness if it was the touch of your foot, eye consciousness if it were seeing, ear consciousness if it were hearing and mind consciousness if you were identifying, remembering/thinking. Now you are in a place where the phenomenon has not taken place. All are just possibilities and you have the full potential to choose but you have not committed to one particular thing. When that happens, you can say you are beginning to master the nutriment of contact. That is to say your mind is centered. You will soon see how difficult it is for you to keep this experience. It is like walking on a tightrope. You can lose balance and fall at any moment.

Mindfulness at that level is the highest kind of mindfulness. It is steadfast and mature. Previously you have maintained mindfulness with the help of an object. Now you are maintaining mindfulness without the help of an object.

It is similar to when you are learning how to ride a pushbike. At the beginning, you have to hold the two handles tightly with your

hands to get the balance. You even have to get a second person to run along with you holding the back of the seat or get training wheels to keep the balance of the cycle until you can gather speed. But once you are trained and have the balance, you know that it is not necessary to hold the handle so tight. You can hold the handles gently and still keep your balance. In fact after further training you can balance with a single hand. Finally a day comes when you can balance and ride the bike with both hands off the handlebars just by shifting your body weight.

This skillfulness in leaning to ride a bike is exactly the way you train your mind. You observe your in-breath and out-breath in sitting meditation, or the touch of the left and right foot in walking meditation, and be with it as much as possible in a non-reactional, choice-less way. Just observe what is happening in the present moment. Don't fight with it, do not try to get rid of it and do not try to follow and make contact with it. In that way one day you will learn the art of how to make the breath more and more subtle. When you see the end of the in-breath and out-breath and when you find that contact has not taken place, you know that you are progressing in your meditation. You will see a balance.

At the beginning it will take 30-40 minutes for you to calm down the breath and go to this kind of a mystic experience where the mind is centered. You see the distractions in the periphery and with great diligence keep them at bay. It is a challenge because this experience is sign-less and with no contact. You may feel as if you are suspended in the middle. If you can maintain this experience you can just observe the sounds, and bodily pain without reaction. Your mind will be centered and balanced.

This is what may occur in a continuous full-time 7-10 day retreat because the environment is conducive to mindfulness. Your experience is cumulative. Day by day you build on the previous day's experience. However, to succeed in this manner, you have to maintain noble silence and continuous mindfulness. You must let

go of your day-to-day problems and work and be determined to make the best use of the time you took off from work and family to attend this retreat.

Object-less Awareness

The mind is centered and you can now see the numerous distractions of thoughts, sounds and bodily pain come and go. But you have not made contact and attached to any of them. For the first time you can understand that mind is seeing everything but remaining aloof and unattached. It is not hooked up with any of the sense impingements. This is known as object-less awareness. You can never experience this in the sensual world.

When we are in contact with the senses; eye, ear, nose, tongue and the body, the mind is operating at partial capacity. It is not balanced. It is constantly promoting desire, conceit, and egoistic ideas of self. Whenever the mind comes back to the center and there is no manifested/dualistic consciousness, it is just maintaining the possibility level. You can see for the first time that the mind is trying to stand up without the help of crutches. This experience, this state of mind is possible only for human beings.

This is not a possibility for other animals. It is also not a common occurrence for other beings. Humans can reach such a junction due to the combination of the evolution of the mind and its training. In this very life the mind can reach the stage of being centered and balanced without the help of an object or crutch. Whenever it happens, the mind feels isolated, like an outcast. It is an unconventional, radical change, a new experience. Not only are you appreciating the present moment, you are now keeping the continuity of the present moment at this high level. Therefore, it is a great challenge. It is like a tightrope walker, who is balanced on a wire.

To begin with this may be just theory that you may only understand through analysis and contemplation. But you cannot stop there. It must lead to real life meditative experience. Once you have experienced it once, then you must find the way and means of maximizing it. You have to learn to maintain this experience for as long as possible. Just like maintaining a candle flame without flickering in the wind. If there are side currents and cross currents of air the flame flickers. How long can you maintain your mind without a flicker?

This is the only moment that is worth being called “living” because it is 100% experience. The rest of the time, our mind is drifting away from the primary object. Whether you are eating, reading, driving or cooking you are watering down the experience by thinking, talking and listening. Our experience of whatever we are doing is partial. It is entangled with many other sense implegements that are constantly fighting for our attention.

I will use an example to make it clear. How many times have you had to reread a paragraph in a book because you were lost in thought? How incomplete is that experience if you did not have the opportunity to reread the passage? How much room is there for doubt and misunderstanding if you did not have the opportunity to reread the paragraph? How incomplete and inaccurate would be your description if you had to summarize and present it to others?

Pure Buddha Nature (*Bodhi Citta*)

We constantly go through life with this partial, distracted experience. Yet we are quick to offer our opinion as fact and often fight to defend our position. There is room for doubt and misunderstanding to arise due to our normal distracted way of going through life.

In order to eliminate this doubt and misunderstanding, you have to examine and explore contact as nutriment. With a scattered mind

that is jumping from one sense base to another, our experience of anything that we are doing is partial and incomplete. With the help of mindfulness, stay in the unbiased middle. Do not be distracted by the numerous distractions in the periphery. Approach it instead as if you are moving from the gravitational sphere to the non-gravitational sphere. In the gravitational sphere (with self) you are being constantly pulled towards the center of the earth. Whenever you are with non-gravity (not-self), you are just floating, as if suspended in mid-air.

Theoretical understanding is the first step. The second step is verification of the theory through experience. The third step is maximizing the experience and eliminating doubt through repeated and extended experience.

You are attempting a drastic and radical change. It will not happen overnight. You will have to practice diligently for a long period of time, possibly for many years. Slowly gradually as and when the mindfulness develops you will see the results. When the spiritual faculties of confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are developed and in balance, you will come back to the source; your primordial pure Buddha Nature.

Chapter 5

Mastering the Nutriments with Choice-less and Non-reactive Observation

“Monks, there are these four nutriments, for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those to be born. Which four?”

Physical food, gross or refined as the first,

Contact as the second,

Mental Volition the third and

Consciousness the fourth.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Chapter Four Summary

- The Buddha uses this discourse, to recommend how to eliminate desire/craving through mindfulness of Physical Nutriment and Contact as Nutriment.
- Choice-less awareness is introduced and meditators are encouraged to develop their mindfulness and observe the breath until it becomes very subtle and disappears. Meditators are instructed to remain in this void/emptiness or dark space for as long as possible keeping all sense impingements at bay in the periphery. Meditators are also encouraged to observe without attaching to any of the sense desires that distract the mind.
- The Buddha compares the teaching, which when experienced is bright and luminous (and enticing), to a raft

used for crossing over as opposed to something that should be cherished, treasured and grasped. Grasping to the Dhamma is a real possibility when one begins to experience the surreal qualities of the Universal Laws of Dhamma.

- The Buddha then introduced the four nutriment that sustain the five aggregates to the discussion. The nutriment that he introduced are:
 1. Physical food (*Kabalinkkāra ahāro*) both gross and refined,
 2. Contact (*Phassa ahāro*),
 3. Mental volitions (*Manosañcetanā ahāro*) and
 4. Consciousness (*Viññāṇaṃ ahāro*)

He then introduced the nutriment of contact.

Balance and Moderation in Physical Nutriment and Contact as Nutriment

Not a single person in the world seems to know the appropriate food requirements for a healthy balanced life. There is a lot of literature based on food science, but there is obesity, cholesterol and diabetes in many countries, and malnutrition and even starvation in others. Therefore, as far as the physical nutriment is concerned, all are familiar with the two extremes. We seem to have difficulty following the middle path. What can we do to encourage moderation in physical nutriment?

It appears to be impossible in this complex world to achieve balance and moderation in the consumption of food. Therefore, one has to understand that our intention is not to get rid of or eliminate the consumption of food. If it were, it would be similar to committing suicide. What then is meant by moderation in physical nutriment? How do we apply it to such diverse people and world?

We have similar issues with contact as nutriment. Without contact there would be no life. The purpose then is not to eliminate the nutriment of contact. Instead, it is to use contact wisely and in moderation and when needed. The issue is that we do not know the limit. We need our eyes to see visual objects. Without visual objects, not only the carnal eye, even the brain, does not develop properly.

Western scientists have performed some experiments with cats. At birth, kittens are blind, as their eyelids are not open. According to a Sri Lankan saying, it takes about seven days for the kittens to open their eyes. Until then, the kittens are communicating with the mother only through contact, feeding, and meowing. After about seven days, they learn how to interact with visual objects.

The scientists kept some kittens in total darkness and some others, the control group, were kept in normal light. Their brain development was monitored to ascertain the effect of the elimination of visual contact with the eye. The kittens kept in the dark were very weak in their brain development compared to the kittens in the normal level of light. Therefore the scientist concluded that visual contact was a requirement for the normal development of the brain.

The same applies to sound. Children who are born without hearing take longer to talk than children who can hear. Not only does it affect speech, but the section of the brain that is responsible for listening also does not develop without contact and interaction with sound waves. Therefore, our practice of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) is not to get rid of physical nutriment or contact as nutriment, but to be detached from its addictive and unwholesome effects.

This is the fifth day of our meditation. You have been diligent and persistent in both the walking and sitting meditation. Your breath is very subtle. Your body is calm. Some of you may begin to feel

new sensations in the body. Very subtle sensations that you had never noticed before are now recognizable.

Sometimes you may observe a swaying of the body. Sometimes you may notice little jerks. Sounds may be heard from your inner organs such as liquid being churned in the stomach and the kidneys. You may feel a tingling of the body. Shivers may run down your body as it would if you were cold. Your body may feel light as if you are floating.

This is due to the sensitivity of your mind. These things were and are always happening in the body, but you never looked at them before. Even if you looked, your mindfulness was not sharp enough to experience and feel.

You may even ‘see or experience’ organs inside the body. You may feel, hear and ‘see’ subtle indications that confirm your heightened awareness and mindfulness. The breath cannot be felt. The meditation object is gone. But your mind is bright and alert. If you do not get distracted but just observe and acknowledge in an aloof and detached manner, you can go deeper and deeper and penetrate the breath or form, which is our object of meditation.

Doubts that May Arise when you are Progressing in Mindfulness

You can no longer perceive the nutriment of contact, but the mind is alert and bright. Your concentration and mindfulness are sharp. You need to be knowledgeable, vigilant and prepared because your rational mind will try to hinder your progress. Doubts and thoughts will surface. There are four common thoughts that can break your concentration and mindfulness and set you back.

1. “I have lost the primary object of the breath. I sat in meditation to observe the breath. I will get up and go now”.

2. “I cannot feel the breath. Let me take a deep breath (forced breathing). Then I can focus on the breath again”.
3. “I am so tired and sleepy. I will take a break and rest. Then I will be fresh and can meditate again”.
4. “I have meditated and tried so hard. I cannot even feel the breath. I am hopeless. I am doing this all wrong. This method is not right for me. Maybe I should try another teacher or another method”.

If these types of thoughts surface, it means that you are not sufficiently prepared. You have not understood the theory and have not developed the confidence required through reasoning, analysis and contemplation. You are still entertaining doubts. You are progressing well but plagued with self-doubt.

Under such circumstances, only you can reverse this line of thinking and go back to the sphere where the absence of the nutriment of contact is not distracting you. You have to be strong, adventurous and take risks. The mind is going to the subsurface level and penetrating the unconscious. When this happens, if you can still maintain the alertness, vigilance and diligence, and be strong, then you can understand that this is a result of going against the grain. This is a result of swimming upstream. This is a sign that you are on track and have to be even more diligent, vigilant and persistent.

When the mind is developed to this level, not only are the distractions becoming distant, even your meditation object becomes distant. They become peripheral objects and in between you observe a space. We can call this space solitude, peace, or freedom (*viveka*). If one can experience this solitude, this freedom and this peace, then one is very fortunate because this is right view. If you are with any doubt, wrong view, or fear, you will not experience this state.

Therefore, you have to go there daily and experience it for as long as possible. When you come back to the sphere of contact you start hearing, smelling, feeling etc. again. When you go back to this space where all distractions including the meditation object are in the periphery or distance, you are free from sounds, and feelings. They are not gone. Even the breath is still there, but they are at the peripheral level as if asking permission to come in. However, your mind is not giving them permission to intrude. You are in object-less awareness. This is the approach that you must develop. Then you will see that with respect to the nutriment of contact mindfulness can have two facets.

The Two Facets of Mindfulness and Concentration

One is mindfulness on one particular object, where the object is recognized as a point of contact such as mindfulness on breath when the breath is still gross and felt. The other is when the breath has come to the subtle level, where you no longer feel the contact of the primary object. This mindfulness is an object-less or sign-less mindfulness. They are reciprocal to each other, and if you are a well-prepared and a well-instructed yogi, when the mind goes to this very subtle level, you will recognize this as a heightened mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

The first type of mindfulness can also be in the midst of a distracted mind. Your mind jumps from one thing to another and various sense objects disturb you. You are mindfully aware that you have little concentration and that your mind is scattered. You develop liking and disliking for various sense objects that you make contact with. You may even observe faultfinding, irritation and even anger, but you are mindfully aware of all of these emotions. You are aware that your concentration is weak and your mind is scattered. This is the beauty of mindfulness.

You are now aware of the difference between the function of concentration and mindfulness. Even with a scattered mind,

mindfulness can be intact. If this possibility is not available, busy lay people will never take to the spiritual life. It is a challenge for busy people who do not have long periods of time to develop concentration. With all the multitasking going on and the many responsibilities of a layperson you may not be able to get the peace, calm and tranquility of concentration. However, you can still be mindfully aware of the state of your mind. You now understand that mindfulness can be experienced with the object and without the object. Mindfulness with the meditation object is relative to mindfulness without the object. Mindfulness without the object is relative to mindfulness with the meditation object. There are no absolutes. This is simply not available.

You are now also aware that you can have mindfulness with a lot of objects, mindfulness with just the primary (meditation) object, or mindfulness without any objects where the objects are at the peripheral level. Understanding this possibility, one has to treat all three experiences with equanimity. Be aware that in the practice, you are developing mindfulness in each of these instances.

However, if you are looking at various scenarios from the concentration point of view, you will say that when the mindfulness is without an object and the objects are at the periphery that you are calm, collected and happy. If this is how you measure your mindfulness, then when distraction such as pain, sounds and thoughts disturb you and the primary object becomes gross, you will be unhappy. This is a wrong approach. I will claim that such a person is looking at the meditation only from the point of view of concentration.

My invitation is to step back and look at the bigger picture. Even if you are seeing this from the concentration point of view, be aware of it. You need to understand that the path is very rugged, with a lot of hazards. However, if you take the perspective and yardstick of constant mindfulness, you can see that the mind is scattered. You also know, when the mind is calm, collected, and

concentrated. You can also see the gradual improvement of mindfulness and the increased sensitivity of the mind.

Mental Volition as Nutriment

We know that all desire and liking is because of contact, but there is another layer beyond sense contact. There is a deeper layer with no contact and heightened mindfulness. If you can develop this (it takes a long time) you will experience a void/emptiness which is a place of calm and peace. After some time you see that there is still some dissatisfaction in the mind. There is an underlying tendency to subtle thoughts even under such circumstances. That is why even if you go there; you are still not at peace. You are still looking for the next experience. How can I proceed to the next step of development? This indicates that even though this is a beneficial and satisfactory situation, the mind is still not at peace. The Buddha recognized this subtle disturbance of the mind as the third nutriment.

The third nutriment is known as mental volition (*manosañcetanā āhāro*). Once you mindfully master physical nutriment in the form of breath and contact as nutriment, you can see subtle thoughts. This activity is still clinging to promotion of the self or ego. This causes discontent. The Buddha said that so long as the physical nutriment (breath) is there, consciousness (*viññāna*) resides in form and takes control. If you meditate and reach the point where breath is so subtle that it is not felt, then consciousness resides in feeling and feeds on or is fueled by contact. When visual objects such as, sounds, smell, taste, and touch are in the periphery and you are in the sign-less, then consciousness loses the nutriment of both physical nutriment and contact as nutriment. Consciousness then takes control by residing in memories and perception and feeding on mental volitions (*manosañcetanā āhāro*).

At times the terms mental volition and the aggregate of fabrications (*manosañcetanā and saṅkhāra skhandha*) are interchanged and

used as synonyms in Buddhist literature. Mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) is a latent volitional manifestation of the mind that is looking for further progress. There is a recognition and expectation that there is more in the spiritual path. It results in mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*) on contact with the faculty of the mind. As such, it is sometimes interchanged with *saṅkhāra skhandha*, the aggregate of fabrications. However, there is a difference. *Saṅkhāra skhandha* is intentional and has kamma potential. It is gross, and easier to recognize or feel because *saṅkhāra skhandha* is one of the five aggregates. The Buddha grouped together or aggregated many rounds of the arising mind so that it can be experienced. Mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) is more subtle. Two of the nutriments have been overcome to view this subtle volitional manifestation of the mind. Physical nutriment (breath) and contact as nutriment have been mastered. What is left for the consciousness to feed on is a very subtle discontent that manifests as subtle thoughts related to ego and self-promotion.

In the *Samyutta Nikāya, Dutiyacetanā sutta* the Buddha said that whenever physical nutriment and contact as nutriment is overcome, consciousness (*viññāna*) feeds on or is fueled by mental volitions. When you have experienced mindfulness, which is without a sign and object for a long time, you will feel an uncertainty and dissatisfaction. So you consider this unsatisfactoriness and try to change it, manipulate it, steer it, or adjust it. When you willfully try to change this feeling of discontent it gives rise to intention.

This intention that you created is disturbing your peace, solitude and freedom (*viveka*). Therefore you have to understand that the tendency to change the current reality is caused by one of the very subtle, latent defilements. They are defilements that are not fully manifested. Unless you master the physical nutriment of form using Tranquility Meditation (when the breath is no longer felt) and the nutriment of contact using choice-less awareness, you

cannot see what is happening in the deeper layers of the mind. We never give the consciousness a chance to isolate these subtle defilements, and observe them in such a pure way.

These are complete and very deep layers of meditation that you experience when mindfulness comes to the point of the sign-less. The primary object disappears but mindfulness remains. It appears like a void or space. If you can stay there long enough you can understand “who I am.” There are still some latent tendencies, some likings and dislikings, some personality traits that you yourself do not know about (*anusaya dhamma*). When the opportunity arises, it leads, steers, and manipulates you. Once the manipulation takes place it tries to fulfill its own desire, conceit and egocentric nature (*taṇhā, mana, ditthi*). Ultimately you cannot understand how, when or where it takes place because it is always happening below the surface of the mind as an undercurrent.

The Buddha said, that unless you remove the gross layers, you cannot go into the under layers of the mind. Without going deep into the under layers, any changes you make are temporary. It is like painting a very old car. The engine and everything is rotten, but you paint the exterior and put it on the market. It looks like a brand new car on the outside. But the inside is still rotten.

Unless you see this mental volition and master it, there will be no permanent change in your liking and disliking. There will be no permanent change in your personality traits. Even if you meditate and identify and know that these are the underlying tendencies, this is the real me, you can hardly make the effort required to change them because they relate to the ego or self. This is the very thing that you are protecting.

You are not aware that these subtle defilements that result in these personality traits are leading you to desire, conceit, and egocentric thinking (*taṇhā, mana, ditthi*). Ultimately you get into imbalance, and a paralytic kind of thinking. Therefore, the Buddha

recommends diagnosis and non-reactive observation⁷. You should identify and acknowledge the defilements but do not try to change them. Instead just observe the subtle thoughts arise and pass away. Let the volition come up, let the volition manifest, let it run its course, and just observe them as if you are an outsider.

The Buddha said, questions and statements such as, “where am I in my spiritual progress? I want to understand this consciousness? I am a *Samatha Yogi* or I am a *Vipassanā Yogi* all arise due to desire for self-recognition and conceit. However, you should not blame yourself. This is not a flaw in your character. You are not making a mistake. You are progressing in your practice. These are your subtle volitional activities trying to make contact with the faculty of the mind. Let them arise and pass away. Do not try to change them. Instead just let the volitional formations of the mind arise and observe them. Then disclaim them by reflecting with appropriate attention. Disclaim the volitional activity by noting this is not me, this is not mine, this is not my soul. If you recognize them instantly and react to it, you have committed yourself and made contact with the subtle mental fabrications/volitional formations of the mind (*mano saṅkhāra*) which leads to the aggregate of fabrications (*saṅkhāra skhandha*). Instead observe with non-reactive awareness.

The more detached you are from these latent activities or formations the less defilement will remain. You begin to understand how little control you had before. The agenda was fixed by your desire and aversion. The underlying principle was always conceit, promoting and safeguarding the ego and self-centric thinking patterns. Understand that even without your conscious

⁷ The term appropriate attention and inappropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra* and *ayoniso manasikāra*) are used often in the Buddhist text. A suitable word could not be found to express this experience of just mere observation of mental volition with no selection. English translations have used the word bare attention, non-reactive awareness or non-reactive observation.

involvement that these subtle volitional activities or formations are always running; even when you are in a deep sleep or unconscious state. Therefore, know that this is not a momentum that you can stop easily. The way to overcome it is not through manipulation, steering or brute force. It is through non-reactive observation.

We feel that we are in control and have the will to steer the outcome. We feel that we can manipulate the outcome the way we want. In the end you realize that the defilements have already taken over and you are just a puppet or a robot. Yet, the Buddha said, that only the human beings could experience and understand how the latent tendencies are taking place. Therefore, you must be bold, patient, and well prepared. You need to experiment with trial and error. Mistakes may happen. You may lose your balance. You may get involved and join the actors instead of just watching the play.

See the true nature of the aggregates. See its true unsatisfactory nature; Impermanent suffering and with no substance like the froth in a still pool or a droplet of water absorbed instantly by the dry ground. Observe the distorted and exaggerated story telling set up to promote and build your ego and self. Do not get caught up in the thinking (constructed or fabricated thoughts) and let consciousness reside in perception and feed on mental volition.

Just observe the subtle thoughts. This is a great challenge because it is completely contrary to your normal personality traits and your desires and aversions. You need to understand that these subtle distractions are like cancers and cankers that can destroy you. These defilements are powerful and are normally in control. Observing that your pure human nature can overcome these wild, beastly, bewildering desires that are distorting your mind, be detached. The seeing and the observing is not a crime. They need to manifest for you to understand. You are not taking a wrong path. It is not a mistake. If the defilements do not manifest you will never be able to see them and be an observer. Otherwise, you will live

your whole life, of maybe 80 to 100 years, but will never be able to master the nutriment of mental volition.

Knowing this, it is better to see the hidden mechanism for yourself. Better to see what is happening in the underlying layers of your mind. It is like seeing how the engine of the car or the electric circuit works. Once you know how it works, then you can correct any weaknesses or broken parts.

When you see the underlying mechanism, you understand that a person who is committing a crime has reached the point of no return. He has no control because once the cause(s) has arisen the effect will take place. Similarly a person who is philanthropic and generous with his actions also has no control once the cause(s) has arisen. The effect will take place. We have social, economic and political values that set boundaries and moderate unskillful actions. However, past conditioning and unskillful personality traits that are not disciplined and restrained will lead to predictable unskillful behavior.

You will see that all our judgments of people and things that happen are based on getting what we want or our share of the pie. If we get what we want we say that it is good. If we do not get what we want we say that it is bad. If it is recognizing and building our ego and self-image that particular program, person or political system is good. If they are depriving us, then it is bad. If someone is praising us and boosting our ego or recognizing our self-worth it is good. If there is no such recognition, if they are running us down then it is bad. Once the mind is free of defilements it can see how we change our views and opinions based on our own defilements of self-promotion. With the defiled mind you cannot understand defilements. Therefore, it is important that you work at removing them one by one.

First, we master the physical nutriment of form by using our breath, and then we go to the point where the mindfulness can exist

without the nutriment of contact. We are now in the space of the sign-less and without an object. We have penetrated the inner layers of the mind. You need to observe this for a very long time with choice-less awareness because your mind has been conditioned for a very long time to cling and grasp to the nutriment of form and contact.

According to the Western scientists, the human being has evolved from other animals through natural selection, over a period of four billion years. Some others believe that an omnipotent God created human beings and call it intelligent design.

