Cook Your Mind

June 26, 2025

The passage we chatted just now, setting the wheel of Dhamma in motion, often leads to the question, “Where’s the wheel?” It’s in the part where the Buddha talks about how he came to a realization of each of the Four Noble Truths that had never occurred to him before, and not just noting what the truth was in each case, but also noting what the duty was. The First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering. The duty is to comprehend it. The Second Noble Truth, the truth of the origination of suffering. The duty there is to abandon it. The Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering. The duty is to realize it. The Fourth Noble Truth, the path to the cessation of suffering. The duty is to develop it. To realize not only what the truth was, what the duty was, but also that he had completed a duty. That was when he gained awakening. So four times three. Three knowledges for each truth gives you twelve. Which is why he said that he had this three cycles of knowledge with the twelve aspects. Which means that the proper Dhamma wheel should have twelve spokes. Although in ancient India they have many, many spokes. Perhaps to indicate the idea that the wheel is in motion. This is another meaning for the word wheel. The first meaning comes from this type of table. We call it a table. You have the four truths and the three levels of knowledge. Then you have twelve little boxes. You draw that out, it’s called a table. In those days they called it a wheel. For instance, in the Vinaya there are lots and lots of wheels. Dealing with the different ways that you might or might not commit an offense. That’s one meaning of wheel. The second meaning of wheel is power. The king gets up in his chariot and the wheels of his chariot can go unimpeded anywhere. That’s the range of his power. In this case, the Buddhist power of course is in the Dhamma. The Dhamma that vanquishes all other teachings. The passage says that no Mara or Brahma or anybody at all can put a stop to it. So the power of the Dhamma is everywhere. That’s the meaning of the wheel. If we think particularly about the first meaning of the twelve spokes, the Buddha’s wheel has twelve spokes. You ask yourself, how many spokes does your wheel have? We’re lucky to have four. And you can add four more by being clear about what the duties are. Often with suffering we don’t comprehend it, we just try to push it away. Or we try to run away from it. With the cause of suffering we actually try to develop it. There’s many of those things that we crave. Or things that we cultivate actively. So we’re doing the wrong duties. At least know what the duties are. Suffering is to be comprehended. That means understanding it. What is the suffering? It’s the clinging to the aggregates. To the point we have no more passion, aversion, or delusion around them. For the cause of suffering, the duty is to abandon it. That too means to develop dispassion for the craving, for the objects of craving. And then there’s the cessation of suffering. That too is dispassion. When you actually see that you have dispassion for the craving and the suffering falls away. You get to those levels of dispassion in each of those cases by developing the path. In fact, it’s through developing the path that all the other duties get done. So that’s what we’re focusing on right now, which is why we call the practice bhavana, which means to develop. Because as you get the mind on the path, you start with Right View. Right View is the Buddhist way of describing what the problem is, how it can be solved. And the remaining factors of the path are there to help you to see for yourself that what he says is true, both in terms of the facts of suffering and in the value of knowing that you can put it into suffering. For instance, with Right Resolve. It’s interesting that Right Resolve doesn’t focus on the three types of craving the Buddha said cause suffering. It focuses on three mental attitudes that get in the way of concentration. In fact, all the other factors of the path starting with Right Resolve through Right Mindfulness are aimed at getting the mind in Right Concentration. And as you do that, you begin to see how the aggregates function in the mind. Because the aggregates aren’t things. It would be good if there were a better translation in English. The word khandha in Pali means heap or mass. The aggregates are activities. And as you’re holding to the precepts, as you’re developing Right Effort, you’re going to be dealing with these different forms of fabrication, the way you breathe, the way you talk to yourself, your perceptions and feelings. Those are aggregates. You get hands-on practice. And using those aggregates to develop skillful thoughts, to calm the mind down, to create a state of concentration. And then when the mind is in concentration, you begin to see the aggregates even more clearly. And you can see that they really are stressful. They really are not worth holding on to, as long as you keep in mind the fact that there is an alternative, which is the third Noble Truth. If you don’t believe in that alternative, you’re not going to let go. But if you do believe in it, you see there’s got to be something better. And the mind can