

# *Skill in Questions*

HOW THE BUDDHA TAUGHT

*Thānissaro Bhikkhu*

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*“That’s the purpose of discussion, that’s the purpose of counsel, that’s the purpose of drawing near, that’s the purpose of lending ear: i.e., the liberation of the mind through no clinging.” — AN 3:68*

*“Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a large fish rise. The thought would occur to him, ‘From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a large fish, not a small one.’ In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: ‘From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question, he is discerning, not dull.’” — AN 4:192*

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## Foreword

This is a book about discernment in action, centered on the Buddha's strategic use of discernment in framing and responding to questions.

The idea for this book was born more than a decade ago from reading three of the Buddha's discourses. The first was SN 44:10, in which he refused to answer the question of whether there is or is not a self. This discourse called attention to the fact that the Buddha had clear ideas about which questions his teachings were meant to answer, and which ones they weren't. I realized that if I wanted to understand and get the best use out of his teaching on not-self, I had to find the questions to which this teaching was a response and not take it out of context. I also realized that the same principle would apply to the Buddha's other teachings as well.

The second discourse was MN 2, which defined appropriate attention—one of the most important qualities of mind in leading to awakening—as the ability to know which questions were worth attending to, and which ones were not. Among the questions listed as not worth attending to were, “Am I?” “Am I not?” “What am I?” This discourse reinforced the lessons of SN 44:10, proving that they were not limited to the circumstances described in that discourse, at the same time showing that the ability to focus one's questions on the issue of suffering and stress was central to the path.

The third discourse was AN 4:42, in which the Buddha classified questions into four types depending on the response-strategy they deserved: a categorical answer, an analytical answer, cross-questioning, and being put aside. Although the discourse didn't define these types of questions or illustrate them with examples, it did suggest that the Buddha had reflected carefully on the general issue of how to approach questions. Because so many of his teachings were in response to questions, the thought occurred to me that it would be instructive to look through the discourses to see if and how he used this typology in practice, and how it affected the way he approached particular topics in his teaching. And more than instructive: Given the importance of appropriate attention in the practice of the path, a study of this sort would provide a valuable practical tool, giving guidance in how to keep the practice on course by paying careful attention to the questions that motivated it and gave it shape.

That's how the idea for this book was born.

For many years I was unable to pursue this project because of other responsibilities, but I did keep a growing file of passages from the Canon that seemed relevant to this project as I encountered them in the course of other pursuits. These passages showed that the Buddha actually employed his fourfold typology in approaching questions, and that it was a useful tool in focusing attention on issues of genuine importance and avoiding distractions. I began applying the typology in my own practice, and found that it clarified many issues that had previously been unclear. Also, I began referring to the Buddha's response-strategies in my writings, for instance in the articles, “No Self or Not-self?” “Questions of Skill,” “De-perception,” and “Perennial Issues,” along with the discussions of appropriate attention in *The Wings to Awakening*, “Food for Awakening,” and “Untangling the Present.” Some of the other projects I worked on in this period—in particular, the books, *The Paradox of Becoming* and *The Shape of Suffering*—broadened and sharpened my understanding of the issues involved in the Buddha's choice of response-strategies.

At the same time, I began noticing discussions on the topic of questions in non-Buddhist sources as well. Two passages in particular underlined its importance. One was a story told by a man born in New York whose parents

had been immigrants from Eastern Europe. They had placed great importance on his education, and his mother would ask him every day after school, not what he had learned that day, but what questions he had asked. The mother was wise, understanding the importance of an inquisitive mind in the ability to learn what is of true value in a subject. The second passage was a quote from a famous author to the effect that if they can get you to ask the wrong questions, it doesn't matter what answers you come up with. This quote underlines the fact that we often pick up our questions from other people without considering whether they actually help us or not, and that people can often use their influence in this way to keep others distracted from what's in their true best interest to know. Reflecting on this quote, I appreciated even more the Buddha's typology and the way he taught it in practice. He didn't rest content with teaching others the right answers to questions; by his example, he provided them with the tools to foster their own discernment: to choose their questions wisely, to find the answers for themselves, and to gauge whether their answers really helped them. This was a rare and important gift.

For the past year and a half I have been working on this project, and I have found that the more time and energy I have put into this issue, the more fruitful the results have been in my teaching and practice. As the manuscript took shape, I benefitted from sharing it with others and gaining their insights in how to improve it. In addition to the monks here at the monastery, these people include: Ven. Varadhammo Bhikkhu, Michael Barber, Gerald Eule, Bok-Lim Kim, Emer O'Hagan, Addie Onsanit, Nathaniel Osgood, Xiao-Quan Osgood, Narciso Polanco, Dale Schultz, Mary Talbot, Sebastian Wong, Jane Yudelman, and Michael Zoll. Ruby Grad and Jonathan Tarbox generously gave of their professional skills, compiling the indexes and proofreading the text, respectively. The generosity of these people in providing their time and expertise has greatly improved the book. I, of course, am responsible for any errors that remain.

I would like to dedicate this book, in gratitude, to the memory of Phra Rajvinayasobhana (Boontham Puññamayo) of Wat Makut Kasatriyaram, Bangkok, a monk I have known for many years as *Luang Lung*, or Venerable Uncle. Beginning with the day of my ordination, he provided much help and encouragement in my practice of the life gone forth. When he passed away last March, it was as if I had lost a protector. I hope that the merit of this book will help speed him on his way to Nibbāna.

And I hope it will help you, the reader, in the quest for discernment on the path.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Skill in Questions*

When we read the account of the Buddha's last night, it's easy to sense the importance of his final teaching before entering total nibbāna: "Now, then, monks, I exhort you: All fabrications are subject to decay. Bring about completion by being heedful." These words call attention to themselves because they were the last he ever said.

That may be why it's so easy to overlook the importance of what the Buddha did right before saying them. In a gesture extremely gracious—given that he had been walking all day, had fallen severely ill along the way, and now was about to die—he offered one last opportunity for his followers to question him. He even made the offer four times to show that it wasn't just a gesture. He seriously wanted to clear up any remaining doubts in their minds before closing his mouth for good.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, "If even a single monk has any doubt or indecision concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, the path or the practice, ask. Don't later regret that 'The Teacher was face-to-face with us, but we didn't bring ourselves to cross-question him in his presence.'"

When this was said, the monks were silent.

A second time... A third time, the Blessed One said, "If even a single monk has any doubt or indecision concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, the path or the practice, ask. Don't later regret that 'The Teacher was face-to-face with us, but we didn't bring ourselves to cross-question him in his presence.'"

A third time, the monks were silent.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, "Now, if it's out of respect for the Teacher that you don't ask, let a friend inform a friend."

When this was said, the monks were silent.

Then Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, "It's amazing, lord. It's astounding. I'm confident that in this community of monks there isn't even a single monk who has any doubt or indecision concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, the path or the practice."

"You, Ānanda, speak out of confidence, while there is knowledge in the Tathāgata that in this community of monks there isn't even a single monk who has any doubt or indecision concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, the path or the practice. Of these 500 monks, the most backward is a stream-winner, not destined for the planes of deprivation, headed to self-awakening for sure." — *DN 16*

It's possible to read this passage simply as a rhetorical flourish, indicating how special the assembly was that had gathered to witness the Buddha's passing: Only those who had had their first taste of the deathless were privileged enough to be present. But the passage goes deeper than that, showing *how* the Buddha had brought them to that taste. Instead of enforcing an unquestioning acceptance of his teachings, he had resolved his students' doubts by being open to their questions. The fact that this incident is placed right before the last teaching is a measure of how central this method was to his teaching, and how important it was to his followers who assembled the Canon.

Other discourses emphasize this point as well. AN 2:46 [§73], for instance,

notes that the Buddha trained his followers in cross-questioning, with the result that, “when they have mastered the Dhamma, they cross-question one another about it and dissect it: ‘How is this? What is the meaning of this?’ They make open what isn’t open, make plain what isn’t plain, dispel doubt on its various doubtful points.”

The central role of questioning in the Buddha’s teaching may be connected to the fact that his teaching starts not with a first principle but with a self-evident problem: how to put an end to suffering. And instead of trying to argue from this problem back to first principles, he stays focused on the immediate question of how to solve it. As he noted, suffering gives rise to two responses—bewilderment and a searching question: “Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?” To help put an end to that bewilderment, the Buddha presented his teachings as responses to the many questions deriving from that primal, searching question. Thus questions formed the primary mode for organizing what he taught.

But even though the Buddha ordered his teachings around questions rather than first principles, he did not set out to answer every controversial question that came his way. He focused solely on questions related strategically to the end of suffering, i.e., questions that would actually help in attaining that goal. For this reason, he classified questions—as they related to this focus—according to the response-strategy they deserved, and he arrived at four sorts: those that deserved a categorical answer, those that deserved an analytical answer, those that deserved to be cross-questioned before being answered, and those that deserved to be put aside. This fourfold classification is the theme of this book, for it provides important insights into both how and what the Buddha taught about the way to end suffering.

To understand the importance of this classification, and why the Buddha formulated it in those terms, it might be useful first to reflect in general terms on what it means to ask and answer a question based on a desire to attain a goal. A helpful way to begin that reflection is with a question that, in Western thought, is first stated in Plato’s *Meno*:

*When you’re looking for something but don’t know quite what it is, how do you know when you’ve found it?*

In the *Meno*, Socrates uses this question as the departure point for his doctrine of memory from past lives: You know what you want because you knew it in a previous lifetime. But from a Buddhist point of view, a more fruitful approach to this question is to look at the psychology of how people go about setting up a problem and solving it in the here and now: You know when you’ve found the knowledge you were seeking because the desire that sparked your search had already given it a function and a shape. You wanted knowledge that would perform a desired function, and you wanted it to make sense, to fit in with what had worked with similar problems in the past. When you’ve encountered something that, when put to the test, meets both specifications—the function and the fit—you know that that’s what you wanted. (Ironically, even Socrates himself would set up a problem and test the proposed solutions in precisely this way.)

The questions aimed at determining the fit and function of your answers operate on three levels. The first level aims at giving your ignorance a shape, to define your felt need and why the need makes sense. The second and third levels determine if the answer actually functions as you want it to, with the second level establishing tests for checking the actual performance of whatever potential answer seems to fit that shape, and the third setting standards for measuring whether an answer has actually passed the tests.

In formulating a question on the first level, you create the frame of a sentence

and leave part of the frame blank. The important feature of the blank is that it's not an amorphous hole. It's more like the shape of a missing piece of a puzzle. Only a piece that matches the shape and the pattern of the puzzle will fit. If you ask, "Why am I suffering?" and are told, "42," you won't be satisfied with the answer, for it's not just a wrong piece from the right puzzle. It's from the wrong puzzle entirely.

The reason we need questions to give shape to our ignorance is that the shape helps to narrow down the range of potential answers we will need to test to see if they fulfill the function we want. It's a way of saving energy and time so that our second and third levels of questions can be applied immediately to the most promising candidates. If it turns out that none of the possibilities suggested by the shape of the first-level questions pass the second- or third-, we can then turn around and question the puzzle with which we started: Maybe the shape it suggested was mistaken, and we have to find a new puzzle or a new way of putting the pieces together. Then we experiment with a new shape, and apply the second- and third-level questions again. This way, through trial and error, we have a chance of finding the answer we want. When our questions on all three levels are well formulated, they help us to recognize the solution to our problem even though we originally had only a vague notion of what it might be.

But if the questions are wrongly formulated, they can easily lead us astray. The original narrowing-down might narrow down on the wrong spot, focusing our attention away from the actual answer. The tests we set for our answers, and our standards for judging the results of those tests, might be misguided or aim too low.

This means that when you try to find an answer to a question of this sort, you have to do more than simply provide a piece that fits into the puzzle you've formulated. You have to question the question, remembering that your answer will have an impact, in terms either of what the questioner—you or your listener—will do with it, or of what it will do to the questioner. And this means that the puzzle analogy, which is essentially static, has to be replaced with a more dynamic one: The questioner is assembling a complex tool or instrument, such as a piano or a machine, and—seeing that you have practical experience with what he wants to assemble—has asked you for a missing part and advice on how to use the completed instrument. In this case, the first-level questions would cover the structure of the instrument; the second-level questions, the way it should be played or used; and the third-level questions, standards for determining whether it's being played or used well. If you want to give responsible answers in a situation like this, you can't simply supply the missing part. You first have to ascertain the desire behind the request: Does the questioner really want the part, or is he trying to make you look like a fool? Or does he want to use the part to assemble something more sinister? Even if his desire for the part is sincere, you want to make sure he's planning to use the instrument for a beneficial purpose, that the instrument is the correct one for the purpose he has in mind, and that he knows how to use the instrument in a way that doesn't cause inadvertent harm.

For instance, suppose that you're a construction engineer, and a close friend—a would-be do-it-yourselfer totally inexperienced in construction—has come to you for advice. He's discovered that a concrete barrier in his backyard is acting as a dam after heavy rain, preventing drainage, and keeping his yard and cellar flooded. He has what he thinks is a jackhammer for chipping away the concrete and has asked you for a missing part. Your first duty is to make sure that he really intends to use the jackhammer to attack the barrier, and that he's not actually going to dig into a sewer main instead. Then you check to see that the concrete is actually causing harm, and that its removal will be beneficial: The water, when allowed to flow, won't cause worse damage somewhere else. And

you want to make sure that your friend isn't assembling a cement mixer to make more cement by mistake.

When you're sure that his purpose is skillful and that he actually has a jackhammer, you then check to see that the parts he's already assembled have been put together correctly. Otherwise, even the best possible part you might give him wouldn't fit, and the jackhammer wouldn't work. And even then, when you supply the missing part, you might have to quiz him to make sure that he knows where to put it and how to use the jackhammer once it's fully assembled so that he doesn't end up injuring himself. And ideally you should give him the opportunity to ask you questions, for otherwise you can't be sure that he's understood what you've said. If you're really responsible, you'll give him a checklist of questions that will teach him how to judge whether he's using his jackhammer appropriately and with skill.

What this means is that when you take into consideration the impact of the knowledge you're providing, simply being truthful is not enough. You also have to ensure that your answer will be beneficial. If it's challenging to your listener, you have to take care in presenting it with words that are timely: appropriate to the situation and the listener's level of skill and understanding.

This was the Buddha's approach to the responsibilities he took on when answering questions. His primary purpose in teaching was to provide his listeners with something they were looking for—a total end to suffering and stress—yet he knew that they might have only vague or downright wrong ideas of what that end might be or how to attain it. He had learned from experience that the act of framing skillful questions played an essential role in directing his own search for release, so his first step in helping his listeners overcome their ignorance was to show them how to give it the proper shape: how to frame the questions they addressed to him so that they would recognize the truth and utility of his solutions when they heard them. However, he had also learned from personal experience the importance of self cross-examination in testing the original frames he had formulated, and the answers he had come up with, in the course of his quest. Thus he also wanted to teach his listeners how to frame the questions they addressed to themselves, so that they could become independent in the Dhamma and learn to overcome their ignorance on their own.

In other words, he wasn't content simply to provide answers to people's questions. He also wanted to show them how unskillful questions can be recognized through testing, and how skillful questions—conducive to the end of suffering—can be framed and tested in their place.

The Buddha was one of those rare teachers who understood how the content of his teaching gave insight into the act of teaching, so that *how* he taught was shaped by *what* he taught. In this case, the *how* was shaped by what he had learned on the night of his awakening. In the second watch of the night, he had seen that people's experience of pleasure and pain is shaped by their actions (*kamma*), that their actions are shaped by their views, and that their views are shaped by their attitude of respect or disrespect for those who have realized and taught the truth.

This insight showed him that, as a teacher, he would be responsible for more than simply providing his listeners with right views. To be effective, he would also have to provide them with good reasons for respecting him and accepting those views, along with the right framework for putting them to proper use and testing the results they received. In other words, his approach would have to be strategic. He saw that words are not only descriptive but also performative: The act of speaking is a type of *kamma*, and as with all *kamma* it has an effect. The speaker's responsibility is to make that effect as beneficial and timely as possible.

Thus, when answering questions, he kept the *kamma* of teaching and

learning in mind. He saw that teaching and learning, to be most effective, have to be cooperative efforts. This meant, as a basic ground rule, that he'd be open to questions about his teachings, showing that he was responsive both to his listeners' desire to find an end to suffering and to their desire to learn and understand his teachings. At the same time, however, he'd be careful to answer questions only when he felt the questioner was truthful and sincerely wanted to put an end to suffering and stress. Then he'd make sure that the person's way of framing questions was appropriate to that task. If it was, he'd respond to the questions with answers that were categorical—absolute and without exceptions. If it wasn't, he had a choice. Either he'd reframe the questions, giving what he called analytical answers, if the questions were relevant to the ending of suffering and the frame could be adjusted to bring it in line with the path—the jackhammer wrongly assembled—or else he'd put the questions aside if he found them irrelevant and the frame totally inappropriate: the cement mixer when a jackhammer was the better tool. If he saw that his listeners might have trouble understanding the way he framed his answers, he'd cross-question them to help them remember and apply their knowledge of other skills to understanding and utilizing the skills he was teaching. When he was being especially thorough, he'd continue the cross-questioning by providing them with a checklist of points to ask themselves so that they could put his answers to the best use and gauge for themselves how well they were succeeding.

These are apparently the considerations that lay behind the Buddha's decision to classify questions as to whether they deserved categorical answers, analytical answers, cross-questioning, or to be put aside. These four categories form the framework for his skill in questions—*pañha-kosalla*—which was not simply a matter of providing deft answers to difficult questions, but also an ability always to keep in mind how an individual question fits into the larger quest for freedom from suffering. This is why the Buddha said that a person's wisdom and discernment can be gauged by the way he or she responds to questions, for wisdom is not content simply with correct answers. It's strategic, pragmatic. It wants those answers to have as beneficial an effect as possible.

Because of this intimate connection between what the Buddha taught and how he taught, the *how* is not just an offshoot of the *what*. The *what* is also shaped by the *how*. In particular, there's a great deal to be learned about the content of the Buddha's teachings by examining where those teachings fit into the four response-strategies, for the questions provide the framework in which the terms and strategies of the teachings find their meaning. This is particularly important in a teaching like the Buddha's, which—as we have noted—neither starts nor ends with first principles, but stays focused on a question that seeks a solution to a problem. This is why the Buddha viewed questions as the primary means by which the mind creates contexts for its concepts. If we want to understand and use his teachings for their intended purpose, we have to view them in terms of the questions they were and were not meant to answer. So there's a great deal to be learned by looking at his skill in choosing which questions to answer as they were, which to reframe, which to cross-question, and which to put aside.

This is the motivation behind this book. Although the Buddha lists the four types of questions three times in the discourses (DN 33, AN 3:68 [§118], and AN 4:42 [§1]), he doesn't illustrate the lists with examples of the different types. However, there are many situations in which he calls attention to the fact that a particular question deserves a particular response-strategy, which he then provides. Thus it's possible to collate these examples from the discourses to show these various response-strategies in action, along with the distinctive patterns that emerge when the material is organized in this way.

For this reason—after Chapters One and Two provide a theoretical and

narrative background for the Buddha's approach to responding to questions—Chapters Three through Eight provide readings that consist primarily of passages in which a particular response-strategy is used. I say *primarily* because the Buddha tended to use particular response-strategies with particular topics, and so I have augmented the passages in some of the chapters with additional passages that help to flesh out these topics. I have done this with two aims in mind: to help give a more coherent account of the Dhamma lessons contained in the Buddha's responses, and to help clarify the rationale behind the response-strategies he has chosen.

Also, each chapter is prefaced by a discussion calling attention to some of the salient lessons to be learned when similar response-strategies are viewed side by side. Although some of these discussions are fairly long, they are not meant to be exhaustive. They simply provide a few beginning insights for anyone interested in pursuing the material further. Because the Buddha, in responding to questions, is often operating on many levels, I felt it would be most useful to limit my observations to the essentials, and to give extensive quotations from the texts so that the reader can observe the Buddha's skill in questions in action for him or herself.

However, because it's easy to get lost in the large number of passages provided in these chapters, *I would recommend reading the discussion sections for all the chapters before delving into the readings in any one of the chapters.* That way you can start with a clear overview of the main points, which will then allow you to pursue the particulars of whatever you find interesting without losing your bearings.

You will notice—especially in the discussions in Chapters Three, Five, and Eight—that I have frequently compared the Buddha's approach to asking and responding to questions with Socrates' approach as recorded in the Platonic dialogues. I have done this for four reasons.

The first is that some modern commentators have asserted that the Buddha employed the Socratic method in his teaching, and I felt that a close examination of the Buddha's approach to the four types of questions would offer a good opportunity to test exactly how far this assertion is true.

The second reason, related to the first, is that some have noted that the Buddha and Socrates were near contemporaries in the so-called Axial Age, and that as seminal figures representing the spirit of inquiry in that age they shared a common agenda. A comparative study of how they handled questions is a good way to test this assertion as well.

Third, to the extent that Socrates and Plato set the agenda for Western intellectual life, I thought that comparing the Buddha's approach to dialogue with Socrates' would be a useful starting point for comparing the Buddha's thought with Western thought in a way not limited to superficial or invidious generalities—to see precisely where his approach to wisdom differs from the assumptions about wisdom that Westerners have absorbed, often unthinkingly, from the history of their culture.

Fourth, I found that the comparisons between the Buddha's approach and Socrates' help highlight what is truly distinctive and important in the Buddha's manner of teaching. To make clear what he *was* doing in his teaching strategy, it's useful to have a clear point of comparison to show what he *wasn't*. The compilers of the Pali Canon use this approach to introduce the Buddha's teachings in the discourses they place at the beginning of both the Dīgha Nikāya and the Majjhima Nikāya (DN 1 & 2, MN 1 & 2), and it's especially helpful here in clarifying the Buddha's reasons for dividing questions into four types.

There are many advantages to viewing the Buddha's teachings from the standpoint of these four types of questions, but one of the most important is that

it allows us to see those teachings in a framework that the Buddha himself regarded as having utmost importance. For example, when we compare the questions to which the Buddha gave categorical answers to those whose answers were more specific to the context, we can see which of his teachings, in his eyes, had the most categorical, universal significance, and which had a more limited, specific range. When we note the topics he taught using analytical or cross-questioning strategies—which are primarily methods of clarification—we can see which of his teachings his contemporaries found hardest to understand. This, in turn, helps us to see which of his teachings were most original to his thought and newest to them. And when we examine the questions he put aside, we can learn important lessons about how his teachings are best understood and used, in that they were clearly meant to function in the context of some questions but not others.

This way of organizing the Buddha's teachings also draws attention to the central fact that all of his teachings have the strategic purpose of helping people to change their minds. As we watch the Buddha respond to questions, we are watching discernment in action, for that's how he understood discernment: as an action, as a compassionate strategy for bringing about release. To see his teachings in this light helps to correct the common tendency to regard Buddhist wisdom as sage aphorisms devoid of context. It also helps to correct the more academic tendency—dating back to the Abhidhamma—of teaching Buddhist wisdom as a vocabulary lesson, believing that if we can define the terms, we can fully understand what he's saying. Admittedly, the terms are important, and clear definitions useful, but they find their true meaning only when applied in the context of the Buddha's overall strategy of questions and answers in teaching the path to release.

Although our main focus will be on how the Buddha used the four response-strategies when dealing with the questions of his time, the import of the book is not entirely historical. As we will see in Chapter Two, the Buddha's own path of practice to awakening was directed by the questions he asked himself. The more skillful he became in asking and answering the right questions, the closer he came to release. For this reason, in Chapters Five and Six we will find that he encouraged his students to ask questions of him—and themselves—in just the same way. Thus, for anyone interested in practicing the Buddha's teachings, an important dimension in reading this book will lie in learning how to apply its lessons in formulating the questions you ask yourself in the course of your practice.

At the same time, Chapters Four, Five, and Eight show the many ways in which the Buddha's listeners misinterpreted his teachings by trying to force those teachings to answer questions shaped by the listeners' preconceived notions—an important object lesson for those of us at present who may not share the preconceived notions of the Buddha's time, but still bring preconceived notions to the Dhamma nonetheless. When we see the advantages that the Buddha's listeners gained as he reworked their questions, we can be more inclined to accept the idea that our questions may require some reworking as well.

So by watching the Buddha in action as he responds to a wide range of questions that people in his time brought to their practice, we can gain lessons in how to be more skillful and discerning in the questions we bring to our own.

## CHAPTER ONE

*The Kamma of Teaching*

The Buddha as a teacher was known for his skill in giving apt and effective answers to difficult people asking difficult questions. When a fierce and powerful spirit threatened him, saying, “I will ask you a question, contemplative. If you can’t answer me, I will possess your mind or rip open your heart or, grabbing you by the feet, hurl you across the Ganges,” the Buddha remained unfazed and gave such satisfactory answers that he converted the spirit into becoming one of his followers (Sn 1:10). When approached by Sakka, the king of the devas—who had never received satisfactory answers to his questions from any other teacher—he answered those questions in such a way that Sakka gained the highest happiness he had ever experienced: his first taste of awakening [§4]. When a famous brahmanical teacher sent sixteen of his students to test his knowledge of advanced stages of meditation, the Buddha’s answers to their questions not only converted all sixteen, but also brought all but one of them to total release (Sn 5).

The discourses in the Pali Canon—our earliest extant record of the Buddha’s teachings—show that the Buddha’s skill in dealing with questions went beyond simply providing good answers. Whereas other teachers at the time had formulaic doctrines that they repeated regardless of the questions they were asked, the Buddha tailored his answers not only to the question but also to the questioner’s needs [§5, §99]. He could often detect the assumptions or beliefs lying behind a question [§66], and could tell when two questions—though widely different in their wording—were actually equivalent [§167].

The Buddha was also able to pass some of this mastery on to his students. When Ven. Assaji, one of the Buddha’s first students, was approached by the wanderer Upatissa—later Ven. Sāriputta—his brief answer to Upatissa’s question gave Upatissa a first glimpse of awakening. When Upatissa later reported this answer to his friend, Kolita—later Ven. MahāMoggallāna—Kolita gained his first glimpse of awakening as well [§3].

From the early years of the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha’s followers memorized and celebrated these skillful answers. The question-and-answer dialogues recorded in the fourth and fifth chapters of the *Sutta Nipāta*, we are told, were memorized during the Buddha’s lifetime not only by monks but also by lay followers (Ud 5:6; AN 7:50). When the Pali Canon was compiled, two chapters in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* were devoted to the Buddha’s answers to questions posed by devas; another chapter, to the answers that his nun disciples gave to questions posed by Māra. When King Asoka, in one of his edicts, compiled a list of texts for monks and nuns to chant frequently, he included Ven. Assaji’s answer to Upatissa’s question in the list. Amulets distributed to pilgrims to the Buddhist holy spots in the early centuries of the Common Era were inscribed with the first line of Ven. Assaji’s answer on the reverse side.

Part of the reason for the early tradition’s focus on these question-and-answer dialogues was their effectiveness as teaching tools: They spoke directly to the questions that many people brought to the early Buddhists about their teachings. But another part is that the Buddha explicitly cited the skill with which one addresses a question as a measure of one’s wisdom and discernment. The early Buddhists, in focusing on this aspect of the Buddha’s teachings, wanted to show clearly that their teacher was wise.

“There is the case where one individual, through discussion with

another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], *from the way he addresses a question*, he is discerning, not dull. Why is that? He makes statements that are deep, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. He can declare the meaning, teach it, describe it, set it forth, reveal it, explain it, & make it plain. He is discerning, not dull.' Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a large fish rise. The thought would occur to him, 'From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a large fish, not a small one.' In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], *from the way he addresses a question... he is discerning, not dull.*' — AN 4:192 [emphasis added]

Thus, given the tradition's appreciation of the Buddha's skill in answering questions, it is somewhat ironic that in the centuries following the compilation of the Pali Canon a misunderstanding developed around one of the most important features of that skill. The Canon contains a list of the Buddha's analysis of questions into four categories based on the response they deserved, but the meaning of those categories was apparently forgotten at a later date.

"There are these four ways of answering questions. Which four? There are questions that should be answered categorically. There are questions that should be answered analytically. There are questions that should be answered with cross-questioning. There are questions that should be put aside. These are the four ways of answering questions." — AN 4:42

In the three discourses where the Buddha lists these four categories of questions, he gives no examples or definitions for any of the categories, nor does he explain why a particular question would fall into one category rather than another. This may be why his intended definitions of the categories were lost by the tradition and—by the time of Buddhaghosa, the primary commentator of the Theravada tradition—replaced by definitions that dealt with issues in formal logic and had nothing to do with questions the Buddha actually encountered (see Appendix One).

Fortunately, however, even though the Buddha didn't explain the four categories in the discourses where he listed them, he did leave clues in other discourses that provide a clear indication of what these categories meant. In some cases, he would state outright that he was employing a particular response-strategy. For instance, he might preface an analytical answer by saying, "Prince, there is no categorical answer to that," or "Here... I am one who speaks analytically, not one who speaks categorically"; a session of cross-questioning by saying, "Very well then ... I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit"; or the fact that the question deserved to be put aside by saying, "Not a valid question," "Don't say that," or "Enough.... Put that aside. Don't ask me that."

In other cases, he would correct his students if they asked a question in the wrong way: "Your question should not be phrased in this way... instead, it should be phrased like this." Or he would chastise them for employing the wrong response-strategy to a question: "His question, which deserved an analytical answer, has been given a categorical answer by this worthless man." Or he would commend them for using the right response. Once [§62], when he asked Ven. Ananda, "Ananda, every habit & practice, every life, every holy life that is followed as of essential worth: Is every one of them fruitful?" Ven. Ananda responded, "Lord, that is not [to be answered] with a categorical

answer.”

