

Go.

Essays on Insight Practice

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Introduction: Letting Go

1. Suffering
2. The origin of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering
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The pages in this book are glowing with the energy of liberation. It is designed for those who want to make a complete end of suffering, as soon as possible. Earlier, I reflected on the event which sparked my serious interest in the Dhamma. I realized that it did not matter what the teaching *was*, I only had to be ready to hear it.

At the center of this practice is receptive awareness. This is a way of knowing experience without being for or against things, not wanting things to be different. It is abiding in the simple knowing of experience.

The *summum bonum* of the book is the chapter on wisdom. It features seven ways of knowing experience and cessation. The chapter will be most effective if you bring your clear attention.

My sincere hope is that you will come to the Noble Truths.

1. Dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ
 2. Dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ
 3. Dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ
 4. Dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ
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Virtue

The Buddha described a path of gradual training. Rather than a set of doctrines or a belief system, he describes a set of qualities and practices that sustain a spiritual life for the long-term. To begin, it is generosity and virtue.

Generosity is foremost an intention.

Virtue as well is connected to your heart. If these are not present, we can evoke them. The Buddha recommended the giving of a gift, and the taking of precepts. For an enlightened being, these will come naturally.

You may give yourself a week to give a twenty dollar bill to somebody you don't know. You may cook a nice meal for somebody, call your grandma, I don't know. In regard to the precepts, you can be committed to not killing, stealing, lying, adultery, and consuming intoxicants. That's the bare minimum. From the *Visuddhimagga*, an ancient Buddhist meditation manual:

Now, if a man has little learning
And he is careless of his virtue,
They censure him on both accounts
For lack of virtue and of learning.

But if he is of little learning
Yet he is careful of his virtue,
They praise him for his virtue, so
It is as though he too had learning.

And if he is of ample learning
Yet he is careless of his virtue,
They blame him for his virtue, so

It is as though he had no learning.

But if he is of ample learning
And he is careful of his virtue,
They give him praise on both accounts
For virtue and as well for learning.

Virtue and learning or understanding go hand-in-hand. They are intimate with each other, fully developed inseparable. We can understand virtue as the careful monitoring or guarding of the processes behind the way we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think about things. If virtue is not developed, these sensory processes will incline towards the unwholesome intentions associated with greed, hatred, and delusion.

We do things we regret later. An important function of virtue is to establish the “bliss of blamelessness,” essentially a non-regret conducive to meditation and meditative concentration. It is said that virtue, meditation, and wisdom are like the three legs of a tripod, each mutually supporting the other. When one leg is missing or broken, well, the tripod cannot stand.

People may go to a retreat center or monastery. In these locations, virtue changes. Silence is kept more often, and with enough practice you may find that sensory restraint is kept more or less automatically. Virtue is a real treasure, a real gift we can give to the world.

The world needs virtue. It’s not limited to people of old or something.

They say the Dhamma is akālika, timeless and immediate.

Intention is closely linked to speech. Communication reflects our deepest intention; it is a window into our heart. Learning to be present and mindful in all circumstances is the path of freedom. Freedom will be found through your actions of body, speech, and mind.

It is already set in motion.

The section on virtue is finished.

Meditation

I think the best way to meditate is just to sit. Even if it is not clear what you are doing, the act of sitting is in itself helpful.

When we sit, or sit still, this is meditation.

When sitting, you should not be dull. The mind can get sunken, it can get into a state of sinking mind. This is something you should pay attention to.

Sitting still, you may notice uprightness of the spine and torso. It's helpful to have a balanced posture. You should eat enough during the day to keep a stable and balanced posture.

You can notice coarse qualities in the mind. What do you want to do?

You can notice the tension in the body, if you like. How are the shoulders? Is the chest area relaxing?

The first few minutes of meditation are always a little bit, I don't know, I guess just settling into the sitting posture. What to do after this initial period is dependent on the circumstance. Usually we tell people to bring their clear attention to the physical sensations of breathing in the chest area, or wherever it is clearest to them. We say to watch the rise and fall with clear awareness.

Getting a little bit more complicated, it can be helpful to label the breaths "in" at the start of the in-breath, and "out" at the start of the out-breath. This is called a mental note. This is probably my most common practice.

We pay clear attention to the breath to lessen the preoccupation of the thinking mind. To explain how this works, here is a passage from Gil Fronsdal:

“Sometimes we assume that if we can only find the right understanding of a problem, we will be able to resolve it. We think that the only way of relating to our thoughts and concerns is in the very world of our thoughts and concerns itself.

We are as if in the middle of a maze in which the walls are just a little higher than our eyebrows. We walk around looking for the way out, bumping into walls, going down dead ends. Our emotions swing between hope and discouragement, unfounded confidence and fear. Stuck in the maze, we may feel an urgent need to get out, and yet it seems so difficult. But if we simply stood on our tiptoes and looked over the walls, from a higher vantage point we would easily see the way out.

Our world of thoughts and concerns can be like a maze...”

The function of the perception of breathing is to lessen our preoccupation with myriad thoughts and concerns. Once we have matter-of-factly returned our clear attention to the breath, it is like a higher vantage point. The world does not seem so small, for a moment.

The physical sensations of breathing. The clear perception of the breath. Sitting still.

Taking a deep breath or two can sometimes help.

The hard part of our practice is keeping the mind centered. Clearly centered, here. Directly in the present moment, and not thinking about the past and future.

This is a trainable skill. The practice of concentration or samādhi is the work of unifying the mind right here. When we first start meditating, this process takes a long time. Like the momentum of a train, concentration tends to develop slowly. Concentration can develop in twenty or thirty minutes spent sitting, but longer term practitioners will know also that it can strengthen over weeks and months.

To people unfamiliar with meditation this practice may seem illogical or counter-intuitive. Focusing on something unrelated to our major concerns can seem unnecessary, even boring.

It's sometimes said that mindfulness is easy, only remembering to do it is hard. We can keep the breath in mind when we are waiting in line, about to go to sleep, walking, waiting for a friend, things like this. The breath is always with you, always knocking on the door of your awareness.

Sometimes people quite enjoy walking meditation. This is the same practice, but while walking. You can either focus on your breathing while walking, or the placement of your feet on the ground. It can be helpful to use the mental note "right" at the placement of the right foot, and "left" at the placement of the left foot. I do this one a lot.

It's important to be really gentle in meditation. Sometimes things like inner bodily tension can be too overwhelming to be with directly. In this case, we can use our awareness like soft cotton balls touching the edges of it. Kindness is so important.

We are learning to be present for things as they are, without wanting change. This is our practice of mindfulness.