The Buddha invited all to come and see for themselves. He said that if you have not seen for yourself, then you do not know. You are coming up with brilliant hypotheses, theories and views based on science and scriptures of old. The moment you see that the mind is defiled, and that it is biased, you realize that this is only a view not a fact. This view is coloured or distorted by your defilements. Therefore the third nutriment of the mind, mental volition (*manosañcetanā āhāro*), usually cannot be seen by a consciousness that is influenced or propelled by fabrications (*sankhāra*).

In the early Christian theology, they claimed that everything was decided by God, individual beings had no will (volition - *cetanā*). Then Father Aquinas claimed that individual beings did have a will. If one accepts that they have a free will then, they can improve themselves through training. They can learn to change their bad habits and behavior through restraint. So long as there is a will there is the possibility for reform through education. If there is no will, then there is no point of educating people. The Catholic Church accepted Aquinas' claim on individual will. After that, Father Aquinas became the father of education in the Western education system.

Buddhism first came to Germany about 250 years ago. During this period Arthur Schopenhauer studied some books on Buddhism and made a claim and presented data to support that there was an individual will. He also claimed that this will was evil. This was devastation to the Western psychology. When he said that each individual had a will everyone was happy. One could manipulate the will for betterment. But when he claimed that each and every manipulation of the will (*mano saṅkhāra*⁸) resulted in evil, he was accused of being against the social laws and ethical values. Despite this antisocial claim, Friedrich Nietzsche endorsed Schopenhauer and reiterated his views.

Whenever you are doing something willfully (with volition), then it must be led by desire, conceit or egocentricity (*taṇhā, mana, ditthi*). Otherwise, you do not need any will. Any will is coming into being through your desire, conceit, or through your egoistic idea of self. Therefore it will always result in karmic consequences (*vipāka*). To avoid consequences we must eliminate the will or volition (*cetanā*). How do we eliminate volition?

The simple answer is that when you are in the present moment, the mental fabrications or volitional formations of the mind are not necessary. You have accepted the present moment and are living it. When you are in the past and the future, you need to use volition. When you are thinking (constructing thoughts) about another person and judging him or her you are creating volition. Volition is always there when you are manipulating the present moment. The absence of volition will not result in the loss of mindfulness. When you are mindful, you can see the subtle mental fabrications and identify if they are skillful or unskillful. You can observe with non-reacting awareness and overcome the tendency of manipulating or changing the present moment. You will see the subtle thoughts arise and pass away. The fuel required for the

⁸ Mental fabrications or volitional formations of the mind

maintenance of the five aggregates is not available when you just observe. You are no longer feeding and creating new mental volitions. Consciousness is no longer residing in memories/perception and feeding on mental volition.

This is the point when you can understand the due place of the nutriment of mental volition. When you can keep the mind in the present moment, it is not necessary to have will or volition. To start with, all you need is to be aware of the in-breath as the in-breath. Each moment we keep our attention, awareness, and mindfulness with the arising in-breath, arising out-breath, or the arising or falling of the abdomen, you are in the present moment. When you place the right foot down, if you know this is the right foot, and you experience hardness, stiffness, tension, etc. you are in the present moment. When you put the left foot down and you know that you are on the left foot and you experience hardness, softness, tension etc. then you are in the present moment. This indicates that you have the potential to do away with will or volition.

When you are in the present moment in all your activities, no longer is it necessary to have a will or volition. You do not need a formal degree or deep knowledge and understanding of the teaching of the Buddha to experience this Truth. Each and every person has the potential to experience it.

Summary of Overcoming Nutriment of Mental Volition

When you penetrate the breath with strong mindfulness and are in the sign-less, without the meditation object, if you have any mental fabrications/volitional formations of the mind (*mano saṅkhāra*), you will pollute the stream of consciousness. If you entertain any desire or determination to change the current reality and are looking for further progress or reacting to the subtle thoughts you observe, you are polluting the thought moment, which is pure as it

is. Your mental fabrications are trying to destroy the fine, natural balance of your mind and causing turmoil.

Therefore, you must be very knowledgeable and prepared to come to this stage of realization (purity of mind) and to sustain this level of purity. Ultimately, when you achieve this solitude, freedom or peace of mind, if there are no mental fabrications/volitional formations of the mind then there is no dualistic/manifested consciousness (*saṅkhata viññāna*) to experience it. Only the experience remains. There is no dualistic/manifested consciousness or experiencer to argue and say that it is irrational, it does not belong to this world and it does not belong to our humanness.

The Buddha says it is something every human being can experience. Not only can you experience this state of mind you can familiarize yourself with it and see the continuity of this state of mind. Questions such as, “to which world does it belong, to this world or other world, does it belong to the rational mind or not, is it measureable or not, is it comparable or not,” are all theoretical argumentative questions that become meaningless. The longer you keep the pure stream of consciousness under such circumstances the more clarity you will have. You can see that you are nearing the stress free, frictionless, experiential middle path. You realize that it is possible, verifiable and within the human potential.

This is why the Buddha said, “Come and see for yourself, (*ehi passiko*)”. It is available to all, whether you have faith or not, whether you have the theoretical understanding or not, whether you have past experience or not. The Buddha said that you can experience it if you follow the instruction as per the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and maintain virtue as laid out in the Noble Eightfold path.

Therefore, by observing and understanding your liking and disliking that leads to craving and clinging (*tanhā*), the operation

of will/volition (*cetanā*), and one's own personality traits, you realize that no one can help you. Competent doctors can diagnose all other diseases, but no one can help you to identify and eliminate the defilements in your mind to eliminate the disease of suffering (*dukkha*).

There was an opportunity for assistance during the time of the Buddha, as he had the power to 'see' the minds of others. He could 'see' their mental fabrications and prescribe the appropriate meditation (discourse). In fact, most of his discourses were tailor made based on the aptitude and requirement of his congregation of monks, nuns and lay devotees. Each discourse led to the deathless. But since he has passed away and attained *Maha Parinibbāna*, we are on our own. Only you can see your own mind and its defilements. Therefore, only you can eliminate the defilements that you see and identify. You are your own savior. The Buddhas show us the Path by instructing us in the Dhamma.

Dhamma and mindfulness are like mirrors. They help us to penetrate and see the deeper levels of our own minds. It takes time, but the diligent can penetrate even the deeper levels of the mind that contain the subtle, latent defilements (*anusaya dhamma*). Even if presently you are mindful only for one split second, over time, ultimately the cumulative effect is unthinkably beneficial. Therefore, try your best to develop mindfulness in all your activities. Whether you understand this profound theory or not, your mindfulness will slowly take you towards the (stress free) middle path.

Chapter 6

A Closer Look at the Nutriment of Mental Volition and Fabrications

“Monks, there are these four nutriments, for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those to be born. Which four?”

Physical food, gross or refined as the first,

Contact as the second,

Mental Volition the third and

Consciousness the fourth.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta

Chapter Five Summary

- We discussed the doubts that may arise to hinder one’s progress when one has mastered the restraint of physical nutriment and contact as nutriment. Unless one is well prepared, the remaining defilements may lead one to forced breathing, giving up the meditation or even taking a nap.
- Mindfulness is possible with an object such as the breath, without an object such as when one has lost the feeling of breath and experienced the sign-less and with many objects such as when one has a scattered mind. One should treat the experience of all three types of mindfulness equally and with equanimity. We also learnt the difference between concentration and mindfulness. When you are mindful you can still be aware that your concentration is weak and your mind is scattered. This is the beauty of mindfulness.

- Mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetana āhāro*) was introduced and we learnt how to penetrate the deeper layers of the mind to view the subtle, latent volitions. Detached, non-reactive observation was used to master the mental volition as nutriment. We observed the difference between the gross aggregate of fabrications (*saṅkhāra skhandha*) and the mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*) both of which are founded on volition (*cetana*).
- When we are in the present moment and there is no longer a need to manipulate and change the current reality, volition is no longer required. Anyone can reach this level of mindfulness if they practice diligently and consistently for long hours. One does not need an academic degree or deep knowledge of the Teachings of the Buddha to experience this Truth. Each and every person has the potential to experience it.

If you wish to have a very healthy operation of the five aggregates, you have to master and restrain the intake of the nutriments⁹. If you wish to experience the cessation of the aggregates, you have to ensure that you do not continuously provide the fuel or nutriments that are required to sustain and maintain the aggregates. Therefore, if a person agrees that his existence or life itself (his five aggregates) is suffering, he should understand that suffering happens because knowingly or unknowingly he is nourishing or

⁹ Ordinary people think that desire/pleasure resides in the object that one sees, sound that one hears, flavour that one tastes, aroma that one smells, or tactile sensation that one comes in contact with. Some think that it lies in the sense bases of eye, ear, tongue, nose or body. They maximise the sense pleasures and even resort to unskillful actions such as stealing, sexual misconduct and lying to get what they desire. But desire and pleasure arise in the mind. They do not reside in the external object or the sense bases. People feed the nutriment of contact excessively in order to maximise the sense pleasure derived through the sense doors. They can never be satisfied because they are looking for an internal feeling arising due to cause and effect in an external object.

providing fuel to the aggregates by ensuring the continuity of the proximate factor or nutriment. That is how he (or she) is maintaining the body, (the tangible form), and his or her feelings, perception, fabrications and consciousness.

Therefore, understand that, one has to take responsibility for one's own suffering. There is no second person involved in inflicting suffering. You are responsible for your suffering, and it is also you who is responsible for the cessation of suffering. If you are willing and really want to, you can eliminate suffering. To achieve this, one has to first have a theoretical understanding or book knowledge (*sutamaya pañña*) of how to moderate the intake of the nutriment. Then if you are serious and committed to eliminate suffering you should acquire the deductive thinking and inferential knowledge (*cintāmayā pañña*). He or she is now ready to put this knowledge to practice (*bhāvanāmayā pañña*).

When one is seriously committed to understand the root cause or the nutriment required for sustenance or maintenance of the five aggregates one has the information necessary to practice and see for oneself.

In this discourse the Buddha claimed that the five aggregates were fed and nourished by the four nutriment. With his omniscient knowledge, the Buddha said, “Monks, these five aggregates are nourished by four types of nutriment. They maintain the already arisen beings, and facilitate and nourish the beings that are yet to arise.”

In the previous chapters we discussed the first and second nutriment of physical food and contact in detail. You are aware that a living being (the five aggregates) cannot exist without gross and subtle food and the nutriment of contact. You are aware that without the nutriment of contact that form, feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness cannot arise.

You have also experienced the freedom and peace that arises when the breath (an example of the aggregate of form and subtle physical nutriment) ceases to be felt. You are also aware that you can prolong your experience of the sign-less with choice-less awareness. There will always be possibilities for contact to arise. The possibility will collapse if you select one of the options and contact takes place. The five aggregates will arise instantaneously. If the contact does not take place, they remain as just possibilities or choices that you have not made. There is no labeling, no feeling, no perception, and no concept of me, myself, and mine. All of these arise only after contact takes place. With choice-less awareness you have mastered contact as nutriment.

Volitions have a dual role. As mental volitions they play a very deep, primordial and intrinsic role in the maintenance of the five aggregates. Also, once it comes into fruition, it works as fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) which is one of the five aggregates (*saṅkhāra skhandha*). In other words, one aspect of mental volitions (*cetanā*) is how it facilitates, or sustains the five aggregates as the third nutriment of mental volitions (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) to form, feeling, perception, fabrications and consciousness. The other aspect is the mental volitions that blossom into the aggregate of fabrications on contact.

It is a challenge to translate (*manosañcetanā*) and the resulting *saṅkhāra*, into English. Westerners, or those that think in a Western way, have many shades of meaning to the term, *saṅkhāra*, and translate it as fabrications. The literal translation of fabrications is something that is willfully made up, constructed or created. The word is also associated with untruth, falsehood, fake, made up or delusional thoughts, words and deeds. Many Sri Lankans, even if they are Pāli scholars and engaged in translation, find it difficult to translate the term *saṅkhāra*. The term *manosañcetanā āhāro* also has many nuances. It too has many shades of meaning and is translated to English as mental volition as nutriment. Therefore we have to look at it from all possible

perspectives. Only then can we understand it. Even then, your knowledge will be just enough for you to acquire pragmatic usage. You cannot claim that you know it. It is a very complex and profound term. As such, we need to take a closer look at mental volitions as nutriment and fabrications in this chapter.

Shortly before the enlightenment, the Maha Bodhisatta was still searching for the real experience of Truth. This quest, or deep thirst for Truth is known as, *kim sacca gavesi* in Pāli. At this time the Maha Bodhisatta had a comprehensive understanding of the required moral training. He was exceptionally compassionate and never violated or transgressed the social accord. He had a strong sense of responsibility towards ethical values and accountability. He also had a very good understanding and mastery of concentration. He was a very successful disciple of the great teachers - Alara Kalāma and Uddakarāma Putta - well known for their mastery of concentration.

Even with this advanced level of purity and concentration he felt that there was an underlying, latent tendency that led to discontent and suffering. That is why he continued his search for Truth. The Maha Bodhisatta felt that there was still something missing. Something buried in the deepest layers of his mind, which he had to uncover and reveal.

Shortly after the enlightenment, the Exalted One proclaimed this peon of joy,

“Through many a birth in existence wandered I,
Seeking but not finding, the builder of this house¹⁰.
Sorrowful is repeated birth.”

¹⁰ **House** – Body and Mind

“O house builder¹¹ thou art seen. Thou shall build no house again.
All thy rafters¹² are broken. Thy ridge-pole¹³ is shattered.
Mind attains the unconditioned¹⁴.
Achieved is the end of craving.”

On Awakening the Exalted One exclaimed with joy that he saw the builder of this house which he referred to as craving (*tanhā*). It was a breakthrough understanding. It was freedom from mental volition (*visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ*). This realization led to the shattering of the house, its rafters and ridgepole. The mind attained the unconditioned.

When you can understand the behavior of mental volitions (*manosañcetanā*) and mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*), you are at the core or deepest level of the mind. You can now see how the next chapter of life - becoming, arises. You can see the operation of becoming (how it was in the beginning of this life, or if one is going to have another life in the future). That was the great breakthrough that led to Awakening or Realization of Truth.

Until this Realization of Truth, the Maha Bodhisatta never thought of sharing his knowledge and wisdom with others. He never took on the role of the teacher even though it was requested of him by his teachers. He continued exploring his mind and body for answers. The big difference was his very thorough understanding of the mental volitions as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*). It was a unique accomplishment. Therefore we will study it in greater detail.

¹¹ **House builder** – Cause for rebirth – craving and attachment (*tanhā*)

¹² **Rafters** – defilements (*kilesa*)

¹³ **Ridge-pole** – Ignorance and delusion (*avijja*)

¹⁴ **Unconditioned** – Nibbāna

From Mental Volition to the Three Types of Fabrications

In the discourse on the Mindfulness of the Breathing (*Ānapanasati sutta*), the Buddha teaches that mental volitions matures to fruition as mental, verbal and physical fabrications in three stages.

The first stage is the mental ramification of defilements on the mind or the subtle thoughts that lead to mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*). This takes place in the deeper layers of the mind. Then, based on this we have the verbal ramifications in the way of speech (*vaci saṅkhāra*). Finally we have the physical behavior (*kāya saṅkhāra*).

If one is to understand the theory and practice of volition, the Buddha is not going to begin with mental fabrications even though that is where the latent defilements begin. They are difficult to see and reach. If one wants to understand and restrain the grave and most damaging effects of the defilements one has to begin the training with the physical and verbal misbehavior which are visible and easier to control. That is the point where the ethical training, (*sīla sikkhā*) begins. That is where it is easiest to start.

Kāya saṅkhāra means bodily volitional activities that are skillful or unskillful. This ethical training, or moral training is only limited to your active participation or willful actions. We never ask one to control their involuntarily actions, or passive, or unintentional activity. You cannot restrain these. So, don't worry about involuntary, passive or unintentional activities as they are not going to result in any karmic consequences. They become nullified then and there. Therefore training of restrain is limited only to your volitional or willful actions.

Bodily or physical misbehavior includes killing of living beings, stealing and sexual misconduct. In each of these instances the misconduct must be accompanied by volition or intention. Whenever you eat, drink or breathe there may be tiny living organisms that die. But there is no intention or will to kill them. If

you are not doing any intentional killing, then you can say that you are morally pure in as far as the killing of living beings.

Taking that which is not given to you is stealing. You purchase merchandise only if it is profitable or of value to you. Otherwise you do not purchase the merchandise. Some may feel that this gain is immoral. This is not what we mean by stealing. Stealing only includes instances when we exploit others knowingly or fraudulently.

Sexual conduct can be appropriate or inappropriate. We have to be concerned only with inappropriate sexual conduct. For householders this includes sexual conduct with those committed to others, minors, celibate mendicants and sexual activity without consent (forced). This is what we have to refrain from. Those that observe the eight precepts (during meditation retreats), those ordained as novices and those that have taken higher ordination abstain from all sexual activity. They observe celibacy. These are the instances that you have to understand as far as the physical activities are concerned. In each of these instances we are concerned only with the intentional actions.

The verbal fabrications (*vaci saṅkhāra*) can be articulated or mental chatter. Harsh speech, slander, lying and gossip are included in verbal misconduct. As with the bodily fabrications volition or intention is required for the verbal fabrications to have karmic consequences.

Saṅkhāra is also categorized in three ways based on the Cūlavadda Sutta¹⁵. The in and out breath are physical and hence bodily formations (*kāya saṅkhāro*) because they are connected with the body. Directed thought and sustained thought (*vitakka vicāra*) are verbal formations (*vaci saṅkhāro*) because they result

¹⁵ MN 44 The discussion between Bhikkuni Dhammdinna Theri and Upāsaka Visākha

in articulated speech, and perceptions and feelings (*saññā* and *vedañā*) are mental formations (*citta saṅkhāro*) because they influence and are connected with mental volition as nutriment and mental fabrications. *Kāya saṅkhāro*, *vaci saṅkhāro* and *citta saṅkhāro* in this context have no volition and therefore, no *kamma* potential.

Mastering the Bodily Fabrications, Verbal Fabrications and Mental Fabrications in Meditation

If you force the breath willfully it results in bodily fabrications (*kaya saṅkhāra*). That is why I ask you not to force the breath. Let the breathing take place naturally. This is known as bodily formations (*kaya saṅkhāro*). Your attention must be on the breath that is happening by itself. If you are going to force the breath you will never give a chance for these bodily formations to cease. Instead you are agitating the breath. Whenever we are in sitting meditation, let the sitting body rest, relax and be symmetrical and still like a pyramid. Just observe what is happening without any intentional involvement, or active participation. You will observe a process. This is all you need to do. This is a very good and healthy start. If you can keep your stream of consciousness like this you can progress swiftly.

Applying or directing the mind to a particular object and evaluating or understanding that particular object is called *vitakka* and *vicāra*. This is known as the verbal formations and is void of volition (*vaci saṅkhāro*). The verbal formations can also include noting. In the early days of your meditation, you may sometimes use noting. You note the in-breath and out-breath mentally as “in-breath and out-breath”. This is categorized as verbal fabrications (*vaci saṅkhāra*) as it is with volition or intention.

In this context *vitakka* means you are actively directing the mind to noting and applying the mindfulness to the in-breath as the in-breath happens. You know now that the mind is face-to-face with

the in-breath. And *vicāra* is to observe and see the individual characteristics of the in-breath and out-breath. It is also seeing the natural characteristics of the in-breath versus the out-breath. It is no longer just the noting it is feeling the touch and being able to identify and distinguish its unique, differentiating characteristics. These two are called the crux of articulation, and verbal fabrication in meditation. At the beginning you apply noting, but after a while when the in-breath and out-breath difference disappears and the mind starts to calm down, you must withdraw noting as a technique.

You are now mindful without any object or sign, the practice seems to be boring and flat. At this point many people feel that there is something wrong, or that you are falling asleep. Sometimes you want to introduce forced breathing so as to experience the sensation of breath. The mind that is bored is often disinterested.

In one sense, we may say that when you are experiencing the wave of your breath then you are in *samsāra*. When it is flat and indistinguishable then you are in *Nibbāna*. When the meditation is progressing well and it is leading to *Nibbāna* you find that it is boring, monotonous and you may fall sleep. You may feel lost, like an outcast and may lose interest in the meditation. Therefore you must practice diligently making this wave of breath flat. This is happening due to your good technique. When you have confidence in the technique you will begin to appreciate the flattening off of the wave.

When you experience this stillness it is very important that you discuss your experience with the teacher. You are calming down the physical formations and the verbal formations (*kāya saṅkhāro* and *vacī saṅkhāro*). Interviews and discussions with the teacher will ensure that you understand this experience as an improvement in your meditation. Then you will not be discouraged or misinterpret this stillness as a personal failure or error in your technique.

When the primary object (your meditation object) and the secondary objects (sound, smell, pain,... etc.) are at the periphery level, they are only possibilities, nothing manifests. You can now coast or ‘put the plane onto autopilot’. You can just observe using choice-less awareness and do nothing.

You will then experience some subtle disturbances; the mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*), are disturbing your freedom and peace of mind. The mental volitions have no role to play; therefore they are agitating the mind by entertaining doubts. You feel that you have to do something; usually, either you to get up from your meditation posture and leave or start thinking about something.

Subsequently, there is a lot of habitual thinking that will take place based on your personality traits (your own likings and disliking’s). You must just observe with bare attention or non-reactive observation. You must train yourself so that you will not be agitated or coerced to do something to change this situation. Instead you should just watch and observe with no reaction.

At this point the physical fabrications and the verbal fabrications are somewhat tamed and under control. However, the mental fabrications (perception and feelings) are not under control.

Therefore they cause great agitation. The Buddha said, that at this time the consciousness (*viññāna*), cannot find any foothold to feed on. It can no longer feed on the physical formations (the breath) and the verbal formation (*vitakka and vicāra*) because they are restrained. Therefore the consciousness and the nutriment of mental volitions (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) begin to justify themselves with subtle deep rooted defilements. This may result in constructed thoughts as follows: “What about teaching my dear and near ones about this spiritual state. It is meritorious. Why should I not share this with others?” Thinking thus, you get up and write an essay or letter or call your friends on the phone. “It is a

wonderful state, why don't you come and learn this method?" This is how it happens. Every time you proliferate like that, you are losing your stillness and solitude. You are losing your freedom and peace of mind. Otherwise you may think, "After so much effort I have come up to this level, just being in this state is not enough. What is the next step?" You start thinking about how to accelerate your progress, how to improve further, how to achieve the highest goal in this present sitting.

The mind is like a donkey chasing after a carrot that is just beyond its reach. It keeps on running without being content with what it has. In truth you are at a high level of mental development. Despite this, sometimes you feel disappointed that even the breath is now not available. You begin forced breathing so as to see the primary object again. At this point some people may claim that they have achieved great spiritual heights. This is an over-estimation because in reality it is volition wanting to make some story or other. It is mental volition as nutriment leading you to mental fabrications.

Therefore, one has to understand that when there are no external distractions such as sound, sights, objects, or impingements, the mind tends to make up its own. You will be amazed to see that mind-made things appear more realistic than real things. That is why you get lost in this conditioning. You can brainwash yourself or you can brainwash another with these mind made objects. Therefore understand that over time, gradually, using restraint that you must refrain from physical activities or movements of the body and physical or bodily fabrications (forced breathing when breath is not felt). Then you must reduce the verbal fabrications of noting, (*vitakka vicāra*) as much as possible.

You can never reach the theoretical maximum of knowledge. Instead you just observe what is happening. To observe with bare or non-reactive observation you must have theoretical understanding, preparation, experience resulting from past errors, and association with fellow practitioners. Only then will you

understand what is meant by just mere observation, bare attention or non-reactive observation. This is *Vipassanā*. You can see ripples, waves and at times whirlpools in your mind. But in time everything dissolves into the same body of water. However, if you recognize and decide that this is a ripple, this is a wave, this is a whirlpool you will get agitated. Instead of bare attention or non-reactive observation you have grasped and followed a mind-made concept or volitional formation of the mind (*mano saṅkhāra*). You have to understand that everything that arises in the world is designed to cease. This non-reactive observation of arising and passing away should be your focus.

You are now not looking at the beginning, middle and the end of the breath. Instead you see emotions, mental patterns, and thinking. A lot of new projects may take over your mind. Or you may see that you do not have any intentional or conscious thinking. You may observe that thinking just happens. It is very difficult for you to understand and differentiate between thinking with the thinker (constructed thought) and thinking without the thinker (non-reactive observance of thoughts arising and passing away).