“Very well then, Ānanda, give an analytical answer.”

Ānanda then gave an answer, got up, and left, after which the Buddha said to the monks who had listened in, “Monks, Ānanda is still in training, but it would not be easy to find his equal in discernment”—showing both that Ven. Ānanda’s answer qualified as analytical and that his ability to use this strategy aptly in responding to the question was a clear sign of his discernment.

In addition to flagging instances where one of the more strategic approaches to answering questions should be used, the Buddha also made a habit of framing his formal talks as responses to questions he would pose at the beginning of the talks, to show the proper framework for understanding his statements, at the same time demonstrating which questions are worth answering in a categorical way.

So even though he did not spell out a clear system for classifying the four sorts of questions into these four categories, he did teach his four response-strategies by example. This means that it’s possible to draw examples from the discourses to see what the Buddha meant by these four categories and how they are best put to use. That is the approach taken in this book. Instead of trying to approach the four categories of questions with predetermined definitions, I have culled the discourses for passages in which the Buddha calls attention to the way he is using a particular response-strategy in answering a question. Having gathered these passages and organized them by strategy, I tried to discover the patterns underlying each strategy, and then added other passages that fall in line with those patterns. In adopting this approach, I have done my best to follow the method for learning these strategies that the Buddha himself seems to have intended. He apparently wanted his students to use their own powers of observation to gain a sense of how he used these categories in action, so that they could employ them in action themselves.

When we collect the instances of the various response-strategies as flagged by the Buddha, we find that the primary criterion for sorting out the four categories is a consideration highlighted in the Buddha’s own statement of his purpose in engaging in conversation:

“That’s the purpose of discussion, that’s the purpose of counsel, that’s the purpose of drawing near, that’s the purpose of lending ear: i.e., the liberation of the mind through no clinging.” — AN 3:68

In every case, the Buddha responds to questions in line with how effective a particular response to those questions would be in leading the listener to follow the path of practice leading to liberation. He starts not with a logical first principle, but by holding in mind a solution to a problem, an intended final goal. Then he has to gauge how the act of asking and answering a question would relate to that goal. This, in turn, requires that he focus on three issues: the way the question is framed, the topic of the question, and the mental state of the listener.

To gain a fuller appreciation of how the Buddha uses these considerations in gauging the proper response-strategy for a particular question, we need to look at his larger analysis of what is involved in the act of teaching—and learning—the way to liberation. And the best way to do this is to consider these issues in light of the two teachings he said were categorical: skillful and unskillful kamma (action) on the one hand, and the four noble truths on the other [§§21-22].

Of these two teachings, the one on kamma is the more basic. In the second watch of the night of his awakening, the Buddha gained insight into how beings pass away and are reborn in line with their actions [§18]. This insight was the source both of the content and of the method of his teachings on skillful and

unskillful kamma. He saw that beings fared well on the basis of skillful kamma, and poorly on the basis of unskillful kamma. Their choice of skillful or unskillful kamma, in turn, was influenced by their views and by their level of respect for noble ones. This last factor indicated that skillful and unskillful kamma were not inspired solely by internal factors. If beings could be induced to develop respect for the noble ones, they could learn from those noble ones to develop right view and skillful kamma. This meant that they could be taught.

Soon after his awakening, though, the Buddha despaired at the idea of trying to teach others what he had found.

“The thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment [*ālaya*], is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this/that conditionality [*idappaccayatā*] [§40] & dependent co-arising [*paṭicca samuppāda*] [§41] are hard to see. This state too is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding (*nibbāna*). And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me.’

“Just then these verses, unspoken in the past, unheard before, occurred to me,

‘Enough now with teaching  
what  
only with difficulty  
I reached.  
This Dhamma is not easily realized  
by those overcome  
with aversion & passion.  
What is abstruse, subtle,  
deep,  
hard to see,  
going against the flow—  
those delighting in passion,  
cloaked in the mass of darkness,  
won’t see.’

“As I reflected thus, my mind inclined to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma.” — *MN 26*

However, the Brahmā Sahampati—on reading the Buddha’s thoughts, came down from his heaven and, on bended knee, pleaded with the Buddha to teach, saying that there would be those who would understand the Dhamma and benefit from it. The Buddha then confirmed this fact with his own knowledge, and so resolved to teach.

On a later occasion, the brahman Lohicca challenged the Buddha on whether it was fitting to teach the Dhamma, arguing,

“Suppose that a contemplative or brahman were to arrive at a skillful doctrine. Having arrived at a skillful doctrine, he should not declare it to anyone else, for what can one person do for another? It would be just the same as if, having cut through an old bond, one were to make another new bond. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?” — *DN 12*

The Buddha responded that this position would create obstacles for those who desire freedom, thus implying that it is both possible and beneficial to teach others. He did note, however, that a teacher could escape censure only if he had attained the goal of the contemplative life and was able to teach his disciples in a way that convinced them to lend ear, apply his instructions, and attain that goal for themselves. Thus a teacher's duty was both to have true knowledge and attainment on the one hand, and to be able to interest others in trying to follow the way to that attainment on the other.

Now, even a skilled teacher could not expect that everyone would reach the goal after listening to his teachings. The listener's past and present kamma could form insurmountable obstacles. For example:

"Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

"He is endowed with a [present] kamma obstruction, a defilement obstruction, a result-of-[past]-kamma obstruction; he lacks conviction, has no desire [to listen], and has dull discernment." — *AN 6:86*

"Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

"He has killed his mother; he has killed his father; he has killed an arahant; he has, with corrupt intent, caused the blood of a Tathāgata to flow; he has caused a split in the Saṅgha; or he is a person of dull discernment, slow & dull-witted." — *AN 6:87*

In addition to having no control over the past and present kamma of his listeners, a teacher has no control over their future kamma. Thus he has no control over what they will do with his words. Given these limitations posed by the workings of kamma, a teacher can at most only point the way to others and persuade them that it's worth following. His words, on their own, cannot spark an experience of liberation without his listeners' kammic cooperation. Their proper response while listening is to develop appropriate attention—i.e., to focus on questions that would lead to the end of suffering and stress [§25]—and then to practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma (SN 55:5), i.e. to practice in a way that leads to disenchantment with stress and suffering, and on to release [§37]. But whether they would do so is up to them [§94].

I have taught you this path  
having known  
—for your knowing—  
the extraction of arrows.

It's for you to strive  
ardently.  
Tathāgatas simply  
point out the way.  
Those who practice,  
absorbed in jhāna:  
from Māra's bonds  
they'll be freed. — *Dhp 275-276*

Because his primary task was to inspire in his listeners the will to follow the path, the Buddha adopted an approach as a teacher that was more rhetorical than logically dialectical. In other words, instead of presenting his teaching as a body of knowledge derived logically from a foundation of first principles, he

focused on the impact his words would have on his listeners: getting them not only to acquiesce to his teachings but also to act on them. This meant that he, like any rhetorician, had to tailor his instructions to his audience, sensitive to their level of understanding and to the mixture of skillful and unskillful qualities in their minds. Instead of starting all his discourses with the same principles, he had to start each one at a point accessible to where his listeners already were.

However, his purpose in speaking was not to leave them there. It was to induce them to act in the direction of the desired goal. In fact, this is precisely the difference between a dialectical or foundational approach and a rhetorical one: In dialectics, everything lies in the foundational principles, and the duty of logic is to draw out their implications to wherever they will lead. In rhetoric, words are not merely descriptive. They are also performative, having an impact on the listener and leading the listener to react in various ways. The duty of the rhetorician is to use this performative aspect of words skillfully to induce his or her audience to move from where they already are toward a specific desired result.

In the common practice of rhetoric, the desired results are often ad hoc and subject to the mood of the moment, but it is possible to develop a coherent rhetorical system where intermediate results are all directed toward a single overarching end. This was the rhetorical approach the Buddha adopted. But it is important to understand what “coherent” means in the context of a system of this sort. In a logical or dialectical system, coherence is foundational, lying in the logical consistency with which secondary principles are derived from first principles. In a systematic rhetorical approach, however, coherence is teleological, lying in the consistency with which intermediate ends assist in reaching a common final goal. This point is important to keep in mind as we evaluate the coherence of the Buddha’s teachings.

The word “rhetoric” has acquired some unfortunate connotations in our culture—as in the phrases, “empty rhetoric” and “rhetorical tricks”—but we have to remember that when combined with compassionate and responsible motives, rhetorical tools can have a powerful effect for the good. Because the Buddha aimed his teachings at leading his listeners to the end of suffering, we can characterize his teaching style as the rhetoric of compassion. And because he was concerned with the long-term beneficial impact of his teachings—he wasn’t the sort of person who simply wanted to gain their approval or get them to feel good in the present moment—we could add that the compassion of his rhetoric was also responsible.

As a responsible and compassionate rhetorician, he faced a particular difficulty in that the goal he taught was non-verbal. The deathless is said to be “touched with the body” (AN 6:46) or “plunged into” (Khp 6), indicating that it is an all-encompassing experience unmediated by the verbal processing of the mind. However, this did not mean that the path to that goal couldn’t be taught by verbal means. In the same way that the kamma of the noble eightfold path can be used to bring an end to kamma [§31], words can be used to induce a listener to practice in line with the Dhamma so as to experience something that lies beyond words. They do this by engendering right view within the listener, so that the listener will then be inclined to exert the proper effort to follow the remainder of the path. The Buddha would sometimes use his psychic powers to subdue the pride of his listeners in a non-verbal way [§205; also MN 86; Mv.I.15-21], but these non-verbal methods served simply to induce his listeners to feel proper respect for his words. This respect was what then caused them to act on those words and follow the path to release.

“Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view.  
Which two? The voice of another and appropriate attention. These are the

two conditions for the arising of right view.” — *AN 2:124*

“In a knowledgeable person, immersed in clear knowing, right view arises. In one of right view, right resolve arises. In one of right resolve, right speech.... In one of right speech, right action.... In one of right action, right livelihood.... In one of right livelihood, right effort.... In one of right effort, right mindfulness.... In one of right mindfulness, right concentration arises.” — *SN 45:1*

Because right view plays an instrumental role in the path leading to release, the words that inspire it—and the truths they contain—are instrumental as well, an important part of the kamma leading to the end of kamma.

This is why the Buddha never taught a truth simply because it was true. As a compassionate and responsible rhetorician, he also chose his words for their beneficial and timely effect.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial [or: not connected with the goal], unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & displeasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

“In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & pleasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has sympathy for living beings.” — *MN 58*

These three attributes of his words—true, beneficial, and timely in being pleasing or displeasing—provide a useful framework for understanding the ways in which the Buddha responded to questions from his listeners.

A primary point to note in the above passage is that the Buddha, while listing the possibility that true words might be unbeneficial, never entertains the idea that untrue words could ever be of benefit. There is no such thing as a “useful fiction” in his teaching. Thus the first consideration in choosing one’s words is always whether they are true, for only in the realm of truth can anything beneficial be found.

As *AN 2:124* [§7] suggests, a teacher hoping to focus a listener’s attention on what is true and beneficial should encourage the listener to develop appropriate attention, for this is the primary internal quality leading to awakening.

“With regard to internal factors, I don’t envision any other single factor like appropriate attention as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the heart’s goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who attends appropriately abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful.” — *Iti 16*

This is because appropriate attention frames issues in terms of skillful and unskillful actions. Not only that, it also frames issues in terms of the four noble truths.

“The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones... discerns what ideas are fit for attention, and what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.... And which are the ideas fit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation [*āsava*] of sensuality doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of becoming... the unarisen fermentation of ignorance doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance is abandoned.... He attends appropriately, *This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at habits & practices.” — MN 2

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Kosambī in the siṃsapā forest. Then, picking up a few siṃsapā leaves with his hand, he asked the monks, “What do you think, monks? Which are more numerous, the few siṃsapā leaves in my hand or those overhead in the siṃsapā forest?”

“The leaves in the hand of the Blessed One are few in number, lord. Those overhead in the forest are far more numerous.”

“In the same way, monks, those things that I have known with direct knowledge but have not taught are far more numerous [than those I have taught]. And why haven’t I taught them? Because they are not connected with the goal, do not relate to the rudiments of the holy life, and do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. That is why I have not taught them.

“And what have I taught? *‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress’*: This is what I have taught. And why have I taught these things? Because they are connected with the goal, relate to the rudiments of the holy life, and lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. This is why I have taught them.” — SN 56:31

On the night of his awakening, the Buddha had found that the most beneficial truths to teach as means to liberation were those focusing on stress and the way to its cessation. In fact, he often declared that these two issues formed the framework for his entire teaching.

“Both formerly & now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress.” — SN 22:86

In this way, his teaching can be seen as a response to the bewilderment and search that come from the gut-level experience of stress—the first level of questions to which his teaching responds.

“And what is the result of stress? There are some cases in which a person overcome with stress, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, & becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with stress, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this stress?’ I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.” — AN 6:63

The teachings on skillful and unskillful kamma relate to the teachings on stress and its ending in two ways. The first is that they provide a preliminary

framework for understanding how actions lead either to pleasure or pain. Thus they act as a preliminary level of right view that can be developed into right view on the transcendent level.

“And which is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.” — MN 117

Taking skillful action and pleasant results as one pair, and unskillful actions and unpleasant results as another, we have the framework for the four noble truths.

“And which is right view? Knowledge in terms of stress, knowledge in terms of the origination of stress, knowledge in terms of the cessation of stress, knowledge in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.” — SN 45:8

The other way in which the principle of skillful and unskillful kamma relates to the four noble truths is that, for a person who desires the end of stress, each of the truths implies a duty that must be developed as a skill.

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: .... ‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’.... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’.... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly realized’.... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed.’” — SN 56:11

Thus the role of appropriate attention is not only to see things in terms of the four noble truths, but also to attend to things in such a way as to develop the skills appropriate to each: developing factors of the path, abandoning the causes of stress, and comprehending the factors of stress in such a way as to realize dispassion for them [§§23-24].

In addition, the role of appropriate attention is to dismantle and reject any form of questioning that would interfere with developing these skills [§25]. In particular, it rejects the categories of *papañca*, a type of thinking whose categories begin with the thought, “I am the thinker” [§52] and proliferate from there. We will consider this topic further in our continued discussion of appropriate attention in Chapters Three and Eight. Suffice it to say here that *papañca* is a primary example of dialectic or foundational thinking—with “I am the thinker” the underlying first principle—and thus the antithesis of the Buddha’s rhetorical approach.

So, in providing a framework for understanding stress in a way that encourages one to develop the skills actually leading to its cessation, appropriate attention provides the Buddha’s standards for determining whether a teaching is true and beneficial.

As for whether the teaching is timely in being pleasing or displeasing, the Buddha’s teaching methods show that he kept in mind at least five major dimensions in what *pleasing* and *displeasing* might mean.

First was the issue of whether the teacher knew what he/she was talking

about, and acted in line with his/her words. We have already noted, in the discussion of DN 12, that a person is qualified to teach the goal of the contemplative life only if he/she has had direct experience of that goal. This accords with a principle set forth in the Dhammapada [§§11-13], that words are fragrant only when carried out, and sweet only when spoken from direct knowledge of what they say. In this sense, the Buddha's words were always pleasing.

The second consideration the Buddha used in judging the timeliness of a teaching was that of clarity. There are occasional instances in which he deliberately spoke in a cryptic way—either to humble the pride of his listener [§47; also SN 1:1; SN 1:20], to rebuff a listener looking for a debate [§123], or to spark the curiosity of the monks (MN 131, MN 138)—but for the most part he made every effort to be clear. He would invite his listeners to question him about any of his teachings they did not understand [§75] and often would tailor his similes and metaphors to the personal background of the person he was teaching. In line with the pragmatic thrust of his teaching, he held that two of the duties of a Dhamma teacher were to speak step by step and to explain the sequence of cause and effect [§8]. In this way he took to heart the duty of a discerning teacher, which is to take subtle and profound matters, and to “reveal them, explain them, & make them plain” [§55]. This is an area where the issue of timely speech overlaps with that of beneficial speech, for unclear words are hard to put into practice. Clear words are effective tools on the path.

Third, the Buddha had a strong sense of who was and wasn't fit to engage in discussion. Although he was willing to teach all people regardless of their kammic background (AN 3:22, below), he would engage specific individuals in discussion only if he respected their ability to conduct a fair discussion. As Ven. Sāriputta commented, some questioners are sincere, whereas others ask questions with evil or contemptuous motives [§2]. Thus only when a listener was truthful and sincere in his or her search for truth would the Buddha be willing to join in a discussion. This means that even when he was aggressive and cutting in arguing with his listeners, it was not a sign of disrespect [§§125-126]. The fact that he was willing to speak with them in the first place showed that he respected their intentions and compassionately wanted to help them understand the error of their views.

Fourth, the Buddha was sensitive to the social background of his speakers, understanding how best to address the members of the different social castes of his time in a way appropriate to their status [§10]. For instance, he could use urbane language with brahmins, although there are also many discourses in which he derides them for their ill-founded caste pride [§125]. However, there are no recorded cases in which he insulted lepers or members of lower castes for their social status. In many cases he showed them high respect (Thag 12:2; Ud 5:3).

Finally, the Buddha was sensitive to the need for a teacher not to hurt himself or others with his teaching [§8]. According to the Commentary, this means that the teacher must not exalt himself or disparage others. Again, the Buddha had a sense of time and place when employing this principle, making critical remarks about other contemporary teachers by name only to his monk disciples (AN 3:138, Chapter Seven), and criticizing a person's occupation or mode of practice to his face only when the person showed that he sincerely wanted the Buddha to comment on the kammic results of his way of life [§§145-147].

In making sure that his words conformed to these standards for being timely as well as beneficial, the Buddha showed the pragmatic thrust of his teaching. He didn't expound truths just for the sake of saying what's true. He wanted his words to *work* so that the kamma of teaching would bear fruit.

To put it another way, he wanted that kamma to be skillful. Anyone familiar with the factors of the noble eightfold path will recognize that the Buddha's standards for his speech—true, beneficial, and timely—fall under the path factor of right speech. Even though the Buddha had followed the path to its end, he still applied its standards to the problem of how to speak to others so that they would follow the path to awakening. This is an important point. As we will see in later chapters, the Buddha would recommend some ways of thinking as skillful at certain stages of the path and not at others. But the path factors of right speech, right action, and right livelihood he saw as standards of behavior that applied all along the path, and even after the path had issued in awakening.

“I do not say, brahman, that everything that has been seen should be spoken about. Nor do I say that everything that has been seen should not be spoken about. I do not say that everything that has been heard... everything that has been sensed... everything that has been cognized should be spoken about. Nor do I say that everything that has been cognized should not be spoken about.

“When, for one who speaks of what has been seen, unskillful qualities increase and skillful qualities decrease, then that sort of thing should not be spoken about. But when, for one who speaks of what has been seen, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities increase, then that sort of thing should be spoken about.

“When, for one who speaks of what has been heard... what has been sensed... what has been cognized, unskillful qualities increase and skillful qualities decrease, then that sort of thing should not be spoken about. But when, for one who speaks of what has been cognized, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities increase, then that sort of thing should be spoken about.” — *AN 4:183*

“There is the case where a certain person, abandoning false speech, abstains from false speech.... He doesn't consciously tell a lie for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of any reward.... He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world.

“Abandoning divisive speech he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord.

“Abandoning coarse speech, he abstains from coarse speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing, & pleasing to people at large.

“Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal.” — *AN 10:165*

Thus in ensuring that his speech is beneficial, clear (“circumscribed”), and timely, the Buddha is following the principle of abstaining from idle chatter. In knowing when it is appropriate and inappropriate to criticize contemporary teachers, he is abstaining from divisive speech. In knowing how to frame the answers to his questions, he is following the principle of speaking truths that do not foster the unskillful mental quality of delusion.

Underlying all of these considerations is a personal quality that SN 16:3 calls compassion (*kāruṇīya*); MN 58 [§69], sympathy (*anukampā*); and AN 5:159 [§8],

kindliness (*anudayā*). The Buddha, as a teacher, saw himself as a doctor, treating the fevers and illnesses of the world.

“I have heard that on one occasion, when the Blessed One was newly self-awakened—staying at Uruvelā on the bank of the Nerañjarā River in the shade of the Bodhi tree, the tree of awakening—he sat in the shade of the Bodhi tree for seven days in one session, sensitive to the bliss of release. At the end of seven days, after emerging from that concentration, he surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As he did so, he saw living beings burning with the many fevers and aflame with the many fires born of passion, aversion, & delusion.” — *Ud 3:10*

“There are these three types of sick people to be found existing in the world. Which three?

“There is the case of the sick person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive amenable food, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive amenable medicine, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive proper nursing—will not recover from that illness. There is the case of the sick person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive amenable food, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive amenable medicine, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t receive proper nursing—will recover from that illness. There is the case of the sick person who will recover from that illness if he receives amenable food, amenable medicine, & proper nursing, but not if he doesn’t.

“Now, it is because of the sick person who will recover from that illness if he receives amenable food, amenable medicine, & proper nursing—but not if he doesn’t—that food for the sick has been allowed, medicine for the sick has been allowed, nursing for the sick has been allowed. And it is because there is this sort of sick person that the other sorts of sick persons are to be nursed as well [on the chance that they may actually turn out to need and benefit from such nursing].

“These are the three types of sick people to be found existing in the world.

“In the same way, these three types of people, like the three types of sick people, are to be found existing in the world. Which three?

“There is the case of the person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn’t get to see the Tathāgata, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t get to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata—will not alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities. There is the case of the person who—regardless of whether he does or doesn’t get to see the Tathāgata, regardless of whether he does or doesn’t get to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata—will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities. There is the case of the person who will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities if he gets to see the Tathāgata and gets to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata, but not if he doesn’t.

“Now, it is because of the person who will alight on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities if he gets to see the Tathāgata and gets to hear the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata—but not if he doesn’t—that the teaching of the Dhamma has been allowed. And it is because there is this sort of person that the other sorts of persons are to be taught the Dhamma as well [in case they may actually turn out to need and benefit from the teaching, or will benefit from it at a later time].

“These are the three types of people, like the three types of sick people, to be found existing in the world.” — *AN 3:22*

Thus a teacher, like a doctor, should always hold the well-being of his suffering listeners in mind, aiming his remarks at their immediate or eventual liberation. However, for this compassion to be pure, one should not teach for the sake of material gain [S8]. And even though one should aim at gaining the respect of the listener, one should hope that the respect is aimed not at oneself but at the Dhamma, so that the listener will understand it and feel inspired to practice it.

“Any monk who teaches the Dhamma to others with this sort of thought in mind, ‘O, may they listen to the Dhamma from me! And having listened, may they gain confidence in the Dhamma! Confident, may they show an expression of confidence in me!’—the Dhamma teaching of this sort of monk is impure.

“But any monk who teaches the Dhamma to others with this sort of thought in mind, ‘The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here & now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the observant for themselves.’ O, may they listen to the Dhamma from me! And having listened, may they understand it! Understanding it, may they practice for the sake of what’s authentic!’ He teaches the Dhamma to others inspired by the true rightness of the Dhamma, inspired by compassion, inspired by kindness, inspired by sympathy—the Dhamma teaching of this sort of monk is pure.” — *SN 16:3*

Compassion should also be balanced with mindful alertness so that one isn’t emotionally dependent on whether one’s listeners show an interest in one’s instructions.

“There are three establishings of mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, cultivating which he is a teacher fit to instruct a group.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where the Teacher—out of sympathy, seeking their benefit—teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: ‘This is for your benefit, this is for your happiness.’ His disciples do not listen or lend ear or apply their minds to gnosis. Turning aside, they stray from the Teacher’s message. In this case the Tathāgata is not satisfied nor is he sensitive to satisfaction, yet he remains untroubled, mindful, & alert. This is the first establishing of mindfulness....

“Furthermore, there is the case where the Teacher—out of sympathy, seeking their benefit—teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: ‘This is for your benefit, this is for your happiness.’ Some of his disciples do not listen or lend ear or apply their minds to gnosis. Turning aside, they stray from the Teacher’s message. But some of his disciples listen, lend ear, & apply their minds to gnosis. They do not turn aside or stray from the Teacher’s message. In this case the Tathāgata is not satisfied nor is he sensitive to satisfaction; at the same time he is not dissatisfied nor is he sensitive to dissatisfaction. Free from both satisfaction & dissatisfaction, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert. This is the second establishing of mindfulness....

“Furthermore, there is the case where the Teacher—out of sympathy, seeking their benefit—teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: ‘This is for your benefit, this is for your happiness.’ His disciples listen, lend ear, & apply their minds to gnosis. They do not turn aside or stray from the Teacher’s message. In this case the Tathāgata is satisfied and is sensitive to satisfaction, yet he remains untroubled, mindful, & alert. This is the third

establishing of mindfulness....

“There are three establishings of mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, cultivating which he is a teacher fit to instruct a group.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.” — MN 137

These, then, appear to be the considerations that shaped the rhetoric of the Buddha’s teaching. He began with the realization that the end of suffering and stress can be attained through human effort and with his compassionate desire to help others reach that attainment. Thus his teaching is strategic and teleological, i.e., all his words are aimed at this goal. This means that his words have to be not only true, but also beneficial for the listener in not creating distractions or obstacles to that end.

The Buddha’s strategies to attain that end are further shaped by the principle of kamma, or action. There are people whose kammic background—past or present—is such that they will respond to the Dhamma teaching the path to the end of suffering and stress. Within the context of this background, the act of teaching and learning is a collaborative effort. On the one hand, the act of *teaching* is a type of kamma, which means that the teacher has to maintain a pure intention while teaching, to ensure that he is teaching from kind and compassionate motives. He must also keep in mind the performative nature of his words—what they *do* to the listener or *incite* the listener to do—and that they must follow the principles of right speech. On the other hand, the act of *learning* is also a type of kamma, in that the listener must respond sincerely to the teacher’s words in order to benefit from them. This means that the purity of the listener’s intention plays an important role as well. The Buddha cannot take his listeners to awakening simply by acting on his own.

Because the act of instruction is a collaborative effort, the listener’s contribution is not fully under the teacher’s control. For this reason, the teacher’s words have to be not only true and beneficial, but also timely so as to persuade the listener to act in an appropriate way. Here the primary consideration, as noted in the Buddha’s second knowledge, is that the listener develop an attitude of respect. This in turn requires that the teacher be sensitive to the listener’s background and motivation in listening. In cases where the Buddha sensed that the listener was not ready to develop the proper attitude, he gave only a cursory teaching or none at all [S95]. If, however, the listener was ready, the Buddha would adjust his teaching strategies, paying attention to the listener’s state of mind and social status, sensing when to be clear and when cryptic, when to be pleasing and when not, so as to persuade the listener to take up the practice and reap its benefits in the most effective way.

As we will see throughout this book, these considerations also underlay the Buddha’s responses to questions posed by those he was trying to teach. If we keep these considerations in mind, we can more fully appreciate his four major response-strategies for dealing with these questions. The details of how these considerations shaped his responses will become apparent in the following chapters, but here we can make the following general observations:

- 1) Questions deserving a categorical answer are those framed in terms of appropriate attention.
- 2) Questions deserving an analytical answer are those touching on topics of legitimate concern for the pursuit of liberation, but are wrongly framed. The purpose of the analytical answer is to reframe the question—either by adding an extra variable or two, or by changing the variables entirely—so that it can be answered in a categorical way.
- 3) Cross-questioning is a strategy used in nine types of situations, only

four of which involve cross-questioning in response to a question. However, all nine uses of this strategy are concerned with clarification, and two common threads among them are important to note: A person should take responsibility for his or her actions or statements; and truth is to be found and clarified by a mutual willingness to cross-question and be cross-questioned. Thus we will list all nine situations here. They are:

- a) A monk is accused of an offense that he denies committing. His fellow monks cross-question him to see if he can give a coherent and believable account of his behavior.
  - b) A monk, even after being reproved by his fellow monks, maintains a position in the Buddha's presence that is clearly pernicious. After the Buddha ascertains that the monk will not abandon the pernicious view, he rebukes the monk and then turns to the other monks to cross-question them as to the relevant right view. This is to ensure that none of them pick up the first monk's errant position.
  - c) The Buddha or one of his disciples makes a statement that a listener finds unclear. The listener asks him to explain what the statement means and how it fits in with his other statements.
  - d) A person asks a question unclear in its wording or underlying motive. The Buddha cross-questions him to clarify the original question.
  - e) A person asks for a definition of a term without realizing that he has enough knowledge to provide at least part of the definition himself. The Buddha responds by cross-questioning the person in such a way that the person ends up contributing to the answer of his own question.
  - f) A person asks a question in a way indicating that he may not understand the response the Buddha will give—either the content of the response or the strategy with which it is given. The Buddha then draws an example, usually an activity, familiar to the person and questions him on it. From the person's replies, the Buddha shows how the proper response to the original question can be understood in the same frame as the person's understanding of the familiar activity. For the most part, this sort of response is pleasing to the listener.
  - g) A person presents an argument against the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha cites an example that disproves the person's position and then questions him on it. From the person's answers, the Buddha shows how the person has contradicted himself and so disproven his own argument. This strategy usually displeases the listener initially, but it can nevertheless lead to his conversion to the Buddha's way.
  - h) The Buddha encourages his listeners to cross-question themselves about their actions or traits present in their minds. This process can lead directly to awakening.
  - i) The Buddha cross-questions his listeners as to phenomena they are experiencing in the present moment. Often this strategy causes them to abandon any clinging to what they are being asked to examine, so that they too achieve awakening.
- 4) Questions deserving to be put aside are those that are so wrongly framed—springing from ways of thought antithetical to the categories of appropriate attention, and dealing with topics that distract attention from the path—that they cannot be properly reframed in a way that would lead to liberation. Thus they are put aside.

