

Unravelling the Golden Roots of



Contemporary Buddhism



By

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## 1. Preface

Understanding the foundational Buddhist concepts from the *Tripitaka* (Pali Buddhist Canon) is essential for beginners. Buddhism, originally a philosophy, has evolved into a religion enriched with traditions, beliefs, and rituals that have been shaped by human culture. At its core, however, it remains a profound way of understanding life. This book explores its essential teachings—universal principles that anyone can follow, regardless of background or belief, without conflict.

Venerable Walasmulle Abhaya Thēro has made immense contributions to humanity by deepening our understanding of the *Tripitaka* through interpretation, practice, and teaching, primarily in the Sinhala language. His sharp insights have been instrumental in identifying inconsistencies within certain texts and realigning them with the core principles of Buddhist philosophy. As the need for a contemporary English resource grows, it is time to share these insights more broadly.

Drawing from Venerable Walasmulle Abhaya Thēro’s direct teachings, sermons, and in-depth discussions with devoted practitioners (*Ārya Śrāvakas*), this booklet humbly seeks to enhance our 21st-century understanding of essential Buddhist concepts. It emphasises the unique value of mindfulness rooted in the *supramundane* (*lokottara*) path, in contrast to the *mundane* (*laukika*) techniques often promoted by modern mindfulness teachers. The Buddhist path, commonly presented as *Dāna* (Generosity/Giving), *Sīla* (Morality/Virtue), and *Bhāvanā* (Mental Cultivation/Meditation), tends to reflect a *laukika* focus. In contrast, *Prajñā* (Wisdom/Insight), *Sīla* (Ethics/Discipline), and *Samādhi* (Concentration/Meditation) more accurately embody the *lokottara* orientation. This book centres on the *supramundane* (*lokottara*) perspective, staying true to the core teachings found in the *Tripitaka*.

By presenting these foundational principles in clear and accessible language, while remaining faithful to the wisdom of the *Tripitaka*, this booklet aspires to inspire readers to walk the path toward *Nirvāṇa* and supramundane bliss.

It has been my honour to collaborate with Venerable Walasmulle Abhaya Thēro and support his monumental efforts through this work, dedicated to the benefit of all humanity and to those seeking peace, tranquillity, and well-being.

*Note to Readers:*

This book is offered at a nominal price through a global publication platform to reach and benefit like-minded individuals worldwide, beyond the borders of our small island in the Indian Ocean, who are seeking spiritual insight. All proceeds are dedicated to supporting the Buddhist Doctrine (*Sāsana*), for the upliftment and well-being of humanity.

**Chula Goonasekera**

*Compiling Editor*

## 2. Foundational Lessons for Successful Outcomes

Learning, understanding, and applying knowledge through experience are essential for success in any pursuit, and Buddhist doctrine is no exception. This section introduces the foundational concepts of Buddhist philosophy. As your understanding deepens through study and personal experience, you will gradually come to appreciate the transformative benefits of these teachings, known as Ariyā Dhamma. With time and dedication, this journey may lead you to become a committed practitioner of the path, known as an Ariyā Śrāvaka.

### Dhamma in the Buddhist Canon

The core teachings of Buddhism, known as the Dhamma, are preserved in the *Tripitaka*, which literally means "Three Baskets," and form the foundation of the Buddhist canon. These teachings primarily focus on understanding and transforming the mind. This book is dedicated to following these principles.

1. **Vinaya Pitaka** (*Basket of Discipline*, Volumes 1–9): This section outlines the rules and ethical guidelines for *bhikkhus* (monks) and *bhikkhunis* (nuns), forming the monastic code that supports moral living and communal harmony.
2. **Sutra Pitaka** (*Basket of Discourses*, Volumes 10–44): Comprising the Buddha's sermons, this collection presents his teachings on the *Dhamma* through dialogues and parables, often structured in an abstract or thematic manner. It emphasises the application of wisdom to real-life situations.
3. **Abhidharma Pitaka** (*Basket of Higher Knowledge*, Volumes 45–57): This basket offers a systematic and analytical exposition of concepts found in the Sutras. It delves into the nature of the mind and reality, often articulated through intricate classifications and profound *Dhamma* poetry.

At its core, *Dhamma* refers to the natural laws that govern existence. For instance, Newton's discovery of the law of gravity unveiled a natural truth that had always existed, though it remained unrecognised until he brought it to light. Similarly, the *Dhamma* encompasses timeless truths that may not yet be fully understood or accepted until they are personally experienced or uncovered through deeper inquiry, scientific exploration, and dedicated practice. *Dhamma* can refer to various things, including the Buddha's

teachings, natural law, or the nature of existence. It signifies behaviours that align with duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues, and the “right way of living.” *Śraddhā* in Buddhism refers to faith or confidence, but not blind belief. It is a trust rooted in wisdom (*prajñā*) and personal insight, rather than in rituals or dogma. On the Buddhist path, true *śraddhā* arises from an initial understanding of the *Dhamma* and deepens through direct experience of its truth in practice. It represents a rational confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma (the teaching), and the Saṅgha (the noble community—followers of the cessation of all suffering), supported by reflection and experiential verification.

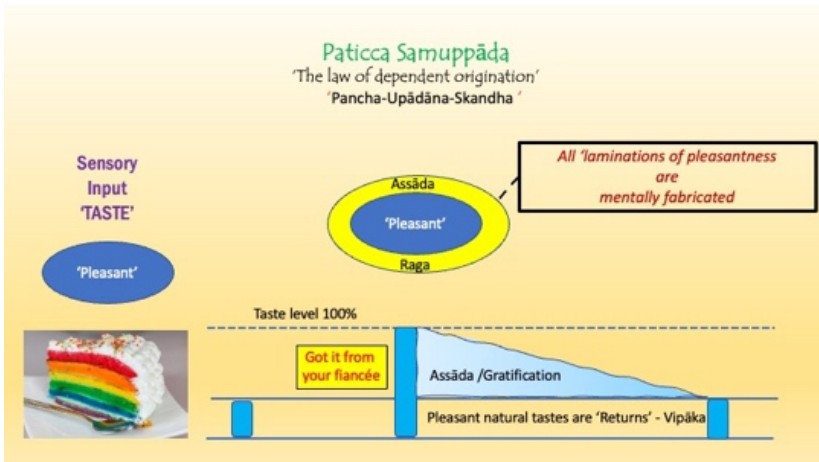
### Buddhist Philosophy

**Buddhist philosophy** refers to the systems of inquiry and philosophical investigations developed by various Buddhist schools following the Buddha’s *parinirvana* (passing away), which later spread throughout Asia. The Buddhist path integrates philosophical reasoning with meditation as a gradual process leading to *lokottara* (supramundane) attainments, ultimately culminating in *Nirvāṇa*. *Lokottara* refers to that which transcends the mundane world (*laukika*) and is associated with salvation and the pursuit of *Nirvana*. The term is particularly used to describe the “four paths and four fruits” related to the Noble Path (*ārya-mārga*). Buddhism is also regarded as a philosophy because it emphasises human effort in achieving a good life and adopts a realistic, experiential approach.

At its core, Buddhist philosophy explores the nature of existence, suffering, and the path to liberation. It examines concepts such as reality, emptiness, insatiability, and futility, while also addressing ethical conduct and the nature of consciousness.

### Sensory perceptions and our mind

We understand the world through our senses and respond with our thoughts, words, and physical actions. Our five sensory organs—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin—interact with five external stimuli: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, shaping our perceptions. When these external stimuli engage with the corresponding internal organs, we experience the world through the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The mind functions as both an internal and external faculty, facilitating memory and recall. Together, these form what are known as the twelve Dhātus (fundamental elements — six internally and six externally).



If you think carefully, we all—directly or indirectly—spend our lives chasing increasingly pleasant sensations and trying to possess their sources. What we need to understand is that this pursuit is endless, and none of our sensory organs ever become truly satisfied. In other words, our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body are like oceans that can never be filled. Similarly, the pursuit of sensations has no final destination; we continually seek more, and when we cannot attain them, it often leads to frustration, anger, and dissatisfaction.

It is important to recognise that our sensory organs naturally transmit pleasant and unpleasant signals to the mind. These signals are interpreted—both consciously and unconsciously—by the mind, and we may find some of them enjoyable. This is a process we cannot completely stop. However, when we begin to associate pleasurable sensations with greed, the craving for them no longer originates in the sensory organs or their objects, but in the mind itself. Likewise, when we experience displeasure, it can escalate into anger, which may lead to harmful mental and physical actions.

Furthermore, none of us perceives the world in precisely the same way. Our perceptions and interpretations form the basis of our reactions. For example, a piece of cake or a particular scent may be highly pleasant to one person and deeply unpleasant to another. Affection or aversion is processed in the mind,

not in the object or the sensory organ. It is valuable to explore and revisit this truth—how our perceptions differ when faced with the same stimulus, and why our reactions vary so greatly.

Similarly, it is crucial to realise that greed and anger do not arise from the sensory organs but from the mind. These mental states are triggered by three primary catalysts named as Rāga (attachment), Dvesha (aversion), and Moha (delusion). These are cognitive processes that drive us to act in various ways that may not be beneficial. Furthermore, the forces leading to Dvesha and Moha are among the most detrimental mental fabrications, as they obstruct our progress according to Buddhist doctrine. In other words, attachment, anger, suspicion, and pride are not qualities of a calm and balanced mind.

### The Six Faculties: Our sensory galore

All beings possess six senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These are our six **internal faculties** (*indriya*), which allow us to see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think.

When a form, sound, scent, taste, texture, or thought—collectively known as **external sense objects**—comes into contact with a corresponding sensory organ, it creates an impression (*rūpa*). This impression gives rise to **sensations** (*vedanā*) at the sensory site, which in turn trigger **perceptions** (*saññā*)—signals sent to the mind. The mind then processes these perceptions through **mental formations** (*saṅkhāra*), culminating in **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)—the awareness or recognition of the object. This chain of events marks the origin of a clear, unpolluted thought. In an enlightened being (*arahant*), *viññāṇa* represents the purified final state of cognition, free from defilements.

When events unfold in alignment with one’s desires or preferences, they give rise to happiness, pleasure, and what we conventionally label as “positive” thoughts. Conversely, when circumstances oppose one’s desires, they result in unhappiness, anger, hatred, and “negative” thoughts.

Humans possess a unique capacity to mentally revisit both pleasant and unpleasant experiences—a function attributed to the **sixth sense**, the mind. While the five physical senses—sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch—operate through their respective organs (eyes, nose, ears, tongue, and skin), it is the **mind** that interprets these sensory inputs. This interpretation is often shaped by memory and linked with past feelings of pleasure, aversion, or confusion, influencing perception and consciousness.

Our faculties sometimes operate in concert, which is why they are referred to as **faculties**—they coordinate to generate integrated experiences. For example, the smell of a particular food may evoke craving and anticipation for its taste, enhancing the flavour experience even before eating begins.

However, when you have a common cold, your sense of smell is diminished. Would you experience the taste of food the same way? Likely not. Many people report little or no taste during illness. Why is this difference?

Because **sense faculties are interdependent**, when one is impaired, the integrated sensory experience is disrupted. The sense of taste is not isolated; it is enhanced by smell, memory, and mental expectation—all processed by the mind. This illustrates how deeply connected and co-arising our sensory and cognitive experiences truly are.

### Our Physical World and Kāma-Lōka

Our physical world can be understood in two parts: the internal (within ourselves) and the external (outside ourselves). The internal world is made up of two components—the mind and the body, with the mind being the more powerful of the two.

Let's try a simple experiment: attempt to keep your mind focused on a single thought for just a few minutes. Can you do it? Most of us cannot. This exercise shows that we are not entirely in control of our minds. Now, consider the body—can the mind command it to stop ageing, prevent hair from turning grey, or stop wrinkles from forming? We cannot fully control the body either.

Despite this lack of control over our internal world, we constantly try to control the external world. When we fail, we often respond with anger or hatred. But pause and reflect: if we struggle to control our minds, what hope do we have of controlling the world around us? And if we can't manage that, what sense is there in developing hatred toward things—or even people close to us, like our children, spouse, or loved ones—simply because they don't meet our expectations?

This leads us to Kāma-loka, the "world of desire" or "world of feeling." It is the realm where beings experience the pleasures and pains of sensual existence. This includes humans, animals, and certain devas (gods). Kāma-loka—characterised by delusion and the pursuit of sensory pleasures through the nose, tongue, and body—is one of the three realms within the 'Trailokya'.

The other two are Rūpa-dhātu (the realm of material form) and Arūpa-dhātu (the realm of formless existence).

### Greed vs. Need

*Rāga* is a key term that will appear frequently throughout this text. Without a clear understanding of its meaning, it will be difficult to grasp the overall message, especially for those beginning the *lokottara* path of liberation.

If you develop a craving for a pleasure—such as an image, sound, smell, taste, or touch—it likely falls within the scope of *Rāga*. In other words, *Rāga* is a mental impulse that urges you to take verbal or physical actions to obtain a specific pleasure and satisfy the mind.

However, the line between craving and genuine need can be very subtle. Needs can evolve into cravings if they remain unmet. For example, when you're thirsty, drinking water is a basic need—one that is easily satisfied in most parts of the world. But if you lack access to water, that unfulfilled need can intensify into a craving and eventually escalate into desperate actions—even violence—to satisfy it. Still, that is not the kind of craving referred to here.

Our physical bodies rely on enzyme activity to generate the energy we need, and certain fundamental conditions must be maintained to support this process. For instance, body temperature is regulated around 37°C through automatic responses such as shivering in cold weather or sweating in heat. When you enter an environment that is too cold or too hot, you instinctively take action to maintain your internal balance, like wearing warm clothes or seeking shade. If these needs cannot be met, a craving may arise to fulfil that essential requirement. For example, air-conditioning a room may be a necessity when the outside temperature is 45°C. Still, it may also be used for comfort—or even status (*mana*)—when the actual need is minimal or non-existent. Thus, the boundary between need and greed is very subtle.

The nutrients required for optimal bodily function follow a similar logic. Sometimes, you may crave fruits and salads—possibly because your body genuinely needs them. At other times, you might reject those same foods. So even what appears to be a craving for food may stem from a biological need, not merely a desire to indulge in pleasure—that is, greed or *Rāga*. This practical explanation helps clarify what is meant by *Rāga* and craving: it is not the same as fulfilling the body's essential nutritional requirements.

Furthermore, there are no restrictions on using or consuming the sensations you receive. Enjoy what you have—but do not keep chasing them repeatedly to gratify a mind that is merely seeking more pleasure for its own sake.

### Refining Our Understanding

There are two kinds of understanding. The first is **knowledge**, which arises from accumulated memory—an intellectual grasp of a subject based on external information or learned concepts. This is known as *anubodha*, or “knowing accordingly.” While useful, it remains relatively superficial.

The more profound and more transformative kind of understanding is called *paṭivedha*, or “penetration.” This refers to the direct perception of reality as it truly is, beyond names, labels, and conceptual thought. Such insight arises only when the mind is purified and fully developed through meditation. Attaining this level of realisation is the true goal of practice.

To move toward this, we must remain vigilant of thoughts rooted in *Rāga* (greed), *Dvesha* (hatred), and *Moha* (delusion), as these give rise to *akusalā*—unwholesome actions—that lead one toward the four lower realms of *Kāma-loka* (the sensual realm). These *pāpa kamma* (unwholesome deeds) are driven by the intensified forms of these defilements: *Lobha* (intense greed), *Dvesha* (intense hatred), and *Moha* (deep ignorance).

### 3. Beginning the Journey on the Path of Dhamma

Understanding the core concepts of Buddhism begins with listening to a teacher who possesses both deep insight into the Dhamma and the experience necessary to guide your understanding. These selfless teachers are known as *Kalyāṇa Mitta* (noble friends). However, they are not meant to be role models for personal imitation. In the Dhamma itself, it is clearly stated that the true model to follow is the Dhamma, not any individual, not even the Lord Buddha himself, the enlightened discoverer of these natural laws of the universe.

#### Who is an Ariyā Śrāvaka

An **Ariyā Śrāvaka** is a noble disciple or "noble hearer" on the Buddhist path—one who has not only heard the Dhamma but has directly realised it. Specifically, this term refers to a practitioner who has attained at least the first stage of enlightenment, known as **Sotāpanna** (Stream Enterer). Such a person has entered the stream leading irreversibly toward **Nirvāṇa** and is no longer subject to rebirth in lower realms.

Unlike ordinary disciples, the Ariyā Śrāvaka has overcome key defilements, such as the perception of the world as ultimately satisfying, rooted in the 18 dhātu points, i.e. the six sense objects, six sense faculties, and six consciousnesses (sakkāya-dīṭṭhi), doubt (vicikicchā), and attachment to rites and rituals (sīlabata-parāmāsa), marking a profound transformation in their spiritual journey.

#### The Five Aggregates

The Five Aggregates—*Rūpa* (form), *Vedanā* (sensation), *Saññā* (perception), *Saṅkhāra* (mental formations), and *Viññāṇa* (consciousness)—collectively constitute what is conventionally referred to as the "past, present and future existence ." Each sensory stimulus (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental) activates these aggregates through the six sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, leading to a multifaceted experiential process.

*Rūpa* refers to physical form or sensory input; *Vedanā* to the felt response; *Saññā* to recognition or perception; *Saṅkhāra* to volitional or mental formations; and *Viññāṇa* to conscious awareness. Each sense base gives rise to a corresponding type of consciousness (e.g., *Chakku-viññāṇa* for visual perception, *Mano-viññāṇa* for mental objects etc).

*Vedanā*, a central term in Buddhist psychology, is typically translated as "feeling" or "sensation." It denotes the affective tone—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—that arises when one of the six internal sense bases contacts a corresponding external object, in conjunction with the appropriate consciousness. The three types of *Vedanā* are:

- *Pleasant (sukhā vedanā)*
- *Unpleasant (dukkhā vedanā)*
- *Neutral (adukkham-asukhā vedanā)*

*Vedanā* is not synonymous with emotion; rather, it is the immediate felt quality of experience that precedes emotional and cognitive reactions. As one of the Five Aggregates (*Pañcakkhandha*), it plays a critical role in the arising of craving (*taṇhā*) and suffering (*dukkha*).

This framework illustrates how experience and the sense of identity are constructed through ongoing interaction with the world, and how awareness emerges from this dynamic process.

For ordinary beings—including all except the fully liberated Arahants—these aggregates are typically experienced with attachment (*Upādāna*) in the forms of desire (*Rāga*), aversion (*Dvesha*), and delusion (*Moha*). This attachment transforms the Five Aggregates into the *Pañca Upādāna Skandha*, or the “Five Clinging Aggregates,” which become the source of continued existence and suffering.

Although Arahants still experience the Five Aggregates—also referred to as *avyākṛta* (undeclared or non-speculative), which pertain to the *pañcaskandha* (five aggregates) and not to the *Pañca Upādāna Skandha* (five clinging aggregates)—they no longer generate the clinging aggregates, as they have completely eradicated craving (*taṇhā*) and attachment (*upādāna*). Their experience remains *prabhāsvara*—luminous and pure—free from any mental fabrication rooted in *rāga* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), or *moha* (delusion). This unconditioned, undefiled state constitutes true liberation (*nibbāna*).

### Upādāna (Clinging or Bonding)

Upādāna—meaning clinging, attachment, or grasping—originates in the mind and varies from person to person. Consider a boy and a girl visiting a toy shop: the boy desires a toy car, while the girl longs for a teddy bear. If their parents buy the toys each child desires, both are pleased. If they receive nothing, both are disappointed. But if their desired toys are swapped—giving

the teddy bear to the boy and the car to the girl—neither is satisfied. This illustrates that happiness does not reside in the toy itself; rather, it arises in the mind.

Desire for a specific object gives rise to happiness, and this desire can deepen into attachment, known as *rāga* (craving or passion). If the toy is lost or broken, the child experiences distress. If someone else damages or takes the toy, the child may feel not only sadness but also anger—this is *Dveṣha* (aversion or hatred). Just as happiness is not inherent in the toy, neither is hatred; both are mental constructs.

Attachment to sensory experiences and perceptions inevitably leads to *dukkha*—a state of suffering, dissatisfaction, or mental discomfort. Therefore, reducing or eliminating attachment in the forms of lust (*rāga*), aversion (*Dveṣha*), and delusion (*moha*) is essential to preventing the arising of *dukkha*. The absence of *dukkha* is none other than true and lasting happiness. On a mundane (*laukika*) level, this principle forms the foundation of mental well-being.

Ego and pride (*māna*), as well as doubt and scepticism (*vicikicchā*), arise from *moha* (ignorance or delusion). These, too, are forms of attachment that give rise to craving and aversion. *Moha* begins to dissolve when one abandons *micchā-ditṭhi*—the wrong view that lasting satisfaction can be found in worldly objects and experiences. By relinquishing this view, one cultivates *sammā-ditṭhi*—the supramundane (*lokottara*) right understanding that all earthly pleasures are ultimately unsatisfactory and insatiable. As this right view strengthens through learning and reflection on the Dhamma, *prajñā* (wisdom) naturally arises.

To transcend the cycle of *dukkha* is to attain true bliss. This state is called *Nibbāna*—the complete cessation of craving, aversion, and delusion. It represents full release from all forms of attachment to the six sense faculties (*indriya*). However, ultimate liberation from *dukkha* is only realised upon reaching the state of an *Arahant*—one who has completely eradicated all defilements and attained perfect peace.

*Upādāna* and *taṇhā* (craving) are the two primary causes of suffering. The cessation of clinging leads to *Nirvāna*.

According to the *Tripitāka*, there are four types of clinging:

1. **Sense-pleasure clinging (*kāma-upādāna*)** – repeated craving for worldly pleasures

2. **View clinging** (*diṭṭhi-upādāna*) – attachment to views, such as externalism (belief in the eternal existence of self or world) or nihilism (belief that life lacks inherent meaning)
3. **Rites-and-rituals clinging** (*sīlabbata-upādāna*) – belief that mere ritual practices can lead to liberation
4. **Self-doctrine clinging** (*attavāda-upādāna*) – identifying a self in what are selfless phenomena involves mistakenly arguing that the world is of inherent value and desire (*icchā*).

### *Abhisankhāra (higher mental fabrication)*

In Buddhist philosophy, attachment or clinging to sensory stimuli through greed, hatred, or delusion is known as **Abhisankhāra**—the root cause and the beginning of all suffering. When **Abhisankhāra** arises in relation to any of the five sensory experiences, driven by **rāga** (greed), **dvesha** (hatred), or **moha** (delusion), it inevitably leads to the three characteristics of existence: **Anicca** (insatiability), **Dukkha** (suffering or the corruption of the pure mind, resulting in actions that lead to misery), and **Anattā** (futility, or the futility and inherent emptiness of such experiences).

Negative thoughts and emotional ‘bonding’ pollute the mind and are the fundamental source of harmful speech and actions, ultimately leading to suffering for oneself and others. Deep introspection reveals that the mind is rarely at rest—it constantly generates thoughts and recalls memories, shaping our actions. These actions may be wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral, but the state of the mind influences all.

Any mental, verbal, or physical activity that arises through **Abhisankhāra** is referred to as **Kleṣa** (or *Kilesa*), which represents the defilements and is the root of suffering. This is because, no matter how intensely we pursue sensory pleasures out of greed or anger, they can never fully satisfy the mind. In other words, *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion) are the fuel that sustains the endless cycle of craving—an unending chase with no final fulfillment.

On the other hand, **Vipāka** refers to the ripening or maturation of **kamma** (intentional actions). It is the result or consequence of *kamma*—the effects that follow from one’s past intentional deeds, whether wholesome or unwholesome.

### Types of Abhi-Saṅkhāra – What Should Be Cultivated?

1. **Puñña Abhi-Saṅkhāra** (also *punnābhi-saṅkhāra*):  
These are wholesome or meritorious mental formations that lead to moral speech and actions. They generate positive *vipāka* (karmic results), supporting rebirth in the human, *deva*, or *brahma* realms, and can also initiate progress on the path to *Nirvāṇa*. This type of *saṅkhāra* should be actively cultivated in the mind.
2. **Apuñña Abhi-Saṅkhāra** (also *apunnābhi-saṅkhāra*):  
These are unwholesome or immoral mental formations. For example, merely thinking about committing one of the Ten Immoral Acts (such as killing a living being) constitutes *vaci-abhi-saṅkhāra* (verbal formation), while actually committing the act is *kāya abhi-saṅkhāra* (bodily formation). These actions result in negative *vipāka* and may lead to rebirth in the lower realms (*apāyās*), such as hell or animal realms. These mental fabrications should be reduced or eliminated by reflecting on the principles of *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *Anattā* (futility).
3. **Āneñja Abhi-Saṅkhāra** (also *aninja abhi-saṅkhāra*):  
These are subtle and neutral mental formations that arise from advanced meditative states associated with deep equanimity. They lead to rebirth in the *Arūpa-loka* (Formless Realms), such as the higher *brahma* worlds. While they are not harmful, they are still within *saṃsāra* and do not lead directly to *Nirvāṇa*.

### The Five Clinging Aggregates (Pañca Upādāna Skandha)

It is essential to understand that happiness (*Prīti*) and pleasure (*Sukha*) are mental phenomena generated by the mind, not inherent qualities of external objects or sensory stimuli. This explains why individuals exposed to the same object or experience may respond with vastly different emotions. The true source of these feelings lies within the mind, not in the external object itself.

When our sensory desires remain unfulfilled, we often experience sadness, frustration, or misery. These emotions can intensify into *Dvesha* (hatred) toward those perceived as obstacles to our gratification. Our relentless pursuit of pleasure through the six sense faculties (*Indriya*)—driven by attachment, craving, and greed—is ultimately unsatisfying. This ongoing dissatisfaction

is referred to as *anicchā*, the realisation that such cravings are “never satisfying.”

The root cause of suffering lies in our mental attachment to perceptions, expressed through *Rāga* (craving or attachment), *Dvesha* (aversion or hatred), and *Moha* (delusion or ignorance). An *Arahant*—a fully awakened being—has severed all such bonds to perception, thereby ending the cycle of suffering. In contrast, ordinary beings continue to generate attachments with each arising perception. It is crucial to recognise that all forms of attachment originate in the mind, not in the sensory organs or external stimuli.

Attempts to fulfil our desires through the *Pañca Upādāna Skandha* (Five Clinging Aggregates) can never bring lasting satisfaction. Each perception, when clung to, inevitably leads to dissatisfaction, loss, and suffering. When these aggregates are grasped, they become the *Upādāna Skandha*—the very foundation for ongoing suffering, or *Vipāka*, the result of past kamma.

Three fundamental mental defilements—*Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion)—keep beings bound to the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Among them, *Rāga* and *Dvesha* operate as opposing mental currents, forming the roots of all emotional experiences and reactions. Pleasure and pain (*harsa* and *śoka*), excitement and depression—all arise from these two forces. When *Rāga* and *Dvesha* are eradicated from the mind, emotional turbulence ceases entirely.

This is the path of liberation—the journey toward freedom and, ultimately, *Nirvāṇa*.

### Am I Ignorant (*Avijjā*)?

*Avijjā* refers to ignorance—not merely a lack of information, but specifically the ignorance of the Four Noble Truths and the true nature of physical and mental phenomena. It is the fundamental delusion that binds sentient beings to *saṃsāra*, obstructing the path to liberation. As the root of all unwholesome mental states, *avijjā* leads the procession of defilements.

According to the teaching of Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*), ignorance is the first link in a chain of twelve conditions that culminate in suffering (*dukkha*). It gives rise to volitional formations (*sankhāra*), which in turn condition consciousness and the rest of the chain. Breaking this cycle begins with dispelling ignorance through insight and right understanding.

*Avijjā*—or *avidyā*—is the non-realisation of the Four Noble Truths. This fundamental ignorance leads to attachment to the eighteen elements of

perception and the five aggregates (*Pancha-skandha*), and results in “value-added mental fabrication,” known as *abhi-saṅkhāra*. Through the mechanism of Dependent Origination, ignorance propels beings through the endless cycle of *saṃsāra*.

As it deepens, *avijjā* can evolve into more intense forms of *moha* (delusion). In its most entrenched state, it can lead beings to the *sattara apāyā*—the four lower realms devoid of true happiness. Ignorance of the Four Noble Truths gives rise to *saṅkhāra*—mental activities, whether moral or immoral. In this way, *avidyā* governs the process of mental formation and obscures the mind from right understanding.

## 4. The Nature of Kleśa (Mental Defilements)

### Understanding Mental Defilements (Kleśas)

Any thought, word, or action that arises from *abhi-saṅkhāra*—mental formations conditioned by volition—in response to sensory perception is a *kleśa*, a mental defilement. These defilements cloud the mind and obstruct the path to *Lokottara Nibbāna* (supramundane liberation). This is why it is essential to first reduce *olārika* (coarse) or *mahā kleśa* (intense mental defilements) in order to cultivate the clarity (*vipaśyanā* or *visharshana*) necessary to truly understand and follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

Achieving this clarity requires repeated contemplation of *anicca* (insatiable or insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering), and *anattā* (worthlessness or futility) in relation to sensory stimuli and the consciousness they generate. This insight is further deepened through the examination of *assāda* (initial attraction or pleasure), *ādīnava* (hidden drawbacks or dangers), and *nissaraṇa* (escape or release).

All forms of mental attachment—through *rāga* (desire), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion)—give rise to *kleśas*: afflictions that distort perception, cloud judgment, and lead to unwholesome actions. These include disturbed mental states such as anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, craving, and depression. In English, *kleśas* are often referred to as afflictions, defilements, destructive emotions, disturbing emotions, negative emotions, or mental poisons.

### Kleśas Promote the Five Hindrances

Closely linked to the *kleśas* (mental defilements) are the Five Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), which obstruct both meditation and the development of insight:

- **Kāmacchanda** – sensual desire
- **Vyāpāda** – ill will or anger
- **Thīna-middha** – sloth and torpor
- **Uddhacca-kukkucca** – restlessness and worry
- **Vicikicchā** – doubt or indecisiveness

*Kleśas* fuel these hindrances. *Rāga* (desire) encompasses all forms of attraction, including seemingly “positive” or pleasant thoughts that lead to craving. *Dvesha* (aversion) includes not only anger and hatred but also jealousy, fear, and other intense negative emotions. In practice, reducing *rāga*

is essential to weakening *dvesha*, as desire and aversion are two sides of the same emotional cycle. When *dvesha* diminishes, the mind naturally begins to cool and stabilize.

*Moha* (delusion) begins to fade through the clear understanding of the wisdom of suffering: *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility). Contemplating these truths gradually reduces attachment to coarse forms of *rāga*, *dvesha*, and *moha*. As insight into these realities deepens, delusion weakens—and with it, the grip of the *kleśas* loosens—paving the way toward mental clarity, inner peace, and ultimately, liberation.

### How to Remove Kleśa (Mental Defilements)

The removal of *kleśa*—mental defilements such as *rāga* (craving), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion)—is a gradual and layered process. It requires both intellectual understanding and direct meditative experience. The path to purification unfolds in three distinct stages:

#### 1. *Dassana Pahātabba – Defilements to Be Abandoned Through Right View*

These defilements are removed through *dassana*, or right understanding, which arises from hearing the *Dhamma*, studying sacred texts, and engaging in deep reflection. This stage provides the conceptual and philosophical foundation for more profound realisation. By clarifying one’s worldview and dispelling fundamental misconceptions, the practitioner becomes mentally prepared for insight through meditation.

#### 2. *Bhāvanā Pahātabba – Defilements to Be Abandoned Through Meditation*

The second category includes more subtle defilements that cannot be uprooted through study alone. These must be overcome through direct experiential practice—primarily via *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Sustained awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects gradually reveals the *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility) nature of all phenomena. This experiential insight weakens the grip of defilements on the mind.

#### 3. *Na Dassanā, Na Bhāvanā Pahātabba – Defilements Not Removed by View or Basic Meditation Alone*

Some defilements are so deeply rooted that they cannot be removed through intellectual understanding or basic meditative practice. These subtle *kleśas* can only be uprooted through profound insight developed in advanced states of *dhyāna* (meditative absorption) and *vipassanā* (insight meditation). At this

level, *prajñā* (wisdom) becomes essential. The practitioner works directly with *ārammaṇa*—mental objects arising in deep contemplation—to dismantle even the most latent impurities.

In essence, conceptual knowledge alone is insufficient. True liberation demands meditative insight and experiential wisdom. The inner transformation required to eliminate *kleśas* is neither quick nor superficial—it calls for sustained mindfulness, disciplined effort, and direct realisation of the *Dhamma*.

## 5. Bonding and Dependent Origination (Paṭicca Samuppāda)

### The Mechanics of Craving and Clinging

The persistent craving (*taṇhā*) in ordinary beings to gratify the six senses—through visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental contact—gives rise to *upādāna* (clinging). This craving is rooted in *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which engages with sense objects in the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction. The process is further intensified by *saṅkhāra*—specifically *abhi-saṅkhāra*, or value-added mental formations that shape, fabricate, and distort perception.

These formations contaminate the mind, reinforcing the illusion of permanence and selfhood. In doing so, they perpetuate the cycle of craving, attachment, and suffering, binding us ever more tightly to the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth—known as *saṃsāra*.

### Where Am I Within Paṭicca Samuppāda?

The truth is this: the senses are inherently insatiable. They cannot be fulfilled to the point of lasting contentment. Reflect for a moment—aren't most of our daily actions, whether directly or indirectly, aimed at gratifying the senses? Whether through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought, we are constantly seeking stimulation. Yet, this cycle of pursuit never truly ends. With each act of gratification, *taṇhā* (craving) intensifies, further fuelling the wheel of becoming.

A single sensory impression, when processed by *viññāṇa* (consciousness), can be interpreted in vastly different ways—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—depending on the individual. In other words, different people may respond to the same *rūpa* (form) with completely different emotional reactions. These conditioned responses gradually give rise to mental defilements such as *lobha* (greed), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion).

The term *āyatana* refers to the six internal and external sense bases (*salāyatana*), which facilitate sensory contact. When a sense base and a corresponding sense object meet, *phassa* (contact) arises. Contact gives rise to *vedanā* (feeling or sensation), which leads to *taṇhā* (craving). Craving evolves into *upādāna* (clinging or grasping), which in turn conditions *bhava* (becoming or karmic existence). From becoming arises *jāti* (birth), which inevitably leads to *jarāmaraṇa* (aging and death), and thus to *dukkha* (suffering).

When the mind is clouded by *avidyā* (ignorance), this entire chain of *Paṭicca Samuppāda*—Dependent Origination—unfolds. It reinforces suffering through conditioned mental processes and perpetuates the illusion of self. Though the mind is originally pure, radiant, and luminous, it becomes defiled through this progression of craving, clinging, and becoming.

### *The Classic Formula*

*"Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā; saṅkhāra paccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇa paccayā nāmarūpaṃ; nāmarūpa paccayā salāyatanaṃ; salāyatana paccayā phassa; phassa paccayā vedanā; vedanā paccayā taṇhā; taṇhā paccayā upādānaṃ; upādāna paccayā bhava; bhava paccayā jāti; jāti paccayā jarāmaṇaṃ, sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti."*

### **Translation:**

- With *Avidyā* (ignorance) as condition, *Saṅkhāra* (volitional formations) arise.
- With *Saṅkhāra*, *Viññāṇa* (consciousness) arises.
- With *Viññāṇa*, *Nāmarūpa* (mind-and-body) arises.
- With *Nāmarūpa*, *Salāyatana* (six sense bases) arise.
- With *Salāyatana*, *Phassa* (contact) arises.
- With *Phassa*, *Vedanā* (feeling) arises.
- With *Vedanā*, *Taṇhā* (craving) arises.
- With *Taṇhā*, *Upādāna* (clinging) arises.
- With *Upādāna*, *Bhava* (becoming) arises.
- With *Bhava*, *Jāti* (birth) arises.
- With *Jāti*, *Jarāmaṇa* (aging and death), along with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, arise.
- Thus arises this entire mass of suffering.