Retreat

In this chapter I will describe the process of intensive meditation retreat. In meditation retreat, we are essentially deepening two conditions or grooves in the mind which are conducive to insight. These are the path condition or *maggapaccaya*, and the repetition condition or *āsevanapaccaya*. Described in the *Abhidhamma*, Buddhist psychology.

The path condition is what aligns with the Buddhist path. Like the rudder on a boat, it sets the direction for practice.

The repetition condition is frequency of carrying out the meditation instructions. It is like the rhythm of practice.

These two conditions allow for the continuous and steady application of mindfulness and the wisdom faculty. On retreat, we deepen these two grooves in the mind through many hours of meditation a day. One retreat method is to frequently return to a meditation object like the breath. With repetition and repeated iterations, the breath can become a strong and stable anchor to the present moment. The body relaxes.

Retreat involves having no distractions. No phone, no reading or writing. In the time of the Buddha, people went on intensive retreat with only the teachings they could remember. They did not have books or things like this.

Retreat is a sacred process of aligning ourselves with our deepest values.

What is your heart's deepest purpose?

Simplicity

Your practice is ideally very simple (but not simplistic). Watch your breath and label “in” and “out.” Use mental notes when they are appropriate. When you feel a sense of strong presence, watch the arising and passing of things and let go. Let go, let go, let go. Go.

We can use practically anything as a mental note. One very common practice I have is to simply repeat the word “here” over and over. It helps with the busy mind.

We can drop in questions like “What is this?” “What’s being believed?” “What else is there?”

With mental notes, the timing is important.

Drop in the mental note like you would a pebble into a deep and clear lake.

In particular, some perceptions can be liberating:

- “This is not me”
- “This is not mine”
- “Not me”
- “Not mine”
- “Steady”
- “Ease”
- “This is unreliable”

These are liberating perceptions.

A good practice too is just to smile.

Introduction to Wisdom

This is the chapter of the book on wisdom, being wise.

There are seven divisions in this chapter describing different facets of wisdom.

Within each division, you will read a discussion followed by a systematic teaching.

I am inspired by the Theravada Abhidhamma, particularly Bhikkhu Bodhi's masterful editorship and guide to the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*. The Abhidhamma is a kind of analytical framework for understanding the inner processes behind seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and cognizing that make up the whole human system. Importantly, the entire life process is shown to occur in a discrete, lawful fashion without any doer behind it. It's meant to be like a detailed map for navigating the wilderness of the mind.

Do not mistake what you have read about the nature of reality as ultimately real or existing. A very key point I'm making is that everything you can experience is a *process*. It is not fixed; it does not have some kind of a fixed foundation in the bedrock of reality. Everything is impermanent.

Don't get hung up on the details of this book. The purpose is not to formulate a fully precise Buddhist philosophy, but to convey a message, a mood, an intention. Do not worry if you cannot understand everything that is being taught. Find out if you can discover the mood or atmosphere of the text instead.

Again, do not get hung up on the details. There will be idiosyncrasies.

The basic message of the book is just to let go. Let go. Go.

Contents

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The whole can be understood as comprising:

- I) Consciousness
- II) Mental Factors
- III) The Cognitive Process
- IV) Materiality
- V) Conditionality
- VI) The Path
- VII) Nibbāna

Of this, everything except for Nibbāna is conditioned, and marked by the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self nature (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*).

Through mindfulness these various phenomena can be observed directly, without the mediation of concepts. Consciousness, mental factors, and materiality (parts I, II, and IV) can be seen as the fragments, bedrock, or raw substrate of mental-physical experience.

The cognitive process, conditionality, and the path (parts III, V, and VI) can be seen to collectively make up the basics of interaction between these fragments of experience, as a mode for understanding their limitations and strengths, as well as their cessation.

Mind

The mind refers to the atmospheric knowing of experience. The mind is felt somatically as broadness, atmosphere, or tone of experience. The mind and body are not so different. When the body contracts so does the mind.

We can feel into the mind by opening awareness to it. However, awareness and the mind are not so distinct. The pali word for mind is citta. Citta can refer to the bare knowing of an experience. The word is also sometimes translated as heart, or heart-mind. But the citta is actually more simple than the definition. The simplicity of knowing is compromised by a word.

In the Abhidhamma, or Buddhist psychology, citta is translated as consciousness. In the teachings of the Buddha, consciousness is seen to be intimately intertwined with suffering and clinging. However, we usually do not think about awareness, or mindfulness in this way. Consciousness can take on various flavours depending on the things or mental qualities operating in the mind. Commonly, this is greed. Greed arising in the mind obscures vision and shrinks awareness, contracting the body-mind into a knot.

The other two are hatred and delusion. These three flavours of the mind are related to each other, since all three are carrying the mental quality of delusion. In a greedy mind, the delusion is that greed is good. In a hateful mind, the delusion is that hatred works. In a deluded mind, well, it's just confused and numbish.

The opposite are also occurring. The flavours of consciousness without greed, hatred, and delusion are known as the beautiful mind. These feel open, but not necessarily because the mind isn't focused. There can be wisdom. The wisdom knife.

The non-greed, non-hatred mind is beautiful, like a rare bird. It comes out only when you are nice.

The citta is hard to see. It arises and passes constantly, or it is not to be seen at all. When you think you have seen the mind, it's not there. Try to see it despite the odds.

Consciousness sometimes has no apparent tone or flavour to it. It is not wholesome, beautiful, or unwholesome. In this case, the Abhidhamma says that the consciousness is a sense-receiving kind of consciousness. This means the consciousness is just there to pick up an object, objects being the things of the world. You see an apple with the eye-consciousness.

Part I: Consciousness

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Consciousness (*citta*) is the bare knowing of an object.

Consciousness is of four kinds:

- i) Unwholesome consciousness
- ii) Wholesome consciousness
- iii) Indeterminate consciousness
- iv) Liberative consciousness

Unwholesome consciousness is of three kinds:

- i) Consciousness with greed
- ii) Consciousness with hatred
- iii) Consciousness with delusion

Wholesome consciousness is of two kinds:

- i) Wholesome consciousness without wisdom
- ii) Wholesome consciousness with wisdom

Indeterminate consciousness is of seven kinds:

- i) Eye-consciousness
- ii) Ear-consciousness

- iii) Nose-consciousness
- iv) Tongue-consciousness
- v) Body-consciousness
- vi) Mind-consciousness
- vii) *Bhavanga* consciousness

Here, bhavanga consciousness is the kind of subliminal consciousness that operates in deep sleep, and between every cognitive process.

Liberative consciousness is of two kinds:

- i) Path consciousness
- ii) Fruition consciousness

This is the explanation of consciousness as part of the whole.