The Buddha also uses the last three response-strategies—analytical, cross-questioning, and putting aside—to avoid giving a categorical answer in situations where a categorical answer would lead him to harm himself or others, in the



“One asks a question of another through stupidity & bewilderment. One asks a question of another through evil desires & overwhelmed with greed. One asks a question of another through contempt. One asks a question of another when desiring knowledge. Or one asks a question with this thought, ‘If, when asked, he answers correctly, well & good. If not, then I will answer correctly [for him].’

“All those who ask questions of another do so from any one of these five motivations. And as for me, when I ask a question of another, it’s with this thought: ‘If, when asked, he answers correctly, well & good. If not, then I will answer correctly [for him].’” — AN 5:165

## SKILL IN ANSWERS

§ 3. Then Ven. Assaji, having gone for alms in Rājagaha, left, taking his alms. Then Sāriputta the wanderer approached him and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he stood to one side. As he was standing there he said, “Bright are your faculties, my friend, pure your complexion, and clear. On whose account have you gone forth? Or who is your teacher? Or in whose Dhamma do you delight?”

“There is, my friend, the Great Contemplative, a son of the Sakyans, gone forth from a Sakyan family. I have gone forth on account of that Blessed One. That Blessed One is my teacher. And it is in that Blessed One’s Dhamma that I delight.”

“But what is your teacher’s teaching? What does he proclaim?”

“I am new, my friend, not long gone forth, only recently come to this Dhamma & Vinaya. I cannot explain the Dhamma in detail, but I will tell you the gist in brief.”

Then Sāriputta the wanderer spoke thus to the Ven. Assaji:

“Speak a little or a lot,  
but tell me just the gist.  
The gist is what I want.  
What use is a lot of verbosity?”

Then Ven. Assaji gave this Dhamma exposition to Sāriputta the wanderer:

“Whatever phenomena arise from cause,  
their cause,  
& their cessation:  
Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata,  
the Great Contemplative.”

Then to Sāriputta the wanderer, as he heard this Dhamma exposition, there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.” — *Mv.I.23.5*

§ 4. [Sakka the deva-king:] “But what, dear sir, is the cause of desire, what is its origination, what gives it birth, what is its source? When what exists does it come into being? When what doesn’t exist does it not?”

“Desire has thinking as its cause, has thinking as its origination, has thinking as what gives it birth, has thinking as its source. When thinking exists, desire comes into being. When thinking is not, it doesn’t.”

“But what, dear sir, is the cause of thinking, what is its origination, what gives it birth, what is its source? When what exists does it come into being? When what

doesn't exist does it not?"

"Thinking has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its cause, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its origination, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as what gives it birth, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its source. When the perceptions & categories of objectification exist, thinking comes into being. When the perceptions & categories of objectification are not, it doesn't."

"And how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced the practice leading to the right cessation of the perceptions & categories of objectification?"

"Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Grief is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Equanimity is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued."

"Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.' Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of a feeling of joy, 'As I pursue this joy, unskillful qualities increase, and skillful qualities decline,' that sort of joy is not to be pursued. When one knows of a feeling of joy, 'As I pursue this joy, unskillful (mental) qualities decline, and skillful qualities increase,' that sort of joy is to be pursued. And this sort of joy may be accompanied by directed thought & evaluation or free of directed thought & evaluation. Of the two, the latter is the more refined. 'Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.' Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

[Similarly with grief and equanimity.]

"This is how he has practiced, deva-king: the monk who has practiced the practice leading to the right cessation of the perceptions & categories of objectification."

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words: "So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One's answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity overcome."

Then Sakka the deva-king, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words, asked him a further question: "But how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced for restraint in the Pāṭimokkha?"

"Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Verbal conduct is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Searching is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued."

"Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.' Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of bodily conduct, 'As I pursue this bodily conduct, unskillful qualities increase, and skillful qualities decline,' that sort of bodily conduct is not to be pursued. When one knows of bodily conduct, 'As I pursue this bodily conduct, unskillful qualities decline, and skillful qualities increase,' that sort of bodily conduct is to be pursued. 'Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.' Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

[Similarly with verbal conduct and searching.]

"This is how he has practiced, deva-king: the monk who has practiced the practice for restraint in the Pāṭimokkha."

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words: "So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One's answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity overcome."

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words, asked him a further question: "But how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced for restraint with regard to the sense faculties?"

"Forms cognizable by the eye are of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Sounds cognizable by the ear.... Aromas cognizable by the nose.... Flavors cognizable by the tongue.... Tactile sensations cognizable by the body.... Ideas cognizable by the intellect are of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued."

When this was said, Sakka the deva-king said to the Blessed One, "Dear sir, I understand the detailed meaning of the Blessed One's brief statement. If, as one pursues a certain type of form cognizable by the eye, unskillful qualities increase, and skillful qualities decline, that sort of form cognizable by the eye is not to be pursued. But if, as one pursues a certain type of form cognizable by the eye, unskillful qualities decline, and skillful qualities increase, that sort of form cognizable by the eye is to be pursued.

"If, as one pursues a certain type of sound cognizable by the ear....

"If, as one pursues a certain type of aroma cognizable by the nose....

"If, as one pursues a certain type of flavor cognizable by the tongue....

"If, as one pursues a certain type of tactile sensation cognizable by the body....

"If, as one pursues a certain type of idea cognizable by the intellect, unskillful qualities increase, and skillful qualities decline, that sort of idea cognizable by the intellect is not to be pursued. But if, as one pursues a certain type of idea cognizable by the intellect, unskillful qualities decline, and skillful qualities increase, that sort of idea cognizable by the intellect is to be pursued.

"This is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Blessed One's brief statement. Hearing the Blessed One's answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity overcome."

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words, asked him a further question: "Dear sir, do all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal?"

"No, deva-king, not all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal."

"Why, dear sir, don't all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal?"

"The world is made up of many properties, various properties. Because of the many & various properties in the world, then whichever property living beings get fixated on, they become entrenched & latch onto it, saying, 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' [S48] This is why not all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal."

"But, dear sir, are all contemplatives & brahmans utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate?"

"No, deva-king, not all contemplatives & brahmans are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate."

"But why, dear sir, are not all contemplatives & brahmans utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate?"

"Those monks who are released through the total ending of craving are the ones who are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate. This is why not all contemplatives & brahmans are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate."

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king.

Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words: "So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One's answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity overcome."

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One's words, said to him, "Yearning is a disease, yearning is a boil, yearning is an arrow. It seduces one, drawing one into this or that state of becoming, which is why one is reborn in high states & low. Whereas other outside contemplatives & brahmans gave me no chance to ask them these questions, the Blessed One has answered at length, so that he has removed the arrow of my uncertainty & perplexity."

"Deva-king, do you recall having asked other contemplatives & brahmans these questions?"

"Yes, lord, I recall having asked other contemplatives & brahmans these questions."

"If it's no inconvenience, could you tell me how they answered?"

"It's no inconvenience when sitting with the Blessed One or one who is like him."

"Then tell me, deva-king."

"Having gone to those whom I considered to be contemplatives & brahmans living in isolated dwellings in the wilderness, I asked them these questions. But when asked by me, they were at a loss. Being at a loss, they asked *me* in return, 'What is your name?'

"Being asked, I responded, 'I, dear sir, am Sakka, the deva-king.'

"So they questioned me further, 'But what kamma did you do to attain to this state?'

"So I taught them the Dhamma as far as I had heard & mastered it. And just this much was enough to gratify them: 'We have seen Sakka, the deva-king, and he has answered our questions!' So, instead of my becoming their disciple, they simply became mine. But I, lord, am [now] the Blessed One's disciple, a stream-winner, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening."

"Deva-king, do you recall ever having previously experienced such happiness & joy?"

"Yes, lord, I do."

"And how do you recall ever having previously experienced such happiness & joy?"

"Once, lord, the devas & asuras were arrayed in battle. And in that battle the devas won, while the asuras lost. Having won the battle, as the victor in the battle, this thought occurred to me, 'Whatever has been the divine nourishment of the asuras, whatever has been the divine nourishment of the devas, the devas will now enjoy both of them.' But my attainment of happiness & joy was in the sphere of violence & weapons. It didn't lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. But my attainment of happiness & joy on hearing the Blessed One's Dhamma is in the sphere of no violence, the sphere of no weapons. It leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding." — DN 21

§ 5. [King Ajātasattu:] "Once, venerable sir, I approached Pūraṇa Kassapa and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, I sat to one side. As I was sitting there, I asked him, 'Venerable Kassapa, there are these common craftsmen: elephant-trainers,

horse-trainers, charioteers, archers, standard bearers, camp marshals, supply corps officers, high royal officers, commandos, military heroes, armor-clad warriors, leather-clad warriors, domestic slaves, confectioners, barbers, bath attendants, cooks, garland-makers, laundrymen, weavers, basket-makers, potters, calculators, accountants, and any other common craftsmen of a similar sort. They live off the fruits of their crafts, visible in the here & now. They give pleasure & refreshment to themselves, to their parents, wives, & children, to their friends & colleagues. They put in place an excellent presentation of offerings to contemplatives & brahmans, leading to heaven, resulting in happiness, conducive to a heavenly rebirth. Is it possible, venerable Kassapa, to point out a similar fruit of the contemplative life, visible in the here & now?’

“When this was said, Pūraṇa Kassapa said to me, ‘Great king, in acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture, in inflicting sorrow or in getting others to inflict sorrow, in tormenting or getting others to torment, in intimidating or getting others to intimidate, in taking life, taking what is not given, breaking into houses, plundering wealth, committing burglary, committing highway robbery, committing adultery, speaking falsehood—one does no evil. If with a razor-edged disk one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single heap of flesh, a single pile of flesh, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil. Even if one were to go along the right bank of the Ganges, killing and getting others to kill, mutilating and getting others to mutilate, torturing and getting others to torture, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil. Even if one were to go along the left bank of the Ganges, giving and getting others to give, making sacrifices and getting others to make sacrifices, there would be no merit from that cause, no coming of merit. Through generosity, self-control, restraint, & truthful speech there is no merit from that cause, no coming of merit.’

“Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Pūraṇa Kassapa answered with non-action. Just as if a person, when asked about a mango, were to answer with a breadfruit; or, when asked about a breadfruit, were to answer with a mango: In the same way, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Pūraṇa Kassapa answered with non-action. The thought occurred to me, ‘How can anyone like me think of disparaging a contemplative or brahman living in his realm?’ Yet I neither delighted in Pūraṇa Kassapa’s words nor did I protest against them. Neither delighting nor protesting, I was dissatisfied. Without expressing dissatisfaction, without accepting his teaching, without adopting it, I got up from my seat and left....

“Another time I approached Pakudha Kaccāyana and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, I sat to one side. As I was sitting there, I asked him, ‘Venerable Kaccāyana, there are these common craftsmen.... They live off the fruits of their crafts, visible in the here and now.... Is it possible, venerable Kaccāyana, to point out a similar fruit of the contemplative life, visible in the here & now?’

“When this was said, Pakudha Kaccāyana said to me, ‘Great king, there are these seven substances—unmade, irreducible, uncreated, without a creator, barren, stable as a mountain peak, standing firm like a pillar—that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain, or both pleasure & pain. Which seven? The earth-substance, the liquid-substance, the fire-substance, the wind-substance, pleasure, pain, and the soul as the seventh. These are the seven substances—unmade, irreducible, uncreated, without a creator, barren, stable as a mountain peak,

standing firm like a pillar—that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, and are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain, or both pleasure & pain.

“And among them there is no killer nor one who causes killing, no hearer nor one who causes hearing, no cognizer nor one who causes cognition. When one cuts off [another person’s] head, there is no one taking anyone’s life. It is simply between the seven substances that the sword passes.’

“Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Pakudha Kaccāyana answered with non-relatedness. Just as if a person, when asked about a mango, were to answer with a breadfruit; or, when asked about a breadfruit, were to answer with a mango. In the same way, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Pakudha Kaccāyana answered with non-relatedness. The thought occurred to me, ‘How can anyone like me think of disparaging a contemplative or brahman living in his realm?’ Yet I neither delighted in Pakudha Kaccāyana’s words nor did I protest against them. Neither delighting nor protesting, I was dissatisfied. Without expressing dissatisfaction, without accepting his teaching, without adopting it, I got up from my seat and left.

“Another time I approached Sañjaya Velatthaputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, I sat to one side. As I was sitting there, I asked him, ‘Venerable Sañjaya, there are these common craftsmen.... They live off the fruits of their crafts, visible in the here and now.... Is it possible, venerable Sañjaya, to point out a similar fruit of the contemplative life, visible in the here and now?’

“When this was said, Sañjaya Velatthaputta said to me, ‘If you ask me if there exists another world [after death], if I thought that there exists another world, would I declare that to you? I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not. If you asked me if there isn’t another world... both is and isn’t... neither is nor isn’t... if there are beings who transmigrate... if there aren’t... both are & aren’t... neither are nor aren’t ... if the Tathāgata exists after death... doesn’t... both... neither exists nor doesn’t exist after death, would I declare that to you? I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not.’

“Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Sañjaya Velatthaputta answered with evasion. Just as if a person, when asked about a mango, were to answer with a breadfruit; or, when asked about a breadfruit, were to answer with a mango: In the same way, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, Sañjaya Velatthaputta answered with evasion. The thought occurred to me, ‘This—among these contemplatives & brahmans—is the most foolish & confused of all. How can he, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, answer with evasion?’ Still the thought occurred to me, ‘How can anyone like me think of disparaging a contemplative or brahman living in his realm?’ Yet I neither delighted in Sañjaya Velatthaputta’s words nor did I protest against them. Neither delighting nor protesting, I was dissatisfied. Without expressing dissatisfaction, without accepting his teaching, without adopting it, I got up from my seat and left.” — DN 2 [See also Chapter Seven and Appendix Two for answers given by other teachers, and §99 for the answer given by the Buddha.]

## THE BUDDHA’S RHETORIC

§ 6. “Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of wrong view.

Which two? The voice of another and inappropriate attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of wrong view.” — *AN 2:123*

§ 7. “Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view. Which two? The voice of another and appropriate attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of right view.” — *AN 2:124*

§ 8. “It’s not easy to teach the Dhamma to others, Ānanda. The Dhamma should be taught to others only when five qualities are established within the person teaching. Which five?

“[1] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, ‘I will speak step-by-step.’

“[2] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, ‘I will speak explaining the sequence [of cause & effect].’

“[3] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, ‘I will speak out of kindness.’

“[4] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, ‘I will speak not for the purpose of material reward.’

“[5] The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, ‘I will speak without hurting myself or others.’

“It’s not easy to teach the Dhamma to others, Ānanda. The Dhamma should be taught to others only when these five qualities are established within the person teaching.” — *AN 5:159*

§ 9. “There are these five rewards in listening to the Dhamma. Which five?

“[1] One hears what one has not heard before. [2] One clarifies what one has heard before. [3] One gets rid of doubt. [4] One’s views are made straight. [5] One’s mind grows serene.

“These are the five rewards in listening to the Dhamma.” — *AN 5:202*

§ 10. “There is the case where a monk knows his social gathering: ‘This is a social gathering of noble warriors; this, a social gathering of brahmans; this, a social gathering of householders; this, a social gathering of contemplatives; here one should approach them in this way, stand in this way, act in this way, sit in this way, speak in this way, stay silent in this way.’” — *AN 7:64*

§ 11. Just like a blossom,  
bright colored  
but scentless:  
a well-spoken word  
is fruitless  
when not carried out.

Just like a blossom,  
bright colored  
& full of scent:  
a well-spoken word  
is fruitful  
when well carried out. — *Dhp 51-52*

§ 12. First  
he'd settle himself  
in what is correct,  
    only then  
teach others.  
He wouldn't stain his name  
    : he is wise. — *Dhp 158*

§ 13. A monk restrained in his speaking,  
giving counsel unruffled,  
declaring the message & meaning:  
    sweet is his speech. — *Dhp 363*

## CHAPTER TWO

*The Bodhisatta's Quest*

The Buddha's own accounts of his actions as a bodhisatta, taken together, are one of the earliest spiritual autobiographies in recorded history. Some writers—citing the Buddha's teaching on *anattā*, or not-self—have seen irony in this fact. Why would a teacher whose central teaching denies the self, they have asked, be so concerned with his own self-story?

This question derives from two misunderstandings. First, the *anattā* teaching does not deny the existence of the self. It is a mode of perception, a strategy using the label "not-self" to help abandon attachment to whatever is clung to as self, so as to reach liberation. Second, the Buddha's central teaching is not *anattā*. It's *kamma*, the principle of action. As we noted in the preceding chapter, the most fruitful and appropriate viewpoint for a person aiming at liberation is to regard experience in terms of skillful and unskillful actions, and their respective results. The *anattā* teaching is meant to function in the context of questions shaped by that viewpoint: When is the perception of self a skillful mental action and when is it not? When is the perception of not-self a skillful mental action and when is it not?

From this perspective, it is altogether appropriate that the Buddha would have pioneered the genre of spiritual autobiography, and for two reasons. First, the content of these accounts shows how his actions, his *kamma*, led to his understanding of action, and how that understanding then led to his awakening. The basic pattern of the accounts is this: "First I did this, then I experienced these results. In response to these results, I did that and experienced those results." In the course of these experiments with action, he had done something no one else had done, and had learned something new about action that was of universal import. His purpose in relating his autobiography wasn't simply to elicit an empathetic response from his listeners; he wanted to teach them lessons about *kamma* that would apply to their own pursuit of true happiness as well. Thus the story of his actions deserved to be shared.

Second, the Buddha's act of relating this story shows one of the instances in which a perception of self is skillful: By sharing his experiences of his actions and their results, the Buddha encourages his listeners to develop both a desire for awakening and a confidence that if the Buddha did it, they could do it too. AN 4:159 calls these attitudes the craving needed to abandon craving, and the conceit needed to abandon conceit. This is thus an area where the perception of self is skillful both in the act of relating the accounts and in the act of listening and responding to them.

In addition to showing the role of *kamma* in the bodhisatta's quest, these accounts also show the role of questioning as a type of *kamma* that provided the framework for shaping his other actions. In the basic pattern of the accounts, the statement, "I did this," is often prefaced by the questions that led to his doing the "this": "I asked myself, 'Why am I doing that? What if I were to do this?'" Thus it is possible to cull from these accounts the questions that shaped the Buddha's quest for awakening, not only to get a sense of the underlying concerns they express, but also to see what lessons the Buddha learned about questions in general as he allowed particular questions to shape his actions.

When viewed from the standpoint of the Buddha's later use of his fourfold strategy in responding to questions, the questions that shaped his quest for awakening show two consistent features. The first is that they all take for granted the principle that action has results, and that those results determine

whether the actions are skillful or unskillful. As the Buddha says in MN 26 [§14], his quest was from the very outset a search for “what might be skillful.” Other accounts in the Canon tell us that there were teachers in the bodhisatta’s time who taught a doctrine of inaction—saying either that human action was totally powerless to give results, that it was totally predetermined by influences from the past, or that the only way to liberation was to abstain from physical action—but the bodhisatta does not appear to have shown any interest in their teachings. He was convinced that the way to a deathless happiness involved skillful action. The one question he reports posing to his teachers—“To what extent do you declare that you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma?”—shows that he was interested not simply in rote learning, but also in actual attainment. His response to their answers shows his conviction that attainment is something to reach through action. To the extent that his questions all reflect this conviction, they were properly framed.

In a handful of texts [§§83-84; also MN 14], the Buddha says that he approached members of sects who taught various forms of inaction (which, according to his analysis, includes determinism) and disputed their teaching, but he doesn’t indicate whether these conversations occurred before or after his awakening. Either way, they would be consistent with concerns that we know *did* predate his awakening, for his arguments against doctrines of this sort are based on the conviction that if one engages in a holy life involving effort, one should believe in the efficacy of human effort. Otherwise, if one believes that everything is predetermined by the past, predetermined by an outside power, or—the other extreme—totally without cause, one’s actions are not in line with one’s beliefs. This alone, of course, doesn’t prove the efficacy of action, but it does tell us why the bodhisatta showed no interest in doctrines denying that efficacy.

The second feature common to all the questions the bodhisatta posed to himself is that they all rank as a form of self cross-examination. In questioning himself, he examined his assumptions and habits, at the same time stretching his imagination to find new and better possibilities for what might be skillful in his search. He then tested his answers in practice, to see what did and didn’t succeed in producing the desired results, at the same time formulating additional questions to establish what counts as success. In this way he refined the shape of his original questions—his sense of what is skillful and unskillful—honing it to the point where it yielded the perspective of the four noble truths. In the course of this refinement he discovered that some of his concepts of skillful and unskillful—such as the idea that self-torment is inherently skillful—had to be recast.

Even his response to the memory of his experience of jhāna in his youth followed the same pattern of phrasing a question and then testing the answer he had arrived at. He asked himself, “Could that be the path to awakening?” And even though there followed the consciousness, “That is the path to awakening,” he still tested this answer to see how far it might be true [§17].

Because all of these questions are a form of self-examination through cross-questioning, it is easy to see why the Buddha made such extensive use of cross-questioning in his teachings, citing it as a distinctive feature of the way he taught [§73]. He saw that the ability to question one’s own assumptions, and to make one’s understanding more accurate and useful by testing new assumptions in practice, lay at the heart of the path to liberation. As §19 shows, even the application of the four noble truths, in the form of dependent co-arising, was a type of self-examination through cross-questioning that led to his ultimate awakening. Thus cross-questioning is obviously a strategy that the Buddha had perfected in the process of his own quest.

An important aspect of his pursuit of that perfection lay in consistently holding to high standards for measuring the success of his quest. MN 26 [§14] indicates that the bodhisatta was not easily satisfied by the attainments he achieved under the instruction of other teachers. He wanted the deathless, and was not content with anything less. In AN 2:5 [§15] he claimed that one of the reasons for his self-awakening was that he didn't rest content with the skillful qualities he had developed until they had yielded absolute release. Thus, when he later became a teacher, a crucial element in the training he gave his students in self cross-examination lay in showing them how to measure their own behavior, and the success of their actions, against high standards as well.

This insistence on high standards aimed at a very specific goal is one of the distinctive features of the Buddha's pragmatism. Instead of allowing his students to rest complacent, defining "what works" by "what feels good enough for me," he showed them that the highest form of compassion is to raise one's standards to the level of a deathless happiness, for only through testing the results of one's actions against those standards can a truly safe and reliable happiness be attained.

In addition to perfecting the strategy of cross-questioning, the bodhisatta also perfected the other response-strategies, along with the most fruitful way to combine them. His basic assumption, tested and verified in practice—that action is fruitful and that it can be either skillful or not—provided his most basic standard for questions that are to be answered categorically. He then refined the principle of skillful and unskillful action into four categories—unskillful action, undesirable result, skillful action, desirable result—which formed the framework for the four noble truths. As he further explored the framework of these truths through self cross-examination, he arrived at the categories of dependent co-arising. The fact that awakening followed on these ultimate refinements meant that the four noble truths and dependent co-arising provided his most refined standard for the categorical response-strategy as well. In this way, he learned the value of self cross-examination in refining the framework of his categorical questions.

Also, his discovery that self-torment was not inherently skillful provided the hard-earned insight—after six years of extreme physical suffering—that some questions deserve analytical answers. His first statement in his first sermon—that sensual indulgence and self-torment are both ignoble extremes—can be seen as an analytical answer to the question of whether self-torment was a nobler livelihood than sensual indulgence. His listeners had long assumed that the answer was a categorical Yes, so before teaching them the middle way the Buddha had to reframe the question by giving the analytical response that his own self cross-examination had shown to be most productive in leading to freedom.

As we will see in Chapter Four, many variations on the issue of how different livelihoods should be judged kept resurfacing throughout his teaching career, and they provided the occasion for the largest sub-set of his analytical answers. When asked which livelihood is most praiseworthy and fruitful, the Buddha would respond in each case that a livelihood is to be measured not by social status or heroic austerities, but by the fruitfulness of one's actions.

And finally, when the bodhisatta on the night of his awakening moved from the first and second knowledges (the recollection of his past lives, and the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings) to the third knowledge (the knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations) [§18], he learned an object lesson in the fact that assumptions useful on one level of the path might have to be put aside on a higher level. This meant that questions based on those assumptions would have to be put aside on higher levels of the

path as well.

He also learned which particular assumptions deserve to be put aside. The first and second knowledges were expressed in terms of beings and worlds—the basic terms of *bhava*, or becoming. The third knowledge dropped those terms in favor of the bare terms of stress and fermentations, their origination, their cessation, and the path to their cessation.

DN 1 [§184] and MN 136 [§66] show that many other meditators of the period, on gaining knowledge of the same sort that the bodhisatta gained in his first and second knowledges, proceeded to develop theories about the self and the world based on what they had seen. As a result, they became entangled in controversies and further states of becoming, leading them further and further away from awakening.

In contrast, the bodhisatta, on attaining those two knowledges, maintained the original framework for his quest: “What is the most skillful use of this knowledge?” By maintaining this framework, he was able ultimately to avoid developing theories of the self or the world. In fact, *in order to* maintain this framework on a heightened level, he *had to* stop thinking in terms of beings and worlds. After discovering in his second knowledge the role of view and intention in determining birth, aging, and death throughout the cosmos, he applied this knowledge to processes he experienced in the present moment, as they were directly experienced apart from notions of being and self. As he cross-questioned his experience of the causes of aging and death in the present, he learned the entire interdependent sequence of causes down through becoming, from there through the factor of fabrications—which shape views and intentions—and from there to ignorance. In this way, he learned how the ending of ignorance could bring all these causes to an end. This proper framing of the issue, part of the third knowledge he gained that night, led to the step corresponding to what is elsewhere called the arising of the Dhamma eye: insight into dependent co-arising and its use in bringing stress and suffering to an end.

“I discerned, as it had come to be, that ‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.’ — MN 19

Then, apparently, he followed a similar process whereby he discerned how ignorance and the fermentations are mutually conditioned [§42], and how both of these could also be brought to an end.

“I discerned, as it had come to be, that ‘These are fermentations... This is the origination of fermentations... This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.’ My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, ‘Released.’ I discerned that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’” — MN 19

This was his total release. And because total release followed on dismantling and putting aside the terms of becoming—*self* and *world*—he learned that, even though questions framed in these terms might be legitimately answered on earlier levels of the path (see Chapters One and Six), on later levels they would have to be put aside.

From these passages we can see how the bodhisatta’s experience in cross-questioning his assumptions of what might be skillful in leading to release provided him with the framework for the four response-strategies he used, as the Buddha, in dealing with his listeners’ questions and in teaching them the way

to release.

But his quest for awakening also taught him other lessons about questions. In particular, he learned an important lesson about the pitfalls of using a simile to answer a question. Prior to his awakening, his initial response to the three similes about timber and sensuality [§17] was to undertake six years of severe austerities and the total avoidance of pleasure. This, however, was a serious misreading of how to use those similes most effectively. Only when he came to appreciate the pleasure of jhāna as secluded from sensuality was he able to benefit from the similes. This may explain why, when using a simile to explain an answer, he would often accompany the simile with detailed cross-questioning to ensure that his listener would interpret the simile in the most effective way. His hard-won experience had taught him the need for clarity in this approach.

These are some of the ways in which the bodhisatta's quest for awakening perfected his skill in asking and answering questions. By describing these experiences to his listeners, he taught them important lessons in how they could develop skill in asking and answering questions as part of the path to their awakening as well.

## READINGS

§ 14. "Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, being subject myself to birth, I sought what was likewise subject to birth. Being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, I sought [happiness in] what was likewise subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement. The thought occurred to me, 'Why do I, being subject myself to birth, seek what is likewise subject to birth? Being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, why do I seek what is likewise subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement? What if I, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, were to seek the unborn, unexcelled safety from the yoke: unbinding. What if I, being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, were to seek the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrowless, unexcelled safety from the yoke: unbinding.'

"So, at a later time, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—and while my parents, unwilling, were crying with tears streaming down their faces—I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

"Having thus gone forth in search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Ālāra Kālāma and, on arrival, said to him, 'Friend Kālāma, I want to practice in this Dhamma & Vinaya.'

"When this was said, he replied to me, 'You may stay here, my friend. This doctrine is such that a wise person can soon enter & dwell in his own teacher's knowledge, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.'

"It was not long before I quickly learned the doctrine. As far as mere lip-reciting & repetition, I could speak the words of knowledge, the words of the elders, and I could affirm that I knew & saw—I, along with others.

"I thought, 'It isn't through mere conviction alone that Ālāra Kālāma declares, 'I have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.'" Certainly he dwells knowing & seeing this Dhamma.' So I went to him and said, 'To what extent do you declare that you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma?' When this was said, he declared the dimension of

nothingness.

“I thought, ‘Not only does Ālāra Kālāma have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. I too have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. What if I were to endeavor to realize for myself the Dhamma that Ālāra Kālāma declares he has entered & dwells in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’ So it was not long before I quickly entered & dwelled in that Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. I went to him and said, ‘Friend Kālāma, is this the extent to which you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge?’

“‘Yes, my friend....’

“‘This, friend, is the extent to which I too have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.’

“‘It is a gain for us, my friend, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge. And the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. The Dhamma I know is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma I know. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come friend, let us now lead this community together.’

“In this way did Ālāra Kālāma, my teacher, place me, his pupil, on the same level with himself and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness.’ So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

“In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and, on arrival, said to him, ‘Friend Uddaka, I want to practice in this Dhamma & Vinaya.’ [The story here follows a pattern similar to that of the bodhisatta’s encounter with Ālāra Kālāma, except that Uddaka teaches the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, which he himself has not attained, but which had been attained by his teacher, Rama. When the bodhisatta reaches that attainment, Uddaka offers to set him up as the sole leader of the community.]