“*Paṭicca*” means “dependent upon” or “conditioned by,” and “*Samuppāda*” means “arising” or “originating.” Hence, *Paṭicca Samuppāda* literally means “arising through dependence”—the dynamic process by which suffering is perpetuated.

### *Locating Yourself Within the Chain*

Most individuals are caught somewhere in the middle of this chain—usually between *vedanā*, *taṇhā*, and *upādāna*. We feel something, react to it

emotionally, and then cling to the pleasant or resist the unpleasant. Few are mindful enough to see the process as it arises, much less interrupt it. The critical pivot is the moment between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. If mindfulness is present at this junction, the chain can be broken.

### From Avidyā to Vidyā

The ultimate aim of this teaching is to guide the practitioner from *Avidyā* (ignorance) to *Vidyā* (true knowledge). This knowledge is not merely theoretical, but direct experiential insight into the insatiable (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and worthless (*anattā*) nature of all conditioned phenomena. With the arising of this wisdom, the links of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (dependent origination) begin to dissolve.

Even *Arahants*—fully liberated beings—experience the unfolding of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* as *vipāka* (the result of past actions). However, since they have eradicated *Avidyā*, their experiences no longer give rise to *taṇhā* (craving) or *upādāna* (clinging). This absence signifies the presence of *Nirodha*—the cessation of the cycle. *Nirodha*, a Sanskrit term meaning “cessation” or “removal,” refers in practice to the withdrawal from engaging the six senses in ways that generate *Rāga* (attachment), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion).

An *Arahant* still sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and thinks—but without attachment, craving, or karmic consequences. They remain untouched by the defilements that bind others to *saṃsāra*.

### Why Some Seem to Have It Easy

You might wonder why some people appear to effortlessly receive what they desire. This, too, is *vipāka*—the fruition of past actions. Pleasant or unpleasant, all experiences arise as results of prior *kamma*. But it is our present response—especially whether we meet them with *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), or *Moha* (delusion)—that determines our future path.

### The Way Out

Minimising—and ultimately eradicating—*Rāga*, *Dveṣha*, and *Moha* is the path to liberation. Yet this is no small task, for the world is skilfully constructed to sustain these defilements. The essential tool for dismantling them is deep, repeated reflection on *Anicca* (insatiability), *Dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *Anattā* (futility). With this insight, the cycle loses its power, and freedom becomes possible.

## Consequences of Chasing Pleasures

As sentient beings, we are naturally drawn to pleasurable experiences—through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought. These sensations give rise to gratification, and over time, we begin to seek them more and more. When our desires are thwarted—when we are unable to obtain the pleasure we crave—we often respond with frustration, aversion, or even hatred toward that which obstructs us. This is the cycle we must break. Yet breaking free is not merely a matter of willpower—it requires insight.

### *The Roots of the Cycle: Craving and Attachment*

The process begins with *taṇhā*—craving, which leads to attachment. We cling to pleasurable sensations, not realizing that such clinging inevitably results in suffering. To transcend this cycle, we must understand the true nature of our sensory experiences and the mental constructions we impose upon them.

This triad of insight—*Assāda*, *Ādīnava*, and *Nissaraṇa*—forms the contemplative framework for liberation:

#### 1. *Assāda – The Seeming Delight*

*Assāda* refers to the attraction or gratification we feel toward pleasurable experiences. It is a *mind-made* pleasure constructed through contact with sensory stimuli (*phassa*). For instance, we may feel joy when we are praised, experience comfort in a luxurious setting, or find beauty in a particular form (*rūpa*). These pleasures are not inherently present in the objects themselves but are projected onto them by the mind, shaped by our past conditioning.

We seek *assāda* not only in material indulgence but also in status, recognition, and emotional validation. However, what is perceived as delightful is subjective and insatiable. Beauty, taste, and comfort are all relative experiences that change with time, mood, and perspective.

#### 2. *Ādīnava – The Inherent Drawbacks*

While *assāda* provides momentary satisfaction, *ādīnava* reveals the deeper truth—the hidden danger. These pleasures are unstable and ultimately unsatisfactory. What once pleased us may later disappoint, burden, or harm us. In fact, the greater our attachment to *assāda*, the more vulnerable we become to suffering when it is lost or unattainable.

This is why pleasure, when chased blindly, leads to *dukkha*—suffering. The joy of possession can turn into the anxiety of loss. The thrill of recognition

can quickly turn into the fear of irrelevance. Even the most pleasurable experiences are fleeting, giving rise to a deeper hunger.

The Buddha taught that the path of suffering begins with *assāda*, proceeds through *taṇhā* and *upādāna* (clinging), and results in *bhava*, *jāti*, and ultimately *jarāmaraṇa*—aging, death, and the sorrow they bring. This is the truth laid out in *Paṭicca Samuppāda*—Dependent Origination.

### 3. *Nissaraṇa* – The Way Out

*Nissaraṇa* means "escape" or "renunciation." It is the realisation that liberation lies not in chasing *assāda*, nor in suppressing it, but in clearly seeing its limitations. True detachment arises when one comprehends the futility of seeking permanent happiness in insatiable things.

This insight is not dry negation—it brings a deeper, more lasting form of joy. As attachment to external pleasures fades, one experiences *viveka-sukha*—the bliss of seclusion, of freedom from compulsion. This freedom is born from *Sammā Dīṭṭhi* (right view), which sees *assāda* for what it is: a conditioned, unstable mental construct that cannot satisfy the heart's deepest longing.

#### *Illusion and Projection*

The allure of *assāda* is like a mirage. We chase after objects—thinking they hold the key to happiness—only to find that the pleasure was never truly in the object itself. It was a projection of the mind. For example, a form (*rūpa*) may appear beautiful to one person and unremarkable to another. This proves that *assāda* does not reside in the object but in the perceiver's mental fabrications.

The more we chase these illusions, the more we strengthen *taṇhā*, leading inevitably to *kleśas*—mental defilements such as greed, aversion, jealousy, and pride. These, in turn, perpetuate *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of birth and death.

#### *A Subtle but Crucial Insight*

Understanding how *assāda* leads to *dukkha* is subtle. Initially, it is counterintuitive—how can pleasure cause pain? But through careful observation and meditative insight, one sees that the pleasure derived from the senses is not free; it always carries the seed of suffering. This insight is pivotal. It gradually transforms the way we relate to the world—not through forceful suppression, but through wise renunciation.

The path to *nissaraṇa* is not about denying life or withdrawing from experience, but about developing clarity. As insight into *assāda* and *ādīnava* deepens, the chase loses its appeal. One begins to walk a different path—a path not driven by craving but guided by wisdom. This is the essence of the Buddha’s teaching: freedom through understanding, joy through non-attachment, and peace through the ending of grasping.

### What is Dhamma?

**Dhamma** (Pāli) refers both to the Buddha’s teachings and to the true nature of reality itself. It is the timeless teaching that reveals the nature of existence, suffering, and liberation. The Dhamma offers a practical and experiential path leading to freedom from craving and ignorance, open and accessible to all who sincerely engage with it.

It encompasses:

- The universal laws governing existence,
- The path to enlightenment,
- The ethical, mental, and wisdom practices leading to liberation.

At its core, the Dhamma includes the **Four Noble Truths**, the **Noble Eightfold Path**, and profound insights into the nature of life, suffering (*dukkha*), and freedom (*nibbāna*).

### *Dhamma as Universal Law and Practice*

The Dhamma is not merely a philosophy, belief system, or abstract theory. It is a practical path of training that integrates:

- **Wisdom and insight** (*prajñā*).
- **Ethical conduct** (*sīla*),
- **Mindfulness and meditation** (*samādhi*),

The Buddha did not invent this truth; rather, he discovered it through deep insight into reality. It reflects the natural order of the cosmos, akin to a universal law that applies regardless of culture or time.

### *The Tripiṭaka: The Canonical Source*

The primary collection of the Buddha’s teachings, the **Tripiṭaka** (Pāli Canon), is the authoritative textual source for the Dhamma. It records the discourses,

monastic rules, and philosophical analyses that constitute the Buddha's comprehensive guidance for liberation.

### *The Law of Samsāra and Kamma*

**Samsāra** is a Sanskrit term meaning “wandering” or “world,” conveying the idea of **cyclic, repetitive existence**. In Buddhist philosophy, it refers to the **continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth**—the ceaseless round of existence across different realms.

This cycle is not linear but **circular and unsatisfactory**, perpetuated by deep-rooted ignorance (**Avidyā**) and craving (**Tanhā**). As long as these mental defilements persist, beings are bound to Samsāra, experiencing repeated rebirths in realms such as the **human world, animal realm, heavenly spheres, or hellish states**.

### *Why We Are Caught in Samsāra*

According to the Dhamma, our entrapment in Samsāra arises from:

- **Kamma (Karma):**  
Intentional actions driven by volition. These actions generate **vipāka** (results), which shape the conditions of future rebirths.
- **Sensory Craving:**  
The relentless pursuit of experiences through the **six sense faculties**—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. This craving leads to attachment and further suffering.

Our repeated attempts to find lasting satisfaction through insatiable experiences result in **dukkha** (suffering), reinforcing the cycle.

### *Breaking Free*

The cycle of Samsāra continues **until liberation (Nirvāṇa)** is attained. Liberation is achieved through insight into the **three characteristics of existence**:

- **Anicca** (insatiability)
- **Dukkha** (unsatisfactoriness)
- **Anattā** (futility)

By following the **Noble Eightfold Path** and uprooting the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion, one can ultimately transcend Samsāra and realise the peace of **Nibbāna (Nirvāṇa)**.

### *Sensory Pleasures, Assāda, and Mental Defilements*

All pleasures we seek—through food, music, relationships, comfort, and entertainment—are **mind-made** (*assāda*). These pleasures are not inherent in the objects themselves but are projections shaped by our conditioning.

- **Assāda** (gratification) fuels **Rāga** (greed, craving, attachment).
- When craving is frustrated, it leads to **Dveṣha** (anger, aversion, hatred).
- **Moha** (delusion) clouds understanding, causing confusion and ignorance.

This triad (*Rāga, Dveṣha, Moha*) forms the core of mental defilements (*kleśa*), perpetuating suffering.

Every *assāda* is subject to **Ādīnava**—its inherent drawbacks or consequences. The path to freedom lies in **Nissaraṇa**—the relinquishment or release from this endless pursuit.

### **Understanding Dhamma: Intellectual and Experiential**

Understanding Dhamma is not simply intellectual. It requires:

- **Stepwise practice** through ethical living, meditation, and insight.
- Personal realisation of the truths over time.

This leads not only to immediate benefits—such as greater peace, clarity, and ethical integrity—but also to profound inner transformation.

### *Equality on the Path*

In the practice of Dhamma:

- All practitioners are equal.
- Worldly education or status does not determine progress.

- Some may advance rapidly, while others may face challenges in attaining **dhyāna** (meditative absorption), which is important for developing **vipassanā** (insight).

When difficulties arise, guidance from experienced meditation teachers (*Dhamma Sadāchāri*) can be crucial to overcoming obstacles and deepening practice.

### What is Kamma (Karma)?

**Kamma** (Pāli: *Kamma*) means “action” or “deed,” specifically referring to intentional mental, verbal, or physical acts (*sanchetana*). It is based on the spiritual principle of cause and effect: our intentions and actions (the causes) shape our future experiences (the effects).

Kamma goes beyond a simple good-versus-evil dichotomy. In Buddhism, it is divided into **Kusala** (wholesome or skilful) and **Akusala** (unwholesome or unskillful) actions. Kusala actions arise from wisdom, compassion, and non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion (*alobha, advasha, amoha*). These lead to happiness and peace for oneself and others. Akusala actions stem from greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dveosa*), and delusion (*moha*), and result in suffering.

Kamma is not a divine decree or a metaphysical force controlled by gods. It is an impersonal, natural law—self-regulating and impartial—governing how our intentional actions bring consequences. Therefore, rituals or prayers cannot alter kamma’s effects; only conscious, intentional behaviour can.

In simple terms: “Do good, and good will come to you; do bad, and bad will follow.” Kamma can be compared to sowing seeds: good seeds yield a good harvest, while bad seeds yield a poor one.

Philosophically and practically, kamma embodies the law of cause and effect. The mind precedes all actions; wholesome intentions lead to wholesome results, unwholesome intentions to suffering—just as a cartwheel follows the ox’s hoof or a shadow follows the body.

Importantly, kamma refers only to **volitional** actions—those done with intention. It is a dynamic force shaped by our choices and decisions. Some describe kamma as “action-influence,” meaning our deeds generate energies that bear fruit in due time. Our present joys and sorrows reflect past intentional actions.

This means who we are today results from what we have done before, and who we become tomorrow depends on what we do now. However, kamma does **not** imply fatalism. The Buddha rejected the ideas of strict determinism and total randomness. Instead, kamma operates alongside countless other conditions, leaving room for moral responsibility, personal growth, and change.

Kamma also explains the inequalities and varied circumstances in life. Differences among individuals arise not only from genetics or environment but also from karmic imprints carried from previous lives. It is one of many key factors shaping success, happiness, and suffering.

Though kamma cannot be seen physically, it can be understood by analogy. Like a seed containing the potential for roots, leaves, flowers, and fruit, kamma stores the potential for future experiences. When the right conditions—soil, water, sunlight—are met, kamma matures and produces its effects.

### Misconceptions Regarding Kamma

The Buddha encouraged the wise to **critically examine and abandon** several common **misunderstandings** about kamma. These false views undermine moral responsibility and distort the principle of ethical causation:

#### 1. *"Everything is the result of past kamma"*

While past kamma certainly influences present circumstances, *not everything* is caused by past actions. Present choices, environmental factors, and other conditions also play crucial roles. Attributing all behaviour or outcomes solely to past kamma denies the significance of present volition and undermines accountability.

#### 2. *"All events are caused by the will of a Supreme Creator"*

This belief removes moral agency from the individual, implying that people have no control over their actions or outcomes. If everything were predetermined by divine will, ethical conduct and effort would be meaningless, and personal responsibility would be nullified.

#### 3. *"Events happen without any cause"*

This view, often called **nihilism** or **accidentalism**, contradicts the Buddha's core insight into *paṭicca samuppāda* (dependent origination). The notion that actions and consequences arise randomly denies the law of cause and effect and fails to explain the patterns and continuity observable in experience.

### *Kamma Is Not Selective or Sectarian*

A widespread misconception is that kamma applies only to followers of certain religions or belief systems. This is incorrect. **Kamma is universal and impartial**—it functions independently of one's religious label, cultural background, or personal faith.

Just as **gravity** affects everyone regardless of belief, **kamma** operates based on **intention and action**, not affiliation. It is not a divine system of reward and punishment, but a **natural moral law** rooted in **volition (cetanā)**.

### *Kamma Is Not Fatalism*

Another subtle misunderstanding is that kamma implies **fatalism**—the idea that everything is predetermined and unchangeable. In truth, while past actions influence the present, the **present moment holds the power to shape the future**. By acting wisely and ethically now, one can transform the trajectory of their life.

## 6. Curtailing Mental Fabrications (Saṅkhāra, Sañcetanā)

“Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi”

*“Volition, monks, is what I call kamma.”*

This statement highlights a core tenet of the Buddha’s teaching: **intention (Cetanā)** is the basis of **kamma (karma)**. It is not merely action, but volitional mental activity that creates karmic consequences.

### Saṅkhāra: Mental Formations and Conditioned Fabrications

The Pāli term *Saṅkhāra* is derived from:

- *sam* (prefix): “together” or “with”
- *kara* (noun/verb): “doing,” “making,” or “activity”

Thus, *Saṅkhāra* literally means “that which is put together” or “co-doing.” It refers to the mental formations or fabrications that arise through the interplay of causes and conditions.

In the context of the Five Aggregates (*Pañcakkhandha*), *Saṅkhāra* denotes the volitional forces—mental reactions, intentions, and tendencies—that shape both perception and behaviour.

*Saṅkhāras* are:

- Conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhata*)
- Products of past *kamma*
- Active forces that shape consciousness and reinforce *Samsāra*

They are not merely passive formations but dynamic mental processes—the impulses that prepare or “form” future experience.

### Role in Samsāra

In Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*), *Saṅkhāra* is the second link: *Avijjā* → *Saṅkhāra* → *Viññāṇa* → ...

Here, *Saṅkhāra* (volitional formations) arises from *Avijjā* (ignorance) and conditions *Viññāṇa* (consciousness). This illustrates how volitional actions, rooted in ignorance, fuel the cycle of *Paṭicca Samuppāda*, contributing to the arising of *klilesas* (mental afflictions) in the present and perpetuating the cycle of reincarnation (*samsāra*).

### Transcending Saṅkhāra

To progress on the path, one must cultivate **Right View** (*Sammā Diṭṭhi*) and gradually purify **Cetanā** (volition) — reducing the influence of unwholesome

*Saṅkhāras* rooted in **Rāga** (craving), **Dvesha** (aversion), and **Moha** (delusion), while nurturing wholesome volitional formations grounded in wisdom, compassion, and equanimity.

Ultimately, liberation is attained when all *Saṅkhāras* cease — a state known as **Nibbāna**.

As the Dhamma teaches:

“All *saṅkhāras* are insatiable. When one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering.”

*Volition (Cetanā) is Kamma*

**Volition** (*cetanā*) is the essence of kamma—it is the intentional mental force behind all actions. In Buddhist teaching, the **mind is the forerunner of all states**, both wholesome and unwholesome. Our experiences are shaped, guided, and conditioned by the mind.

If one speaks or acts with a **corrupted and impure mind**, suffering will inevitably follow—just as the cartwheel follows the foot of the ox.

Conversely, if one speaks or acts with a **pure and wholesome mind**, happiness will follow—like a shadow that never leaves its form.

To curtail *saṅkhāra* (volitional formations), one must understand the central role of **intention** (*cetanā*) in shaping kamma. Through the cultivation of mindfulness and the purification of the mind, we gradually weaken the defilements—such as greed, hatred, and delusion—that fuel unwholesome volitions. In doing so, we reduce the formation of unwholesome kamma and move closer to liberation.

### **Saṅkhāra: The Root of Thoughts, Speech, and Actions**

Feelings and perceptions arise in the mind—this is essentially what is meant by *Vedanā* (feeling) and *Saññā* (perception). The resulting thoughts, shaped by *Saṅkhāra* acting upon these perceptions (also referred to as *sancetanā*, or volitional formations), define and guide our actions and ultimately shape our destiny.

*Saṅkhāra* refers to "mental formations" and originates from a term meaning “constructs” or “bonding”—forces that arise within the mind. When these formations give rise to verbal expressions, they are called *vaci-saṅkhāra* (verbal fabrications). When they manifest as bodily actions, they are termed

*kāya-saṅkhāra* (bodily fabrications). Thoughts that arise almost involuntarily within the mind are known as *mano-saṅkhāra* (mental fabrications).

It is essential to understand that both *vaci-saṅkhāra* and *kāya-saṅkhāra* originate from the mind. Speech and action are not independent phenomena but expressions of internal mental formations—arising from our *Saṅkhāra*.

### 1. *Kāya Saṅkhāra*

*Kāya saṅkhāra* refers to conscious mental intentions that manifest as bodily actions.

- **Unwholesome bodily actions**—such as killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct—stem from *apuññābhi kāya-saṅkhāra* (unwholesome bodily volitions).
- **Wholesome bodily actions**—such as selfless *dāna* (generosity)—arise from *puññābhi kāya-saṅkhāra* (wholesome bodily volitions).

This category also includes *vipāka*-neutral mental activities that support life and maintain bodily functions, such as breathing and other automatic physical processes.

### 2. *Vaci Saṅkhāra*

*Vaci saṅkhāra* (speech) are mental formations that power internal thought processes leading to verbal expression. Without *vaci saṅkhāra*, speech is not possible.

- **Hateful or harmful speech** arises from *apuññābhi vaci-saṅkhāra* (unwholesome verbal volitions).
- **Dhamma discussions or truthful, kind speech** come from *puññābhi vaci-saṅkhāra* (wholesome verbal volitions).

These activities are associated with *vitakka-vicāra* (applied and sustained thought). When such thought is directed toward the Dhamma, it is referred to as *savitakka-savicāra*. In essence, *vaci saṅkhāra* represents internal verbal reasoning—whether skilful or unskilful.

### 3. *Mano Saṅkhāra*

*Mano saṅkhāra* are spontaneous or unconscious mental formations that arise without deliberate intent.

- Though involuntary, they can be **wholesome, unwholesome, or vipāka-neutral**.

They often reflect one's inherent *gati* (character tendencies) and are conditioned by the degree of *moha* (delusion) or *avijjā* (ignorance) present in the mind.

### The Flow of Causality in Dependent Origination

- Actions—whether wholesome or unwholesome—that are rooted in *avijjā* (ignorance) give rise to *viññāṇa* (consciousness) and are intensified by *abhi-saṅkhāra* (strong mental formations), generating *assāda* (attachment or allure). Along with this consciousness, *nāma-rūpa* (matter and energy forms) comes into being. *Nāma-rūpa* refers to the two fundamental components of a living being: *nāma* denotes the mental aspects, while *rūpa* represents the physical aspects. These elements are mutually dependent and inseparable, forming the foundation of individual existence—the *nāma-rūpa*, or the matter and energy forms.
- **Nāma (Mental):**  
This encompasses all mental phenomena, including consciousness, perception, and the various thoughts and feelings that arise within the mind. It is the subjective, inner aspect of experience.
- **Rūpa (Physical):**  
This refers to the physical realm, including the body and external objects. It is the objective, external aspect of existence.

**“Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā’ti yadā paññāya passati, atha nibbindati dukkhe, esa maggo visuddhiyā.”**

This translates to: “All conditioned phenomena (saṅkhārā) are insatiable—when one sees this with wisdom (paññā), one becomes disenchanting with suffering (dukkha); this is the path to purity (visuddhi).”

All saṅkhārā are anicca (insatiable), dukkha (unsatisfactory), and anattā (without essence). Realising this truth enables one to understand suffering through wisdom. The arising of insight leads to dispassion and detachment from saṅkhārā, marking the beginning of the end of suffering. This is the path of purification—**esa maggo visuddhiyā**.

To move the physical body, the mind must first generate the intention or thought to do so. This thought activates the brain, which sends signals to the

relevant body parts, such as the leg muscles, to carry out the action. In this process, **kāya saṅkhāra** (bodily formations) initiate physical movement.

If the purpose of walking is to go to the bathroom—a morally neutral action—it is considered a **kāya saṅkhāra**, but not an **abhi-saṅkhāra**. Similarly, breathing, which involves bodily movement (e.g., the lungs), occurs even without conscious awareness. Such involuntary actions are also categorised as *kāya saṅkhāra*.

However, if one moves the body with the intention to commit an immoral act, such as harming someone, it becomes an **apuññābhi-saṅkhāra** (unwholesome volitional formation). Conversely, if the action is motivated by a wholesome purpose, such as helping someone in need, it becomes a **puññābhi-saṅkhāra** (wholesome volitional formation). The moral weight (**kamma**) of an action is determined by the underlying intention, which is shaped by mental factors, especially **sati** (mindfulness).

For example, if a person becomes angry and thinks, “I wish I could hit this person,” they are generating unwholesome **vaci saṅkhāra** (verbal formations). If these thoughts intensify and are spoken aloud, they still qualify as **apuññābhi vaci-saṅkhāra**, whether expressed internally or externally. Conversely, *vaci saṅkhāra* can also be wholesome. For instance, if person X observes a good deed by person Y and generates appreciative or kind thoughts, those are **puññābhi vaci-saṅkhāra**.

All other mental activities that arise without being directed toward speech or bodily action are considered **mano saṅkhāra** (mental formations). For example, if one is struck by a cane, the initial responses—feeling the pain (**vedanā**) and recognising that someone caused it (**saññā**)—are *mano saṅkhāra*, occurring during the **vipāka** (result) stage. Following this, based on the sensory input, further **vaci saṅkhāra** may arise, such as formulating hostile thoughts or verbal retaliation. If the pain evokes a strong emotional response, it may even lead to **kāya saṅkhāra**, resulting in physical reprisals.

### What is ‘Gati’?

Those initial *manō saṅkhāra*—which arise as *vipāka* (results of past actions) and are not yet influenced by *rāga* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), or *moha* (delusion)—are still shaped by an individual’s *gati* (deep-rooted character traits), except in arahants. The seeds of thinking, speaking, and acting are sown the very moment a sense input is received—for example, seeing or hearing something that captures one’s attention.

If that sense input resonates strongly—either through attraction or aversion—the mind may quickly initiate a cascade of thought processes. This leads to the generation of *vaci saṅkhāra* (verbal formations), such as internal self-talk or speech, and *kāya saṅkhāra* (bodily formations), resulting in physical action. Fortunately, there is typically a brief time lag between the arising of these *saṅkhāra* and their full manifestation, during which one can exercise mindfulness and self-restraint.

For example, consider a person gradually becoming angry. Even without speaking, they may be generating intense *vaci saṅkhāra* internally. This internal agitation often manifests externally—through flushed skin, tightened facial muscles, or restless body language. Yet the individual might not even realize they are becoming angry until the reaction has already intensified. This delay in awareness is significant: once anger arises, we can lose control before we consciously recognize what is happening.

The key to managing such emotions lies in catching them early, at the stage when the initial *manō saṅkhāra* begin to form. Understanding how this process unfolds and how rapidly it can lead to unwholesome consequences enables us to intervene more effectively in the future. By recognising and halting the progression of *vaci* and *kāya saṅkhāra* at an early stage, we can prevent much suffering. This early intervention is a vital aspect of practice as described in the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness).

A person involuntarily generates *manō abhi-saṅkhāra* based on their latent *gati*, as detailed in the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*. If these are not interrupted, they can develop into conscious *vaci* and *kāya saṅkhāra*, leading to the critical stage of *upādāna* (clinging or grasping). This clinging, in turn, fuels *taṇhā* (craving), further entrenching the cycle of suffering.

### *Mastering ‘Gati’ Toward Wholesome (Kusala) Actions*

*This is a Gradual Process:*

1. Watch your thoughts; they become words.
2. Watch your words; they become actions.
3. Watch your actions; they become habits.
4. Watch your habits; they become your character.
5. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

*Saṅkhāra* also play a role in our day-to-day functioning; they are the mental processes behind routine actions necessary for living in the present moment.

However, *Sanḅhāra* can also give rise to morally significant actions—wholesome or unwholesome—that lead to karmic consequences (*vipāka*) in future lives. This latter category, capable of generating future karmic results, is often referred to as *abhi-sanḅhāra*—strong or intensified mental fabrications.

The term *Sanḅhāra* is commonly used to denote volitional actions that carry either beneficial or harmful karmic consequences. In the context of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (Dependent Origination), the phrase "**avijjā paccayā sanḅhāra**" is more precisely understood as:

- "**avijjā paccayā apuññābhi-sanḅhāra**" – unwholesome (*akusala*) fabrications, or
- "**avijjā paccayā puññābhi-sanḅhāra**" – wholesome (*kusala*) fabrications.

### The Origins of Rāga, Dvesha, and Mōha

Rāga, Dvesha, and Mōha are the mental driving forces behind ten unwholesome actions, known as 'Dasa Akusala'. Therefore, the absence of Rāga, Dvesha, and Mōha naturally gives rise to 'Sīla' (moral discipline). This explains why 'Sīla', by its very nature, does not require deliberate cultivation for its benefits to manifest.

Attraction to pleasures gives rise to **Rāga** (craving), resulting in **Assāda** (gratification). When obstacles arise in the pursuit of these pleasures, they trigger **Dvesha** (aversion). Neither Rāga nor Dvesha ceases on its own; thus, pursuing them becomes an endless and ultimately futile endeavour. In parallel, **Mōha**—delusion or ignorance—also expands, manifesting as ego and pride (**Māna**) or as doubt and suspicion (**Vicikiccā**). In essence, Rāga, Dvesha, and Mōha inflame our senses like fire, and we keep running in search of relief, generating **Vastu-Kāma** (desire for objects) and **Klesha-Kāma** (afflictive desire). Reducing or extinguishing these defilements is akin to putting out the flame beneath a boiling kettle—the cooling begins only once the fire is extinguished. Ignorance of this truth is **Avidyā**—the root cause of this inner fire.

We have all spent years chasing pleasures (Assāda), yet never achieved complete, sustained satisfaction or fulfilment. This endless pursuit fosters an insatiable craving (Rāga) in our minds, which in turn drives verbal and physical actions aimed at repeatedly attaining anticipated pleasures. Since

this craving never truly satisfies the mind, the inevitable failures encountered in the pursuit of pleasure give rise to *Dvesha*—manifesting as hatred, aversion, anger, hostility, or jealousy.

**Mōha** refers to thoughts of uncertainty and disbelief, often described as delusions. It encompasses the desire to control events according to one’s own preferences. *Mōha* arises from the habitual replaying and dwelling on past experiences in the mind. It is not a physical feeling, perception, or sensation (*vedanā*).

At the extreme end of ignorance (*avidyā*), *Mōha* can lead one toward *satharāpāyā*—the dangerous or lower realms. *Avidyā* is completely eradicated only upon attaining the status of an **Arahant**.

### *Minimising Oḷārika (gross) Rāga, Dvesha, and Moha*

Mental thoughts of uncontrollable impulses can lead to disasters such as capture, hatred, or even violence. Most violent incidents we see daily on news channels or social media often originate from excessive, uncontrollable desire or anger. The matters that give rise to these thoughts are sometimes very trivial. A murder can occur due to an argument over a single word, a food item, or a minor dispute. First, we need to reduce these uncontrollable major thoughts of *Rāga* (desire), *Dvesha* (hatred), and *Moha* (delusion) to begin progressing on the path to *Nibbāna*.

### Turning ‘Lobha-Dvesha-Moha’ into ‘Alobha-Advasha-Amoha’

Different levels of **rāga** (craving or attachment), **dvesha** (aversion or hatred), and **moha** (delusion) can be expressed using related terms. **Lobha**, **dvesha**, and **moha** are deeper, more intensified forms of these defilements, giving rise to stronger **akusala kamma** (unwholesome actions) and potentially resulting in rebirth in the four lower realms.

All unwholesome bodily, verbal, or mental actions originate from these three unwholesome roots. Transforming these negative tendencies requires the deliberate cultivation of their wholesome opposites: **generosity**, **loving-kindness**, and **wisdom**. Through consistent practice, the influence of greed, hatred, and delusion diminishes. By understanding the root causes of these defilements, one can facilitate more effective and lasting inner transformation.

The key to reducing the influence of greed, hatred, and delusion—and cultivating their wholesome opposites—lies in nurturing the **three wholesome roots**: **alobha** (non-greed), **advasha** (non-hatred), and **amoha**

(non-delusion). This transformation is supported by strengthening ethical conduct and engaging in conscious practices that counteract these unwholesome tendencies.

*Cultivating the Three Wholesome Roots:*

- ⇒ **From *Lobha* (Greed) to *Alobha* (Non-Greed):**  
Practice selfless generosity (*dāna*) and cultivate detachment, avoiding even subtle expectations of return. Through giving, sharing, and letting go of attachment to possessions and outcomes, the grip of greed is gradually loosened.
- ⇒ **From *Dvesha* (Hatred) to *Advesha* (Non-Hatred):**  
Foster *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). Cultivate empathy and understanding for all beings—even those who cause harm. This softens aversion and transforms hatred into goodwill.
- ⇒ **From *Moha* (Delusion) to *Amoha* (Non-Delusion):**  
Cultivate *prajñā* (wisdom) and mental clarity. Engage in mindfulness, observe thoughts and emotions without reactivity, and study teachings that dispel ignorance. *Realizing* the true nature of reality is essential for overcoming delusion.

As **lobha** decreases, attachment to worldly matters naturally lessens. **Dvesha** diminishes as **mettā**, **karuṇā**, and **muditā** (empathetic joy) increase. The presence of **alobha**, **advesha**, and **amoha** indicates the weakening of defilements and supports progress toward higher spiritual realisation. For example, **dāna** performed with **alobha**, **advesha**, and **amoha** is considered a deeply meritorious and transformative act.

With increasing understanding of the **Four Noble Truths**, one gradually moves toward the states of **alobha**, **advesha**, and **amoha**. The Buddhist principle of **hetu-phala** (cause and effect) is rooted in the interplay between these opposing sets: **lobha/dvesha/moha**, which lead to suffering and rebirth in the lower realms, and **alobha/advesha/amoha**, which support liberation and favourable rebirths in the human, deva, and brahma realms.

To assess spiritual progress, one must examine whether they are genuinely transitioning from **lobha**, **dvesha**, and **moha** to their wholesome counterparts—**alobha**, **advesha**, and **amoha**. This internal shift is fundamental to the path of purification and ultimate liberation.

### What is - Mind and the quantum world ('Mana Dhammā')?

**Mana Dhammā** refers to the interaction between the mind (*mano*) and an omnipresent repository that stores an individual's experiences and other related phenomena (*dhammā*), as perceived by one's mental consciousness (*manoviññāṇa*). Individuals with higher levels of natural spiritual power may also access the past *mana dhammā* of others. In essence, *mana dhammā* describes how the mind becomes aware of and interacts with past experiences, personal traits, events, and related phenomena.

The phrase "**Manōpubbangamā Dhammā, Manōsetthā Manōmayā**" translates to:

*"Mind is the forerunner of all phenomena; mind is chief; all things are mind-made."*

This highlights the central role of the mind in shaping both the living and non-living aspects of reality.

*Mana* has been interpreted in various ways—such as supernatural power, divine energy, miraculous ability, or spiritual strength. These can be collectively understood as forms of spiritual energy. Just as each of the five physical senses is associated with a corresponding object—the eye with sights, the ear with sounds, etc.—in this context, *dhammā* refers to objects of the mind: mental phenomena that the mind becomes aware of, whether consciously recalled or not.

While *mano* typically means “mind,” it can also be understood as *manodhātu* (mind-element), functioning immediately after the other sense faculties. In the context of *mana dhammā*, the mind serves both as an internal sense organ and as the object of perception itself.

Therefore, *mana dhammā* can be understood through three interrelated components:

- **Mano:** The mental faculty or organ responsible for awareness and cognitive processing.
- **Dhammā:** The mental phenomena or objects experienced by the mind.
- **Manoviññāṇa:** The mental consciousness that becomes aware of these mental phenomena.

Our understanding of the transmission of spiritual energy and its limitless powers remains very limited. Even *Nama-Rupa* may be interpreted as a form

of spiritual energy. People who engage in the *lokkottara* (supramundane) spiritual path generally do not disclose or speak freely about their experiences or their extended abilities beyond those of ordinary humans, as most have minimized their *mana* (ego) and have nothing to gain from such revelations. Naturally gifted healers may work through different pathways—drawing on past karmic energy or engaging in the relinquishment or disengagement of invisible ‘demons’ dwelling in lower realms with karmic or energetic ties to the afflicted individual. Others may recognise a historical event stored in their undisclosed memory under secure layers of consciousness and guide the individual back into this past experience—using methods such as hypnosis—to re-expose them to the original scenario and neutralise its influence on the current deficit or disability affecting the person in this life.

On the other hand, instances where one’s own mind becomes empowered to minimise or even modulate personal health issues are often seen as ‘extraordinary’ cases, with no explanation that aligns with current medical or scientific understanding. This is one reason why living with more ‘positive energy’ can be beneficial to the individual, as the generation of ‘dark energy’ through negative mental processes is minimised, thereby promoting more favourable outcomes, which we often describe as being ‘lucky’.

## 7. Satara Satipaṭṭhāna

The word "**lokottara**" refers to the supramundane approach in meditation aimed at establishing **Sati**, also known as **Satipaṭṭhāna**. Sati is a wholesome mental factor that arises only during moral thoughts (**kusala citta**) and does not arise during immoral thoughts (**akusala citta**). It is the seventh factor in the **Noble Eightfold Path**.

**Satara Satipaṭṭhāna** refers to a self-training process that consists of four foundations (**Satara** meaning "four"), hence the name. Sati supports and promotes only moral thoughts (kusala citta), never immoral ones (akusala citta). However, Sati also plays a role in recognising and observing any arising immoral thoughts, allowing the practitioner to deal with them mindfully.