Mental Qualities

Mental qualities are the various activities of the mind which carry an agenda or duty or function. This is a very broad category. Very, very broad. Any kind of book or teaching on these is sure to limit the vast and beautiful variety of mental activity.

Mental activity is a translation of the pali word saṅkhāra. Alternative translations are choices, volitional formations, and formations. Perhaps you can get a sense of the term.

In the Abhidhamma, the word they use is cetasika. The common translation is mental factor. I enjoy the term mental quality. Choices, volitional formations, formations, mental factors, and mental qualities are all referring to an aspect of your experience.

Like consciousness or the mind, mental qualities carry an emotional flavour or tone, either wholesome or unwholesome, skillful or unskillful, beautiful or not.

Mental factors are really a technical term. It is best to think of these mental factors as various notes or tonalities of the mind, which come together in various combinations depending on circumstance. You can think of them like the keys of a piano. For each of the mental factors, you should notice when they are present, when they are absent, and the conditions which give rise to their presence and absence.

For example, one mental factor is determination. When you are feeling determined, this factor is there. Another is desire. Another is joy. Energy too.

Under what conditions do you experience these things? When is there joy in the mind? When desire, when energy?

Two important mental factors for meditation are initial application (of attention), and sustained application (of attention). These factors are like the workhorse of meditation. They bring the attention back to the meditation object over and over, and keep it there. The commentaries give an example of striking a bell. The strike is initial application; the resounding of the bell is sustained application.

Some mental factors are said to be present in practically every waking moment. Attention is one such factor which functions to turn the mind towards an object. Again, an object is just a thing like a sound or a sight. On experiencing something through the ear or eye, the attention turns towards that object.

The pinprick experience of something, some object, is known as contact. The mental factor of contact is like the impingement of something on the psycho-physical system.

Since there is contact, there is also feeling. Feeling or *vedanā* is a general word indicating the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality of an experience. It is also called the hedonic tone or feeling tone. The mental factor *vedanā* feels.

As an experience is reacted to, it is done so with an intention. Intention or *cetanā* is the volitional motivating factor behind every volitional impulse. Intimately connected with the wholesome or unwholesome, and our sense of purpose.

These mental factors are extremely basic in function. Contacting an experience with the mind is very primitive to the mind. Feeling something as pleasant or unpleasant is deeply human. Intending harm is a division from others.

One-pointedness is what keeps the mind aligned with one object or thought at a time. (When this activity is continuous and strong, it is integral to *samādhi* or concentration.)

Perception or saññā is bound up with memory. It is the “knowing as” of the mind. Pervasive and generally accurate, perception is what knows things as “floor” and so on. Perception is strengthened by the practice of mental noting, but is usually more primitive than thought.

The mental life faculty is manifested as mental vitality. When we feel lifeless or dead inside, this mental factor is weak.

In every single moment, the Abhidhamma says these factors are arising and passing. These are the indeterminate mental factors, meaning they can be bound up with both a wholesome or unwholesome mind. In a neither wholesome nor unwholesome mind, like seeing an apple, these factors just do the function of aligning the mind with the experience, neutral flavour.

Sometimes we need to take a break, have a cup of tea, go on a walk, things like this.

Mental qualities can be like the filter over our experience. For us, often this filter is greed, hatred, and delusion, the unwholesome qualities.

The unwholesome qualities or activities of mind are characterized by contraction. They are the black holes of the mind, like vortices. When these forces in our mind are strong, there is not even enough mindfulness to know they are there. They go underground, and you act unconsciously.

The Abhidhamma tells us that some unwholesome qualities are universal, meaning present and operating in all states of greed, hatred, and delusion. The universal unwholesome qualities are delusion, immorality, and agitation.

In any unwholesome consciousness, there is delusion or moha. Delusion here means that the mind is intentionally ignoring something. For example, the mind could be ignoring the truth that

sensual pleasures have no power to satisfy. Delusion means the mind is ignoring the Dhamma, ignoring the teachings.

Immorality also operates in all unwholesome states. States of greed, hatred, and delusion have no shame, no respect for one's own welfare, or the welfare of others.

Agitation is restlessness. Unwholesome activities of the mind always involve a constant reassertion of clinging and grasping. In the case of greed, this could be persistently reimagining a sexual fantasy, never satisfied with anything, never content with anything. In the mind of hatred, this could be hashing out an argument with someone over and over.

Greed, hatred, and delusion should be seen as a disease.

They almost always involve a concept of what the mind wants or doesn't want. Persistent thinking, tension in the body, and weakening of mindfulness are signs that these unwholesome factors are present. They are not a personal failing, nor do we need to be ashamed when we see they are present.

The unwholesome mental factors are part of an impersonal process. What makes them tricky is the belief that they are somehow independent from circumstances, that they are personal, separate, or private, something like this.

For each of the mental factors, you should notice when they are present, when they are absent, and the conditions which give rise to their presence and absence.

There are some mental factors accompanying greed: wrong view and conceit. Wrong view, as I understand it, is abstract, metaphysical thinking connected with whether things exist or not, the meaning of the universe, and so on. These are views which detract from the here and now, and are kind of a dead end. People can become very concerned with abstract philosophies. The other mental factor sometimes arising with greed is conceit. The pali

word for this is māna. Conceit is probably the most deeply rooted defilement of the mind. If you are conceited, you are not free. Most fundamentally, conceit is clinging to the belief “I am.” Cut off this defilement, and you will become enlightened.

Further, there are some mental factors accompanying hatred. These are envy, miserliness, and remorse. Envy is connected with jealousy. It is becoming selfish at the success of others. Miserliness is like the mirror of envy. It is becoming selfish at your own success, and not wanting to share it. These two defilements are often connected with material possessions, but can be related to meditative success and failure, intellectual success and failure, objects like this. Remorse is also connected with hatred, and I think most connected with self hatred. Bhikkhu Bodhi describes this one as the “mental scratching” that happens when you know you’ve done something wrong. A very painful one.

In the consciousness with pure delusion, there are also some mental factors. Delusion dissociated from greed and hatred is said to be harder to see. Strong delusion or momūha can be sensed as darkness or tunnel vision. The mental factors associated are spiritual doubt, and sloth and torpor. Spiritual doubt is said to be the only mental hindrance which can stop a person from practicing the Dhamma. It manifests as unconfidence, and doubt regarding one’s social, familial, meditative, or workplace circumstances. Persistent thinking is a sign this one is operating. It is good to try and distinguish it from skillful reflection, which well timed can be crucial. Sloth and torpor are the last two factors, and they always come together. These are manifested as physical and mental tiredness, lack of energy. It does not mean the mind doesn’t have energy, but rather that it is not being accessed. The mind has become lazy. Sometimes they suggest a reflection on death as an antidote.