“In this way did Uddaka Rāmaputta, my companion in the holy life, place me in the position of teacher and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.’ So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

“In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages in the Magadhan country and came to the military town of Uruvelā. There I saw some delightful countryside, with an inspiring forest grove, a clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. The thought occurred to me, ‘How delightful is this countryside, with its inspiring forest grove, clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. This is just right for the exertion of a clansman intent on exertion.’ So I sat down right there, thinking, ‘This is just right for exertion.’” — MN 26

§ 15. “Monks, I have known two qualities through experience: discontent

with regard to skillful qualities & unrelenting exertion. Relentlessly I exerted myself, (thinking,) ‘Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.’ From this heedfulness of mine was attained awakening. From this heedfulness of mine was attained the unexcelled safety from bondage.

“You too monks, should relentlessly exert yourselves, (thinking,) ‘Gladly would we let the flesh & blood in our bodies dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if we have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing our persistence.’ You too in no long time will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.

“Thus you should train yourselves: ‘We will relentlessly exert ourselves, (thinking,) “Gladly would we let the flesh & blood in our bodies dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if we have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing our persistence.”’ That’s how you should train yourselves.” — AN 2:5

§ 16. “The thought occurred to me, ‘What if—on recognized, designated nights such as the eighth, fourteenth, & fifteenth of the lunar fortnight—I were to stay in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines? Perhaps I would get to see that fear & terror.’ So at a later time—on recognized, designated nights such as the eighth, fourteenth, & fifteenth of the lunar fortnight—I stayed in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines. And while I was staying there a wild animal would come, or a bird would drop a twig, or wind would rustle the fallen leaves. The thought would occur to me: ‘Is this that fear & terror coming?’ Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Why do I just keep waiting for fear? What if I were to subdue fear & terror in whatever state they come?’ So when fear & terror came while I was walking back & forth, I would not stand or sit or lie down. I would keep walking back & forth until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was standing, I would not walk or sit or lie down. I would keep standing until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was sitting, I would not lie down or stand up or walk. I would keep sitting until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was lying down, I would not sit up or stand or walk. I would keep lying down until I had subdued that fear & terror.” — MN 4

§ 17. “Then, Aggivessana, these three similes—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a wet, sappy piece of timber lying in the water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now, what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy timber lying in the water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is wet & sappy, and besides it is lying in the water. Eventually the man would reap only his share of weariness & disappointment.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who doesn’t live secluded from sensuality in body & mind, and whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is not relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels

painful, racking, piercing feelings due to his striving [for awakening], he is incapable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the first simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“Then a second simile—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a wet, sappy piece of timber lying on land far from water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now, what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy timber lying on land far from water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is wet & sappy, even though it is lying on land far from water. Eventually the man would reap only his share of weariness & disappointment.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who lives secluded from sensuality in body only, but whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is not relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings due to his striving, he is incapable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the second simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“Then a third simile—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a dry, sapless piece of timber lying on land far from water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now, what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the dry, sapless timber lying on land?”

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is dry & sapless, and besides it is lying on land far from water.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who lives secluded from sensuality in body & mind, and whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings due to his striving, he is capable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the third simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“I thought, ‘What if I, clenching my teeth and pressing my tongue against the roof of my mouth, were to beat down, constrain, & crush my mind with my awareness?’ So, clenching my teeth and pressing my tongue against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, & crushed by mind with my awareness. Just as a strong man, seizing a weaker man by the head or the throat or the shoulders, would beat him down, constrain, & crush him, in the same way I beat down, constrained, & crushed my mind with my awareness. As I did so, sweat poured from my armpits. And although tireless persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established, my body was aroused & uncalm because of the painful exertion. But the painful feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

“I thought, ‘What if I were to become absorbed in the jhāna of non-breathing?’ So I stopped the in-breaths & out-breaths in my nose & mouth. As I did so, there was a loud roaring of winds coming out my earholes, just like the loud roar of winds coming out of a smith’s bellows.... So I stopped the in-breaths & out-breaths in my nose & mouth & ears. As I did so, extreme forces sliced through my head, just as if a strong man were slicing my head open with a sharp sword.... Extreme pains arose in my head, just as if a strong man were tightening a turban made of tough leather straps around my head.... Extreme forces carved up my stomach cavity, just as if a butcher or his apprentice were to carve up the stomach cavity of an ox.... There was an extreme burning in my body, just as if two strong men, grabbing a weaker man by the arms, were to

roast & broil him over a pit of hot embers. And although tireless persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established, my body was aroused & uncalm because of the painful exertion. But the painful feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

“Devas, on seeing me, said, ‘Gotama the contemplative is dead.’ Other devas said, ‘He isn’t dead, he’s dying.’ Others said, ‘He’s neither dead nor dying, he’s an arahant, for this is the way arahants live.’

“I thought, ‘What if I were to practice going altogether without food?’ Then devas came to me and said, ‘Dear sir, please don’t practice going altogether without food. If you go altogether without food, we’ll infuse divine nourishment in through your pores, and you will survive on that.’ I thought, ‘If I were to claim to be completely fasting while these devas are infusing divine nourishment in through my pores, I would be lying.’ So I dismissed them, saying, ‘Enough.’

“I thought, ‘What if I were to take only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup?’ So I took only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup. My body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems.... My backside became like a camel’s hoof.... My spine stood out like a string of beads.... My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old, run-down barn.... The gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like the gleam of water deep in a well.... My scalp shriveled & withered like a green bitter melon, shriveled & withered in the heat & the wind.... The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well; and when I thought of touching my spine, I grabbed hold of the skin of my belly as well.... If I urinated or defecated, I fell over on my face right there.... Simply from my eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair—rotted at its roots—fell from my body as I rubbed, simply from eating so little.

“People on seeing me would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative is black. Other people would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative isn’t black, he’s brown.’ Others would say, ‘Gotama the contemplative is neither black nor brown, he’s golden-skinned. So much had the clear, bright color of my skin deteriorated, simply from eating so little.

“I thought, ‘Whatever painful, racking, piercing feelings have been felt in the past by contemplatives or brahmins due to their striving, this is the utmost. None have been greater than this. Whatever painful, racking, piercing feelings will be felt in the future by contemplatives or brahmins due to their striving, this is the utmost. None will be greater than this. Whatever painful, racking, piercing feelings are being felt in the present by contemplatives or brahmins due to their striving, this is the utmost. None is greater than this. But with this racking practice of austerities I haven’t attained any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to awakening?’

“I thought, ‘I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Could that be the path to awakening?’ Then there was the consciousness following on that memory: ‘That is the path to awakening.’ I thought, ‘So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities?’ I thought, ‘I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities, but that pleasure is not easy to achieve with a body so

extremely emaciated. What if I were to take some solid food: some rice & porridge?’ So I took some solid food: some rice & porridge. Now five monks had been attending to me, thinking, ‘If Gotama, our contemplative, achieves some higher state, he will tell us.’ But when they saw me taking some solid food—some rice & porridge—they were disgusted and left me, thinking, ‘Gotama the contemplative is living luxuriously. He has abandoned his exertion and is backsliding into abundance.’

“So when I had taken solid food and regained strength, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.” — *MN 36*

§ 18. “Monks, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me, ‘What if I were to keep dividing my thinking into two sorts?’ So I made thinking imbued with sensuality, thinking imbued with ill will, & thinking imbued with harmfulness one sort, and thinking imbued with renunciation, thinking imbued with non-ill will, & thinking imbued with harmlessness another sort.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with sensuality arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with sensuality has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding.’

“As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others... to the affliction of both... it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding, it subsided. Whenever thinking imbued with sensuality had arisen, I simply abandoned it, destroyed it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with ill will arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with ill will has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding.’

“As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others... to the affliction of both... it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding, it subsided. Whenever thinking imbued with ill will had arisen, I simply abandoned it, destroyed it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with harmfulness arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with harmfulness has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding.’

“As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others... to the affliction of both... it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to unbinding, it subsided. Whenever thinking imbued with harmfulness had arisen, I simply abandoned it, destroyed it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence.

“Whatever a monk keeps pursuing with his thinking & pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with sensuality, abandoning thinking imbued with renunciation, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with sensuality. If a monk keeps pursuing

thinking imbued with ill will, abandoning thinking imbued with non-ill will, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with ill will. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with harmfulness, abandoning thinking imbued with harmlessness, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with harmfulness.

“Just as in the last month of the Rains, in the autumn season when the crops are ripening, a cowherd would look after his cows: He would tap & poke & check & curb them with a stick on this side & that. Why is that? Because he foresees flogging or imprisonment or a fine or public censure arising from that [if he were to let his cows wander into the crops]. In the same way I foresaw in unskillful qualities drawbacks, degradation, & defilement, and I foresaw in skillful qualities rewards related to renunciation & promoting cleansing.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with renunciation arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with renunciation has arisen in me; and that leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, & leads to unbinding. If I were to think & ponder in line with that even for a night... even for a day... even for a day & night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking & pondering a long time would tire the body. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed; and a disturbed mind is far from concentration.’ So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, & concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind would not be disturbed.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with non-ill will arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with non-ill will has arisen in me; and that leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, & leads to unbinding. If I were to think & ponder in line with that even for a night... even for a day... even for a day & night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking & pondering a long time would tire the body. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed; and a disturbed mind is far from concentration.’ So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, & concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind would not be disturbed.

“And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with harmlessness arose. I discerned that ‘Thinking imbued with harmlessness has arisen in me; and that leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, promotes lack of vexation, & leads to unbinding. If I were to think & ponder in line with that even for a night... even for a day... even for a day & night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking & pondering a long time would tire the body. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed; and a disturbed mind is far from concentration.’ So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, & concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind would not be disturbed.

“Whatever a monk keeps pursuing with his thinking & pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with renunciation, abandoning thinking imbued with sensuality, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with renunciation. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with non-ill will, abandoning thinking imbued with ill will, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with non-ill will. If a monk keeps pursuing thinking imbued with harmlessness, abandoning thinking imbued with harmfulness, his mind is bent by that thinking imbued with harmlessness.

“Just as in the last month of the hot season, when all the crops have been gathered into the village, a cowherd would look after his cows: While resting under the shade of a tree or out in the open, he simply keeps himself mindful of

‘those cows.’ In the same way, I simply kept myself mindful of ‘those qualities.’

“Unflagging persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established. My body was calm & unaroused, my mind concentrated & single. Quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.<sup>1</sup> With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I entered & remained in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, I remained equanimous, mindful, & alert, and sensed pleasure with the body. I entered & remained in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—I entered & remained in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of recollecting my past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two... five, ten... fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion: ‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

“This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away & reappearance of beings. I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with actions: ‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.’ Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—I saw beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with actions.

“This was the second knowledge I attained in the second watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the ending of (mental) fermentations. I discerned, as it had come to be, that *‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are fermentations...*

*This is the origination of fermentations... This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.* My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, 'Released.' I discerned that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

"This was the third knowledge I attained in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute." — MN 19

NOTE: 1. AN 9:41 describes the question that led the bodhisatta from right resolve to the first jhāna:

"Even I myself—before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta—thought, 'Renunciation is good; seclusion is good,' but my heart didn't leap up at renunciation, didn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing, 'That is peace.' The thought occurred to me, 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing, "That is peace"?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'I haven't seen the drawback of sensuality; I haven't pursued [that theme]. I haven't understood the reward of renunciation; I haven't familiarized myself with it. That's why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing, "That is peace."'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'If, having seen the drawback of sensuality, I were to pursue that theme; and if, having understood the reward of renunciation, I were to familiarize myself with it, there's the possibility that my heart would leap up at renunciation, grow confident, steadfast, & firm, seeing, "That is peace."'

"So at a later time, having seen the drawback of sensuality, I pursued that theme; having understood the reward of renunciation, I familiarized myself with it. My heart leaped up at renunciation, grew confident, steadfast, & firm, seeing, 'That is peace.' Then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna."

Similar questions and reflections then led him to the remaining jhānas and levels of formlessness [§150.]

§ 19. "Monks, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, the realization came to me: 'How this world has fallen on difficulty! It is born, it ages, it dies, it falls away & rearises, but it doesn't discern the escape from this stress, from this aging-&-death. O when will it discern the escape from this stress, from this aging-&-death?'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'Aging-&-death exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Aging-&-death exists when birth exists.<sup>1</sup> From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.'

Then the thought occurred to me, 'Birth exists when what exists? From what as a requisite condition comes birth?' From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: 'Birth exists when becoming exists. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.'....

"'Becoming exists when what exists?' ... 'Becoming exists when clinging exists....

"'Clinging exists when what exists?' ... 'Clinging exists when craving exists....

"'Craving exists when what exists?' ... 'Craving exists when feeling exists....

"'Feeling exists when what exists?' ... 'Feeling exists when contact exists....

"'Contact exists when what exists?' ... 'Contact exists when the six sense media exist....

"'The six sense media exist when what exists?' ... 'The six sense media exist when name-&-form exists....

"'Name-&-form exists when what exists?' ... 'Name-&-form exists when

consciousness exists....

“‘Consciousness exists when what exists?’ ... ‘Consciousness exists when fabrications exist....

Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Fabrications exist when what exists? From what as a requisite condition come fabrications?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Fabrications exist when ignorance exists. From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“‘Thus:

From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering. Origination, origination.’ Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never before heard.

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Aging-&-death doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of aging-&-death?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Aging-&-death doesn’t exist when birth doesn’t exist. From the cessation of birth comes the cessation of aging-&-death.’

“Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Birth doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of birth?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Birth doesn’t exist when becoming doesn’t exist. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth.’....

“‘Becoming doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Becoming doesn’t exist when clinging doesn’t exist....

“‘Clinging doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Clinging doesn’t exist when craving doesn’t exist....

“‘Craving doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Craving doesn’t exist when feeling doesn’t exist....

“‘Feeling doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Feeling doesn’t exist when contact doesn’t exist....

“‘Contact doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Contact doesn’t exist when the six sense media don’t exist....

“‘The six sense media don’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘The six sense media don’t exist when name-&-form doesn’t exist....

“‘Name-&-form doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Name-&-form doesn’t exist when consciousness doesn’t exist....

“‘Consciousness doesn’t exist when what doesn’t exist?’ ... ‘Consciousness doesn’t exist when fabrications don’t exist....

Then the thought occurred to me, ‘Fabrications don’t exist when what doesn’t exist? From the cessation of what comes the cessation of fabrications?’ From my appropriate attention there came the breakthrough of discernment: ‘Fabrications don’t exist when ignorance doesn’t exist. From the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.

“Thus:

From the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications.

From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness.

From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form.

From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media.

From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact.

From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling.

From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving.

From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance.

From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming.

From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering. Cessation, cessation.’ Vision arose, clear knowing arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never before heard.” — SN 12:10

NOTE: 1. The statements, “X exists when Y exists” and “X doesn’t exist when Y doesn’t exist” appear as part of the general causal principle—*idappaccayatā*, this/that conditionality—underlying dependent co-arising as a whole [§42]. In that principle, these statements are paired with two other statements: “From the arising of X comes the arising of Y” and “From the cessation of X comes the cessation of Y.”

The first pair of statements can be read in two ways: loosely and precisely. Read loosely, they can mean that the existence of X creates the conditions for Y eventually to exist; when X goes out of existence, that creates the conditions for Y eventually to go out of existence. Read in this way, the statements are equivalent with the second pair of statements. The resulting interpretation of this/that conditionality, however, has very little explanatory power, for it cannot account for the Buddha’s rejection of determinism [§§83-84], nor can it account for the complexity of feedback loops in the Buddha’s detailed descriptions of causality.

Read as precise statements, however, these statements can mean that Y will come into existence simultaneously with X’s coming into existence and that Y will go out of existence simultaneously with X’s going out of existence. Read in this way, this/that conditionality contains the interplay of two fairly different causal principles—causes that bring effects in the immediate present, and causes that can give effects over time—which goes a great way toward explaining both the complexity and the non-deterministic nature of the causal relationships described in the Buddha’s teachings. (See the Introduction to *The Wings to Awakening* for a discussion of this point.)

However, it has been argued that this second reading is invalid because it obviously does not apply to the statement that aging-&-death exist when birth exists, for the aging and death of a being can obviously occur many years after its birth. This argument, however, ignores the possibility that the Buddha in this passage is referring to the arising, decay, and passing away of momentary mind-states, which can occur so quickly that the process of aging-&-death on this level would occur simultaneously with the process of birth.

This interpretation is supported by two considerations. The first is that the Buddha terms this insight a “breakthrough of discernment,” which would hardly apply to the general observation that aging-&-death follows on birth. The second consideration is that in SN 23:2 [§199], the Buddha states that one becomes a “being” whenever one gets caught up in desire for any of the aggregates. Because this is a purely mental process, and because individual aggregates and their attendant desires can arise and pass away very quickly—SN 22:95 compares the arising and passing away of feelings with the evanescent appearance and disappearance of bubbles caused by rain falling on a body of water—the aging-&-death of a “being” on this level could very easily occur simultaneously with its birth.

## *Categorical Answers*

The Buddha often structured his talks as categorical (*ekamsa*) answers to specific questions that he himself had posed. In this way, he accomplished three objectives. He was showing his listeners which questions are worth asking, he was demonstrating the context in which they should place the concepts he was discussing, and he was providing a framework to help them remember what he said. (See Appendix Two.) The fact that he structured his talks in this way means that the vast majority of the questions he answered in the Canon are categorical, and that there are thousands of them. It would be impractical in a book of this scope to survey all of the Buddha's categorical answers, so we will focus instead on two central questions related to this type of answer: (1) What standards did the Buddha use to determine which sorts of questions deserved a categorical answer? (2) How did he intend his listeners to organize the vast body of his categorical answers into a coherent and useful fund of knowledge? In answering these two questions, we will also gain an understanding of how far the truth-value of a categorical answer goes.

Fortunately, the Buddha himself provided a useful hint in how to answer these two questions by clearly indicating that some of his answers were more categorical than others. Of all the teachings he gave in the Canon, only two did he label as categorical. The first is the distinction between good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, and good mental conduct on the one hand, and bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, and mental misconduct on the other [§21]. Comparing MN 9 [§27] with AN 10:165 [§28], we can see that this distinction is the same as that between skillful and unskillful kamma. The second teaching the Buddha labeled as categorical was that of the four noble truths [§22].

These two sets of teachings are categorical because their range isn't limited to particular situations. Acting on them leads categorically—universally—to good results. They are reliable guides to mastering the principle of kamma across the board. Any people who act on the distinction between skillful and unskillful actions—adopting the skillful and abandoning the unskillful—produce bright kamma, in the sense that they don't have to fault themselves on their behavior; observant people, on close examination, praise them; their good reputation gets spread about; they die unconfused; and—on the breakup of the body, after death—reappear in the good destinations, in the heavenly world [§31]. Any people who act on the four noble truths—comprehending stress, abandoning its cause, realizing its cessation, and developing the path to its cessation—produce kamma that leads to the end of kamma, in that these truths are conducive to the goal, conducive to the Dhamma, and basic to the holy life; they lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding: a happiness so total that the need for any further action for the sake of happiness has been transcended (SN 56:31).

As for other teachings that the Buddha gave as categorical answers to questions, they can be regarded as falling under these two. As Ven. Sāriputta noted,

“Just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant's footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skillful qualities are included in the four noble truths.” — MN 28

In much the same way, all the Buddha's categorical answers to questions are

encompassed by his two categorical teachings. For instance, as we saw in Chapter Two and will see again in Chapter Eight, the teachings of dependent co-arising are also conducive to awakening and unbinding. A cursory glance at these teachings shows that they actually fall under the four noble truths, being an elaboration of the first three of the four. In the case of other categorical answers the relationship to the categorical teachings may not be so obvious, but careful analysis will show that it's there.

As we noted in Chapter One, the four noble truths and the distinction between skillful and unskillful action supply the categories both of right view and of appropriate attention. And as we have also noted, right view and appropriate attention involve not only looking *at* these topics, but also looking at the rest of experience *in terms of* them. In particular, right view and appropriate attention use these topics as a framework for selecting and developing the skills needed to comprehend stress and bring it to an end. They direct one to focus primary attention on one's actions and the results of those actions, and in this way they foster the skill most essential for understanding and mastering the principle of kamma: the ability to learn from one's mistakes so as to develop ever-higher levels of skill.

Thus appropriate attention—and, to streamline the discussion, we will refer to both right view and appropriate attention under this term—provides the framework for best understanding the Buddha's overarching approach to giving categorical answers. This framework shows not only how to frame questions that will deserve categorical answers, but also how best to learn from those answers—how to comprehend and use them once they are received. In this way, just as Chapter One was concerned with the kamma of teaching, this chapter will focus on the kamma of learning, of listening and figuring things out. Because learning involves understanding the intention of the person teaching, the discussion in this chapter will inevitably overlap somewhat with the discussion in Chapter One, but here we will focus more on how the Buddha's intention in teaching shaped the kind of learning he encouraged in his students, and—by implication—in those of us who still want to reap the most benefit from his words.

It's commonly recognized that people attend to a teaching in line with the views they bring to it. But it's a common mistake to regard these views as lying somehow outside of the field of action—thinking that, for instance, one's understanding of the world may guide one's actions while at the same time not noticing that one's choice of a view and the way one attends to it is a type of action as well. The Buddha, however, saw clearly the kammic aspect of building a view, holding to it, forming questions based on it, and attending to its different features. All of these actions form the frame for how people listen to a teaching and what they take away from it. So when the Buddha, in the typical formula at the beginning of his talks, told his listeners to “listen and attend well,” he wasn't simply telling them to pay attention to all of his words. He was also telling them to bring appropriate attention to what he was saying, framing the questions they brought to the teaching in terms of appropriate attention and placing his comments in the same framework as well.

It might seem strange that the Buddha would be asking his listeners to bring right view to his teaching even before they had heard his teaching, but he was depending on the fact that all people have experienced stress, and all search for someone who knows a way to put an end to stress (AN 6:63, Chapter One). This is the primal search, beginning in early childhood, from which all other searches grow. The question embodied in this search—“Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?”—is probably the most earnest question we ask. In advising his listeners to bring right view to his teaching, the Buddha was simply

recommending that they approach it from the viewpoint of this earnest, primal search, and not through the lens of less primal issues. For anyone sensitive to the problem of stress, this is not too much to ask.

To help clarify the issue of what does and doesn't count as appropriate attention in this area, the Buddha in MN 2 [§25] defined appropriate attention primarily as knowledge of which sorts of questions deserve attention and which don't. The implication here is that those deserving attention are the ones most worth bringing to his teachings. He then provided lists to illustrate both categories of questions. Although the lists are not exhaustive, they provide important insights into where the line between appropriate attention and inappropriate attention can be drawn, and why it is drawn precisely there.

The questions deserving appropriate attention, predictably, are those defined in terms of the four noble truths. Those not deserving attention are these:

“This is how one attends inappropriately: ‘Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?’ Or else one is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’” — MN 2

These questions are framed in terms of two dichotomies—*me* and *not me*, *existence* and *non-existence*—placed in the time frame of *past*, *future*, and *present*. Although the texts don't explicitly make this connection, these terms correspond to what MN 18 [§50] calls the “perceptions & categories of *papañca*.” *Papañca* is a difficult term to translate. Some common English equivalents for it include objectification, complication, elaboration, differentiation, and proliferation.

In ancient Indian artistic theory, *papañca* referred to the elaboration of an artwork's basic theme: the process of embodying that theme in specific objects—the notes of a musical piece, the colors and forms of a painting, or the words and images of a literary work. The Buddha, however, had his own uses and explanations for the term. Without giving it a formal definition, he cited it functionally in MN 18 and DN 21 [§4] to describe the sort of thinking that leads to conflict. In Sn 4:14 [§52] he identified the root of *papañca*-classifications as the thought, “I am the thinker.” Because this thought turns the “I” into an object or being; and because the classifications derived from this thought deal with the status of individual objects existing in a world of objects, “objectification” is probably the best translation for the Buddha's use of the term, *papañca*. The one caveat here is that, unlike the modern psychological use of “objectification”—in which the subject treats other people as objects—objectification in the Buddha's sense begins when the subject objectifies itself. Only then does it apply the same process to others.

Given that objectification-classifications begin with the thought, “I am the thinker,” the connection between objectification and the inappropriate questions in MN 2 is clear. Those questions are phrased in terms that try to define what the “I” is, what it means to “be,” whether the “I” exists, and what its fate over time has been and will be: Did it come into existence from nothing? Has it always existed? Will it always exist? Will its continued existence be happy?

As the Buddha pointed out, people who attend to inappropriate questions of this sort tend to settle on views like these:

“The view *I have a self* arises in him as true & established, or the view *I have no self*... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self*...

or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self...* or the view *It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self* arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: *This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity.* — MN 2

In addition, the act of attending to these inappropriate questions can lead to other views as well, for the “where” in the questions, “Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?” leads not only to views about the nature of the existence of the self, but also about the existence of the world, its source, and its final end. DN 1 [§184] provides a long list of views that can be derived in this way.

The Buddha found these questions inappropriate because the act of giving an answer framed in their terms—regardless of how true it might be—would go against the duties of the four noble truths. As SN 22:81 [§153] points out, any answer to these questions would be a form of fabrication. But these questions—instead of focusing attention on the process of fabrication leading up to them, with the purpose of freeing the mind from passion for that process—focus on using the process of fabrication for gaining what they see as worthwhile information about other things. In this way, they induce more passion for the results of fabrication, while keeping the actual processes in the dark. Thus they interfere with the duty appropriate to the first noble truth, which is to comprehend fabrication to the point of dispassion.

Similarly, SN 22:36 [§200] points out that the act of self-definition is also an act of obsession, in that one develops passion for whatever one identifies as one’s self. Because anything that could be identified in this way comes under the five clinging-aggregates, one is again going against the basic duty with regard to the first noble truth, which is to comprehend those clinging-aggregates to the point of dispassion. Furthermore, the act of taking on an identity in the context of a specific world of experience is an act of becoming, which is one of the fermentations from which the mind needs to be released. The desire to engage in becoming is one of the primary forms of craving leading to suffering and stress. To indulge in this desire goes against the duty with regard to the second noble truth, which is to abandon that craving.

At the same time, as MN 102 [§53] shows, any sense of “I am” applied to even the subtlest levels of concentration developed along the path hides a remnant of clinging that, because it has not been fully comprehended and abandoned, gets in the way of awakening.

Thus the texts go into a fair amount of detail to show how any answer to the above inappropriate questions would go against the duties of the four noble truths. As a result, any such answer—instead of leading to happiness or freedom—would lead only to entanglement.

“This [the array of views derived from these questions] is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from stress.” — MN 2

MN 18 [§50] makes a similar point in terms of the psychology of sensory perception:

“Dependent on eye & forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling.

What one feels, one perceives [labels, assigns a meaning]. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions & categories of objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, & future forms cognizable via the eye.

[Similarly with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect.] — *MN 18*

The progression in this passage is instructive. At first the processes of sensory contact are described in impersonal terms: eye, forms, eye-consciousness, contact, and feeling. With feeling, however, an agent appears, who then feels, perceives, and thinks. This thinking, however, does not yet use the perceptions and categories of objectification—a point that will be important in allowing for the use of thought on the path. (The verb for *thinking* used here—*vitakketi*—corresponds to the noun *vitakka*, which appears in the standard definitions of right concentration [§33] and noble right resolve [§39].) Nevertheless, the agent frequently moves from thinking to objectifying, at which point the role of agent changes to that of victim, assailed by the perceptions and categories of objectification, entangled in the thicket and fetter of views.

There are at least five reasons for this entanglement.

(1) The first is that the categories and perceptions of objectification deal in abstractions that are impossible to pin down with any certainty in the present. Thus any answer framed in their terms is bound to lead simply to more uncertainty.

The remaining reasons derive from the self-reflexive nature of this kind of thinking.

(2) The categories of objectification not only raise issues about objects of thought—selves and worlds—but also draw into those issues the identity of the person thinking: “How does this thinker, as an object, fit into the world of its thoughts? How does it fit into the world of other people’s thoughts?” In this way, the thinker is inevitably entangled in internal difficulties and controversy.

(3) As SN 22:36 [§200] points out, the act of self-definition is an act of self-limitation, for anything that one might identify as one’s self—even a cosmic self—is limited by the restrictions of space and time.

(4) Also, all people engaged in objectification are busy defining themselves and the world around them in terms of “I am the thinker.” Thus they are defining—and placing limitations on—not only themselves and their worlds, but also other people who have defined themselves and their worlds in line with their own “I am the thinker.” The act of trying to impose on other people the limitations implicit in one’s own objectifications, insisting that they submit to one’s own sense of self and world, is an act of aggression, an attempt to exert dominance over how they define themselves and their worlds. There are bound to be people who will resist any views produced from this sort of thinking, and thus the person engaged in this process is bound to meet with external conflict.

(5) Finally, the act of identifying oneself creates a “being” [§199]. As Khp 4 points out, all beings subsist on food. In creating a being that needs to feed, one is creating the many problems that come with that need: the hunger—the “foremost disease” (Dhp 203)—driving that need, along with the consequent needs to secure a source of food and to defend it from other beings who will try to take it as food for themselves. Often, one has to defend against being treated as food oneself.

These are some of the ways in which the categories and perceptions of objectification assail and entangle the person who fabricates them.