When a person pauses to consider whether an intended action is moral or immoral—and then chooses to perform only those actions with moral consequences—that person is acting with **Sati**, the wholesome mental factor.

The term **paṭṭhāna** in *Satipaṭṭhāna* means "establishment," "training," or "moulding" the mind to act with Sati. This training unfolds in four interrelated but sequential steps, which is why it is called **Satara Satipaṭṭhāna**. In this process, one contemplates the five aggregates (**pañcakkhandha**) through four categories of observation (**anupassanā**).

This is the core practice required for successful meditation. The term *Satipaṭṭhāna* combines **sati** (mindfulness) and **paṭṭhāna** (foundation or establishment), describing the domains in which mindfulness should be established to cultivate insight (**vipassanā**) and ultimately attain liberation (**Nibbāna**).

### What is the meaning of anupassanā?

*Anupassanā* is a Pāli term that appears in all four *Satipaṭṭhānas*. It means observing, contemplating, reviewing, and reflecting—specifically through the lens of the three characteristics: *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility).

In meditation practice, *anupassanā* refers to “sustained observation” or “contemplation,” which involves paying close and continuous attention to the subject of meditation. This is done without distraction or attachment, to ultimately eliminate bodily, emotional, mental, and doctrinal fabrications

(*kāya*, *vedanā*, *citta*, *dhamma*), which arise from *rāga* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion).

This practice helps you:

- Cultivate deep insight into the nature of reality
- Perceive the three characteristics (*anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*) in all phenomena
- Uproot ignorance (*avijjā*) and attain liberation (*Nibbāna*)

### The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*)

**There are four elements in the practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna***, each corresponding to a form of *Anupassanā* (contemplation or observation). These four contemplations act as a "rescue remedy," offering a systematic approach to purify the mind and overcome defilements.

#### 1. *Kāyā – Kāyānupassanā – Mindfulness of the Body*

In *Kāyānupassanā*, "*kāya*" refers not only to the physical body but also to the six faculties and the aggregates of *rūpa* (form), *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations), and *viññāna* (consciousness). In this context, "*kāya*" also includes the influence of *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion) on physical actions.

The practice involves observing bodily responses to stimuli. For instance, if you feel pain in your leg due to a dog bite, your immediate reaction may be to withdraw your leg. Upon recognising the source (a dog), you might then react by shouting or attempting to harm the dog, driven by *dvesha*. Contemplating this secondary reaction through the lens of *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (futility) gradually weakens conditioned responses.

**In summary:** One trains not to react impulsively at a gross (*oḷārika*) level to sensory stimuli from the six faculties.

#### 2. *Vedanā – Vedānupassanā – Mindfulness of Feelings*

This practice involves observing feelings (*vedanā*) as they arise—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—without becoming entangled in them through *rāga*, *dvesha*, or *moha*. Sustained mindfulness weakens reactive patterns and conditions the mind for liberation from habitual responses.

**In summary:** Reflect mindfully on how to respond, rather than react, when certain feelings arise.

### 3. *Citta – Cittānupassanā – Mindfulness of the Mind*

Here, one observes mental states as they arise, noting the presence or absence of greed, hatred, and delusion. This fosters clarity and objectivity, allowing one to recognise the conditioned patterns of the mind.

**In summary:** Maintain moral awareness and observe involuntary mental states without judgment.

### 4. *Dhammā – Dhammānupassanā – Mindfulness of Mental Phenomena*

This involves meditating on the arising and passing away of physical and mental phenomena related to the body, sensations, and mind. Through this, the practitioner sees the truth of insatiable suffering and the futility of clinging, gaining insight into the impersonal nature of all experience.

The Buddha Dhamma is fundamentally about purifying the mind. A defiled mind gives rise to defiled thoughts, which further contaminate the mind. These unwholesome thoughts (*akusala saṅkhāra*) eventually manifest as defiled speech and actions, though not instantly. There is a time lag between thought, speech, and action, and this delay offers a critical opportunity for self-regulation.

The path of discipline begins with controlling bodily actions, then speech, and ultimately the most subtle: thoughts. Our thoughts are deeply conditioned by our underlying tendencies and habitual traits, known as *gati*. However, *gati* are not fixed—they can be gradually transformed through mindful restraint of speech and action.

This is why *Kāyānupassanā* (mindfulness of the body) is taught first in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Through *Kāyānupassanā*, we learn to discipline ourselves not to use the five senses for indulging in *rāga* (craving), *dvesha* (hatred), or *moha* (delusion). Restraining physical actions and speech ensures that our *Sīla* (moral discipline) remains intact. Even though both speech and actions stem from thoughts, their delayed manifestation allows us to intervene and prevent unwholesome outcomes.

For example, when we think, “This person has wronged me,” we may feel the urge to retaliate verbally or physically. But between the arising of that thought and the outward reaction, there is space for mindfulness and wisdom (*sati-prajñā*) to intervene. Recognising and skilfully using that gap is how we begin to purify the mind and reshape our *gati*.

We tend to delay bodily actions more than speech. So, unless one is overwhelmed by rage, there is usually enough time to catch oneself and stop

any unwholesome action. As we improve in this practice and gain control over speech and actions, instances of reacting in rage gradually diminish and eventually disappear. The more we act with *sati* (mindfulness), the more we relinquish unwholesome *gati* and cultivate wholesome tendencies.

Thus, *Kāyānupassanā* essentially means “catching ourselves before we say or do something wrong.” It brings awareness to our speech and actions before they manifest. This leads not only to wholesome actions in worldly (*laukika*) terms but also helps us disengage from attachments rooted in *rāga*, *dvesha*, and *moha*, opening the path to *Nirvāṇa* in supramundane (*lokottara*) terms.

As *Kāyānupassanā* is practiced, one’s *gati* gradually transforms, and a natural calmness arises. One becomes less reactive to feelings and impulses, making it easier to practice the next stage of the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*, *Vedanānupassanā*. *Vedanā* (feeling) lies precisely between sense contact and emotional reaction. Therefore, *Vedanānupassanā* offers the opportunity to pause and reflect before reacting.

When both these practices are well established, *gati* changes to such an extent that even initial thoughts arise with less “venom,” making it easier to practice *Cittānupassanā*—the cultivation of wholesome, moral, and skilful thought patterns.

Eventually, it becomes easier to enter *samādhi* and to contemplate *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*—or other Dhamma concepts—through *Dhammānupassanā*.

Thus, one begins with *Kāyānupassanā* (contemplation of the body) and gradually progresses through the other three forms of *Anupassanā* (contemplation): *Vedanānupassanā* (feelings), *Cittānupassanā* (mind), and *Dhammānupassanā* (mental objects). Completion of all four leads to the state of *Sammā Sati* (Right Mindfulness), which serves as the foundation for the path toward the *lokottara* (supramundane) way of meditation, and ultimately reach *Sammā Samādhi* (Right Concentration). This progression supports the attainment of higher stages of realisation: *Sakadāgāmi*, *Anāgāmi*, and finally *Arahantship*.

We speak or act in response to what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think. There is always a time gap between the moment of sensory input (or a mental impulse) and our response. Even if we begin to say something hurtful, we can become aware and stop ourselves, or apologise if harm has already been caused. Even if we begin to rise in anger to strike someone, we can recognise the consequences and stop immediately. This is how the practice begins.

With consistent effort, one's *gati* will change, and such unwholesome reactions will gradually decrease.

It becomes clear, then, that *Kāyānupassanā* is the first and most crucial foundation in the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*.

## 8. The Ten Fetters Originating in Our Mind (Dasa Saṃyojana)

The ten fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are distinct from the *kleśas* (afflictive emotions); they are mental constructs or shackles created by the mind to sustain *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). These fetters bind us to the cycle of *saṃsāra* and its inherent suffering. They represent the internal chains that keep us clinging to sensory experiences. To begin purifying the mind—or more precisely, to maintain clarity and presence—these fetters must be gradually weakened. This involves reducing indulgence in sensual pleasures and preventing the mind from becoming distracted or momentarily defiled.

**These fetters are mental hindrances that obstruct spiritual progress.**

To move toward our ultimate spiritual goal—*Nibbāna*—we must first understand the *saṃyojanas*, or mental fetters, and systematically eliminate them. This process leads through the four supramundane noble stages: **Stream-Enterer** (*Sotāpanna*), **Once-Returner** (*Sakadāgāmi*), **Non-Returner** (*Anāgāmi*), and finally, **Arahantship**. At the stage of Arahantship, all ten fetters are completely eradicated. An enlightened being at this level is entirely free from the fetters that give rise to the ten *akusala* (unwholesome) actions.

Such liberation is achieved through deep insight and the cultivation of the three characteristics of existence: *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (futility). In contrast, one who remains unaware of these fetters and lives guided by unexamined thoughts, speech, and actions is known as a *puthujjana*, or ordinary worldly person. The ten fetters (*saṃyojanas*) describe the inner bonds or attachments that tie beings to the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*).

### 1. *Sakkāyadit̥ṭhi* – The belief in a personal identity or self (*atta*).

**Self-identity view** refers to the deeply ingrained tendency to cling to the five aggregates (*Pañcakkhandha*), mistakenly perceiving them as a permanent, independent self-capable of fulfilling desires and extinguishing cravings. This misidentification gives rise to various mental defilements, including egoism, conceit, craving, attachment, selfishness, ill-will, and hatred.

*Sakkāya Dit̥ṭhi* is often oversimplified as merely the belief in a self or “I.” However, *sakkāya* specifically refers to the *Pañca Upādāna Skandha*—the five clinging aggregates—and the conditioned processes that give rise to *kleśa* (mental afflictions). *Dit̥ṭhi* means “view,” and in this context, it refers to

the mistaken perception that *assāda* (the allure or gratification of experience) is sustainable (*nicca*), pleasurable (*sukha*), and constitutes a self (*attā*). This distorted view is what defines *Sakkāya Diṭṭhi*—a fundamental delusion at the root of suffering.

This self-identification typically manifests in three ways:

- “This is mine” – rooted in craving (*taṇhā*)
- “This I am” – rooted in conceit (*māna*)
- “This is myself” – rooted in wrong view (*diṭṭhi*)

*2. Vicikicchā – Sceptical doubt, uncertainty, indecision, lack of conviction, or mistrust in the Dhamma.*

**Sceptical doubt** (*vicikicchā*), the second fetter, is also identified as one of the five mental hindrances (*Pañca Nīvaraṇa*). Unlike **inquiring doubt**, which arises from a genuine desire to understand and explore the teachings, sceptical doubt is a paralysing uncertainty that inhibits full commitment to the Dhamma path. It often manifests as mistrust toward the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Sangha, and may include doubts about one’s capability or worthiness to pursue spiritual training, thus obstructing progress toward liberation.

It is essential to distinguish between these two forms of doubt. Inquiring doubt can foster deeper insight through thoughtful questioning and investigation of the Buddha’s teachings, particularly the path to liberation and the core practices of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).

*3. Sīlabbataparāmāsa – Attachment to rituals, precepts, rules, or external practices with the false belief that they alone will lead to liberation.*

This refers to attachment to mere rites and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) as a means of attaining liberation and enlightenment. *Sīlabbataparāmāsa* is the mistaken belief that mere adherence to rituals, rules, or external precepts is sufficient to attain Nibbāna. According to Buddhist teachings, the Fourth Noble Truth—the path leading to the cessation of suffering—is the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, engaging in practices with the belief that they alone will lead to final liberation constitutes the fetter of *sīlabbataparāmāsa*.

This fetter, along with the fetters of self-identity view and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), is eliminated upon attaining the first stage of enlightenment: Stream Entry (*sotāpanna*). A Stream Enterer has overcome these three lower

fetters. Even strict observance of moral disciplines, such as the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) or higher precepts, can be considered part of this fetter if practised with the belief that they alone lead to liberation.

#### 4. *Kāmarāga – Sensual desire, passion, lust, greed, and attachment to sense pleasures.*

**Sensual desire** refers to the craving for sensory experiences received through the six sense faculties: sights (eye), sounds (ear), smells (nose), tastes (tongue), tactile sensations (body), and mental objects (mind). It is not the sense organs or the sense objects themselves that constitute a fetter, but rather the desire or lust (*chandarāga*) for these experiences. This craving forms a powerful bond that keeps beings entangled in the cycle of **samsāra**—the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

In the **Four Noble Truths**, craving is identified as the cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*). This craving (*taṇhā*) is traditionally classified into three types:

1. **Craving for sense pleasures** (*kāma-taṇhā*)
2. **Craving for existence or becoming** (*bhava-taṇhā*)
3. **Craving for non-existence or annihilation** (*vibhava-taṇhā*)

**Sensual desire** (*kāma-rāga*) is also one of the **seven latent tendencies** (*anusaya*)—deep-seated mental predispositions that lie dormant until triggered by contact with sense objects. These tendencies are considered major obstacles to spiritual progress and the root causes of suffering in Buddhism. The seven latent tendencies are:

1. **Sensual desire** (*kāma-rāga*): Attachment to sensual pleasures and experiences
2. **Aversion** (*paṭigha*): Resistance to unpleasant experiences or people
3. **Wrong view** (*ditṭhi*): Misperceptions of reality, such as belief in a permanent self
4. **Doubt** (*vicikicchā*): Uncertainty regarding the Buddha’s teachings
5. **Conceit** (*māna*): Pride or inflated self-regard
6. **Craving for existence** (*bhava-rāga*): Clinging to future rebirth or continued existence
7. **Ignorance** (*avijjā*): Lack of understanding of the true nature of reality and the Four Noble Truths

These latent tendencies can give rise to unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions.

An intensified form of sensual craving becomes one of the **four types of attachment** (*upādāna*): attachment to sense pleasures, attachment to views, attachment to rites and rituals, and attachment to the notion of self. These attachments serve as a crucial link in the chain of **Dependent Origination** (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), which sustains continued becoming and rebirth in *samsāra*.

Furthermore, **sensual desire** (*kāma-cchanda*) is identified as the first of the **five mental hindrances** (*Pañca Nīvaraṇa*), which are unwholesome mental states that obstruct the development of concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) during meditation and mental cultivation.

### 5. Vyāpāda – Aversion, ill will, malice, anger, hatred, hostility, and irritation (synonyms: *paṭigha*, *dvesha*).

Ill will encompasses a range of negative emotions, including anger, resentment, aversion, animosity, hostility, and hatred. When unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) is frequently directed toward a repulsive object (*paṭigha-nimitta*), it nourishes the arising of ill will that has not yet arisen and intensifies the ill will that is already present.

Ill will is identified as one of the seven latent tendencies (*anusaya*) and as the second of the five mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*). The fetter of ill will (*paṭigha*), along with the fetter of sensual desire, is weakened—but not yet eradicated—upon reaching the second noble stage of Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmi*). It is completely eliminated, along with sensual desire, upon attaining the third noble stage of Non-Returner (*anāgāmi*).

### 6. Rūparāga – Craving or attachment to material existence and the form realms.

The desire to be reborn in the fine material worlds (*rūpa-brahma loka*) binds one to the ongoing cycle of *samsāra*. Through dedicated practice of concentration meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*), a meditator can access eight progressive stages of deep mental absorption (*dhyaṇa*): four fine material absorptions (*rūpāvacara dhyāna*) and four immaterial or formless absorptions (*arūpāvacara dhyāna*). These elevated states of consciousness provide the clarity, stillness, and insight necessary to examine—and ultimately overcome—*rūparāga*, the subtle craving for existence in refined material realms.

### *Understanding and Overcoming Rūparāga*

*Rūparāga* refers to the craving for sensory pleasure associated with form—pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations—as well as the subtle mental pleasures linked to meditative absorption. This craving often extends to desires for wealth, status, comfort, and favourable circumstances, and is reinforced by the fear of their loss. It fuels a subtle longing for a life filled with ease, beauty, and gratification.

While such experiences may seem harmless or even virtuous, they bind the mind to conditions that are inherently insatiable and ultimately unsatisfactory. This attachment persists due to a fundamental misunderstanding: the belief that lasting satisfaction can be found in conditioned phenomena. Yet all forms—no matter how refined—are subject to arising and passing away. Recognising this truth is essential for cultivating dispassion and renunciation.

To progress beyond attachment to even these exalted states, the meditator must employ the higher *dhyānas* not as ends in themselves but as tools for insight. By deeply contemplating the insatiability, conditionality, and inherent dissatisfaction of even the most sublime experiences, one begins to see that *rūparāga*—attachment to form—remains rooted in ignorance.

### *Practical Steps for Weakening Rūparāga*

- *Cultivating Dispassion (Vairāgya)*  
Dispassion is the cornerstone of liberation. It arises not from suppression but from wisdom. Begin by observing how attachment to form creates dependency and suffering. For instance, notice the anxiety that arises when a cherished possession is threatened or lost. Contemplate how every pleasurable experience, no matter how profound, eventually fades. Over time, this observation weakens the illusion that such forms are reliable sources of happiness. Dispassion grows not through aversion but through insight—the clear seeing of insatiability (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and futility (*anattā*).
- *Practicing Non-Attachment*  
This refers to the intentional and gradual loosening of the emotional grip on experiences, possessions, and even personal identity. This does not require renouncing all material things but rather transforming one's relationship with them. A practitioner may still

live in a home, use technology, and earn a living—but without clinging to these as sources of identity or security. Begin by practicing generosity (*dāna*) and cultivating simplicity. Occasionally relinquish small comforts. Reflect regularly on the insatiability of your body and sensations. Each act of letting go weakens the roots of craving and prepares the mind for deeper insight.

- *Developing Compassion (Karunā)*  
Compassion is a powerful antidote to the self-centred tendencies that sustain *rūparāga*. When the heart opens to the suffering of others, it naturally releases its grasp on personal pleasure. Make compassion an integral part of your practice by engaging in loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation, helping those in need, and reflecting on the shared nature of suffering. This shift in focus—from self to others—gradually erodes the habitual craving for comfort and gratification, leading to a more spacious, liberated state of mind.

Overcoming *rūparāga* is not a matter of repression but of transformation—through clear seeing, mindful letting go, and compassionate engagement. The stages of *dhyāna* offer a stable foundation from which one can penetrate the nature of craving. By systematically cultivating dispassion, practising non-attachment, and developing compassion, the meditator moves steadily toward the abandonment of craving and the realisation of true freedom beyond form.

### 7. *Arūparāga – Craving or attachment to formless, immaterial realms.*

**Arūparāga** refers to attachment to the formless realms (*arūpaloka*)—the desire to be reborn in the highest heavens, which are characterized by the absence of material form. This craving is one of the ten fetters, or mental defilements, that bind beings to the cycle of rebirth. The term *arūpaloka* translates to "formless realm" and represents the highest of the three realms of existence in Buddhist cosmology. Unlike the *rūpaloka* (realm of form), where beings possess physical bodies, the formless realms are characterized by the absence of material form.

**Arūparāga** is a manifestation of craving for existence (*bhava-rāga*)—the desire to continue existing, even in a higher, immaterial state. It is considered a more subtle and refined form of attachment than *rūparāga*. While *rūparāga* denotes a desire for material pleasure and form, *arūparāga* reflects a craving for the subtler pleasures and mental states associated with the formless realms.

### 8. *Māna – Conceit, pride, vanity, ego, self-evaluation, and social comparison.*

**Māna** refers to conceit—self-pride or arrogance. It is an inflated sense of self, manifesting as pride, a sense of superiority, or self-importance. In the *Abhidhamma*, it is identified as one of the fourteen unwholesome mental factors (*akusala cetasika*), rooted in *lobha* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion).

The fourteen unwholesome mental factors are traits that give rise to unwholesome actions and disturbed mental states. They include: ignorance, lack of shame, lack of moral fear, restlessness, attachment, wrong view, conceit, aversion, envy, stinginess, regret, sloth, torpor, and doubt. Recognising these factors is essential for identifying and overcoming unwholesome tendencies on the path to liberation.

Conceit is also classified as one of the seven latent tendencies (*anusaya*)—subtle mental habits that remain dormant until triggered by sensory experiences. As a fetter (*saṃyojana*), conceit becomes especially refined in the form of **asmi-māna**—the underlying sense of “I am.” This differs from *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the coarser view of self based on identification with the five aggregates of clinging (*pañc’upādānakkhandha*). While *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is eradicated at the first stage of enlightenment (Stream Entry), *asmi-māna* persists through the first three stages and is only fully abandoned at the final stage of Arahantship.

### 9. *Uddhacca – Restlessness, agitation, distraction, excitement, and mental turbulence.*

**Uddhacca**, manifests as inner agitation, distraction, or over-excitement, particularly during meditation. Like other unwholesome states, it arises from the three unwholesome roots: *lobha* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion). It is also one of the Five Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), specifically paired with remorse as *uddhacca-kukkucca* (restlessness and remorse).

Restlessness obstructs both concentration and inner tranquillity. A restless mind is often likened to rippling water—unable to reflect clearly—or a fluttering flag—constantly in motion. This mental instability can be triggered by sensory input through any of the six sense doors. It may also arise from misinterpreting meditative experiences.

Meditation plays a central role in cultivating the Buddhist path of liberation, with the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment. There are two main types

of meditation: **concentration (samatha-bhāvanā)** and **insight (vipassanā-bhāvanā)**.

*Samatha-bhāvanā*, or tranquil meditation, involves developing deep concentration and one-pointedness of mind by focusing attention on a single meditation object. As the mind becomes increasingly concentrated, various stages of calmness and joy arise, known as *Dhyāna*, or deep mental absorptions. These states are characterised by freedom from the Five Hindrances and a profound inner stillness.

*Vipassanā-bhāvanā*, or insight meditation, is a technique of mental development that enables the meditator to see things as they truly are. It leads to the gradual eradication of mental defilements and ultimately to final liberation from suffering. The term *vipassanā* comes from Pali, where *vi-* means “intensive,” “deep,” or “clear,” and *passanā* means “seeing” or “perceiving.” Thus, *vipassanā* refers to the practice of deep or clear seeing, aimed at gaining insight into the true nature of mental and physical phenomena.

Even a Non-Returner (*Anāgāmī*), who has progressed deeply in meditative absorption, still retains subtle traces of restlessness. Like conceit (*māna*), it is only entirely abandoned upon attaining **Arahantship**, the final stage of enlightenment.

### *10. Avijjā – Ignorance, delusion, misunderstanding, and lack of true understanding of Anicca, Dukkha, and Anattā.*

Samsāra is not a place or a specific plane of existence, but a process fuelled by ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), and the volitional actions we perform (*kamma*), through which we continue from one existence to another.

## 9. Curtailing the Dasa Akusala: Not Through Fear

Understanding and gradually overcoming the Dasa Saṃyojana (the ten fetters) is essential, as it naturally guides one away from the Dasa Akusala (the ten unwholesome actions). This is the true path to Nibbāna. The weakening and eventual elimination of the fetters leads to the cultivation of Sīla (moral conduct) and reduces the tendency to engage in unwholesome behaviour.

Avoiding the Dasa Akusala merely out of fear—whether fear of breaking religious precepts or legal regulations—does not bring about any supramundane (lokottara) benefit in one’s pursuit of liberation. Refraining from unwholesome actions due to fear, societal pressure, or superficial adherence to Sīla may prevent harm temporarily, but it does not result in true inner transformation. This is because the Dasa Akusala are only symptoms—manifestations of deeper mental tendencies—not their root causes. Indeed, most societies prohibit many of the Dasa Akusala through legal or moral codes, yet such prohibitions alone do not lead individuals toward liberation.

Buddhist practitioners are often taught from a young age to avoid these ten unwholesome actions because of their harmful consequences. However, it is crucial to recognize that the Dasa Akusala originate in the mind—as thoughts and intentions—before they manifest in speech or bodily actions. Thus, addressing the Dasa Saṃyojana is key to reducing unwholesome behavior at its root.

In other words, merely refraining from acts such as killing during a temporary observance of Sīla has limited spiritual value if the underlying mental defilements remain intact. True progress on the path occurs when one works to eradicate the internal tendencies that give rise to such actions—whether against humans or animals—by gradually weakening the ten fetters. This reflects the essence of authentic Buddhist practice.

Treating the Dasa Akusala as external rules to be followed aligns with the laukika (worldly) path. In contrast, working to uproot the Dasa Saṃyojana belongs to the lokottara (supramundane) path—the path that leads to genuine liberation.

## 10. Eradicating the Fetters: A Central Aim of the Path

To be free from suffering, one must gradually eliminate the **ten fetters** (**saṃyojana**) that bind beings to **samsāra** (the cycle of rebirth). These fetters are progressively abandoned through the attainment of the **four stages of enlightenment**.

Ārya Śrāvakas (noble disciples) are expected to eradicate the **five lower fetters** by first engaging in meditation to attain the **fine-material (rūpa)** and **formless (arūpa) absorptions** (*Dhyānas*), and then contemplating the **five aggregates of clinging (upādāna khandha)**. After reaching each absorption state, the meditator reflects on the aggregates as **anicca** (insatiable), **dukkha** (unsatisfactory), and **anattā** (worthless). Through this process, one may attain the stage of **Non-Returner (Anāgāmi)** by eradicating the five lower fetters.

It is also essential to contemplate the six sense organs and the mental processes that arise from them, recognising their *anattā* (futile) nature. Additionally, by cultivating the five spiritual faculties (*pañca indriya*)—faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—one strengthens the capacity to eliminate the fetters.

### Doctrinal Categories for Understanding and Cultivation

Anyone seeking to eradicate all ten fetters and attain enlightenment and liberation from *samsāra* must diligently cultivate the Thirty-Seven Requisites of Enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*), in addition to gaining a deep understanding of the following key doctrinal categories:

#### 1. Five Hindrances (*Nīvaraṇa*)

Mental obstacles that hinder progress in meditation and insight:

- **Sensual desire** (*kāmacchanda*)
- **Ill will** (*vyāpāda*)
- **Sloth and torpor** (*thīna-middha*)
- **Restlessness and worry** (*uddhacca-kukkucca*)
- **Doubt** (*vicikicchā*)

#### 2. Five Aggregates (*Khandha*)

The components of personal experience and identity, which must be seen clearly to overcome attachment:

- **Form** (*rūpa*) – the physical world and materiality

- **Feeling** (*vedanā*) – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations
  - **Perception** (*saññā*) – recognition and labelling of experiences
  - **Mental formations** (*sankhāra*) – volitions, habits, and intentions
  - **Consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) – awareness of sensory and mental objects
3. **Six Sense Bases (*Āyatana*)**  
The internal and external sense fields, which are the basis of contact and perception:
- **Internal:** eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind
  - **External:** visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects
4. **Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhaṅga*)**  
Mental qualities that support awakening when balanced and developed:
- **Mindfulness** (*sati*)
  - **Investigation of Dhamma** (*dhamma-vicaya*)
  - **Effort** (*virīya*)
  - **Joy** (*pīti*)
  - **Tranquillity** (*passaddhi*)
  - **Concentration** (*samādhi*)
  - **Equanimity** (*upekkhā*)

**The Thirty-Seven Requisites of Enlightenment**, also known as *Bodhipakkhiya Dhamma*, are a set of interrelated qualities and practices that, when diligently cultivated, lead to liberation from saṃsāra and the realisation of enlightenment. Sometimes referred to as the “**Wings to Awakening**,” they encompass the three pillars of the Buddhist path: **wisdom (prajñā), ethical conduct (sīla), and mental discipline (samādhi)**. Rather than functioning as a rigid checklist, these requisites form a dynamic and holistic framework for spiritual development. Through consistent practice and integration of these teachings into daily life, one gradually weakens the bonds of ignorance and craving, ultimately eradicating the **ten fetters (saṃyojana)** and progressing toward **full awakening (nibbāna)**.

**Here is a breakdown of the main groups and their key components:**

1. Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna):

- Contemplation of the Body: Observing the body's physical processes, including breath, posture, and sensations.
- Contemplation of Feelings: Noticing different types of feelings, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- Contemplation of the Mind: Examining the arising and passing of thoughts, emotions, and mental states.
- Contemplation of Mind-Objects: Analysing the objects of thought, such as concepts, ideas, and perceptions.

## 2. Four Right Efforts (Sammappadhāna):

- Striving to Prevent Unwholesome States: Making an effort to stop the arising of unwholesome thoughts and emotions.
- Striving to Abandon Unwholesome States: Cultivating equanimity and mindfulness to overcome unwholesome states.
- Striving to Develop Wholesome States: Nurturing and strengthening wholesome mental qualities.
- Striving to Maintain Wholesome States: Protecting and sustaining the development of wholesome qualities.

## 3. Four Bases of Power (Iddhipada):

- Faith: A strong belief in the Buddha's teachings and the possibility of awakening.
- Mindfulness: A constant awareness of one's present experience.
- Effort: A vigorous and determined effort in one's spiritual practice.
- Enquiry: The ability to focus the mind and achieve deep states of absorption.

## 4. Five Faculties (Indriya):

- Faith: A strong belief in the Dharma.
- Effort: A determined effort in one's practice.
- Mindfulness: An awareness of the present moment.
- Concentration: The ability to focus the mind.
- Wisdom: Insight into the nature of reality.

## 5. Five Strengths (Bala):

- Faith: Firm belief in the teachings.
- Effort: Determined effort in practice.
- Mindfulness: Awareness of the present moment.
- Concentration: Ability to focus the mind.

- Wisdom: Insight into the truth.

#### 6. Seven Factors of Enlightenment (Bojjhaṅga):

- Mindfulness: Awareness of the present moment.
- Investigation of Dhamma: Inquiring and examining the nature of phenomena.
- Effort: The ability to strive and exert effort.
- Joy: A feeling of happiness and well-being.
- Tranquillity: Calmness and peacefulness of the mind.
- Concentration: Single-pointed focus.
- Equanimity: A balanced and impartial state of mind.

#### 7. Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-Magga):

- Right View: A clear understanding of the nature of reality.
- Right Intention: Cultivating wholesome intentions.
- Right Speech: Speaking truthfully and kindly.
- Right Action: Engaging in ethical conduct.
- Right Livelihood: Choosing a livelihood that does not harm others.
- Right Effort: Making an effort to cultivate wholesome states.
- Right Mindfulness: Awareness of the present moment.
- Right Concentration: Focusing on the Nibbāna

## 11. Pancha Nīvaraṇa – The Five Hindrances

"Nīvaraṇa" refers to that which covers, conceals, or obstructs. These five unwholesome mental factors hinder the mind from entering deeper meditative absorption (*Dhyāna*) and obstruct the path to *Nibbāna*. They cloud the naturally radiant nature of the mind (*Prabhāsvara citta*) and must be weakened or removed in order to transition from the *Kāma-Bhūmi* (sensual realm) to the *Ariyā-Bhūmi* (noble meditative ground).

### The Five Hindrances are Mental Obstructions

The Five Hindrances (*Pañca Nīvaraṇa*) are mental obstructions—like veils or barriers—that prevent us from accessing supramundane (*lokottara*) states of meditation and enlightenment. These hindrances must be clearly identified and gradually weakened, especially in their *olārika* (gross or coarse) forms, in order to make meaningful progress in meditation and ultimately move toward liberation.

#### 1. Kāmacchanda – Sensual Desire or Craving

This refers to the pursuit of pleasure through sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or mental imagery. Craving for sense pleasures through the five physical senses creates longing and attachment, which disturb inner stillness. The remedy is to contemplate the insatiability (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and futile (*anattā*) nature of sensual pleasures.

#### 2. Vyāpāda – Ill-Will or Aversion

This includes anger, hatred, malice, hostility, resistance, and irritation. Hostile mental states such as resentment, animosity, and hatred obstruct mental peace, loving-kindness, and clarity. The antidote is to cultivate *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and forgiveness, along with reflection on the harm that ill-will causes to oneself and others.

#### 3. Thīna-Middha – Sloth and Torpor

This hindrance manifests as mental inertia, drowsiness, sluggishness, and a general lack of energy or alertness. *Thīna* refers to mental dullness, apathy, and sluggishness; *middha* to physical heaviness, drowsiness, or sleepiness. Together, they render the mind unfit for meditation by promoting laziness and inattention. The remedy is to arouse , effort, sharpen mindfulness, and investigate the Dhamma (*dhamma-vicaya*).

4. **Uddhacca-Kukkucca – Restlessness and Remorse**

*Uddhacca* signifies mental agitation, overexcitement, or turbulence; *kukkucca* indicates guilt, worry, or regret over past actions. These states disrupt concentration and prevent inner stillness. The antidote is to practice *sati* (mindfulness), remain anchored in the present moment, and recognize that regret is unproductive unless accompanied by right action. When the mind wanders, gently bring it back.

5. **Vicikicchā – Sceptical Doubt**

This is uncertainty or indecisiveness about the path—not to be confused with critical inquiry or wise reflection. Doubt about the Dhamma, the practice, or oneself can paralyse decision-making and hinder spiritual progress. *Vicikicchā* often refers to a wavering or sceptical state of mind regarding the teachings, obstructing clarity and wisdom (*buddhi*). The remedy is to strengthen wise faith (*saddhā*) through study, reflection, direct experience, and to investigate doubts rather than suppress them—particularly through an understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

**What promotes the five hindrances**

The five mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) are unwholesome mental states or defilements that obstruct progress in mental development, particularly during meditation. They arise due to unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) directed toward sensory experiences and mental objects. *Ayoniso manasikāra* refers to inappropriate or distorted attention to physical and mental phenomena and is associated with four types of perverted perception (*vipallāsa*): perceiving the insatiable (*anicca*) as satiable, the painful (*dukkha*) as pleasurable, the worthlessness (*anattā*) as worthy, and the unattractive (*asubha*) as attractive. It is the opposite of *yoniso manasikāra*, which means wise attention or appropriate reflection. In essence, *ayoniso manasikāra* involves a distorted view that misperceives insatiable as permanence, suffering as happiness, and worthlessness as worthiness..

In concentration meditation, these hindrances obstruct the development of deep concentration (*Dhyāna*) and tranquillity. They can also impede the cultivation of preliminary stages of concentration, such as momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*) and access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), which precede the attainment of absorption.

The five hindrances can be prevented and uprooted by cultivating *yoniso manasikāra*—wise attention—through insight into the three universal characteristics: *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. These insights sever the root of ignorance (*avijjā*), which nourishes and sustains all five hindrances.

### Clearing the Path Toward the Four Noble Truths

The Five Hindrances (*Pancha Nīvaraṇa*) are not merely distractions—they are fundamental obstacles to spiritual awakening and realising the Four Noble Truths:

1. **Dukkha** – They deepen suffering.
2. **Samudaya** – They arise from craving (*taṇhā*).
3. **Nirodha** – They must be overcome to cease suffering.
4. **Magga** – Their removal is essential to walking the Eightfold Path.

Overcoming the *Pancha Nīvaraṇa* is crucial, as it obstructs the gateway to Nibbāna through *supramundane* (*lokottara*) meditation, which transcends the *kāma loka* (the realm of sensual desires). These hindrances are deeply rooted in the mind's habitual craving for sense pleasures, driven by *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). From birth, we are conditioned to seek stimulation through our sensory organs, yet this pursuit never leads to lasting fulfilment. The chase for increasingly appealing sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and sensations becomes a never-ending cycle of desire and dissatisfaction.

It is through **Vijñāna** that the Five Hindrances manifest, clouding mindfulness and obstructing meditative concentration. *Vijñāna* refers to conscious awareness—the recognition of sensory or mental stimuli, either individually or in combination, often shaped by memory. In the context of the six sense bases, *Vijñāna* arises dependent on the five physical sense organs—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—as well as the mind, which is considered the sixth sense base. Each sense base is associated with a corresponding object: visual forms, sounds, odours, flavours, tactile sensations, and mental objects or perceptions.

Together, these six sense bases and their respective objects give rise to the experience of consciousness.

Recognising and skilfully diminishing the influence of the Five Hindrances is essential for deepening meditation and progressing toward Nibbāna. As these

hindrances subside during *lokottara* meditation, the mind becomes increasingly refined, allowing for entry into deeper meditative absorptions known as *Dhyāna*.