Sometimes you may see thought without the thinker. But if you do not know you are going to claim responsibility for that thinking. The thoughts may be dirty and unbecoming. The mind cannot exist without thoughts. Therefore it is making its own proliferation.

Unable to understand reality and mind-made, the mind claims that it is not becoming for me to think like that. That is harmful thinking. When defiling thoughts come, just observe. Do not take ownership. This is the nature of the human mind. If you are thinking of these thoughts as defiling, you will get defiled. If you say it is not me, it is not mine, and it is not myself, and do not attach to them, then, you are purified because they are just superficial waves. If you wish to calm down these mental volitions you must withdraw and just observe. This is not my mind producing these

thoughts, these thoughts are not me. They are without a thinker. Then these thoughts are known as *asampajāna mano saṅkhāra*.

The mind cannot exist without thoughts. The more that you can familiarize yourself with this experience the more you will see that it is a game, a drama, it is not real. If you have physical mental activities, and verbal mental activities on top of this, and if you have active thinking or a lot of constructed thoughts on top of this, then how can you observe and study this state of mind? There is no way for such a possibility.

Therefore you must be mindful. Each and every moment that you are unmindful, and are engaged in physical fabrications (forced breathing), verbal fabrications including noting (*vitakka or vicāra*) or mental fabrications (perception and feelings) you are complicating and polluting this pure state of mind. You need to be able to distinguish whether you did it (you were aware of it) or if it is something that happened to you without intention or control.

When you walk on the walking path and when you come to the end, you see a bird, a butterfly or a flower. You cannot understand whether you have looked at it or if you just saw it. Looking and seeing are completely two different things. You are responsible when you look, because you recognize using past conditioning (*saññā*) and then think. You are accumulating karmic forces. However, seeing or viewing is something that happens to a person who has a living eye. If it is something you see, then it is harmless. But, if you are looking, to distinguish whether it is good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant then you are responsible (activating perception and feeling).

In the day-to-day activities when we are in a carnival or when you are in a place where there is music and television, sometimes listening happens, sometimes hearing happens. Sometimes it is a background noise that the mind has not identified. This is hearing. Listening takes place when you actively hear and follow the music.

The Buddha said, you are committed only if you are listening, but the hearing is a passive action that happens when ear consciousness arises. If you observe your daily actions using a video camera you can see how many unwanted movements you perform within the day. You are performing like a puppet. These things were happening and you did not know about it until you saw the video recording.

When you go to the supermarket you buy many things. When you come back home, at times you do not know why you bought some of it. The bag is full and the bill is high. But what is the use of this item you bought for your home? That is what happens. If you do not understand the function of mental volition as nutriment, and you are doing a lot of things with little mindfulness, you are running from one thing to another on auto pilot.

Instead, if you have only a few activities and perform them with great mindfulness, you can thin-slice the time so you can cut the momentum. You see episode by episode clearly, just like in a cartoon film. When the cartoon film is running at a certain speed, animation takes place. If you show plate by plate, there is no animation, no drama, and no story. You can see lines here and there, but they are disjointed. For the cartoon to become a drama or story the continuity and speed is required.

That momentum leads to un-mindfulness and lets the mental volition as nutriment take place and develop into mental fabrications. When a generator is running at 1,500 rotations per minutes (rpm), it produces 120/240 voltage. When it is at a lower speed there is no electricity. Electricity is the byproduct of this momentum or speed. Similarly, a world with a fast pace life style, leads to uncontrolled mental volitions which in turn lead to fabrications. The result of the fast pace of life is tension, stress and frustration.

However, a slow paced life is not completely free of these issues. But they face less tension and frustration. The fast paced world claims that these people are lethargic, unproductive, and not creative. They claim that they are not scientific and not advancing the world with new research and findings. They claim that “We are the advanced people. We are the go getters” The Buddha said that the fast pace life style leads to “advanced sufferers.” They experience advanced suffering, advanced frustration, conflict and stress.

Therefore understanding that, if you wish to experience the very subtle mental volitions, you have to first and foremost do away with the physical fabrications, and habitual tendencies of moving without awareness. Then you have to understand and master all of the verbal fabrications. You have to tame the applied or directed thoughts (*vitakka*) and the evaluated or sustained thoughts (*vicāra*) and then you will see what is happening in the deeper layers of the mind. Also, whether you like it or not, these thoughts are arising and passing away at a very fast speed. That speed may be due to past life tendencies, or if you are 60 years or older due to habitual, likings and disliking's, that have precipitated, and crystallized. They just continue to manifest with little control.

In addition, you may have some hopes and dreams that you wish to fulfill. Normally these propel you forward towards your goals. Then after a certain amount of effort and time, these strong desires go beyond your control. Whenever it goes beyond your control, it develops secondary forces similar to, centrifugal and centripetal forces. When it has reached this stage you don't know how to stop or moderate it. Your goals and ambitions are driving you forward at a very fast pace and you have lost control.

Without fabrications, life is boring and monotonous. Therefore a certain amount of fabrications are necessary. But when you reach the stage where you cannot see the beginning, the middle, or the end of your thoughts you know that you are in trouble. Instead of

calm, rational, well thought of, meaningful thoughts there is a continuous stream of mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*). These thoughts tend to govern most of your speech and actions.

Getting Out of the Rut

What you can do to get out of this rut and calm the mind is to first slow down its pace. Then, begin with the physical and verbal misdeeds by observing the precepts or moral rules of virtue. Reflect and observe your daily actions and verbalizing often to make sure that you sustain virtue over a long period of time. Then tackle the mind.

Assume your usual sitting meditation posture, keep the body still with determination and observe the mind. Observe the mind with full attention, mindfulness, diligence and vigilance. Just see what is happening in the mind. Then you will see the stream of inner chatter that have not manifested as words and speech as yet. It is not at the verbal level but the preparations are there.

Once the inner chatter has slowed down the breath becomes calm and subtle. The mind and the body also become calm. Then if you go to the place of maximum stillness where you cannot feel the breath, (also known as solitude, freedom and peace), then you can understand that there is an energy flow. You cannot see any wave action, but it is there just like the horizon in the sea. Observe it without getting involved and see how many minutes you can remain there without getting involved.

The Buddha said that at this moment there are three things happening. “*yañca bhikkhave, pakappeti yañca, ceteti yañca anuseti yañca, ārammaṇametam hoti viññāṇassa ṭhitiyā.*” The consciousness is seeking firm ground because you do not entertain any physical or verbal, fabrications. Therefore only the mental aspect is there. Consciousness is agitating in order to get a foothold to cling to so as to exert its own authority. If there is no agitation,

it can't create the delusion of me and not me. So, in order to make me and not me, it comes out with a lot of proposals such as:

1. Future Planning (*pakappeti*)

You feel that this is the best time to work on future planning, but you do not know what you are foregoing. You are foregoing your solitude; you are foregoing your mindfulness, calm, freedom, and peace of mind. But, it appears as if you are working on something positive and progressive. Thoughts such as “If I do not think about my progress who else will?” arises in your mind. Whenever this level of calmness occurs, these types of thoughts flood the mind.

2. Determinations (*ceteti*)

You feel a need or strong determination or intention to do something urgent or important. Or you feel a need to improve or adjust the current situation.

3. Historical and past life tendencies (*anuseti*)

This includes your natural habits and tendencies. Some may have been acquired in past lives. Some may be the result of experiences when you were young. When such tendencies arise, the consciousness (*viññāna*) will take foothold. Then the subtle volitions will arise as the nutriment of mental volition (*manosancetana āhāro*) and become nutriment for the consciousness.

When this happens you must never claim the action of the consciousness (*viññāna*) as me, mine or myself. You must never claim the actions of the mental volitions as me, mine or myself. Instead you must learn the art of disclaiming. This is very challenging. You must be very vigilant and observe what is happening in the inner layers of your mind. When you observe this you can see that you have no control, no executive power at all.

You are not in command. But this understanding of your lack of governing ability is not a weakness. The Buddha says that this is the truth of suffering. This is the truth of the transient nature of phenomena that results in suffering. It is in a state of flux. It is in the periphery, but in a state of flux; just arising and passing away. Do not bind to it or claim it as me and mine. Try to maintain at least one thought moment further as just the observer. When you can do this, it is called non-reactive observation or bare attention.

Otherwise by mere appreciation of the thought formations, you create a self and you create judgement; this is good, this is bad. You find that this is preferable and that is not preferable. You like this and you dislike that. This is how the arising of the mental volitions gives a boost to your ego. This is the root cause for maintenance of your ego. This is the nutriment for your ego, your conceit, and your desire. But if you are prepared, if you have the experience of past mistakes and you learnt and know them as past mistakes, with their assistance you can just observe so as to remain uninvolved. Then you can see the third nutriment. The subtle mental activity becomes nutriment of mental volition as soon as you identify and judge it. Then you will react to it with desire or aversion. Therefore you must keep them at bay in a non-reactional way. If successful the complete potential and all possibilities are there, but nothing will manifest.

This is the maximum of equanimity. This is an equipoise mind. You have reached your full potential. You are just like an unborn baby. Your full potential to be anyone lies ahead of you. The best is to keep all opportunities open. Leave them as possibilities, and then you can see the maximum capacity of a human being. You are uncommitted and free. This state of mind is known as *visāṅkhāragata citta*.

The Mind Free of Mental Volition

The mind could remain for a short period without the third nutriment of mental volition. There is no judgement and no planning for the future. Whenever thoughts arise you understand that it is free of intention, this is not me, mine, or myself. But, even if you disclaim the thoughts that you observe, they continue to arise and pass away. Then you can see the un-governability of thoughts. You can see as it is happening that even though it is a process, a flux that mere observation of this possibility itself is suffering. There is a burning desire to construct thoughts.

This stage of mind is not due to a single aspect or cause. It has many causes and factors and they are in a flux just like a TV screen that has only dots with no image. You can observe it and you can understand how difficult it is for you to keep the mind in this state. The mind is always seeking for some external object to grasp. It is asking for some sign, object, wave, friction, tension, or an event. Each and every encounter will result in subtle or gross suffering. However, the Buddha says there is an alternative. You can keep the mind still and just observe without choosing to change the current state. This point is as far as you can go. The mental volitions are calmed down to the maximum level. The more you practice the better you will understand the ways and means to maintain this equilibrium, and balance for a longer time. This is an indication of your spiritual maturity.

You are not going to make use of this chance to create fabrications (*saṅkhāra*). Keep your mind as pure and undisturbed as possible. Whenever this state of mind occurs, the physical, verbal and mental healing or therapy will take place. However, it is only a byproduct. This is not Awakening. You now have a good understanding of the process. You develop restraint, not only in the physical and verbal actions of the mind, but also in the very subtle mental formations. You can calm your mind and through non-reaction, you can come to a previously unknown state of

equilibrium. The Buddha said that this is your real home. This is the pure state you started with. Everyone starts from here.

As a human being you have the potential to do many things. But keeping the potential as such, without manifesting into fabrications is possible. It is something that the conventional world feels is inhuman and impossible. But, the Buddha said that it is possible. Whenever you reach this state of mind and come to understand that this is your home state, you understand that the day-to-day activities without mindfulness are unproductive and worthless. You are polluting the present moment experience with fabrications. This is the current reality for most people.

Therefore, the Buddha says that as a spiritual seeker, you should aim at this kind of a thought moment throughout your daily activities. The moment you go there and understand this experience as your real home, you are in the spiritual experience. This change is what we expect from our meditation. The change from the conventional truth to the Absolute Truth is possible. This is the change from a sentient being to a spiritual being.

Chapter 7

The Power of Mental Volition and Fabrications to Influence the Arising Consciousness

“Monks, there are these four nutriments, for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those to be born. Which four?”

Physical food, gross or refined as the first,

Contact as the second,

Mental Volition the third and

Consciousness the fourth.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Chapter Six Summary

- The four nutriments (physical nutriment, contact, mental volition and consciousness) are the proximate cause for the arising of the five aggregates. When physical nutriment and contact as nutriment are mastered or subdued then one can restrain the third nutriment of mental volition (*manosañcetanā āhāro*). Non-reactive observation or bare attention is required to master and subdue mental volition.
- The Buddha expands on the nutriment of mental volition and the mastering of it. Mental volition is the bedrock upon which mental, verbal and physical fabrications arise. We

discuss the gross and subtle mental fabrications, verbal fabrications and physical fabrications¹⁶.

- If one is seriously interested in understanding mental fabrications, one has to start with restraint and managing or mastering of the physical and verbal fabrications. Once they are calm and subdued, then one can enter into the sphere where the mental volitions are taking place. Observing the mental volitions is not accomplished by theorizing, wishing, performing of skillful deeds, or by the grace of the teacher or a supernatural being. One has to go through this process systematically. Then only can one have direct access to see and work with the nutriment of mental volition.
- We discussed the mental fabrications – feeling and perception, verbal fabrications – directed thought and evaluation used for noting, and physical fabrications – the forced in and out breath. We learned how to subdue and master the breath and directed and evaluated thought.
- We discuss the difference between mental volition and fabrications and how to prevent mental volition leading to fabrications using non-reactive observation or bare attention.

In this chapter, we continue examining the relationship between the four nutriments and the five aggregates. There is a lot of interconnectedness between the two. Specifically, we will address the relationship between mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) and fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) as one of the five aggregates.

In the Cūḷavedalla Sutta, The Bikkuni Dhammadinna Theri explained how the physical, verbal and the mental fabrications

¹⁶ Citta/mano saṅkhāra, vaci saṅkhāra and kāya saṅkhāra in Pali

relate to each other in the mind. Specifically she addressed perception and feeling and said that they were acting in the role of mental fabrications. Perception and feeling were influencing the mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*) which ultimately led to the aggregate of fabrications.

Therefore by attending a meditation retreat and directing one's awareness to one's own feelings and perceptions in their unpolluted, original, primordial form, one can understand what is happening in the depth of the mind. One can observe how perception and feeling acting as mental fabrications influences and affects the aggregate of fabrication This is one way of accessing and understanding mental volition and how it leads to fabrications.

Another way to understand it is to examine this aspect, in terms of the first few steps of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination.

With ignorance (*avijjā*) as the cause, fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) arise

With fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) as the cause, consciousness (*viññāna*) arises

Ignorance is the proximate cause for fabrications and the distance cause for consciousness. As long as ignorance is present in the mind, the various formations of the mind keep on arising, at a high speed and the mental fabrications select the next type of consciousness. Therefore, the type of consciousness is completely based upon the mastering and restraint of the mental volition as nutriment by using non-reactive observation. This reduces or controls the formations of mental fabrications.

Whenever mental volition as nutriment is in control you have no governing power, you cannot implement any kind of influence regarding the type of consciousness that arises because it has influenced this process of mental preparation. Therefore, one must understand this process through the practice of meditation, and observation of this natural happening.

We have to step back and observe how ignorance influences, or manipulates this process of mental change that results in mental fabrications. How this mental process of change is then going to influence and manipulate the selection of the type of consciousness. This is important as it explains what will happen at the moment of death when re-becoming takes place and also what will happen at the end of this thought moment when the beginning of the next thought moment arises. These are macro and micro episodes of the consciousness. One is said to be developed and skillful in meditation when, you can see the next thought moment or the next stream of consciousness. One is completely free, completely liberated if one can experience and completely understand this mental process of change.

When one begins to observe this process of mental change in meditation one understands that previously one had very little influence in the selection of the next arising thought moment. One realizes that if you have no understanding of restraint, or mastery regarding the present state of mental volition as nutriment and how it leads to fabrications, the next thought moment, and consciousness will arise according to the momentum, of habitual tendencies.

Therefore, it is important to observe and understand mental volition as a nutriment for the five aggregates and fabrications which is one of the five aggregates. Also it is important to observe the role of perception and feelings as mental fabrications. Similarly we need to understand consciousness which works as a nutriment for the five aggregates and also how it works as one of the five aggregates. The best way is to understand all the different facets, nuances and definitions of the various stages of mental preparation so that we have a good theoretical knowledge about the various mental formations.

From Ignorance to Fabrications and from Fabrications to Consciousness

In this chapter we will also discuss how our ignorance is going to influence or colour the mental preparation and defile the mental fabrications, and how in turn the aggregate of fabrications are going to influence, colour, and manipulate the selection of the type of consciousness. Consciousness is the most important factor as it determines the continuity of becoming. But behind the scenes it is mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*), that directs the selection while ignorance influences the aggregate of fabrications.

At any given moment consciousness has a variety of possible outcomes. The consciousness may be eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind consciousness. The next consciousness is not decided based on what one wants at that moment or even what the Bhikkhu (Sāti) wants or predicts despites his clinging and grasping to his view as being Truth. It is just one of six possibilities that one has little control over unless the process is managed. Therefore, you cannot say that consciousness is everlasting and eternal. It is changing from this moment to the next moment in an unpredictable way because consciousness is based only on what is being filtered through mental fabrications. Therefore, mental fabrication is the one that is going to select or choose what the next thought moment is going to be from all the possibilities. It is the mental fabrications that decide on the next type of the consciousness? At any given present moment they all appear as possibilities.

The Importance of the Selection of the (next moment) Type of Consciousness

At any given moment one, who has a sensitive eye is bombarded with many visual objects, with various shapes and colours to choose from. Similarly, one who has the sensitivity of the ear has many sounds to choose from. When one takes all six sense organs

and the number of external objects (form) in the world the possibilities for selection is enormous. When one takes all the possibilities available for the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body and understands that only one can be selected at any given moment, one realizes the importance of this choice. One also realizes that many objects are ignored and lost forever at every given moment. All these objects are bombarding the six sense doors and everything is asking for attention to be selected in the next given moment. Under such circumstances, who is deciding the sense object of the next moment?

Is consciousness going to give priority to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or the mind? Is the consciousness the chief executive officer (CEO)? No. Mental fabrications are directing the selection of the type of consciousness. It seems as if there is a private secretary behind the CEO directing the boss. It is fabrications that select one from all the possibilities and determines what the next moment selection is going to be. Whatever is presented through the fabrications invariably is going to become the subject matter of the consciousness in the next moment. If one does not have the ability to observe the process that takes place deep in the mind, of when it is undecided, when it is being decided, and when it is decided by the various mental formations, then one will not realize that ultimately consciousness is only going to approve, sign and make it a done deal. Therefore, most people assume that it is being decided and controlled by consciousness.

Ultimately on the surface it seems as if consciousness is the CEO because it is interacting with the public, taking the responsibility, and approving the selection. But the prioritizing and selections are decided by mental volition as nutriment and mental fabrications.

Let us take a buffet with many dishes as an example. One cannot eat or sample all of the dishes. Besides, there are some that you like, some that you do not like and some that you have never tasted before. As you have never been to this restaurant before, you have

not sampled any of the food served. But you have eaten similar dishes with the same name, prepared by other chefs and stored this data in your memory. Therefore you select food from the dishes you like, leave out the dishes you do not like and sample a little bit from a few of the new dishes that look appealing to you. If you do not like to experiment with new dishes or none of them look appealing you leave all of them out.

The selection is happening based on your habitual tendencies, recommendation of friends who have eaten in this restaurant, and the reputation of the chef and the restaurant. It is happening due to your habitual liking, disliking and personality traits. The question then arises if these habits, or personality traits, or liking and disliking are really concerned about your well-being? This is a very deep question. It is most likely that the dishes selected are not the healthiest choice.

You may find that the habitual tendencies have their own agenda. For example you want to keep your mind on your breath. But your mind keeps going to memories and thoughts of your last vacation which you enjoyed. Therefore, our likings and disliking and natural personality traits such as enjoying travel make it very difficult for one to make the selection most favourable for our well-being. Our likes and dislikes and habitual tendencies are not always leading us to our well-being or our liberation. In fact often it may lead us to anger, harsh speech, eating unhealthy food, and even stealing and the telling of lies.

Mindfulness with Clear Comprehension (*Satisampajañña*)

It is important for us to have a theoretical understanding, and analytical knowledge as to how these various volitional activities work deep in the mind. This is where mindfulness is essential. When one has continuous mindfulness, or steadfast mindfulness (*sati*) clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) arises. The Buddha

claims that when the mindfulness is steadfast, then clear comprehension is naturally going to take place. You do not have to do any special meditation to get clear comprehension.

When you reach this stage of mindfulness you can observe the process of selection that is taking place. Therefore (*sati*), the mindfulness, has to accompany the (*sampajañña*) clear comprehension for this deep observation. You will now be able to see what happens when you control or try to control the selection and what happens when you let go and just observe.

For the last 30 years there has been a lot of civil unrest in Sri Lanka due to an internal war. So long as the war continues, there is no development in the country. Once, the war is settled, and there is peace in the country it begins to develop naturally. Similarly, if peace and calm is present in the mind, then the development of the mind takes place naturally.

Satisampajañña develops in the same way. As you develop mindfulness diligently with confidence and consistency, one day you will see that clear comprehension has arisen. They are side by side together. At this point you can direct the mindfulness with clear comprehension to this mental phenomenon of choosing or selecting the next thought moment.

Acceptable Criteria for Selecting – Canki Sutta

Let us take an example from the Majjhimanikāya Sutta #95, known as the Canki Sutta. The head-man of the village of Canki was an elderly Brahmin named Canki who had a very good reputation. When the Buddha visited the city of Canki, the elderly Brahmin was at a conference with 500 other reputed Brahmins who were his students.

When Canki heard of the Buddha's visit to his village he wanted to visit and pay his respects to The Buddha. The five hundred Brahmins who were his students discouraged him by saying that a

respected elderly person, with many disciples should not visit the Buddha who was still young (with black hair). Instead they said that the Buddha should visit him and pay his respect to the elderly Brahmin.

Canki, the head-man, was adamant. After much discussion and argument Canki decided that he would visit and pay respect to the Buddha. Therefore, he praised the Buddha and encouraged the others by saying that they were not aware of the Buddha's omniscient knowledge and that no matter what they said that he would be going. Ultimately Canki accompanied by his Brahmin students visited the Buddha in the forest grove where He was residing.

The Buddha welcomed them and soon they were deep in conversation. The youngest in the group of Brahmins, a youth of about 16 years named Kāpatika, who was a genius, interrupted the conversation of the elders with a question.

When he interrupted the conversation of the elders the Buddha reprimanded him, telling the youth that he must wait his turn to speak. He advised the youth that interrupting the elders was not appropriate behavior for a youth and that he would get his turn when they were done.

The head-man Canki then defended the youth by saying that even though he was young, that Kāpatika was intelligent, reputed and fully versed in all the Vedas. As such, Canki claimed that Kāpatika had the qualifications and ability to raise a question.”

The Buddha then concluded the discussion with the elder Brahmins and gave Kāpatika the opportunity to speak. Kāpatika questioned the Buddha as follows: “We are completely devoted to our tradition and practicing it wholeheartedly. Our book knowledge is different to your teaching. Under such circumstances, how is one to decide whether to follow your teaching or whether to follow the one we have already mastered?”

The Buddha then questioned Kāpatika on the selection process he had used to follow the elderly Brahmin Canki and his teachings. Kāpatika then outlined his reasoning systematically as follows.

1. Based on full confidence in the reputation of the teacher and his teachings
2. Based on our liking of the teacher and the teachings
3. Based on our heritage and lineage of our oral tradition

The Buddha accepted these three as acceptable criteria for selection but pointed out in each case that there was always the possibility that truth could be with any of the other reputed teachers that he had let go saying they were heretics when he made each of the selections. The Buddha said that based on his knowledge each of these criteria has two-fold weaknesses which you can verify in this very life. The Buddha then added two more criterial to the list that Kāpatika gave for a total of five criteria that were commonly used when a selection was made. The Buddha added:

4. Based on questioning, analyzing, and reasoning
5. Based on your view after reflection

The Buddha said that based on his omniscient knowledge there were five criteria currently in use for selection of this type of value judgment. However, even if it is selected by confidence (*saddhā*), Liking (*ruci*), heritage/lineage (*anussava*), analysis and reasoning (*ākaraparivitakka*) or view based on reflection (*ditthinijjhānakkhanti*), what you selected may not carry the truth, what you rejected may carry the truth.” Then, everything you took as Truth will be challenged.