For each of the mental factors, you should notice when they are present, when they are absent, and the conditions which give rise to their presence and absence.

These are the unwholesome mental factors.

Unwholesome qualities can camouflage themselves, hard to see.

Agitation can be very subtle.

The beautiful mind. The wholesome mind has the flavor of freedom, ease, and peace. Simplicity too is a characteristic of this beautiful mind.

The first beautiful mental quality is faith. Faith is like the diamond that does not get burned, despite the layers of soot covering it. Faith is confidence that the wholesome path is worth much.

The second beautiful mental quality is mindfulness. Mindfulness or sati is awareness. My purpose in discussing it here is to evoke it. Clearly aware.

Mindfulness could be defined as the awareness that leads to Nibbāna. Some say it is strictly wholesome, while other wise teachers say that mindfulness is neutral. In any case, the path of mindfulness is to engage with it, to evoke it in oneself.

The *Visuddhimagga* states that the proximate cause of mindfulness is clear perception. Other causes include wise friendship, and reading texts.

The third beautiful mental quality is morality. Having a clear conscience is well regarded in the Buddhist texts as worthwhile.

The fourth beautiful factor is non-greed. Non-greed is the absence of greed, and allows the mind to bend and flow with a situation, maybe like dancing.

The fifth factor is non-hatred. Non-hatred is the absence of hatred, and can take on the various flavours of friendship, loving-

kindness or mettā, acceptance, rejoicing for others, and compassion. A beautiful thing.

The next factors are mental balance, tranquility, lightness, flexibility, malleability, familiarity, and uprightness. These factors come in especially during meditation practice, and perform a balancing or assisting function.

These wholesome mental factors always occur as a group, they co-arise with each other. This means that if you are practicing mindfulness, all other aspects of the wholesome mind will automatically become stronger along with it.

The beautiful mind also includes ethics: right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

Critical to liberating insight is the last factor of the beautiful mind, the wisdom faculty or paññindriya. This factor is variable, only sometimes occurring. During meditation practice we sharpen this factor and use it to cut out defiled, unwholesome states.

This is the beautiful mind.

You may notice mental factors not included on the list, such as fear. Fear, like all the other qualities, is multifaceted and the experience of it will be unique to each person.

Part II: Mental Factors

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Mental factors (*cetasikā*) are the specialized cognition in the knowing of an object.

The relationship between consciousness and mental factors should be understood as that between a king and his retinue. The king is like the consciousness, which knows an object, while the servants are like

the mental factors, which delimit and inspect the object.

Mental factors are of three kinds:

- i) Indeterminate mental factors
- ii) Unwholesome mental factors
- iii) Wholesome mental factors

Indeterminate mental factors are of two kinds:

- i) Universal indeterminate mental factors
- ii) Variable indeterminate mental factors

The universal indeterminate mental factors are contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), intention (*cetanā*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), the mental life faculty (*jīvitindriya*), and attention (*manasikāra*). These mental factors are present in every consciousness.

The variable indeterminate mental factors are initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), determination (*adhimokkha*), energy (*vīriya*), joy (*pīti*), and desire (*chanda*). These mental factors are sometimes present in consciousness, depending on circumstance.

When the indeterminate mental factors are present in an unwholesome or wholesome consciousness, they become similarly unwholesome or wholesome. In indeterminate consciousness (eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc.) they are kammically indeterminate.

These are the indeterminate mental factors.

Unwholesome mental factors are of four kinds:

- i) Universal unwholesome mental factors
- ii) Greed mental factors

- iii) Hatred mental factors
- iv) Delusion mental factors

The universal unwholesome mental factors are delusion (*moha*), moral shamelessness (*ahirika*), fearlessness of wrongdoing (*anottappa*), and agitation (*uddhacca*). These mental factors are present in every unwholesome consciousness.

The greed mental factors are greed (*lobha*), wrong view (*ditṭhi*), and conceit (*māna*). Greed is present in every consciousness with greed, while the other two only sometimes.

The hatred mental factors are hatred (*dosa*), envy (*issā*), miserliness (*macchariya*), and remorse (*kukkucca*). Hatred is present in every consciousness with hatred, while the other three only sometimes.

The delusion mental factors are sloth (*thīna*), torpor (*middha*), and spiritual doubt (*vicikkichā*). Strong delusion (*momūha*) is present in every consciousness with delusion, while the other three only sometimes.

These are the unwholesome mental factors.

Wholesome mental factors are of three kinds:

- i) Universal wholesome mental factors
- ii) The abstinences
- iii) The wisdom faculty

The universal wholesome mental factors are faith (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), moral shame (*hiri*), fear of wrongdoing (*ottappa*), non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), mental balance (*tatramajjhatthatā*), tranquility (*passadhi*),

lightness (*lahutā*), flexibility (*mudutā*), malleability (*kammaññatā*), familiarity (*pāguññatā*), and uprightness (*ujjukatā*). These mental factors are present in every wholesome consciousness.

However, some wise people say that mindfulness is neither unwholesome nor wholesome, but neutral.

Furthermore, the great divine abidings (*brahmavihārā*) of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and rejoicement (*muditā*) are represented by the mental factor of non-hatred. Equanimity (*upekkhā*) is represented by the factor of mental balance.

The abstinenes are right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), and right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). These mental factors are present in wholesome consciousness whenever there is abstinence from their opposites.

The wisdom faculty (*paññindriya*) is the same as non-delusion (*amoha*), and is sometimes present in wholesome consciousness.

These are the wholesome mental factors.

This is the explanation of mental factors as part of the whole.

The Cognitive Process

The basic meditation instruction is when you notice the mind getting involved in thinking and preoccupation, steadily bring the mind to the physical sensations of breathing in the abdomen. The main barriers to this are the five classical hindrances: sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt.

This is a cognitive process. We notice the mind getting stuck, and without reacting, try a new way.

What do we react to? Well, any number of things. That is, anything experienced through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind.

Without getting technical, we see an apple with the eye. In the next moment, we make the determination to eat it. This is a cognitive process.

The cognitive process sometimes feels immediate. As soon as we walk into a loud room, there is anger. This too is a cognitive process.

Roughly speaking, the cognitive process applies to things experienced through the five material senses and the mind. The five material senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching process the material objects of the world. The mind sense in a way weaves together the five other senses, and can react to things in its own way as well.

The mind can interpret mental objects. In the case of breathing meditation, sometimes this is the perception of the breath. The mind processes consciousness and mental factors in an ongoing chain, quite often weaving together concepts, views, and stories along with it.

The mind can also know Nibbāna.