We must recognise that we engage with the world through six types of perception, each based on sensory input. These perceptions evoke reactions—like, dislike, or neutrality—that are common to all beings, including enlightened ones (*Arahants*). These responses fall under the category of *Vipāka Vedanā* (resultant feelings), which are shaped by past kamma and governed by the law of cause and effect. What we sometimes call “fate” or “luck” is often the fruition of these karmic results. Although we may not control the initial sensory impressions that arise in our *prabhāsvara* (pure or luminous) mind, our habitual responses—rooted in attachment, aversion, or delusion—perpetuate the cycle of suffering.

## 12. Grasping the Essence of the Four Noble Truths

**The Four Noble Truths** are the foundational teachings of Buddhism. They outline the nature of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. These truths form the core framework for understanding and overcoming suffering in the Buddhist tradition. They represent the Blessed One's central philosophy: the reality of life's inherent dissatisfaction; the underlying cause that gives rise to this suffering; the path to transcend it; and the state of liberation attained by following this path.

1. **The Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha*):** Life is inherently marked by suffering and dissatisfaction. This includes not only obvious forms such as birth, ageing, illness, and death, but also more subtle dissatisfaction found even in pleasurable experiences due to their insatiability.
2. **The Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*Samudaya*):** Suffering arises from *taṇhā* (craving), *upādāna* (clinging or attachment), and *avijjā* (ignorance). These mental defilements give rise to repeated cycles of suffering.
3. **The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*Nirodha*):** It is possible to end suffering by eradicating craving and attachment. This state of cessation is known as *Nibbāna* (liberation).
4. **The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering (*Magga*):** The Noble Eightfold Path provides a practical guide to liberation. It encompasses right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The Four Noble Truths summarise the Buddha's insight into the nature of existence. Notably, the Buddha emphasised that suffering (*dukkha*) is not limited to painful emotions or events but includes the very experience of the five clinging aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*) — form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness .

### *The Origin of Suffering: Craving (Taṇhā)*

According to the Second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering is *taṇhā*, or craving. There are three primary forms of craving:

- *Kāma Taṇhā* – Craving for sense pleasures

- *Bhava Taṇhā* – Craving for existence or becoming
- *Vibhava Taṇhā* – Craving for non-existence or annihilation

Liberation (*Nibbāna*) is the cessation of craving. It is a sublime state of perfect peace and freedom from suffering, transcending all forms of rebirth within the thirty-one planes of existence.

### 13. Practising The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path (Ariyā Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga) is the guide to ending suffering (dukkha) and attaining Nibbāna, the ultimate liberation. It comprises eight interdependent factors that cultivate ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. The first step in the Noble Eightfold Path is *Sammā Diṭṭhi* (Right View), which is not merely “something to be done,” but rather a new way of understanding how the world works—specifically, insight into what arises from the realities of *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (suffering), and *Anattā* (futility). This understanding helps break the first three *saṃyojana* (fetters): *sakkāya diṭṭhi* (identity view), *vicikicchā* (doubt), and *sīlabata-parāmāsa* (attachment to rites and rituals).

The eight aspects of the path are:

1. **Right View (Sammā Diṭṭhi)** – Understanding the Four Noble Truths and the nature of reality (Assda, Adinava, Nissrana)
2. **Right Intention (Sammā Saṅkappa)** – Cultivating intentions of renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness
3. **Right Speech (Sammā Vācā)** – Speaking truthfully, kindly, and purposefully
4. **Right Action (Sammā Kammanta)** – Acting ethically, avoiding harm to others
5. **Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva)** – Earning a living in a way that supports, rather than contradicts, spiritual progress
6. **Right Effort (Sammā Vāyāma)** – Diligently abandoning unwholesome states and cultivating wholesome ones
7. **Right Mindfulness (Sammā Sati)** – Deep awareness of body, feelings, mind, and mental objects
8. **Right Concentration (Sammā Samādhi)** – Developing meditative absorption (*dhyāna*) for clarity and insight

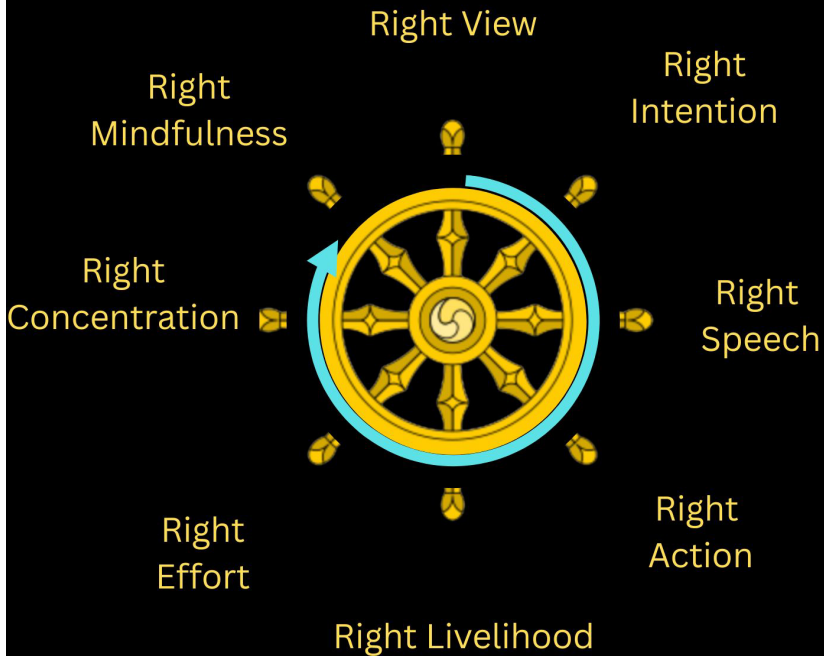
These eight factors are traditionally grouped into three pillars:

- **Wisdom (Prajñā):** Right View, Right Intention
- **Ethical Conduct (Sīla):** Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood
- **Mental Discipline (Samādhi):** Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration

The Noble Eightfold Path is not a belief system, but a systematic training designed to dismantle ignorance and uproot defilements. It guides one through ethical living, mental discipline, and penetrating insight toward the realisation of Nibbāna—the cessation of suffering and the end of rebirth.

Symbolised by the **Dharma Wheel (Dharmachakra)**, this path leads from delusion to awakening.

# Noble Eightfold Path



The Noble Eightfold Path outlines the practices necessary to overcome suffering and attain enlightenment (Nirvana). It serves as a practical guide to ethical living and mental development, comprising eight interconnected elements grouped into three core disciplines: wisdom (Prajna), ethical conduct (Sila), and mental discipline (Samadhi).

## Two Streams of the Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path can unfold along two primary streams, depending on one's approach and intention in practice.

Those who follow it in *mundane (laukika)* terms generally seek pleasure, worldly success, and favourable rebirths, ultimately aspiring to reach heavenly realms. This path is commonly practised through the triad of *Dāna* (generosity), *Sīla* (morality), and *Bhāvanā* (mental cultivation), as described earlier.

In contrast, those who pursue the path in *supramundane (lokottara)* terms set *Nirvāṇa* as their ultimate goal. Here, the Eightfold Path is understood through the integrated framework of *Prajñā* (wisdom or insight), *Sīla* (ethical conduct), and *Samādhi* (meditative absorption).

This *lokottara* path is the direct route to the attainment of *Arahantship*—full liberation from the cycle of *Samsāra*.

### 1. Wisdom (*Prajñā*)

**Prajñā** encompasses two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) and right thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*). Together, these cultivate two essential qualities: *Karuṇā* (compassion) and *Prajñā* (wisdom), marking the beginning of the *lokottara* (supramundane) path. Central to this path is the insight that the five grasping aggregates (*pañc'upādānakkhandha*) are characterised by *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility).

*Prajñā* (Sanskrit) or *prajñā* (Pāli) is a core Buddhist term typically translated as “wisdom,” “intelligence,” or “understanding.” In Buddhist commentarial literature, it is described as the deep and direct realization of the true nature of all phenomena. Within the context of meditation, *prajñā* refers specifically to the ability to clearly comprehend the three universal characteristics: *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. Ultimately, *Ariyā Dukkha* (the noble truth of suffering) is fully penetrated and understood through the cultivation of *prajñā*.

### 2. Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*)

Ethical conduct is rooted in universal love and compassion for all living beings. It includes the next three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. *Sīla* imposed by fear or external rules does not yield *lokottara* results and may even be counterproductive by

generating *Dvesha* (aversion). What truly matters is *Samvara Sīla*—ethical restraint arising from inner understanding.

### 3. Mental Discipline (*Samādhi*)

**Samādhi** is cultivated through the final three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: **right effort** (*sammā vāyāma*), **right mindfulness** (*sammā sati*), and **right concentration** (*sammā samādhi*). The term *Samādhi* comes from the root *sam-adhi*, meaning “to collect” or “to bring together.” It is commonly translated as “concentration” or “unification of mind,” referring to a state of inner stillness and mental cohesion grounded in moral and mental purity.

The key distinction between a practitioner of the **laukika** (mundane) Eightfold Path and one on the **lokottara** (supramundane) Noble Eightfold Path lies in their **motivation and understanding**. A *laukika* practitioner avoids immoral actions—such as the *Dasa Akusala* (ten unwholesome deeds)—primarily out of fear of consequences, whether worldly or karmic. In contrast, a *lokottara* practitioner—such as an *Ariyā Sāvaka* or *Sotāpanna* (stream-enterer)—refrains from unwholesome acts not out of fear, but through direct insight into their inherent futility and the suffering they perpetuate.

Thus, *Samādhi* in the *lokottara* path is not just mental stillness, but a luminous clarity that arises from wisdom and ethical purity, ultimately leading to liberation.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH		
PRAJÑA	1. <i>Right understanding</i> ( <i>Samma Ditthi</i> )	Right understanding (Right view) is the insight into the Four Noble Truths, leading to the abandonment of attachment (rāga), aversion (dvesha), and delusion (moha). It is developed through contemplation of the drawback of all sufferings as anicca (insatiability), dukkha (suffering), and anattā (futility).
	2. <i>Right thought</i> ( <i>Samma Sankappa</i> )	Right thought refers to the intention to let go of thoughts driven by desire or aversion, cultivating an attitude of non-attachment and non-harm toward all beings.
SILA	3. <i>Right speech</i> ( <i>Samma Vaca</i> )	Right speech involves refraining from lying, slander, harsh or abusive language, and idle gossip. It is practiced through mindful awareness and contemplation of anicca, dukkha, and anattā, recognising the harm in unwholesome speech.
	4. <i>Right action</i> ( <i>Samma Kammanta</i> )	Right action promotes ethical behaviour by eliminating saṃyojana (mental fetters) that lead to killing, stealing, dishonesty, and sexual misconduct. It supports the cultivation of a virtuous life through reducing these fetters and contemplating anicca, dukkha, and anattā in harmful actions.
	5. <i>Right livelihood</i> ( <i>Samma Ajiva</i> )	Right livelihood involves choosing an ethical means of living that avoids causing harm—such as dealing in weapons, intoxicants, killing, or deceit. It is developed by reducing mental fetters (saṃyojana) and contemplating anicca, dukkha and anattā.
SAMĀDHI	6. <i>Right effort</i> ( <i>Samma Vayama</i> )	Right effort is the committed mental Effort to prevent and eliminate unwholesome thoughts, while cultivating and strengthening wholesome ones. Its purpose is to overcome wrong views (micchā diṭṭhi) by contemplating the anicca, dukkha and anattā.
	7. <i>Right mindfulness</i> ( <i>Samma Sati</i> )	Right mindfulness is the focused awareness of the body, feelings, mental states, and thoughts. Its goal is to overcome attachment and mental defilements by contemplating the anicca, dukkha and anattā nature of all sufferings.
	8. <i>Right concentration</i> ( <i>Samma Samādhi</i> )	Right concentration is a form of advanced meditation that focuses on the anicca, dukkha and anattā nature of all sufferings. This practice leads through four stages of deep meditative absorption (Dhyāna.) and enables a temporary experience of Nibbāna (liberation).

## 14. Experiencing the Four Stages of Awakening

Certain mental qualities support spiritual growth and lead to awakening. These qualities are cultivated through mindfulness, inquiry, effort, joy, calm, concentration, and balance. Each factor involves both understanding its significance and actively practising it in daily life:

1. **Mindfulness (Sati)** – Being fully present and nonjudgmental; cultivated through consistent awareness in everyday activities.
2. **Investigation of Reality (Dhammavicaya)** – Exploring the truth and the teachings; developed through study, reflection, and discernment.
3. **Effort (Viriya)** – Applying sustained effort and diligence in practice; strengthened through perseverance and dedication to the path.
4. **Rapture (Pīti)** – Experiencing joy and delight arising from spiritual engagement; nurtured by cultivating wholesome mental states.
5. **Tranquillity (Passaddhi)** – Developing inner calm and stillness; supported by relaxation and deepening meditation.
6. **Concentration (Samādhi)** – Achieving focused, unified attention; refined through mental training and meditative absorption towards Nibbāna.
7. **Equanimity (Upekkhā)** – Maintaining balanced awareness and acceptance; practiced by meeting all experiences with impartiality and composure.

When these seven factors are fully developed, they form wholesome mental states that support deep meditation. At this point, the meditator attains **path knowledge (magga ñāṇa)**—the direct realisation of the Four Noble Truths. This marks the firsthand experience of **Nibbāna**, the complete elimination of mental defilements, and the emergence of a noble being (**ariya**).

These seven factors are also regarded as defining qualities of an enlightened individual. **Enlightenment (Nibbāna)** is the liberation from suffering, achieved by relinquishing attachment and delusion. It is characterised by a life rooted in wisdom and compassion. The Four Noble Truths teach that suffering arises from clinging, and that its cessation brings lasting peace.

Enlightenment is often likened to a flame extinguished when its fuel is exhausted—when grasping ends, suffering ceases, and one becomes "cooled and rightly freed through enlightenment."

### The Four Stages of Awakening

Let us explore the four stages of awakening: Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi, and Arahant (Arhat). Progress on the Dhamma journey must be rooted in essential understanding and follow a clear, sequential path—much like a student advancing from Grade 1 through Grade 12 and then on to university. In the same way, a stream-enterer (Sotāpanna) cannot be expected to function at the level of a non-returner (Anāgāmi) without first mastering the earlier stages.

At each stage of awakening, there are three key objectives to understand and fulfil:

1. Understand the goals
2. Practice diligently to achieve those goals
3. Recognise clearly when the goals have been realised

This principle applies consistently across all stages of attainment.

The training that leads to the cessation of suffering is known as the Noble Eightfold Path. The term *magga* (path) refers not only to the process of mental and ethical cultivation but also to the transformative results that unfold through that practice—culminating in the progressive stages of enlightenment:

1. Stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*)
2. Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi*)
3. Non-returning (*Anāgāmi*)
4. Full Awakening (*Arahant*)

Each of these stages is characterised in two keyways: by the proximity it brings the practitioner to Nibbāna, and by the specific unwholesome mental qualities—known as the ten fetters (*samyojana*)—that are weakened or eradicated. These fetters represent deeply embedded mental and emotional patterns, including four of the five hindrances, as well as other manifestations of the three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion. As insight matures, these defilements are progressively abandoned.

To enter the supramundane path of awakening is to transcend the identity of an ordinary person (*puthujjana*) and become a noble being (*ariya*). While the final stage of Arahantship may seem distant or idealistic, it is not merely a theoretical aspiration. There are individuals—even in the present day—who are believed to have realised this highest attainment, and many more who have progressed through the earlier stages of awakening.

*Stage 1: Stream Enterer (Sotāpanna)*

At the Sotāpanna stage, one perceives with wisdom that **assāda** (the allure of sensory pleasure) inevitably leads to **ādīnava** (danger or disadvantage). This insight arises from the direct realisation that all conditioned phenomena are **anicca** (insatiable), **dukkha** (unsatisfactory), and **anattā** (futile). **As a result, a Sotāpanna no longer engages in *apāyagāmi kamma***—actions that lead to rebirth in the lower realms, such as hell.

Such a person is assured of attaining **Nibbāna** in the future and will never again fall into the lower realms of existence. A Sotāpanna, by natural disposition rather than fear of retribution, refrains from committing **ānantarika pāpa kamma**—the gravest unwholesome actions that lead to immediate rebirth in hell. These are known as the five heinous offences or "five deeds leading to immediate downfall":

1. *Killing one's mother – a grievous act against the source of life and nurture.*
2. *Killing one's father – a profound violation of respect and filial duty.*
3. *Killing an Arahant – the destruction of one who has attained full enlightenment.*
4. *Wounding a Tathāgata – inflicting harm upon a Buddha, the embodiment of ultimate spiritual realisation, with deliberate ill will (*chetanā*).*
5. *Creating a schism in the Sangha – disrupting the unity of the monastic community by misrepresenting the Dhamma.*

**Ānantarika kamma** (karma with immediate consequences) refers to these five heinous actions, which generate extremely negative karmic results, leading to immediate and unavoidable rebirth in the lowest realms. These acts are so severe that they obstruct spiritual progress.

This stage marks the beginning of the end of **samsāra**, the cycle of rebirth—hence the term *stream-enterer*, referring to one who has entered the stream that inevitably leads to full awakening.

Contrary to the common belief that meditation alone leads to this realisation, it is said that stream-entry can also be attained through hearing the true **Dhamma (Saddhamma)**, particularly when taught by a **Dhamma Sādācāri**—a noble friend who has achieved at least the first level of meditative absorption (**dhyāna**). The understanding that arises from such teachings is rooted in **prajñā** (wisdom), not in blind belief or ritual observance.

At this stage, there is a natural cessation or significant weakening of **rāga** (greed). A Sotāpanna is inherently incapable of committing gravely immoral actions (**pāpa kamma**), even under extreme duress. Their moral integrity stems not from fear of punishment, but from a profound internal transformation of view and understanding.

Furthermore, a Sotāpanna's **sammā-diṭṭhi** (right view) is considered to be at least 51% free from wrong views, indicating a firm foundation on the path. This clarity enables continued progress along the **Noble Eightfold Path**, primarily through the cultivation of **prajñā** (wisdom), **sīla** (virtue), and **samādhi** (concentration).

Thus, the first stage of enlightenment is not merely a milestone—it represents irreversible progress. It reflects a deep experiential insight into **paṭicca samuppāda** (dependent origination) and the truth of **anattā**. A Sotāpanna no longer seeks liberation through external rites or rigid observances, having directly understood that true liberation arises only through inner transformation, guided by the Dhamma.

At this level of enlightenment, the **Ārya Śrāvaka** (noble disciple) has eliminated the first three **fetters (saṃyojana)** that bind the ordinary mind:

1. **Self-identity view** (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) – the mistaken belief in a permanent, unchanging self with everlasting happiness (satiabile).
2. **Sceptical doubt** (*vicikicchā*) – uncertainty about the Dhamma, the path, or the teacher.
3. **Clinging to rites and rituals** (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) – the notion that mere external practices or ceremonies can lead to liberation.

### Stage 2: Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*)

A Once-Returner (**Sakadāgāmi**) is a partially enlightened being who has not only eliminated the first three fetters but has also significantly weakened the next two:

4. **Sensuous craving** (*kāma-rāga*) – especially attachment to sensually appealing objects composed of the **sathara mahābhūta** (the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air).
5. **Ill-will** (*vyāpāda*) – aversion or hostility, also referred to as *paṭigha*.

At this stage, there is a marked reduction in sensual desire (*rāga*), particularly in its coarser form—*olārika vastu-kāma* (attachment to material objects)—as well as a noticeable weakening of *dveṣa* (hatred). While *rāga* and *dveṣa* may still persist in subtle forms, *moha* (delusion), in its grossest manifestation, has been completely uprooted. This explains why references to *moha* become rare beyond this point of attainment.

The *Sakadāgāmi* (Once-Returner) occupies an intermediate position on the path of awakening. Unlike ordinary beings, their mind is lighter, more refined, and less frequently disturbed by thoughts rooted in greed or aversion. When such thoughts do arise, they no longer become obsessive or overpowering. This reflects a significant degree of emotional and psychological purification.

Although a *Sakadāgāmi* still experiences residual traces of sensual desire and ill will—especially when contrasted with an *Anāgāmi* (Non-Returner), who is entirely free from both—they are steadily moving toward complete liberation. Their progress represents a deepening of insight, an expansion of emotional maturity, and a more detached relationship with sensory experience.

Thus, a practitioner who attains this second stage of awakening is an *Ārya Śrāvaka* (noble disciple) advancing along the Noble Eightfold Path. The loosening of the fetters signals a profound inner transformation rooted in wisdom and clarity. A *Sakadāgāmi* is destined to be reborn at most one more time—and only within the human or heavenly realms—before attaining full enlightenment.

### Stage 3: Non-Returner (Anāgāmi)

The **Anāgāmi**, or **Non-Returner**, attains the third stage of enlightenment by completely overcoming sensuous desire and ill-will, meaning there is no longer any trace of *kleśa kāma*, or defilements rooted in sensual craving. At this stage, the practitioner has eradicated the five lower fetters (*pañca orambhāgiya saṃyojana*), which bind one to the sensual realm:

1. Self-identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*)
2. Sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*)
3. Attachment to rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*)
4. Sensuous craving (*kāma-rāga*)
5. Ill-will (*vyāpāda*)

This marks the complete removal of desire for sensory pleasures, or *kleśas* related to the five senses.

However, five higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya saṃyojana*) still remain and must be overcome to attain **arahantship**. These are:

6. Craving for fine-material existence (*rūpa-rāga*) – attachment to the bliss and subtlety of form-based meditative states
7. Craving for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*) – attachment to formless meditative absorptions
8. Conceit or pride (*māna*) – subtle egoic tendencies
9. Restlessness (*uddhacca*) – subtle mental agitation or lack of complete serenity
10. Ignorance (*avijjā*) – deep-seated misperception about reality and the nature of self

While these higher fetters are significantly weakened in an Anāgāmi, they are only completely eradicated upon reaching the stage of **arahantship**. This is because attachment to meditative tranquillity—particularly to the form and formless *Dhyānas*—may still persist.

### Stage 4: Perfection (Arahant)

An Arahant is a perfected being—one who has attained deep insight into the true nature of existence and realised Nirvāṇa (spiritual enlightenment). Having completely uprooted the defilements of Rāga (attachment), Dvesha

(aversion), and Moha (delusion), the Arahant is no longer bound by Saṃsāra and will not be reborn.

Although an Arahant still experiences the five aggregates—Rūpa (form), Vedanā (feeling), Saññā (perception), Saṅkhāra (mental formations), and Viññāna (consciousness)—they are no longer entangled in them through craving or ignorance. These perceptions arise and cease without giving rise to attachment, aversion, or delusion.

In the state of Arahant-ship, Avidyā (ignorance) has been completely eradicated. The Arahant abides in perfect wisdom, having fully realized the Four Noble Truths and transcended all karmic bondage. They have eliminated the five remaining higher fetters—craving for form (rūparāga), craving for the formless (arūparāga), conceit (māna), restlessness (uddhaccaṃ), and ignorance (avijjā)—and are thus fully liberated from Saṃsāra.

Though they have reached the end of the path and have nothing further to attain, Arahants may still engage in meditation, enjoying the “pleasant abiding in the here and now.” They may also continue to cultivate wholesome qualities such as compassion and teaching, acting from wisdom rather than personal need.

Having fully realised Nibbāna, the Arahant has extinguished the flame of craving and brought about the complete cessation of grasping and suffering. While they continue to experience the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha)—form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness—they do so without upādāna (clinging), abiding in complete freedom.

The final fetter—ignorance (avijjā)—is the deepest root of all suffering, and its eradication marks the full realization of enlightenment. With its end, true wisdom arises. While Arahants still live in the world, they experience the profound peace and happiness of liberation. They may still encounter vipariṇāma-dukkha—suffering due to change—arising from past kamma (actions), but their hearts remain untouched by grasping, fear, or anxiety. Although they experience physical pleasure and pain like all embodied beings, they no longer suffer psychologically from attachment, aversion, or delusion.

At the time of death, the Arahant attains Parinibbāna—the final and complete cessation of all conditioned existence.

Ten fetters	Sotāpanna Stream-enterer	Sakadagami Once-returned	Anāgāmi Non-returned	Arahant Enlightenment
<b>The Ten Fetters (dasa samyojana) are mental attachments or obstacles that bind individuals to the cycle of suffering. Overcoming these fetters is essential for attaining liberation and enlightenment.</b>	Becoming a Sotāpanna involves understanding the Four Noble Truths and developing the ability to see reality as it truly is—including the nature of suffering, its cause, and the path to its cessation. A Sotāpanna has also relinquished the fetters of sakkāyadiṭṭhi (identity view), vicikicchā (doubt), and sīlabbataparāmāsa (attachment to rites and rituals)..	Olarika vastu kāma has been disengaged, meaning the desire or attachment to material objects has been diminished. Furthermore, olarika kāmarāga (coarse sensual desire) and vyāpāda (ill will) have also ceased. Olarika vastu kāma has been disengaged, meaning the desire or attachment to material objects has been diminished. Furthermore, olarika kāmarāga (coarse sensual desire) and vyāpāda (ill will) have also ceased.	Kleśa kāma is disengaged, meaning that mental defilements and sensual desires are weakened or disconnected. Additionally, anuśāṅgika kāmarāga (latent sensual craving) and vyāpāda (ill will) have been relinquished.	All ten fetters are eliminated, and enlightenment is attained. All kleśas (mental defilements) are fully relinquished, and Nirvana is achieved.
<b>Sakkāyadiṭṭhi Vicikicchā Sīlabbataparāmāsa Kāmarāga Vyāpāda Rūparāga Arūparāga Māna Uddachcha Avijjā</b>	Kāmarāga Vyāpāda Rūparāga Arūparāga Māna Uddhaccaṃ Avijjā	Kāmarāga Vyāpāda Rūparāga Arūparāga Māna Uddhaccaṃ Avijjā	Rūparāga Arūparāga Māna Uddhaccaṃ Avijjā	

When a thought arises in response to a signal from one of the sensory organs, the mind is initially in a pure, unpolluted state, referred to as the Prabhāsvara

state. The goal is to maintain this intrinsic clarity by refraining from reacting to experiences with craving, aversion, or delusion.

*Lower vs. Higher Fetters*

- **Lower Fetters (Orambhāgiya Saṃyojana):** These bind beings to the sensual realm (Kāmadhātu).
- **Higher Fetters (Uddhambhāgiya Saṃyojana):** These bind beings to the fine material world (Rūpaloka) and the formless world (Arūpaloka).

The stages of awakening do not always unfold in a strictly linear progression, nor do they necessarily require long intervals between them. During the Buddha's time, some individuals attained Arahant ship almost instantaneously. However, such attainments are typically realised inwardly rather than outwardly declared and are rarely accompanied by any visible signs.

## 15. The Power of Meditation and the Path to Liberation

**Meditation is a profound practice that cultivates mental clarity and focused awareness.** It involves either concentrating the mind or gently clearing it of distractions. While meditation takes many forms, it is generally categorised into *laukika* (worldly) and *lokottara* or *ārya* (supramundane) types. Though integral to numerous religious traditions, meditation is also widely embraced in secular contexts for its psychological and physiological benefits. Practised regularly, it can significantly reduce stress, fear, anxiety, depression, and pain, while enhancing perception, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

### Ārya Meditation and the Path of Awareness

*Ārya* meditation is a disciplined training of attention and awareness, aimed at liberating the mind from habitual, reflexive, and discursive thought. The goal is to attain a state of mental clarity and emotional stability, free from judgment and distraction. This process is often likened to climbing a ladder to glimpse the rooftop—a metaphor for accessing higher states of consciousness. This ladder comprises four steps, known as the *Dhyānas* (meditative absorptions). Attaining the fourth *Dhyāna* is a pivotal milestone, as it enables one to transcend deep-seated mental obstacles and move toward actual realisation.

A mind clouded by *kleśas* (mental defilements) cannot perceive clearly. Therefore, the journey begins by addressing and minimising *laukika* distractions—especially *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). These must be weakened before deeper meditation can occur.

### Why You're More Likely to Succeed During Retreats

Retreats offer a unique and conducive environment for spiritual practice. In a retreat setting, unwholesome physical actions become less likely, as the surroundings naturally support restraint, mindfulness, and ethical behaviour. With fewer external distractions, attention can be turned inward. Speech, too, must be refined to reflect wholesome conduct. This is why the *Karmaṣṭhāna* is often chanted—it reinforces mindful speech and ethical intention. Although the mind may initially wander, even during chanting, tools such as *savitarka* (discursive examination) help purify verbal expression, while *savicāra* (subtle reflection) calms and clarifies mental activity.

## Meditation Retreats



Retreats bring together like-minded individuals in a peaceful setting, reducing unwholesome actions and promoting wholesome thoughts and speech. This supportive environment enhances focus on Dhamma and fosters mental conditions ideal for meditation and attaining Dhyāna.

Retreats also foster a sense of community among like-minded practitioners. This collective effort creates a supportive environment that accelerates spiritual progress. Seated comfortably in a tranquil setting, the body becomes less prone to *akusala* (unwholesome) actions. As focus deepens, thoughts and speech begin to reflect *savitarka* and *savicāra*—wholesome initial and sustained attention. These qualities lay the groundwork for *kusala* (wholesome) mental states, creating the conditions necessary for entering *Dhyāna*.

This structured and supportive atmosphere explains why many practitioners make deeper progress during a retreat than in everyday life. Although the techniques can be practised anywhere, a retreat minimises *akusala* actions—physical, verbal, and mental—by fostering a disciplined, quiet, and focused environment.

### Body, Speech, and Mind in Harmony

During a retreat, find a comfortable posture—sitting, walking, lying down, or standing. Any of these positions can support meditation if the body is settled in a way that prevents unwholesome tendencies. True practice, however, also involves refining speech and thought. Here, *savitarka* anchors the wandering

mind, while *savicāra* guides subtle mental reflection through words. Over time, through conscious disengagement from unwholesome actions and thoughts, meaningful transformation occurs. Gradually, *kāya* (body), *vācana* (speech), and *manas* (mind) align along a wholesome, integrated path.

**Progress in meditation is closely tied to specific mental states that arise in the present moment**, allowing one to experience *kundalinī* (the activation of spiritual energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine), *sukha* (joy), and *suva* (tranquillity), as they relate to the stages of spiritual awakening. This journey is rooted in the insight of *udaya-vaya prajñā*—the clear comprehension of the arising and passing away of phenomena, which, in terms of *lokottara* (supramundane) understanding, is summarised within the frameworks of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination) and the *Ārya Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga* (Noble Eightfold Path).

As meditative awareness deepens, the wisdom of *vaya prajñā* (insight into dissolution) gradually loosens one’s attachment to the *kāmaloka* (the sensual realm), leading to a state of inner balance and equanimity.

The resulting experience of profound comfort and peace, known as *nibbāna-sukha*, is regarded as the essence and ultimate goal of advanced meditative practice. Unlike worldly pleasures—which are unstable, unsatisfactory, and ultimately futile—*nibbāna-sukha* is to be understood as *nicca* (stable), *sukha* (pleasant), and *atta* (fulfilling or meaningful).

However, when one emerges from the refined absorptive states of *Dhyāna*, the mind re-engages with the *udaya* (arising) aspect of experience. It may once again be drawn toward the sensory realm. While the experiences gained in meditation are momentary, they serve as catalysts for deep and lasting transformation within the practitioner.

This inner transformation is both subtle and profound. It unfolds through distinct internal stages that are not externally observable or measurable by conventional means. Over time, however, these changes become self-evident and perceptible to others through shifts in behaviour, speech, and overall presence.

### How Can I Enter the Noble Lokottara Path?

Embarking on the *lokottara* (supramundane) path is akin to undertaking a profound educational journey—one that requires readiness, sincerity, and a solid foundation of understanding. As with all meaningful learning, the study

and practice of the Buddha’s teachings must be approached gradually and with discernment.

This path unfolds through inquiry—into both the known and the unknown—and through a deep examination of causes, conditions, and consequences. Paradoxically, while the *lokottara* path involves detachment from worldly entanglements, it also demands a deeper engagement with the inner journey toward *Nibbāna*.

It is entirely voluntary—free from ritual, dogma, or material obligation. There are no commandments to obey, only an honest willingness to observe, reflect, and transform. The freedom of this path lies in your intention and effort, not in external conformity.

### *Disengaging from Defilements Within the World*

The journey does not begin by fleeing the sensual world, but by remaining within it—within the *kāma-loka* (realm of sensual desire), where the roots of *rāga* (craving), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion) have taken hold. Though this may seem paradoxical, it is essential. Liberation is not achieved by escaping experience, but by transforming one’s relationship to it.

This process requires sustained mindfulness and the cultivation of *vipassanā* (insight) into the insatiable, unsatisfactory, and ultimately futile nature of worldly phenomena. The “bliss” we seek in the sensual realm is fleeting, unstable, and deceptive.

Over time, through disciplined meditation and deep reflection, one begins to realise that it is possible to live in the same world without being driven by ego, attachment, or reactivity. As this inner shift deepens, the stimuli that once triggered craving or aversion begin to lose their hold.

This marks the beginning of genuine disengagement—a natural, unforced letting go. It signals entry onto the *lokottara* path: the path beyond suffering, leading toward the peace and freedom of *Nibbāna*.

### *Vipassanā (Vidarśana): Insight into Anicca, Dukkha, and Anattā*

*Vipassanā*, or *vidarśana*, is the cultivation of direct insight. It involves the precise, mindful observation of bodily and mental processes—free from judgment, resistance, or clinging. A pivotal milestone in this practice is the attainment of *sammā samādhi* (right concentration), the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

At this stage, the mind becomes temporarily free from *rāga* (craving), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). While these defilements are not yet entirely uprooted, they are suspended through deep meditative absorption, known as *vishkambana prahāṇa*, a temporary disengagement.

This calm and stable mental state provides the foundation for developing *prajñā* (wisdom)—the penetrating insight required to perceive the truths of *anicca* (insatiability), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility), and to understand the *lokottara* (supramundane) path.

### *Breaking the Bonds and Seeing Clearly*

To walk the noble path, one must break the internal chains of ignorance and attain *sammā diṭṭhi*—right view. This means seeing the world not through the lens of desire or delusion, but with clarity and discernment rooted in direct experience.

Understanding the nature of the 31 realms of existence helps cultivate the path toward *Lokottara* (supramundane) liberation. These realms—whether celestial, human, or infernal—function not only as cosmological descriptions but also as psychological analogies. In deep *dhyāna* (absorptive meditation), one may even temporarily perceive the emotional or energetic qualities associated with these realms.

Such experiences are not the goal. Rather, they strengthen one's resolve and deepen understanding. They reinforce the truth that all phenomena are insatiable and non-saturating (*anicca*), ultimately unsatisfying (*dukkha*), and devoid of lasting substance or futile (*Anattā*).

Through this insight, it becomes clear that the endless struggle to "gain something of value" in the world is, in essence, a mirage. The pursuit of permanence, pleasure, or identity in *saṃsāra* is futile.

### *Entering the Lokottara Path*

To enter the *Lokottara* path, one must relinquish the illusion that anything within *saṃsāra* can provide true and lasting fulfillment. This does not imply rejecting the world, but rather perceiving it clearly—as unstable, unreliable, marked by suffering, and ultimately empty of enduring essence.

Through insight (*vipassanā*), wisdom (*prajñā*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), meditative stability (*samādhi*), and unwavering effort (*virīya*), the path gradually becomes more apparent. Progress is neither sudden nor easily visible from the outside—but it is deeply and profoundly transformative.

In time, you will come to know—not through belief, but through direct experience—that liberation is not only possible, but that the *Lokottara* path is real and attainable.

## 16. Buddhist Practice Today – *Laukika* vs *Lokottara*

In the modern world, Buddhist practice often emphasises the mundane (*laukika*) aspects—rituals, offerings (*dāna*, usually not truly selfless), and mindfulness techniques aimed primarily at stress relief and personal well-being. While these practices provide tangible benefits such as emotional balance, mental peace, and the accumulation of merit, they remain rooted in *samsāric* existence.

*Laukika* refers to any activity or practice associated with the profane or mundane world of unenlightened beings. It encompasses worldly, habitual, and temporal matters, lacking sacred or transcendent significance, and is generally considered not conducive to spiritual liberation.