At this point, Kāpatika accepted the Buddha’s guidance and line of reasoning and said if everything that I have accepted as truth is challenged, then what is the method we should use for absolute Truth? The Buddha said that one must, in addition to using all five

criteria in conjunction, test the teachings again and again for experiential truth. Only then can you arrive at something that you can approve and accept as truth.

The Danger of Accepting One's View as Truth

Whenever our mental volition as nutriment or mental fabrications are selecting the criteria or the next thought moment and consciousness, it may be using one or all five criteria. However, even when all five criteria are met, what you selected may not carry the truth, what you rejected may carry the truth. Then, everything that you have selected has been challenged.

Using confidence or our liking or disliking, or our oral lineage and tradition, or our cognitive analytical reasoning's, or our views after reflection or all of them is what the monk Sāti used when he concluded that consciousness was eternal. But his selection did not carry the truth. What he rejected carried the truth. Therefore, we must observe, experience and see for ourselves. Do not arrive at a conclusion that this is truth without seeing for yourself. Without the experiential wisdom it is just a view.

You have to understand that I arrive at this conclusion, or I arrived at this inference through confidence in the Buddha Dhamma. Okay, it is one of the accepted methods. But do not consider it as true. Do not say that what I selected or what I accepted with full confidence is the truth. Similarly if you select something because of your liking and disliking, it is a valid way of selecting. But do not claim and fight over the decision that it is truth. It is a good method, but do not carve it in rock. Likewise, each and every method of selection and choosing can be accepted but do not arrive at the conclusion that this is truth that all else is false without observation of truth.

Let us take the example of a new meditator who is seeking a place to anchor the breath. Do you select the rising and falling of the

abdomen or the in-breath and out-breath at the nostrils? In Sri Lanka, traditionally, the majority of meditators and teachers believe that the in-breath and out-breath at the nostril level is easier and the better method. You can accept that, it is not a problem. However, it may not be the truth for you. Maybe the rising and falling in the abdomen is the better method for you. If you go to the Panditarāma in Burma, you are not allowed to do breathing at the nostrils. You have to practice rising and falling, of the abdomen. You can try that method as there is no harm in doing that. But do not arrive at a decision; this is the best without seeing for yourself. What you have to do is to apply which ever method you chose again and again and see which one makes your mind happy. Do not select a method just based on confidence in your teacher. Even if it is making you happy check and see whether there are people, who have practiced this method for a long time and have got conclusive results. Your decision must be confirmed by the lineage. Then you have to analyze and examine the method and include your findings in your selection process. Finally you have to reflect on your overall experience and come to an informed decision that this is the better method for you. However, even with this process of testing this is just a view.

Until you develop deep meditation you have to use the object of meditation that you feel is best. But the method is not *Nibbāna* it is just a tool. Eventually the breath disappears. Even if you selected the rising and falling, of the abdomen eventually it too will disappear. It is only up to this point that you have to select an object of meditation that is right for you using these five criteria. This method of selection will assist you in the meditation object most suited for tranquility meditation for you.

Otherwise you will be worried as to which one is better and keep asking each and every person you meet. However, no one can help you. You have to apply yourself and find the method of tranquility meditation that will take you to this point of calm and stillness

You have to understand that in an untrained mind, the mental formations are manipulating and steering your ability of decision making. It is steering all the possibilities and selecting one thing, based on confidence, our liking and disliking, your inherent personality type,... etc. and forcing consciousness to approve and accept the chosen priority by justifying it after the fact. Then consciousness blindly takes what is selected by the mental formation and runs with the flag into the battlefield to defend and justify the selection. Whether you are winning (or if you are losing), whether you are getting what is most liked (or you dislike your selection) is it leading you to your well-being? That is the important question.

In the last two hundred plus years we were blindfolded into accepting that science is the truth and that other teachings are unproven theories of mystics. But where does science lead the human being in the ethical and moral sphere? It leads to a place where there are no ethical values, no sensitivity to the environment such as global warming, and no sensitivity to the needs of underprivileged or poor people.

It took over 200 years and even now some do not understand how much the whole world has accepted as truth, that which is not for their well-being. All this technology, new development and progress where is it leading? It is leading to more conflict, wars, frustration and suffering. The best is to be patient and see whatever there is in the depth of the mind. Whenever there is no pre-planned or pre-meditated event or action available, see how the mind, mental volition in this context, is going to take control. It becomes restless and many alternative suggestions arise to stimulate and excite the mind.

The Refined Mind that has Mastered Desire, Hatred and Delusion

In the Paṃsudhovaka Sutta the Buddha said, that before refinement of the mind through meditation it is basically running through the cycle of desire, hatred and delusion. But once you keep mental formations under control, when the mind is refined, there is another kind of thinking that takes place. Suggestions, ideas and proposals will take their place. Once you remove the gross thoughts, you see what is in the depth of the mind - very subtle formations are arising.

The Buddha has claimed that an untrained mind runs on these three tendencies (desire, hatred and delusion. But once you understand it and do away with them, then according to the Buddha, six other very subtle tendencies may come to surface. If you do not control or master the gross ones, you never see these subtle formations. Even if you recognize them, they appear to be beneficial and in your best interest, but in the long term they are misleading. Until you come up to this level, you never confront with them directly. Even if you confront them, it appears to be beneficial, but ultimately you lose the present moment mindfulness. It never allows the mind to be here and now. You end up with daydreaming, fantasizing and story-telling that you feel is beneficial to your well-being. The Theravada tradition has identified six of these kinds of underlying tendencies.

Six mental proliferations that tend to distract you when you have subdued gross desire, hatred, and delusion are:

1. You think about your family, relatives and close friends and how you can share this knowledge and advise them. You feel that it is very beneficial to think about your dear and near ones and you happily engage in a dialogue with them. You forget that you have lost your mindfulness and don't realize that you are losing the present moment.

Ultimately you get engrossed with and lost in thinking about your loved ones and advising them.

2. You think about becoming a kind and generous person and, how you plan to help others. It appears like compassion which you feel is skillful. Therefore you continue to make plans on how you are going to work for the welfare of others. You are day dreaming and fantasizing in a very prolific way, but do not realize that this too is delusion and that the peace of mind, freedom and relief that you have got from not-thinking is lost.
3. You may think of past misdeed and misbehavior, verbal or physical which were unskillful and plan to change your ways. You realize that for healthy development of the mind you have to do away with all the verbal and physical unskillful deeds. Therefore, you think about the kind of person you are going to be in the future. You feel that it is possible to even change others and completely do away with the physical and verbal unskillful, but in reality you are fantasizing and in a dream.
4. You start thinking of your health and all the ailments you have. I have diabetes, or high blood pressure, or high cholesterol,...etc. and plan for healthy changes in diet with more exercise. You plan the wholesome food you are going to eat and the exercise program or gym you are going to join. You plan to start a daily meditation practice with yoga and walking to keep the body supple. When the gross desire, hatred, and delusion/incomprehension are gone, this type of proliferation that you mistake as skillful thinking can happen. I will never do anything foolish again to jeopardize my health and I will live a long and healthy life. This is known as *amara vitakka* in Pali.

5. You think that you know the deep, profound dhamma, and plan how you are going to share it with others. Ultimately you dream of becoming a popular world teacher or meditation master. All these kinds of thoughts are going to happen and you plan how you will earn fame and gain and all kinds of praise in the future.
6. You start thinking about the news you have missed during the time of the meditation retreat. No radio, newspaper, or television for 10 days. You don't know if a tornado or flood is on the way or if the value of the dollar has risen or dropped in the currency market. You start thinking of how you can get this information regarding the current affairs and the news you are missing.

The mind pollutes this pure, peaceful state with all kinds of thoughts which are not really important or urgent and each and every one provides food for the next thought moment and the arising consciousness. One either regrets the miss deeds of the past, vows not to make the same mistakes or goes into the future with grandiose plans of being a better person. Consciousness is happily grasping at this anchorage and keeps on proliferating. Consciousness feeds on this acceleration of runaway thoughts.

This is how the mental proliferation is going to take the upper hand. Unfortunately, each and every time you see this proliferation as being an act of kindness, generosity, compassion or beneficial to your wellbeing. It seems as if you are working for your benefit, but in truth you are working for the ego, the conceit, and your desire (*taṇhā, mana ditthi*). As you are unaware of the truth, you continue to let it happen. You do not understand that this is a subtle way to justify the desire, behind the conceit, and a subtle way to boost the ego. However, if you can identify them as such, diagnose and understand them for what they really are, you can master them and become like the Buddha. However, this is very rare unless you are well prepared because whenever there are benevolent thoughts

arising, you do not know that they are just the crafty mind promoting the ego.

This is the point where you have to understand the crafty mind. This mental proliferation, under the guise of being beneficial, good and skillful thinking is taking advantage of your innocence. Therefore you must be well prepared. You have to be self-critical. Everything happening under such circumstances may be justified by your liking and disliking, justified by what you have heard already as good and this is rational and reasonable and it is worth taking as a view, but it has its own weakness. Therefore, watch out for thoughts that arise in the guise of being beneficial. You have to be your own teacher. The Buddha says that it is unbecoming to think that someone else can help you because you are your own savior from this stressful experience of *samsāra*.

All the rational decisions you have made, viewpoints you have defended, all the Dhamma you have heard, your selections based on liking and disliking and your confidence in the Dhamma and your teacher may be good. However, the Buddha said that there is something better. First of all you have to do away with the unskillful (*akusala*) and then come to the skillful (*kusala*). When you come to this stage you get the opportunity to give up the good and select the greater good. This is the crux of insight meditation. Even if you earn this solitude, freedom, peace of mind, contentment and satisfaction, if you are not understanding and appreciating it that means you are still craving to have more exciting or better next moment thinking. By this very desire and thinking, you are corrupting the present moment. Working towards this solitude or stillness is the first step. Protecting the solitude from subtle constructed or fabricated thoughts and mental proliferation that promote the ego is the second step.

When we are young, up to about six years of age, we had this solitude, freedom, and peace of mind, but we did not appreciate it because we did not know its value. After six years you start to

experience stress, friction and mental frustration. After you experience this stress you are lost in thought. However, the good thing is, when you practice again and again you are going to get to this experience many, many times. Do not focus on how many times you have taken the wrong path. Let that go; it is in the past that cannot be changed. Next time when you practice you will experience it again.

Therefore, one has to understand this mental proliferation that appears as being very productive, progressive, and taking care of one's own well-being for what it really is. You must reflect on the past mistakes and see that this 'beneficial' thinking and proliferation do not lead to the solitude, peace of mind, and freedom. Therefore, first you have to experience this freedom and solitude so that you can appreciate the same.

Disclaiming of the Subtle 'Beneficial' Thoughts

There are a few tactics the Buddha gave to overcome 'the crafty mind coming in the guise of beneficial thinking'. He said that when you come up to this level where the gross desire, hatred and incomprehension are mastered to expect the 'beneficial' proliferation to arise. Do not claim this future planning, 'beneficial productivity', and creativity as mine. Instead knowing that this is self-promotion of the ego, disclaim them as this is not me, this is not mine, this is not my soul¹⁷.

Even if in the midst of the beneficial thinking if a stray malicious thought appears, do not react to it. Don't assume this as me, mine or myself.

¹⁷ This is done with understanding of the process of cause and effect that results in the birth and dissolution of a mind; the truth of impermanence, suffering and not self of the five aggregates; and the operation of the doctrine of dependent origination that leads to birth and suffering. It is not a mechanical verbalizing of the words.

If you claim it as mine you succumb to the situation, are committed and you accumulate karmic forces. The moment you disclaim whatever is happening there is no accumulation of karmic forces. Therefore, you maintain your purity and innocence.

In the Ānāpānassati Sutta, the Buddha mentions that you must develop equanimity, (*vivekanissitaṃ*, *virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ*, and *vossaggaparināmiṃ*) to just observe. You observe the good, the bad and the neutral mental formations and the mental proliferation with no desire to grasp, avert or change. Look at it in a very relaxed manner; don't get involved with any of the mental formations. If it is good you must not grasp and cling to it. If it is bad, you must not get disheartened and frustrated, and create desire to avert and change it. You have to understand that these are just bubbles arising in the water and it is a natural phenomenon and observe them in a relaxed manner. That means you are to familiarize yourself and master this detached non-reactive observation a thousand and one times. Just observe arising and passing away of the bubbles in a still clear pond.

Another good example of non-reactive observation is how you observe the clouds in an open area on a beautiful sunny day. You are lying on the ground watching the sky and you see the clouds pass. They move across the sun and block the sun and move on further letting the sun shine through again. Are you going to recognize and identify that these are clouds? They are just arising and passing away (*vivekanissitaṃ*, *virāganissitaṃ*). The sun is far, far away and the clouds cannot touch it. They are just covering it temporary at a low level, way below the sun. Likewise our thoughts, perception, feelings, consciousness and our body, are just like the passing clouds. Some of our feelings and thoughts are good, some are bad. If we identify as good and bad we develop the likings and disliking. Observing them in a free and relaxed manner, you do not let the thoughts proliferate. You do not colour them, manipulate them, or steer them in a particular direction. You just

let them arise and pass away. You let go of them as they arise (*nirodhanissitam*).

Begin by observing the cessation or passing away of the thoughts. When a thought is recognized observe its disappearing or ending. When a feeling is recognized observe its ending. Whenever perception is recognized observe its ending. When you practice observing the cessation you may start to see the arising. The arising may be irritating or frustrating but the disappearance of anything is leading you back to the solitude, freedom and peace of mind (*vossaggaparinānim*). Then you see more than just the arising of the thoughts and feelings, the disappearance becomes more prominent. If we are to focus on the appearing part only, we tend to get frustrated and tense. You chastise yourself for the unacceptable quality of the thoughts, feelings or perception. But, if you are to see the disappearing part you are back again with peace. Ultimately what happens is not that bad things are not arising, of course bad things are arising. Do not get involved. Just let go of these with a calm mind. You must maintain the rule of thumb that the main thing is not to worry and to be non-judgmental.

Restraining the Ego by Disregarding the Other People's Opinion of You

From an external point of view, one can say that a non-reactive person is indifferent, callous, insensitive or thick skinned. But if you are affected by what people say or think you will reflect on this and your mind slips from the present moment. So your main aim is to keep the mind on the present moment experience, here and now. Therefore you have to be equanimous, equipoised, and unattached to the arising phenomena. You may be observing form, feelings, perception, fabrications, or consciousness. It applies to all the aggregates and mind objects. Understand that whatever the wattage of the electricity you are handling, you are insulated as long as your rubber gloves are protecting you. The quality of the

mind objects, feelings and perception cannot damage you. Therefore make sure you put on the gloves of *satisampajañña*.

That is the way the meditator must practice choice-less awareness and non-reactive observation. Be just aware of whatever arises. It will never tarnish or corrupt you. With practice you will see the results of equanimity. But, how do you explain the reason of your indifference to others? Everyone misunderstands. People say that this is escapism. If we are to justify each and every accusation, you will never get a chance to experience this level of mindfulness. Therefore, you have to ignore everything including what others think of you. The Buddha said to practice and see it again and again, prove it to yourself on an experimental basis. Habitually you feel that your liking and disliking is something to be justified and proved to others, and approved by others. Therefore you have conflict and argue and fight with others who have different views and opinions.

All thinking is leading to strengthening your liking and disliking, your habits, or your personality traits. But under the light of Vipassanā, you put aside self-criticism and let it go. Let the non-reactive observation happen again and again. This is the only way you can understand the process of the development of mental formation. So far what you did was to blindly approve the selections. When the consequences arise you are disappointed, frustrated and tense. With this method of non-reaction, you understand the role of mental volition as nutriment and mental fabrications. Do not commit, approve or second it. Just let it arise and pass away without coming into fruition.

I do not know whether you can do it by practice or if it is your inherent nature and comes naturally to you. People say that in fifty percent of persons it is their inherent nature. Some people say by training you can get to the fifty percent level. It is an open discussion with no formal conclusion. Therefore whatever your nature, even if inherently you are not familiar with this process,

slowly, one day you will prove to yourself that this is a non-stressful, calm and refined way that leads to peace of mind and happiness. Mindful non-reactive observation is a mature, more refined, peaceful and calm manner that is less stressful than mindless reactions with strong emotions to every thought that arises. It is by experiencing this truth that you have to prove it to yourself.

The Buddha has shown you the method. He never claimed to be a savior. Neither can any brahma (god), deva or mara save you. Nor can they do it for you. You have to practice, observe your mind, experience and test for yourself. You have to put this teaching into practice, together with the restraint of the other nutriments, to see how often this mental volition, sometimes referred to as will, is going to take the stressful path if you do not know (ignorant of) what it is doing. If you recognize and experience mindfulness with clear comprehension, you can see what is happening in the depth of your mind clearly and it is easier to follow these instructions.

Therefore, all the good qualities you have developed, the spiritual powers - the mental faculties of confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom - must be geared, focused to experience the peace of a non-reactive mind. Then only can one understand how much of selection and decision making is happening without your awareness. When you see this, don't get frightened with the contents of what you observe because it is only now that you are seeing what is happening in the depth of your mind. You can see its trends, its behavioral patterns, and each and every time you see you are gaining a certain level of mastery over your mind. You have a long journey and process to follow before making any decision and then in the end, the beautiful thing is that you do not have to make any selections or decisions. By mere practicing, it is leading you to the least stressful point of peace and freedom. You are learning to be accepting of the present moment experience with equanimity.

Chapter 8

Consciousness as Nutriment and as One of the Five Aggregates

“Monks, there are these four nutriments, for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those to be born. Which four?”

Physical food, gross or refined as the first,

Contact as the second,

Mental Volition the third and

Consciousness the fourth.”

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsankhaya Sutta

Summary of Chapter 7

- The proximate cause for the arising of fabrications is ignorance. The Pali word *avijja* (ignorance) refers to not knowing/experiencing of the four noble truths and the true nature of all phenomena. The proximate cause for the arising of consciousness is fabrications. It is the nutriment of mental volition and fabrications that are selecting and guiding the type of consciousness as eye, ear, nose,..etc.)
- The nutriment of mental volition is influenced and defiled by perception and feeling taking the role of subtle mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*). By the time mental volition and the subtle mental fabrications have gone through numerous cycles of defilement and it is aggregated, it is known as fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) and it has accumulated

kamma potential. It is due to ignorance that we are unaware of this process of defilement.

- We use non-reactive observation or bare attention to observe the nutriment of mental volitions without commitment and entanglement. One observes the thoughts arise and pass away like how one would watch the clouds on a beautiful sunny day with detached indifference.
- The gross defilements that corrupt mental volitions are thoughts of desire, hatred and ignorance. When these are restrained with non-reactive observation the mind is said to be refined. The mind is peaceful, pure and free. One must protect this hard earned freedom with mindfulness. If not one will lose the experience of being in the present moment -"I am hear now"
- There are six types of proliferation that tend to arise when the mind is refined from gross desire, hatred and ignorance. One can observe subtle defilements that come in the guise of beneficial factors to destabilize the refined mind. One either regrets the misdeeds of the past, vows not to make the same mistakes or goes into the future with grandiose plans of being a better person. These are restrained and mastered by observing the mental volition as nutriment with steadfast mindfulness and clear comprehension (*satisampajañña*).
- One must be well prepared and recognize these proliferations as promotion of conceit and boosting of ego. Though they seem compassionate we must give up the lesser good for the greater good of the peace and solitude of the mind. If not the crafty mind will indulge in fabrications that seem beneficial and your hard earned peace, purity and freedom will be lost.

- You must experience this freedom by mastering the nutriment. If you have not experienced this freedom you will not understand the burden and stress that is released when “benevolent” mental volitions and fabrications are restrained.
- When the mind is very pure, it is ready to accept things as they are. You are aware that subtle mental volitions that may appear to be beneficial but are detrimental to your liberation are bound to arise. Therefore, even mental volitions that appear to be benevolent should be restrained with steadfast mindfulness and clear comprehension.

We have discussed the first three nutriment - physical nutriment (breath), contact as nutriment and mental volition as nutriment in the previous chapters. We have also learned how to master or subdue them through tranquility meditation, choice-less awareness and non-reactive observation.

The fourth and last nutriment is consciousness. We will be discussing consciousness as nutriment in this chapter. If you look back, you will remember that the cause for this Sutta being dispensed by the Buddha was because of the wrong view of a monk named Sāti. It was because consciousness is a nutriment and also one of the aggregates and the complexity of this subject that the monk Sāti developed this pernicious, wrong view that consciousness is eternal. Just like the mental volition as nutriment, consciousness also has different facets, nuances, and meanings based on its function.

Doctrine of Dependent Origination/Co-Arising

In the last chapter we discussed the first two steps of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. In this chapter we will add the third and the fourth step.

1. With ignorance as cause fabrications arise

2. With fabrications as cause consciousness arises
3. With consciousness as cause name-form (*nāma-rupa*)¹⁸ arises
4. With name-form as cause the six sense bases arise.

Name-form cannot arise if consciousness is not present. In this context consciousness is nutriment or one of the basic requirements for the feeding and the arising of name-form. However, where there is name-form there is consciousness. And where there is consciousness there is name-form. This is because in this context name (*nāma*) is comprised of five common actions that together represent consciousness¹⁹ or the mental part of the mind (*citta*). These five actions that arise together are: feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention. Form or materiality represents the internal sense base and external object/form such as sound, smell, tangible object,... etc. *nāma-rupa* together is the birth of the mind (*citta*).

The sensing that occurs when name-form (*nāma-rupa*) arises is pure and the pure mind of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and identifying/remembering that arises at the moment of coming together of the causes is known as the *Pabhassara Citta*. It is the very first mind (*citta*) formed in each of the six sense organs when sensing occurs. It is exceedingly pure and very clear. The *Pabhassara Citta*, is not corrupted by, delusion, anger, desire, sloth, doubt, restlessness or any other defilement. Whenever a *Pabhassara Citta* arises in a sense organ, it is an effect of a previous kamma. Therefore, it doesn't contain any defilements or impurities. All the un-wholesome mental actions occur in the faculty of the mind. This happens only after, when thinking occurs

¹⁸ *Nāma rupa* is also translated to English as mentality and physicality/materiality

¹⁹ *Vedaṇā, sanna, cetana, passa and manasikara* in Pali

in the faculty of the mind. As we cannot observe the pure mind resulting from name-form the Buddha grouped together or aggregated several sets of actions so that we could observe the arising and passing away of the mind as the five aggregates.

This is a complex subject. This teaching is complex because the first few steps of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination address re-becoming and also represent the arising and passing away of the mind from one thought moment to another.

Death and Re-becoming

The primary purpose of the Buddha was the ending of birth, and the suffering resulting from birth. The first four steps of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination address this event and the changes that take place in the mind at the time of death and re-becoming. The Buddha has taken one aggregate at a time to show the predominant function of each step of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. However the five aggregates are present together in every arisen mind

For example when we say ignorance leads to fabrications we are talking of ignorance in the mind (*citta*) or ignorance in the five aggregates. The five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, fabrication and consciousness - together constitute the mind. Fabrication (*saṅkhāra*) is the aggregate that was affected directly by the effect of ignorance and is recognized and visible to the meditator because it is aggregated.

The intention or (*cetanā*) in (*nāma-rupa*) is a result (*vipāka*) of past kamma and not constructed or fabricated by skilful or unskilful kamma (*saṅkhāra*)²⁰. We will address fabrication by unskilful

²⁰ Fabrications can be subtle like a line drawn in water that disappears immediately, moderate like a line drawn in the sand on the beach that gets

thoughts (defilements) to observe this change. The term fabrications or *saṅkhāra*, is used after the mind is corrupted by desire and unskillful thoughts. What changes have taken place in the mind when several sets of repeated actions and several minds have been aggregated?

Both perception (*saññā*) - distinguishing seeing from sound, smell, taste... etc. and feeling (*vedanā*) - distinguishing feeling as likable, not likable or neutral is pure in the first mind, name and form (*nāma-rupa*) formed in each of the six sense organs when sensing occurs. Even a Fully Awakened Being can distinguish a feeling as likable, not likable or neutral. They do not, however, defile the pure feeling with attachment and desire which results in fabricated formations (*saṅkhāra*).