Concepts in the mind are produced by the cognitive process. Concepts are essentially a glomming together of various mental factors and parts, with the *belief* that the concepts are essential, independent, and fundamentally existent.

Sometimes we are able to see concepts as they are. When we do not see concepts as concepts, it is called a delusion.

In deeper meditation, the mind is able to see things directly, without the mediation of concepts.

The cognitive process, how we react to the various stimuli of the world, has implications for our karma. Karma is a sanskrit word referring to deeds and activities of the mind. Intimately related to the mental factor of intention (*cetanā*), it is through the law of karma that we experience the results of our wholesome and unwholesome actions.

For example, say that in the past I have been greedy for some material object, like alcohol or a watch. In the present this memory arises in the mind and I experience the painful memory. This is karma, the results of good and bad deeds.

The law of karma is referred to as planting seeds. When you water wholesome seeds, wholesome intentions, this will ripen in the future by way of pleasant memories or skillful habits. Unwholesome intentions result in painful memories and often muscular tension.

There are hundreds of muscles in the human body. The karma we do, for good or for ill, affects those muscles in a certain way. Greed is tension in the present and future. So this is karma.

The problem of karma gives rise to certain thoughts. Such as, if we see an apple out of the corner of our eye, does that create

karmic consequences? If intention operates in every single moment, how should I act in the world? How subtle does it get?

How does your conditioning affect your response?

The cognitive process is highly individual. Do you react immediately to things, or is there a delay between stimulus and response? We usually wish that our cognitive process was different than it is. How does yours manifest?

In deep meditation, sensitive experience becomes quieter and more refined. Thoughts and mental factors are seen clearly, seeming to arise out of some depths. Sometimes we notice a blank spot in our awareness. This is called the bhavanga consciousness, and is said to be like the filler between cognitive processes. It is like the subliminal consciousness.

What would it be like to know something directly through the sense-doors? What is it like to have no delusion?

Part III: The Cognitive Process

○

The cognitive process (*cittavīthi*) is the orderly receiving of and reaction to an object.

It is the process behind seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or cognizing an object.

Objects are of two kinds:

- i) Materiality
- ii) Mental objects

Mental objects are of four kinds:

- i) Consciousness
- ii) Mental factors
- iii) Nibbāna
- iv) Concepts

These various objects appear at the six sense-doors when the conditions are met.

The sense-doors are of six kinds:

- i) The eye-door
- ii) The ear-door
- iii) The nose-door
- iv) The tongue-door
- v) The body-door
- vi) The mind-door

The mind-door is the same as the bhavanga consciousness.

The eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body-doors receive their respective objective materiality (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles). The mind-door may receive both materiality and mental objects.

The cognitive process can then be understood in two ways:

- i) Receiving then subsequently reacting to an object
- ii) Receiving and reacting to an object simultaneously

The mode of receiving then subsequently reacting to an object can be understood in the following way:

First there is the stream of bhavanga consciousness. Then an object is received at one of the six sense-doors by way of the respective indeterminate consciousness. Next, the object is reacted to in the following mind-moment by way of unwholesome or wholesome consciousness. Afterwards the mind again lapses into the bhavanga.

Here, it should be noted that the indeterminate consciousness creates no kammic consequences.

This is the mode of receiving then subsequently reacting to an object.

The mode of receiving and reacting to an object simultaneously can be understood in the following way:

First there is the stream of bhavanga consciousness. Then an object is received at one of the six sense-doors by unwholesome or wholesome consciousness. Afterwards the mind again lapses into the bhavanga.

Here, it should be noted that there is no indeterminate consciousness except for the bhavanga, and every active mind-moment creates kammic consequences.

This is the mode of receiving and reacting to an object simultaneously.

The first mode can be understood as a stimulus-response sequence, while the second mode can be understood as an immediate or preconditioned reaction.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the cognitive process becomes increasingly subtle as tranquility (*passadhi*) increases and the wisdom faculty (*paññindriya*) gets sharper.

The cognitive process is very rapid, but is usually obscured by concepts. As such, the stream of bhavanga is also usually unnoticed.

This is the explanation of the cognitive process as part of the whole.

The Body and World

The body is not to be avoided. Physical pain is one of the deepest gateways we have to a human spiritual life.

Reading this, you have a body. You can see it and hear it. Importantly, you can also feel it somatically from the inside out.

The pali word for material form is *rūpa*. Other translations are form, matter, physicality, and materiality. As for why, the Buddha said with a kind of pun: “And why is it called form? Because it is deformed, that is why it is called form.”

The body is deformed in various ways due to the environment. We all have scars, and experience mosquito bites. The body is very fragile. Something that we do not have complete control over cannot be called strictly ours. Attachment and repulsion to the body can bring much suffering.

It is a sensitive area. The body is our conduit to some of the deepest human feelings and emotions. In my practice, I have noticed that heart pain is connected to grief.

Materials scientists have discovered many material properties concerning the physical world. In Buddhist practice, the focus is on the felt sense. We bring our mindfulness and clear attention to the details of our human body experience.

The body houses the five physical senses. Working together, these senses formulate a full and rich experience to be received by consciousness. The sensitive matter found in the optic nerve, skin and organs, ear drum, taste buds, and nasal passage are to be respected and mindfully and clearly known. The human body.

I don't know why we have exactly five bodily senses like this. If one disappears, the others make up for it.

The world according to Buddhist thought is the external objects to be contacted by the senses. That is, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. At the most basic level, these are very simple. In the case of sight, it is just blocks of color or something. Seeing without concepts, the objective world is immediate.

We see a roundish block of red color with the eye, and the mind constructs the concept of "apple" to be laid overtop.

Our experience is like this. The external objective world and the inner experience are coming together. It is only the mind which confounds us.

Tangible objects are received somatically, through the bodily sense. The meeting of a touch, the body-sensitivity, and the associated body-consciousness is an impingement on the senses.

Broadly speaking, the objects of the tangible object sense-sphere are either hard or soft, wet or not, cool or hot, and felt as pressure or movement. In classical Buddhist thought, these are represented by the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. We can feel these when we are mindful of our breathing in meditation.

The five physical senses are always operating in the present moment. Some material object or other is always impinging. The breath is an excellent example for us, since it is always present and always changing. It is only the mind which gets involved in concepts about past and future, remembering and planning, things like this.

The Abhidhamma describes various kinds of materiality which are not strictly objective. I took this to mean that the mind plays some kind of role or other in the perception of that object. There are maybe ten kinds of this "cognized materiality" pointed out.

The first is the sexuality faculty. In the traditional Abhidhamma, they have two for male and female. How can you be mindful in regard to sexuality?