In contrast, the supramundane (*lokottara*) path transcends worldly concerns and leads toward ultimate liberation from *samsāra*. It is the path to *Nirvāṇa*, realised through ethical purification, deep meditation, and the cultivation of wisdom (*prajñā*). This path is not merely meditative; it involves a profound internal transformation that unfolds through the four stages of awakening: *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmi*, *Anāgāmi*, and ultimately, *Arahant*. While *laukika* practices can serve as stepping stones, they must be supported by *lokottara* understanding to fulfil the true purpose of the Buddha’s teachings—complete liberation from suffering.

Contemporary Buddhism is often described through a threefold path: selfless giving (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). However, within the *lokottara* framework, wisdom (*prajñā*) comes first. With wisdom, ethical behaviour arises naturally, and true *samādhi* (mental stillness) develops. Ethics imposed by fear, tradition, or external authority cannot yield *lokottara* results.

Today, *dāna* has become the most visible and emphasised aspect of Buddhist practice, often pursued with expectations of worldly return. This transactional mindset has shifted focus away from the noble aims of the *lokottara* path. A culture of material offerings—to monks, temples, and institutions—has become widespread, driven by the mistaken belief that greater offerings yield greater merit. This represents a significant distortion of the original teachings.

The true value of selfless service—rooted in kindness, generosity, and compassion—has in many cases devolved into institutionalised or ceremonial giving. Yet the Buddha’s first and most fundamental precept—non-violence (*ahiṃsā*)—remains absolute and must guide all authentic practice.

Fortunately, true *Ārya Śrāvakas* continue to live the *Dhamma* with integrity, serving others without desire for recognition or material gain.

Over time, genuine **sīla** has weakened. Instilling fear through rigid enforcement of the five, eight, or ten precepts is counterproductive. Ethical conduct should stem from understanding and compassion, rather than coercion. Today, the most common practice of **sīla**—events often conducted on full moon days with a time set aside for **sīla**—is unlikely to yield any real supramundane benefit, as these events do not address **anicca**, **dukkha**, and **anattā** at their roots.

Meditation (*bhāvanā*) today is often limited to basic mindfulness techniques, such as *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing), primarily used for stress relief. While helpful, these practices generally address *laukika* concerns. The focus of this text is *lokottara bhāvanā*—a supramundane path that transcends the worldly and leads toward *Nirvāṇa*, the supreme bliss described in the *Tipiṭaka*.

The *Dhamma* is not a call to ritual or institutionalism—it is an invitation to a peaceful, *lokottara* journey toward absolute freedom. *Nirvāṇa* is not a reward bestowed after death; it is a reality to be understood, practised, and realised in this very life.

Within the *Ariyā Sāsana* (the Noble Teaching), one who has attained the level of *Sotāpanna* is known as an *Ārya Śrāvaka*—a noble disciple. The word *sota* refers to the Noble Eightfold Path, while ‘*apanna*’ means “entered.” In the *Tipiṭaka*, this group is recognised as supramundane (*lokottara*) *Ārya* monks or disciples. Thus, the *lokottara Saṅgha* consists of both monks and lay practitioners who have reached this level of realisation. If a robe-wearing monk exhibits excessive *rāga* (lust) or *dvesha* (hatred), it is highly unlikely that they belong to the category of *Ārya Śrāvaka* monks.

### Keeping the Prabhāsvara Mind Unpolluted

The **Prabhāsvara mind** refers to the originally pure, luminous, and unpolluted mind present at the very inception of thought. It is often likened to clear, clean water, naturally transparent and radiant. Just as water becomes muddy when contaminated, the mind becomes clouded when defiled by impurities. If the water is protected from pollutants, it remains clear; likewise, maintaining mental clarity requires guarding the mind against the defilements of *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion).

The term *Prabhāsvara* means “radiant” or “luminous.” It signifies the uncorrupted state of mind that exists before any thought is tainted by unwholesome tendencies. According to Buddhist teachings, preserving this pristine state is not achieved through external rules or fear, but through insight, by understanding the futility of polluting the *Prabhāsvara* mind with *rāga*, *dvesha*, and *moha*. This awareness forms a cornerstone of the path to mental purification and liberation.

### Assāda is Anicca, Dukkha, and Anattā



*Assāda*—the mind-made pleasures arising from lustful attachment to perceptions through the six faculties—carries *Ādīnava* (drawbacks, consequences) inherently. The cessation of *Assāda* begins by avoiding attachment to the six faculties through *Nissaraṇa* (renunciation), and by eliminating *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Mōha* (delusion). This ultimately eradicates *Ādīnava*.

‘*Anicca*’ is the opposite of ‘*iccha*’ (desire). No matter how much we pursue satisfaction through the six faculties, true fulfilment is never achieved. Due to *Anicca*—the insatiable and unsatisfactory nature of all conditioned experiences—

we become frustrated, leading to *Dukkha* (suffering). Despite continuous effort, suffering outweighs fleeting pleasures. We are truly powerless to prevent this cycle. Hence, attachment driven by *Rāga* or *Dvesha* leads to nothing of lasting value. This is *Anattā*—futility, voidness, and lack of inherent essence.

### Udayavaya Ñāṇa (Wisdom of arising and cessation of defilements)

**Udayabbaya Ñāṇa** (also spelt *Udayavaya Ñāṇa*) is a key meditative insight in the development of **Vipassanā** (insight meditation). It signifies the wisdom that discerns the origination (*udaya* — arising through *paṭicca samuppāda*, or dependent origination) and dissolution (*vaya* — cessation understood through the Noble Eightfold Path) of all conditioned phenomena.

At this stage, the meditator begins to see that:

- *All experiences — whether physical sensations, thoughts, feelings, or perceptions — arise due to causes.*
- *These experiences mature and transform, often in unpredictable ways.*
- *Ultimately, they all cease, without exception.*

This cycle of arising, transformation, and cessation is known as **Atthaṅgama** and is observed through the **Five Clinging Aggregates** (*Pañcupādānakkhandhā*) — form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. These aggregates give rise to **kleśas** (mental defilements) such as craving, aversion, and delusion, which are further reinforced by **abhisaṅkhāra** (deep volitional formations rooted in ignorance).

Through direct observation, the practitioner realises the nature of:

- **Anicca** — all phenomena are insatiable,
- **Dukkha** — they are ultimately unsatisfactory,
- **Anattā** — they are ultimately futile.

The significance of **Udayabbaya Ñāṇa** lies in the fact that:

1. It is not theoretical knowledge, but **experiential wisdom** gained through deep meditative observation.
2. This insight marks the beginning of **profound clarity and equanimity**, often accompanied by **joy, rapture, and heightened mindfulness**. It serves as a gateway to even deeper insights.

The initial state of the mind is pure and clear. However, it is **rāga** (craving), **dvesha** (aversion), and **moha** (delusion), arising moment by moment, that pollute the **prabhāsvara citta** — the mind's naturally radiant and untainted nature. Each moment tainted by defilement contributes to a life immersed in **dukkha** (suffering). This suffering is fundamentally rooted in **rāga, dvesha,**

and moha. The doctrine of **anattā** highlights the futility of clinging through craving or aversion.

For one who does not understand the **Four Noble Truths**, the world appears to offer satisfaction (*iccha*), pleasure (*sukha*), and a sense of self (*atta*). This mistaken perception is **avijjā** — ignorance. The realisation that the senses can never provide lasting fulfilment opens the door to the cessation of suffering. This insight lies at the core of the Four Noble Truths and the **Noble Eightfold Path**.

**Assāda** (apparent pleasure or allure) is centred on the **18 dhātus** — the domains of sensory contact, encompassing form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), and perception (*saññā*) across the six sense bases. Seeking enduring satisfaction through these sensory objects is futile; **assāda** does not truly exist in any of the 18 domains — it is a mental projection. Liberation comes from abandoning three fundamental delusions:

- *Nicca* — the belief that sensory satisfaction is permanent
- *Sukha* — the belief that happiness can be maintained through external means
- *Atta* — the belief that experience is inherently stable, fulfilling, and valuable

Understanding the **Four Noble Truths** marks the beginning of the end of **avidyā** (ignorance). These truths form the core of the Buddha's teaching:

1. The truth of suffering (**dukkha**)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (**samudaya**)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (**nirodha**)
4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering — the **Noble Eightfold Path (magga)**

It is essential to recognize that ritual and meditative practices existed long before the Buddha's enlightenment. He initially engaged in these disciplines, thoroughly examined them, and ultimately rejected their limitations, realising they could not lead to the cessation of suffering.

Instead, the Buddha revealed the **lokottara** (supramundane) path to liberation — the **Ariya Atṭhaṅgika Magga** (Noble Eightfold Path). His intention was not to found a religion centred on devotion to his person, but to illuminate a

direct, experiential path beyond suffering through the realisation of the **Dhamma**.

### *Anicca*

The term **anicca** is pronounced “*anichcha*.” Its root, **iccha** (or *icca*), means "desire" or "what one likes"—often in a restless or unending way. **Anicca**, in contrast, signifies the insatiability or absence of what is desired; it refers to the reality that what one wants either does not occur or, if it does, does not last.

Because desire is inherently insatiable, it leads to an endless pursuit of satisfaction, chasing pleasant experiences that can never truly be fulfilled. This pursuit ultimately results in exhaustion, disappointment, and suffering. **Anicca** is commonly used to describe the fleeting, unstable, and unsatisfactory nature of the six sense perceptions. It reflects a deep realisation: sensory experiences cannot bring lasting fulfilment.

Recognising the cessation of **paṭicca samuppāda** (dependent origination or conditional arising)—specifically the links rooted in desire and attachment—is the first step toward entering the **lokottara** (supramundane) path.

### *Dukkha*

*Dukkha*, in *Ariya* (noble or enlightened) terms, goes beyond mere *vedanā* (feelings) and encompasses the *pañcupādānakkhandha* (the five clinging aggregates). It is traditionally categorised into three forms: Viparināma-Dukkha, Dukkha-Dukkha, and Saṅkhāra-Dukkha.

### *Anattā*

In Buddhism, *Anattā* (Pali) is commonly translated as “futility” or “no-soul.” It is a core concept that asserts the absence of a permanent, unchanging, independent, or inherently satisfying self or essence in any phenomenon, including human beings. According to the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis (also known as Dependent Origination, or *Paṭiccasamuppāda*), as well as the analysis of existence into the Five Aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*), the belief in an abiding, immortal substance—whether referred to as *Ātman*, “I,” soul, self, or ego—is considered a false view and a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of *Anattā*, and clinging to such a belief is seen as a source of suffering and ultimately futile.

*Dhammanudhamma Paṭipadā* (the practice of the Dhamma with insight into the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) and *anicca, dukkha, and anattā*).

This refers to the practice of contemplating the true nature of existence in alignment with the Dhamma. Specifically, it involves directing one's contemplation toward anicca (insatiability), dukkha (suffering), and anattā (futility) with respect to the Pañca-Upādāna-Khandha (the five clinging aggregates). Through this insight-based practice, one gradually overcomes attachment, delusion, and the misperception of a permanent self, progressing along the path to liberation.

## 17. Lōka: The Realms of Existence in Buddhist Cosmology

**Lōka** refers to the various realms or planes of existence within the cycle of **saṃsāra**—the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. According to traditional Buddhist cosmology, there are **thirty-one planes of existence**, each representing different levels of mental purity and karmic refinement. The **human realm** is just one of these and is located within the **Kāma-Loka**—the **Sensuous World**.

These realms are broadly classified into three categories, in **descending order of refinement**:

1. **Arūpa-Loka** (The Immaterial World) — *4 realms*  
For beings who have transcended material form, resulting from mastery of the **formless dhyānas** (meditative absorptions).
2. **Rūpa-Loka** (The Fine-Material World) — *16 realms*  
Inhabited by beings who have attained the **form dhyānas**, and whose existence is subtle, free from sensual desire but not yet formless.
3. **Kāma-Loka** (The Sensuous World) — *11 realms*  
Realms where sensual desire (*kāma*) predominates. This includes **humans, animals, and various deities** still attached to sensory pleasures.

### *The Four Woeful Realms – Sathara Apāyā*

The **lowest four realms** of the Kāma-Loka are referred to as the **Sathara Apāyā**, or the **four woeful destinations**, marked by intense suffering and mental defilement. These are not eternal states but the karmic results of severely unwholesome actions.

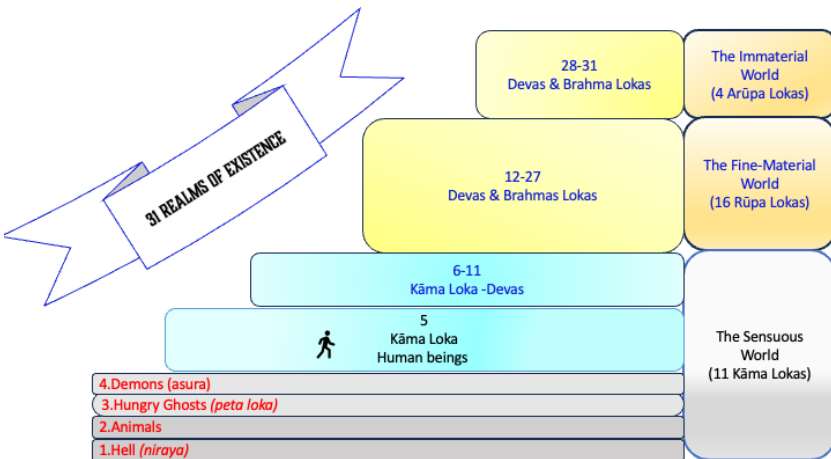
1. **Tiracchāna-yoni** (*Animal Realm*)  
A condition dominated by **ignorance**, instinct, and the struggle for survival.
2. **Preta-loka** (*Hungry Ghost Realm*)  
Populated by beings afflicted by **insatiable craving**, often represented with bloated bellies and needle-thin necks, symbolising endless but unfulfillable desire.

3. **Asura-loka** (*Demon or Titan Realm*)  
A realm of **jealousy, competition, and aggression**, characterized by perpetual conflict, especially with the higher Devas.
4. **Niraya** (*Hell Realm*)  
The realm of **intense torment and suffering**, arising from extremely unwholesome actions. Unlike eternal damnation, Buddhist hells are temporary but profoundly painful.

### *The Human Realm and the Higher Kāma-Loka*

The **human realm** is considered the **fifth realm** within Kāma-Loka and is uniquely valuable. It represents a **rare balance**—with enough suffering to motivate spiritual progress and enough freedom and clarity to pursue the path.

The **remaining six realms** of Kāma-Loka are various **Deva (divine)** and **Brahma-like** realms, inhabited by celestial beings who enjoy long lifespans, blissful experiences, and subtle pleasures. However, they are still within the sphere of sensuality and thus subject to rebirth.



In simpler terms, hell is part of the Kāma-Loka, whereas the Rūpa and Arūpa realms are typically referred to as "heavenly" realms. While many religious

traditions describe only three realms—hell, the human world, and heaven—Buddhist philosophy outlines thirty-one distinct planes of existence. This elaboration is not presented to affirm or deny the literal existence of these realms, but rather to support a conceptual understanding that can be helpful in describing—or even experiencing—various mental states during meditation.

These realms can be directly encountered, at least temporarily, through meditative experiences. Most beings aspire to be reborn in the human or heavenly realms (Deva or Brahma Lokas), though some seek even more refined states of rebirth in the Rūpa or Arūpa Lokas. Very few aspire to be reborn in the lower realms, such as those of animals, ghosts, or hell beings.

*Arūpa* means “without form” or “incorporeal.” Beings born in these formless realms exist without physical bodies, as purely mental phenomena. The desire for rebirth in these realms is subtler than the desire for rebirth in the fine-material worlds. Advanced meditators may aspire to these realms in pursuit of a blissful existence free from attachment to physical form.

The four *Arūpa-Lokas* represent extremely subtle states of consciousness, corresponding to deep levels of meditative absorption beyond the fourth *Rūpa Dhyāna* (fine-material absorption). These four immaterial realms are:

1. ***The Sphere of Boundless Space*** (*Ākāśānañcāyatana*)
2. ***The Sphere of Boundless Consciousness*** (*Viññāṇañcāyatana*)
3. ***The Sphere of Nothingness*** (*Ākiñcaññāyatana*)
4. ***The Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception*** (*Nevasaññā–Nasaññāyatana*)

These states reflect increasingly refined levels of detachment from the material world. Beings in these realms experience prolonged, blissful existences, even longer than those in the Rūpa-Loka. However, rebirth in any realm—including the highest—is still impermanent and conditioned by kamma (karma). Once the kamma that caused the rebirth is exhausted, the being dies and is reborn in another realm, according to remaining kamma.

The *fetter* of desire for rebirth in the fine-material realms (*rūpa-rāga*) is eradicated only upon attaining the final Noble stage of Arahantship. Similarly, the desire for rebirth in the formless realms (*arūpa-rāga*) is also abandoned at that same stage.

Wholesome actions (*kusala kamma*)—those free from greed, hatred, and delusion—support rebirth in the higher realms, such as the human, Deva, or Brahma worlds.

## 18. The Noble Eightfold Path: A Stepwise Guide

Buddhist literature is vast. Learning and understanding the Four Noble Truths (Ariya Atṭhaṅgika Magga) can be a challenging process for most people. For example, I needed a study plan and guidance as a child. I could not have entered an advanced-level class and expected smooth success if I had not attended the lower-grade courses and learned the basics. Similarly, listening to Dhamma lays the foundation. There was no need to memorise everything that was said. Understanding is the key.

## Supramundane (Lokottara) Eight-Step Guide Summary

Right understanding - Samma Ditthi	Right thought - Samma Sankappa	Right speech - Samma Vaca	Right action - Samma Kamanta	Right livelihood - Samma Ajiva	Right effort - Samma Vajama	Samma Sati	Enter Samma Samādhi	<p>The status of an Arahant is <b>Nirvāṇa</b>—the ultimate attainment.</p> <p>No more craving, no more hatred, no more delusion.</p> <p><b>Rāga-khayo Nibbāna,</b> <b>Dvesha-khayo Nibbāna,</b> <b>Mōha-khayo Nibbāna.</b></p>		
									7	Practice diligent awareness, mindfulness, and attentiveness toward the activities of the body, sensations or feelings, and the mind and thoughts related to lust, hate, and delusion.
									6	Develop a strong, energetic will to prevent the rise of evil thoughts and to cultivate the perfection of good and wholesome states of mind. Use wisdom to recognize the insatiable nature of seeking gratification and strive to cease this pursuit.
									5	Minimize or abstain from earning a livelihood through professions that cause harm to others—such as trading in arms, lethal weapons, toxins, or poisons; the killing of animals; or engaging in deceit and exploitation.
									4	Promote moral, honorable, and peaceful conduct. Abstain from taking life, stealing, engaging in dishonest dealings, and committing sexual misconduct.
									3	Refrain from telling lies or engaging in slander, or in speech that fosters hatred, enmity, disunity, or disharmony. Abandon harsh, rude, impolite, malicious, and abusive language, as well as idle chatter, useless talk, and foolish gossip. Instead, speak with words that are friendly and benevolent—pleasant, gentle, meaningful, and beneficial.
									2	Understand <b>Salāyatana</b> (the six sense bases), along with the defilements of <b>Rāga</b> (attachment), <b>Dvesha</b> (aversion), and <b>Mōha</b> (delusion), as well as the <b>Pañca Upādāna Skandha</b> (the five aggregates of clinging). Cultivate thoughts rooted in selfless detachment, love, and non-violence—qualities aligned with wisdom. Abandon selfish desire, ill will, hatred, and violence. Instead, foster <b>Mettā</b> (loving-kindness), <b>Muditā</b> (empathetic joy), and <b>Upekkhā</b> (equanimity). These intentions are also known as <b>Nekkhamma</b> (renunciation), <b>Viyāpāda</b> (non-ill will), and <b>Avihimsā</b> (non-violence) <b>Saṅkappā</b> (intentions/right thoughts).
									1	Listen to the Dhamma and learn about the Four Noble Truths: <b>Dukkha</b> (suffering), <b>Samudaya</b> (its origin), <b>Nirodha</b> (its cessation), and <b>Magga</b> (the path leading to its cessation). This understanding is known as <b>Sammā Dīṭṭhi</b> —right view—which means seeing the way to distance oneself from, or bring an end to, attachment to <b>Assāda</b> (gratification). Also learn about its <b>Ādinava</b> (drawbacks) and <b>Nissarapa</b> (escape). Understand the insatiable nature of the six sense faculties in their pursuit of gratification. This is the path that leads to <b>Absolute Peace and Happiness</b> , known as <b>Nibbāna</b> .

## 19. What is Nirvāṇa (Nibbāna)

Among all your faculties, your mind seems the most controllable and obedient. But is it really? Try to think and focus on something or someone you truly like, and attempt to keep your mind fixed on that and nothing else for ten minutes. Can you do it? Doesn't your mind wander away without your permission? In other words, your mind isn't as controllable as you might have believed.

And what about your body? It doesn't always behave the way you want, either. No matter what you do to prevent baldness or grey hair, or to maintain youthful skin, ageing is inevitable—wrinkles will eventually appear.

In essence, there is nothing we can control exactly the way we'd like. This is a universal principle, a natural law that we cannot change.

Thus, it is unwise to try to control things exactly as we wish. There is a word that encapsulates all our desires: *ichcha*. Its opposite is *anicca*. The entire world is *anicca*—it can never fully satisfy our desires or bring lasting fulfilment.

Suffering arises from our attempts to go against these natural laws. Therefore, try not to become attached to the perceptions generated by your senses, nor attempt to mould them entirely to your liking.

If you continue to reflect on this universal law, your anger and hatred will gradually diminish. When someone shouts at you, it is their problem, not yours. There is no need to let it upset you. If someone refuses to clean the house or ignores your reasoning for doing so, simply do it yourself. This approach helps keep both your mind and your surroundings clean.

Do not allow hatred to develop over trivial conflicts, as the resulting suffering can be far greater than the issue itself.

We now recognise that all worldly matters and gratifications are insatiable and subject to *Anicca* (insatiability), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anattā* (futility). The attempt to transcend gratification by freeing ourselves from lustful, hateful, and delusional attachments is known as *Nibbāna* or *Nirvāṇa*.

Minimising—and eventually eliminating—attachment to the six faculties (*Indriya*) through the cessation of *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Mōha* (delusion) is called *nirodha*. This cessation prevents the development of *Ariyā Dukkha* (noble suffering).

In the state of *Arahant*, this purity of mind remains unbroken. One’s consciousness is maintained in the *prabhāsvara* state—naturally luminous and unpolluted by *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, or *Mōha*. This is the ultimate realisation of *Nirvāṇa*: absolute freedom and true happiness.

An *Arahant* does not belong to any particular religion. An *Arahant* has let go of *upādāna*—the clinging to existence in all realms—even though countless *kamma* seeds from the past may remain.

### Path to Nirvāṇa (Nibbāna)

The first step on the path to **Nirvāṇa** is to listen to the **Sath Dhamma**—the beneficial and liberating teachings of the Dhamma—delivered by a **Dhamma Sādācāri**, a Noble Friend who has attained at least the first level of **Ariyā Dhyāna**. The goal of this step is to develop **Dassanena Pahathabba**—right vision—by deeply understanding the **Four Noble Truths**, which leads to the attainment of **Sammādiṭṭhi** (Right View).

This process is known as **yoniso manasikāra**, meaning “appropriate attention” or “wise reflection.” It involves the contemplation and realisation of the three universal characteristics: **Anicca** (insatiability), **Dukkha** (suffering), and **Anattā** (futility).

The opposite of this is **ayoniso manasikāra**—“inappropriate attention” or “unwise reflection”—which refers to ego-centred, distorted, or deluded thought patterns that obscure true understanding.

When one fully grasps the harmful consequences (**ādinava**) of **assāda**—the deceptive pleasures fabricated by the mind—one truly understands the **First Noble Truth** and its underlying causes. Recognising how to eliminate these causes and following the path that leads to their cessation is the essence of the **Four Noble Truths**.

This realisation leads to the cessation of the **samsāric** journey, known as **Nissaraṇa**—the end of **carana** (wandering or cyclical existence). The word *Nissaraṇa* comes from *nis* (out or end) and *carana* (journey), symbolising liberation.

Only **Nirvāṇa** is **nicca** (permanent), **sukha** (blissful), and **atta** (true essence). All other phenomena are marked by **anicca**, **dukkha**, and **anattā**.

### *Majjima Patipada*

**Majjhima Paṭipadā** is often inaccurately translated as “the middle path,” implying a literal or spatial middle between two extremes. However, in the

deeper sense, *Majjhima* does not refer to a physical midpoint but to a state of **detachment from both indulgence and aversion**—freedom from the mental intoxication and dullness that arise from attachment. These intoxicating states are born of *Rāga* (desire or clinging to pleasure), *Dvesha* (aversion or the suffering that results from losing what one is attached to), and *Mōha* (delusion or confusion). *Rāga* encompasses being bound by liking, lust, love, greed, craving, attachment, or attraction.

*Paṭipadā* means “path” and refers explicitly to the **Noble Eightfold Path** (*Ariyā Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*)—the disciplined and mindful journey one follows to cultivate wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental clarity. Its aim is not to strive forcefully, but to avoid intoxication by delusion and to liberate oneself from the bonds of conditioned existence.

In the Buddha’s teachings, this involves maintaining the mind in a naturally **unpolluted, radiant state**—known as the *Prabhāsvara Mind*. This is not an active process of adding or achieving, but a gentle **preservation of clarity** through non-engagement with reactive attachments and aversions.

A helpful metaphor is that of a sculptor carving a Buddha statue from a block of stone. The statue was always present within the stone; the sculptor does not create it, but simply **removes what is unnecessary** to reveal the form. Similarly, the *Prabhāsvara Mind* has always been within us, obscured only by layers of mental clutter and impurities born of *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Mōha*. Liberation lies not in acquiring something new, but in removing the excess that conceals our inherent clarity.

## 20. The Four Noble Truths (Chathurārya Sathya)

**The Four Noble Truths**, known in Pāli as *Chathurārya Sathya*, form the foundational conceptual framework of the Buddha's teachings. These truths must be personally understood and directly experienced—they are not merely philosophical ideas, but insights to be realised through practice. They describe the nature of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to liberation.

### 1. Dukkha – The Truth of Suffering

Life is inherently unsatisfactory. This includes physical and mental suffering, as well as the subtle dissatisfaction that pervades conditioned existence.

### 2. Samudaya – The Truth of the Origin of Suffering

Suffering arises from craving (*taṇhā*), rooted in ignorance. This is further elaborated through **Paṭicca Samuppāda** (Dependent Origination), which describes the chain of causes that give rise to suffering.

### 3. Nirodha – The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

The end of suffering is possible. When craving and ignorance are uprooted, suffering ceases—this state is **Nirvāṇa**, the unconditioned, liberated state.

### 4. Magga – The Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering

This is the **Noble Eightfold Path** (*Ariya Atṭhaṅgika Magga*), a practical guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom that leads to the end of suffering.

#### What is Dukkha

Dukkha can be broadly categorised into three types: Viparinama-dukkha, Dukkha-dukkha, and Saṅkhāra-dukkha.

#### *Viparinama-dukkha (suffering due to change):*

This type of dukkha arises from pleasant experiences that are the result of past actions (*vipāka*). It refers to the suffering that occurs when these pleasurable experiences inevitably change or fade away. Furthermore, attachment (*rāga*) to these experiences, or mentally fabricated pleasure (*assāda*), can also lead to this type of suffering. For example, great success or happiness may eventually diminish over time, leading to dukkha. This doesn't mean that happiness, success, or bliss are inherently bad or that one shouldn't enjoy them. If you feel happy, then enjoy the feeling—but recognise that pleasurable experiences, whether the result of past kamma (actions) or the pursuit of *assāda* (craving), inevitably change or fade. Thus, try not to be attached to these experiences with any desire. When we become attached to

moments of happiness or joy, we fear their loss. The desire for pleasant, invariably insatiable conditions leads to dissatisfaction and sorrow. Thus, even happiness becomes a source of suffering when we expect it to last.

*Dukkha-dukkha (suffering of suffering):*

This is the suffering that arises from direct unpleasant experiences, which may result from past deeds or kamma—both physical and mental. It arises from *dvesha* (aversion), in particular toward unpleasant sensory experiences. Examples include the pain of a broken ankle or the emotional distress from the loss of a loved one. This may have occurred because of your past deeds but leave it at that. There is nothing to gain by getting angry, blaming someone, or developing hatred against anyone or anything. Similarly, this category includes sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, and situations such as being with those you dislike or being separated from those you love. It reflects being caught in negative emotional states leading to hatred, anger, repulsion, hostility, ill will, or jealousy, which lead to further mental, verbal, or physical actions that, in turn, lead to more dukkha. This is *Dukkha-dukkha*.

*Saṅkhāra-dukkha (suffering due to conditioned existence):*

This is a more subtle, existential form of suffering. It refers to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of all conditioned phenomena. Even neutral experiences (*vipāka upekṣā*) can become the basis for mental formations (*abhisāṅkhāra*), leading to attachment and suffering. *Saṅkhāra-dukkha* originates from *taṇhā* (craving), as our mental activity is often driven by a desire for things to be other than they are. This more subtle form of suffering stems from *moha* (delusion). It arises from the very nature of conditioned phenomena, which are insatiable and incapable of providing lasting satisfaction. *Saṅkhāra-dukkha* points to the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of existence itself—the suffering rooted in ignorance, the illusion of a separate self, and the mistaken belief in the independent reality of the world. It is embedded in the structure of the conditioned being.

**Four Sublime States or Attitudes (Gati)**

These represent role models or the ideal approach, attitude, and conduct toward other living beings, helping us cultivate a mindset that is primed to follow the path to *Nibbāna*. When these attitudes are deeply ingrained in one's personality, one will naturally disengage from activities that lead to the *Dasa Akusala* (the ten unwholesome actions).

1. **Metta (Maitri):** Loving-kindness, goodwill, friendship, fraternal love, benevolence, or bestowing happiness, without any desire to possess. It involves recognizing and appreciating the good in others.
2. **Karuna:** Compassion, sympathy, mercy, gentle affection, and empathy. It is the aspiration to be genuinely helpful and to alleviate the suffering of others.
3. **Mudita:** Appreciative or altruistic joy, gladness in another's success, well-being, or happiness. It involves rejoicing in the skilful actions, merits, and attainments of others.
4. **Upekkha:** Equanimity, dispassion, detachment, serenity, impartiality, tolerance, and balance of mind. It signifies maintaining mental calmness and impartiality in all situations.

## 21. Five Spiritual Faculties (Pañca Indriya) – Essential Strengths

The Five Spiritual Faculties, or *Pañcha Indriya*, are essential strengths that support spiritual development and lead toward liberation. These faculties—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—serve as guiding principles, helping individuals cultivate a wholesome mindset and navigate life’s challenges with greater skill and clarity.

### 1. Faith (Saddhā):

Faith refers to a deep trust in the spiritual path and the teachings. It nurtures confidence, optimism, and a belief in one’s potential for growth and awakening.

### 2. Effort (Viriya):

This signifies diligent effort and perseverance in engaging with wholesome actions and overcoming unwholesome tendencies. It fuels consistent progress on the spiritual journey.

### 3. Mindfulness (Sati):

Mindfulness is the ability to remain present and aware of one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions without judgment. It fosters clarity, self-understanding, and balanced awareness.

### 4. Concentration (Samādhi):

Concentration is the capacity to focus the mind with stability and calm. It supports deep mental stillness and the ability to direct attention toward beneficial and liberating insights.

### 5. Wisdom (Prajñā):

Wisdom is the faculty of deep understanding and discernment. It involves seeing things as they truly are—understanding insatiability, unsatisfactoriness, and futility—leading to insight and liberation.

## 22. Thirty-Seven Prerequisites of Enlightenment

The Thirty-Seven Factors, known as the "Requisites of Enlightenment," comprise a comprehensive set of wholesome qualities and mental states that

support spiritual growth and ultimately lead to enlightenment. These factors are organised into seven groups and are collectively referred to as the *Bodhipakkhiya Dhammas*. To attain final liberation, one must cultivate these qualities within the mind. They also include the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhaṅgā*). Cultivating these factors helps individuals understand the Four Noble Truths and progress toward enlightenment.

### Grasp It, Don't Just Memorise It

It is important to understand that these descriptions are intended for the *Ariyā Śrāvaka* to *grasp* the concepts, not merely to memorise them. By following the foundational steps of minimising—and eventually eliminating—*rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion), you will gradually begin to develop the qualities that lead toward the stages of *Nirvāṇa*. There is no formal test or external assessment to confirm whether you have attained these qualities; rather, you will begin to notice changes within yourself. Your behaviour, especially in situations that once provoked strong reactions, will start to shift toward equanimity.

## The Seven Groups of Enlightenment (37 factors in total)

1	<i>The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna)</i>	<i>The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are key practices in Buddhist teaching that help develop insight and understanding of reality. They include mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects (such as thoughts and concepts). These practices are central to insight meditation and the path to liberation.</i>
2	<i>The Four Right Efforts (Sammappadāna)</i>	<i>These efforts focus on cultivating positive qualities and eliminating negative ones. They involve preventing unwholesome states, abandoning those that have arisen, developing wholesome states, and strengthening existing wholesome states. These practices contribute to mental purification and progress toward enlightenment.</i>
3	<i>The Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda)</i>	<i>The Four Means to Accomplishment are mental qualities that help achieve spiritual and personal goals. They include: Desire or aspiration (chanda) – the intention to succeed, Energy or effort (virīya) – persistent effort, Mind or consciousness (citta) – focused mental engagement, and Investigation or reasoning (vīmaṃsā) – mindful inquiry. Cultivating these qualities builds the mental strength needed for deep concentration and spiritual realization.</i>
4	<i>The Five Spiritual Faculties (Pañca Indriya)</i>	<i>The Five Faculties are inherent mental strengths that aid progress on the path to enlightenment. They include: Faith (saddhā) – trust in the Dhamma, Effort (virīya) – diligent effort, Mindfulness (sati) – continuous awareness, Concentration (samādhi) – focused attention, and Wisdom (paññā) – deep understanding of reality. These faculties work together in balance to foster spiritual development and insight.</i>
5	<i>The Five Spiritual Powers (Pañca Bala)</i>	<i>The Five Powers are the matured, unshakable forms of the Five Spiritual Faculties, representing fully developed inner strengths that help overcome obstacles and maintain steady progress toward enlightenment. They include: Faith (saddhā) – unwavering confidence in the Three Jewels, Effort (virīya) – sustained effort, Mindfulness (sati) – consistent awareness, Concentration (samādhi) – deep, stable focus, and Wisdom (paññā) – clear insight into reality. When fully developed, these powers are impervious to doubt or distraction.</i>
6	<i>The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (Satta Bojjhaṅga)</i>	<i>Also named "Wings to Awakening" are core mental qualities that, when cultivated and balanced, lead to enlightenment. They include: Mindfulness (Sati) – awareness and presence, Investigation of mental phenomena (Dhamma Vicaya) – discerning exploration of reality, Effort (Virīya) – sustained effort and enthusiasm, Joy (Pīti) – uplifting interest in practice, Tranquillity (Passaddhi) – calmness of body and mind, Concentration (Samādhi) – stable mental focus, and Equanimity (Upekkhā) – balanced, impartial awareness. Together, these factors foster wisdom and liberate the mind from suffering.</i>
7	<i>The Noble Eightfold Path</i>	<i>The Noble Eightfold Path, is the practical guide for cultivating ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom, leading to the cessation of suffering and enlightenment. The path avoids extremes of indulgence and self-mortification.</i>

The **final state of achievement** is known as **Sammā Vimutti**, which means *right liberation*—the complete and irreversible release from suffering through the cessation of **Rāga** (attachment), **Dvesha** (aversion), and **Mōha** (delusion). It is the culmination of the **Noble Eightfold Path** and represents the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path: **freedom from the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra)**.

Unlike temporary relief or surface-level detachment, **Sammā Vimutti** is neither conditioned nor fleeting. It is the **total liberation of the mind**, attained through deep insight into the **insatiable (anicca)**, **unsatisfactory (dukkha)**, and **futility (anattā)** nature of all conditioned phenomena. This state arises only when the roots of greed, hatred, and ignorance are completely uprooted.