In addition to identifying an object and remembering, the faculty of the mind has the special ability to construct thoughts within the faculty. These thoughts or actions of the faculty of the mind which are referred to as thinking are fabricated with conditioned perceptions (*saññā*) that have identified the form and evaluated the feeling with desire as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

The consciousness in step two and three is re-becoming consciousness (*patisandi viññana*) or a new thought moment of the living being. The fabrication that leads to re-becoming consciousness is not selected by the dying person. It is based on a grave action²¹, death proximate action or habitual tendencies of the individual. In most cases it is habitual tendencies as few individuals have committed a grave action or have an overriding death proximate action.

washed away at high tide or strong like a line carved on a rock with a sharp knife. Strong fabrications have strong *kamma* potential that can cause great suffering or great happiness based on unskillful and skillful fabrications.

²¹ The five grave actions are killing the mother, father or an Arahant, shedding the blood of the Buddha, and causing disharmony in the sangha.

The arising of name-form (*nāma-rupa*) signifies the birth of a new being (or a new thought moment). *Nāma* is represented by feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention,. The materiality in form is represented by the four great elements and the derived elements from the four. The first name-form (*nāma-rupa*) that arises when sensing takes place is pure. The sense bases in step four of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination represent the functioning organs and resulting arising of feeling. The rest of the Doctrine explains how the corruption takes place. In each step where an aggregate is used, all five aggregates of the mind are present because none of the five can exist alone. The sense base is the one that is active next as it gives rise to contact which results in feeling.

This is the theoretical explanation given in the Pali Canon. We have to first try to understand and get the book knowledge. Then we have to examine, analyze, discuss and get the analytical or rational understanding.

Ultimately, due to cause and effect, the whole selection criterion is decided upon by the nutriment of mental volition and mental fabrications. This influences the aggregate of fabrications which in turn influences consciousness and the name-form of the new being.

In summary, ignorance leads to fabrications which lead to (re-)becoming) consciousness which leads to name-form (in the new being) which leads to the six sense bases that lead to Feeling....

For ease of understanding, the Buddha gave this linear representation of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. On the surface it appears to be a simple chain reaction of factors. However, when it is happening it is multi-dimensional, matrix. But this linear relationship is required for one to get the basic idea and the theoretical knowledge of cause and effect.

Therefore, if one can recognize when fabrications direct the consciousness and the selection, one knows that it results in the

arising of a mind, or the five aggregates. Name-form which includes the sense base is the first to arise in a new being. If the required causes are present together, then the effect will take place. As such the only way to control or slow down the effect or result is to manage, control or restrain the cause. This is the only way that one has a certain amount of controlling capacity to experience what is going to happen in the future. To develop this restraint we have to understand what has happened, what is happening and what is going to happen. What has happened cannot be changed but we can learn from it. What is happening is in the present moment and with mindfulness and clear comprehension it can be restrained. What is going to happen (re-becoming) will then over time be restrained to a shorter and shorter number of births until there is no more re-becoming, with understanding, present moment mindfulness/clear comprehension (*satisampajañña*), and practice.

Slowing down the Speed of Habitual Tendencies

If one feels that what is happening is not in one's best interest, one is always seeking improvement or a greater goodness. However, achieving this is a challenge as what is happening in the present moment is already coming with a momentum. It is in acceleration mode due to our past habitual tendencies. Therefore one has to observe it very patiently for a long time to see the selection criteria, and the manner in which our fabrications are generated. Also, one needs to be aware how each and every thought moment influences and colours the consciousness which then affects or influences the experience of name-form.

It is very difficult to see the inner mechanism and understand the workings of an electric generator when it is running at a very fast speed. Similarly, one has to understand that if the mind is generating an unskillful or destructive current at a very high speed that we cannot stop it completely. We can, however, slow it down. Therefore, when one is ready to see the workings of the mind, one has to develop mindfulness and slow down the pace. That is why

we say that one must perform all actions silently, mindfully and slowly to develop mindfulness.

In other words if you are very active, dynamic, and working at a fast pace, lots of actions, experiences and phenomena are happening with very little or no mindfulness. It will be very difficult for you to see the underlying mechanism. Instead, you have to slow down, be relaxed have less duties and a non-dramatic nature with higher amount of mindfulness. Then only can one understand and see what is happening in a more clear and understandable manner.

Observing the Nutriment of Mental Volition to Determine one's Nature

If you wish to see the reflection of your face in a pond, you have to ensure that there are no ripples or waves. Then you can see a clear reflection of your face. When there are ripples or waves, then the reflection becomes distorted.

It is the same with the mind. First you have to master mental physical (breath) and mental verbal restrain (noting) before one begins the development of mental restrain Therefore when one is meditating if the meditation object is still visible, and if one is still using noting, then that means that you have to keep on practicing tranquility meditation. One must reach the point when one can no longer feel the breath and one is in solitude, free and relaxed. Objects are there but only at the periphery. You must be familiar with this experience until you feel that it is your real home. If you see that your solitude, freedom and peace of mind is disturbed by thoughts, sounds or pain you should understand that the mind needs to be calmed down further.

Once you reach this kind of a space or solitude, then you have to patiently observe what is happening in the depths of the mind. There are sounds and possibly some pain at the peripheral level,

and the thoughts are coming and going. They never cease to exist. But you must observe and understand which type of thought attracts and excites the mind. That indicates the tendency of the mind. Some people complain that their mind is often thinking, daydreaming or fantasizing. They say my main problem is thinking. Some others may say that the pain is unbearable and that they cannot sit and focus on their breath. Some say that sounds are disturbing their peace of mind.

Whenever there is a disturbance it indicates who you are. It is an indication of your nature. Which distraction becomes prominent is not due to your will, volition or intention it is due to your habitual tendencies. Your intention is to keep the mind as calm and still as possible. But you have no control. This indicates your vulnerability. This indicates a pre-determined pattern of the mind. This indicates your habitual tendencies, your nature and who you are.

The consciousness is constantly seeking an anchor. However, it is mental volition as nutriment that leads to constructed thoughts that makes the selection. It is making the selection based on your liking and disliking and your habitual tendencies. The habitual tendencies indicate your inner intrinsic nature. No one else can determine your habitual tendencies and your nature. You have to do this by patiently watching your mind.

Even after you develop deep stillness of mind or restrain of physical, verbal and mental fabrications, the drama is still going on. At this point you must observe the subtle thoughts in a diagnostic manner similar to a doctor examining a patient. The patient is having symptoms and it may be frustration due to pain, or it may be boosting of the ego. You must be able to recognize the subtle formations and the underlying causes yourself.

Thinking without a Thinker

The Buddha said, that under such circumstances, whatever thoughts you observe, are just happening. You are not the thinker. Even if you are not intentionally and consciously planning for the future, a passive thinking is taking place. We have been conditioned, since unknown time, to always indulge in future planning or some form of passive inconsequential thinking. Therefore you will observe either some passive inconsequential thinking or some thinking based on habitual tendencies.

You have to understand that even under such circumstances, if there is any kind of active thinking, active future planning, it leads to kamma potential and you have to take responsibility for this. Your karmic forces will take effect the moment you have let the guard (of mindfulness) down. You will go into constructed thoughts referred to as fabrications. You must be prepared, and instructed not to have any kind of active or conscious thinking, or planning, and you must be patient. Even if you do not have intentional thinking and planning, habitual tendencies or your intrinsic nature are going to take the place of intentional thoughts.

Disclaiming the Unintentional Thoughts

You are observing a human mind. When this happens do not claim this as my mind and my thoughts. Just see that you are in a very deep layer of the mind. You are not at the tip of an iceberg but deep below the surface of the water. Observe as if you are an archeologist or deep-sea observer. You must have enough data for a comprehensive feasibility study. If you jump to conclusions with your theoretical understanding of what you want to do, or try to accelerate the progress, lack of information will set you back.

Each and every distraction or thought is surfacing either due to desire, conceit, or due to your egocentric thinking. As an experiment or challenge, try not to make any movement, avoid any

active thinking, and any conscious action. You will see that you cannot stop the thoughts even though you are mindful, restrained and calm. You can see a huge speed, and acceleration that is overpowering your determination. Observe for as long as you can.

The Buddha said, that if there is thinking, if there is future planning, if there are habitual tendencies, the consciousness (*viññāna*) takes advantage of it and grasps and establishes itself upon that. When you practice restraint of intentional thinking, then that is restraint at the utmost level of spirituality.

Your restraint regarding the physical activity is something other people can see, and guide. Your restraint regarding verbal articulation is also visible to others and others can help you. But, where mental volition as nutriment is concerned, you are the patient and the doctor. Observation is the medicine. No one can help you. You have to work at it consistently over a long period of time. Ultimately the thinking will slow down. But if you provide the nutriment of mental volition to constructed thoughts (fabrications), consciousness will take control. Future planning and the other habitual tendencies will provide the momentum for consciousness to take over. You will then understand that you have to do away with un-mindful future planning even if it happens in the guise of being beneficial.

You may question as to what is wrong with thinking about benevolent actions such as helping others? What is wrong with thinking about your family and loved ones and their betterment, you own health, and working towards not repeating past mistakes?

But at the root of each and every one of these benevolent plans there is desire. Conceit is trying to reestablish your ego. Consciousness is losing ground and struggling to reestablish the ego. Instead of thinking about unskillful or bad things such as physical, verbal and mental misconduct, of the past it is focusing on skillful things planned for the future. This future planning is

feeding the ego. Therefore you have to be aware and prepared. Now you are in a sphere where you cannot take on social and ethical responsibilities, you cannot enlighten other people, the only thing you can do is maintain this pure state, maintain this solitude, freedom and peace you earned. Whether it is thinking of past unskillful deeds or future skillful deeds it is a mental action. At this point the contents or quality of the contents is not the issue. Each and every thought gross or subtle is causing ripples and waves in the still mind. Each and every ripple or wave is distorting the reflection.

Therefore, you must restrain future planning. Only then can you observe the underlying habitual tendencies. If not, the constructed thoughts and fabrications will overpower and murky the stillness of the mind. The Buddha said that these habitual or underlying tendencies which form in the depths of the mind lose their power when you isolate them and look at them with non-reactive observation. You have to remove layer by layer starting with the gross all the way to the subtle. Then only you can see clearly that the habitual tendencies are still there. When you can observe these tendencies and you are bold and radical and strong enough to disclaim them -- this is not me, this is not mine, this is not myself -- then they become weak, lose their power and pass away. You must be well prepared and know that these tendencies have desire as their root and conceit and ego promotion as the goal. You must be aware that they are not leading towards your well-being and liberation. They are leading to the perpetuation of samsara, tension, stress and frustration. Then only you will be successful in mastering mental volition and fabrications.

When you have slowed down and weakened the stream of fabrications, then consciousness has no power. The consciousness, finds no foothold, or anchor to grasp (*appatiṭṭhita viññāna*). Whenever consciousness finds no foothold, then it cannot create name-form (*nāma-rupa*). For the first time, you understand and experience an un-manifested consciousness. The consciousness is

tamed. When you come up to this level you are one with nature, completely merged with the present moment experience rather than trying to steer or manipulate, the present moment.

Challenges of Teaching the Restraint of Nutriment and the Experience of the Un-manifested Consciousness

This manner of weaning the nutriments is a very challenging yet subtle art. Once you reach this point you understand through experimentation the ways and means that is right for you. You cannot find this in the books. Therefore when you go there, and see for yourself, you understand for the first time the magnificence and greatness of the Buddha. There is no literature and you cannot learn it from a teacher. The Bodhisatta had to realize this truth on his own by the power of His omniscient mind.

You too are a genius to find a way to see that consciousness can be un-manifested and that it is possible as a human being to realize this experience in this very life. But how does one teach this personal experience to another person. That is the most difficult task of a teacher. It is a challenge because, at present you are providing nutriment in truck loads, at great speed to sustain the five aggregates.

The Current Reality

Venerable Nyanaponika wrote a very good book on the “Four Nutriments of Life.” He said people were upset when he introduced restraint of physical nutriment. “They think I am going to chastise them for eating meat. They think I am bringing up a sensitive topic that will lead to arguments about wholesome and unwholesome food”. Venerable Nyanaponika said that whether it is meat, fish or vegetarian, healthy or not healthy is not the issue. It is the greed and the excessive consumption of food that needs to be restrained. How many truckloads of food and drink have you consumed,

digested and passed as excrement? How many hours have you spent at the gym to burn the excess calories you have gained by over eating?

How much contact is made from the five sense organs? How much of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and tangible feeling arise from morning till night? How much of thinking of past actions and words you have spoken and how much of future planning for your benefit and the benefit of others has occurred over your life time. How do you begin to teach restraint in a society when there is an overload of high speed feeding of the five aggregates? How do you introduce such concepts to a society when every TV program, movie, billboard and show promotes the feeding of the aggregates with more and more exotic and enticing programs and advertisements that promote the desire for nutriments? Who will believe, understand or want to even try restraining of the nutriments to experiment and realize its potential?

From Disease, Stress and Suffering to the Experience of the Un-manifested or Un-established (Awakening)

When the nutriments are unrestrained and their excessive consumption is encouraged by advertisements, television and society, all the five aggregates are proliferating with great momentum. Whenever you reach your full potential and become a top performer in your career, your ego becomes the center of the resulting frustration, and tension of your high-performance lifestyle. Your mind is running from one thing to another at an unimaginable speed as your dynamic and fast paced life style demands multi-tasking. The mind moves from seeing, to hearing, identifying, remembering, thinking, planning speaking and acting. Each time there is contact a new mind is created and the old one disappears. Twenty four hours is not enough to keep up with the workload and you are still striving for more; more wealth, possessions, experiences and power. Even sleep does not stop the

racing mind. You start the next morning with the tension and it gets worse as the day unfolds. Where will this lifestyle lead to at your deathbed?

All these things are happening at great speed, and you have no controlling power. If you wish to have the controlling power you have to disclaim, and weaken the nutriment. The challenge is to understand the un-established consciousness (*appatiṭṭhita viññāna*). This experience is liberation or awakening and it happens instantaneously.

The Buddha proclaimed as follows “There arose in me the stainless eye, there arose in me knowledge and wisdom, and there arose in me light (*Cakkhum udapādi, ñāṇam udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi*). There is no other way to put this experience into words. However, the Buddha was not talking about his light, his wisdom or his knowledge. It is ‘a’ knowledge and wisdom that He was talking about. At this point in time, only He had experienced the un-manifested; only He had the evidence of the experience. But the Buddha knew that it was available to others. Therefore the Buddha proclaimed to His disciples that if you know the path, then you can cut through the defilements with diligence so that you too can experience the deathless.

This un-manifested or un-established consciousness or *appatiṭṭhita viññāna* is what we are working towards. When this state of consciousness is explained, many lay devotees ask (if one realizes this state) how one can maintain this particular state forever. Then they question the existence and perpetuation of the human race. This is not about keeping that thought moment forever. It is about observing the state for at least a split second. Then only you can say you have experienced the whole panorama of life.

In the meditation we practice restraint gradually. When it is happening you can see that when you get close to the center, your motivation wanes. You question why you are meditating. You

cannot justify the time and effort. At the beginning you have many great ideas about *Nibbāna*. But when you go deeper and deeper, you cannot understand what this whole effort is for. Even your faith or confidence fades. Therefore, the Buddha says whenever you become an *Arahant*, you become one without faith (*assaddho*). You become a person who no longer requires faith (*saddhā*). You have no need to depend on faith. What is the use of faith once you have experienced the un-manifested or un-conditioned? Faith is required only when you have not realized or experienced the un-manifested consciousness.

This is how you verify what the Buddha has declared. You validate the experience yourself. When you view it, from a materialistic viewpoint, you become a burden to society. In conventional terms you are of little or no use. What you are doing does not result in political gain, social gain or economic gain, but still you are striving with great energy, sacrificing your whole life, your earnings, your knowledge and everything you have.

You are fighting when you yourself do not know where you are going and what you hope to achieve. The more you understand the nutriment of mental volition, fabrications and the consciousness, the more you feel as if you are caught up slowly into a natural current or flow that is taking you forward. Therefore, as far as the motivational element is concerned, it is no longer required. Things just happen; everything happens naturally. You try your best to be with nature, the natural flow that is sweeping you forward. No longer is there a need to manipulate, steer, or make changes to the current reality. You know that each and everything that you do consciously is going to have a backlash -- you will be creating kamma potential for which you will be accountable. Therefore, the less you become involved and the less motivated you are to change the current reality and take control, the better it will be.

Ultimately you are like a blade of grass thrown into a river. It will be swept along the waterway, floating downstream until it is thrust

into the ocean. You feel one with the ocean as if you have merged with this vast body of water. Your identity disappears. Whether you come from this river or that river does not matter. You are in the center of the consciousness. It is called a merging into the conscious energy or conscious power. Ultimately there is nothing to maintain, everything happens naturally by itself.

Sāti the monk cannot understand this experience. He started with a pernicious view, that consciousness is eternal, and that consciousness goes from this life to another. He accepted and claimed that all the other aggregates are changing - your form or physicality, feelings, perceptions, and fabrications. But the consciousness he claimed is constant, permanent and ever-lasting. But, the Buddha said that if you can understand these four nutriment starting with the physical nutriment, contact as nutriment and, mental volition as nutriment that you can understand theoretically how the consciousness will take control and dictate terms. When the consciousness takes foothold it leads to the next thought moment, which is name-form (*nāma rupa*). The consciousness leads and the resulting name-form validates the direction of the consciousness and perpetuation or re-becoming occurs.

The Moral Dilemma of who is Responsible

Therefore, in the Insight or *Vipassanā* method, we begin with the practice of restrain from the gross to the subtle. When you are observing and trying to restrain these subtle mental volitions as nutriment you will face the ambiguity and dilemma of how to justify the moral responsibility. Up to now, you were answerable and responsible for your mental, verbal and physical fabrications. But once you go beyond that, you see that you are now disclaiming the subtle mental fabrications (*mano saṅkhāra*) as not-self. You are disclaiming them as not ‘me, mine or myself’, based on cause and effect. This phenomenon of me, mine and myself is because you are thinking in terms of space and time. If you think based on

space and time you get caught up in this dilemma. You have to do away with space and time. In order to do away with the space and time you have to see that morality or moral responsibilities works only when the space and time come into being.

To fully understand the whole picture, you have to go to the brim, to the edge or last point, and then dash through to the other side. Once there you cannot assume that even the center of these phenomena is “me, mine, or myself”. You have to disclaim all. After this many things happen. You often come back to the gross area and then you go back to the subtle area. Whenever this happens you must not let the will take control and get the upper hand. If you let it happen, then disclaim, thinking it is not me, it is not mine, it is not myself. Ultimately, you will learn the art. Sometimes it is very difficult to identify. You just do not know, you can't distinguish whether you did it or whether it happened to you.

Overcoming Drowsiness

For example, when in meditation you may fall asleep. When you get up you cannot understand whether you were asleep or if this was a form of relaxed mindfulness. If you are in a group sitting you may feel embarrassed and guilty. You may think it is unbecoming to fall asleep in front of others when you should be meditating. You may even be concerned and embarrassed of what would happen if you collapse and fall down. In Sinhala we have an amusing saying as follows; you claimed that you came to the Meditation Centre to be a Buddha (*Buduwenna*) 'but instead you came to sleep (*budiyanna*). The meditation center is a common place for both!

When such a thing happens, how many times do you have to make the same mistake and disclaim. This is what will happen unless you understand the situation. Whether it is with mindfulness or without mindfulness it is very difficult even for the teacher to identify. He

will not say that you should not sleep and that if you want to sleep you must go to a separate place or your room.

When the Venerable Moggallāna realized the stage of 'stream enterer – *sotāpanna*, he wanted to practice alone. He went to a cave at the top of a mountain and started meditating. Before long he became drowsy and sleepy. Venerable Moggallāna was alone in the cave. This was early in the dispensation of the teachings and the Buddha had only a few disciples. The Buddha was scanning the minds and progress of his disciples with his extrasensory capacity when he saw that Venerable Moggallāna was falling asleep. Venerable Moggallāna went to a cave in order to have peace and quiet and meditate diligently but he is drowsy. The Buddha appeared in front of Venerable Moggallāna and asked him, if he was drowsy and falling asleep. Venerable Moggallāna confirmed that he was by saying, “Yes Lord.”

The Buddha then gave some methods of dealing with drowsiness. All are very simple, practical methods. He said if you feel sleepy observe how your mind is enjoying this relaxed inactive position of the consciousness. If you are appreciating it, definitely you are going to fall asleep. Therefore, if you can catch it at the perception stage and identify your feeling you have a good chance to overcome it.

You can also mobilize the *vitakka/vicāra* with noting such as ‘sleeping, sleeping, sleeping; Or, if you are still noting the in-breath and out-breath or rising and falling of the abdomen, mobilize some energy with mental articulation of the in-breath and out-breath. If you are by yourself you can chant one of the very energetic teachings of the Buddha such as the *Bojjhanga sutta*. The Buddha said “energy is a factor of enlightenment. I practiced; I mastered, and I am telling you, develop the energy”. It is very energizing to use the very words that the Buddha uttered. So you can chant the words of the Buddha as follows: “*Viriya*

sambojjhaṅgo kho Kassapa, mayā sammadakkhāto bhāvito bahulīkato abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati.”

If this does not work, the Buddha recommended the rubbing of the face and body to improve the circulation. He also suggested tugging or pulling the earlobes.” That is what the monks do when they meditate for long hours into the night and get sleepy.

If none of these methods work the Buddha recommended walking meditation and/or washing your face with cold water. If it is late in the night he recommended going outside and looking at the far away lights, the sky, the moon or the stars. If everything fails he recommended taking a nap. Go back to your room and go to sleep with a determination that you will get up in 15 or 30 minutes because otherwise you are just wasting time.

The Buddha never reprimanded Venerable Moggallāna, by saying that he was going to a cave only to fall asleep. The Buddha said that it is very difficult to say whether it is happening due to your intention, habit or because you have not had enough sleep. In the meditation, it is a common occurrence and a puzzle. One has to experiment, make mistakes, learn from the mistakes and determine the appropriate solution for oneself.

Using Mindfulness to Overcome Habitual Tendencies

Before I started meditation I was a smoker. I wanted to give it up but I could not. I didn't have much money, but whenever I had some money I felt so happy and proud to have a cigarette. Then one day I caught a bad cold and still had a cigarette. I got a very bad taste because the sinuses were blocked. I thought that this is the best time to stop smoking.

I stopped smoking and went to Venerable Dhammika and said, “Bhante, today I achieved something. For many years I had a habit of smoking. I made the determination not to smoke and today I have stopped smoking. I am not going to smoke anymore”. Then

he told me, “you are a fool, you are trying to stop this bad habit with just effort in an immature way. You may succeed for some time. Then one day you are going to start smoking again.”

Even the stopping of wrong-doing or bad habits should not be stopped just for the sake of emotion. You should observe your bad habits again and again and see how you can develop mindfulness in relation to your habitual tendencies (smoking). Then you can control it. You have to first see the beginning, the middle and the end of the act of smoking with full mindfulness. Then, there will be times when you will catch yourself only after you have started to smoke. You will feel so disheartened and low in your self-esteem. You may even lose confidence in yourself. Then you begin to understand that even though you want to stop smoking, that you cannot control it. The habit is too strong. Smoking is not a crime like killing and stealing, but one has no control over even a small thing like the stopping of smoking that is for one’s own health.

After a long time of practice you recognize mid-way and ultimately you see the beginning when the longing for a cigarette comes up. The habit begins to fade off slowly. You have to monitor up to the last puff, and then only you can say I see the beginning, I see the middle, I see the end of smoking mindfully with awareness. Only at this point is the situation under control. You will catch yourself before you start smoking just as the longing for a cigarette hits you. Habitual tendencies, especially those that are addictive, are hard to break.

When you decide to be a meditator others expect a higher standard of behaviour from you. You are expected to set an example for others. People observe you carefully and find fault with your conduct and behavior. They say you are a confirmed meditator; you should have flawless morality, concentration and wisdom. Why are you behaving in this irresponsible manner? Not only are you prone to self-criticism, but others are also critical of your words and actions. This is a form of suffering resulting from

meditation. You are meditating to get rid of suffering, but there is another type of suffering resulting from meditation.