incline to really comprehending those aggregates, comprehending the clinging and abandoning the craving, all through developing the path. So we work on the development. I was reading an article recently where someone was saying that the Buddhist images for the way we create suffering are all artificial. Building houses, building houses, sand castles. And that the purpose of the path is to allow those things to pass away. Whereas all the images for the path are of natural processes. That’s not the case. There’s a verse where the Buddha said, “Irrigators direct the water. Fletchers straighten the arrow. Carpenters shape the wood. The wise control their minds.” So in the case of places like that, you’re not going simply with nature. Because after all, what does nature do? Nature thrives on sensuality. Nature thrives on craving. That’s the way of nature. As we often say, it’s only natural that the mind is going to go for its cravings. When I say only natural, usually the emphasis is on, well, it’s to be expected. But from the Buddhist point of view, only natural means, okay, that’s as far as it goes. We’re going to go against nature to some extent. Like when irrigators direct water, they have to build dikes, they have to build canals. They have to work with the fact that water tends to go down, but they have to figure out some way to get it to go up sometimes. Go to places it wouldn’t ordinarily go. When you’re making an arrow, you have to have a flame. In fact, you have two flames. And if the arrow shaft is not straight, you have to expose it to heat on one side or the other until it’s finally straightened out. The wood isn’t straight on its own. So sometimes you have to push your mind to make it calm down. Sometimes you have to push it to make it more active. You’re getting to do something it wouldn’t naturally do. It’s the same with carpenters. They want the wood to be straight. The wood is not naturally straight. You have to work with it. In one way you have to work with its nature, but in another way you have to work against the way it’s going to go normally. So as we’re practicing here, we’re trying to use some of the mind’s tendencies, like its desire for comfort, its desire for pleasure, but we’re pointing them in a direction that it doesn’t normally go. Trying to find some comfort with the breath, trying to find some ease with getting the mind to settle down and letting it go. The author of that article said in another article one time that the natural position of your hand is to be relaxed. Well a hand that’s permanently relaxed is a dead hand. A live hand relaxes and grasps, so it relaxes and grasps. If it didn’t grasp anything at all it wouldn’t be a useful hand. That’s its nature. So it’s the same with the mind. To practice you’re going to have to learn what things to grasp and what things not to grasp. What things to let go and what things not to let go. So the practice is not simply following in line with the way of nature. It’s not only natural. It goes against a lot of our tendencies. Because after all it’s taking us to a place we’ve never been before. We’re not relaxing back into our original nature. We’re not telling ourselves that the mind’s basic awareness is already awakened. There’s a fine talk on that topic. It says if it’s already awakened, what kind of awakening is this? We’re suffering. And if the mind was already naturally pure, then if you got it pure again after impurities have come into it, what would be keeping from getting impure again after that? We’re going someplace we haven’t been before. We’re getting out of samsara. Out of the processes of samsara. We’re stopping our samsara-ing, our wandering around. The wandering is natural. Stopping it is not. But it’s where true happiness is. Think of the Buddhist image of a cook. We’re cooking in the mind. So it can provide us with real pleasure. The food on its own. It doesn’t get cooked. If you walked into a kitchen and saw the vegetables cooking themselves, you’d probably want to run away. You have to cook the vegetables the same way you have to cook your mind. But that’s when you can eat it. That’s when you can enjoy it. So focus on the developing. And all the other duties of the Four Noble Truths will come. Because there comes a point when the path is fully developed. And although it requires passion to develop the path, there comes a point where that too has to become something that you comprehend and abandon. As John Munn says, there comes a point where all Four Noble Truths become one. And the duty becomes one. Let go. But before you can let it go, you’ve got to get the path to the point where it’s delivered you to the spot where, when you let go, things open up inside to something you’ve never seen before. So have confidence in this path. It takes time to find joy in it. To learn how to cultivate your conviction. There have been many, many, many, many, many generations of people who’ve benefited from it. And it doesn’t depend on their nationality. It didn’t depend on their gender. All it depended on was their willingness to be true in following the path, developing the path. And the Buddha said it did, that’s the ultimate happiness.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2025/250626_Cook_Your_Mind.mp3>