The second is the heart-base. This is said to be the seat of consciousness. I like that a lot.

The third is the physical life faculty, the counterpart to the mental life faculty.

The fourth is nutriment, or sustenance. This is essentially food. How can you be mindful in regard to food?

The fifth is the space element. This is the element that delimits physical matter, and allows for movement and room.

The sixth is bodily intimation, and the seventh is vocal intimation. Sometimes we mistake a tree branch rustling for a human voice, or the movement of a curtain for a human figure. Bodily and vocal intimation are like this. They are essentially a form of materiality which is in part cognized by the mind, i.e., influenced by past perception. Emptiness permeates all concepts in this way.

The eighth, ninth, and tenth forms are lightness, malleability, and wieldiness of matter. I take these to be material properties of the body which change depending on the quality of mindfulness present. For example, if mindfulness is strong, the body can feel lighter or more wieldy or something.

These are the ten kinds of cognized materiality. In Buddhist practice, we are trying to find the meeting point between the subjective and the objective. How does the world change for you when you are mindful? How does suffering manifest in your external world? Do you keep a messy room?

We know that all things must pass. All material things, a beautiful sunset too.

Bringing acceptance to the body is key.

Part IV: Materiality

○

Materiality (rūpa) is the simple physical basis for cognition.

The relationship between consciousness, mental factors, and materiality should be understood as that between a king and his retinue, and the chariot they arrive on. The chariot they arrive on is like materiality, which forms the physical support for cognition.

Materiality is of three kinds:

- i) Objective materiality
- ii) Sensitive materiality
- iii) Cognized materiality

Objective materiality is of five kinds:

- i) Sights
- ii) Sounds
- iii) Smells
- iv) Tastes
- v) Tangibles

Tangibles are of four kinds:

- i) Earth element
- ii) Water element
- iii) Fire element
- iv) Air element

These are the four great essential elements, from which all other materiality is derived. Earth element

is felt somatically as hardness or softness; water element as cohesion or fluidity; fire element as heat or cold; air element as distension or pressure.

This is objective materiality.

Sensitive materiality is of five kinds:

- i) Eye-sensitivity
- ii) Ear-sensitivity
- iii) Nose-sensitivity
- iv) Tongue-sensitivity
- v) Body-sensitivity

Sensitive materiality is the same as the five sense-doors (barring the mind-door) discussed above. They are called doors because it is where the objective materiality may meet its respective indeterminate consciousness.

Eye-sensitivity is the subtle matter found in the optic nerve. Ear-sensitivity is the subtle matter found in the ear drum. Nose-sensitivity is the subtle matter found in the olfactory nerves. Tongue-sensitivity is the subtle matter found in the taste buds. Body-sensitivity is the subtle matter found in the sensory nerves of the skin and organs.

This is sensitive materiality.

Cognized materiality is of ten kinds:

- i) Sexuality faculty
- ii) Heart-base
- iii) Physical life faculty
- iv) Nutriment
- v) Space element
- vi) Bodily intimation
- vii) Vocal intimation
- viii) Lightness of matter

- iv) Malleability of matter
- x) Wieldiness of matter

Here, it is said that the heart-base is the seat of consciousness. Nutriment is food, and the space element delimits the four great elements. Bodily and vocal intimation are the means by which people act and communicate.

This is cognized materiality.

Materiality essentially makes up the physical body and the objective sense-world. It is important to note that all materiality is subject to arising, presence, dissolution, and impermanence.

This is the explanation of materiality as part of the whole.

Conditionality

Conditionality is a specific method of understanding how things work. It should be looked at with wariness.

If you are safely in the present moment, the workings of conditionality will be revealed to you. No need for a text.

Come back to the breath as needed.

Okay, the interactive field of causality is immense. A condition like the weather impacts our mood. Having eyesight is a condition. In Buddhist practice, we are concerned with how we can use and shape the web of conditionality in order to find inner peace. They talk about the karma which leads to the end of karma.

Karma is governed by intention (*cetanā*). Intentions are like seeds planted in a massive field. Wholesome intentions ripen at a later time as a pleasant result. Unwholesome intentions ripen at a later time as an unpleasant result. Both wholesome and unwholesome intentions can be sensed in the present as such. We can know the seeds we are planting.

In the field of awareness, seeds from the past are ripening all the time. In the next moment, the way we react plants a new seed.

We can't possibly know all of the seeds in the field, and when they will ripen. The best we can do is very carefully monitor the seeds we are planting in the present. You have to be meticulous with your intention.

This is the understanding of karma. Karma is closely tied to your creativity.

Why are we here? Is there some original condition which gives rise to our suffering?

The Buddha avoided metaphysics. Buddhist practice is focused on the present moment, primarily because suffering only happens in the present moment. If you will become free from suffering, that process too will only happen in the present moment.

The mass of suffering occurring in the present can seem impenetrable. When this is the case, Buddhist teachers sometimes bring out the understanding of dependent origination as an antidote.

Dependent origination is a sequence of twelve conditions which shape the way we suffer.

The twelve links are: ignorance; volitional formations; consciousness; mentality-materiality; the six sense-doors; contact; feeling; craving; clinging; becoming; birth; old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and unrest. Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

You don't have to memorize these. I'll go through how each link conditions the next.

First, I will discuss ignorance. Ignorance is the same as delusion, they are synonyms. Ignorance means ignoring, it is a self-definition. If you have ignorance, it means you are ignoring the truth that all things are impermanent.

Impermanence is embedded in the fabric of our life. You literally cannot avoid it.

Ignorance conditions volitional formations (*saṅkhārā*). As we read earlier, volitional formations are activities of the mind, choices we make, tied up with intention, perception, desire, joy, energy, and so on. These are the mental factors, and they are subtly influenced by delusion. Ignorance in the mind inclines the

mental factors towards favoring unwholesome states, on a subtle level.

Volitional formations condition consciousness. Mental factors, these subtle formations, are more basic than consciousness. Consciousness does the atmospheric, kind of broader knowing of an experience. So even before you are consciously present with an experience, mental factors and their inner conditions have impacted the way you are perceiving things.

An example of this is when you are going into a store to buy a shirt. Automatically when you go into the store, your awareness screens out everything that is not a shirt. You are there to buy a shirt.

In the Dhammapada, it is said that formations or saṅkhārā are the foremost suffering. The most persistent and subtle saṅkhāra is the formation of a permanent “self.”

Consciousness conditions mentality-materiality. Mentality is essentially the conglomeration of consciousness and mental factors. Materiality is material form, the sense experience of a body. The body too will be influenced by consciousness. In Eastern Abhidhamma literature, they have published stores of knowledge on the causal links between consciousness and material form, the body.