Now you can understand what is happening. Your habitual tendencies – be it desire for smoking, anger or even being critical of others are happening with a momentum at high speed. You cannot just stop it with your will-power. You have to slow down and be mindful in all your daily activities. When you slow down, you will realize how little control you have and there will be a lot of self-criticism. But if you are being guided by an experienced teacher, he/she will understand and sympathize with you. However, everyone else, including yourself, will be very critical.

When you see how mental volition as nutriment and the consciousness work, don't be fooled into thinking that it is for your well-being. They have their own personal agenda. What you have to do is not to stop it and kill it, but to observe and then only you can see the beginning, the middle and the end. Then, you will develop so much compassion and sympathy for all persons who are doing misdeeds. They don't have any guidance or skillful training. They don't have any mindfulness, or resources/tools from their past memories that they can use to break these habitual tendencies. They are like robots or living and running based on their emotions of desire and aversion. Just like Pavlov's dogs²². You can understand your humanness and lack of control by the setbacks and mistakes you have made.

Final release will only be when one realizes *Nibbāna* in this very life and *Parinibbāna* when you pass away. However, with meditation you can experience and understand this release or freedom through restraint. Once you experience the whole process, you can understand that your own experience is also directly

²² Pavlov trained dogs to come for meals to the sound of a bell.

applicable to other persons. If you can realize/achieve it, then so can others. There is no difference.

The more you delve into the deeper layers of the nutriments the better you understand the human mind. From the external point of view people may say that you are selfish, because you are moving away from social obligations, your family and friends. You are choosing solitude over the more popular social and party life. But you are slowly moving to the stress-free freedom.

Consciousness as a Magician – Taming the Magician

The Buddha said that once you see for yourself the way it really is, you understand all of humanity. Even when you are in the present moment you understand the whole universe. You now have enough resources to go deep and ultimately deductive knowledge will bridge the understanding and make it universal. This is an endowment, a bonus for your effort and diligence in meditation.

The deep side of this complex teaching is the understanding of consciousness. The Buddha recognized Consciousness as a magician. It performs all kinds of illusions to trick you. If you appreciate the magic, and applaud the performance you will be fooled by the magician's illusion. You have to look at the magic not from the entertainment point of view, but to see how the illusion takes place. You have to go against the grain because what we have been doing so far is appreciating and encouraging the magician by clapping.

Instead, the Buddha gave the key to observe the magic, to see things as they really are from behind the screen in order to observe the illusion behind the trick. Only when you see the process or trick of the magician can you be in control. Otherwise, consciousness, mental volition, contact, or physical nutriment will take control and make decisions. The Buddha said if you practice consistently, you understand that the nutriments have their place and are a necessity.

But we should not be a slave to their terms by constantly feeding them. Instead, you can take the reins into your hands through the practice of restraint.

Start with the visible gross physical and verbal fabrications. Then slowly, enter the depths of the mind by understanding the four nutriments. One can understand the workings of the human mind by mastering the nutriments. Then one can see the Dhamma. You can see how consciousness leads to name-form and how name-form leads to consciousness in the Dependent Origination. If you know the correct path it is leading to the center or the crux of the illusion. Ultimately you see the Dhamma and through the Dhamma you see the Buddha.

You can now observe the Dependent Origination/Co-arising of the mind as follows:

With ignorance as condition mental formations arise²³,

With mental formations as condition consciousness arises,

With consciousness as condition name-form arises,

With name-form as condition the six sense bases arise,

With the six sense bases as condition contact arises,

With contact as condition feeling arises,

With feeling as condition craving arises,

With craving as condition grasping arises,

With grasping as condition becoming arises,

With becoming as condition birth arises,

²³ *Vibhaṅgha sutta (Nidāna saṃyutta)*

With birth as condition decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

Chapter 9

All Four Nutriment Have Craving as the Source (Physical and Contact as Nutriment)

O monks, what is the cause of the arising, decay, and passing away of the four nutriment? It is Craving O Lord.

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta

Chapter Eight Summary

- Using the *Mahā Taṇhāsaṅkhaya sutta* as the topic for this book, we have been exploring and attempting to understand how the wrong, pernicious view, of consciousness being eternal comes into being. So strong is this wrong view that even the other monks found it is difficult to convince the monk Sāti who was a disciple of the Buddha. Ultimately the Buddha intervened and dispensed this complex Sutta to clarify the dangers and folly of this wrong view. He discussed and explained the arising, decay and passing away of the five aggregates including consciousness, based on cause and effect, and the distant and proximate cause for the welfare of all the monks gathered.
- The Buddha pointed out that the proximate cause for the five aggregates including consciousness was the four nutriment – physical nutriment for the body, contact as nutriment for the five aggregates, mental volition (and resulting fabrications) for consciousness and consciousness as nutriment for consciousness.

- It was the dual role of consciousness (as nutriment and as one of the aggregates) and the resulting complexity that contributed to the monk Sāti's false view.
- The Buddha said if one could see the proximate causes functioning, then one would understand that the type of consciousness arises depending on the nutriment. And ceases to exist when the nutriment ceases.
- We discussed that eliminating the nutriments was not possible as it would lead to death but that the nutriments could be restrained and managed. Techniques such as tranquility meditation (physical nutriment of the breath for the body), choice-less awareness (nutriment of contact for the five aggregates), non-reactional awareness/bare attention (nutriment of mental volition and fabrications for consciousness) were used to master the nutriments. Under such circumstances, one can see and understand that consciousness cannot be eternal. Consciousness has its own nature of arising and passing away again and again depending on the nutriment as cause.
- Using this opportunity the Buddha explained that all the five aggregates have the same nature. If one is to see from the beginning to the end of the arising, decay and passing away, then he/she can understand the relevant proximate cause or the nutriment and that they are in a state of flux. They are arising and passing away very swiftly. Accordingly, these five aggregates are also subject to arising and passing away. One who can see the functioning of the nutriment will not come to a wrong conclusion such as the theory of eternalism or nihilism of the five aggregates including consciousness. However, one who cannot see the arising and passing away of the nutriments, such as the monk Sāti, can come to a wrong conclusion that consciousness is eternal.

In the last few chapters we discussed the four nutriment that are feeding and sustaining the arising and cessation of the five aggregates. The Buddha then looked for the cause or the source of the nutriment. Then seeing for himself with his omniscient knowledge, the Buddha gave a conclusive answer. The Buddha said that all the four nutriment have craving as their source, craving as their origin, craving as their reason for arising. If one's mind is developed and mindfulness is steadfast and accompanied by clear comprehension, then one has the direct information and can see for themselves how these wrong, pernicious views regarding the consciousness or any of the aggregates can arise. It comes down to the single factor of not seeing or ignorance of the cause of the origination of the nutriment - craving.

If you study the Four Noble Truths, the first truth is the noble truth of suffering. And then the Buddha gives the cause or reason for suffering - craving. That is what we have arrived at by examining the four nutriment. In this chapter we will discuss and understand how these four nutriment are related to craving.

Seeking the Cause of Physical Nutriment

Let us begin with the physical nutriment. One can see, experience and understand that desire and craving is the cause for excessive eating and drinking. That is why the Buddha made this unique statement, “*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*”. All living beings are dependent on the nutriment. They sustain the born and those waiting to be born. Therefore, all beings have this common characteristic or nature.

As far as the food cycle or the food chain is concerned we can see it happening. Each and every creature, from morning to evening, is seeking nutriment or food/water. The bigger and stronger creatures eat the smaller and weaker ones, both on land and in water. It is an endless cycle. As human beings we too cannot escape from this desire. We have to have our food/drink and to

ensure the continuous uninterrupted supply; we have to have a livelihood.

Based on your upbringing and culture, we consider some of the livelihoods to be justifiable and others to be not justifiable. From the evolution point of view, early human beings were hunters and gatherers. During the time of the Buddha they also had cultivation of various crops and engaged in agriculture. Throughout the Buddhist Canon it has been mentioned that agriculture is one of the justifiable ways of producing one's own food or livelihood.

One can now understand that our desire and need for food which, we can identify as craving, is in turn dependent on meaningful employment. We are totally dependent on food for living. In this context, the Buddha said, “One has to understand first and foremost that suffering is because of not understanding, (ignorance) that the proximate cause for the nutriment - desire or craving - is internal or within”. Because of ignorance we think that the cause is external or outside of us.

By using the *Mahā Tanhāsankhaya sutta* and the physical nutriment as an example we can understand our desire for food/drink and its effects on our life style and livelihood. It is one way of understanding how craving arises. The profound method of teaching that the Buddha often used is that if one can understand the cause of one of the four nutriments, then that can be used to understand the others.

Using the knowledge from Physical Nutriment for Liberation

The very first nutriment, the physical food, has craving as the source and origin. The Buddha said that we can use this knowledge for understanding, and liberation “*āhāraṃ nissāya āhāraṃ pajahati.*” If you know that the problem is within you, you know that the answer is within you. This breakthrough knowledge can be

used to eliminate the cause. One has to carefully study the Buddha's teachings and realize that what we want is not just to be liberated from the nutriment of food, but to use this knowledge of proper usage of food, for liberation from total suffering. This is one of the basic teachings you have to understand if you decide to become a serious meditator.

According to early tradition, when you ordain as a novice monk/nun and enter the Noble Order, you have to reflect on the purpose of food before each meal. You have to understand that the purpose of eating is only to sustain the monkhood or the life style of a renunciate so that one can work towards liberation.

The monks/nuns have four requisites: robes, foods, dwelling, and medicine. Whenever you use robes, food, dwelling, or medicine, each and every time, the Buddha has given a reflection. The purpose of the reflection is to moderate or restrain the usage of these four requisites. Shortly after higher ordination the preceptor has to teach in the ordination hall how to moderate or restrain the usage of these four requisites - robes, food, dwelling, and medicine.

Therefore to see the effects of craving we learn how to restrain intake of food. The Buddha said that before you eat every morsel of food, you have to recite this formula, " I am going to eat this food with understanding. I am not going to eat this for energy, sensuous pleasure, body-building, or to have a beautiful complexion. I am eating in order to alleviate the pain of hunger so as to maintain this body. Therefore, each and every morsel you eat has to be eaten mindfully.

Venerable Sāriputta has instructed monks not to eat to the full capacity of the stomach. He said to stop eating four to five morsels short of a full stomach and drink water. This is the way to ensure that one avoids the discomfort of over eating. By over eating you cause unnecessary problems for yourself and others.

According to a survey published by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the production of food in the present time is more than enough to sustain the world population. Despite this claim, an unthinkable proportion of the world population goes to bed without enough food, in hunger. This is because those in affluent societies are using so much food and also because much is being wasted or thrown into garbage by restaurants. Also it is said that 40% or more of food produced is used by breweries for beer and alcohol, and if production exceeds demand they throw the surplus into the sea in order to maintain the price. In developing countries and in war torn countries such as in some parts of Africa, there is starvation and hunger. Sadly, in other parts of the world there is obesity, diabetes, heart attacks and stroke due to over-eating.

Every one, specifically those who are incorporating mindfulness in their way of life, should act responsibly to ensure the moderation of food. First you will realize that by restraining the food/beverage intake, one can experience the relationship between craving for food and over eating. Second the moderation of physical nutriment helps to eliminate ignorance. Third with moderation of food one is reducing the demand for food and with reallocation of resources, one is reducing world hunger. This could have a positive impact on the collective value of the human race. If one understands that one fourth of their suffering and ignorance is due to not knowing or understanding the nutriment of food, one will make effort to understand how to restrain food intake and bring it to a moderate level.

One of the qualities of the Buddha is that he knows the value of moderating one's food intake. Therefore, whenever you come to a meditation retreat, you observe the precept to refrain from eating solid food after 12 noon. This precept is taken to ensure more time for the practice and less cooking for the lay devotees who donate the food for monks. To reach this balance you must understand the suffering of hunger when there is no food and the suffering of over

eating resulting in disease and obesity. If you do not understand the proper balance, then it will contribute towards the perpetuation of suffering. Once you understand the relationship between food and craving you will begin moderation in eating.

There was one event during the time of the Buddha that highlights this phenomenon. Venerable Ananda, attendant to the Buddha, was very handsome and very good in Dhamma talks. He was very much in demand and often the nuns invited him for Dhamma talks. There was one nun who developed a strong attraction or crush towards Venerable Ananda. Ultimately, the situation escalated. She withdrew, could not eat and refused to even get out of bed in the morning. Eventually she visited a very senior nun and asked for advice. The senior nun instructed another junior nun to pay respect to Venerable Ananda and request him to come for some chanting for a sick nun. Venerable Ananda quickly diagnosed the sickness and realized that this nun was depressed, love sick and, bedridden due to his frequent visits and Dhamma talks to the nuns. Unable to cope with the situation, in desperation, she was requesting some protective chanting and asking for help.

Venerable Ananda said, “Sister, the Buddha has mentioned that this, body, comes into being due to four causes - craving, conceit, food and sexual intercourse with another. All these four are proximate causes for the arising of a being. You know that the Buddha with his infinite wisdom and compassion taught us how to get rid of desire by means of desire. He also taught us how to get rid of conceit by means of conceit and food by means of food. But he has never taught us to use this sexuality or sensuality to get rid of sexuality. When Venerable Ananda gave this discourse, the nun realized that he had diagnosed her disease, the cause of her disease and had come to give her the appropriate treatment.

After saying this Venerable Ananda explained how one can use food in order to get rid of the desire for (overeating) food. He said that the Buddha recommended using contemplative thinking, as

instructed, every time you eat each and every morsel and to chew the food and eat slowly and that is how you can get rid of desire by eating. That is how one can get rid of the desire by means of desire,

He then went on to explain how one can one get rid of the conceit out of the conceit. The Buddha recommended using wise reflection, as instructed on impermanence, un-satisfactoriness and not-self, every time you say or do something out of desire to promote the ego (*taṇhā, māna, ditthi*).

The Buddha however, has instructed you to never enter the realm of sensuality and sexuality. When Venerable Ananda said this the nun knew that Venerable Ananda was aware of her condition. She bowed down, paid respect to Venerable Ananda and asked for forgiveness. Then Venerable Ananda said, “If you understand your disease and your mistake that is good because the Buddha’s dispensation (*āssana*) is not about punishing the wrong doer. Instead it is to teach by making use of that misdeed or related information, as to how one could get rid of that corruption or canker. Venerable Ananda recommended that the nun used restraint of physical nutriment and restraint of conceit or ego building to reduce sensual desire. You can now understand that if you are serious about mindfulness, then whenever you are eating, you have to contemplate. If not, eating is going to create so much of desire not only for food but also for all forms of sensual desires.

That is why so many people are happy to go to parties. The party atmosphere always promotes the consumption of eating and alcohol which leads to increasing craving/desire for sensuality. Whenever the monks eat, it is a ceremony. They are eating in front of the donors. They eat in a slow, exemplary manner with contemplative thinking. That is how you prevent unwanted desire from arising.

King Asoka, before he became a Buddhist, was depressed and despondent of his war crimes. He used to eat a lot and he also gave

food generously to recluses. The non-Buddhist monks and ascetics that he was supporting did not know their limits. In the end his servants had to often raise them up from their seats. The king was not pleased with the behavior of the recluses.

One day King Asoka saw a very young monk seeking alms. The king was happy with his calm and serene conduct even though he was only about seven years old. The king asked the young novice monk, who was a disciple of the Buddha, to come to the palace. When he came the King asked the novice Nigroda to take a suitable seat. Not seeing any senior monks present, novice Nigroda attempted to climb into the throne. The King Asoka then assisted him to the throne and invited him to partake in a meal. Novice Nigroda then informed the King that he could not accept the invitation without permission from his teacher. He then added that if the King invited both the teacher and himself, and his teacher accepted the invitation, that he could come. The next day the King invited the senior monk and the Venerable Nigroda for a meal. The king was very happy to see their calm and contemplative manner of eating. When one is taking the eight precepts or one is developing mindfulness in one's daily life one must be very mindful at the dining table. In ordinary society the dining table is an opportunity for spirited conversation and socializing. Knowing this one must be aware of the role played by physical nutriment and its relationship to desire and suffering.

Whenever Venerable Mahsi Sayadaw of Myanmar conducted retreats, he would visit the dining table and observe how the yogis behaved at the dining table. This is a restraint that one has to understand before undertaking. It is not a discipline that should be undertaken with blind faith. You need to understand that whenever you indulge in unmindful eating you are invariably contributing towards developing desire and craving. Therefore it is good to reflect on the purpose of food as the Buddha taught before every meal.

When you come to know the relationship between the arising of desire and the eating of food, you are ready to implement your disciplinary rule in the day-to-day activities, including the taking of meals. No one else needs to instruct you to discipline yourself. You understand the relationship between desire and food. You are disciplining yourself not to - show off to others, gain attention, hint to others to follow your example, torture yourself by self-mortification or prevent obesity. It is to restrain desire as you understand that unrestrained physical nutriment leads to desire and craving.

When you realize that the desire for food is internal and not something done to you by an outsider (the person cooking or offering the food) you are ready for mindfulness in your daily life. You must make sure that your eating in public is exemplary.

Controlling the Number of Distractions

Similarly Sayadaw U Pandita in Burma said that whenever you are getting an overload of external sensuous impingements; seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting there is less mindfulness and you are creating a lot of stress for your brain. Instead, if you reduce or limit the contact or impingement of sensuous objects you can develop strong mindfulness, with each and every sensing. Then the few that you have chosen will be handled with mindfulness and undertaken with understand.

That is why in the sitting meditation we close our eyes, and select a quiet place with no sounds or odor. That is why we observe noble silence and do not eat in the meditation hall. It is also the reason why we restrict intentional movements of the body. We limit the contacts from the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body so that you can be mindful of the few distractions that may make contact.

As a beginner you must remember to let the breath arise and pass away naturally. When you are focusing on the feeling of breath it

is an intentional act. Even though your intention is to be with the feeling of breath it is a challenge because our mindfulness is not strong. Once you develop a certain amount of mindfulness and consistency of practice, you understand how the in-breath and out-breath happen without your involvement. It is happening through involuntary muscles and you are a neutral observer. This is the starting point. You now have an opportunity to see the beginning, middle, and the end of the in-breath and out-breath. When you reach this state amidst all the sounds and pains, you are doing well. You will understand this later when the feeling of breath disappears.

It is exactly the same with food for the body and food for thought. When we chew our food slowly before swallowing and let it mix well with the saliva it is easier to digest. This makes you healthier. It also facilitates the development of mindfulness. If you gobble up your food, you have half-digested food in the stomach that causes gastritis and heart burn and all kinds of discomfort. Also you tend to over eat as you are eating unmindfully.

It is similar for the food for thought or food for the development of the mind. If you are totally engrossed and captivated with sensuous impingements or objects and external stimuli and you are unmindful, you can understand what it does to your mind. There is an overload of information vying for its attention and you are constantly with stress and frustration. This is what happens to the very rich. The wealthier you get the more you consume and collect. You end up consuming more food, buying more houses, cars, clothing, jewelry,... etc. and end-up with more headaches. Ultimately the more you encourage and develop sensuous impingements and stimuli with no restraint or moderation, the more you suffer. In other words your wealth and riches lead you to discomfort, disease and ill-health.

This is what happens to both the body and the mind. It does not matter that the external object is physical nutriment (food and

drink) or if it is sensuous impingement (contact as nutriment) both result in more discomfort, disease, stress and frustration. Selective absorption or wise selection from all the sense impingements is what controls the balance. For instance, if as a leader or a politician you are not mindful, if you are not aware that taking food is contributing towards this overall craving, and if you are struggling to discipline yourself, what kind of a management or what kind of discipline can you bring to the nation? How can you lead the people to moderation? That is why the Buddha said, “Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees. (*Jānato ahaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayaṃ vadāmi.*)”.

Restraint is for Your Own Welfare

First and foremost you have to understand that when you are unmindful, you are in-compassionate to your body and the mind. You are not living (and working), with the best interest of your body and mind. When I say this you come back with a complaint saying you do not have enough time to be mindful because you are so busy with all the things you have to do as a householder. Next you say you do not know the meaning of mindfulness. Mindfulness should be your first and second priority. If you make mindfulness your first and second priority, then you will find that whatever you do with mindfulness is more efficient. You are saving time. Your priorities will change, some may even drop off but you are doing things slowly and mindfully. You are even mindful of your eating in public. However, this is a challenge to teach others as it appears as if we are interfering with your likings and disliking’s.

All we can do is to ask you to read the, *Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya sutta*, and learn for yourself that each and every morsel, each and every meal you eat, matters. Otherwise, whatever the type of meditation you are following, whatever the potential of your teacher, the teaching or the meditation centers you are following is wasted. If you cannot understand and take control over these physical nutriments, then everything goes to waste.

Therefore, when you incorporate mindfulness in your life it has to be practiced at each and every meal as much as possible. To rush your meals and overeat or to move towards dieting or not eating (self-mortification) is not the Buddha's way. The Buddha never said that you can realize enlightenment by stopping food. That is what he tried for six years before the enlightenment. People in India were performing self-mortification and doing away with food to realize liberation. The Buddha also tried not eating to the utmost level and found it a waste of time. Therefore, moderation of the food is the start to the path to Arahantship. You have to find the way to understand the importance of moderate feeding. You have to focus and do this for yourself.

Also I want to stress that it is not correct to look into other's plates, and discipline others. Moderation in eating is a social discipline as eating is often in the presence of the donor and there are a number of monastic rules regarding the appropriate way to partake in the meal. Therefore, when you go back home do not try to discipline your family members instead discipline yourself. To succeed you have to find the cause as to why it is happening. It should not be undertaken just out of faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma or the Sangha. You have to understand the relationship, between desires and eating then you will see how overall craving and desire, is increasing or decreasing according to the feeding habits.

Therefore, whenever someone is evaluating the culture, manners and refinement of a person, know that the feeding habit is one of the things they observe. There are differences in feeding habits between various countries and cultures. The yogi must understand that his feeding habits must be pleasing and uplifting to others. It must be refined especially in the retreat environment.

The first nutriment is gross and subtle food and it is relatively easy to explain a tangible object such as food. We will now consider craving/desire as the cause for the second nutriment - contact.

Restraining of Contact

Many devotees complain that the numerous sensuous impingements that they are being bombarded with are not under control. How can we control our contact to manage the bombardment of distracting information? Leaders and disciplinarians are always looking outward to discipline the society to control painful and uncomfortable situations instead of disciplining themselves. But, the teaching of the Buddha was completely the other way around. Whatever and how many sensuous impingement or contacts are happening, your selective absorption should only be accepting what is beneficial. There is no second person involved. So, you have to take care of yourself. You may be at a carnival where there are many sounds, lights, aromas, food, alcohol and many other desirable contacts. Even under such circumstances you can discipline yourself if you know and understand your limits. If you do not know that you are in a carnival with many distractions you will be hijacked by the amount of external contacts. Therefore, the person who is not disciplined and does not know his limits always complains about the outside world. But the person who is disciplined takes care of him/herself through mindful selection.

Avoiding Conflict and Quarrels Through Restraint

During the time of the Buddha, there was a lot of support, praise, and fame for the disciples of the Buddha. The other religious leaders were jealous of their popularity and fame. Therefore there were many envious and jealous persons with malicious intent of harming the Buddha and his monks. Ultimately, recluses and ascetics from other sects hired some thugs in the street to harass the Buddha's monks. Whenever the monks went on their alms round they scolded them in harsh and coarse language which made the monks uncomfortable. Soon the situation turned ugly. Not only

were they abusing the Buddha's monks they also started to abuse the Buddha with vile accusations.

Venerable Ananda was very concerned when they started to vilify the Buddha. He informed the Buddha of the situation and requested that they move to another city. At this time the Buddha and his monks were travelling far and wide from place to place spreading the Buddha Dhamma. Venerable Ananda felt that this city was toxic and not a suitable place for the Buddha to reside. The Buddha then questioned Ananda as to what they would do if the next city they went to also treated them disrespectfully. The Buddha said that changing the place was not the solution. Instead he said that they should just observe and bare the untruthful and undeserving insults and accusations with forbearance. He assured Ananda that they would go away in a few days. The Buddha then advised Ananda, not to find fault with the people of the city for making them uncomfortable because they were acting through ignorance.

The Buddha said,

“Whether you are living in the village or in a forest,

One is confronted with pleasant and unpleasant things.