Thus, **Sammā Vimutti** is not an escape from life, but a **profound clarity and peace** that emerges from seeing reality as it truly is—free from craving, aversion, and delusion.

### 23. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

**Satta Bojjhaṅga**, also known as the **Seven Factors of Awakening**, are mental qualities considered essential for achieving spiritual liberation. They are not meant to be practiced in isolation but are interconnected qualities that support and enhance one another. Cultivating these factors fosters increased self-awareness, emotional regulation, and ultimately, enlightenment.

These seven factors include:

1. **Mindfulness (Sati):**  
The practice of present-moment awareness, both internally and externally. It involves cultivating clear, sustained attention and recognizing thoughts, emotions, and sensations without attachment.
2. **Investigation of the Dhamma (Dhammavicaya):**  
A quality of inquisitive observation, this factor involves examining the nature of reality, applying wisdom and insight to understand the teachings and the true nature of suffering.
3. **Effort (Viriya):**  
The mental strength to exert effort and maintain diligence in the practice. It reflects enthusiasm, persistence, and the drive to overcome obstacles on the path.
4. **Joy (Pīti):**  
A deep sense of delight and rapture that arises naturally through practice. This joy uplifts the mind and strengthens commitment to the path.
5. **Tranquillity (Passaddhi):**  
A state of calm and serenity in both body and mind. This quality helps settle agitation and brings a soothing stillness to one's experience.
6. **Concentration (Samādhi):**  
The ability to sustain focused attention on 'Nibbana', leading to a unified, stable, and clear state of awareness.
7. **Equanimity (Upekkhā):**  
A balanced and impartial state of mind that remains steady in the face of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame. It reflects deep inner peace and detachment.

When developed together, these seven factors create a harmonious foundation for profound meditative insight and the eventual realisation of true freedom.

### 1. Mindfulness (Sati)

Although *sati* has several meanings—such as memory, mindfulness, recollection, and wakefulness—here it is understood as mindful awareness of the contents of one’s experience as they manifest from moment to moment in the immediate present. Mindful awareness means paying bare attention to whatever arises, whether it is a physical or mental process, without reacting or passing judgment. This practice leads to insight into the true nature of phenomena. One is expected to maintain full awareness of what is happening right now, without dwelling on the past, which is already gone, or the future, which has yet to arrive. Mindfulness is frequently mentioned among the 37 requisites of enlightenment:

- *Mindfulness as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna)*
- *Mindfulness as the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga)*
- *Mindfulness as one of the five spiritual faculties (pañca indriya)*
- *Mindfulness as one of the five spiritual powers (pañca bala)*

Non-judgmental awareness must be maintained continuously from moment to moment throughout all moments of waking life for mindfulness to become a true factor of enlightenment. As such, mindfulness holds a central role—not only as an essential foundation for the development of the other six factors of enlightenment, but also as a balancing force necessary for their maturation.

With well-developed mindfulness, one is able to maintain equanimity toward sensory experiences received through the six sense faculties: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. By not reacting with craving toward pleasant objects or with aversion toward unpleasant ones, one can exert control over the mental process through which the unwholesome roots of greed (*rāga*), aversion (*dvesha*), and delusion (*moha*) may lead to unskillful thoughts, speech, or actions.

“Sati” means mindfulness, and “paṭṭhāna” means foundation; hence, *satipaṭṭhāna* refers to the *Foundations of Mindfulness*, which are:

- *Contemplation of the body (kāyānupassanā)*

- *Contemplation of feelings (vedanānupassanā)*
- *Contemplation of the mind (cittānupassanā)*
- *Contemplation of mental objects (dhammānupassanā)*

To achieve spiritual progress, a meditator must diligently cultivate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness with clear comprehension and mindfulness (*sati*), thereby supporting the development of both mindfulness as a factor of enlightenment and insight wisdom (*prajñā*).

Buddhist literature describes four supportive factors that enhance the development of mindfulness as a factor of enlightenment:

- *Mindfulness with clear comprehension (sati-sampajañña)*
- *Avoiding association with confused and unmindful individuals*
- *Associating with individuals who cultivate mindfulness*
- *Strong personal commitment to developing mindfulness*

In practising mindfulness with clear comprehension, one maintains awareness during all daily activities—walking, speaking, dressing, eating, washing, using the toilet, sleeping, and so on. Associating with those who lack mindfulness and have no inclination to develop it can gradually weaken one's practice. Conversely, associating with mindful individuals committed to cultivating mindfulness provides positive reinforcement and encouragement.

## 2. Investigation of Dhammas (Dhamma Vicaya)

The term *dhamma*, meaning mental and physical phenomena, combined with *vicaya*, meaning to analyse, investigate, or scrutinise, refers to the quality of mind that critically examines and discerns the true nature of mental and physical phenomena (*nāma-rūpa*). This investigation is not an intellectual or purely cognitive activity, but rather an analytical and intuitive process rooted in meditative awareness, penetrating and examining the nature of all phenomena as they arise, moment by moment, within one's own experiential field.

*Dhamma vicaya*, or investigation of phenomena, is a designation for wisdom (*prajñā*) and is referenced throughout the Buddha's teachings under various names, including:

- *Right View (sammā ditṭhi), the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path*

- *Investigation or discrimination (vīmaṁsā), one of the Four Bases of Mental Power (iddhipāda)*
- *Wisdom (prajñā), as one of the Five Spiritual Faculties (pañca indriya)*
- *Wisdom (prajñā), as one of the Five Spiritual Powers (pañca bala)*

Through investigation, one develops analytical insight into the true nature of mental and physical phenomena, revealing the Three Universal Characteristics: insatiability (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and futility (*anattā*). Well-developed mindfulness (*sati*) supports this critical investigation by enabling close observation of phenomena as they arise and cease, leading to the realisation of the distinction between mind (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*), and the conditioned nature of their arising and ceasing (*paṭicca samuppāda*).

While mindfulness is largely a passive and receptive process, investigation of *dhammas* is an active process—analysing, scrutinising, and dissecting phenomena to uncover their true nature. This factor can be cultivated through *wise attention (yoniso manasikāra)* to qualities such as wholesome and unwholesome, blameable and blameless, inferior and superior, and harmful and beneficial. For example, one may investigate unwholesome mental states such as craving, aversion, anxiety, and fear as they arise, as well as wholesome qualities such as loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity.

The development of *dhamma vicaya* is facilitated by the preceding factor of mindfulness (*sati*) and leads to the strengthening of the subsequent factors of effort (*virīya*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—thus supporting the full unfolding of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

### 3. Energy or Effort (Virīya)

Steady and consistent effort is required for the cultivation and maturation of the seven factors of enlightenment. It is also essential for abandoning harmful mental qualities and facilitating the arising and nurturing of mental qualities beneficial to spiritual development.

Effort, in the context of the Four Right Efforts (*sammappadhāna*), encompasses the following:

- *Effort as one of the four bases of mental power (virīya iddhipāda)*

- *Effort as one of the five spiritual faculties (pañca indriya)*
- *Effort as one of the five spiritual powers (pañca bala)*
- *Right Effort (sammā vāyāma) as the 6<sup>th</sup> factor of the Noble Eightfold Path*

In applying effort (*virīya*) toward spiritual development, it must be sustained from the beginning to final liberation. Depending on the stage of a particular task, there are three types of effort:

- *Effort required to begin an action (ārambha dhātu virīya)*
- *Effort required to sustain an action despite obstacles (nikkama dhātu virīya)*
- *Effort required to continue until the action is completed (parakkama dhātu virīya)*

Within the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment, there are four types of right effort:

- *To prevent the arising of unwholesome mental states*
- *To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen*
- *To cultivate wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen*
- *To maintain and develop wholesome mental states that have already arisen*

The unwholesome mental states that have not yet arisen include the five mental hindrances:

- Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*)
- Ill-will (*vyāpāda*)
- Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*)
- Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*)
- Sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*)

Effort should also be applied to abandon thoughts of:

- Sensual desire (*kāma saṅkappa*)
- Hatred (*vyāpāda saṅkappa*)
- Cruelty (*vihimsā saṅkappa*)

The wholesome mental states that need to be developed and maintained with right effort are the seven factors of enlightenment (*satta bojjhaṅga*).

#### 4. Rapture or Joy (Pīti)

Joy, pleasure, or happiness can be either sensual or non-sensual. Sensual (*sāmisa*) joy is the joy created by sensual objects received through the five sense doors: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. On the other hand, rapture or non-sensual (*nirāmisa*) joy—also known as spiritual happiness—is the pleasurable interest in a meditation object. It is the joy or bliss experienced in the mind and body, associated with well-developed concentration and mental peace through meditative experiences. This type of joy brings a sense of contentment and refreshment to both mind and body.

Compared to calmness (*passaddhi*), the next factor of enlightenment, rapture, has a more exciting and energising quality. This naturally stimulates the meditator to continue and persist in meditation. Rapture is not felt as a physical sensation but appears when the mind is free from the five mental hindrances. It is present as a factor in the first two stages of deep absorption (*dhyāna*).

Rapture is one of the five qualities, known as the *dhyānic factors*, that develop when the mind is in a state of deep concentration:

- *Initial application (vitakka)*
- *Sustained application (vicāra)*
- *Rapture or joy (pīti)*
- *Mental bliss or happiness (sukha)*
- *One-pointedness with equanimity (ekaggatā with upekkhā)*

Five different types of rapture are described:

- **Minor rapture (khuddaka pīti):** Typically, the first to appear, it can cause the hair on the body to stand up.
- **Momentary rapture (khaṇika pīti):** Very brief, appearing and disappearing like flashes of lightning.
- **Showery rapture (okkantika pīti):** Washes over the body repeatedly, like waves on a shore.

- Uplifting rapture (*ubbega pīti*): So intense it may feel as though the body is being lifted off the ground.
- Pervading rapture (*pharaṇa pīti*): Fills the entire body with joy and is considered the quintessential dhyānic factor of rapture.

The appearance of rapture (*pīti*) indicates that the mind has reached a deep state of concentration and has relinquished the five mental hindrances. However, meditators should not become attached to this sensation. They should continue focusing on the primary meditation object, *nivan-sukha*, as attachment to rapture may hinder further mental development.

### 5. Tranquillity (*Passaddhi*)

Calmness, serenity, quietness, or tranquillity (*passaddhi*) naturally follows joy or rapture (*pīti*) and leads to concentration (*samādhi*). It is of two types:

1. *Tranquillity of the mental factors (kāya-passaddhi)*
2. *Tranquillity of the mind or consciousness (citta-passaddhi)*

*Kāya-passaddhi* does not refer to the quieting of the physical body, but rather to the calming of mental factors (*cetasika*) such as feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*). As tranquillity develops, it suppresses the opposing factors of restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*).

For tranquillity to arise, the preceding four factors—mindfulness, investigation, effort, and rapture—must be well established. When the mind reaches this state of peace and calm, there is a risk that the meditator may mistake it for a final stage of liberation and cease further mental development.

Tranquillity is often likened to the pleasant, cooling shade of a tree for someone suffering under the scorching heat of the sun. It counteracts the mental hindrances of restlessness (*uddhacca*) and remorse (*kukkucca*), both of which can disturb the serene nature of the mind (*citta*) and its associated mental factors (*cetasika*).

### 6. Concentration (*Samādhi*)

Concentration (*samādhi*) is “the state by virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly focused on a Nibbana object, undistracted and unscattered.” The cultivation and maturity of the preceding five factors—mindfulness, investigation, effort, rapture, and tranquillity—are

essential for the proper development of concentration as a factor of enlightenment.

Concentration appears in several other frameworks within the Thirty-Seven Requisites of Enlightenment:

- *As one of the five spiritual faculties (samādhindriya)*
- *As one of the five spiritual powers (samādhibala)*
- *As Right Concentration in the Noble Eightfold Path (sammā samādhi)*

In concentration meditation, a deep state of focus or one-pointedness of mind is cultivated. This state is sustained as long as the meditator's attention remains wholly absorbed in the chosen meditation object.

As concentration deepens further, the meditator enters successive stages of calm and joy known as *dhyāna*, or deep mental absorptions. These are entirely free from the five hindrances. Such deep concentration, combined with the suppression of hindrances, prepares the mind for insight (*vipassanā*) into the true nature of mental and physical phenomena: insatiable (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and futility (*anattā*).

For meditators who wish to engage in insight meditation from the outset, without prior concentration training, a level of focus called **momentary concentration** is sufficient. This involves mindful attention to mental and physical phenomena as they arise and pass away, without becoming absorbed

Among the five spiritual faculties—faith or conviction (*saddhā*), effort (*vīriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*)—there must be a proper balance between effort and concentration. Excessive effort leads to restlessness and agitation, while excessive concentration leads to sloth and torpor. Maintaining this balance is crucial for developing concentration as an enlightenment factor.

### 7. Equanimity (Upekkhā)

Equanimity is the mental quality of being non-reactive and neutral, maintaining a perfectly balanced mind in the face of various experiences. Its development as a factor of enlightenment is facilitated by the proper cultivation of the preceding six factors of enlightenment. Equanimity is also the last of the four immeasurable (*brahma-vihāras*), the others being loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and sympathetic joy (*muditā*).

Additionally, equanimity is one of the mental factors associated with the deep absorption stages (*dhyāna*) in meditation.

It should be noted that equanimity, as a factor of enlightenment, is not considered a neutral feeling but rather a mental attitude of balance and impartiality—synonymous with the mind’s neutrality (*tatramajjhataṭā*).

When equanimity becomes a factor of enlightenment, one is able to face experiences with people and objects impartially, without attachment or aversion. An Arahant with well-developed equanimity will face the following worldly conditions with total composure:

- *Gain (lābha) and loss (alābha)*
- *Disrepute (ayasa) and fame (yasa)*
- *Blame (nindā) and praise (paṭisamsā) check*
- *Pleasure (sukha) and pain (dukkha)*

For equanimity to develop as a factor of enlightenment, there must be a proper balance among the five spiritual faculties (*pañca indriya*). Among these, faith (*saddhā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are paired, as are effort (*vīriya*) and concentration (*samādhi*), each in a reciprocal relationship. A balance between faith and wisdom, and between effort and concentration, is necessary for spiritual progress. The faculty of mindfulness (*sati*), which underpins the other four, acts as a moderator to ensure that each pair remains in balance, avoiding extremes.

It is advised that when the mind is sluggish due to the hindrance of sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), it is not the right time to practice the factors of concentration, tranquillity, and equanimity. Instead, one should cultivate effort, investigation, and rapture. Conversely, when the mind is restless due to the hindrance of restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), one should avoid effort, investigation, and rapture, and instead practice concentration, tranquillity, and equanimity.

Contemplation of the seven factors of enlightenment is a method for developing mindfulness of mental objects (*dhammānupassanā*). For example, in contemplating the factor of mindfulness as a mere mental object, the meditator is aware of the following:

1. *When the mindfulness factor has arisen*

2. *When the mindfulness factor has not arisen*
3. *When the unrisen mindfulness factor arises*
4. *When the arisen mindfulness factor reaches completion*

Similarly, the meditator contemplates the other six factors of enlightenment. These are regarded as mere phenomena, observed without any notion of “I,” “self,” or “soul” in oneself or others—detached and free from clinging.

Within the group of seven factors of enlightenment, there are two subgroups. One is the energising group, consisting of effort (*vīriya*), investigation (*dhamma-vicaya*), and rapture (*pīti*). The other is the calming group, consisting of concentration (*samādhi*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Mindfulness (*sati*) functions as the balancing factor that ensures the proper development and maturation of the other six.

When mindfulness Nibbana is cultivated regularly, it brings the four foundations of mindfulness—mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), mind (*cittānupassanā*), and mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*)—to perfection. A meditator who consistently practices the four foundations of mindfulness will develop the seven factors of enlightenment (*satta bojjhaṅgā*) to perfection, leading to the attainment of true knowledge (*vijjā*) and liberation (*vimutti*).

## 24. The Ten Immoral Actions (Dasa Akusala)

Immoral acts are intentional and committed through one's mind, speech, and body (*manō, vacī, kāya*). This process begins with *manō saṅkhāra*, which then leads to *vacī* and *kāya saṅkhāra*. *Assāda*—the perceived pleasure or attraction—is the root cause of *manō saṅkhāra* that compels one to engage in the ten immoral actions (*dasa akusala*). Therefore, relinquishing *assāda* through a deep understanding of *anicca* (insatiable), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anattā* (futility) will naturally lead one away from *dasa akusala*. However, merely refraining from these ten immoral acts is not sufficient to eradicate *assāda*.

The ten immoral actions are categorised into three groups based on their origin in mind, speech, and body (*manō, vacī, kāya*):

### Three Manō Saṅkhāra acts (immoral acts done with the mind):

1. Abhijjā (covetousness; greed for others' belongings)
2. Vyāpāda (ill-will, hatred)
3. Micchā Diṭṭhi (wrong views)

### Four Vacī Saṅkhāra acts (immoral acts done with speech):

4. Musāvāda (lying)
5. Pisunāvācā (slandering)
6. Parusāvācā (harsh speech)
7. Sampappalāpā (frivolous or idle talk)

### Three Kāya Saṅkhāra acts (immoral acts done with the body):

8. Pānātipātā (killing)
9. Adinnādānā (taking what is not given)
10. Kāmēsu micchācārā (not just sexual misconduct, but also indulgence in sensual pleasures)

**Ariyā Śrāvakas** (noble disciples) naturally develop a tendency to disengage from immoral actions—not out of fear, but through direct understanding of the **Four Noble Truths** and by entering the **Noble Eightfold Path**. Their **Sīla** (moral conduct) arises spontaneously and becomes a natural expression of their deepening **Prajñā** (wisdom). In contrast, observing moral precepts or striving to practice **Dasa Kusala** (the ten wholesome actions, which are the opposites of the ten unwholesome actions) out of fear—as part of a ritualistic

or externalised approach—does not effectively support supramundane (**lokottara**) realisation or the path to **Nirvāṇa**. When **Sila** is rooted in fear rather than understanding, it can gradually give rise to **Dvesha** (aversion), subtly undermining one's internal harmony and distorting the very foundation of the **Four Noble Truths** and the **Eightfold Path**.

## 25. Sathara Mahābhūta

You are born from the union of two cells. It is nourishment that enables your growth. This nourishment comes from both animals and plants. Animals feed on plants, while plants, in turn, absorb nutrients from the earth's air, water, and soil. Our planet is composed of approximately 80% water, and similarly, so is the human body. These fundamental elements contribute to the development of an adult weighing around 70 kilograms. When you die, your body will decompose and eventually break down into these same elements, returning to the earth.

According to Buddhist texts, the four primary elements of the world are known as *paṭhavī*, *āpo*, *tejo*, and *vāyo*—corresponding to solid, liquid, heat, and air. These are the *Sathara Mahābhūta*, or the four great elements, described as follows:

- **Earth Element (*paṭhavī-dhātu*):** This refers to any matter where solidity or attractive force is prominent. Internal earth elements include head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, organs, and intestinal matter.
- **Water (or Liquid) Element (*āpo-dhātu*):** This denotes any matter where the cohesive or fluid nature is prominent. Internal water elements include bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, nasal mucus, urine, semen, and other bodily fluids.
- **Fire Element (*tejo-dhātu*):** This represents any matter where energy or temperature is prominent. Internal fire elements are the bodily processes that generate warmth, digestion, and are responsible for aging.
- **Air (or Wind) Element (*vāyo-dhātu*):** This element is associated with motion and expansion. Internal air elements include the air involved in breathing and the winds within the abdomen.

## 26. Meditation: Ārya Bhāvanā — What Is It For?

We practice meditation to steer the mind away from its natural tendency to excessively pursue the pleasures of the *Kāma Loka*, driven by *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion). When we focus on the happiness and comfort that arise as we reduce *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Moha*, we are following the *lokottara* (supramundane) path. In contrast, the *laukika* (mundane) approach involves concentrating on worldly objects—such as a flame, a cemetery, a statue, or any object composed of the *satara mahābhūta* (the four great elements). This latter method does not reorient the mind away from its deep-seated tendencies tied to the *Kāma Loka*. As a result, it does not lead to lasting freedom from *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Moha*, nor does it end the ongoing "rat race" driven by the insatiable demands of the five senses.

Meditation cultivates an appreciation for the peace and joy experienced when one is distanced from *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Moha*. In other words, a wholesome *Rāga* (longing) for this pure mental state begins to drive one's practice. This process involves understanding the drawbacks of *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Moha*, and recognising the benefits of abiding in the state of *Prabhāsvara Citta* (luminous mind). Practices such as chanting *Karmasthāna* help maintain focus and disengage the mind from worldly (*Kāma Loka*) concerns. With consistent effort, the time spent engaged in *Kāma Loka* activities gradually decreases, and the meditator begins to experience a sense of inner freedom—even if only temporarily.

It is important to understand that the mind is inherently pure. If we can maintain it in the *Prabhāsvara* state, these corrective measures become unnecessary. However, the mind frequently sinks into *Kāma Loka*-related thoughts, losing its natural clarity. Meditation is therefore essential to elevate the mind back to its original *Prabhāsvara* condition.

A growing body of scientific evidence supports the numerous benefits of meditation. Studies have shown that it empowers individuals vulnerable to depression and mood disorders, enhances chronic pain management, improves quality of life, alleviates post-traumatic stress, and reduces the incidence of perioperative delirium. Meditation also increases cerebral blood flow, enhances activity in specific brain regions, and boosts immune function. However, the precise neural mechanisms behind these effects remain unclear. Among psychological factors, meditation appears to exert the most substantial influence on emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, there are anecdotal reports of remarkable

improvements—or even apparent “cures”—in cases of severe allergies, disabling arthritis, and various mental health conditions.

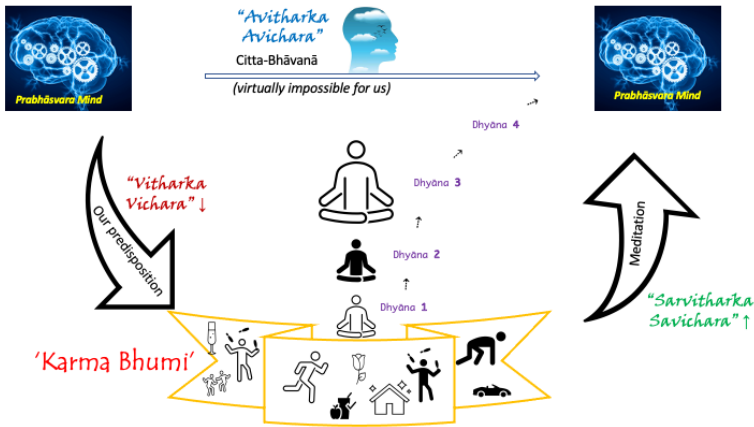
### Entering Dhyāna: Deepening Mental Stillness

As concentration deepens, the five hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and sceptical doubt—begin to subside. In their absence, the factors of *Dhyāna* emerge:

- *Vitakka* and *Vicāra* (initial and sustained attention)
- *Pīti* (joy)
- *Sukha* (bliss)
- *Ekaggatā* with *Upekkhā* (one-pointedness with equanimity)

*Vitarka* refers to initial applied thought and is often associated with *kāma* (desire), *viyāpāda* (ill will), and *hiṃsā saṅkalpana* (harmful intentions). In meditation—particularly at the first level of *Dhyāna*—*vitarka* and *vicāra* represent discursive or wandering thoughts that may distract from the meditation object.

As one progresses, these thoughts become more refined, evolving into *savitarka–savicāra*—focused and wholesome thoughts free from *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). These refined states support mental clarity and stillness, forming the foundation for insight and eventual liberation.



We live in a *Kamma Bhūmi*—a world seemingly full of pleasures. But is it truly so? The pleasures we chase are driven by greed, each attempt merely an effort to satisfy the senses. Yet, true fulfilment never arrives. Instead, we spend our lives sustaining the thirst for these desires. Reflect on your own past: haven't you been chasing pleasures throughout your life? Have you ever fully satisfied any of your senses to the point of complete contentment?

Dhyāna is a deeply personal experience, representing a significant milestone in spiritual development. It sits at the higher end of the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*—the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. While eight levels of *Dhyāna* are described, even experiencing the first four provides ample assurance that one's meditation is on the right path. This is known as *Ariyā Dhyāna*, attained through meditation directed toward *Nirvāṇa*. In contrast, other forms of *laukika* (worldly) meditation may induce similar states but are not considered foundations for transcending to higher realms.

*Dhyāna* is not *Nirvāṇa*—it is only a “taste” of it. *Laukika Dhyāna* may lead to rebirth in celestial realms (*Bambalowa*), while *Lokottara Dhyāna* leads toward the ultimate goal: *Nirvāṇa*.

### How, then, can we achieve Dhyāna?

Think of *Dhyāna* as a performance indicator, much like a speedometer. If you're driving at 70 km/h, the speedometer reflects that speed—it doesn't cause it. Similarly, *Dhyāna* is not achieved by grasping at it. Rather, it arises

naturally when the mind is cultivated correctly. Focus your efforts on *Karmasthāna* (the meditation object), and through dedicated practice, gradually reduce *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion). When the mind is fully immersed in *Karmasthāna*, *Dhyāna* may arise spontaneously. It is not the final goal, but an indirect confirmation that your practice is progressing.

If your primary objective is to “achieve” *Dhyāna*, it will slip away. Instead, orient your practice toward experiencing *Dutu Nirvāṇa*—the peaceful clarity (*Śānti*) that arises from deep contemplation of *Dhamma*, especially the Four Noble Truths. This mental serenity will gradually deepen over time. Let that be your focus.

### *Understanding the Hindrances*

*Dvesha* manifests in many tangible ways: jealousy, anger, hatred, fear—all expressions of mental unrest or “burning.” In contrast, pleasurable or clinging thoughts belong to *Rāga*. Reducing *Rāga* also helps diminish *Dvesha*, thereby cooling the inner fire and settling the mind.

To uproot *Moha*, the root of delusion, one must develop insight into *Anicca* (insatiability), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anattā* (futility). When these truths are clearly seen, the illusion fades.

**Kleśas**—the defilements—are *Anicca*: insatiable and ever-changing. But *Nirvāṇa* is *Nicca*: satiable and sustained. As *Avidyā* (ignorance) wanes, so does the false belief in *Assāda*—the idea that pleasure or satisfaction can be found in the 18 *Dhātus* (sense realms). True peace lies not in the external world but within your own mind.

### *Dhyāna Levels*

In Buddhism, *Dhyāna* refers to progressive stages of meditative absorption—states of deep, sustained concentration. These states mark the gradual purification of the mind and a withdrawal from the five hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt. *Dhyāna* plays a central role on the path to enlightenment, forming the foundation for cultivating insight (*vipassanā*) and developing wisdom.

By systematically developing these levels of concentration, practitioners refine the mind, weaken the grip of defilements (*kleśas*), and move toward a direct realisation of reality. *Dhyāna* is central to many Buddhist practices, including mindfulness meditation, insight meditation, and the development of the Seven Factors of Awakening.

It is important to note that these meditative states do not have rigid or clearly defined boundaries. Individual practitioners may experience them with varying intensity or in a non-linear progression. Thus, the following is not a strict classification, but a descriptive outline of their key features and associated mental qualities.

### Dhyāna in Practice

The development of *Dhyāna* is not a matter of forcefully inducing a state. Rather, it arises naturally from sustained and sincere effort in one's chosen *Karmasthāna* (meditation object or method). Just as a flame steadies in a windless environment, the mind settles into *Dhyāna* when the conditions are right.

Even in the first *Dhyāna*, *Rāga* (craving) has no place. Though *Savitarka–Savicāra* (applied and sustained thought) are still present, the mind is already withdrawn from sensuality. Some advanced practitioners may even carry out simple daily tasks while maintaining first-level *Dhyānic* absorption.

Ultimately, *Dhyāna* is not something to be pursued or grasped directly. It is the natural byproduct of disciplined meditation practice. Through right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, the mind is gradually trained, refined, and liberated.

## 27. Engaging in a Retreat: A Foundation for Meditation

Meditation is a tool that allows you—at least temporarily—to experience the bliss of being free from *rāga* (desire), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion), and to enter states of *dhyāna*. It also serves as a platform to revisit the core teachings of the Dhamma and make progress toward sustained reductions in attachment, ultimately leading to *sammā samādhi* (Right Concentration). Through meditation, we minimise and eventually relinquish our natural inclination toward external attachments, cultivating instead a deep inner happiness. This process of purification paves the way to *Nibbāna*.

There are unwholesome, negative mental states—mental defilements—that can obstruct the development of a radiant, *Prabhāsvara* (luminous) mind during meditation and prevent the attainment of *Dhyāna*. The term *nīvaraṇa* literally means “that which covers or obstructs,” referring to the factors that hinder entry onto the path toward *Nirvāṇa*. Reducing these defilements helps transition the mind from the state of *Kāma Bhūmi* (sense-desire realm) to *Ariyā Bhūmi* (noble realm). One must reach *Ariyā Bhūmi* to successfully enter the meditative path. These obstructive forces are collectively known as the *Pañca Nīvaraṇa* (Five Hindrances).

Supramundane (*lokottara*) meditation is designed to sustain the mind in its original, unpolluted state—*Prabhāsvara*. While a calm and peaceful state can also be achieved through mundane (*laukika*) practices such as *Ānāpāna*, *Kasiṇa*, or Yoga, these often lack the full integration of *Sīla* (virtue or moral conduct), especially when practiced ritually without deeper understanding. In contrast, *Sīla* forms the inherent foundation of the *lokottara* Noble Eightfold Path.

The true defilements that pollute the *Prabhāsvara* mind are *rāga* (craving), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). Even actions that appear wholesome may not support the proper foundation for successful meditation or eventual realization. During meditation retreats, these three defilements can be more effectively and temporarily minimised.

To begin this process, it is essential to recognise that all external perceptions are ultimately unsatisfying. A basic yet internalised understanding of this truth is sufficient—it should be ‘installed’ in your mind like a program, not memorised as mere information. Meditation is meant to decouple you from all forms of bondage, including hatred and delusion. Insight—true understanding—is the key. This is why a comprehensive grasp of *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna* (the Four Foundations of Mindfulness) is necessary before

starting. Qualities such as generosity, kindness, and compassion must also be cultivated. Meditation, then, becomes the tool that enables you to embody *Sammā Samādhi* (Right Concentration).

### Meditation is a Personal Practice

While meditation is often introduced in group settings, it is ultimately a deeply personal journey—one that must be undertaken freely and without external pressure or interference. At the same time, it is your responsibility to ensure that your presence does not disrupt or disturb the practice of others.

### Posture and Preparation

The first step in meditation is to find a comfortable and sustainable posture. There is no single correct way—meditation can be practised while sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, depending on what best suits your body and state of mind. That said, sitting is traditionally preferred, especially in group settings, as it offers an optimal balance between alertness and relaxation.

If your goal is to move beyond the fourth *Dhyāna*—a stage where all external sensory input ceases and only the mind remains active—a stable and secure posture becomes essential. At deeper levels of meditative absorption, physical stability ensures safety and uninterrupted inward focus.

### Ethical Foundation

Meditation traditionally begins with alignment to the principle of *Karmasthāna*—the resolve to refrain from any action, direct or indirect, that could cause harm to the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (his teachings), or the *Sangha* (his noble community of followers).

In its conventional sense, *Sangha* refers to the monastic community of ordained monks (*Bhikkhus*) and nuns (*Bhikkhunīs*). However, in the *Ariyā* (noble) context, *Sangha* includes anyone—monastic or lay—who has attained at least *Sotāpanna* (stream-entry), including laymen (*Upāsakas*) and laywomen (*Upāsikās*).

One of the gravest ethical violations in this context is *Sangha-bheda*—the distortion or division of the true *Dhamma*—which undermines the integrity of the spiritual path.

### Aligning with Noble Energy

After a brief period of silent reflection on this ethical commitment, gently bring your awareness to the noble spiritual energy present in the universe—the collective radiance of all enlightened beings. This is not a mystical

invocation but a conscious attunement to the wisdom, clarity, and compassion that arise from the realised path. Such alignment offers subtle support, motivation, and inspiration for your own journey toward awakening.

At this point, make a personal vow: to do no harm and to extend a pre-emptive pardon for any unintended effects your presence or aura may generate during meditation.

### Chanting and Reflective Silence

Once you have settled into a comfortable posture, begin by taking a few deep, mindful breaths—inhale and exhale slowly and steadily. This gentle breath awareness helps relax the body and centre the mind, forming a foundational step toward deeper concentration and meditative stability.

The core practice proceeds by chanting one *Karmasthāna* at a time, followed by 3–4 minutes of silence for reflection.

In a broader meditative context, *vitarka* refers to initial applied thought, often involving *kāma* (desire), *viyāpāda* (ill will), and *hiṃsā* (harmful intentions or thoughts). During the first level of *Dhyāna*, *vitarka* and *vicāra* describe the discursive or wandering thoughts that distract the mind from its meditation object. *Savitarka* refers to the verbal or mental repetition of the *Karmasthāna*, while *Savicāra* involves contemplating and understanding its meaning.

At higher stages of *Dhyāna*, these evolve into *Savitarka–Savicāra*—focused, wholesome thoughts free from *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion).

Together, these cultivate the *Savitarka–Savicāra* state: a meditative absorption rooted in repeated reflection and sustained insight into the *Sath Dhamma*—the wholesome teachings expounded by a *Dhamma Sādācāri*, a noble spiritual friend who has attained at least the first *Dhyāna*.

These reflections are grounded in wholesome mental states such as:

- *Mettā* (loving-kindness)
- *Muditā* (empathetic joy)
- *Upekkhā* (equanimity)
- *Nekkhamma* (renunciation)
- *Aviyāpāda* (non-ill-will)
- *Avihimsā* (non-harming)

### Maintaining Purity of Mind

To keep the mind unpolluted in real time, meditation must be both active and intentional. The goal is to train the mind to remain free from *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion)—at least during the session itself. *Karmasthānas* function as repetitive, wholesome reflections that strengthen inner clarity and reduce unwholesome tendencies. However, this is not always easy. When the mind begins to wander, gently return to the foundational practice of breath awareness. This helps stabilise attention and allows you to re-engage with the next *Karmasthāna*.

You may also find that certain *Karmasthānas* resonate more deeply with your personal understanding. In such cases, it is entirely appropriate to focus more intently on those that speak to you most clearly.

## 28. Karmasthāna

**Karmasthana** is a focal point used to stabilise the wandering mind and steer it away from delusional thoughts. The term *karma-asthana* literally means “place of work,” though it is sometimes interpreted as “karma displacement.” Karmasthanas serve as concentrated thought anchors, designed to redirect the mind from lustful, hateful, and delusional distractions. Even a brief focus on a Karmasthana during meditation can make it possible to enter various states of trance or *Dhyāna*.

A key requirement is understanding and maintaining awareness of the Karmasthana’s meaning while chanting. All Karmasthanas are chanted in the present tense, reinforcing attention to the current moment. This practice serves as a tool for mental deconditioning. While each Karmasthana may differ in appearance or form, their core message remains consistent—something that becomes increasingly evident to advanced practitioners.

In meditation, the Karmasthana refers to the object or point of mental focus, often aligned with foundational Buddhist insights such as *anicca* (insatiable), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (futility). Concentration on the Karmasthana enables the meditator to gradually transcend *vitarka* (initial applied thought) and *vicāra* (sustained thought), facilitating deeper meditative absorption, including states characterised by *savītarka* (with initial thought) and *savicāra* (with sustained thought).

It is essential to understand that the purpose of a Karmasthana is not merely to anchor the mind at a single point, but to prevent the *Prabhāsvara* (luminous) mind from being tainted by *Rāga* (attachment), *Dvesha* (aversion), or *Moha* (delusion). With experience, a meditator may eventually no longer need to chant Karmasthanas in order to attain *Dhyāna*.