Mentality-materiality condition the six sense-doors. The body as well as consciousness and assisting mental factors differentiate themselves to interpret the five physical senses plus the mind-sense. At this point only is the mind able to receive external stimuli.

The six sense-doors condition contact (phassa). Contact is the meeting of one of the six senses, the respective sense-consciousness, and an external object. For example, the eye plus eye-consciousness plus a sight. The mind plus mind-

consciousness plus an idea. The meeting of the three is contact, an impingement on the psycho-physical system.

Contact conditions feeling (vedanā). Having contacted an object, the mental factor of feeling becomes distinct. It may be believed that the pleasantness or unpleasantness or neutrality of a situation is inherent to the situation. For example, that “our” article of clothing or something is always pleasant. But feeling tone is a condition, impacted by the previous links. People can become obsessed with this mental quality.

Feeling conditions craving (tanhā). In the second Noble Truth they say: *Katamañca, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatrataṛābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ—kāmatanḥā bhavatanḥā vibhavanḥā.* “And what, oh monks, is the Noble Truth of the origination of suffering? It is that craving of renewed becoming, gone with delight and lust, delighting here and there, just so—craving for sense pleasure, craving for becoming, and craving for extermination.” This is the second Noble Truth, conditioned by feeling tone. At this link in the chain, craving has arisen in the mind in the form of greed.

We also say that craving can be in the form of craving to get rid of something unpleasant, and that is hatred.

If the feeling tone is neutral, the mental factor activated is delusion, and the mind of pure delusion (momūha) is there.

Craving conditions clinging (upādāna). Clinging is grasping or clenching of the fist of the mind. This can be felt in the body as clenching of material form in the forehead. Traditionally we say that clinging is clinging to views. The view of a permanent self becomes tighter. Some people like to get into arguments from their views, maybe political or something. At the root is our ignorance.

It is said that ignorance, craving, and clinging run and circle around each other. (Maybe like a dog chasing their tail.)

Clinging conditions becoming (bhava). Becoming is a term referring to hardness, like dried concrete. It is the point in which the mind's identities and views have become fixated or locked in some way or other. The heart has become hardwired.

Becoming conditions birth. In the traditional texts, this means rebirth into a new existence. In modern interpretation, we say this is the birth of an identity, the birth of an ego. The root of this sort of conceptual proliferation is conceit.

Birth conditions old age and death. In the traditional texts, this means death in the next life. In the West we say this is the inevitable death and alteration of self identity and ego. Given conceit, the mind reels with suffering. They give a long name for this: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and unrest. Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

This is the understanding of dependent origination.

The links are interpenetrating, and appear non-sequentially in actual experience. It is said the easiest place to weaken and stop the chain is between the links of feeling and craving. Mindfulness and clear comprehension will stop the flood.

The understanding of karma above refers to our way of reacting to something with a delay. The method of dependent origination is seen when our habitual responses are immediate.

This is the explanation of conditionality.

Part V: Conditionality

Conditionality is the complex yet lawful inter-fabrication of consciousness, mental factors, and materiality.

Conditionality can be understood in two ways:

- i) Simple *kamma*
- ii) Dependent origination

Kamma (sanskrit: *karma*) can be understood simply as the ripening of unwholesome or wholesome consciousness.

Governed by the mental factor of intention (*cetanā*), unwholesome or wholesome actions done in the past ripen as unpleasant or pleasant objects and their corresponding indeterminate sense-consciousnesses in the future. Given that ripening of kamma, an unwholesome or wholesome consciousness follows in the next mind-moment reacting to that same object. That reaction consciousness in turn bears fruit in the future.

However, kamma is not a law of predetermination, because spiritual practice includes choice.

This is the understanding of simple kamma.

The twelve-fold chain of dependent origination can be understood as having twelve links, as follows:

- i) Ignorance
- ii) Formations
- iii) Consciousness
- iv) Mentality-materiality
- v) The six sense-doors
- vi) Contact
- vii) Feeling
- viii) Craving
- ix) Clinging

- x) Becoming
- xi) Birth
- xii) Old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and unrest.

The following analysis will inspect each link as it conditions the next in the wheel of becoming.

Dependent on ignorance arise formations:
Ignorance (*avijjā*) is the same as the mental factor of delusion (*moha*), and formations are mental factors. With ignorance, concurrent subtle mental factors precondition the mind in alignment with that same delusion.

Dependent on formations arises consciousness:
When there are formations present, a variegated consciousness (*citta*) is there utilizing those same basic mental factors.

Dependent on consciousness arises mentality-materiality:
Consciousness and mental factors make up mentality (*nāma*), while materiality is materiality (*rūpa*). When consciousness arises the material world must be there to support that consciousness.

Dependent on mentality-materiality arise the six sense-doors:
Mentality supported by materiality resorts to sensitive matter (eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, etc.) and the bhavanga consciousness (of the mind) which allows for the taking in of objects.

Dependent on the six sense-doors arises contact:
With the meeting of one of the six sense-doors, the corresponding consciousness, and an object, there is the mental factor of contact (*phassa*).

Dependent on contact arises feeling:

When consciousness contacts an object, a feeling tone (mental factor: *vedanā*) conditioned by the previous links feels that object as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Dependent on feeling arises craving:

Craving (*taṇhā*) is the mental factor of greed (*lobha*). With a pleasant feeling there is craving to have more. With an unpleasant feeling there is craving (here manifested as the mental factor of hatred, *dosa*) to get rid of it. With a neutral feeling there is typically reinforcement of delusion (*moha*).

Dependent on craving arises clinging:

Repeated craving is called clinging (*upādāna*). It is manifested as tenacious concepts and desire.

Dependent on clinging arises becoming:

Clinging which gives rise to hard-held concepts is a state of habitual response, known as becoming (*bhava*).

Dependent on becoming arises birth:

With the fixation of views and habitual responses, there is the birth (*jāti*) of a rigid self-identity supporting that clinging.

Dependent on birth arise old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and unrest:

The previous interpenetrating conditions, when they arise in each moment, are suffering (*dukkha*).

Each link is dependent on the preceding links.

When one link is removed, the rest cannot follow.

This is the understanding of dependent origination.

Herein, in the cognitive process, the understanding of simple kamma corresponds to the mode of receiving then subsequently reacting to an object. The understanding of dependent origination corresponds to the mode of receiving and reacting to an object simultaneously.

This is the explanation of conditionality as part of the whole.

The Buddhist Path

A simple pause can sometimes allow something wonderful and unexpected to occur.

Pausing before taking a step. A cup of tea.

In essence, the Buddhist path is non-reactivity to the various sensitive experiences of life. Life offers us many encounters.