The wise never looks for the reason for the pleasant and unpleasant feeling,

Not inside, not outside.²⁴“

This is a very profound teaching with deep meaning. We cannot say that the uncomfortable situation is caused by the outsiders. You

²⁴ “*Gāme araññe sukhadukkha phuṭṭho,
nevattato no parato dahetha.
phusanti phassā upadhiṃ paṭicca,
nirūpadhiṃ kena phuseyyuṃ phassā*
Sakkāra sutta : Udāna

know now that the cause for feeling is contact. Therefore it is not external. Why did the Buddha say it is not inside? It is because even if it is unpleasant, or pleasant you are not going to take initiative and make contact. Therefore, whatever the pleasure, whatever the pain, the wise do not attribute to the external or internal. Contact directs you according to your likings and disliking. The wise that have practiced restraint with choice-less awareness do not make contact. Therefore, they are not directed by contact. Accordingly the wise do not look inside or outside. They use restraint and forbearance.

The cause for contact is desire and craving. Your desire directs the selection of the nutriment of contact. If you have developed a certain amount of understanding about choice-less awareness and non-reactive observation, then even if contact arises, you will not be affected by the feeling that arises. You will not be disturbed because you know how to maintain the balance in the mind and to be equanimous towards the vicissitudes of the world. Whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, a gain or a loss, praise or blame, pain or joy, whatever it may be, if one is affected by it, then one's mind is immature and she/he is unmindful.

Knowing this you have to develop choice-less awareness. Then even if external distractions or pain and pleasure come and contact is made the feeling does not bind or lead to craving. This is the Buddha's instruction. You select which one is the priority from whatever is coming towards you. Then the choice will depend on your own internal values and discipline rather than the numerous external sensuous impingements. This is what choice-less awareness and non-reactive observation teaches you.

The Buddha was not affected by either praise or blame. He knows that even a small fault is often exaggerating and made into a big deal. Similarly, when people wish to praise you, they often exaggerate with disproportionate compliments. One has to

understand that this is because people are unmindful, immature and lack restraint.

The Example of the Trained Elephant in Battle

Let us take an example that the Buddha gave to understand this better. In India, at the time of the Buddha, the elephant was used for warfare. Therefore he was well-trained for the battlefield. The Buddha said that whenever a well-trained elephant goes to the battlefield, stones and arrows hit him from all sides. The elephant is trained to bare the pain and ignore the attack. He does not turn and run away from his attackers or charge without orders.

The Buddha is like an elephant trained for battle. Whenever arrows, stones or barbs are thrown at Him, He withstands it; He exemplifies restraint. That is how He associates with people. In any society there are people ready to find fault, and pass judgement. They are always inflaming the situation because they are not restrained. The Buddha knows how to handle such persons. He knows the cause for it. Therefore, whether it is praise or blame the Buddha remains unshaken. An Arahant does not look outside for fault and blame. He remains balanced in all situations facing whatever comes with calm. This is how we should conduct ourselves in society.

Using Restrain of Contact in Daily Life

When you go back and sit in meditation, you expect to instantly have a face-to-face with the breath. If you understand how many times in a minute, the mind is going to move away from the primary object you will be discouraged. The training is painfully slow in the real world. You have to understand that the primary object, the breath, is only a tool that we use to learn the trade. We use the breath as we use training wheels to learn to ride a bicycle. Once you have some balance and the wheels are gone there are many other distractions that can make you fall. Similarly when you

have some measure of balance and the breath is gone there are many other distractions that can make you fall. Therefore, if you are waiting to meditate until there are no distractions, then what is the use of *Nibbāna*. Liberation, (Nibbāna) is necessary because every place is with attractions and distractions. The world is in turmoil. Liberation is when you are in balance, when you are unshaken in a world that is in turmoil.

You must be prepared when you go back to society. People will be talking about politics, careers, achievements and the economy. Under such circumstance considering the speed and the amount of information that is coming at you, contact is bound to happen. It is a challenge to control. But if you know the technique, they cannot make an impact on contact. Your mind takes in information by selective absorption.

When you are at a sitting meditation you are not comfortable from the beginning to the end of the one-hour sit. You may feel comfortable for 10-15 minutes and then the discomfort will begin. If you expect only the comfort and no discomfort you will never advance in meditation. If you also expect immediate awareness of your primary object, the breath, you will be disappointed and frustrated. This level of expectation is not in the Pali Canon. Therefore, whenever you are learning the meaning of *sati* or mindfulness with the help of choice-less awareness or non-reactive observation, it is giving a message. A communication to oneself on how one must conduct oneself in day-to day living.

If you do not know or understand the meaning of mindfulness, then the meditation can lead to unwanted suffering. Instead, if you think of mindfulness meditation as an interesting hobby, you will not suffer. Don't expect that everything is going to be a bed of roses as soon as you start meditation. The world does not change because you learned choice-less awareness and non-reactive observation at the retreat. However, you understand how to increase your comfort zone, tolerance, and your acceptance of the present moment.

The more you practice and understand this the more you reduce the impact or the painful nature of contacts. If you plan to reduce all contacts when you go back into society you will not succeed. It will be an impossible task. It will be similar to covering the earth with animal hide, because it is covered with thorns, instead of wearing suitable footwear.

Whenever the contact happens you should understand that if you misuse it, it will lead to desire or hatred. If you are selective and mindful, it will increase your restraint, tolerance, forbearance, mindfulness and maturity. You cannot do away with contact. But, one has to be mindful whenever contact occurs. When in sitting meditation it is the contact of breath at the nostrils, when in walking meditation it is the sole of your feet touching the earth. In your day-to-day activities you need to be aware of the touch of your hands and fingers as you work. Wherever contact occurs it is a reminder for you to be mindful. Therefore instead of trying to control all the contacts, you observe the five sense doors mindfully when contact occurs.

Therefore, whether you are multitasking or in simple slow motion, as in the retreat center, it does not matter. With awareness, the efficiency of mindfulness will develop. Otherwise each and every contact is going to lead to either pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Each pleasant and unpleasant sensation without restraint leads to desire. Whenever the mindfulness is there you try to understand whenever the contact happens, when it is pleasant you note it as a pleasant contact. When unpleasant, you note it as an unpleasant contact. Then, your penetration of contact increases, the mindfulness becomes more efficient and your restraint, tolerance, forbearance, and patience develop. Therefore, as far as the contact is concerned, it is more eventful than the mindfulness on the food. With food we need to be mindful 2-3 times a day at meal times. But contact is happening from morning till night. It is a continuous chain of contacts from the moment you open your eyes to the last event before you close your eyes to sleep. Therefore, if you know

how to make use of each and every contact, you understand that you have many opportunities to be mindful as we come in contact with many objects in our daily life.

Chapter 10

All Four Nutriment Have Craving as the Source (Mental Volition and Consciousness as Nutrient)

O monks, what is the cause of the arising, decay, and passing away of the four nutriment? It is Craving O Lord.

Majjhima Nikāya - Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta

Chapter Nine Summary

- We discussed that the five aggregates arise with the four nutriment as their proximate cause, and the four nutriment arise with desire/craving as its source or cause. The Nutriment are born out of desire and produced from desire²⁵. Therefore, all the four nutriment have one common characteristic. They are diversified in terms of physical nutriment as the first, contact as the second, mental volition as the third and consciousness as the fourth, but, they have the very same single cause of desire/craving (*taṇhā*) as the source.
- The Buddha also claimed that the cause for the arising of suffering and for the arising of the five aggregates was the single cause of desire/craving.
- We attempted to understand the relationship between physical nutriment and desire, and contact and desire. Using common knowledge and experimenting, we

²⁵ Tanha is translated into English as both desire and craving.

observed that when physical nutriment and contact as nutriment is not restrained the desire/craving increases. When physical nutriment and contact as nutriment is restrained desire/craving decreases.

- Therefore selecting of each of the five external sense objects - colour/image, sounds, odor, flavours, and tactile sensations need to be restrained as they are also driven by desire.

Mental Volition as Nutriment has Desire/Craving as the Source

In this Chapter we will examine mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) to ascertain that the source or cause is desire. One may find this difficult to understand or prove when compared with the first two discussed in the last chapter. That is why the Buddha, started from the most obvious nutriments, and slowly traced his way down to the more challenging mental volition as nutriment.

Understanding this nutriment may be very difficult in an affluent country with a luxurious lifestyle, and a capitalist national policy that promotes success, worldly accomplishments and the accumulation of wealth. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult for one to understand and convince others that each and every volitional manifestation of the mind, each and every mental fabrication, one's productivity, and one's creativity is a result of desire and craving (*tanhā*). The most sarcastic statement the Buddha made is that whenever one is talking and working towards worldly development, it is nothing but the development of a number of tombs in the cemetery. That is the ultimate result of not accepting the present moment and manipulating the third nutriment. You have to understand that each and every development, creativity, and innovation is propelled by desire. You also have to understand that, what you are attempting to do by

restraining mental volition is swimming upstream or going against the grain.

If you teach young children, that creativity, motivation and determination is coming out of desire and that you must try to do away with desire, they will never learn. They will never come out with creative and productive ideas. They will never come up with innovations. Therefore when you are teaching the third nutriment, the student should have a certain level of spiritual maturity and some experience of the negative side of *samsāra*. They should have experienced the perpetuation of suffering and many life experiences, to understand this Truth.

Each and every one of us is still chasing behind the carrot and this is happening throughout our life until death. That was what our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents did but none of them died content. None of them died with full satisfaction, but we continue doing the same as they did. How do we find the balance? Are we also going to follow in the steps our forefathers and make the same mistake? Are we also going to regret at the deathbed, or is there a way out? The Buddha said that to have this level of maturity, understanding, approach and analytical thinking, one must be in their 40s.

The Buddha made this general assessment of the human life span based on the society in his time. Assuming a life span of 100 years the Buddha categorized the years in decades as follows:

The first decade is called, *uttāna dasaka*. That means you are lying on your back and been taken care of by others.

The second decade is the playful, carefree time of youth in full bloom.

The third decade is the period when you think about your appearance and beautify yourself with make-up and various creams, perfumes,... etc. because the first signs of ageing appear.

The fourth decade and onward is when the spiritual maturity develops. One has experienced suffering and has many life experiences to draw from. It is after one is in their 40s that one is born into the spiritual world.

Until one is in the 40s one does not have the life experiences of suffering and the maturity to understand what is happening. But this is the normal standard. Even during the time of the Buddha there were enlightened youth of both genders among the ordained and the laity. However, these are exceptional cases. Usually one has to reach the maturity required with age (*ñāna dasaka*) to reach this stage of understanding. Until such time, it is very difficult for one to understand that creative ideas, the will, determination and the mental fabrications, have desire or craving as its source. Ultimately this desire (*tanhā*) is going to lead you to tension, frustration and suffering. It is only then that understanding arises.

It is not common knowledge that each and every motivation, intention/will, and determination is because of desire. Therefore, one should have a certain amount of background knowledge that one can draw from to understand. The Buddha said that those that lean towards practicing tranquility meditation and starting the practice with tranquility and realizing freedom of the mind (*ceto vimutti*), use the understanding of the relationship between the physical food as nutriment, contact as nutriment and craving/desire to restrain and eliminate desire.

The Buddha said that Insight Yogis – those that lean towards understanding through analysis, reasoning, wise reflection and observation realize the truth or freedom through the wisdom approach (*paññā vimutti*). This is known as the path of wisdom. Each and every motivation, innovation and creativity is observed and experimented with to understand that mental volition as nutriment and mental fabrications have desire as the source. By using their understanding of cause and effect and wise reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*) they restrain and eliminate ownership or the

concept of self. Therefore, it is a food for thought for the Vipassanā yogis, or wisdom-based meditators.

The most challenging and most subtle is the understanding of the relationship between consciousness and desire. Desire is the base for the existence of consciousness. Therefore, consciousness attempts to keep desire intact at whatever cost. As a result, knowingly or unknowingly, we are feeding desire each and every moment that we are conscious. Consciousness has a mutual and vested relationship with desire and desire has a mutual and vested relationship with consciousness. These last two nutriments are very difficult for one to understand unless one has strong powers of wise reflection/appropriate attention. One must have a sharp intellect, wisdom and understanding, and swim upstream or go against the grain to use this method.

Yoniso manasikāra, is normally translated as wise reflection or appropriate attention. Venerable Katukurunde Ñāṇananda, translated it as radical reflection because the general tendency is to facilitate and promote one's own creative thinking, productivity, motivation, and determination by taking ownership, which results in the concept of self. The wisdom yogis use radical reflection to dis-claim the concept of self. But whichever method is used the Buddha said that ultimately, if it is intentional then the source or cause is desire.

Whenever the consciousness is working, without mindfulness in an undisciplined way, the consciousness is naturally associated with desire/craving (*taṇhā*). Understanding this is very difficult as a linear relationship. It is also a challenge to understand using normal analytical and deductive methods and inference. One has to have this radical or one-of-a kind, against the grain, wise reflection. Therefore, this understanding requires *paññā vimutti*, which means freedom or liberation with wisdom. Wisdom yogis who have the ability for radical reflection will be very happy and appreciative of the Buddha for his realization that each and every

intentional mental activity, however innovative, creative or progressive it may be, is leading to suffering.

Therefore, we will just state that each and every mental volition (*manosañcetanā āhāro*) or fabrications (*saṅkhāra*), (both of them have intention/volition) are based on desire. Insight Yogis will understand this; others will need to accept it. Desire and the nutriments are working in a reciprocal manner. Consciousness cannot develop or exist without desire. Therefore it has a vested interest in keeping mental volition and desire alive. If this is truth, then what is the way out?

One may question the practical value of this understanding? Also, how can we incorporate this into our life? The Buddha gave us non-reactional observation (*apannaka paṭipadā*) or acceptance of the current reality. Whenever we wish to adjust, improve or manipulate, it means that we are not happy with the current reality or the present situation. Then, any manipulation of the current situation; any effort to improve or change is a reaction to the unsatisfactory nature of the current situation.

Therefore if you can mindfully, diligently and consistently see when the phenomenon arises, and passes away and that they are based on cause and effect, then as our aim is to see things as they are, there is no need for reaction and manipulation to arise. There is no need for assuming ownership of me, mine and myself to arise as you have observed cause and effect in action. You have experienced and understand that phenomena arise due to it's own cause, and whenever the cause ceases to exist, the phenomena cease to exist. Why then should one develop tension and aversion to the current situation? Creativity, innovation and productivity arise out of this tension or dis-satisfaction. The way out, the Buddha, said is developing of this unassuming, non-reactional quality.

The Two Methods of Insight Meditation

Apaṇṇaka Paṭipadā – Non-reactional Path. This method is restraining each and every thought moment with non-reactive or detached observation over a long period of time. You are mindfully vigilant and try your best not to get involved or committed with any of your volitional activities by selection with desire.

Atammayatā Paṭipadā – Not-self Path. This method is used when one selects the sense impingement and assumes it as me, mine or myself. Your participation, commitment, creativity or manipulation has happened. When it happens you know the art of disclaiming. Yes, this current reality or present situation is unjust, painful, it is not what you like, but this is not me, it is not mine, it is not myself. You have a good understanding of cause and effect and disclaim using your wisdom. You use wise reflection to observe that this is just a natural phenomenon of cause and effect and the arising of a mind. When the causes come together (contact occurs) it arises, when the causes cease to exist, the effect also ceases to exist. This natural process cannot be controlled. Therefore, there is no ‘I’. It is not-self.

These are the two methods of Insight Meditation. The first method is by cutting off desire gradually. When the cutting of desire is by reducing the physical nutriment and nutriment of contact, it is slow. In the second method, one cut’s off ownership (concept of self) by using the intellect, insight and wise reflection into cause and effect. Cutting through ownership or the concept of self with wisdom is like a lightning bolt. When the wisdom method is used it is quick and electric.

Therefore, some people take a long time to get rid of desire by practicing restraint using one's own physical foods and contact as nutriment. But some people, maybe due to past merits and exposure to the Dhamma, quickly realize that getting involved with the arising phenomena, as it happens is not in their best interest.

They have experienced the suffering that can arise when they tried to adjust, manipulate, and take ownership by claiming it as me, mine and myself. They have realized that not taking ownership of the arising phenomena, and not getting involved, has immediate results. If they have quick intellect and wisdom, then they can get immediate results and they can understand in the next moment what their attitude should be to the arising phenomena. This happens in a very quick and electric way to those with a wisdom mind.

Therefore, we have two approaches. Even though both come under the same subject of restraint of nutriment, either by gradually getting rid of desire or by cutting off of ownership with wisdom the latter too results in the elimination of desire. But it is more interesting to use your wisdom, your quick intellect, and to go deep into the working of the mind and understand with the direct touch, that each and every time you take ownership and react or manipulate the arising phenomenon, it is going to result in kamma potential. Therefore, instantly one has to do away with ownership and manipulation. But if you are not basing this on direct knowledge of cause and effect, your progress is doubtful. Wise or radical reflection will result in developing wisdom. Appropriate attention and observation of cause and effect as it is arising and passing away will lead to liberation²⁶.

The Example of the Sewing Machine

As explained in the previous chapters, at the beginning you will start the practice with faith or belief, but later you have to go into the deep layers of the mind and see for yourself. You have to first start with the restraining of the physical and verbal, mental

²⁶ One will develop wisdom/insight by observing the already arisen phenomenon with wise reflection to observe its decay and passing away. As one matures spiritually one will use appropriate attention to observe the arising and passing away of all phenomena as per cause and effect.

formations and then you can go deep to see the underlying tendencies and, your habitual nature. When one can understand that there is a momentum and resulting from that momentum the phenomena arise either knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, volitionally or in an involuntary way, you are progressing in the meditation. You know that (with or without your knowledge) we get connected with the external object. The Buddha said that if one knows that the contact or connecting is happening in the deeper layers of the mind, one knows that is where the knot is tied. If there is no subsurface connection, then the knot is not tied and the binding does not take place.

Venerable Katukurunde Ñāṇananda gave a very good example. He saw that when we use a sewing machine we can see the thread going downward with the needle. Then, if one understands the mechanism, one knows that as the needle goes down there is a bobbin underneath that is putting a hook for each and every penetration. You can see only the needle going up and down. Yet, each and every time it goes down it gets hooked up underneath and then there is binding and the stitching happens.

Imagine if there is no thread in the bobbin. The needle goes up and down, and it appears like stitching, but it is not stitching because there is no thread in the bobbin. The Arahant is like the machine without thread in the bobbin. The needle goes down but stitching or binding does not take place. We rush to fill the bobbin immediately after it is used. We try our best to always keep the bobbin filled. That is what we do by planning, creating and innovation. We bind ourselves by taking ownership and assuming this is me, this is mine, this is myself. This example illustrates that even if the suggestion comes, just like the thread going down with the needle, if there is no binding or desire, then the needle goes down but the stitching does not take place.

Similarly when you mature in your mindfulness you develop vigilance in an object-less manner. You look at it, but never let it

blind. The Buddha said that even though you see well with your eyes, to conduct yourself as if you are blind. You see everything but your reaction and attitude must be like that of a person who is blind. You hear every sound to which you attentively listen, but even if one is blaming or reprimanding you, you must conduct yourself like a person who does not hear. Even if someone is going to praise you, understand that praising is always exaggerated. Listen to it mindfully and diligently but your reaction or response must be just like a person who cannot hear. Similarly with the other sense organs whether you smell pleasant odors or unpleasant odors, pleasant flavours or unpleasant flavours, comfortable contact or uncomfortable contact, you behave like a person who is paralyzed. The sense impingements are coming but there is no reaction. You try your best to keep the volition at the lowest possible level by not reacting.

This behaviour may seem antisocial. One may appear backward, or one may be shunned as not being a team player. But it is better than reacting like a snake to be accepted by society. You do not know that each time you react you accumulate kamma potential. Ultimately when the results of kamma come to fruition, you wonder what has happened.

You cannot see the relationship because when you are attacking like a serpent you are not mindful. You do it in a habitual way. *Saṅkhāra* is dependent on habitual tendencies. It is an accumulation that happens throughout this life or even possibly from previous lives. The reaction is very quick. Unless you have steadfast mindfulness you never claim that you committed the unskillful deed. You feel that it is something that happens without your knowledge.

The Buddha said that there is no second person involved in your unskillful deeds. If you were mindful you would not have reacted in this unbecoming manner. But, you are unmindful and therefore it happens through your habitual tendencies. But even if you did

not intend to react in this unbecoming manner the consequences, the kamma potential exists. You have to bear the consequences at the opportune time.

That is why the understanding of your habitual tendencies is important. If you develop mindfulness with clear comprehension you can understand how it happens. Imagine how you will feel if someone else is going to notice your bad behaviour and tell you. You will get angry and irritated. You will never be happy. You may even question why they are interrupting and interfering with your affairs. You may say, “Why are you talking about my habits and behaviour? It is none of your business. Do not criticize me. Look at yourself, you are no better. Who are you to correct me?”

The Buddha said that it is not your duty, even if you can see, to tell others that this is a habitual tendency, this is your nature or this conduct is based on your desire. Instead the Buddha suggested taking a mirror, polishing it, and looking at it. Then you can see for yourself that you are interfering and advising others. Until that happens there will be no change in you. The Buddha said, “Monks, I will proclaim that until you see for yourself, until you experience for yourself, no change will happen in your personality, no change will happen in your likings and disliking, no change will happen in your habitual tendencies.”

Whenever well-meaning friends and relatives come up with ideas to change you or someone else’s bad habits it is a waste of time. Nothing will happen until that particular person understands his/her own nature, not as a mistake but as a natural phenomenon. Without that, whatever external intervention you are planning with the best of intention is not going to work. The Buddha said that it is like pouring water into a pot that is upside down.

To fill the pot, you must first turn the pot right side up. Then the water that you pour can be contained in the pot. It is possible in some instances that external advice and intervention could work;

but it will work only when the individual sees his/her bad behaviour or habits themselves and are ready for change. Therefore, meditation is to see and understand one's own shortcomings, weaknesses, ignorance or not knowing. When that happens, you develop an urgency to change. You are ashamed and embarrassed to see your own mistake. Even if it is surfacing in the midst of your insight meditation you develop distaste for your behaviour or shortcomings similar to an allergic reaction to a foreign body in your blood stream. Meditation is not for the purpose of correcting and advising others.

You have to have great faith in the Buddha as an insight yogi. The Buddha encourages your weaknesses to surface, and when they have surfaced you feel nauseous, embarrassed, cornered, and like an outcast. Therefore, you try to find some form of escapism, instead of understanding that whenever you meditate and you are progressing well, these weaknesses surface so that they can be let go. When the weaknesses surface it is of course not a healthy or happy experience. So you need to know that understanding it and restraining it or disclaiming it is the most important thing.

A devotee brought to my attention that Sigmund Freud has mentioned a similar claim in his Western psychology books. I did not confirm his detail research. But this is what he said. This was in the 1917 or 1918 time frame. Sigmund Freud, in the latter part of his life, has mentioned that you have to let the psychiatric patient, speak. In other words you must let his/her psychological wounds surface. You must let them talk openly and freely. The therapist just listens, giving full attention and consideration to what they are saying. You do not judge their actions or behaviour as good or bad. You must not be judgmental, but you let them know that whatever they say will be confidential and not divulged to anyone else. Then you let them talk and listen with diligence. The patient often does not know the root cause for his ailment. They keep on talking knowing that what they say will not be repeated until one day the root cause surfaces. As soon as it comes out they

may get emotional and cry but they are ready to let go of the traumatic event or behaviour. The point I am making is that Sigmund Freud, like the Buddha has mentioned that the therapist must listen to what the patient says diligently, without passing judgement or reacting.

Freud says that the therapist must be a very attentive listener to let the patients mind calm down. He also says that when the mind calms, a telepathic message is transmitted from the patients mind to the therapist's mind. This is not through analytical or rational thinking, compassion, or the healing capacity of the therapist. This mind to mind communication happens. When you are listening, the other party lets go of his stress and frustrations as he is confident of the professional code of ethics that requires patient doctor confidentiality and lets his problems or weakness surface naturally. The trained therapist then lets the patient divulge his innermost thoughts and pain and identifies the critical information which is at the root of the problem. He then uses it to help the patient to let go of the underlying problem.