The questions framed in terms of appropriate attention, however, avoid these uncertainties and conflicts by using a level of thinking prior to

objectification. To begin with, they are framed in terms that are immediately felt and perceived. Thus they deal in certainties about actions and results. In fact, in MN 2 [§25], these terms are expressed not as questions but as observations: “This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.” Only in other discourses [§33; §39] does the Buddha express these sentences in the form of questions, to show how best to induce these observations about the mind in the present.

Second, questions expressed in terms of appropriate attention avoid the entanglements that come with trying to define a sense of the self and the world around an “I am.” Instead, they simply offer therapy for the problem of suffering: explaining how it can be comprehended in terms of actions and results, and thus brought to an end. When the Buddha offered views based on these categories to his listeners, he was not engaging in an act of aggression or seeking dominance, for he was not trying to define who they were. Instead of treating them as objects, he was speaking to the main burden of subjectivity: the experience of pain. In offering his teachings, he was simply offering tools—or to use his own analogy, medicine—to cure that pain, leaving his listeners free to use that medicine, or not, as they saw fit.

Now, there are obviously some passages in the discourses where the Buddha offers answers to such questions as, “Was I in the past?” or “Shall I be in the future?”, particularly in his discussion of past and future lives. These answers, however, should be viewed in terms of his strictures for his own speech: that it be true, beneficial, and timely. In all of the instances where the Buddha answers questions that could derive from the root thought, “I am the thinker,” he does so with the purpose of addressing a person caught in the midst of that mode of thinking, and inducing either (1) an interest in why “the thinker” should pursue skillful action or (2) a sense of dispassion for the act of continuing to think in the mode of objectification at all. A graphic example of the latter case is the following:

Now on that occasion the Blessed One was dwelling in Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Grove. Then thirty monks from Pāvā—all wilderness dwellers, all alms-goers, all triple-robe wearers, all still with fetters [*saṃyojana*]—went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side.

Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One, “These thirty monks from Pāvā... are all still with fetters. What if I were to teach them the Dhamma in such a way that, in this very sitting, their minds—through lack of clinging/sustenance—would be released from fermentations?”

So he addressed the monks: “Monks.”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “From an inconceivable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. What do you think, monks? Which is the greater, the blood you have shed from having your heads cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, or the water in the four great oceans?”

“As we understand the Dhamma taught to us by the Blessed One, this is the greater: the blood we have shed from having our heads cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, not the water in the four great oceans.”

“Excellent, monks. Excellent. It is excellent that you thus understand the Dhamma taught by me.

“This is the greater: the blood you have shed from having your heads

cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, not the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, being cows, you had your cow-heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, being water buffaloes, you had your water buffalo-heads cut off... when, being rams, you had your ram-heads cut off... when, being goats, you had your goat-heads cut off... when, being deer, you had your deer-heads cut off... when, being chickens, you had your chicken-heads cut off... when, being pigs, you had your pig-heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, arrested as thieves plundering villages, you had your heads cut off... when, arrested as highway thieves, you had your heads cut off... when, arrested as adulterers, you had your heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—enough to become disenchanting with all fabrications, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of the thirty monks from Pāvā—through lack of clinging/sustenance—were released from fermentations. — *SN 15:13*

Thus, when the Buddha found it timely and beneficial to use the categories and perceptions of objectification in a strategic way to get a person mired in those categories to see the advantages of dropping them, he would use them for that purpose. This, in fact, is the function of the mundane level of right view, which employs categories that fall into the realm of objectification, such as “beings” and “worlds.”

However, he did not always have to follow this approach. As we noted in our discussion of MN 18, there is a type of thinking that precedes objectification and does not impose the categories of objectification on what is felt and perceived. When his listeners were ready, the Buddha would appeal to that level of thought in hopes of getting them to use it in their pursuit of the path.

This he would do in a variety of ways. To begin with, he would often describe the benefits of thinking in terms of appropriate attention:

“The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones... discerns which ideas are fit for attention, and which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.... And which are the ideas fit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation of sensuality doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of becoming... the unarisen fermentation of ignorance doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance is abandoned.... He attends appropriately, *This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity view, uncertainty, and grasping at habits & practices.” — *MN 2*

Second, the Buddha would recommend questions that his listeners should ask other people or themselves. Because the questions they should ask themselves are a type of cross-questioning, we will consider them in Chapter Six. Here we will simply note that, in recommending the questions they should ask others, the Buddha advised (1) that they ask only experienced and knowledgeable people and (2) that the questions deal with skillful action: how to understand the concept of skillfulness, what sort of actions are skillful, and how specific skills are to be developed [§§43-44]. Of special interest are the questions in MN 135 [§43], for these are said to be the source of discernment:

“This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term benefit & happiness?’”

These questions mark the beginning of discernment because they recognize that long-term happiness is better than short-term, that happiness depends on one’s actions, and that one’s actions can be chosen and developed as skills. Everything else in the practice comes from recognizing these basic principles.

But the Buddha’s most common method in encouraging appropriate attention among his listeners was, as we have already noted, to frame his talks as categorical answers to questions that he himself would pose. In fact, most of the detailed descriptions of the ramifications of right view—the definitions of many of the terms, and explanations of how to carry out the duties appropriate to the categories of right view—are found in talks of just this sort [§§27-31, 33, 35-36, 38-41].

Because this information comes primarily in discourses where the Buddha is in total control of the shape of the discussion, posing the questions before providing the answers, it’s somewhat surprising to find gaps and apparent inconsistencies in the information about right view that can be drawn from these passages. For instance, many of the most basic terms are not formally defined. The four noble truths center on stress, but nowhere is stress given a formal definition. It is illustrated with examples, and the Buddha gives a summary definition—in terms of the five clinging-aggregates [§33]—that helps strategically in knowing how to analyze stress for the purpose of putting an end to it, but nowhere does he say what stress is in and of itself. Similarly with other basic terms: Happiness (*sukha*), which in one form serves as part of the path of practice (as a factor in right concentration), and in another form (unbinding) as the goal of the practice, is nowhere defined. Becoming (*bhava*), a concept central to understanding the cause of stress, is said simply to have three types—sensuality, form, and formless—but what it is, is not explained. The mind (*citta*), which functions as the agent trained in the course of the practice and is released on the attainment of the goal, is described in terms of what it does but never in terms of what it is.

As for apparent inconsistencies, one of the most striking is that the discourses offer at least four separate definitions of right view:

“And which is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmins who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after

having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.” — MN 117

“And which is right view? Knowledge in terms of stress, knowledge in terms of the origination of stress, knowledge in terms of the cessation of stress, knowledge in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.” — SN 45:8

“And which is the right view that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The discernment, the faculty of discernment, the strength of discernment, analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, the path factor of right view in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is free from fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right view that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.” — MN 117

“By & large, Kaccāyana, this world is supported by [takes as its object] a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, ‘non-existence’ with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, ‘existence’ with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one.

“By & large, Kaccāyana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings [sustenances], & biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on ‘my self.’ He has no doubt or uncertainty that mere stress, when arising, is arising; stress, when passing away, is passing away. In this, his knowledge is independent of others. It’s to this extent, Kaccāyana, that there is right view.” — SN 12:15

The first of these definitions is obviously preliminary, as it doesn’t fully cut through the mental fermentations. The next two are more advanced and—because the strength and faculty of discernment, mentioned in the third definition, are defined as seeing things in terms of the four noble truths—apparently equivalent. The fourth is more advanced than the others, as it reduces the four noble truths to one: stress. Yet, even though all four definitions are right, the first definition is framed in terms of worlds and beings, a frame discarded by the second and third definitions. They, in turn—in their definition of stress—are framed in terms of aggregates [§33], a frame discarded in the fourth. The fourth, by reducing everything that arises and passes away to mere stress, also implicitly reduces the four duties of the second and third definitions [§§34-35] to one [§36].

Another apparent inconsistency closely related to the theme of this book concerns the relationship of thinking (*vitakka*) to objectification (*papañca*). As we noted above, MN 18 states that thinking comes prior to objectification, a fact that allows for thinking devoid of objectification—framed in terms of processes and events—to have a role on the path, in the factors of noble right resolve and right concentration. However, DN 21 [§4] states that the categories and perceptions of objectification come prior to thinking; when these categories do not exist, thinking stops. Thus any thinking employed on the path would require at least a modicum of objectification.

If the Buddha were trying to propose a foundational philosophy or a full description of reality, these gaps and apparent inconsistencies would be blatant weaknesses in his system. And later Buddhist scholastics and philosophers, who

*did* try to present Buddhism as a foundational philosophy, clearly regarded them as such, providing definitions for all the terms the Buddha neglected to define, and trying to resolve inconsistencies by advancing the idea that there were two levels of truth in his teachings, conventional and ultimate. But there are two reasons for regarding this approach as misguided.

The first is that the Buddha himself never used the concept of two levels of truth, so the concept is foreign to his teachings. He did occasionally mention (e.g., DN 9), when adopting the technical vocabulary of others for the sake of discussion, that he was speaking in line with the expressions of the world to which he did not hold. But that simply meant that his adoption of that vocabulary should not be taken out of context. He never identified any of his own vocabulary as dealing with ultimate truths. When identifying the “highest noble truth,” for instance, he cited only one truth—unbinding—and the context shows clearly that he was referring not to true statements about unbinding, but to the actual attainment of release [§49]. As §195 notes, this attainment lies beyond the limits of expression and description, which means that it lies beyond even the powers of “ultimate” description to describe. And reading §197 together with §198, it’s obvious that this attainment lies beyond the range even of the word, “all.” Thus the scholastic attempt to identify such terms as the aggregates as dealing in ultimate realities—while other, more personal terms, deal only in conventional truths—is clearly misguided. All language, in the face of the experience of unbinding, is a matter of convention.

The second reason for regarding the scholastic approach as misguided can be seen in all the evidence we have cited that the Buddha was not trying to build a systematic description of reality—or ultimate realities—as a whole. Thus to try to create one out of the raw materials of his words is a misapplication of his teaching—a form of inappropriate attention that distracts from the actual practice of his teachings, and one he would not condone.

Here it’s useful to remember the Buddha’s own analogy for his project as a teacher. From the first day of his teaching to the last, he stated that he was teaching a *path*. He started not with a first principle, but with a self-evident problem—stress—and then showed a path to its solution. Instead of trying to provide a total account of the world, he was simply showing the route to a particular goal where the initial problem is solved.

This is why the most fitting way to respond to his teaching is to employ appropriate attention, seeing his words in terms of how they apply to the immediate problems of stress and the way to its end. This in turn is why he defined appropriate attention as “This is stress”... “This is the origination of stress” ... “This is the cessation of stress” ... “This is the way leading to the cessation of stress,” for he wanted his listeners to apply these categories to what is immediately present to awareness. Building on this analysis of the present, the next step is to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma (SN 55:5), i.e., to develop the skills elicited by appropriate attention to the point of disenchantment with and dispassion for the aggregates of stress, leading to the solution of total release (SN 22:39-42).

Thus in order to benefit from the Buddha’s teachings and to reach their goal, it’s necessary to apply the framework of appropriate attention to what he says: to orient oneself to one’s immediate surroundings in terms of his directions, and then to follow the path he recommends. That’s all.

In a teaching of this sort, there is no need for a systematic description of the entire landscape or for a formal definition of all the terms. Definitions are necessary only when there might be some cause for confusion. To follow a road, one doesn’t need to have “road” formally defined; but when one is told to turn left at the big tree, there can be many trees, and many gradations of big, so these

terms have to be clearly defined or described—perhaps not in a formal way, but clearly enough to be of use. This may be one of the reasons why, when the Buddha was explaining his terms, he would phrase his questions not with a “what,” but with a “which”: not *what* is a tree, but *which* tree.

It’s also important to note that if the instructions start out by saying to turn left, that doesn’t mean that any later instructions to turn right are inconsistent with initial principles. The instructions have to follow the twists and turns of the path. Although there is a consistency to the Buddha’s description of the various stages of the path, that consistency—as we noted in Chapter One—is teleological and pragmatic: teleological in that all the steps of the path are aimed at the primary goal of solving the problem of stress; pragmatic in that the steps actually work together in leading to that goal. This is why the Buddha insisted that the ideal Dhamma teacher teach step-by-step [§8], for the consistency of the Dhamma lies not in any adherence to formal definitions but in the coherent progression of its stages.

This explains why there are different levels of right view, for different stages of the path. This also apparently explains the seeming inconsistency between MN 18 and DN 21 on the relationship of *thinking* to the categories and perceptions of *objectification*. On one level of the path, thinking is necessary, and—because they aren’t afflictive enough to qualify as objectification on this level—the categories and perceptions supplied by right view should be developed: thus the interpretation given in MN 18. However, on a more advanced level of the path—as when, according to MN 79, even skillful resolves are abandoned in the second jhāna—any categories of thinking would be experienced as afflictive, so on that level even the categories of right view would count as objectification and so should be abandoned: thus the interpretation in DN 21. In this way, the sense of what counts as *objectification* would alter as one’s sensitivities develop along the path and call for different strategies of approach. The fact that the Buddha gives no formal definition for the term allows him to use it with differing shades of meaning as differing levels of sensitivity require.

The same principle accounts for the lack of definitions in the more general area of developing of the mind for the sake of happiness. There are cases where formal definitions in this area might be counterproductive, in that one’s sense of the mind and of happiness will naturally develop as one progresses along the path. If these concepts are tied down from the beginning by formal definitions, they can hinder one’s developing sensitivities.

Thus, these are some of the implications of the Buddha’s basic analogy comparing his teachings to directions for following a path to a destination: To begin with, the directions are to be used only for the sake of reaching the goal, and not for their implications for other purposes. To achieve this aim, they need only be clear and complete enough to enable the listener to follow them to the end of the path. Not everything needs to be defined, only the points necessary for keeping the listener from going astray. And although consistent definitions often help in clarity, there are cases where a definition useful at one stage of the path would be an obstacle at another. This is why the Buddha sometimes gives different explicit definitions of his terms, for use at different stages, and at other times gives no explicit definitions at all, allowing the person on the path to develop his or her own sensitivity, based on experience, of how the directions should be understood at any particular turn along the way.

A useful way of exploring some of the further implications of the path analogy is to compare the Buddha’s use of the analogy with the same analogy as used by Socrates in Plato’s dialogues.

In the *Meno*, Socrates states that a man who has been to Larissa knows the way to Larissa and so would be able to give correct instructions to someone else

on how to get there. Yet a man who had never been to Larissa, but who had received correct and adequate information on how to get there—who, in Socrates' terms, didn't have *knowledge* but had a correct *opinion*—could also give correct instructions to someone else on how to get there. The question is, then, with both knowledge and correct opinion serving as adequate guides to correct action, in what way is knowledge superior to correct opinion?

Socrates' answer is that correct opinion doesn't "stay put"—that it scampers away from the soul. But knowledge ties opinion down with clear definitions and reasons so that it stays put in a way that it doesn't change meaning or get forgotten. Thus for Socrates, there is no genuine knowledge without clear definitions of the essence of things: what they are in and of themselves. And for him the philosophic quest is a process of dialectic, where friends test one another's definitions to arrive at a clear intellectual vision of ultimate essences, in and of themselves. In cases where clear definitions are hard to arrive at, they can be approximated by proposing a hypothesis and then testing its implications against reality. If the hypothesis fails, one has still benefited from the dialectic by learning how to think more clearly and ultimately to propose better hypotheses. This process continues until one finds a definition totally adequate to its object, connected by adequate reasons to all other known objects of value in the world of experience. Socrates expressed doubt that this project could reach completion on the human plane, but was convinced that dialectic—with its definitions connected by reasons—prepared one for a direct intellectual vision of the Good after death.

Thus for Socrates, philosophical dialogue was aimed at more than just giving directions to a goal. Simple utility was not enough. He aimed instead at a form of knowledge built out of clear definitions connected through reason: an intellectual grasp of reality as a whole, and a goal understood in terms of its inherent essence.

In contrast, the Buddha used the path analogy in two ways—general and specific—to make points that differ sharply from Socrates'. (1) His general analogy, in which he called the fourth noble truth a "path," indicated that his attitude toward his teaching was strictly utilitarian. All his words were meant to be instrumental in attaining the goal. (2) And in a specific application of the path analogy [S96], he showed that although his teaching was utilitarian and his truths instrumental, they were universal nevertheless—not that they were logically derived from universal principles, but that they gave universal results.

These two uses of the path analogy can be explained as follows.

(1) In the general analogy, right view is the first step of the path. It is part of a course of action leading to total release. The fact that the Buddha places right view in this position—and not outside of the path—shows that, unlike Socrates, he is content to provide his listeners with a correct opinion on how to get to the goal, for if they adopt that opinion and keep it in mind, it will be enough to motivate them to apply right effort in following his instructions. Only when they have reached the goal will their correct opinion become confirmed through direct knowledge of the noble truth of unbinding [S49]. But this knowledge is to be attained not through dialectic, definitions, or logic, but by developing all eight factors of the noble path.

Even the words of the third noble truth, describing the cessation of stress, are simply a correct opinion about the goal. They neither stand outside that path nor are they a fully adequate representation of the goal. As MN 18 [S50] indicates, the attaining of the release of cessation ultimately requires abandoning all bases for the processes of thought.

"Now, when there is no eye, when there are no forms, when there is

no eye-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is no delineation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is no delineation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is no delineation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is no delineation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.

“When there is no ear....

“When there is no nose....

“When there is no tongue....

“When there is no body....

“When there is no intellect, when there are no ideas, when there is no intellect-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is no delineation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is no delineation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is no delineation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is no delineation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.” — *MN 18*

Because no thought can occur in this attainment, processes of thought—such as language and logic—cannot encompass it. This is why even right views have to be abandoned in the attainment of the goal, a point conveyed in the Buddha’s famous simile of the path as a raft:

“Suppose a man were traveling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the far shore safe & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, ‘Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the far shore safe & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the far one. What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, & leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the far shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands & feet?’

“Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, & leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the far shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands & feet. Having crossed over to the far shore, he might think, ‘How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the far shore. Why don’t I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying on my back, go wherever I like?’ What do you think, monks? Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?”

“No, lord.”

“And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over to the far shore, would think, ‘How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the far shore. Why don’t I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?’ In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the

purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas.” — *MN 22*

“The great expanse of water stands for the fourfold flood: the flood of sensuality, the flood of becoming, the flood of views, & the flood of ignorance. The near shore, dubious & risky, stands for self-identity. The far shore, safe and free from risk, stands for unbinding. The raft stands for just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. Making an effort with hands & feet stands for the arousing of persistence.” — *SN 35:197*

Just as the raft cannot encompass the far shore, even right view—as a factor of the path—cannot encompass unbinding. Thus the Buddha’s approach of providing correct opinions but not knowledge in the ultimate sense is dictated by the nature of the goal he taught. Direct knowledge of unbinding is not something that one person can give to another even in an approximate form, not even through language or logic. This is a point the Buddha repeatedly makes, for in his eyes language is too slippery, and logic too unreliable, to form an adequate guide to what is true. The phrase, a “teaching hammered out by logic” is, for him, a term of denigration [§184]; as he points out in *MN 95*:

“Some things are well-reasoned and yet vain, empty, & false. Some things are not well-reasoned, and yet are genuine, factual, & unmistakable.... In these cases it isn’t proper for a knowledgeable person who safeguards the truth to come to a definite conclusion, ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’” — *MN 95*

Thus the knowledge provided by logic is not necessarily knowledge at all, even on the level of everyday sensory experience. Now, the Buddha does observe the principle of consistency in presenting his teachings and in arguing against others. In fact, as we will see in Chapter Five, his primary strategy for disproving an opponent’s position is to cross-question the opponent to the point where the opponent shows the internal inconsistency of his own views. However, the simple fact that a teaching is consistent is no proof of its validity. For the Buddha, consistency is simply one way of instilling an attitude of respect and faith that the teaching makes enough sense to deserve a careful hearing and to be put into practice.

As for the limitations of language as a means of comprehending the goal, one of the Buddha’s most striking statements of his position is in *Sn 4:9* [§47]. There, Māgandiya, upset that the Buddha would not accept his gift of his daughter, asks the Buddha to describe the inner peace that could excel her. The Buddha, seeing Māgandiya’s pride, answers with a complex grammatical pun:

One doesn’t speak of purity  
in connection with view,  
                                  learning,  
                                  knowledge,  
                                  habit or practice.  
Nor is it found by a person  
through lack of view,  
                                  of learning,  
                                  of knowledge,  
                                  of habit or practice.  
Letting these go, without grasping,

at peace,  
independent,  
one wouldn't long for becoming.

The pun lies in the fact that the words in the instrumental case in the first sentence—translated above as *in connection with*—can also mean *in terms of* and *by means of*. Thus the first sentence of the Buddha's answer could mean either:

One doesn't speak of purity  
in terms of view,  
learning,  
knowledge,  
habit or practice.

Or:

One doesn't speak of purity  
by means of view,  
learning,  
knowledge,  
habit or practice.

The Buddha apparently means this sentence in the first sense, but Māgandiya interprets it in the second. This, however, conflicts with the Buddha's statement in the sentence that follows it. Thus Māgandiya complains that the Buddha's statement is nonsense. However, given that Māgandiya originally asked for a description of inner peace and not for directions on how to get there, he should have taken the statement in its first sense, which would have made a perfectly reasonable point: The goal is not to be defined in terms of view, learning, knowledge, habit or practice, even though it cannot be attained without these things. And the Buddha, by expressing his answer in this fashion, is not only *stating* that language is inadequate to define the goal; he is also *showing*, through his use of a pun, that language is too slippery to reliably express truths of this sort.

In addition to avoiding any attempt to define the unconditioned goal in terms of language, the Buddha also refrained from defining things in general in terms of their essences. Whereas Socrates wanted his definitions to arrive at essences—the “bee-ness,” in one of his analogies, that makes every bee a bee—the Buddha provided definitions to clarify the categories of right view simply with an eye to their utility. In some cases, this meant giving formal definitions, but in others it meant defining nouns with verbs [§38], or giving a list of examples or gradations [§33; §90]—types of definition that Socrates abhorred because they didn't get at the essence of the thing defined. For the Buddha, however, these sorts of definitions were perfectly adequate because they provided enough functional knowledge for use on the path. Because his approach was utilitarian and pragmatic, he neither affirmed nor denied the existence of essences. They were simply irrelevant to his program. Thus the later Buddhist scholars who tried to use his teachings to affirm or deny the existence of such essences were applying inappropriate attention to his instructions.

The Buddha's words to Māgandiya also show that any interpretation of the Buddha's categorical teachings as the viewpoint of the awakened mind are similarly misguided, for the ultimate inner peace is not to be defined in terms of view. Even Anāthapiṇḍika, a stream-winner—and thus one “consummate in view” [§143]—did not claim to know fully the views of the Buddha or his fully awakened disciples [§182]. SN 22:122 [§24] states that arahants should view the five aggregates in such a way that affirms dispassion, but this is not to say that

this is the inherent view of the awakened mind. As the discourse says, it is simply a way for them to maintain a pleasant abiding along with mindfulness and alertness. AN 4:24 [§46], in explaining the way in which an awakened one is “Such” with regard to all knowledge, asserts that although the awakened one knows everything that can be “seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect,” none of this knowledge is “established” in the awakened mind. Even the knowledge and vision of release is distinct from the release itself (AN 10:70). Thus any attempt to define awakening in terms of the Buddha’s categorical answers—or to clone awakening by forcing them on the mind as the content of the awakened mindset—is misguided and counterproductive, for it mistakes the path for the goal.

Another example of inappropriate attention applied to the Buddha’s categorical answers is the attempt of later Buddhist commentators to formulate a terminology of ultimate realities based on the Buddha’s teachings. A simple illustration will show that, in doing so, they were misreading the Buddha’s intentions.

In the first noble truth, the Buddha analyzed stress in terms of the five clinging-aggregates: the form clinging-aggregate, feeling clinging-aggregate, perception clinging-aggregate, fabrications clinging-aggregate, and consciousness clinging-aggregate. Given that these five categories are found in the first noble truth, the duty with regard to them is to comprehend them so as to give rise to dispassion. One way of doing this is to see that, because they are inconstant, they are stressful; because they are stressful, they do not deserve to be viewed as “me,” “myself,” or “what I am.” The purpose of this contemplation is to induce the dispassion that leads to release.

Later commentators, however, took these aggregates to be the Buddha’s definition of what, in ultimate terms, a person *is*. This was a mistake on two counts. To begin with, the Buddha never defines in ultimate terms what a person is—to define oneself, remember, is to limit oneself [§200]—and he expressly states that one should not regard these clinging-aggregates as “what I am” [§140]. Second, in his definition of right view in SN 12:15 [§172], he describes a stage in the practice where, after one has watched the arising and passing away of the world—i.e., the factors of dependent co-arising, which include the aggregates—one drops all reference to these factors, along with ideas of “existence” and “non-existence,” and views whatever arises simply as stress arising, whatever passes away simply as stress passing away. Here, “whatever arises and passes away” would cover not only the first noble truth, but the second and fourth as well. Thus, at this advanced stage of right view, concepts of “four noble truths” get dropped along with “aggregates.” What this means is that “aggregates” and “noble truths” function as concepts useful at a certain point in the path, but are then dropped as one comes closer to awakening. They are not meant to be viewed as “ultimate realities” in and of themselves.

Thus the Buddha’s general use of the path analogy indicates that the views he taught as part of the path are not “knowledge” in Socrates’ sense of the term. At the same time, they are not an expression of reality as viewed from an awakened perspective. Instead of being ultimate truths, they are instrumental truths: correct opinions that serve a function when they are appropriate, to be abandoned when they have served that function, and to be replaced by other truths more appropriate to later stages of the path. Ultimately all views are abandoned when unbinding is touched. Although the Buddha in Sn 4:9, above, seems to deny that this touching can be described as “knowledge” (*ñāṇa*)—apparently meaning knowledge *about* something—in other instances he uses another word for knowing—*aññā*—to indicate that it is a direct knowing of another sort entirely: a “seeing with the body” (Dhp 259) on a dimension apart

from the ordinary dimensions of the six senses [§205]. Knowledge is required to achieve this knowing, and knowledge follows on it [§79, §163], but the knowing and the knowledge are two different things. Knowing is the goal; knowledge, merely instrumental.

(2) In MN 107, however, the Buddha uses the path analogy in a more specific way to convey a different point: that people who do not follow his instructions go astray from the goal. The implication of this version of the analogy is that there is one goal and one right path to it—another distinctive feature of the Buddha’s pragmatism. We have already noted that his very high standards for “what works”—i.e., what works in gaining total release—helped him to avoid the complacency that marks some of the lazier forms of pragmatism; he also realized that what worked for him didn’t work *only* for him. “What works” is not simply a matter of personal preference. Even though the truths of right view are instrumental rather than ultimate, they are still categorical: true for all.

“What do you think, brahman? Are you skilled in the road leading to Rājagaha?”

“Yes, sir, I am skilled in the road leading to Rājagaha.”

“Now, what do you think? There’s the case where a man would come, wanting to go to Rājagaha. Having come to you, he would say, ‘I want to go to Rājagaha. Tell me the way to Rājagaha.’ You would tell him, ‘Well, my good man, this road goes to Rājagaha. Go along it for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a village named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a town named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see Rājagaha with its lovely parks, lovely forests, lovely meadows, lovely ponds.’ [But] having been thus exhorted & instructed by you, he would take a wrong road and arrive out west.

“Then a second man would come, wanting to go to Rājagaha. Having come to you, he would say, ‘I want to go to Rājagaha. Tell me the way to Rājagaha.’ You would tell him, ‘Well, my good man, this road goes to Rājagaha. Go along it for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a village named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see a town named such-&-such. Go along for a while. Having gone along for a while, you will see Rājagaha with its lovely parks, lovely forests, lovely meadows, lovely ponds. Having been thus exhorted & instructed by you, he would arrive safely at Rājagaha. Now, what is the reason, what is the cause—when Rājagaha is there, and the road leading to Rājagaha is there, and you are there as the guide—that when they are thus exhorted & instructed by you, the first man takes the wrong road and arrives out west, while the second man arrives safely at Rājagaha?”

“What can I do about that, Master Gotama? I’m [just] the one who shows the way.”

“In the same way, brahman—when unbinding is there, and the path leading to unbinding is there, and I am there as the guide—when my disciples are thus exhorted & instructed by me, some attain unbinding, the absolute conclusion, and some don’t. What can I do about that, brahman? The Tathāgata is [just] the one who shows the way.” — MN 107

In showing the way, the Buddha was not simply offering a personal preference about how to practice. He was pointing out the truth. If his listeners did not follow his instructions, they would actually get lost. As they listened to his teachings, right view might have the status of opinion in their minds, but that was not its status in his, for he based his teachings on his own confirmed

knowledge of what does and doesn't work in attaining release. The fact that he didn't force his listeners to adopt right view doesn't mean that he endorsed other views. As he stated in DN 16 [§151], there are no awakened persons in a teaching that doesn't contain the noble eightfold path; in SN 48:53, he stated that one of the realizations of stream-entry—the first level of awakening—is this:

“Furthermore, the monk who is a learner [one who has attained any of the first three levels of awakening] reflects, ‘Is there outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] any contemplative or brahman who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One?’ And he discerns, ‘No, there is no contemplative or brahman outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One.’ This too is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner, can discern that ‘I am a learner.’”  
— SN 48:53

In Sn 4:12 [§48] the Buddha makes a similar point, that the truth is one. Other truths that deviate from right view are simply the personal opinions of those who state them, but the activity of actually attaining release confirms that they have no status as truths. In MN 126 [§67] he illustrates this point with similes, stating that anyone who tries to attain release with views other than right view is like a person who tries to churn butter from water, to squeeze sesame oil from gravel, or to get milk from a cow by twisting its horn.