**Karmasthanas** are introduced progressively, with each level designed to deepen focus and insight in accordance with the practitioner’s capacity. For beginners, emphasis is placed on the principles of *Assāda* (gratification), *Ādīnava* (danger), and *Nissaraṇa* (escape). At more advanced stages, while this foundational understanding remains, Karmasthanas are further enriched by insights from *Sammā Dīṭṭhi* (right view) and *Sammā Samādhi* (right concentration).

During meditation, practitioners may experience a range of physical and sensory phenomena, such as teary eyes, bodily stiffness, lights of various colours, flashes of white light, or profound joy. These are signs of progress,

but they should not become the object of focus. True attainment of *Dhyāna* arises only from sustained attention on the Karmasthana.

Typically, meditation sessions begin with chanting the Buddha's nine supreme qualities. This serves both as a devotional act and as a reminder of the noble qualities one seeks to embody. It is at once spiritually grounding and personally motivating.

Through this practice, we cultivate *Sammā Sati* (right mindfulness), firmly rooted in the present moment. Meditation does not concern itself with the past or future—it is the cultivation of continuous present-time awareness, free from *Rāga* (attachment), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion), supported by unwavering focus on the Karmasthana.

### Examples of Karmasthana:

#### *Karmasthana 1 – Mettā Meditation*

**“Ahaṃ avero homi, abyāpajjho homi, anīgho homi, sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.”**

This is a *Mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation, traditionally recited to cultivate goodwill toward oneself and all beings:

- Ahaṃ avero homi – May I be free from enmity, hostility, and danger.
- Abyāpajjho homi – May I be free from malice and ill will.
- Anīgho homi – May I be free from mental and physical suffering.
- Sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi – May I care for myself and live happily.
- Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā – May all beings be well, happy, and free from suffering.

#### *Karmasthana 2 – On Nibbāna*

**“Etaṃ santam etaṃ paṇītam, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho, sabbūpadhipaṇiṇissaggo, taṇhākkhayo virāgo, nirodho nibbānam.”**

"This is peaceful, this is excellent—namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all possessions, the cessation of craving, detachment, cessation, and extinction."

This verse emphasizes that true peace and happiness arise through detachment. By abandoning lust (*Rāga*), hatred (*Dvesha*), and delusion

(Moha), the mind becomes purified, allowing genuine joy to emerge. Preventing the formation of Saṅkhāra (mental fabrications) by uprooting taṇhā (craving) leads to the cessation of defilements—this is the essence of Nibbāna.

- **Nirodho** – refers to the cessation or dispassion that arises from distancing oneself from attachment.
- **Nibbāna** – denotes liberation through complete detachment and the extinguishing of craving.

### *Karmasthana 3 – Insatiability and Liberation*

“Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppāda vaya dhammino, uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesam vūpasamo sukho.”

Though often recited at funerals, this verse carries profound meaning for the living:

- Aniccā vata saṅkhārā – *All formations are insatiable.* Until we deeply recognise this, we remain trapped in the cycle of sense craving and mental defilements (*kleśas*).
- Uppāda vaya dhammino – *All conditioned phenomena are subject to arising and passing away.* Real insight arises when we transcend *abhisaṅkhāra* (volitional formations) and the five clinging aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandha*).
- Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti – *Having arisen, they cease.* Understanding this helps us let go of attachments rooted in *taṇhā* (craving), *dvesha* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion).
- Tesam vūpasamo sukho – *The stilling and cessation of these is true happiness.*

Additional reflections:

- Rāga khayō Nibbāna – *The cessation of craving is Nibbāna.*
- Dvesha khayō Nibbāna – *The cessation of hatred is Nibbāna.*
- Moha khayō Nibbāna – *The cessation of delusion is Nibbāna.*

### *Karmasthana 4 – The Core Doctrine*

“Sabba pāpassa akaranam, kusalassa upasampadā, sacitta pariyodapanam, etaṃ Buddhānasāsanam.”

This verse captures the essence of Buddhist moral practice:

- Avoid all evil.
- Cultivate all good.
- Purify one’s own mind.
- This is the teaching of all Buddhas.

### *Karmasthana 5 – Closing Reflections*

The meditation session often concludes with this chant. Devotees may then remain in silent meditation, undisturbed, or quietly leave the space.

**“Natthi me saraṇaṃ aṅṅaṃ, Buddho me saraṇaṃ varaṃ, etena sacca-  
vajjena, sotthi me hotu sabbadā.”**

**“Dhammo me saraṇaṃ varaṃ...”**

**“Saṅgho me saraṇaṃ varaṃ...”**

**“Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ...”**

*“I seek no other refuge. The Buddha is my supreme refuge, the Dhamma my highest refuge, and the Saṅgha my greatest refuge. May I attain complete detachment and liberation from Samsāra. By the power of this truth, may peace be with me always.”*

## 29. Understanding and Attaining Dhyāna

Dhyāna is a deeply personal and refined meditative achievement, representing a high level of concentration and insight. The form of Dhyāna discussed here is *Ariyā Dhyāna*—a noble absorption attained through meditation directed toward the realization of Nirvāṇa. This fundamentally differs from *laukika* (worldly) meditation, which may produce similar experiences but does not lead to the deeper transformative insight required for higher Dhyānic stages. It is positioned at the advanced end of *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness).

While eight levels of Dhyāna are traditionally described, attaining even the first four offers strong assurance that one is progressing along the correct meditative path. It is essential to understand that Dhyāna is not Nirvāṇa; rather, it provides a preliminary experience—a glimpse or "taste"—of Nirvāṇic peace and clarity.

Please note that *laukika* Dhyāna may lead the practitioner to refined states associated with celestial or *Bambalowa* (heavenly) realms, whereas *Lokottara* Dhyāna (supramundane absorption) leads the practitioner toward the direct realization of Nirvāṇa.

### How Can We Achieve Dhyāna?

The path to Dhyāna is not mechanical—it unfolds naturally through sustained engagement with the Dhamma. The following practices are foundational:

1. **Listening to the Dhamma** – Deepens understanding and aligns the mind with truth.
2. **Teaching the Dhamma** – Reinforces one’s own insight through sharing and clarification.
3. **Engaging in Dhamma Sajjhāyana (Chanting)** – Calms and conditions the mind through rhythmic repetition.
4. **Practising Dhamma Manasikāra (Contemplative Reflection)** – Cultivates wisdom by turning inward and reflecting deeply.
5. **Using Laukika (Worldly) Methods** – Includes traditional concentration or breath techniques to settle the mind.

The last two—Manasikāra and Laukika practices—are often integrated within meditation, although Manasikāra can also be pursued independently.

It's important to understand that effective meditation does not require all five methods; rather, each supports the practitioner in a unique way.

If your aim is to “experience Dhyāna,” you are likely to miss it. Dhyāna is not the destination—it is a by-product. Instead, focus your energy on **Karmasthāna** (meditative objects) and diligently work to reduce the roots of suffering: **Rāga** (craving), **Dvesha** (aversion), and **Mōha** (delusion). When the conditions are right, Dhyāna arises naturally, not as a goal, but as a confirmation that your path is aligned.

### Focus on Duta Nirvāṇa

Rather than striving for Dhyāna alone, direct your awareness toward *Duta Nirvāṇa*—the serene peace (*Shānti*) that arises from understanding the Dhamma and the Four Noble Truths. This realisation is the foundation for all further progress. Over time, this tranquillity deepens through meditation and mindfulness. It marks the transition from *Avidyā* (ignorance) to clarity.

The *Kleśas* (defilements) are *anicca*—unsatisfying, and insatiable. *Nirvāṇa*, by contrast, is *nicca*—satisfying, unchanging, and beyond becoming. *Avidyā* is the mistaken belief that lasting pleasure (*assāda*) can be found in the 18 *Dhātus* (sensory realms) to fulfil personal desire. In truth, nothing within these realms offers enduring peace. That peace must be cultivated within, through wisdom and renunciation.

### 30. Dhyāna: Levels 1 -4 (Trances)

#### Early Signs of Progress into Dhyāna

As one begins to approach or enter deeper *Dhyānic* states, certain physical and mental indicators may naturally arise. These are not goals to be pursued, but spontaneous by-products of inner transformation:

- Involuntary tearing – A sign of emotional release or deep inner stillness.
- Spontaneous straightening of the spine – Often associated with *Kundalini* awakening or internal energy realignment.
- Excessive thirst or temporary diarrhoea – May indicate internal detoxification or subtle shifts in *prāṇic* energy.

These phenomena reflect the body-mind system adjusting to subtler levels of consciousness. While noteworthy, they should be observed without attachment and regarded as natural aspects of meditative unfolding.

#### First Dhyāna

In this initial stage, negative mental states such as *dvesha* (anger, hatred, ill will) are significantly reduced. *Vitarka* (applied thought) and *vicāra* (sustained thought) are still present but begin to give way to more refined mental engagement known as *sarvitarka–savichāra*. Chanting *Karmasthane* with proper understanding and under the guidance of a qualified teacher can help facilitate the transition from coarse thought patterns to subtler mental activity.

This stage is characterized by detachment from the external world, accompanied by the arising of *pīti* (joy) and *sukha* (pleasurable well-being). The mind enters focused absorption through *sarvitarka–savichāra*, following the abandonment of unwholesome states such as lust, ill-will, doubt, and restlessness.

While the meditator experiences *pīti* and *sukha*, these are not the ultimate goals. One must avoid clinging to pleasurable sensations and continue cultivating refined thought and deep concentration.

#### Second Dhyāna

At this level, *vitarka* and *vicāra* naturally fall away, allowing for even greater clarity and tranquillity. The mind becomes more inwardly stable, absorbed in *samādhi*, while *pīti* and *sukha* become more vivid and sustained.

A sense of inner coolness and comfort pervades consciousness. *Rāga* (craving) has been left behind, and the mind operates in a more refined state of one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*).

The meditator should now contemplate the insatiability (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and futility (*anattā*) and the nature of joy (rapture, *pīti*), in order to avoid attachment and prepare for the transition to the third *dhyāna*. Though mental excitement has subsided, joy and happiness still persist—but now with deeper serenity.

### Third Dhyāna

In this stage, *pīti* fades, replaced by profound *upekkhā* (equanimity), *sati* (mindfulness), and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension). *Sukha* and *Samādhi* continue, with heightened stillness and non-reactivity.

The mind is deeply composed, serene, and fully absorbed. *Avidyā* (ignorance) is reduced, though not completely eliminated in the first three *dhyānas*. The meditator should be vigilant not to become attached to the lingering *sukha*, and instead reflect on its insatiability (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and impersonality (*anattā*). Actively cultivating *upekkhā* supports the transition to the fourth and most refined level.

Here, emotional reactivity subsides. The meditator rests in still awareness, experiencing a calm state of sustained concentration and balance.

### Fourth Dhyāna

This is the culmination of meditative absorption—a state of complete stillness and refinement. Even *sukha* is transcended, replaced by pure *upekkhā* (equanimity), *sati* (mindfulness), and *adukkhamasukha* (a neutral feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant), accompanied by unwavering *samādhi*.

An *Ariyā* (noble one) abiding in the fourth *dhyāna* has, in that moment, attained full *sammā samādhi* (Right Concentration). At this level, *avijjā* (ignorance), *taṇhā* (craving), and *upādāna* (clinging) are absent. While this is not *Nirvāna* itself, the state reflects *Nirvānic* qualities due to the cessation of mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) through the dissolution of ignorance (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*) in the chain of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (Dependent Origination).

Meditators may perceive radiant inner light—even with closed eyes in darkness—a natural sign of purified consciousness, not a hallucination. The body may feel illuminated or enveloped in white light.

At this stage, one must maintain unwavering *upekkhā*, observing all phenomena—including inner luminosity—with detachment. It is essential to recognize this as a temporary attainment, not final liberation. All conditioned feelings—joy, sorrow, and happiness—are transcended. What remains is lucid mindfulness and serene equanimity.

This state represents the full embodiment of *sammā samādhi*, where no trace of *rāga* (lust), *taṇhā* (craving), or *upādāna* (clinging) remains.

### 31. Dhyānas: From Rūpa (Form-Based) to Arūpa (Formless)

After mastering the four Rūpa Dhyānas (form-based meditative absorptions), a practitioner may progress to the Arūpa Dhyānas, or formless absorptions—levels five and above.

**Rūpa Dhyānas:** These are absorptions based on form, involving visual objects, internal imagery, or meditative concepts.

**Arūpa Dhyānas:** These transcend form, focusing on infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or the state of neither perception nor non-perception.

In the Arūpa states:

- *Only the mind operates; contact with physical form ceases.*
- *Beings in the Brahma realms engage only three sense bases: mind, eye, and ear.*
- *Beings in the Kāma realms operate through all six sense bases: mind, eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body.*

#### Beyond the Four (Rūpa) Dhyānas:

Upon going beyond the four rūpa dhyānas (associated with form), one enters the arūpa dhyānas (formless states). The key distinction lies in focus: rūpa dhyāna involves absorption in "form," whereas arūpa dhyāna is centered on formless elements such as space or subtle awareness.

In these formless states, only the mind remains active. In the Brahma worlds, only the mind, eye, and ear are functional. In the sensual (kāma) worlds, all six sense bases—mind, eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are active. These experiences correspond to the three realms:

- Kāma-loka (world of the senses)
- Rūpa-loka (world of form)
- Arūpa-loka (formless world)

Beyond the fourth Dhyāna, the practitioner may enter the formless absorptions (Arūpa Dhyānas), which transcend even the subtlest attachment to form and sensation. These states include Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, Nothingness, and the state of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

These are profoundly refined states of meditative absorption where even the sense of self or object dissolves. Only pure awareness remains—free from all sensory contact. It is essential to maintain focus on releasing even the most subtle mental fabrications and to refrain from craving these states. Even here, *rāga* (desire or attachment) is a hindrance. Understand that these are temporary mental states—not *Nirvāṇa*.

### Dhyāna vs. Samāpatti

In any state of *Dhyāna*, one remains fully aware of the surroundings and can engage in activities such as speaking, walking, or listening. *Dhyāna* levels 1–4 can be entered in any posture—sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Even in *Lokottara Dhyāna* (supramundane absorption), *Sammā Vācā* (right speech) can still be practiced, as awareness and communicative ability are preserved.

In contrast, *Samāpatti* refers to a deeply absorbed, "locked-in" meditative state where all five sensory faculties are suspended, leaving only mental activity. The body becomes immobile, and physical movement is no longer possible. Speech ceases, and external awareness is completely cut off. If you find yourself in this state, do not panic. To exit, gently decide to come out of the state, open your eyes if possible, and remain still for 10–15 minutes to allow a gradual return to ordinary awareness.

During *Dhyāna Samāpatti* (deep meditative attainment), the body is motionless and the senses inactive. Gently opening the eyes can help facilitate a smooth exit from the state.

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Dhyāna</i>	<i>Samāpatti</i>
<i>Consciousness</i>	<i>Fully aware and functional</i>	<i>Deep absorption; outer awareness suspended</i>
<i>Senses</i>	<i>Functional</i>	<i>Five sense doors are "locked" temporarily</i>
<i>Mobility</i>	<i>Able to speak, move, and respond</i>	<i>May feel immobile or "trapped"</i>
<i>Mind Activity</i>	<i>Stable but interactive</i>	<i>Mind-only operation in still absorption</i>

**Samāpatti** is not dangerous. The sense of “being trapped” is temporary and simply reflects the depth of internal stillness.

To exit Samāpatti safely, gently form the intention to conclude the session, open the eyes slowly and naturally, and remain seated and relaxed for 10–15 minutes to allow the nervous system to fully readjust.

### Nirodha Samāpatti: The Ninth and Supreme Cessation Attainment

Nirodha Samāpatti, also known as "cessation attainment," is a profound meditative state in which all mental activities, sensations, and even awareness itself temporarily cease. This deep stillness is achieved through advanced meditation and is characterised by complete rest of both mind and body. It represents the culmination of both insight (*vipassanā*) and tranquility (*samatha*) meditation practices.

In this state, consciousness is entirely absent—there is no perception of time, no dreams, and no experience of physical sensations or pain. Both perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*) come to a complete halt. Unlike Nirvana, which is a permanent liberation, Nirodha Samāpatti is a temporary condition. The practitioner remains unaware during the state and cannot voluntarily determine the exact moment of emergence, which occurs either naturally or according to the *adhiṭṭhāna* (strong determination) made prior to entering the state—for example, deciding in advance to emerge after a specific number of hours.

This state is distinctly different from deep sleep. Although mental activity ceases, it is accompanied by a significant reduction in bodily metabolism—breathing becomes almost imperceptible. While it may resemble deep sleep, it is neither sleep nor death. The body remains warm, but respiration and metabolic functions slow to a near standstill.

Even the subtle or astral body is at rest during this phase. This extraordinary experience is often described as resembling *Parinibbāna*—the final passing away—signifying the realisation of Nirvana within this life.

### Meditative Achiever Categories

There are four primary categories of achievement:

1. Dhyāna only
2. Dhyāna and Samāpatti
3. Samāpatti only

#### 4. No meditative attainment

Approximately 20% of participants in a 9-day Dhyāna retreat fall into the fourth category. A lack of meditative progress can have many causes, which are discussed later. However, this should not be viewed as a failure. In some cases, it may be due to karmic predispositions. For individuals in this category, the *Tipiṭaka* describes a gradual path toward **Sammā Samādhi**, known as *Anyathāra Ceto Vimutti* (“alternative liberation of the mind”).

#### **Anyathā Ceto Vimutti (Alternative Mental Liberation)**

This meditation technique—an extension or support to the primary *lokottara* (supramundane) path—offers an alternative route guiding the meditator toward *Samāpatti* (deep absorption). From within this state, the practitioner contemplates the three characteristics of all sufferings: **Anicca** (insatiability), **Dukkha** (suffering), and **Anattā** (futility), in order to progress toward **Sammā Samādhi** (right concentration).

At the beginning of the meditation, a **Karmasthāna** (meditation object) is used to gradually weaken attachment to the five aggregates: *Rūpa* (form), *Vedanā* (feeling), *Saññā* (perception), *Saṅkhāra* (mental formations) and *Viññāna* (consciousness).

During transitional moments—brief silent gaps between changes in the Karmasthāna—the meditator shifts attention to the breath, observing its natural rhythm. Alternatively, focus may return to a *laukika Anāpāna* (a mundane breath-related object) to further refine mindfulness.

#### *Aggressive Method for Monastics*

A more intense meditative approach—suitable for monastics but generally impractical for lay practitioners—can accelerate progress to **Dhyāna Level 4** by **starving the senses of stimulation** through prolonged sensory restraint and by **halting the detailed analysis of sensory inputs**.

Examples include:

- Avoid examining a new car (i.e., sensory perception) in detail
- Refrain from dissecting the ingredients of food
- Do not analyse unpleasant smells

This disciplined restraint reduces the formation of **Abhi-Saṅkhāra** (strong mental fabrications) and gradually weakens **Saṅkhāra** (mental formations),

thereby minimizing the emergence of **Kleśa** (mental afflictions or defilements).

## 32. The Roller Coaster Experiences of Dhyāna

To enter and stabilise in higher Dhyāna states, one must genuinely understand and internalise the following teachings:

- **Assāda (gratification), Ādīnava (drawbacks), Nissaraṇa (escape)**
- **Pancha-Upādāna Skandha** (the five clinging aggregates)
- **Anicca, Dukkha, Anattā** (insatiability, suffering, futility)

Without this experiential insight, progress remains conceptual.

### *Mind's Temporary Regression and Stabilisation*

It is normal for the mind to occasionally shift from *Savitarka* (meditative thought) and *Savichāra* (sustained attention on the meditation object) to their opposites: *Vitarka-Vichāra* (wandering thoughts toward worldly concerns). With persistence in practice, the mind gradually stabilizes again. At this stage, more than 51% of *Rāga* (attachment or sensual craving) is relinquished.

### *Kleśa and the Roots of Suffering*

Understanding and reducing Kleśa (mental afflictions) is vital for inner clarity and liberation. These afflictions have three primary roots:

- Mōha – delusion or confusion
- Dveṣha – hatred or aversion
- Rāga – greed or sensual craving

These three roots fuel Taṇhā (craving), which in turn gives rise to Dukkha (suffering).

### *The Paradox of Effort: Do Not Chase Dhyāna*

One cannot attain *Dhyāna* through craving or by desiring the experience—it is not a goal to be acquired like a material possession. As a traditional teaching metaphor wisely puts it: “You cannot reach *Dhyāna* with a 4-wheel drive.”

Effort rooted in grasping leads only to frustration. Let go of striving. Trust in the process. With correct and sustained practice, *Dhyāna* arises naturally—uninvited, yet unmistakable.

### *Limits of External Guidance*

An *Ārya* teacher can guide a sincere practitioner up to the fourth level of *Dhyāna* through *Dhamma* instruction. Beyond this point, further progress relies entirely on the practitioner's own effort and dedication.

It is essential not to engage with any visions, forms, or images that may arise during *Dhyāna*. Interaction with such phenomena can lead to psychological or spiritual harm, for which no external protection is possible.

If the mind is successfully purified of defilements and the practitioner attains the first through fourth deep absorption states (*Dhyānas*), they may develop the mental power to recall past lives (*pubbenivāsānussati ñāṇa*).

### *Experiences in Dhyāna Level 5 and Beyond*

The fifth *Dhyāna* marks the entry into the *Arūpa Dhyānas*—the formless absorptions. At this stage, all five physical senses shut down, leaving only pure mental awareness. One may perceive nothing but the vastness of space, .

From levels five through eight, the practitioner transcends material existence, refining the mind in preparation to escape *Saṃsāra*. These states lie beyond the reach of scientific explanation and defy conceptual understanding.

### *Unlearning and Simplicity: The Buddhist Challenge*

For many Buddhists, conditioning from learned views, doctrines, and rituals can delay genuine progress. Often, there is more to unlearn than to learn. Achieving *Dhyāna* may require days or even weeks of consistent meditation practice to undo deeply ingrained habitual thought patterns.

This is our current understanding, but further scientific evidence may emerge in the future regarding how *Lokottara* meditation practices may exert a significant therapeutic influence on the onset and remission of serious illnesses, such as cancer. However, sufficient evidence is not currently available to establish a definitive link.

### 33. Dhyāna distractors

#### Healing Powers of Meditation

*Lokottara* meditation is not a therapeutic tool for curing diseases. However, Buddhist philosophy emphasises control of the mind—maintaining a *pure* (*prabhāsvara*) state by allowing thoughts to arise without being tainted by **rāga** (attachment), **dvesha** (aversion), or **moha** (delusion). This mental discipline fosters a mindset more conducive to overall well-being. Its health benefits are particularly relevant to psychosomatic conditions, including mental health issues, allergies, arthritis, and specific disabilities with psychological components.

**Dhyāna** is not merely a state of concentration—it is a measure of your success in dissociating from *Assāda* (the deceptive pleasure or gratification we seek in sensory experiences). This dissociation is cultivated through insight into the truth of *Assāda*, by contemplating *Ādinava*—the dangers and drawbacks that follow sensory indulgence—using the lens of the Three Characteristics:

1. *Anicca* (insatiability)
2. *Dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness/suffering)
3. *Anattā* (the futility)

#### Deceptive Experiences During Meditation

As one enters deeper states of meditation or **Dhyāna**, the mind becomes increasingly refined. During such states, some meditators may encounter unexpected visual or auditory experiences, such as:

- *Visions of extreme beauty or pleasure*
- *Voices or sounds that seem to offer guidance*

These phenomena are **not signs of realisation**—they may be external interventions or mental projections, sometimes influenced by unseen realms. Regardless of their apparent beauty or appeal, they remain subject to the Three Characteristics of all sufferings: **Anicca, Dukka and Anattā**.

If one **develops Rāga** (attachment or craving) towards these experiences, or **mentally engages or follows** them:

- It can **halt progress in meditation**.
- It may lead to **unexpected karmic or psychological consequences**.

- One risks becoming **entangled** with energies or entities beyond one's control.

### *The Right Approach*

- Observe such phenomena with **detached mindfulness**.
- Apply **Anicca, Dukkha, Anattā** to all arising experiences—even the most subtle and refined ones.
- Return your attention to your meditation object or the insight you are developing.
- Do not assign meaning, direction, or importance to these sensory-like appearances.

This is a core principle in protecting and strengthening **Samma Samādhi** (Right Concentration) and avoiding diversion from the **Noble Eightfold Path**.

### **'Black' (Dark) Energy**

Just as there is white (positive) energy, there is also its opposite—black (dark) energy. This dark energy can obstruct progress in meditation and hinder the attainment of *Dhyāna*.

Because our default existential state is rebirth, we often engage in wholesome, *laukika* (mundane) actions aimed at securing a more favorable rebirth—such as in one of the heavenly realms. However, these realms are neither eternal nor boundless. Even celestial beings, residing in various heavenly tiers, must eventually pass away.

At the end of each life, what truly endures are our *kamma* (actions)—both good and bad. Good deeds may lead to better rebirths with less suffering, but this, too, is impermanent and does not bring liberation. In general, about 90% of defilements can be corrected or overcome, except for a few deeply rooted ones. Regardless of one's status or intentions, *kamma* inevitably yields *vipāka* (results). This is the inescapable law of moral causation.

### 34. Why We Need Directed Meditation

Meditation is not primarily a therapeutic tool for treating diseases—though certain conditions may improve as a result of its practice. However, it is generally not recommended for individuals suffering from severe depression, schizophrenia, or conditions believed to involve supernatural or spiritual disturbances, as engaging in meditation under such circumstances can potentially be harmful.

In the Buddhist tradition, there are two streams of practice: *laukika* (mundane) and *lokottara* (supramundane). Many practitioners focus on *laukika* methods, aiming to improve their current lifestyles and secure favourable rebirths, including existence in heavenly realms. Actions such as self-serving *dāna* (generosity given with expected returns), as opposed to selfless giving, typically fall into this category.

However, the original teachings of the Lord Buddha were fundamentally *lokottara* in nature—focused on transcending the cycle of rebirth and attaining ultimate happiness through detachment. This supramundane path unfolds through *sammā samādhi* (right concentration), beginning with the attainment of the four *Dhyānas* (meditative absorptions).

Uncontrolled sensory contact gives rise to craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging, leading to insatiable desires and attachments—conditions marked by *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering). These cravings bind us to *saṃsāra*—the endless cycle of rebirth and the suffering that accompanies it. The only way to end this cycle is by attaining *Nirvāṇa*, the cessation of craving. This is made possible by disciplining our automatic responses to sensory contact, restraining ourselves, cultivating wholesome mental states, and practicing mindfulness and *Dhyāna*.

“Your mind is clean—keep it clean.”

Do not allow it to be polluted by *rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). Instead, cultivate *mettā* (loving-kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). Remember: all conditioned phenomena are *anicca* (insatiable), *dukkha* (unsatisfactory), and *anattā* (futile). Only *Nirvāṇa* is *nicca* (satiable), *sukha* (blissful), and *atta* (true self or essence).

As discussed earlier, what we read, understand, or know from secondary sources may not always reflect the absolute teachings of the Lord Buddha. Certain aspects of the *Dhamma* remain challenging to explain due to factors

such as mistranslation, misinterpretation, or the incorporation of rituals and practices that deviate from the original path. In other cases, certain teachings may align with natural laws that modern science has yet to discover or fully articulate.

Therefore, our understanding of *Dhamma* must evolve through personal experience. The most reliable way to interpret *Dhamma* is by linking it to our direct meditative and life experiences, ensuring that our understanding does not conflict with what we observe and feel. Many aspects of the teachings remain open to interpretation or critique. They are offered here not as dogma, but as points for your own reflection, inquiry, and deeper exploration.

### The Five, Eight, and Ten Precepts: A Rule or a Result?

There is often a discrepancy in how the Five Precepts—commonly regarded as a foundational code of conduct for laypeople—are interpreted. While they are typically taught as ethical guidelines, the *Tipiṭaka* presents them not merely as external rules, but as natural behaviours that arise involuntarily in an *Ariyā Sāvaka* (noble disciple) progressing toward higher levels of *Dhyāna*.

In this context, the Five Precepts are not imposed from the outside, but are spontaneously observed as a result of inner purification and mental refinement. As the mind advances through stages of meditative absorption, these ethical behaviours become second nature—no longer deliberate acts of restraint, but the natural expression of a purified mind.

The Five Precepts can also be understood in relation to the *Dasa Akusala*—the ten unwholesome (immoral) actions. Each precept addresses and counters specific aspects of these ten defilements, highlighting the deep interconnection between ethical discipline and meditative development.

Ultimately, the Five Precepts—and their corresponding sub-precepts—must be internalised through understanding, not imposed as rigid rules. True ethical transformation arises from insight and personal reflection, not from coercion.

### Getting Rid of Immoral Acts (*Dasa Akusala*)

Akusala (unwholesome or unskillful kamma) arises from three root causes: desire in the form of greed (*Lōbha*), ill will or hatred (*Dvesha*), and ignorance or delusion (*Moha*). These mental states are the fundamental sources of suffering. All actions originate from three domains: body, speech, and mind.

According to Buddhist teachings, ten unwholesome actions (*Dasa Akusala*) arise from these domains and constitute *Akusala kamma*:

- ⇒ **Bodily actions:** killing, stealing, sexual misconduct
- ⇒ **Verbal actions:** lying, harsh speech, divisive speech, slander
- ⇒ **Mental actions:** covetousness, ill will, wrong views (delusion)

Any action rooted in *Lōbha* (greed), *Dōsa* (hatred), or *Mōha* (delusion) is considered *Akusala* (unwholesome). In contrast, actions rooted in *Alōbha* (non-greed), *Adōsa* (non-hatred), and *Amōha* (non-delusion or wisdom) are regarded as *Kusala* (wholesome).

Overcoming the *Dasa Akusala*—the ten unwholesome actions—is a gradual process requiring both understanding and inner transformation. This process involves three key steps for each unwholesome tendency:

### 1. Recognition

The first step is to clearly recognize and acknowledge the presence of the unwholesome tendency—whether it arises through body (*kāya*), speech (*vācā*), or mind (*mano*). This involves honest self-reflection, free from justification or denial.

### 2. Restraint and Mindfulness

Next, one must restrain the impulse before it manifests, using mindfulness (*sati*) and ethical vigilance (*hiri-ottappa*—a sense of moral conscience and fear of wrongdoing). Here, the Five Precepts serve as practical tools to support day-to-day ethical awareness.

### 3. Replacement and Cultivation

Finally, the unwholesome tendency should be replaced with its wholesome counterpart—for example, replacing hatred with *mettā* (loving-kindness), or greed with *nekkhamma* (renunciation). This step involves deliberate mental cultivation and supports progress on the path of *sīla* (moral virtue), *samādhi* (concentration), and *prajñā* (wisdom).



5. Quitting (*Prahana Sīla*)
4. Dissociation from (*Vermani Sīla*)
3. De-motivation (*Chethana Sīla*)
2. Opposition to (*Sanwara Sīla*)
1. Unbreakable (*Avithikkama Sīla*)

Ten Immoral Acts (Dasa Akushala)	
Manō Saṅkhāra acts (immoral acts done with the mind)	Abhijjā (covetousness; greed)
	Vyāpāda (ill-will, hatred)
	Micchā Ditthi (wrong views)
Vaci Saṅkhāra Acts (immoral acts done in speech)	Musāvāda (lying)
	Pisunāvācā (slandering)
	Parusāvācā (harsh speech)
	Sampappalāpā (frivolous talk)
Kāya Saṅkhāra Acts (immoral acts done with the body)	Pānātipātā (killing)
	Adinnādānā (taking what is not given)
	Kāmēsu micchācārā (excessive of sense pleasures)

These Five Precepts—and their corresponding sub-precepts—must be **internalised through understanding**, not imposed as rigid rules. True ethical transformation arises from insight and personal reflection, not from coercion.

It is unrealistic—and spiritually misguided—to expect that an entire nation can be led to *Nirvāna* merely by enforcing these precepts through authoritarian or punitive means. Attempting to instil virtue through fear, military-style discipline, or threats of reprisal contradicts the very essence of the Buddha's path, which is rooted in awareness, compassion, and voluntary renunciation.

Lasting moral conduct arises from the purification of the mind, not from external compliance. The Five Precepts, when properly understood, are not obligations, but **natural expressions of a mind aligned with wisdom and freedom**.

### Sīla: By Character, Not by Fear

**Rāga–Virāga–Nirodha**—the cessation of craving through dispassion—is the only way to truly realize the **Noble Eightfold Path**:

1. Right Understanding (*sammā-ditthi*) →

2. Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*) →
3. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*) →
4. Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*) →
5. Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) →
6. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*) →
7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) →
8. Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).

When one truly comprehends **anicca** (insatiable), one naturally refrains from immoral actions—not out of adherence to precepts or rituals, but from a deep, intuitive understanding that such actions are ultimately fruitless and harmful.

Thus, *Sīla* (ethical conduct) is not something artificially imposed or merely adopted through vows. It arises spontaneously when one enters the state of *Sota-prajñā* (stream-entry through wisdom). *Sraddhā* (faith) does not stem from blind ritual observance but emerges naturally as a direct consequence of *prajñā* (insightful understanding).

### Citta-Bhāvanā

A (pure) *citta* (mind) is naturally clean (*prabhāsvara*) in nature. However, that *citta* becomes contaminated by defilements (*kleśa*). *Avidyā* and *Tanḥā* are the roots from which *kleśa* arise. Once you cease these, the amount of *kleśa* you have will significantly diminish.

*Citta-bhāvanā* involves contemplation, thought, and insight meditation. It is believed that a person who has not heard of the Dhamma (*assutavā puthujano*) is not aware of its true nature. Therefore, *citta-bhāvanā* is not recommended unless one is a *lokottara Ariyā Śrāvaka* in *Samma Samādhi*.

### What is an Arahant's Vipāka Vedanā?

An Arahant's *Vipāka Vedanā* refers to the resultant feelings or sensations that arise from past *kamma* (karma). These sensations may manifest as *sukha* (pleasant), *dukkha* (unpleasant), or *upekkhā* (neutral/equanimous) experiences. Although liberated, the Arahant still experiences these sensations as the natural fruition of previous actions—but without generating craving (*taṇhā*) or aversion in response.

In Buddhism, *upekkhā* signifies equanimity—a calm, balanced mental state undisturbed by pleasure or pain. It is not mere indifference, but a refined inner poise that neither clings to joy nor resists discomfort. Thus, *upekkhā* can be both a neutral feeling (*adukkham-asukhā vedanā*) and a cultivated attitude of serene impartiality toward all experiences.

The nature of *Vipāka Vedanā* depends on whether the past *kamma* was *kusala* (wholesome) or *akusala* (unwholesome). For ordinary beings, such sensations often trigger reactions rooted in desire, aversion, or delusion, thereby perpetuating the cycle of *samsāra*. In contrast, an Arahant—having eradicated all defilements (*kilesas*)—remains unmoved. Though *Vipāka Vedanā* continues to arise from residual *kamma*, the Arahant observes them with complete equanimity, free from attachment or identification.

This illustrates a core insight of the *Dhamma*: all beings arise (*uppāda*) and function within a continuous stream of sensations and perceptions, conditioned by past actions. Liberation is not found in avoiding these experiences, but in meeting them with unwavering clarity and non-reactivity.

### 35. Nāma-Rūpa and Mana-Dhamma

*Nāma-rūpa* (mind and matter, or name-and-form) is a concept found in the *Tipiṭaka*, though it remains largely misunderstood by most ordinary people. When we reflect on our sensations, we appear to record them in memory—commonly believed to reside in the brain. However, this may not be entirely accurate.

*Vipāka Vedanā* (resultant feelings) that arise from our sensations are thought to be transmitted in an aura-like format, invisible to the naked eye, and stored for later retrieval in the form of *Nāma-Gutta* (a kind of mental encoding). This stored consciousness, or *Viññāṇaṃ*, is described as *anidassanaṃ* (not visible) and *appatiṭṭha* (not tangible). While the exact location of this storage is unknown, it is believed that such information can be recalled as *Mana-Dhamma* (mental objects) when we encounter similar or related stimuli.

For example, we can instantly recognize our mother's face. This recognition occurs because the *Mana-Dhamma* associated with her previous images are retrieved and processed upon seeing her. In this way, our *Saṅkhāra* (mental formations) engage *Mana-Dhamma* during the experience of *Vipāka Vedanā*, and may even escalate to *Abhisāṅkhāra* (intentional mental formations), depending on the reaction.