This is also the work of mindfulness but now you are the patient and you are the therapist. Mindfulness is the foundation and mindfulness is the medicine. So, you let the mind relax and calm down so as to let everything surface. You do not allow any new information to enter the mind. All contact with visual objects, sounds, odors,... etc. are restrained. You try your best not to make any contact. You do not promote smelling, talking, eating, or any contact with tactile sensation, and let the mind calm down and subdue the hindrances. Then the mind will talk. It may be mean and angry. It may be sensual and dirty. Many things have been accumulated over time. Whatever is surfacing may not be sweet. It may be painful. Past hurts, or misdeeds that you have suppressed may surface. As painful or unbecoming misdeeds surface you let go and heal by disclaiming ownership as me, mine,... etc.

The Buddha explained this very clearly. He said, “O monks, as far as you can see and understand this under your very nose, there is a cure. (*Jānato ahaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayaṃ vadāmi*”). The therapist or teacher cannot help you. The meditator is the only person in the battlefield and he/she is face-to-face with the enemy (defilements). If the enemy overpowers you, then you will die. If you overpower the enemy, then the enemy will die.

To survive this onslaught of painful memories you develop the spiritual qualities of confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. If you use the will and try to manipulate the painful situation you will not succeed. You must try to just observe but it is a challenge to restrain your past habitual tendencies. Therefore, even if one makes contact one must not regret or be judgmental. Instead one should disclaim these fabricated thoughts as not-self.

What must your attitude be to keep the mind free from planning, adjustment, manipulations, justifications and creative thinking? One must be like one who cannot see, even though you have eyes. One must be like a person who cannot hear even though you have ears....etc. The Buddha summarized by saying, “Behave like a corpse if the situation is unbearable.”

Let whatever comes to your mind come. Let the past surface, let it torture and burn you. Let your past mistakes make you a criminal. Be detached. Do not add new fabrications by making contact. Just observe the beginning, the middle, and the end as the painful thoughts arise and pass away. These are just thoughts. Disclaim them by reflecting on cause and effect and how they arise. These thoughts are not me, mine or myself.

Sayadaw U. Pandita said that the yogi, should let the phenomena happen. You must try not to plant new seeds. Fabrications will result in new kamma potential. You know that these thoughts are arising on their own based on cause and effect. A universal law is working, you are a neutral observer. If something bad or unjust

comes to mind, you may be in pain, despair, and be tortured. But bear the pain. Do not ask why? See how much you can bear without creating hateful thoughts. Even if it is an exotic, sensual pleasure, you must understand that it is happening according to the cause and effect relationship. Maintain your status as a neutral observer. Do not make contact with either positive or negative observations. The contents are not yours. If you can do this you are not planting new seeds.

This is what we refer to as forbearance. This is what we call detached observation. This is indifference to both the good and bad thoughts that are vying for your attention. It is a challenge for those who consider restraint from a social or disciplinary point of view. Disciplinarians are usually looking at a problem with the head. They are judging and disciplining themselves and others. But this is not the goal. You are to behave like a log, even though you have functioning sense bases. You must not create new skillful or unskillful kamma potential.

The Buddha said that ultimately we must develop equanimity and equipoise for the eight vicissitudes of life. You must go beyond spirituality. I find it is very difficult to explain or convince you because many who meditate have very little confidence in the Buddha Dhamma. Who will understand about the quick wisdom understanding, or this radical reflection? Therefore, I do not see radical reflection as a starting point. The starting point is the gradual development, but when there is spiritual maturity you know that your human rights are, as per my definition, “not to react”.

Sayadaw U. Pandita puts it across very well. He said, “Even if you are not at fault, expect people to say these things are good for the monks, these things are not good or suitable for monks”. But Sayadaw said, “Who is the person who is qualified to interpret terms for (Noble) monks? Monks must be ready and prepared for anything.” They are the people who are working towards

developing equanimity for both the good and the bad. Therefore, if one says that this behaviour is not becoming for a monk that means they do not know that the monks are true disciples of the Buddha. The Buddha and his *Arahants* are prepared and ready for anything. An *Arahant* is a person who is equipped and ready for anything that comes his/her way.

Whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, if you are meditating diligently as instructed, and developing mindfulness and insight, all of you are monks/nuns. You may not be ordained or wearing a yellow robe. You may not have shaved your hair and have a bald-head, but so long as you are practicing, you have to understand that you have to listen to your own inner voice and try as much as possible not to get kamma potential with fabrications (*saṅkhāra*), and volitions (*cetanā*). Unfortunately, you cannot stop it by mere understanding because it is happening at a very fast speed. Instead, you have to understand when something arises in the mind, the motive or cause behind this urge to do something and get kamma potential. Then, do not apply the brakes but use the clutch just so as to distance yourself.

When you practice as instructed, one day, you may have a split second of clarity under a stressful situation. When this occurs you know, that even under such a stressful situation that you can experience solitude, freedom, and contentment. You can see that even under pressure, in tense and stressful situations you are privileged and have this inner strength or resource to draw upon. Do not expect that someone is going to give this to you on a platter. You have to fight for this and continue to live up to this standard.

The Making of Decisions in Daily Life

A tense mind is not suitable to make decisions and draw conclusions. Therefore, do not rush to give quick responses. Your practice of meditation, your development of restraint and all your knowledge of the teachings will be forgotten when you are facing

an unexpected situation. Conclusions and decisions are possible and valid only when the mind is calm and quiet. When a decision is taken with a calm and quiet mind, it is durable. Whenever a decision is taken in a rush it is not reliable because your mind is not ready to synthesize all the information rationally. Observe and understand the motivations of the fabrications and the formations of the mind that are arising and passing away under each and every situation. Question if this motivation, planning and creativity, is for your well-being. That is a valid question to ask before you make a decision.

In the *Vitakkasanthāna sutta*, the Buddha said that whenever an unexpected, urgent, or tense situation arises you may run with the situation. Then, all of a sudden a flash of self-awareness may arise. If you are a meditator of course you are doing a wrong thing in the sense you are running to the situation, but on the way you may develop a thought; why am I running at such a speed to get involved? What is the motivating factor or cause of my involvement?

Then, the Buddha said, the rationalizing begins. “Even if I am running head-on into this situation, the situation has already taken place. What is the use of my running?” Therefore, you slow down and you see that already many people have run there and some are on the way back. Then you think, “I can meet them and I can get the information even without running to the situation.” Then you can slow down further and when you are slowing down you understand, that you can just stand and wait here and get the message. If the mindfulness is strong you may say “this standing posture is tiring, why don’t I sit down, or lie down and wait?”

Usually what happens is that people are in such a rush to make decisions and do things that they do not understand their own motivation for getting involved. They are not interested to find out the reason or their need for giving advice, making changes or manipulations. Therefore if you continue to work at the same speed

telling everyone that you are a community minded person and you have to socialize and be with people, you are burning the candle at both ends. Ultimately you will suffer a lot. Therefore, this slowing down process really happens only when you come to understand your motivation.

Knowing Yourself

Here is an example, but please don't misunderstand me. On the last day of the retreat some of the devotees will come to me and ask, “Bhante, how can we contact you if we have questions? How do we discuss our problems after you go back to Sri Lanka? I will give you a mirror as the answer. Whenever such a question arises, write it on a paper and see what motivated this question. Do it in a self-critical way. Is it because you want to have a quick enlightenment, or you want to show that you are smart, or you want to teach it to another person? Or, is it related to the pleasure or the positive meditative experiences of meditation? These may be some of the motivation factors for the question. The causes then for the question are desire, conceit, and ego. If you self-examine and see this question it is a result of ether desire, conceit or the ego, then you do not need to have a meditation master to answer the question. You can now diagnose it yourself.

I am not discouraging you from asking questions. That is not my motivation, but when you question, understand that your own answer is much closer to the truth and much more down to earth. Do not expect another person to analyze the question and give an enlightening answer. One day you will have the answer yourself.

At the beginning of the retreat we have to spoon feed you and answer each and every question. But don't keep the relationship throughout as bondage. The Indian philosopher, Krishnamurti said; do not develop a relationship of bondage with the teacher. It will ultimately be a shackle to the teacher as well as to the disciple. Therefore, there is no such a thing as a continuing dialogue with a

teacher. One has to take responsibility for one's own liberation. When you go further and further in your practice you never have to search for an answer. Instead you learn to analyze the question. When the urge to ask a question arises, repeat the question to yourself again and again. Is this a real question? If it is, you can analyze it easily and understand where it comes from. The moment you understand that it is coming out of desire, don't be dissatisfied or ashamed. Of course there are no appealing causes for the question if it is based on defilements. But understanding the answer in terms of desire, conceit or the ego means that you are progressing in your practice. You are giving your own due respect and credit to your analytical mind. This is reaching self-sufficiency and contentment.

Whenever something appears to be good, but you see that the motivation is defilements your consciousness becomes unfounded. It has lost its base, and you feel lost and fearful. You feel like you have lost the crutch that was holding you up. It is like being lost in the sea in a small dingy. As soon as you cease to see the dry land that is about five miles away from the shore, you start to see the sea as a glaring light and ultimately you develop sea sickness. Similarly, whenever you are away from your normal familiar signs, signals and objects, you feel lost. This is what happens when consciousness loses its ground. When it happens, if you are to re-establish contact or constructed thought, then you have renewed the process of feeding and sustaining of suffering.

Therefore, you have to wean out contact slowly and ultimately you understand that the primordial form of consciousness is always clear and bright. When it is specialized and manifested on one object it becomes partial, biased, and your experience is imbalanced. Therefore, the more you go to the center, the more you go to the primordial form of consciousness.

When the consciousness is in its primordial form it is glistering. When the brightness and glittering of the consciousness arises the

consciousness itself is not happy because it is an unfamiliar experience. It is a radical, new experience that is not conventional. Therefore, it always wants to go back to the surface. As soon as it goes back to the surface, it is specializing only on one tiny option that it has selected based on habitual desire. It is ignoring the balance of the options that were not selected.

Instead, if you go to the center you feel that consciousness is representing everything but it is not in your memory, you have never been there before. The Buddha said that this is your real home. So what we practice is an awareness of the journey of the consciousness, from the periphery or superficial level to the center. The more it experiences the un-manifested, the more you go to the center where you lose your identity. You end up with a humane and civilized outlook.

You realize that whether you are a male or female, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, ordained or not-ordained that they are all just labels. As long as these labels are present, the mind is biased. All the decisions are biased and partial. So, therefore, let the mind slowly, go down to the depth of the consciousness and wean it off from the superficial level to the deeper layers. The more you go there the more you experience the Buddha Mind and the Buddha Nature. This is a natural law. It is the operation of the natural law of cause and effect and that does not need any manipulation or steering. There is no tension and, no frustration. You are part and parcel of the passing show.

It is a well-known fact that whenever a river enters the ocean it loses its identity. This experience is called an oceanic feeling. Likewise, if you keep a little gasoline in a saucer it evaporates, and goes into the air. There is nothing lost, but you can no longer pinpoint or find the gasoline. As far as it is consolidated into a liquid you can identify and see the gasoline. But, when it has evaporated into the air it loses its identity, space and time. Our whole agony and suffering is because we are caught up in time and

space. We cannot imagine, or go beyond time and space. This is because it appears as if something is lost. But the Buddha said that time and space is a real clear-cut indication of ignorance and delusion. Whenever the brightness arises you find that the mind makes its own prison and becomes imprisoned in the time and space.

The best example the Buddha gave is that of couples that have children. Often children like to play “house”. They make play-houses and invite their parent to come inside and play with them. When the parents go into their play-house, they know this is just to satisfy the children. They go there as a visitor, take part in their tea party, but they know that real life is not in the play-house. When the parents pay a visit to the play-house, their behavior is just to satisfy the innocent, young children and make them happy. Similarly, when you understand that you are socializing with your family and friends and conversing with them to make them happy and that this is not the real life, then there is maturity and spiritual growth in that understanding.

That is how it is when this consciousness comes into the primordial form. It slowly, loses space and time. Ultimately as far as perception is concerned, you are losing the signs and the objects. To the rational mind, this means the loss of everything. But, the Buddha said, it is just a changing of the shape and the manner. Things are the same. Just like the gasoline in a saucer that has evaporated, you cannot pinpoint the place, or tell the time when it was there. When it has evaporated it has disappeared, but nothing has happened to the gasoline. It is still there, but in another form. It has returned back to tiny particles. When it happens you cannot pinpoint it, or attribute it with time. That is what is happening in the release from suffering. This is the release from suffering, or the emancipation from suffering. Emancipation in terms of mental volition as nutriment and consciousness as nutriment is difficult to communicate because our thinking pattern, our education and our linear rationalization is never happy with radical reflection.

But, if you are fortunate enough to experience the effect, the results are electric. There is no time lag in the understanding. Whenever the understanding happens it will be like a lightning bolt. That is why the Buddha says the dhamma, is timeless (*akāliko*). All of a sudden it happens and then it disappears. It is due to many factors coming together including the development of wise reflection²⁷ for a long time. Whenever the real understanding happens, you are not there, time is not there and space is not there; only the experience remains. That experience makes the real change. Therefore even though it is expressed or presented as a development of restraint of a nutriment, you must not measure the experience in terms of these volitional formations of the mind or your consciousness. Their agenda is not for your well-being. You have to witness it to understand.

You have to witness this mindfulness. It is not the mindfulness you gain from the observation of the in-breath and out-breath. This is just a preliminary step. First you have to train it to the point where you can be mindful even without the in-breath and out-breath. You have to remain in the sign-less for a long time. The mindfulness is the only thing you can make use of in order to see the mental volitions and the consciousness. When you observe it, it appears like you are the patient and the doctor. The mindfulness is the medicine. It also always goes hand-in-hand with clear comprehension. This wisdom that arises from within is referred to as Insight or *Vipassanā*. You must understand that you have to go against the grain to experience this.

Therefore, radical reflection, quick intellect, and maturity are required to understand the mental volition, *manosanchetanā*, how it becomes nutriment and why one should wean it with restraint. Similarly one requires maturity to understand how consciousness

²⁷ *Yoniso Manasikāra* is translated as wise reflection or appropriate attention in English.

(*viññāna*) becomes a nutriment, and how one can slowly wean it through meditation. If there is no such method, then we will continue to foster, and feed consciousness. The result of this is that we will then have to bear the stress and suffering of continued existence in *samsāra*.

Let the meditation progress slowly. One day you will understand using trial and error and your own way, the profound, deep teaching of the Buddha. Then you will develop an enormous respect for the Buddha and the Dhamma. Also, you will develop a respect for your own discipline, and the trials and errors that you have gone through up to this point in time. Until then you have no appreciation for the challenges you face. Unfortunately, when you go to the highest level/stage, you are no more. There is no outward recognition of the highest achievement. But do not be discouraged because the experience is with you. That is how the Buddha Dhamma has been preserved for over 2,600 years. The Buddha was so compassionate to teach us the essence of the Dhamma. It is our duty to see for ourselves and experience the Truth of his words so that we in turn can pass it on to others and preserve the pure Buddha Dhamma for future generations.

Glossary of Pāli Terms

Ahāra	Nutriment
Akāliko	Timeless
Akusala	Unskillful
Alobha, Adosa, Amoha	Non-greed, Non-hatred, Non-delusion
Anatta	Not-self (non-governability, cannot change or control)
Anicca	Impermanence, Changing Nature (arising and passing away swiftly with no remainder)
Anusaya	Latent
Anuseti	Historical and Past Life Tendencies, Habits
Anussava	Heritage, Lineage
Apaṇṇaka Paṭipadā	Non-reactional Path
Appatiṭṭhita Viññāṇa	Un-manifested consciousness/Consciousness without a base
Arahant	Enlightened Being
Asampajāna -	Thoughts that are observed and disclaimed as not me,
Mano Saṅkhāra	mine or myself
Assaddho	Without Confidence/Faith

Atammayatā Patipadā	Path taken by not making self/ Not-self making path
Avijjā	Ignorance
Bhāvanā	Development of the mind (meditation)
Buddha	Enlightened One, Fully Awakened One, Blessed One
Cattāro Mahā Bhūta	Four Great Elements (properties of matter)
Cattāro Satipatthāna	Four Foundations of Mindfulness
Ceto Vimutti	Freedom of Mind
Cetana	Volition
Ceteti	Determination, Intention
Citta	Mind
Cittānupassana	Insight Realised by Examining the Mind and its Objects
Citta Saṅkhāro	A formation of the Mind; Feeling and Perception (Void of Volition/Intention)
Ditthi	View
Ditthinijjhānakkhanti	View Based on Reflection
Dhamma	Truth, The Buddha's Teachings, Phenomena
Dosa	Anger, Ill-will, Rage, Hatred

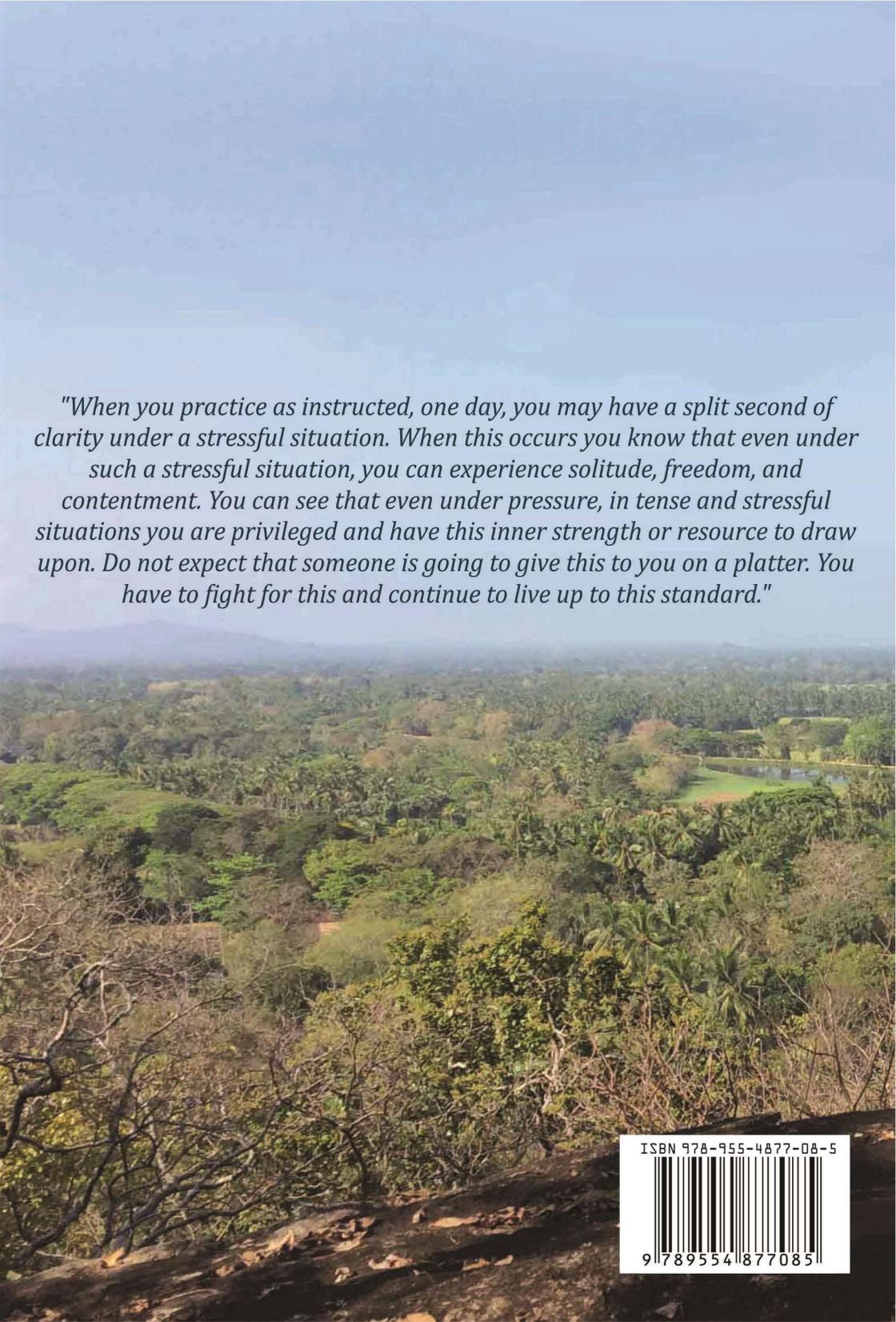
Dukka Satya	The Truth of Suffering/Stress, (as per the First Noble Truth).
Dukka	Un-satisfactoriness/Suffering (as per the 3 characteristics of form – <i>anicca, dukka, anatta</i>)
Ehi Passiko	Come and See
Jhāna	High Stages of Concentration, Absorption
Kalyāna Mitta	Experienced Dhamma Friend who leads you to Unbinding (Nibbāna), True Friend, Noble Friend
Kamma	Action
Karuna	Compassion
Kaya	Body
Kāya Saṅkhāra	Physical or Bodily Fabrications, (delusional deeds), Volitional Formations of the Body, Deeds with kamma potential
Kāya Saṅkhāro	Formations of the Body; In-breath and Out-breath (void of Volition/Intention)
Kāyānupassanā	Mindfulness of the body as body, Insights realised by observing the body as it is.
Kusala	Skillful
Loba	Desire, Greed, Lust

Mahā	Great
Māna	Ego, Pride, Arrogance
Manāyatana	Faculty of the Mind, Sense Base of the Mind
Mano Saṅkhāra	Mental (Volitional) Fabrications, Mental Volitional Formations
Manosañcetanā Ahāro	Mental Volition as Nutriment
Metta	Good-will, Loving Kindness, Friendliness
Moha	Delusion, Darkness
Ñāna Dasaka	40 + years, Spiritually Mature
Nāma	Literal Translation - Mentality, Name
Nāma	(comprised of) Perception, Volition, Feeling, Contact and Attention
Nāma-rupa	Name-Form, Mentality-Physicality/Materiality
Nibbāna	Unbinding, Awakening, Enlightenment
Pakappeti	Future Planning
Pabhassara Citta	Pure Mind
Pañcakkhandha	Five Aggregates (form, feeling, perception, fabrication/volitons and consciousness).

Panca Upādāna Skhandha	Five Aggregates with Clinging/Grasping
Paññā	Wisdom
Paññā Vimutti	Not-Self Path of Wise Reflection to Realize Freedom
Paticca Samuppāda	Dependent Origination, Dependent Co-Arising
Ruci	Liking
Rupa	Form (All objects are referred to as form)
Rupa (bahiddhā)	Form - colour/image, sound, odour, flavour and tactile sensations are referred to as external form.
Rupa (ajjatta)	Form - eye, ear, nose, tongue and body are referred to as internal form or physicality
Saddhā	Confidence, Faith
Samatha	Tranquility
Sampajañña	Clear Comprehension
Samsāra	Cycle of birth, existence, death and re-becoming
Saṅgha	Ordained Disciples of the Buddha
Saṅkhāra	Fabrications, Constructed thoughts, (willfully made up, created, untruth, falsehood)

Saṅkhāra Skhandha	The Aggregate of Fabrications/Volition
Saṅkhata Viññāṇa	Manifested/Dualistic Consciousness
Saññā	Perception
Sāsana	Buddha's Dispensation
Sati	Mindfulness
Sati Sampajañña	Mindfulness with Clear Comprehension
Sotāpanna	Stream Enterer (First Stage of Awakening)
Taṇhā	Craving or Strong Desire
Thera/Thero	Elder
Theravāda	Chanting's or Teaching of the Buddha
Uttāna Dasaka	First decade of a person's life
Vaci Saṅkhāra	Verbal (Volitional) Fabrications, Verbal Volitional Formations,
Vaci Saṅkhāro	Verbal Formations; Applied Thought (<i>vitakka</i>) and Sustained Thought (<i>vicāra</i>) (void of Volition/Intention)
Vedanā	Feeling (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral)
Vimutti	Freedom from Suffering, Liberation

Viññāna	Consciousness.
Vipassanā	Insight
Vossaggapariṇāmiṃ	Solitude, Freedom, Peace of Mind
Yoniso Manasikāra	Wise Reflection, Radical Reflection, Appropriate Attention



"When you practice as instructed, one day, you may have a split second of clarity under a stressful situation. When this occurs you know that even under such a stressful situation, you can experience solitude, freedom, and contentment. You can see that even under pressure, in tense and stressful situations you are privileged and have this inner strength or resource to draw upon. Do not expect that someone is going to give this to you on a platter. You have to fight for this and continue to live up to this standard."

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