So even though the Buddha could not provide his listeners with direct knowledge of unbinding, he could provide them with reliable guidance on how to get there. And given the nature of his guidance—as instrumental but categorical truths—the question is not how a comprehensive view of reality can be constructed from his categorical statements, or how his statements can be made to fit one's own preferences or preconceived notions, but how to put aside one's preferences and apply those categorical statements in pursuit of the path. Because the path has many stages, with many levels of right view, one of the functions of appropriate attention after listening to the Buddha's words is to view his categorical answers as an array of tools, and to ask oneself which tool is suitable for one's practice at any given moment.

In the Buddha's time, there were cases where his listeners did not have to ask themselves this question, for the Buddha personally taught them a level of Dhamma suited to their immediate needs. This is especially clear in the cases where his listeners gained stream-entry or total release either while listening to his categorical answers, or—taking them away to practice—shortly thereafter. It's also shown in the many instances where his listeners, on hearing his categorical answers, took refuge in the Triple Gem.

But even during his lifetime there were those who had to sift through his teachings to find the ones appropriate for them. And this is our position at present. To do this skillfully requires a clear awareness of oneself—an awareness that can be gained only through the strategy of cross-questioning one's attitudes and states of mind. This may be one of the reasons why the Buddha, in addition to teaching his listeners how to ask questions deserving categorical answers, also encouraged them in the strategy of cross-questioning so that they would use his categorical answers in an appropriate way. This is a topic to which we will return in Chapters Five and Six, but here we can simply note that this strategy of cross-questioning oneself is what takes the Buddha's categorical answers—which were designed to be true and beneficial for all times, and which are now always readily available—and makes them timely in a way specific to now.

## READINGS

### CATEGORICAL TEACHINGS

§ 20. When this was said, one of the wanderers said to Vajjiya Māhita the householder, “Now wait a minute, householder. This contemplative Gotama whom you praise is a nihilist, one who doesn’t declare anything.”

“I tell you, venerable sirs, that the Blessed One righteously declares that ‘This is skillful.’ He declares that ‘This is unskillful.’ Declaring that ‘This is skillful’ and ‘This is unskillful,’ he is one who has declared [a teaching]. He is not a nihilist, one who doesn’t declare anything.”

When this was said, the wanderers fell silent, abashed, sitting with their shoulders drooping, their heads down, brooding, at a loss for words. Vajjiya Māhita the householder, perceiving that the wanderers were silent, abashed... at a loss for words, got up & went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entirety of his discussion with the wanderers.

[The Blessed One said,] “Well done, householder. Well done. That is how you should periodically & righteously refute those foolish men.” — AN 10:94 [See also §26; §80]

§ 21. As Ven. Ānanda was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “I say categorically, Ānanda, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done, what drawbacks can one expect when doing what should not be done?”

“... One can fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, criticize one; one’s bad reputation gets spread about; one dies confused; and—on the breakup of the body, after death—one reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell....

“I say categorically, Ānanda, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done, what rewards can one expect when doing what should be done?”

“... One doesn’t fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, praise one; one’s good reputation gets spread about; one dies unconfused; and—on the breakup of the body, after death—one reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.” — AN 2:18

§ 22. Then two or three days later, Citta the elephant trainer’s son and Poṭṭhapāda the wanderer went to the Blessed One. On their arrival, Citta bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side, while Poṭṭhapāda the wanderer greeted the Blessed One courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “The other day, not long after the Blessed One had left, the wanderers, with sneering words, jeered at me from all sides: ‘So, whatever Gotama the contemplative says, Sir Poṭṭhapāda rejoices in his every word: “So it is, Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone.” But we don’t understand Gotama the contemplative as having taught any categorical teaching that “*The cosmos is eternal,*” or “*The cosmos is not eternal,*” or “*The cosmos is finite,*” or “*The cosmos is*

*infinite,*” or “*The soul is the same thing as the body,*” or “*The soul is one thing and the body another,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata exists,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata does not exist,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,*” or “*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.*”

“When this was said, I replied to the wanderers, ‘I too don’t understand Gotama the contemplative as having taught any categorical teaching that “*The cosmos is eternal,*” or “*The cosmos is not eternal,*” ... or “*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.*” But the contemplative Gotama describes a genuine, authentic, and accurate practice, grounded in the Dhamma and consonant with the Dhamma. And when a genuine, authentic, & accurate practice, grounded in the Dhamma and consonant with the Dhamma is being explained, why shouldn’t a knowledgeable person such as myself rejoice in the well-spokenness of Gotama the contemplative’s well-spoken words?’”

[The Buddha:] “Poṭṭhapāda, all those wanderers are blind and have no eyes. You alone among them have eyes. I have taught and declared some teachings to be categorical, and some teachings to be non-categorical. And which are the teachings that I have taught and declared to be non-categorical? ‘*The cosmos is eternal*’ I have taught and declared to be a non-categorical teaching. ‘*The cosmos is not eternal*’ ... ‘*The cosmos is finite*’ ... ‘*The cosmos is infinite*’ ... ‘*The soul & the body are the same*’ ... ‘*The soul is one thing and the body another*’ ... ‘*After death a Tathāgata exists*’ ... ‘*After death a Tathāgata does not exist*’ ... ‘*After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist*’ ... ‘*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist*’ I have taught and declared to be a non-categorical teaching. And why have I taught and declared these teachings to be non-categorical? Because they are not conducive to the goal, are not conducive to the Dhamma, are not basic to the holy life. They don’t lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. That’s why I have taught and declared them to be non-categorical.

“And which have I taught and declared to be categorical teachings? ‘*This is stress*’ I have taught and declared to be a categorical teaching. ‘*This is the origination of stress*’ ... ‘*This is the cessation of stress*’ ... ‘*This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress*’ I have taught and declared to be a categorical teaching. And why have I taught and declared these teachings to be categorical? Because they are conducive to the goal, conducive to the Dhamma, and basic to the holy life. They lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. That’s why I have taught and declared them to be categorical.” — DN 9

## APPROPRIATE ATTENTION

§ 23. “There are qualities that act as a foothold for uncertainty. To foster inappropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen uncertainty, or for the growth & increase of uncertainty once it has arisen....

“There are qualities that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen investigation of qualities as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of investigation of qualities as a factor for awakening once it has arisen...

“To foster appropriate attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen uncertainty, or for the growth & increase of uncertainty once it has arisen....

“Not fostering attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen investigation of qualities as a factor for awakening, or for the growth &

increase of analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening once it has arisen.” — SN 46:51

§ 24. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Sāriputta my friend, which things should a virtuous monk attend to in an appropriate way?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “A virtuous monk, Koṭṭhita my friend, should attend in an appropriate way to the five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Which five? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness clinging-aggregate. A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a virtuous monk, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of stream-entry.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Then which things should a monk who has attained stream-entry attend to in an appropriate way?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “A monk who has attained stream-entry should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained stream-entry, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of once-returning.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Then which things should a monk who has attained once-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “A monk who has attained once-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained once-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of non-returning.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Then which things should a monk who has attained non-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “A monk who has attained non-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained non-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of arahantship.”

[Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “Then which things should an arahant attend to in an appropriate way?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “An arahant should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Although, for an arahant, there is nothing further to do, and nothing to add to what has been done, still these things—when developed & pursued—lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here & now, and to mindfulness & alertness.” — SN 22:122

§ 25. “There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person... doesn’t discern which ideas are fit for attention, or which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas fit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention. And which are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the

un arisen fermentation of sensuality arises, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality increases; the un arisen fermentation of becoming... the un arisen fermentation of ignorance arises, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance increases.... This is how he attends inappropriately: ‘Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?’ Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’

“As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view *I have a self* arises in him as true & established, or the view *I have no self*<sup>f</sup>... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self*... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self*... or the view *It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self*<sup>f</sup> arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: *This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity*. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from stress.

“The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones... discerns which ideas are fit for attention, and which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.... And which are the ideas fit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the un arisen fermentation of sensuality doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality is abandoned; the un arisen fermentation of becoming... the un arisen fermentation of ignorance doesn’t arise, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance is abandoned.... He attends appropriately, *This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress*. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity-view, uncertainty, and grasping at habits & practices.”— MN 2

#### NOTES

1. The Pali for these first two views is *Atthi me attā* and *N’atthi me attā*. Some translators have rendered these sentences as, “Self exists for me,” and, “No self exists for me.” These renderings, however, are unidiomatic and would not naturally come from trying to answer the questions, “Am I?” and “Am I not?” Thus it seems preferable to render them in line with the fact that Pali uses the grammatical construction of the verb “to be” (*atthi*) plus the genitive of I/me/mine (*me*) to say, “I have.”

2. Examples of these views can be found in Western philosophy. For example, the view that *self can be perceived by means of self* can be illustrated with the views of Leibniz, that the self has an inherent knowledge of itself as part of its nature; or of Fichte, that the self has an immediate intuition of itself in the freedom of its actions. The view that *self is perceived by means of not-self* can be illustrated by Kant’s view that the self cannot be directly perceived but can be known indirectly as a formal necessity for the coherence of experience. The view that *not-self is perceived by means of self* can be illustrated by Leibniz’s view that all the self’s ideas of an external world are caused, not by an external world, but by the self’s own activities.

#### SKILLFUL & UNSKILLFUL ACTIONS

§ 26. “Abandon what is unskillful, monks. It is possible to abandon what is

unskillful. If it were not possible to abandon what is unskillful, I would not say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.' But because it is possible to abandon what is unskillful, I say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.' If this abandoning of what is unskillful were conducive to harm & pain, I would not say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.' But because this abandoning of what is unskillful is conducive to benefit & happiness, I say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.'

"Develop what is skillful, monks. It is possible to develop what is skillful. If it were not possible to develop what is skillful, I would not say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.' But because it is possible to develop what is skillful, I say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.' If this development of what is skillful were conducive to harm & pain, I would not say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.' But because this development of what is skillful is conducive to benefit & happiness, I say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.'" — AN 2:19

§ 27. "When a disciple of the noble ones discerns what is unskillful, discerns the root of what is unskillful, discerns what is skillful, and discerns the root of what is skillful, it is to that extent that he is a person of right view, one whose view is made straight, who is endowed with verified confidence in the Dhamma, and who has arrived at this true Dhamma.

"And which is unskillful? Taking life is unskillful, taking what is not given... sexual misconduct... lying... abusive speech... divisive tale-bearing<sup>1</sup>... idle chatter is unskillful. Covetousness... ill will... wrong views are unskillful. These things are called unskillful.

"And which are the roots of what is unskillful? Greed is a root of what is unskillful, aversion is a root of what is unskillful, delusion is a root of what is unskillful. These are called the roots of what is unskillful.

"And which is skillful? Abstaining from taking life is skillful, abstaining from taking what is not given... from sexual misconduct... from lying... from abusive speech... from divisive tale-bearing... abstaining from idle chatter is skillful. Lack of covetousness... lack of ill will... right views are skillful. These things are called skillful.

"And which are the roots of what is skillful? Lack of greed is a root of what is skillful, lack of aversion... lack of delusion is a root of what is skillful. These are called the roots of what is skillful." — MN 9

NOTE: 1. This term is sometimes wrongly translated as "slander." However, slander usually entails falsehood, whereas examples given both in the discourses and the Vinaya show that this term denotes true statements meant to discredit one person in the eyes of another.

§ 28. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Pāvā in Cunda the silversmith's mango grove. Then Cunda the silversmith went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Cunda, of whose rites of purification do you approve?"

"The brahmins of the Western lands, lord—those who carry water pots, wear garlands of water plants, worship fire, & purify with water: they have declared purification rites of which I approve."

"And which kind of purification rites have they declared, those brahmins of the Western lands who carry water pots, wear garlands of water plants, worship fire, & purify with water?"

"There is the case where the brahmins of the Western lands... get their disciples to undertake their practice thus: 'Come, now, my good man: Get up at

the proper time from your bed and touch the earth. If you don't touch the earth, touch wet cow dung. If you don't touch wet cow dung, touch green grass. If you don't touch green grass, worship a fire. If you don't worship a fire, pay homage to the sun with clasped hands. If you don't pay homage to the sun with clasped hands, go down into the water three times by nightfall.' These are the purification rites declared by the brahmans of the Western lands... of which I approve."

"Cunda, the purification rites declared by the brahmans of the Western lands... are one thing; the purification in the Vinaya of the noble ones is something else entirely."

"But how is there purification in the Vinaya of the noble ones, venerable sir? It would be good if the Blessed One would teach me how there is purification in the Vinaya of the noble ones."

"Very well then, Cunda, listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," Cunda the silversmith responded.

The Blessed One said, "There are three ways in which one is made impure by bodily action, four ways in which one is made impure by verbal action, and three ways in which one is made impure by mental action.

#### UNSKILLFUL BODILY ACTION

"And how is one made impure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person takes life, is brutal, bloody-handed, devoted to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. He takes what is not given. He takes, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. He engages in sexual misconduct. He gets sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made impure in three ways by bodily action.

#### UNSKILLFUL VERBAL ACTION

"And how is one made impure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person engages in false speech. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty [i.e., a royal court proceeding], if he is asked as a witness, 'Come & tell, good man, what you know': If he doesn't know, he says, 'I know.' If he does know, he says, 'I don't know.' If he hasn't seen, he says, 'I have seen.' If he has seen, he says, 'I haven't seen.' Thus he consciously tells lies for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of a certain reward. He engages in divisive speech. What he has heard here he tells there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he tells here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus breaking apart those who are united and stirring up strife between those who have broken apart, he loves factionalism, delights in factionalism, enjoys factionalism, speaks things that create factionalism. He engages in abusive speech. He speaks words that are harsh, cutting, bitter to others, abusive of others, provoking anger and destroying concentration. He engages in idle chatter. He speaks out of season, speaks what isn't factual, what isn't in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya, words that are not worth treasuring. This is how one is made impure in four ways by verbal action.

#### UNSKILLFUL MENTAL ACTION

"And how is one made impure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is covetous. He covets the belongings of others,

thinking, 'O, that what belongs to others would be mine!' He bears ill will, corrupt in the resolves of his heart: 'May these beings be killed or cut apart or crushed or destroyed, or may they not exist at all!' He has wrong view, is warped in the way he sees things: 'There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.' This is how one is made impure in three ways by mental action.

"These, Cunda, are the ten courses of unskillful action. When a person is endowed with these ten courses of unskillful action, then even if he gets up at the proper time from his bed and touches the earth, he is still impure. If he doesn't touch the earth, he is still impure. If he touches wet cow dung, he is still impure. If he doesn't touch wet cow dung, he is still impure. If he touches green grass... If he doesn't touch green grass... If he worships a fire... If he doesn't worship a fire... If he pays homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he doesn't pay homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he goes down into the water three times by nightfall... If he doesn't go down into the water three times by nightfall, he is still impure. Why is that? Because these ten courses of unskillful action are impure and cause impurity. Furthermore, as a result of being endowed with these ten courses of unskillful action, [rebirth in] hell is declared, [rebirth in] an animal womb is declared, [rebirth in] the realm of hungry shades is declared—that or any other bad destination.

"Now, Cunda, there are three ways in which one is made pure by bodily action, four ways in which one is made pure by verbal action, and three ways in which one is made pure by mental action.

#### SKILLFUL BODILY ACTION

"And how is one made pure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He does not take, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. Abandoning sexual misconduct, he abstains from sexual misconduct. He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made pure in three ways by bodily action.

#### SKILLFUL VERBAL ACTION

"And how is one made pure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning false speech, abstains from false speech. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty, if he is asked as a witness, 'Come & tell, good man, what you know': If he doesn't know, he says, 'I don't know.' If he does know, he says, 'I know.' If he hasn't seen, he says, 'I haven't seen.' If he has seen, he says, 'I have seen.' Thus he doesn't consciously tell a lie for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of any reward. Abandoning false speech, he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world. Abandoning divisive speech, he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell

here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord. Abandoning abusive speech, he abstains from abusive speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large. Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal. This is how one is made pure in four ways by verbal action.

#### SKILLFUL MENTAL ACTION

“And how is one made pure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is not covetous. He does not covet the belongings of others, thinking, ‘O, that what belongs to others would be mine!’ He bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. [He thinks,] ‘May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!’ He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmins who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is how one is made pure in three ways by mental action.

“These, Cunda, are the ten courses of skillful action. When a person is endowed with these ten courses of skillful action, then even if he gets up at the proper time from his bed and touches the earth, he is still pure. If he doesn’t touch the earth, he is still pure. If he touches wet cow dung, he is still pure. If he doesn’t touch wet cow dung, he is still pure. If he touches green grass... If he doesn’t touch green grass... If he worships a fire... If he doesn’t worship a fire... If he pays homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he doesn’t pay homage to the sun with clasped hands... If he goes down into the water three times by nightfall... If he doesn’t go down into the water three times by nightfall, he is still pure. Why is that? Because these ten courses of skillful action are pure and cause purity. Furthermore, as a result of being endowed with these ten courses of skillful action, [rebirth among] the devas is declared, [rebirth among] human beings is declared—that or any other good destination.”

When this was said, Cunda the silversmith said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, venerable sir! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the community of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.” — *AN 10:165*

§ 29. “Now which are unskillful habits? Unskillful bodily actions, unskillful verbal actions, evil means of livelihood. These are called unskillful habits. Which is the cause of unskillful habits? Their cause is stated, and they are said to be mind-caused. Which mind?—for the mind has many modes & permutations. Any mind with passion, aversion or delusion: That is the cause of unskillful habits. Now where do unskillful habits cease without trace? Their cessation has been stated: There is the case where a monk abandons wrong bodily conduct &

develops right bodily conduct, abandons wrong verbal conduct & develops right verbal conduct, abandons wrong livelihood & maintains his life with right livelihood. This is where unskillful habits cease without trace. And which sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful habits? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful habits.

“And which are skillful habits? Skillful bodily actions, skillful verbal actions, purity of livelihood. These are called skillful habits. Which is the cause of skillful habits? Their cause too has been stated, and they are said to be mind-caused. Which mind?—for the mind has many modes & permutations. Any mind without passion, without aversion, without delusion: That is the cause of skillful habits. Now where do skillful habits cease without trace? Their cessation too has been stated: There is the case where a monk is virtuous, but not fashioned of virtue. He discerns, as it actually is, the release of awareness & release of discernment where his skillful habits cease without trace. And which sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful habits? There is the case where a monk generates desire... for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the... development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful habits.

“And which are unskillful resolves? Being resolved on sensuality, on ill will, on harmfulness. These are called unskillful resolves. Which is the cause of unskillful resolves? Their cause too has been stated, and they are said to be perception-caused. Which perception?—for perception has many modes & permutations. Any sensuality-perception, ill will-perception, or harmfulness-perception: That is the cause of unskillful resolves. Now where do unskillful resolves cease without trace? Their cessation too has been stated: There is the case where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This is where unskillful resolves cease without trace. And which sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire... for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the... development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of unskillful resolves.

“And which are skillful resolves? Being resolved on renunciation (freedom from sensuality), on non-ill will, on harmlessness. These are called skillful resolves. Which is the cause of skillful resolves? Their cause too has been stated, and they are said to be perception-caused. Which perception?—for perception has many modes & permutations. Any renunciation-perception, non-ill will-perception, or harmlessness-perception: That is the cause of skillful resolves. Now where do skillful resolves cease without trace? Their cessation too has been stated: There is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought &

evaluation—internal assurance. This is where skillful resolves cease without trace. And which sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves? There is the case where a monk generates desire...for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen...for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen...for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the... development & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This sort of practice is the practice leading to the cessation of skillful resolves.” — *MN 78*

§ 30. “Now, what is old kamma? The eye is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The intellect is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. This is called old kamma.

“And what is new kamma? Whatever kamma one does now with the body, with speech, or with the intellect: This is called new kamma.” — *SN 35:145*

§ 31. “Monks, these four types of kamma have been directly known, verified, & announced by me. Which four? There is kamma that is dark with dark result. There is kamma that is bright with bright result. There is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result. There is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

“And which kamma is dark with dark result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an injurious bodily fabrication, fabricates an injurious verbal fabrication, fabricates an injurious mental fabrication. Having fabricated an injurious bodily fabrication, having fabricated an injurious verbal fabrication, having fabricated an injurious mental fabrication, he rearises in an injurious world. On rearising in an injurious world, he is there touched by injurious contacts. Touched by injurious contacts, he experiences feelings that are exclusively painful, like those of the beings in hell. This is called kamma that is dark with dark result.

“And which kamma is bright with bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a non-injurious bodily fabrication... a non-injurious verbal fabrication .. a non-injurious mental fabrication.... He rearises in a non-injurious world.... There he is touched by non-injurious contacts.... He experiences feelings that are exclusively pleasant, like those of the Beautiful Black Devas. This is called kamma that is bright with bright result.

“And which kamma is dark & bright with dark & bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a bodily fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious... a verbal fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious... a mental fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious.... He rearises in an injurious & non-injurious world.... There he is touched by injurious & non-injurious contacts.... He experiences injurious & non-injurious feelings, pleasure mingled with pain, like those of human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is called kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result.

“And which kamma is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

“These, monks, are the four types of kamma directly known, verified, & announced by me.” — *AN 4:237*

§ 32. “Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play should be known. The diversity in kamma should be known. The result of kamma should be known. The cessation of kamma should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.

“And which is the cause by which kamma comes into play? Contact is the cause by which kamma comes into play.

“And which is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the world of the devas. This is called the diversity in kamma.

“And which is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that. This is called the result of kamma.

“And which is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and precisely this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the way leading to the cessation of kamma.

“Now when a disciple of the noble ones discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, & the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma.” — AN 6:63

#### THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

§ 33. “[1] Now which is the noble truth of stress? Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful; separation from the loved is stressful; not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

“And which is *birth*? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, & acquisition of [sense] spheres of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

“And which is *aging*? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging.

“And which is *death*? Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

“And which is *sorrow*? Whatever sorrow, sorrowing, sadness, inward sorrow, inward sadness of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called sorrow.

“And which is *lamentation*? Whatever crying, grieving, lamenting, weeping, wailing, lamentation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called lamentation.

“And which is *pain*? Whatever is experienced as bodily pain, bodily discomfort, pain or discomfort born of bodily contact, that is called pain.

“And which is distress? Whatever is experienced as mental pain, mental discomfort, pain or discomfort born of mental contact, that is called distress.

“And which is despair? Whatever despair, despondency, desperation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called despair.

“And which is the stress of association with the unbeloved? There is the case where undesirable, unpleasing, unattractive sights, sounds, aromas, flavors, or tactile sensations occur to one; or one has connection, contact, relationship, interaction with those who wish one ill, who wish for one’s harm, who wish for one’s discomfort, who wish one no security from the yoke. This is called the stress of association with the unbeloved.

“And which is the stress of separation from the loved? There is the case where desirable, pleasing, attractive sights, sounds, aromas, flavors, or tactile sensations do not occur to one; or one has no connection, no contact, no relationship, no interaction with those who wish one well, who wish for one’s benefit, who wish for one’s comfort, who wish one security from the yoke, nor with one’s mother, father, brother, sister, friends, companions, or relatives. This is called the stress of separation from the loved.

“And which is the stress of not getting what is wanted? In beings subject to birth, the wish arises, ‘O, may we not be subject to birth, and may birth not come to us.’ But this is not to be achieved by wishing. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted. In beings subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, the wish arises, ‘O, may we not be subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, and may aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair not come to us.’ But this is not to be achieved by wishing. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted.

“And which are the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: These are called the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful.

“This is called the noble truth of stress.

“[2] And which is the noble truth of the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., sensuality-craving, becoming-craving, and non-becoming-craving.

“And where does this craving, when arising, arise? And where, when dwelling, does it dwell? Whatever is endearing & alluring in terms of the world: that is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“And which is endearing & alluring in terms of the world? The eye is endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“The ear.... The nose.... The tongue.... The body.... The intellect....

“Forms.... Sounds.... Aromas.... Tastes.... Tactile sensations.... Ideas....

“Eye-consciousness.... Ear-consciousness.... Nose-consciousness.... Tongue-consciousness.... Body-consciousness.... Intellect-consciousness....

“Eye-contact.... Ear-contact.... Nose-contact.... Tongue-contact.... Body-contact.... Intellect-contact....

“Feeling born of eye-contact.... Feeling born of ear-contact.... Feeling born of nose-contact.... Feeling born of tongue-contact.... Feeling born of body-contact.... Feeling born of intellect-contact....

“Perception of forms.... Perception of sounds.... Perception of aromas....  
Perception of tastes.... Perception of tactile sensations.... Perception of ideas....

“Intention for forms.... Intention for sounds.... Intention for aromas....  
Intention for tastes.... Intention for tactile sensations.... Intention for ideas....

“Craving for forms.... Craving for sounds.... Craving for aromas.... Craving  
for tastes.... Craving for tactile sensations.... Craving for ideas....

“Thought directed at forms.... Thought directed at sounds.... Thought  
directed at aromas.... Thought directed at tastes.... Thought directed at tactile  
sensations.... Thought directed at ideas....

“Evaluation of forms.... Evaluation of sounds.... Evaluation of aromas....  
Evaluation of tastes.... Evaluation of tactile sensations.... Evaluation of ideas is  
endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where this craving, when  
arising, arises. That is where, when dwelling, it dwells.

“This is called the noble truth of the origination of stress.

“[3] And which is the noble truth of the cessation of stress? The remainderless  
fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that  
very craving.

“And where, when being abandoned, is this craving abandoned? And where,  
when ceasing, does it cease? Whatever is endearing & alluring in terms of the  
world: that is where, when being abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is  
where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“And which is endearing & alluring in terms of the world? The eye is  
endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being  
abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“The ear.... The nose.... The tongue.... The body.... The intellect....

“Forms.... Sounds.... Aromas.... Tastes.... Tactile sensations.... Ideas....

“Eye-consciousness.... Ear-consciousness.... Nose-consciousness.... Tongue-  
consciousness.... Body-consciousness.... Intellect-consciousness....

“Eye-contact.... Ear-contact.... Nose-contact.... Tongue-contact.... Body-  
contact.... Intellect-contact....

“Feeling born of eye-contact.... Feeling born of ear-contact.... Feeling born of  
nose-contact.... Feeling born of tongue-contact.... Feeling born of body-  
contact.... Feeling born of intellect-contact....

“Perception of forms.... Perception of sounds.... Perception of aromas....  
Perception of tastes.... Perception of tactile sensations.... Perception of ideas....

“Intention for forms.... Intention for sounds.... Intention for aromas....  
Intention for tastes.... Intention for tactile sensations.... Intention for ideas....

“Craving for forms.... Craving for sounds.... Craving for aromas.... Craving  
for tastes.... Craving for tactile sensations.... Craving for ideas....

“Thought directed at forms.... Thought directed at sounds.... Thought  
directed at aromas.... Thought directed at tastes.... Thought directed at tactile  
sensations.... Thought directed at ideas....

“Evaluation of forms.... Evaluation of sounds.... Evaluation of aromas....  
Evaluation of tastes.... Evaluation of tactile sensations.... Evaluation of ideas is  
endearing & alluring in terms of the world. That is where, when being  
abandoned, this craving is abandoned. That is where, when ceasing, it ceases.

“This is called the noble truth of the cessation of stress.

“[4] And which is the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the  
cessation of stress? Precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve,  
right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right  
concentration.

“And which is right view? Knowledge with reference to stress, knowledge  
with reference to the origination of stress, knowledge with reference to the

cessation of stress, knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.

And which is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, for freedom from ill will, for harmlessness: This is called right resolve.

“And which is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech.

“And which is right action? Abstaining from taking life, from stealing, & from sexual misconduct: This is called right action.

“And which is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This is called right livelihood.

“And which is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This is called right effort.

“And which is right mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... the mind in & of itself... qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called right mindfulness.

“And which is right concentration? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called right concentration.

“This is called the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.” — *DN 22*

§ 34. “Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’ ... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’ ... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced’ ... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed.’” — *SN 56:11*

§ 35. “And which qualities are to be comprehended through direct knowledge? ‘The five clinging-aggregates,’ should be the reply. Which five? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate. These are the qualities that are to be comprehended through direct knowledge.

“And which qualities are to be abandoned through direct knowledge?

Ignorance & craving for becoming: these are the qualities that are to be abandoned through direct knowledge.

“And which qualities are to be developed through direct knowledge? Tranquility & insight: these are the qualities that are to be developed through direct knowledge.

“And which qualities are to be realized through direct knowledge? Clear knowing & release: these are the qualities that are to be realized through direct knowledge.” — MN 149

§ 36. “And which is comprehension? Any ending of passion, ending of aversion, ending of delusion. This is called comprehension.” — SN 22:23

§ 37. “For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, this is what accords with the Dhamma: that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to form, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to feeling, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to perception, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to fabrications, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to consciousness. As he keeps cultivating disenchantment with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.” — SN 22:39

§ 38. “And why do you call it ‘form’ (*rūpa*)? Because it is afflicted (*ruppati*), thus it is called ‘form.’ Afflicted with what? With cold & heat & hunger & thirst, with the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles. Because it is afflicted, it is called form.

“And why do you call it ‘feeling’? Because it feels, thus it is called ‘feeling.’ What does it feel? It feels pleasure, it feels pain, it feels neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Because it feels, it is called feeling.

“And why do you call it ‘perception’? Because it perceives, thus it is called ‘perception.’ What does it perceive? It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white. Because it perceives, it is called perception.