It is *Nāma-rūpa*—the interplay of mental and material phenomena—and subsequently *Mana-Dhamma*, that give rise to *Vipāka Vedanā*. These can be *Kusala* (wholesome/white), *Akusala* (unwholesome/black), or a mixture of both. Humans experience all three types of *Vipāka Vedanā*, while beings in the Deva and Brahma realms receive only wholesome forms, and beings in the hell realms receive only unwholesome ones. Thus, pleasurable and painful experiences are distributed in accordance with karmic realms—corresponding to Heaven and Hell, respectively.

Yet, we still do not fully understand how *Nāma-rūpa* is formed, where it is stored, or what precisely triggers its retrieval as *Mana-Dhamma*. This process appears to occur instantaneously—within virtually no measurable time—and may involve a mode of transmission or encoding not yet recognized by modern science. The *Tipiṭaka* describes 108 forms of *Nāma-rūpa*, often interpreted as energy emissions or experiential modes. These may correspond to distinct types of "auras" or energetic expressions emitted from the various links in the chain of *Paṭicca Samuppāda* (dependent origination), each arising from specific karmic and mental conditions.

### Ākāsa-Dhātu

*Ākāsa-Dhātu* is a term frequently used by *Ārya Śrāvakas* and appears to refer to the sublunar atmosphere—an aspect of *Ākāśa* (space or ether). In traditional Indian cosmology, *Ākāśa* denotes either “space” or the “æther,” a fundamental element associated with the origin and structure of the universe.

Ancient and medieval science described æther (also called quintessence) as a hypothetical substance that permeates the region of the cosmos above the terrestrial sphere. This terrestrial or sublunar sphere—comprising the realm below the Moon—was believed to consist of the four classical elements. In Buddhism, these elements are known as the *Sathara Mahābhūta*: earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vāyo*).

In Buddhist phenomenology, *Ākāśa* is categorized into two forms:

- *Ākāsa-Dhātu* – limited or conditioned space
- *Ajatākāsā* – unconditioned or infinite space

*Ākāsa-Dhātu*, therefore, corresponds to conditioned, finite space within the sublunar realm, serving as the spatial field in which the *Sathara Mahābhūta* interact. It is the medium through which physical phenomena arise and function. This aligns with ancient cosmological perspectives, in which the sublunar world is governed by material and elemental laws, distinct from the transcendent nature of the higher celestial or formless realms.

### 36. Dasa Paramita (Buddha Paramita): The Ten Perfections

Dasa Paramita refers to the Ten Perfections that a Buddha has fully realised—virtues cultivated by a Bodhisattva on the path to enlightenment. These perfections are presented here to support the understanding of the Ārya Śrāvaka (noble disciple), offering insight into the highest qualities one can attain. They represent a comprehensive spiritual journey for the dedicated practitioner. Please see below the Ten Paramitas, or Ten Perfections:

1. Dāna Pāramī (Perfection of Giving/Generosity): Giving freely without expecting anything in return.
2. Sīla Pāramī (Perfection of Virtue/Morality): Living by ethical principles and precepts.
3. Nekkhammā Pāramī (Perfection of Renunciation): Letting go of worldly attachments and desires.
4. Paññā Pāramī (Perfection of Wisdom): Developing insight and understanding.
5. Viriya Pāramī (Perfection of Energy/Effort): Applying determined effort in wholesome actions.
6. Khanti Pāramī (Perfection of Patience/Tolerance): Enduring hardship and negativity with patience.
7. Sacca Pāramī (Perfection of Truthfulness): Being honest and truthful in word and deed.
8. Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī (Perfection of Resolution/Determination): Setting firm intentions and striving towards goals.
9. Mettā Pāramī (Perfection of Loving-kindness): Cultivating universal love and compassion.
10. Upekkhā Pāramī (Perfection of Equanimity): Maintaining balance and impartiality in all situations.

Essentially, the Dasa Paramita represents a path of self-cultivation through the development of positive qualities and virtues, ultimately leading to enlightenment.

### *What can the Ārya Śrāvaka learn from the Ten Pāramitās?*

It is noteworthy that the Pāramitās, or Perfections, can serve as guiding ideals or mission aims for the Ārya Śrāvaka in their spiritual development. As one cultivates wholesome qualities (kusala gati) within, these perfections naturally mature in one's personality and character. Therefore, these qualities are explained here in more detail to aid our understanding and to support the promotion of our spiritual growth.

1. **Dāna** – Generosity, liberality, and selfless giving. This includes acts of charity, offerings, alms, and gifts—both material and immaterial.
2. **Śīla** – Virtue, ethics, morality, and proper conduct. It involves discipline, observance of precepts, and living a blameless life.
3. **Nekkhamma** – Renunciation or letting go. This refers to turning away from indulgence in sensual pleasures and cultivating contentment through simplicity and detachment.
4. **Prajñā** – Wisdom or discernment. This is a refined and skilled mental quality developed through observation, reflection, and an understanding of the true nature of reality.
5. **Vīrya** – Effort, diligence, and effort. It includes zeal, persistence, perseverance, and the strength to overcome laziness and discouragement.
6. **Kṣānti** – Patience, tolerance, and forbearance. It involves the ability to endure hardships and accept others with a calm and composed attitude. Note: While often translated as "forgiveness," the more profound meaning includes resilience and inner strength.
7. **Satya** – Truthfulness and honesty. This involves being sincere, reliable, and true in thought, word, and deed.
8. **Adhiṣṭhāna** – Determination or resolution. It signifies strong will, unwavering purpose, and firm commitment to one's spiritual goals.
9. **Maitrī (Mettā)** – Loving-kindness and goodwill. This is a genuine wish for the happiness and well-being of others, free from attachment or possessiveness.

10. **Upekṣā (Upekkhā)** – Equanimity and impartiality. It refers to serene detachment, balance of mind, and objective awareness, distinct from indifference or apathy.

These qualities often develop progressively, beginning with mindfulness (*sati*) and culminating in equanimity (*upekkhā*). Each perfection supports and strengthens the next, creating a foundation for deeper spiritual insight. On the path of a noble disciple (*Ārya Śrāvaka*), these qualities may emerge at varying levels of maturity. When fully cultivated, particularly through insight meditation (*vipassanā bhāvanā*), they give rise to supramundane path knowledge, leading to the direct realisation of the Four Noble Truths.

An essential factor in this development is wise or appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). This refers to the mental habit of reflecting on things in terms of cause and effect, contemplating the consequences of one's thoughts and actions, and investigating the conditioned nature of phenomena. Such attention fosters the growth of insight (*prajñā*) and deepens wisdom.

When unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) is present, the unrisen seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅgā*) fail to arise, and those that have already arisen do not develop further. In contrast, with wise attention, the unrisen factors are activated, and the arisen ones mature, leading the practitioner toward full awakening.

Another indispensable condition for spiritual growth is association with a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa mitra sēvanā*). There is no other external factor more beneficial for developing the seven factors of enlightenment than the guidance, support, and example of a virtuous and wise companion on the path. A *kalyāṇa mitra* not only inspires but also helps one stay grounded in the Dhamma, corrects misunderstandings, and encourages the cultivation of wholesome qualities.

### 37. Have I Made Progress Toward Nirvana: A Self-Test

There is no formal test one can take to determine whether Nirvana has been achieved. However, it is beneficial to periodically reflect on your spiritual progress. Simply review the Thirty-Seven Factors—organized into seven groups—and observe how well you understand these abstract principles and how far you’ve come in embodying them.

This test is about your mind’s responsiveness and therefore cannot be reduced to a written exam that only assesses memory recall. It must evaluate how deeply these insights are integrated into your mind’s processing system. These qualities are interconnected, often overlapping, and momentary—they reflect your current mental state. Only you can determine whether they have become lasting traits.

Our ultimate goal should not be to merely memorize these teachings, but to consistently reflect on them and reassure ourselves that we are making progress. At the heart of this journey lies the ability to maintain equanimity toward sensory experiences—examined through the lenses of *Raga* (attachment), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion). This equanimity signals that you are drawing closer to the goal.

Contemplating *Anicca* (insatiability), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anatta* (futility, i.e., recognizing the futility of a fixed self-identity) in relation to sensory perceptions serves as a powerful tool for refining the mind’s qualities toward ultimate realization: *Nibbāna* or *Nirvana*.

#### Take the Test

The Thirty-Seven Factors, known as the “Requisites of Enlightenment,” form a comprehensive framework of wholesome qualities and mental states that support spiritual growth and lead toward awakening. These factors are grouped into seven categories, collectively referred to as the *Bodhipakkhiya Dhammas*, and include the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhaṅgā*). Cultivating these qualities enables one to fully understand the Four Noble Truths and advance steadily toward liberation.

Ultimately, understanding the goal, knowing how to walk the path, and recognizing your own progress through sincere self-reflection are essential. No external test can reveal your spiritual development better than exposing yourself to extreme perceptions of pleasure, displeasure, or neutrality—especially using your preferred stimuli. By doing so, you can better evaluate

whether your mind truly remains free of *Raga*, *Dvesha*, or *Moha*, and gain clarity about where you stand on the spiritual journey.

1. **Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*)**
  - Mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*)
  - Mindfulness of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*)
  - Mindfulness of the mind (*cittānupassanā*)
  - Mindfulness of mental objects (*dhammānupassanā*)
2. **Four Right Efforts (*Sammappadhāna*)**
  - To prevent unwholesome states from arising
  - To abandon unwholesome states that have arisen
  - To develop wholesome states that have not yet arisen
  - To maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen
3. **Four Bases of Spiritual Power (*Iddhipāda*)**
  - Concentration due to desire (*chanda*)
  - Concentration due to Effort (*virīya*)
  - Concentration due to mind (*citta*)
  - Concentration due to investigation (*vīmaṃsā*)
4. **Five Faculties (*Indriya*)**
  - Faith (*saddhā*)
  - Effort (*virīya*)
  - Mindfulness (*sati*)
  - Concentration (*samādhi*)
  - Wisdom (*prajñā*)
5. **Five Powers (*Bala*)**
  - Faith (*saddhā*)
  - Energy (*virīya*)
  - Mindfulness (*sati*)
  - Concentration (*samādhi*)
  - Wisdom (*prajñā*)

(Note: These mirror the Five Faculties but are considered unshakable when fully developed.)
6. **Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhaṅgā*)**
  - Mindfulness (*sati*)
  - Investigation of the Dhamma (*dhammavicaya*)
  - Effort (*virīya*)
  - Joy or rapture (*pīti*)
  - Tranquillity (*passaddhi*)
  - Concentration (*samādhi*)

- Equanimity (*upekkhā*)
- 7. **The Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*)**
  - Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi*)
  - Right Intention (*sammā sankappa*)
  - Right Speech (*sammā vācā*)
  - Right Action (*sammā kammanta*)
  - Right Livelihood (*sammā ājīva*)
  - Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*)
  - Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati*)
  - Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*)

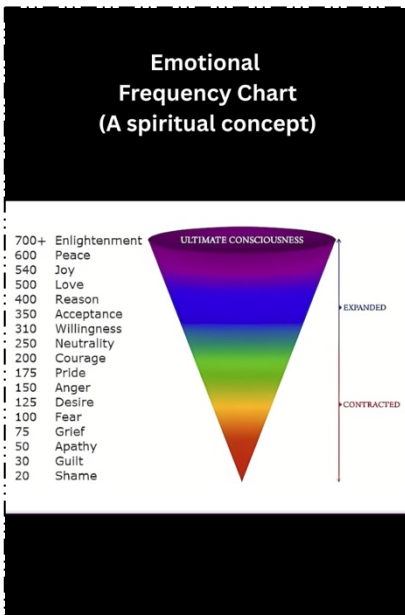
### 38. Supplementary knowledge

This section explores additional topics of interest drawn from various spiritual traditions that are contemporary with—and complementary to—a broader understanding of core Buddhist philosophy.

#### Aura: The Invisible Radiance

An aura is often described as an invisible energy field that surrounds and reflects an individual’s physical, emotional, and spiritual states. Commonly perceived as a person’s “vibe” or “energy,” it may explain why one can feel calm, energised, or uneasy in someone’s presence—even before a word is spoken. Serving as both a boundary and a dynamic interface, the aura stores emotional and spiritual impressions while also acting as a conduit for receiving, interpreting, and responding to external energies.

Modern interpretations liken the aura to a holographic field. Although its precise structure remains scientifically undefined, various technologies have attempted to visualize it. One such method involves the use of an "aura



machine," which detects changes in electrical resistance—often through the hands—to generate colour representations of a person’s emotional state. These colours, typically red, blue, and yellow, are believed to correspond to distinct affective or energetic conditions.

The hues of the aura can shift in response to emotional states such as **rāga** (attachment), **dvesha** (aversion), and **moha** (delusion).

While certain colour patterns tend to appear consistently during specific emotional states, the aura itself is dynamic and unique to each individual.

A mind that is truly “cool” or calm may exert subtle influences on *nāma-rūpa* (matter and energy forms), potentially resulting in

different phenotypic expressions—what some traditions refer to as the

“aura.” However, science has yet to clearly define what an aura is or determine the specific electromagnetic range—if any—to which it might belong. An emotional frequency chart has been described in some circles, suggesting a correlation between an individual’s emotional state and energetic frequency, with enlightenment representing the highest point on that scale. On the other hand, the exact constituents and mechanisms of *nāma-rūpa* (*matter and energy forms*) remain scientifically undefined.

Prolonged and consistent dissociation from **rāga**, **dveṣha**, and **moha** through active meditation may eventually deactivate the genetic mechanisms responsible for the mental and physical reactions triggered by these forces. This transformation likely reflects the state of an **Arahant**—a being whose mind and body are no longer provoked or influenced by stimuli rooted in rāga, dvesha, or moha.

### *Aura in Meditation*

During deep meditation, it is said that an *Ariyā Śrāvaka* (noble disciple) may radiate a distinct aura composed of varying energy waveforms. These radiations are believed to generate an electromagnetic field that extends around the practitioner and, according to some spiritual traditions, may influence unseen beings in the surrounding space. As such, it is customary in certain traditions to offer a pre-meditative pardon—especially during *Karmasthāna* chanting—to any invisible entities that might be disturbed by one’s energetic presence.

When a person places their hand on an aura machine, it produces a visual representation of their energetic field on a screen. In modern terms, the aura is often equated with a person’s “vibe” or “vibration,” which may manifest as a so-called “bad” (dark or black) or “good” (light or white) aura, influenced by the meditator’s internal emotional state.

The origin of the aura is understood to lie in the mind and its emotional movements—*rāga* (attachment), *dvesha* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). These defilements produce energetic waves that radiate outward. In the absence of such mental impurities—namely, greed, hatred, and delusion—the aura is said to become pure or white. This state of inner illumination is often reported by those who have attained higher levels of *Dhyāna* (meditative absorption).

While anecdotal and philosophical traditions provide vivid and meaningful accounts, the aura remains largely unverified in scientific terms. Further

empirical research is needed to explore its nature, origin, and measurable effects.

There is also a profound connection between the aura and *cetanā*—volition or intentional mental activity. Since the aura is considered energetic, it is believed that one's volition directly influences the quality of energy one emits. This aligns with the Buddha's teaching: "**Cetanāham bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi,**" which translates as: "*Monks, it is volition that I call kamma.*" In essence, volition determines karmic energy and its consequences. Although this principle is foundational to Buddhist thought, it has yet to be fully validated by modern science.

According to aura machine readings, specific colours are associated with different emotional and energetic states:



- **Red:** Indicates desires related to power, greed, and hatred—closely linked to *dvesha* (aversion).

- **Yellow:** Associated with cheerfulness, optimism, and intellectual activity—often aligned with *rāga* (attachment).

- **Blue:** Linked to loyalty, devotion, and trust—qualities sometimes related to *moha* (delusion) in its more refined forms. Individuals with a predominantly blue aura are believed to have a stronger ability to enter meditative states.

In terms of energy, the colour spectrum may also correspond to vibrational frequency, with blue

carrying more energy than yellow, and red having the least—similar to the flame colours in a gas burner.

### *Aura and Dhyāna*

At the fourth level of *Dhyāna*, a meditator may experience a sensation of the body becoming “lightened” or luminous, accompanied by a white aura. This is attributed to the role of the mind as the source of inner light. In this context, the aura represents purified karmic energy. It is not uncommon for practitioners engaged in sustained meditation retreats to witness or feel this radiant white presence during deep absorption.

The aura of the **Buddha**, however, is categorically different. It reflects supreme psychic and spiritual power (*mahābala*) and is not born of ordinary emotions such as lust or hatred. His radiance is said to transcend the karmic fluctuations that define the auras of ordinary beings, symbolizing a fully awakened and liberated state of consciousness.

### *Why Should We Discourage Certain Mantras?*

On a similar note, radiant waves emitted during the chanting of harmful or negative mantras can collectively cause harm. While a single vibration may seem harmless, the cumulative intensity of repeated or focused chanting can have a significant impact. This is similar to using a magnifying lens to concentrate sunlight—individual rays are gentle, but when focused, they can generate enough heat to burn. Likewise, the energetic radiation produced by deliberately chanted negative mantras can accumulate and potentially affect others, especially when directed with strong intention or malice.

### **Chakras – The Energy Centres**

We refer to chakras here to offer potential explanations for specific physical symptoms or discomforts that may arise during meditation. These may include pain, stiffness, headaches, dizziness, vertigo, and more. In some cases, such experiences may be linked to “blocked” or imbalanced chakras, where energy is not flowing freely through the body’s subtle energy system.

# 7 Chakras

**Crown Chakra** (Sahasrara)  
Connection to the divine



**CROWN CHAKRA** - The highest Chakra represents our ability to be fully connected spiritually.  
**Location:** The very top of the head.  
**Emotional issues:** Inner and outer beauty, our connection to spirituality, pure bliss.  
**Physical association:** Pineal gland, brain, nervous system.

**Third Eye Chakra** (Ajna)  
Intuition, sense of purpose  
and direction in life



**THIRD EYE CHAKRA** - Our ability to focus on and see the big picture.  
**Location:** Forehead between the eyes. (Also called the Brow Chakra)  
**Emotional issues:** Intuition, imagination, wisdom, ability to think and make decisions.  
**Physical association:** Pituitary gland, eyes, sinuses.

**Throat Chakra** (Vishuddha)  
Self-expression



**THROAT CHAKRA** - Our ability to communicate.  
**Location:** Throat.  
**Emotional issues:** Communication, self-expression of feelings, the truth.  
**Physical association:** Thyroid, respiratory system, teeth, vocal cords.

**Heart Chakra** (Anahata)  
Love, relationships and  
self-acceptance



**HEART CHAKRA** - Our ability to love.  
**Location:** Center of chest just above heart.  
**Emotional issues:** Love, joy, inner peace.  
**Physical association:** Heart, thymus, lower lungs, circulatory system, immune system.

**Solar Plexus Chakra** (Manipura)  
Personal power and ability to  
channel



**SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA** - Our ability to be confident and in-control of our lives.  
**Location:** Upper abdomen in the stomach area.  
**Emotional issues:** Self-worth, self-confidence, self-esteem.  
**Physical association:** Central nervous system, pancreas, liver, digestive tract, skin.

**Sacral Chakra** (Swadhisthana)  
Sexuality and pleasure



**SACRAL CHAKRA** - Our connection and ability to accept others and new experiences.  
**Location:** Lower abdomen, about 2 inches below the navel and 2 inches in.  
**Emotional issues:** Sense of abundance, well-being, pleasure, sexuality.  
**Physical association:** Reproductive organs, kidneys, bowels, immune system.

**Root Chakra** (Muladhara)  
Career, money mindset  
and sense of belonging



**ROOT CHAKRA** - Represents our foundation and feeling of being grounded.  
**Location:** Base of spine in tailbone area.  
**Emotional issues:** Survival issues such as financial independence, money, and food.  
**Physical association:** Spine, rectum, legs, arms, circulatory system.

Each chakra is associated with a color and a specific energy: Red (Root) symbolises grounding and survival; Orange (Sacral) represents creativity and emotions; Yellow (Solar Plexus) is connected to personal power; Green (Heart) relates to love and compassion; Blue (Throat) is linked to communication; Indigo (Third Eye) is associated with intuition, insight, and psychic abilities; and Violet (Crown) represents spiritual awareness, enlightenment, and connection to the divine.

The concept of chakras appears in many spiritual traditions, including *pranic healing*.

### The Seven Major Chakras

		Location:	Function:	Balanced:	Underactive:	Overactive:
1.	Root Chakra (Muladhara)	Base of the spine	Physical grounding, sense of safety and stability	You feel secure, connected, and at home in your body	You may feel fearful, anxious, or unwelcome	May lead to materialism, greed, or resistance to change
2.	Sacral Chakra (Svādhiṣṭhāna)	Lower back/sacral region	Emotions, sexuality, creativity	Emotions flow naturally; openness to intimacy	Emotionally withdrawn, stiff, or closed-off	Emotionally dependent or overly sexual
3.	Solar Plexus Chakra (Maṇipūra)	Upper abdomen, just above the navel	Self-esteem, willpower, social identity	Confident, self-motivated, assertive	Passive, indecisive, timid	Controlling, aggressive, domineering
4.	Heart Chakra (Anāhata)	Center of the chest at heart level	Love, compassion, empathy	Kind, forgiving, emotionally open	Cold, distant, emotionally closed	Overly dependent, possessive, suffocating
5.	Throat Chakra (Viśuddha)	Base of the throat	Communication, expression, truth	Clear, honest communication; creative expression	Shyness, introversion, fear of speaking	Over-talkative, dominating, poor listener
6.	Third Eye Chakra (Ājñā)	Between the eyebrows	Intuition, insight, perception	Clear thinking, strong intuition, imagination	Rigid beliefs, poor intuition, mental confusion	Lost in fantasy, prone to hallucination
7.	Crown Chakra (Sahasrāra)	Top of the head	Spiritual connection, wisdom, awareness	Spiritually aware, open-minded	Spiritually disconnected, dogmatic	Detached from reality, spiritual bypassing

### Why Address Chakras Here?

Chakras are generally active in healthy individuals, yet imbalances may exist unnoticed, just as high blood pressure may go undetected until a health crisis occurs. Similarly, chakra imbalances or "blockages" may manifest subtly until triggered by meditation or spiritual practice.

### Common Causes of Blocked Chakras:

1. Negative thought patterns and emotional energy
2. Energetic "parasites" or unwholesome external influences
3. Energetic cords—both negative and positive attachments

4. Physical illness, such as Tridoṣa imbalances (the three bio-energies referred to in Ayurveda: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*)

### *Energetic Cords and Psychological Influences*

The concept of **cords**—energetic links to people or experiences—is frequently discussed in *pranic healing*. These cords may be positive or negative. Negative cords, in particular, are considered a major contributor to energy blockages and illness.

### *Chakras and Meditation*

During meditation, the activation of *Kundalini* energy is often said to move upward—from the **Root Chakra (Muladhara)** to the **Crown Chakra (Sahasrara)**, and potentially beyond, into the *universal field*. However, in **Lokottara** (supramundane) meditation, higher chakras may activate earlier than the lower ones.

This can create imbalances, sometimes resulting in discomfort. Remedies include:

- Tapping or light physical movement
- Yogic postures
- Chanting or mantra recitation
- Specific hand gestures (mudras)

These techniques aim to stimulate and balance the **lower chakras**, helping to relieve unpleasant sensations during deep meditation.

### *Chakra Frequencies*

Each chakra resonates at a specific frequency that may shift based on emotional or spiritual states:

- **Lower Frequencies:** Anger, fear, and other defilements may lower chakra vibration, especially in the Root Chakra
- **Higher Frequencies:** Meditation elevates chakra vibrations, with **Ārya Dhyāna** believed to produce higher frequencies than **laukika dhyana** (worldly meditation)

In this sense, "opening" a chakra refers to **raising its vibrational frequency**, allowing for greater energetic flow and alignment.

### *Chakra Activation: A Functional Analogy*

You can think of a chakra like a **loudspeaker**—circular and open, regulating the flow of energy.

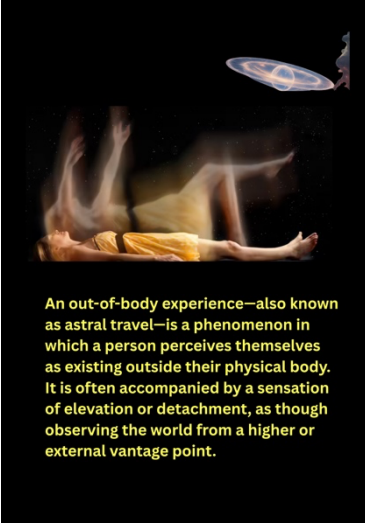
- When an organ (e.g., the heart) is stressed, its corresponding chakra (e.g., Heart Chakra) may overwork to supply healing energy. The chakra’s “mouth” opens wider—this is an **overactive chakra**.
- If the organ is severely impaired, the chakra may weaken and struggle to function, narrowing its energy flow—this is an **underactive chakra**.
- Sometimes, chakras become **congested**, filled with accumulated negative energy. Imagine a loudspeaker partially covered by a football—that’s a **congested chakra**.
- When a chakra lacks vitality and is energetically depleted, it becomes ineffective—this is referred to as **chakra depletion**.

### **Astral Body and Out-of-Body Experiences**

An **Out-of-Body Experience** —also known as **astral travel**—is a phenomenon where one perceives oneself as existing outside the physical body. It is often accompanied by a sensation of elevation or detachment, as if observing the world from a higher or external vantage point.

### *The Astral Body: A Subtle Counterpart*

The **astral body** is described in many spiritual and esoteric traditions as a subtle, non-physical counterpart to the human body. It is believed to:



An out-of-body experience—also known as astral travel—is a phenomenon in which a person perceives themselves as existing outside their physical body. It is often accompanied by a sensation of elevation or detachment, as though observing the world from a higher or external vantage point.

- Exist on a different, more refined **energetic plane**
- Mirror the structure of the physical body
- Remain tethered to the physical form during life
- **Survive physical death**, continuing into the next *Bhava* (existence)

While not directly observable through empirical methods, the astral body is said to play a vital role in consciousness, rebirth, and spiritual evolution. Some traditions propose that karmic imprints and tendencies form

carries karmic imprints and tendencies from one life to the next.

### *Experiencing the Astral Body*

Ariyā Śrāvakas have spoken about the potential to intentionally induce an out-of-body state through deep meditation. He describes the following technique:

*"Relax your body, mentally release weight, and form a clear **Adhiṭṭhāna** (mental resolution or vow) to separate from the body. Under the right conditions, the experience of the astral body may occur."*

This process involves heightened mental stillness and focused volition, often cultivated over time through sustained meditation practice. Though spontaneous out-of-body experiences can occur during sleep, near-death experiences, or trauma, deliberate astral travel typically requires significant spiritual maturity and discipline.

### *At the Moment of Death*

The presence of both a **physical** and **astral body** raises important questions regarding **death and rebirth**:

- Upon physical death, the astral body may continue to exist for a period, carrying the consciousness onward.
- Some traditions suggest that **rebirth** continues not only until the physical cycle ends, but until the **astral body's karmic life span** is also exhausted.
- This implies a subtler, possibly longer cycle of existence beyond mere physical reincarnation.

However, it must be noted that these views—while consistent with certain metaphysical frameworks—are largely **speculative** and not yet verifiable through scientific inquiry.

### *Caution and Reflection*

While many report profound and transformative insights through out-of-body experiences, it's essential to approach this subject with **discernment**. Misinterpretations can arise, and one must be grounded in **ethical conduct**, **clear intention**, and **spiritual guidance**. These experiences are best understood not as goals in themselves, but as possible byproducts of sincere meditative practice.

### **Ariyā Greetings or Mettā Bhāvanā?**

As **Ariyā Śrāvakas** (noble disciples), we often extend blessings to others through phrases such as:

- **Siyalu Sathwayo** – *May all beings be well*
- **Nidhuk Wethwā** – *May they be free from sorrow (as Sotāpannas)*
- **Nirogi Wethwā** – *May they be free from illness (as Sakadāgāmis)*
- **Suwapath Wethwā** – *May they be healthy (as Anāgāmis)*
- **Dukin Miden Wewā** – *May they be free from suffering (by attaining Arahantship)*
- **Nivan Dakith Wā** – *May they realise Nibbāna (as the final liberation)*

However, it is important to understand that these blessings are intended in a **supramundane (lokottara)** sense rather than a merely **mundane (laukika)** one.

In this higher context, the blessings are not literal wishes for worldly pleasure, physical health, or immediate healing. Rather, they express deep

aspirations for the **cessation of Ariyā Dukkha**—the noble understanding of suffering rooted in the defilements of **Rāga** (craving), **Dvesha** (aversion), and **Moha** (delusion).

The true purpose of such phrases is to inspire and support the gradual **abandonment of these mental afflictions**, leading ultimately to **spiritual liberation**. While Buddhist chants are not direct remedies for illness or material hardship, there are anecdotal accounts of unexpected healings among those deeply committed to the meditative path. Such outcomes may be understood as **secondary effects of inner transformation**—including reductions in stress, or profound shifts in mental and emotional equilibrium—arising from sustained spiritual practice.

These blessings—“**Nidhuk Wethwā**,” “**Nirogi Wethwā**,” “**Suwapath Wethwā**,” “**Dukin Miden Wewā**,” and “**Nivan Dakith Wā**”—can also be interpreted symbolically as the **progressive realisation of the four stages of awakening**:

- “**Nidhuk Wethwā**” corresponds to the **Sotāpanna** (*Stream-enterer*), signifying freedom from sorrow rooted in wrong views.
- “**Nirogi Wethwā**” reflects the **Sakadāgāmi** (*Once-returner*), who has significantly weakened sensual desire and ill will—mental defilements that metaphorically ‘disease’ the mind.
- “**Suwapath Wethwā**” aligns with the **Anāgāmi** (*Non-returner*), who has fully overcome these defilements and rests in deep inner tranquility—true mental and spiritual health.
- “**Dukin Miden Wewā**” is fulfilled in the **Arahant**, who has eradicated all defilements and is entirely liberated from suffering.
- Finally, “**Nivan Dakith Wā**” represents the culmination of this noble path—the **full realization of Nibbāna**.

### Soulmate

A soulmate is someone with whom you share a deep, natural connection—romantic or platonic—that transcends surface-level compatibility, creating a profound sense of being truly understood, accepted, and supported. Contrary to the popular notion of singularity, many believe that multiple soulmates can appear throughout one’s lifetime, each serving a unique role in personal evolution.

In modern contexts, a soulmate is often seen as a partner—romantic or otherwise—with whom one shares an extraordinary, enduring bond and the deepest emotional connection. This relationship often evokes a sense of completeness, familiarity, and growth, as though the connection were destined or preordained.

A soulmate bond is frequently experienced as spiritual or karmic, going beyond practical companionship to touch deeper layers of consciousness. It can bring about a powerful sense of recognition, as if one has known the other in a past life. While "soulmate" may suggest exclusivity, various kinds of soul connections exist, each contributing to our journey in distinct ways:

### *Types of Soul Connections:*

- **Soul Partners:** Emotional or professional allies who support your journey, whether briefly or over a lifetime.
- **Soul Ties:** Deep, purpose-driven connections that often catalyze significant changes.
- **Past-Life Soulmates:** Connections marked by intense familiarity, likely carried over from previous lives; they may not be permanent in this one.
- **Karmic Soulmates:** Relationships that challenge and transform you through powerful, sometimes turbulent, life lessons.
- **Romantic Soulmates:** Lovers who foster emotional healing, growth, and deeper understanding of love.
- **Twin Flames:** Considered two halves of the same soul, often mirroring and challenging each other intensely.
- **Companion Soulmates:** Loyal spiritual friends who offer steady support and presence.
- **Soul Families/Groups:** Kindred spirits aligned with your values or life path—even if not physically close.
- **Kindred Spirits:** People who deeply understand you, though not necessarily spiritually connected.
- **Soul Contracts:** Pre-incarnation agreements to play specific roles or fulfill particular purposes in each other's lives.

- **Soul Teachers:** Individuals who guide, heal, or awaken you during pivotal moments.

Even brief encounters can carry the mark of a soulmate, leaving a transformative and lasting imprint on your soul.

From a Buddhist perspective, these long-term *samsaric* bonds—especially those charged with emotional intensity—can evolve into the Five Hindrances, particularly **Kāmacchanda** (sensual desire), rooted in **Rāga** (attachment or craving). To transcend the possessive tendencies that may arise in soulmate dynamics, one must gradually reduce *Rāga* to the level of **Upekkhā** (equanimity). This is cultivated through contemplation of the **Satara Satipaṭṭhāna** (Four Foundations of Mindfulness), which helps loosen clinging and deepen insight.

This path supports the attainment of the **Sakadāgāmi** (Once-Returner) stage, marked by the renunciation of **Vastu Kāma** (object-based sensual desire) toward the soulmate. With continued insight into **Anicca** (insatiability), **Dukkha** (unsatisfactoriness), and **Anattā** (futility), one uproots **Kleśa Kāma** (latent sensual defilements), progressing toward the **Anāgāmi** (Non-Returner) stage—free from the bonds of sensual craving.

### 39. Conclusion

It is important to recognise that discrepancies exist between the original Buddhist teachings and the versions we encounter today. These differences have arisen due to translation errors, misinterpretations, and improper practices over time. Therefore, it is essential to continue exploring historical texts and strive to align contemporary experiences of Buddhist practice with these sources, in an effort to rediscover the absolute truth of Buddhist philosophy.

Today, we can at least confidently comprehend and appreciate the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the attainments associated with *Dhyāna* (meditative absorption).

The superiority of *Supramundane* (*lokottara*) meditation lies in its direct focus on eliminating *Rāga* (craving), *Dvesha* (aversion), and *Moha* (delusion)—the root causes of mental agitation and bodily reactivity, expressed through the nervous system, hormonal responses, and other physiological mechanisms. In contrast, *Mundane* (*laukika*) meditation does not address these root causes directly. Instead, it typically suppresses or redirects them, resulting in only a temporary reduction of *Rāga*, *Dvesha*, and *Moha*-related stimuli. In other words, even an advanced *laukika* meditator may remain susceptible to provocation, whereas a *lokottara* meditator has transcended such reactivity.

#### 40. Author Declarations

We have learned the basics of Buddhist practice from the *Tipiṭaka*, thousands of other texts, and the teachings of our clergy, peers, and colleagues. Various publicly available images have also aided us in illustrating some of our interpretations. We offer deep merit to all the unknown contributors and unacknowledged reviewers of this text.

This book reflects our attempt to explore the fundamental principles of the original Dhamma as taught by Lord Buddha over 2,600 years ago. Given the many translation errors, interpretative inconsistencies, and divisions—both among the clergy and across various texts—it is understandable that many may experience doubt due to existing discrepancies, distortions, and corruptions.

Do not give up. Do not despair. Even this book contains interpretations that seek to relate the Dhamma to modern scientific understanding. It is possible that human wisdom alone is not yet capable of fully grasping the original Dhamma. In other words, Lord Buddha's true teachings may be like a core at the centre of a snowball, now obscured by layers of rust and pollution accumulated over centuries. Human-designed religion, with its imposed rules and regulations, may have been intended to protect the Dhamma, but has often resulted in the exploitation and distortion of its core values for worldly (*laukika*) gain.

The best we can do, at present, is to learn from all available sources—to research, reflect, and apply our own wisdom to clear away these distortions, making the Dhamma itself our only true teacher. This was the purpose behind writing this book.

Such purification of understanding cannot be achieved through imposed rules or fear of negative consequences. Our lack of agreement may simply reflect our limited understanding.

Please also note: this work is a voluntary offering by the authors. There are no financial, organisational, or institutional affiliations influencing its creation.

#### 41. References

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Rāga-kṣayo Nibbānaṃ, Dvesha-kṣayo Nibbānaṃ,  
Moha-kṣayo Nibbānaṃ

*The cessation of craving is Nibbāna, the cessation of aversion is Nibbāna, the  
cessation of delusion is Nibbāna.*