I believe ground zero of Buddhist practice is that no experience can be accurately put into words. Try it, and your results will be unsatisfactory. At its heart, the Buddhist path is within you. It is only found inside.

Ajahn Chah said that everything occurs within the heart.

At times, we have to use our deepest gut instinct. At other times, it is fine to use books.

Looking inside, we find some hurt. This is the truth: the mind causes itself suffering through its own actions. Seeing this brings some okay-ness. We then are able to take a step forward.

The Four Noble Truths are not abstract philosophy, they exist within you. Somebody who understands this on the deepest level is said to be fully enlightened, an Arahant.

The way to get there is to stumble and fall many times. We learn by doing. The actualization of freedom is found by discovering the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. The path has eight factors, as follows: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Since the path is found within, it can be broken down into mental factors.

The first is right view. Right view is the wisdom faculty (paññindriya). Once this factor is established in a person, it is said that the others follow smoothly. Foremost, the wisdom faculty knows the law of impermanence. It knows that all things pass away, basically in the blink of an eye. The entire sensory world arises and passes in an instant. The Abhidhamma describes countless mind-moments arising and passing in a second. Consciousness, mental factors, and materiality do not stay the same for an instant. Perception shifts. Mindfulness is here and then gone. We change houses, find a job. An insect dies on the windowsill. Leaves blow in the wind. Intentions change by day. Our purpose shifts by day. Who we think we are disappears.

The second factor of the path is right intention. This is the mental factor of intention (cetanā), but could also be initial application (vitakka), as it is directly related to where we are putting our attention and why. It is related to thought, skillful reflection and consideration.

The third, fourth, and fifth factors are ethical. They are right speech, action, and livelihood. These are the respective mental factors. Are you ethical?

The sixth factor of the eightfold path is right effort. We are instructed to train ourselves: “Gladly would we let the flesh and blood in our bodies dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if we have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing our persistence.”

The seventh factor is right mindfulness. This is the factor sati.

The eighth factor is right concentration. This is the factor ekaggatā, one-pointedness or unification.

Probably, you have greed, hatred, and delusion. The pali words are lobha, dosa, and moha. Conceit is there too (māna).

Part VI: The Path

○

The path is the way of practice that leads to Nibbāna.

The path can be understood in two ways:

- i) The right path
- ii) The wrong path

The right path is the noble eightfold path of the Buddha, and has eight factors:

- i) Right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)
- ii) Right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*)
- iii) Right speech (*sammā-vācā*)
- iv) Right action (*sammā-kammanta*)
- v) Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)
- vi) Right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)
- vii) Right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)
- viii) Right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

Rather than the word “right,” some wise people prefer the words “complete,” “genuine,” or “concurrent” instead.

The noble eightfold path can be broken down into eight mental factors (*cetasikā*), as follows:

- i) The wisdom faculty (*paññīndriya*)
- ii) Intention (*cetanā*)
- iii) Right speech abstinence (*sammā-vācā*)
- iv) Right action abstinence (*sammā-kammanta*)
- v) Right livelihood abstinence (*sammā-ājīva*)
- vi) Energy (*vīriya*)
- vii) Mindfulness (*sati*)
- viii) One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*)

The noble eightfold path is exclusively wholesome. It is called the right path because it leads to the alleviation and destruction of suffering.

This is the right path.

The wrong path is known as the wrong eightfold path (wrong view, wrong intention, wrong speech, etc.).

The wrong path can be broken down into three mental factors known as the unwholesome roots (*hetū*):

- i) Greed (*lobha*)
- ii) Hatred (*dosa*)
- iii) Delusion (*moha*)

It is called the wrong path because it occurs only in unwholesome consciousness, and leads to suffering.

This is the wrong path.

The right path can arise when one weakens the wheel of dependent origination between the links of feeling and craving. When feeling tone (*vedanā*) is reacted to with mindfulness instead of craving (*taṇhā*), the right path arises. Similarly for any other link.

When the right path arises, the mode of specific conditionality known as path-condition (*maggapaccaya*) also arises. The path-condition aligns subtle concurrent mental factors and the supporting materiality to lead to the respective wholesome result.

Furthermore, the repetition-condition (*āsevanapaccaya*) is also operating, since the path becomes stronger through repetition and practice.

The right path can be further understood as follows:

- i) The practice of virtue (*sīla*)
- ii) The practice of meditation (*samādhi*)
- iii) The practice of insight (*paññā*)

This is also called the threefold training.

The practice of virtue is represented by the right path factors of right speech, action, and livelihood. Namely, virtue is foremost the taking of precepts and the guarding of the sense-doors.

The practice of meditation is represented by the right path factors of right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Namely, meditation is the nurturing and cultivation of those wholesome mental factors which lead to insight and tranquility, bolstered by a meditation subject like the breath (mindfulness of breathing, *ānāpānasati*).

The practice of insight is represented by the right path factors of right view and intention. Namely, insight is seeing consciousness, mental factors, and materiality as they are: impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*).

It is important to note that in the stage of insight, it is only mental factors which see mental factors with insight, define, delimit, and inspect them. In this way, the path undermines itself.

The insight into Nibbāna occurs when the eight right path factors are mature.

This is the explanation of the path as part of the whole.

Nirvana

Nirvāṇa is a sanskrit word referring to the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. The pali word is Nibbāna. It literally means extinguishing, cooling, or quenching of evil.

Part VII: Nibbāna



Nibbāna is the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion.

It is also the full cessation of consciousness, mental factors, and materiality. It is said to be beyond concepts.

When the eight right path factors are mature, and with the culmination of insight knowledge, the liberative path consciousness arises taking Nibbāna as the object, and releases mental factors associated with greed, hatred, and delusion and their associated consciousnesses. At this point, they can never arise again.

In the mind-moment following the liberative path consciousness is the liberative fruition consciousness, which experiences the peace of Nibbāna. Then, the mind again lapses into the ordinary bhavanga, and the cognitive process continues.

The first taste of Nibbāna is called stream-entry. One who experiences this knows a complete but momentary release from suffering, and is known as a stream enterer, or *sotapanna*. Only the mental

factors of wrong view and spiritual doubt are removed.

The final and complete destruction of suffering occurs with Arahantship. With this, all unwholesome mental factors in the mind are removed, put down, laid to rest, and destroyed.

This is the explanation of Nibbāna as part of the whole.

All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind, made by mind.
Speak or act with a corrupted mind
And suffering follows
As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind, made by mind.
Speak or act with a peaceful mind
And happiness follows
Like a never-departing shadow.

—*Dhammapada 1-2*

Sincerest wishes.
by Henry Daum