“And why do you call them ‘fabrications’? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called ‘fabrications.’ What do they fabricate as fabricated things? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood... For the sake of fabrication-hood... For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications.<sup>1</sup>

“And why do you call it ‘consciousness’? Because it cognizes, thus it is called consciousness. What does it cognize? It cognizes what is sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, alkaline, non-alkaline, salty, & unsalty.<sup>2</sup> Because it cognizes, it is called consciousness.” — SN 22:79

#### NOTES

1. In other words, the intentional activity of fabrication is what turns the kammic potential for any of the aggregates into the actual experience of the aggregates. This is what allows for the fact that, with the ending of present intention in the moment of awakening, all experience of the aggregates falls away. With the resumption of intention, the awakened person relates to the aggregates in full knowledge. If the awakening is full—i.e.,

that of an arahant—this knowledge is totally free from clinging and craving.

2. Notice that the example for perception uses the more active sensory process of sight, whereas the example for consciousness uses the more passive sensory process of taste.

§ 39. “Now which, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness—is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions.

“[1] Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong view as wrong view, and right view as right view. This is one’s right view. And which is wrong view? ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is wrong view.

“And which is right view? Right view, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right view with fermentations, siding with merit, resulting in the acquisitions [of becoming]; and there is noble right view, without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And which is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is the right view that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.

“And which is the right view that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The discernment, the faculty of discernment, the strength of discernment, analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, the path factor of right view<sup>1</sup> in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is free from fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right view that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong view & to enter into right view: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong view & to enter & remain in right view: This is one’s right mindfulness.<sup>2</sup> Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right view.

“[2] Of those, right resolve is the forerunner. And how is right resolve the forerunner? One discerns wrong resolve as wrong resolve, and right resolve as right resolve. And which is wrong resolve? Being resolved on sensuality, on ill will, on harmfulness. This is wrong resolve.

“And which is right resolve? Right resolve, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right resolve with fermentations, siding with merit, resulting in the acquisitions [of becoming]; and there is noble right resolve, without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And which is the right resolve that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? Resolve for renunciation, resolve for freedom from ill will, resolve for harmlessness. This is the right resolve that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.

“And which is the right resolve that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The thinking, directed thinking, resolve, mental fixity, mental transfixion, focused awareness, & verbal fabrications in one developing the noble

path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right resolve that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.”

“One tries to abandon wrong resolve & to enter into right resolve: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong resolve & to enter & remain in right resolve: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right resolve.

“[3] Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong speech as wrong speech, and right speech as right speech. And which is wrong speech? Lying, divisive tale-bearing, abusive speech, & idle chatter. This is wrong speech.

“And which is right speech? Right speech, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right speech with fermentations, siding with merit, resulting in the acquisitions [of becoming]; and there is noble right speech, without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And which is the right speech that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? Abstaining from lying, from divisive tale-bearing, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter. This is the right speech that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.

“And which is the right speech that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The abstaining, desisting, abstinence, avoidance of the four forms of verbal misconduct in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right speech that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong speech & to enter into right speech: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong speech & to enter & remain in right speech: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right speech.

“[4] Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong action as wrong action, and right action as right action. And which is wrong action? Killing, taking what is not given, illicit sex. This is wrong action.

“And which is right action? Right action, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right action with fermentations, siding with merit, resulting in the acquisitions [of becoming]; and there is noble right action, without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And which is the right action that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? Abstaining from killing, from taking what is not given, & from illicit sex. This is the right action that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.

“And which is the right action that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The abstaining, desisting, abstinence, avoidance of the three forms of bodily misconduct in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right action that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong action & to enter into right action: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong action & to enter & remain in right action: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right action.

“[5] Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong livelihood as wrong livelihood, and right livelihood as right livelihood. And which is wrong livelihood? Scheming,

persuading, hinting, belittling, & pursuing gain with gain. This is wrong livelihood.

“And which is right livelihood? Right livelihood, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right livelihood with fermentations, siding with merit, resulting in the acquisitions [of becoming]; and there is noble right livelihood, without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And which is the right livelihood that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones abandons wrong livelihood and maintains his life with right livelihood. This is the right livelihood that has fermentations, sides with merit, & results in acquisitions.

“And which is the right livelihood that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path? The abstaining, desisting, abstinence, avoidance of wrong livelihood in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without fermentations, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right livelihood that is without fermentations, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter & remain in right livelihood: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right livelihood.

“Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? In one of right view, right resolve comes into being. In one of right resolve, right speech comes into being. In one of right speech, right action.... In one of right action, right livelihood.... In one of right livelihood, right effort.... In one of right effort, right mindfulness.... In one of right mindfulness, right concentration.... In one of right concentration, right knowledge.... In one of right knowledge, right release comes into being. Thus the learner is endowed with eight factors, and the arahant with ten.

“Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? In one of right view, wrong view is abolished. The many evil, unskillful qualities that come into play with wrong view as their condition are also abolished, while the many skillful qualities that have right view as their condition go to the culmination of their development. In one of right resolve, wrong resolve is abolished.... In one of right speech, wrong speech is abolished.... In one of right action, wrong action is abolished.... In one of right livelihood, wrong livelihood is abolished.... In one of right effort, wrong effort is abolished.... In one of right mindfulness, wrong mindfulness is abolished.... In one of right concentration, wrong concentration is abolished.... In one of right knowledge, wrong knowledge is abolished.... In one of right release, wrong release is abolished. The many evil, unskillful qualities that come into play with wrong release as their condition are also abolished, while the many skillful qualities that have right release as their condition go to the culmination of their development.

“Thus, monks, there are twenty factors siding with skillfulness, and twenty with unskillfulness.” — *MN 117*

#### NOTES

1. These various factors are all equivalent to knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. The relationship between these four truths and the issue of skillful and unskillful action is shown in the fact that SN 46:51 [§23] notes that analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening is fed by paying appropriate attention to qualities as to whether they are skillful or unskillful.

2. Notice that mindfulness plays an active role here and with all the path factors. It is not simply a receptive acceptance of wrong and right views. Instead—in its canonical sense of keeping something in mind—it keeps remembering to abandon the factors of the wrong path, and to enter and remain in the factors of the right path.

## DEPENDENT CO-ARISING

§ 40. “And which is the noble method that he/she [a stream-winner] has rightly seen & rightly ferreted out through discernment?”

“There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones notices:

“When this is, that is.

“From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

“When this isn’t, that isn’t.

“From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.”<sup>1</sup>

“In other words:

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications...

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications... From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“This is the noble method that he/she has rightly seen & rightly ferreted out through discernment.” — AN 10:92

### NOTE

1. This set of principles is called *idappaccayatā*, this/that conditionality. See §19, note 1.

§ 41. Staying at Sāvatti.... “Monks, I will describe & analyze dependent co-arising for you.

“Which dependent co-arising?

From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging.

From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming.

From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now, which *aging-&-death*? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty

of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

“And which *birth*? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, & acquisition of sense media of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

“And which *becoming*? These three becomings: sensuality-becoming, form-becoming, & formless-becoming. This is called becoming.

“And which *clinging*? These four clingings: sensuality-clinging, view-clinging, habit-&-practice-clinging, and self-doctrine-clinging. This is called clinging.

“And which *craving*? These six cravings: craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for ideas. This is called craving.

“And which *feeling*? These six feelings: feeling born from eye-contact, feeling born from ear-contact, feeling born from nose-contact, feeling born from tongue-contact, feeling born from body-contact, feeling born from intellect-contact. This is called feeling.

“And which *contact*? These six contacts: eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, intellect-contact. This is called contact.

“And which *six sense media*? These six sense media: the eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. These are called the six sense media.

“And which *name-&-form*? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements, and the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form.

“And which *consciousness*? These six consciousnesses: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, intellect-consciousness. This is called consciousness.

“And which *fabrications*? These three fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.

“And which *ignorance*? Not knowing in terms of stress, not knowing in terms of the origination of stress, not knowing in terms of the cessation of stress, not knowing in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging. From the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.” — SN 12:2

§ 42. “Now, which is ignorance? Which is the origination of ignorance? Which is the cessation of ignorance? Which is the way of practice leading to the cessation of ignorance?”

“Any lack of knowledge with reference to stress, any lack of knowledge with reference to the origination of stress, any lack of knowledge with reference to the cessation of stress, any lack of knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.

“From the origination of fermentation comes the origination of ignorance. From the cessation of fermentation comes the cessation of ignorance. And the way of practice leading to the cessation of ignorance is precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration....

“And which is fermentation? Which is the origination of fermentation? Which is the cessation of fermentation? Which is the way of practice leading to the cessation of fermentation?

“There are these three fermentations: the fermentation of sensuality, the fermentation of becoming, the fermentation of ignorance. This is called fermentation.

“From the origination of ignorance comes the origination of fermentation. From the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of fermentation. And the way of practice leading to the cessation of fermentation is precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.” — *MN 9*

## RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS

§ 43. “This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’” — *MN 135*

§ 44. “The individual who has attained internal tranquility of awareness, but not insight into phenomena through heightened discernment, should approach an individual who has attained insight into phenomena through heightened discernment and ask him, ‘How should fabrications be regarded? How should they be investigated? How should they be seen with insight?’ The other will answer in line with what he has seen & experienced: ‘Fabrications should be regarded in this way. Fabrications should be investigated in this way. Fabrications should be seen in this way with insight.’ Then eventually he [the first] will become one who has attained both internal tranquility of awareness & insight into phenomena through heightened discernment.

“As for the individual who has attained insight into phenomena through heightened discernment, but not internal tranquility of awareness, he should approach an individual who has attained internal tranquility of awareness... and ask him, ‘How should the mind be steadied? How should it be made to settle down? How should it be unified? How should it be concentrated?’ The other will answer in line with what he has seen & experienced: ‘The mind should be steadied in this way. The mind should be made to settle down in this way. The mind should be unified in this way. The mind should be concentrated in this way.’ Then eventually he [the first] will become one who has attained both internal tranquility of awareness & insight into phenomena through heightened discernment.” — *AN 4:94*

## VIEWS & AWAKENING

§ 45. Simply talking a lot

doesn't maintain the Dhamma.  
 Whoever  
 —although he's heard next to nothing—  
   sees Dhamma through his body,  
   is not heedless of Dhamma:  
*he's one who maintains the Dhamma. — Dhp 259*

§ 46. The Blessed One said, “Monks, whatever in the cosmos—with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people—is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: That do I know. Whatever in the cosmos—with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, its generations with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & common people—is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: That I directly know. That has been realized by the Tathāgata, but in the Tathāgata<sup>1</sup> it has not been established.

“If I were to say, ‘I don't know whatever in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,’ that would be a falsehood in me. If I were to say, ‘I both know and don't know whatever in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,’ that would be just the same. If I were to say, ‘I neither know nor don't know whatever in the cosmos... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized... pondered by the intellect,’ that would be a fault in me.

“Thus the Tathāgata, when seeing what is to be seen, doesn't construe an [object as] seen, doesn't construe an unseen, doesn't construe an [object] to-be-seen, doesn't construe a seer.

“When hearing.... When sensing....

“When cognizing what is to be cognized, he doesn't construe an [object as] cognized, doesn't construe an uncognized, doesn't construe an [object] to-be-cognized, doesn't construe a cognizer.

Thus the Tathāgata—being the same with regard to all phenomena that can be seen, heard, sensed, & cognized—is ‘Such.’ And I tell you: There's no other Such higher or more sublime.

“Whatever is seen or heard or sensed  
   and fastened onto as true by others,  
 One who is Such—among the self-fettered—  
 wouldn't further claim to be true or even false.  
 “Having seen well in advance that arrow  
 where generations are fastened & hung  
   —I know, I see, that's just how it is!—  
 there's nothing of the Tathāgata fastened.” — AN 4:24

NOTE: 1. Reading *tathāgate* with the Thai edition. See MN 58 [§93], note 1. See also §196.

§ 47. *Māgandiya*:

Sage, you speak  
 without grasping  
 at any preconceived judgments.  
 This ‘inner peace’:  
 What does it mean?  
   How is it,  
 by an enlightened person,  
   proclaimed?

*The Buddha:*

He doesn't speak of purity  
in connection with view,  
learning,  
knowledge,  
habit or practice.

Nor is it found by a person  
through lack of view,  
of learning,  
of knowledge,  
of habit or practice.

Letting these go, without grasping,  
at peace,  
independent,  
one wouldn't long for becoming.

*Māgandiya:*

If he doesn't speak of purity  
in connection with view,  
learning,  
knowledge,  
habit or practice;  
and it isn't found by a person  
through lack of view,  
of learning,  
of knowledge,  
of habit or practice,  
it seems to me that this teaching's  
confused,  
for some assume a purity  
in terms of  
—by means of—  
a view.

*The Buddha:*

Asking questions  
dependent on view,  
you're confused  
by what you have grasped.  
And so you don't glimpse  
even  
the slightest  
notion  
[of what I am saying].  
That's why you think  
it's confused.  
Whoever construes  
'equal,'  
'superior,' or  
'inferior,'  
by that he'd dispute;  
whereas to one unaffected



uncertainty, the obsessions of conceit, the obsessions of passion for becoming, & the obsessions of ignorance. That is the end of taking up rods & bladed weapons, of arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, & false speech. That is where these evil, unskillful things cease without remainder'—I understand the detailed meaning to be this:

"Dependent on eye & forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives [labels, assigns a meaning in the mind]. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions & categories of objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, & future forms cognizable via the eye.

"Dependent on ear & sounds, ear-consciousness arises....

"Dependent on nose & aromas, nose-consciousness arises....

"Dependent on tongue & flavors, tongue-consciousness arises....

"Dependent on body & tactile sensations, body-consciousness arises....

"Dependent on intellect & ideas, intellect-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions & categories of objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, & future ideas cognizable via the intellect.

"Now, when there is the eye, when there are forms, when there is eye-consciousness, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is a delineation of contact, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is a delineation of feeling, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is a delineation of perception, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is a delineation of thinking, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.

"When there is the ear....

"When there is the nose....

"When there is the tongue....

"When there is the body....

"When there is the intellect, when there are ideas, when there is intellect-consciousness, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is a delineation of contact, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is a delineation of feeling, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is a delineation of perception, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is a delineation of thinking, it is possible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.

"Now, when there is no eye, when there are no forms, when there is no eye-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is no delineation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is no delineation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is no delineation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is no delineation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.

"When there is no ear....

"When there is no nose....

"When there is no tongue....

"When there is no body....

"When there is no intellect, when there are no ideas, when there is no

intellect-consciousness, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of contact. When there is no delineation of contact, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of feeling. When there is no delineation of feeling, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of perception. When there is no delineation of perception, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of thinking. When there is no delineation of thinking, it is impossible that one will delineate a delineation of being assailed by the perceptions & categories of objectification.” — *MN 18*

§ 51. “For one arriving at what  
does form disappear?

How do pleasure & pain disappear?

Tell me this.

My heart is set  
on knowing how  
they disappear.”

“One not percipient of perceptions  
not percipient of special perceptions,  
not unpercipient,  
nor percipient of what’s disappeared:  
for one arriving at this,  
form disappears—  
for objectification-classifications  
have their cause in perception.” — *Sn 4:11*

§ 52. “I ask the kinsman of the Sun, the great seer,  
about seclusion & the state of peace.  
Seeing in what way is a monk unbound,  
clinging to nothing in the world?”

“He should put an entire stop  
to the root of objectification-classifications:

‘I am the thinker.’

He should train, always mindful,  
to subdue any craving inside him.

Whatever truth he may know,

within or without,

he shouldn’t get entrenched

in connection with it,

for that isn’t called

unbinding by the good.

He shouldn’t, because of it, think himself  
better,

lower, or

equal.

Touched by contact in various ways,

he shouldn’t keep conjuring self.

Stilled right within,

a monk shouldn’t seek peace from another,  
from anything else.

For one stilled right within,

there's nothing embraced,  
so how rejected?

As in the middle of the sea  
it is still,  
with no waves upwelling,  
so the monk—unperturbed, still—  
should not swell himself  
anywhere.” — *Sn 4:14*

§ 53. “There is the case, monks, where a certain contemplative or brahman, with the relinquishing of speculations about the past and the relinquishing of speculations about the future, from being totally not determined on the fetters of sensuality, and from the surmounting of the rapture of seclusion [in the first *jhāna*], of unworldly pleasure, & of the feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain [in the fourth *jhāna*], thinks, ‘I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!’

“With regard to this, the Tathāgata discerns: ‘This venerable contemplative or brahman, with the relinquishing of speculations about the past... thinks, “I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!” Yes, he affirms a practice conducive to unbinding. But still he clings, clinging to a speculation about the past or... a speculation about the future... or a fetter of sensuality... or the rapture of seclusion... or unworldly pleasure... or a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. And the fact that he thinks, “I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!”—that in itself points to his clinging.’

“With regard to this—fabricated, gross—there is still the cessation of fabrications. Knowing, ‘There is that,’ seeing the escape from it, the Tathāgata has gone beyond it.” — *MN 102*

## *Analytical Answers*

The Canon contains many discourses where the Buddha and his disciples provide detailed analyses of important topics. The chapter of twelve analysis (*vibhaṅga*) discourses in the Majjhima Nikāya, and the analysis discourses for each of the seven sets in the wings to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*) in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, are only a few prominent examples of a common format. The speaker starts with a topic or statement, and then gives a detailed explanation of all its important terms.

However, when the Buddha explicitly states that a question deserves an analytical (*vibhajja*) answer, he is speaking of a somewhat different approach. This sort of question is one that addresses a valid issue but, coming from mistaken assumptions, analyzes the issue either in inappropriate terms or in too few variables to do it justice. An analytical answer in this case is one that recognizes those mistaken assumptions and so reframes the issue appropriately before giving a categorical answer.

As the passages collected in this chapter show, there are times when the Buddha treats declarative statements as if they too were questions deserving this sort of response. The following chapters will also contain examples of statements that the Buddha treats as if they were questions deserving cross-questioning or being put aside. This shows that his skill in questions involves seeing not just the assumption behind a question, but also the question behind a statement.

Of the four categories of questions, this is the one with the fewest examples in the discourses, and the examples all center on a common theme: a misunderstanding of skillful and unskillful action. Thus this is the easiest strategy to understand. But a survey of how the Buddha and his disciples use this strategy yields some surprises, for their approach to questions of this sort challenges a number of views about the Dhamma that are currently widespread.

In surveying the Canon's examples of questions deserving analytical answers, we find that they grow from seven types of misunderstanding about skillful and unskillful action:

1) The question in MN 126 [§67] comes from the assumption that kamma is barren, that the holy life bears no fruit even if one practices with a strong wish for results. The correct analytical response shows that the *method* employed in following the holy life is what matters, not the presence or absence of a wish.

2) The question in DN 12 [§68] comes from the assumption that the workings of kamma make it impossible to teach others, for—arguing from the principle that each person has his or her own kamma—one person cannot do anything for another. Thus those who try to teach others are to be criticized for creating a new bond for themselves. The correct analytical response asserts that it is possible to help others through teaching them, and that teachers are to be criticized only if they haven't reached the Dhamma they teach or if their students don't pay attention to or follow their instructions.

3) The question in SN 42:9 [§70] takes a materialistic and exclusively this-life perspective on what sort of behavior is beneficial or harmful. The two-pronged question asked of the Buddha comes from assuming that families are harmed if they are encouraged to be generous during a famine. The correct analytical response shows that generosity leads to genuine long-term well-being for families, and that their genuine ruin comes from any of eight other factors, none of which include generosity.

4) The largest group of examples under this category consists of questions

that assume a particular practice or way of life to be beneficial or unbeneficial across the board. These practices include the householder life [§60], the life gone forth [§62], ascetic practices [§61, §63], meditative absorption [§64], pleasing words, and unpleasing words [§69]. The correct analytical response shows that each of these practices is to be judged, not categorically as good or bad, but as to whether it is conducted in a way that yields beneficial or unbeneficial results. In other words, the variables cited in the question are insufficient to pass valid judgment, and so the analytical answer introduces additional variables to do justice to the issue at hand. Included in this group is a discourse [§61] whose analytical answer contains a long exposition on the first two paragraphs in the Buddha's first sermon, rating different ways of life that pursue the extremes deviating from the middle way. This discourse underlines the point made in Chapter Two that the first two paragraphs in the Buddha's first sermon constitute an analytical answer to a question for which his listeners had assumed they knew the categorical answer.

5) In MN 90 [§103], a similar question is posed as to as to whether anything distinguishes the four social castes with regard to the life after death. This question is sparked by the assertion made by brahmans that one's social caste in this lifetime will be maintained in all future lives. The correct analytical answer shows that one's future course is determined by one's capacity for exertion—analyzed into five factors—and one's actual use of that capacity, whereas one's current caste is a totally irrelevant factor.

6) In a discourse of a similar sort [§65]—dealing with categories for judging individuals—three arahants discuss the relationship of three types of temperament to the preliminary stages of awakening: Which is the most sublime, an individual whose first stage of awakening is dominated by conviction, by concentration, or by discernment? They then take the question to the Buddha, who states that there is no categorical answer to this question, and that the individuals should instead be judged in ascending order as to whether they are once-returners, non-returners, or on the path to arahantship. In other words, individuals are to be judged not on temperament, but on the level of their attainment.

7) The question in MN 136 [§66] is perhaps the most interesting of the lot. A wanderer, asserting that he understands the Buddha as teaching that only mental action is fruitful, asks a junior monk: What does one experience on performing a bodily, verbal, or mental action? The monk answers that one experiences stress. As another monk later explains, this answer could be justified with reference to the statement that all feelings are stressful [§140], but the Buddha rebukes both monks, saying that the original question had to do with the three kinds of feeling: pleasant, painful, and neither pleasant nor painful. Thus the junior monk's categorical response was incorrect because it assumed that a teaching appropriate for one context would apply to another context where it actually doesn't.

As we will see in Chapter Six, the statement that all feelings are stressful is meant to be applied in a systematic practice of self cross-examination aimed at the ending of clinging, an advanced stage in the practice requiring an advanced level of right view. The context here, however, is simply a basic understanding of the relationship between kamma and feeling at a more preliminary stage, where the concepts of skillful and unskillful are not yet mastered and where the mundane level of right view has to be applied. To assert at this stage that all actions lead to the same result—stress—would discourage the listener from developing skillful kamma and abandoning unskillful kamma.

After making this point, the Buddha then proceeds to give an analysis discourse that goes into detail far beyond the relationship of kamma to the three

types of feeling, touching on how actions may take several lifetimes to show their effect, how a skillful or unskillful action can have its results delayed by the effects of an earlier or later action of the opposite sort, and how a person with a limited ability to see beings dying and being reborn would misunderstand the actual workings of kamma—to say nothing of a person with no such abilities at all.

As we survey the range of questions deserving analytical answers, we see that they highlight five important points in the Buddha's teaching that are often misunderstood or underappreciated at present.

The first is that the Buddha had no qualms about judging people and their way of life [§§54-58, §126]. In fact, given that admirable friendship is a basic prerequisite to the practice (SN 45:2), the ability to judge whether a person's behavior is admirable is of primary importance for anyone hoping to follow the path. Because this is such an important part of the practice, and because it is so difficult to judge people accurately, the Buddha advises devoting time and one's full powers of observation to passing judgment, thus taking care to be judicious rather than judgmental [§55]. In judging a person's way of life, one is not passing final judgment on that person's worth; one is simply trying to decide whether his or her example should be followed and extolled to others. In this way, judgment is not an unkind or hurtful action; instead, it is a necessary element in the development of greater skill.

This point is reflected in the Vinaya, where the monks are instructed to keep watch over one another's behavior. As we will see in Chapter Seven, if they suspect that a fellow monk has broken a rule, they are to approach him about the matter. If dissatisfied with his response, they have to meet as a full community and pass judgment on whether he has, in fact, committed an offense. If he has, and the offense is reparable, they help in his rehabilitation. If the offense is irreparable, he is automatically expelled. If it is reparable but the offender stubborn and recalcitrant, they are empowered to suspend him from the group. In this way, they ensure that the monastic Saṅgha provides an environment of admirable friends who can aid anyone desiring training, whether monastic or lay.

Thus the ability to pass fair and accurate judgment on the behavior of others is an important part of the path. However, progress on the path requires not only the ability skillfully to judge the behavior of others, but also—as we will see in Chapter Six—the ability skillfully to judge your own. MN 110 [§56] shows that these two abilities go hand in hand, in that only when you have developed integrity in your own behavior can you recognize integrity in others. Conversely, AN 8:54 [§59] shows that one of the best ways to develop integrity is to associate with admirable people and to emulate their good qualities. So to develop the path, you have to use whatever integrity you have in choosing a teacher; if you've found one, you can then develop the integrity needed to refine your powers of judgment.

It's a basic truth that if you cannot judge other people objectively, it's hard to be objective in judging yourself, for the habits of delusion obscure your awareness both of the motivations and of the results of your actions. MN 61 [§131] shows that on the question of whether actions are to be judged by their motivation or their results, the Buddha's answer was, "Both." His approach to judgment was not that of a judge in a court of law passing final judgment on a person's guilt, but of a craftsman or musician judging a work in progress. By judging the results of a past mistake, one can then adjust one's motivation to improve one's future deeds.

The need to judge others' behavior skillfully does not end with the

attainment of the goal. As AN 3:68 [§118] and AN 4:111 [§98] point out, a teacher must be careful to assess who is worthy of teaching and engaging in debate, and who is not. Otherwise, time that could be well used in teaching those responsive to the Dhamma would be wasted in fruitless arguments. Thus the ability to pass skillful judgment on behavior—one's own and that of others—is not an unkind act. Instead, it is an essential skill both while learning and while teaching the Dhamma.

The second point in the Buddha's teachings frequently misunderstood is that the distinction between *skillful* and *unskillful* is not the same as the distinction between *pleasing* and *displeasing* to others. This point is explicitly made in MN 58, which states that the Buddha's concept of skillful speech allowed for unpleasant statements. Pleasing words are not always skillful, nor are displeasing words always unskillful. Here again, both the actual motivation behind one's words and their effect is what counts. Contrary to the popular picture of a Buddha whose words were invariably gentle and sweet, MN 58 [§69] cites an example where the Buddha found it necessary to be extremely critical and harsh: Devadatta was working toward a schism in the Saṅgha, and the Buddha had to show the other monks in no uncertain terms that Devadatta was not to be trusted. (The full story is in Cv.VII.) There are many other examples of the Buddha's harsh remarks in this book as well—for example, in §66, §§71-72, and §125. The criteria for skillful speech given in §69 show that these examples were not slips on his part; instead, they are demonstrations of how far the range of skillful action can go.

The third point is reflected in the many misunderstandings about kamma displayed in the questions gathered in this chapter, for these show that the Buddha, in formulating his teaching on kamma, was not simply following a belief already well known and widely accepted in his culture. He was saying something distinctively new: that the present is shaped not only by past actions but also by present ones, that actions could be developed as skills, and that those skills could lead all the way to the end of suffering and stress. Because this was such a new understanding of the power of action, his listeners naturally had trouble grasping both what he was saying and how its implications should be applied to the various aspects of their lives. That's why their questions concerning kamma had to be reanalyzed before they could properly be answered.

This point will be reinforced in the next chapter, where we will see that kamma is the primary topic that the Buddha approached through cross-questioning, another response-strategy designed to help clarify issues that questioners might find hard to understand. The fact that he felt compelled to cross-question his listeners on the analogies and examples he cited to explain questions of kamma shows that he knew his teaching was new, that his listeners would have trouble understanding it, and so he needed to put forth extra effort to make it clear.

The fourth point, related to the third, is that the multiple variables needed to answer some of the questions dealing with kamma show that kamma is not as simple a process—or as simplistic a teaching—as is sometimes assumed.

The fifth point is one we have already touched on in Chapter Three: that some of the Buddha's teachings are appropriate for certain stages of the practice and not for others. The statement that all feelings are stressful is not a useful teaching for someone who still doesn't understand the basics of kamma. It's not to be taken as a first principle of the Buddha's system and applied to all questions across the board. As the Buddha noted himself in SN 22:60, if feelings were exclusively stressful, no one would be attached to them; if they were exclusively pleasant, no one would ever feel dispassion for them. Thus the skillful approach

in practice is to focus on their range of pleasurable and stressful aspects when trying to develop skillful kamma and abandon unskillful kamma; and to focus exclusively on their stressful aspect when one's practice has reached a level of skill where one is ready to abandon clinging for all fabricated things. Thus when answering a question dealing with this topic, the proper response is rhetorical: to gauge the level of the listener's understanding and to formulate a response that is timely and beneficial in addition to being true.

In the course of teaching lessons about the proper understanding of skillful and unskillful action, the Buddha's analytical answers also teach some important lessons about how a skillful question should be formulated. Simply by pointing out that a question needs to be treated analytically, the Buddha is saying that the original question was unskillful. The way he analyzes the question shows, by implication, how a skillful question on the same topic should be phrased.

This sort of lesson is made even clearer in three examples where the Buddha takes pains to preface his analytical answer with a cross-question. In MN 90 [§103], the Buddha is addressing a listener—King Pasenadi—who is generally portrayed in the Canon as honest but inept at phrasing his questions. Thus the Buddha takes pains to illustrate his analytical answers with examples and analogies that make the need for an analytical answer clear.

In the other two examples, however, the motivation behind the original question is dishonest and hard-hearted, so the Buddha gives analogies to demonstrate that fact. In DN 12 he shows in a direct way that the attack behind Lohicca's question—that a person who has achieved the goal should not teach it to others—was based on uncompassionate motives. Thus the question in and of itself was unskillful.

In MN 58 [§69] he makes a similar point, though more indirectly. Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, who had incited Prince Abhaya to ask a trick question of the Buddha, had claimed that the Buddha would end up like a person with a two-horned chestnut stuck in his throat, unable to swallow it or spit it out. The Buddha, however, taking Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's image of a dangerous object stuck in the throat, applies it to the infant sitting on the prince's lap: What would the prince do if the child got a sharp object in its mouth? The prince replies that he would remove the object, even if it meant drawing blood, out of compassion for the child. Upon receiving this answer, the Buddha states that, unlike the Nigaṇṭhas—who were content to leave someone choking on a potentially lethal object—his desire in teaching is analogous to the prince's in removing the sharp object: to remove misunderstandings that cause suffering, out of sympathy and compassion for his listeners.

By questioning the prince in this way, the Buddha accomplishes two things. He shows that the Nigaṇṭhas were evil in their motives and, by allowing the prince to speak of his—the prince's—compassion, he brings a potential opponent over to his side. We will discuss this use of cross-questioning as a means of flattering one's listener in the next chapter.

What these last two examples have in common is that the question in each case is unskillful not only because it was wrongly framed in formal terms, but also because it derived from unskillful—uncompassionate—intentions.

MN 58 also shows—and here it's seconded by SN 42:9 [§70]—that analytical responses are especially useful in handling trick questions. In both passages, the Buddha is presented with false dichotomies, and his analytical responses demonstrate precisely why the dichotomies are false. In the case of MN 58, the Buddha's answer shows that the dichotomy covers only a fraction of the variables that have to be taken into account in judging right speech; in SN 42:9, he shows how the dichotomy is totally off the mark, in that it covers none of the

variables that account for why families come to ruin.

The passages collected in this chapter also show how the Buddha passed some of his skill in handling questions of this sort on to his disciples. In MN 126 [§67], he approves of Ven. Bhūmija's ability to give an analytical answer to Prince Jayasena's question, and then proceeds to show how the answer would have been made more effective if accompanied by similes. As we will see in the next chapter, similes of this sort would have provided the opportunity to cross-question the prince, making him a fellow participant in the correct answer and allowing him to see more clearly how skillful that answer was.

In AN 3:79 [§62], the Buddha gives Ven. Ānanda the chance to answer a question analytically in front of a group of monks. This was most likely a lesson for them: to see how a wise disciple would handle a question of this sort. The Buddha's comment on Ven. Ānanda's discernment after the exchange emphasizes that the ability to respond skillfully to a question in this way is a sign of discernment, and that the monks should try to master this skill as an essential part of their training.

## READINGS

### ON JUDGING PEOPLE

§ 54. "And how is a monk one with a sense of distinctions among individuals? There is the case where people are known to a monk in terms of two categories.

"Of two people—one who wants to see noble ones and one who doesn't—the one who doesn't want to see noble ones is to be criticized for that reason; the one who does want to see noble ones is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who want to see noble ones—one who wants to hear the true Dhamma and one who doesn't—the one who doesn't want to hear the true Dhamma is to be criticized for that reason; the one who does want to hear the true Dhamma is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who want to hear the true Dhamma—one who listens with an attentive ear and one who listens without an attentive ear—the one who listens without an attentive ear is to be criticized for that reason; the one who listens with an attentive ear is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who listen with an attentive ear—one who, having listened to the Dhamma, remembers it, and one who doesn't—the one who, having listened to the Dhamma, doesn't remember it is to be criticized for that reason; the one who, having listened to the Dhamma, does remember the Dhamma is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who, having listened to the Dhamma, remember it—one who explores the meaning of the Dhamma he has remembered and one who doesn't—the one who doesn't explore the meaning of the Dhamma he has remembered is to be criticized for that reason; the one who does explore the meaning of the Dhamma he has remembered is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have remembered—one who practices the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, having a sense of Dhamma, having a sense of meaning, and one who doesn't—the one who doesn't practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, having a sense of Dhamma, having a sense of meaning, is to be criticized for that reason; the one who does practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, having a sense of Dhamma, having a sense of meaning is, for that reason, to be praised.

"Of two people who practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, having a

sense of Dhamma, having a sense of meaning—one who practices for both his own benefit and that of others, and one who practices for his own benefit but not that of others—the one who practices for his own benefit but not that of others is to be criticized for that reason; the one who practices for both his own benefit and that of others is, for that reason, to be praised.

“This is how people are known to a monk in terms of two categories. And this is how a monk is one with a sense of distinctions among individuals.” — AN 7:64

§ 55. “[1] It’s through living together that a person’s virtue may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where one individual, through living with another, knows this: ‘For a long time this person has been torn, broken, spotted, splattered in his actions. He hasn’t been consistent in his actions. He hasn’t practiced consistently with regard to the precepts. He is an unprincipled person, not a virtuous, principled one.’ And then there is the case where one individual, through living with another, knows this: ‘For a long time this person has been untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered in his actions. He has been consistent in his actions. He has practiced consistently with regard to the precepts. He is a virtuous, principled person, not an unprincipled one.’ ...

“[2] It’s through dealing with a person that his purity may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where one individual, through dealing with another, knows this: ‘This person deals one way when one-on-one, another way when with two, another way when with three, another way when with many. His earlier dealings do not jibe with his later dealings. He is impure in his dealings, not pure.’ And then there is the case where one individual, through dealing with another, knows this: ‘The way this person deals when one-on-one, is the same way he deals when with two, when with three, when with many. His earlier dealings jibe with his later dealings. He is pure in his dealings, not impure.’ ...

“[3] It’s through adversity that a person’s endurance may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where a person, suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, doesn’t reflect: ‘That’s how it is when living together in the world. That’s how it is when gaining a personal identity [*atta-bhāva*, literally “self-state”]. When there is living in the world, when there is the gaining of a personal identity, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions: gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain.’ Suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, he sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. And then there is the case where a person, suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, reflects: ‘That’s how it is when living together in the world. That’s how it is when gaining a personal identity. When there is living in the world, when there is the gaining of a personal identity, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions: gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain.’ Suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, he

doesn't sorrow, grieve, or lament, doesn't beat his breast or become distraught....

“[4] It's through discussion that a person's discernment may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning': Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where one individual, through discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question, he is dull, not discerning. Why is that? He doesn't make statements that are deep, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. He cannot declare the meaning, teach it, describe it, set it forth, reveal it, explain it, or make it plain. He is dull, not discerning.' Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a small fish rise. The thought would occur to him, 'From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a small fish, not a large one.' In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question... he is dull, not discerning.'

“And then there is the case where one individual, through discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question, he is discerning, not dull. Why is that? He makes statements that are deep, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. He can declare the meaning, teach it, describe it, set it forth, reveal it, explain it, & make it plain. He is discerning, not dull.' Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a large fish rise. The thought would occur to him, 'From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a large fish, not a small one.' In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question... he is discerning, not dull.'” — AN 4:192

§ 56. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthi in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra's mother. And on that occasion—the uposatha of the fifteenth, the night of a very full moon—he was sitting out in the open with the community of monks. Then, having surveyed the silent community of monks, he addressed them: “Monks, could a person of no integrity know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity?’”

“No, lord.”

“Good, monks. It's impossible, there's no way, that a person of no integrity would know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity.’”

“Could a person of no integrity know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity?’”

“No, lord.”

“Good, monks. It's impossible, there's no way, that a person of no integrity would know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity.’”

“A person of no integrity is endowed with qualities of no integrity; he is a person of no integrity in his friendship, in the way he wills, the way he gives advice, the way he speaks, the way he acts, the views he holds, & the way he gives a gift.

“And how is a person of no integrity endowed with qualities of no integrity? There is the case where a person of no integrity is lacking in conviction, lacking

in shame, lacking in compunction; he is unlearned, lazy, of muddled mindfulness, & poor discernment. This is how a person of no integrity is endowed with qualities of no integrity."

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in his friendship? There is the case where a person of no integrity has, as his friends & companions, those contemplatives & brahmans who are lacking in conviction, lacking in shame, lacking in compunction, unlearned, lazy, of muddled mindfulness, & poor discernment. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in his friendship.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the way he wills? There is the case where a person of no integrity wills for his own affliction, or for the affliction of others, or for the affliction of both. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the way he wills.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the way he gives advice? There is the case where a person of no integrity gives advice for his own affliction, or for the affliction of others, or for the affliction of both. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the way he gives advice.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the way he speaks? There is the case where a person of no integrity is one who tells lies, engages in divisive tale-bearing, engages in harsh speech, engages in idle chatter. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the way he speaks.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the way he acts? There is the case where a person of no integrity is one who takes life, steals, engages in illicit sex. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the way he acts.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the views he holds? There is the case where a person of no integrity is one who holds a view like this: 'There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no contemplatives or brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.' This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the views he holds.

"And how is a person of no integrity a person of no integrity in the way he gives a gift? There is the case where a person of no integrity gives a gift inattentively, not with his own hand, disrespectfully, as if throwing it away, with the view that nothing will come of it. This is how a person of no integrity is a person of no integrity in the way he gives a gift.

"This person of no integrity—thus endowed with qualities of no integrity; a person of no integrity in his friendship, in the way he wills, the way he gives advice, the way he speaks, the way he acts, the views he holds, & the way he gives a gift—on the breakup of the body, after death, reappears in the destination of people of no integrity. And what is the destination of people of no integrity? Hell or the animal womb.

"Now, monks, could a person of integrity know of a person of no integrity: 'This is a person of no integrity'?"

"Yes, lord."

"Good, monks. It is possible that a person of integrity would know of a person of no integrity: 'This is a person of no integrity.'

"Could a person of integrity know of a person of integrity: 'This is a person of integrity'?"

"Yes, lord."

“Good, monks. It is possible that a person of integrity would know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity.’

“A person of integrity is endowed with qualities of integrity; he is a person of integrity in his friendship, in the way he wills, the way he gives advice, the way he speaks, the way he acts, the views he holds, & the way he gives a gift.

“And how is a person of integrity endowed with qualities of integrity? There is the case where a person of integrity is endowed with conviction, shame, compunction; he is learned, with aroused persistence, unmuddled mindfulness, & good discernment. This is how a person of integrity is endowed with qualities of integrity.”

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in his friendship? There is the case where a person of integrity has, as his friends & companions, those contemplatives & brahmans who are endowed with conviction, shame, compunction; who are learned, with aroused persistence, unmuddled mindfulness, & good discernment. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in his friendship.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the way he wills? There is the case where a person of integrity wills neither for his own affliction, nor for the affliction of others, nor for the affliction of both. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the way he wills.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the way he gives advice? There is the case where a person of integrity gives advice neither for his own affliction, nor for the affliction of others, nor for the affliction of both. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the way he gives advice.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the way he speaks? There is the case where a person of integrity is one who refrains from lies, refrains from divisive tale-bearing, refrains from harsh speech, refrains from idle chatter. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the way he speaks.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the way he acts? There is the case where a person of integrity is one who refrains from taking life, refrains from stealing, refrains from illicit sex. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the way he acts.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the views he holds? There is the case where a person of integrity is one who holds a view like this: ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the views he holds.

“And how is a person of integrity a person of integrity in the way he gives a gift? There is the case where a person of integrity gives a gift attentively, with his own hand, respectfully, not as if throwing it away, with the view that something will come of it. This is how a person of integrity is a person of integrity in the way he gives a gift.

“This person of integrity—thus endowed with qualities of integrity; a person of integrity in his friendship, in the way he wills, the way he gives advice, the way he speaks, the way he acts, the views he holds, & the way he gives a gift—on the breakup of the body, after death, reappears in the destination of people of integrity. And what is the destination of people of integrity? Greatness among devas or among human beings.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. — *MN 110*

§ 57. “Now, what is the level of a person of no integrity? A person of no integrity is ungrateful, does not acknowledge the help given to him. This ingratitude, this lack of acknowledgment is second nature among rude people. It is entirely on the level of people of no integrity. A person of integrity is grateful & acknowledges the help given to him. This gratitude, this acknowledgment is second nature among admirable people. It is entirely on the level of people of integrity.” — AN 2:31

§ 58. “Monks, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as ‘a person of no integrity.’ Which four?

“There is the case where a person of no integrity, when unasked, reveals another person’s bad points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person’s bad points in full & in detail, without omission, without holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of no integrity.’

“Then again, a person of no integrity, when asked, doesn’t reveal another person’s good points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person’s good points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of no integrity.’

“Then again, a person of no integrity, when asked, doesn’t reveal his own bad points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own bad points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of no integrity.’

“Then again, a person of no integrity, when unasked, reveals his own good points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own good points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of no integrity.’

“Monks, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as ‘a person of no integrity.’

“Now, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as ‘a person of integrity.’ Which four?

“There is the case where a person of integrity, when asked, doesn’t reveal another person’s bad points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person’s bad points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of integrity.’

“Then again, a person of integrity, when unasked, reveals another person’s good points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person’s good points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of integrity.’

“Then again, a person of integrity, when unasked, reveals his own bad points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own bad points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of integrity.’

“Then again, a person of integrity, when asked, doesn’t reveal his own good points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own good points not in full,

not in detail, with omissions, holding back. Of this person you may know, ‘This venerable one is a person of integrity.’

“Monks, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as ‘a person of integrity.’” — *AN 4:73*

§ 59. “And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a layperson, in whatever town or village he may dwell, spends time with householders or householders’ sons, young or old, who are advanced in virtue. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction in those who are consummate in conviction, consummate virtue in those who are consummate in virtue, consummate generosity in those who are consummate in generosity, and consummate discernment in those who are consummate in discernment. This is called admirable friendship....

“And what does it mean to be consummate in conviction? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones has conviction, is convinced of the Tathāgata’s awakening: ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is pure and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine and human beings, awakened, blessed.’ This is called being consummate in conviction.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in virtue? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones abstains from taking life, abstains from stealing, abstains from illicit sexual conduct, abstains from lying, abstains from taking intoxicants that cause heedlessness. This is called being consummate in virtue.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in generosity? There is the case of a disciple of the noble ones, his awareness cleansed of the stain of miserliness, living at home, freely generous, openhanded, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms. This is called being consummate in generosity.

“And what does it mean to be consummate in discernment? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones is discerning, endowed with discernment of arising and passing away—noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress. This is called being consummate in discernment.” — *AN 8:54*

## JUDGING WAYS OF LIFE

§ 60. As he was sitting to one side, Subha the brahman student, Todeyya’s son, said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, the brahmins say this: ‘The householder is accomplishing the Dhamma of the true way, skillful. The one gone forth is not accomplishing the Dhamma of the true way, skillful.’ What does Master Gotama have to say with regard to this?”

“Here, student, I am one who speaks analytically, not one who speaks categorically. I don’t praise the wrong practice of a householder or of one gone forth. For when a householder or one gone forth practices wrongly, then by reason of that wrong practice he is not accomplishing the Dhamma of the true way, skillful. I do praise the right practice of a householder or of one gone forth. For when a householder or one gone forth practices rightly, then by reason of that right practice he is accomplishing the Dhamma of the true way, skillful.”

“Master Gotama, the brahmins say this: ‘This householder-occupation—involving great needs, great duties, great issues, great arrangements—is of great fruit. This going-forth-occupation—involving meager needs, meager duties, meager issues, meager arrangements—is of meager fruit. What does Master

Gotama have to say with regard to this?"

"Here too student, I am one who speaks analytically, not one who speaks categorically. There is the occupation involving great needs, great duties, great issues, great arrangements, that—when failing—is of meager fruit. There is the occupation involving great needs, great duties, great issues, great arrangements, that—when succeeding—is of great fruit. There is the occupation involving meager needs, meager duties, meager issues, meager arrangements, that—when failing—is of meager fruit. There is the occupation involving meager needs, meager duties, meager issues, meager arrangements, that—when succeeding—is of great fruit.

"And which is an occupation involving great needs... great arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit? Agriculture.... And which is an occupation involving great needs... great arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit? Agriculture again.... And which is an occupation involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit? Trade.... And which is an occupation involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit? Trade again....

"Just as the agriculture-occupation is one involving great needs... great arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit, in the same way, the householder-occupation is one involving great needs... great arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit. Just as the agriculture-occupation is one involving great needs... great arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit, in the same way, the householder-occupation is one involving great needs... great arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit. Just as the trade-occupation is one involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit, in the same way, the going-forth-occupation is one involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when failing—is of meager fruit. Just as the trade-occupation is one involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit, in the same way, the going-forth-occupation is one involving meager needs... meager arrangements that—when succeeding—is of great fruit." — MN 99

§ 61. Then Rāsiya the headman went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "I have heard that, 'Gotama the contemplative criticizes all asceticism, that he categorically denounces & disparages all ascetics who live the rough life.' I trust that those who say that, 'Gotama the contemplative criticizes all asceticism, that he categorically denounces & disparages all ascetics who live the rough life' do not slander the Blessed One with what is unfactual, that they declare the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and that the legitimate implications of what they say give no grounds for criticism."

"Headman, those who say, 'Gotama the contemplative criticizes all asceticism, that he categorically denounces & disparages all ascetics who live the rough life,' are not saying what I have said, and they slander me with what is unfactual & untrue.

"Headman, there are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensuality with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathāgata—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.

"And which is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-

awakening, to unbinding? Precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.

[The Buddha then lists ten types of individuals who enjoy sensual pleasures:

1. One who seeks wealth unlawfully, by violence; doesn't make himself happy with it, doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
2. One who seeks wealth unlawfully, by violence; makes himself happy with it, but doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
3. One who seeks wealth unlawfully, by violence; makes himself happy with it, shares it with others, and makes merit.
4. One who seeks wealth lawfully and unlawfully, by violence and without violence; doesn't make himself happy with it, doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
5. One who seeks wealth lawfully and unlawfully, by violence and without violence; makes himself happy with it, but doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
6. One who seeks wealth lawfully and unlawfully, by violence and without violence; makes himself happy with it, shares it with others, and makes merit.
7. One who seeks wealth lawfully, without violence; doesn't make himself happy with it, doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
8. One who seeks wealth lawfully, without violence; makes himself happy with it, but doesn't share it with others, and doesn't make merit.
9. One who seeks wealth lawfully, without violence; makes himself happy with it, shares it with others, and makes merit; he uses his wealth tied to it, infatuated with it, guilty, not seeing the drawbacks, and not discerning the escape (from those drawbacks)].
10. One who seeks wealth lawfully, without violence; makes himself happy with it, shares it with others, and makes merit; he uses his wealth not tied to it, not infatuated with it, guiltless, seeing the drawbacks, and discerning the escape (from those drawbacks).

The Buddha then says that these individuals are to be variously criticized to the extent that they

seek wealth unlawfully, by violence  
do not make themselves happy with it  
do not share it with others or make merit  
use their wealth tied to it, infatuated with it, guilty, not seeing the drawbacks, and not discerning the escape.

They are to be variously praised to the extent that they

seek wealth lawfully, without violence  
make themselves happy with it  
share it with others or make merit  
use their wealth not tied to it, uninfatuated with it, guiltless, seeing the drawbacks, and discerning the escape.

The Buddha then describes three types of ascetics living the rough life:]

“Which three? There is the case, headman, where an ascetic who lives the rough life, having—through conviction—gone forth from the home life into

homelessness, (with the thought,) ‘Perhaps I will attain a skilled state. Perhaps I will realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.’ He afflicts & torments himself. He doesn’t attain a skilled state. He doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, there is the case where an ascetic who lives the rough life, having—through conviction—gone forth from the holy life into homelessness, (with the thought,) ‘Perhaps I will attain a skilled state. Perhaps I will realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.’ He afflicts & torments himself. He attains a skilled state. He doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.

“Furthermore, there is the case where an ascetic who lives the rough life, having—through conviction—gone forth from the holy life into homelessness, (with the thought,) ‘Perhaps I will attain a skilled state. Perhaps I will realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.’ He afflicts & torments himself. He attains a skilled state. He realizes a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision.

“As for the ascetic living the rough life who afflicts & torments himself, who doesn’t attain a skilled state, and doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision: This ascetic living the rough life can be criticized on three grounds. On which three grounds can he be criticized? ‘He afflicts & torments himself’: This is the first ground on which he can be criticized. ‘He doesn’t attain a skilled state’: This is the second ground on which he can be criticized. ‘He doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision’: This is the third ground on which he can be criticized....

“As for the ascetic living the rough life who afflicts & torments himself, who attains a skilled state, but doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision: This ascetic living the rough life can be criticized on two grounds and praised on one. On which two grounds can he be criticized? ‘He afflicts & torments himself’: This is the first ground on which he can be criticized. ‘He doesn’t realize a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision’: This is the second ground on which he can be criticized.... On which one ground can he be praised? ‘He attains a skilled state’: This is the one ground on which he can be praised....

“As for the ascetic living the rough life who afflicts & torments himself, who attains a skilled state, and who realizes a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision: This ascetic living the rough life can be criticized on one ground and praised on two. On which one ground can he be criticized? ‘He afflicts & torments himself’: This is the one ground on which he can be criticized.... On which two grounds can he be praised? ‘He attains a skilled state’: This is the first ground on which he can be praised. ‘He realizes a superior human state, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision’: This is the second ground on which he can be praised.” — *SN 42:12*

§ 62. Then Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “Ānanda, every habit & practice, every life, every holy life that is followed as of essential worth: Is every one of them fruitful?”

“Lord, that is not [to be answered] with a categorical answer.”

“Very well then, Ānanda, give an analytical answer.”

“When—by following a life of habit & practice, a life, a holy life that is followed as of essential worth—one’s unskillful qualities increase while one’s skillful qualities decline: that sort of habit & practice, life, holy life that is followed

as of essential worth is fruitless. But when—by following a life of habit & practice, a life, a holy life that is followed as of essential worth—one’s unskillful qualities decline while one’s skillful qualities increase: that sort of habit & practice, life, holy life that is followed as of essential worth is fruitful.”

That is what Ven. Ānanda said, and the Teacher approved. Then Ven. Ānanda, (realizing,) “The Teacher approves of me,” got up from his seat and, having bowed down to the Blessed One and circumambulating him, left.

Then not long after Ven. Ānanda had left, the Blessed One said to the monks, “Monks, Ānanda is still in training, but it would not be easy to find his equal in discernment.” — AN 3:79

§ 63. Then Vajjiya Māhita the householder went to where the wanderers of other sects were staying. On arrival he greeted them courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the wanderers said to him, “Is it true, householder, that Gotama the contemplative criticizes all asceticism, that he categorically denounces & disparages all ascetics who live the rough life?”

“No, venerable sirs, the Blessed One doesn’t criticize all asceticism, nor does he categorically denounce or disparage all ascetics who live the rough life. The Blessed One criticizes what should be criticized, and praises what should be praised. Criticizing what should be criticized, praising what should be praised, the Blessed One is one who speaks analytically, not one who speaks categorically on this matter.”

When this was said, one of the wanderers said to Vajjiya Māhita the householder, “Now wait a minute, householder. This contemplative Gotama whom you praise is a nihilist, one who doesn’t declare anything.”

“I tell you, venerable sirs, that the Blessed One righteously declares that ‘This is skillful.’ He declares that ‘This is unskillful.’ Declaring that ‘This is skillful’ and ‘This is unskillful,’ he is one who has declared [a teaching]. He is not a nihilist, one who doesn’t declare anything.”

When this was said, the wanderers fell silent, abashed, sitting with their shoulders drooping, their heads down, brooding, at a loss for words.

Vajjiya Māhita the householder, perceiving that the wanderers were silent, abashed... at a loss for words, got up & went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entirety of his discussion with the wanderers.

[The Blessed One said,] “Well done, householder. Well done. That is how you should periodically & righteously refute those foolish men. I don’t say that all asceticism is to be pursued, nor do I say that all asceticism is not to be pursued. I don’t say that all observances should be observed, nor do I say that all observances should not be observed. I don’t say that all exertions are to be pursued, nor do I say that all exertions are not to be pursued. I don’t say that all forfeiture should be forfeited, nor do I say that all forfeiture should not be forfeited. I don’t say that all release is to be used for release, nor do I say that all release is not to be used for release.

“If, when an asceticism is pursued, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities wane, then I tell you that that sort of asceticism is not to be pursued. But if, when an asceticism is pursued, unskillful qualities wane and skillful qualities grow, then I tell you that that sort of asceticism is to be pursued.

“If, when an observance is observed, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities wane, then I tell you that that sort of observance is not to be observed. But if, when an observance is observed, unskillful qualities wane and skillful qualities grow, then I tell you that that sort of observance is to be observed.

“If, when an exertion is pursued....

“If, when a forfeiture is forfeited....

“If, when a release is used for release, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities wane, then I tell you that that sort of release is not to be used for release. But if, when a release is used for release, unskillful qualities wane and skillful qualities grow, then I tell you that that sort of release is to be used for release.”

When Vajjiya Māhita the householder had been instructed, urged, roused & encouraged by the Blessed One with a talk on Dhamma, he got up from his seat and, having bowed down to the Blessed One, left, keeping the Blessed One on his right side. Not long afterward, the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, even a monk who has long penetrated the Dhamma in this Dhamma & Vinaya would do well, periodically & righteously, to refute the wanderers of other sects in just the way Vajjiya Māhita the householder has done.” — AN 10:94

## JUDGING PRACTICES

§ 64. [Vassakāra the brahman:] “Once, Ven. Ānanda, Master Gotama was staying near Vesālī in the Peaked Roofed Pavilion in the Great Wood. I went to him at the Peaked Roofed Pavilion in the Great Wood, and there he spoke in a variety of ways on mental absorption (*jhāna*). Master Gotama was both endowed with mental absorption & made mental absorption his habit. In fact, he praised mental absorption of every sort.”

[Ven. Ānanda:] “It wasn’t the case, brahman, that the Blessed One praised mental absorption of every sort, nor did he criticize mental absorption of every sort. And what sort of mental absorption did he not praise? There is the case where a certain person dwells with his awareness overcome by sensual passion, seized with sensual passion. He doesn’t discern the escape, as it actually is present, from sensual passion once it has arisen. Making that sensual passion the focal point, he absorbs himself with it, besorbs, resorbs, & supersorbs<sup>1</sup> himself with it.

“He dwells with his awareness overcome by ill will....

“He dwells with his awareness overcome by sloth & drowsiness....

“He dwells with his awareness overcome by restlessness & anxiety....

“He dwells with his awareness overcome by uncertainty, seized with uncertainty. He doesn’t discern the escape, as it actually is present, from uncertainty once it has arisen. Making that uncertainty the focal point, he absorbs himself with it, besorbs, resorbs, & supersorbs himself with it. This is the sort of mental absorption that the Blessed One did not praise.

“And what sort of mental absorption did he praise? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first *jhāna*: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second *jhāna*: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third *jhāna*, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth *jhāna*: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is the sort of mental absorption that the Blessed One praised.

“It would seem, Ven. Ānanda, that Master Gotama criticized the mental

absorption that deserves criticism, and praised that which deserves praise.” —  
*MN 108*

NOTE: 1. These neologisms are an attempt to render the wordplay of the Pali into English. The sense is that there is a type of strong concentration involved when one is obsessed with unskillful thoughts, but that it is carried to ludicrous and unhealthy degrees.

§ 65. Then Ven. Savittha and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, greeted him courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side. As they were sitting there, Ven. Sāriputta said to Ven. Savittha, “Friend, there are these three individuals found existing in the world. Which three? The bodily witness, the one attained to view, and the one released through conviction.... Of these three, which pleases you as the most splendid & most sublime?”

“... The one released through conviction, friend. Why is that? In this individual the faculty of conviction is dominant.”

Then Ven. Sāriputta said to Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita, “...Of these three, which pleases you as the most splendid & most sublime?”

“... The bodily witness, friend. Why is that? In this individual the faculty of concentration is dominant.”

Then Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita said to Ven. Sāriputta, “...Of these three, which pleases you as the most splendid & most sublime?”

“... The one attained to view, friend. Why is that? In this individual the faculty of discernment is dominant.”

Then Ven. Sāriputta said to Ven. Savittha and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita, “Friends, we have each answered in line with our own understanding. Come, friends, let’s go to the Blessed One and tell him about this matter. However he answers, that’s how we’ll remember it.”

“As you say, friend,” Ven. Savittha and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita responded to Ven. Sāriputta.

Then Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. Savittha, and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, Ven. Sāriputta told the Blessed One everything covered in his discussion with Ven. Savittha and Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita.

[The Blessed One said,] “It’s not easy, Sāriputta, to give a categorical answer as to which of these three is the most splendid & most sublime. There’s the possibility that the individual who is released through conviction is practicing the way to arahantship, while the individual who is a bodily witness is a once-returned or a non-returned, and the individual who is attained to view is a once-returned or a non-returned.

“It’s not easy, Sāriputta, to give a categorical answer as to which of these three is the most splendid & most sublime. There’s the possibility that the individual who is a bodily witness is practicing the way to arahantship, while the individual who is released through conviction is a once-returned or a non-returned, and the individual who is attained to view is a once-returned or a non-returned.

“It’s not easy, Sāriputta, to give a categorical answer as to which of these three is the most splendid & most sublime. There’s the possibility that the individual who is attained to view is practicing the way to arahantship, while the individual who is a bodily witness is a once-returned or a non-returned, and the individual who is released through conviction is a once-returned or a non-returned.

“It’s not easy, Sāriputta, to give a categorical answer as to which of these three is the most splendid & most sublime.” — *AN 3:21*

## KAMMA &amp; FEELING

§ 66. As he was sitting to one side, Potaliputta the wanderer said to Ven. Samiddhi, "Face to face with Gotama the contemplative have I heard this, face to face have I learned this: 'Bodily action is barren, verbal action is barren, only mental action is true. And there is an attainment in which, on being attained, one doesn't feel anything.'"

"Don't say that, friend. Don't misrepresent the Blessed One. For it's not good to misrepresent the Blessed One, and the Blessed One would not say that: 'Bodily action is barren, verbal action is barren, only mental action is true.' But there is, friend, an attainment in which, on being attained, one doesn't feel anything."

"How long has it been, friend Samiddhi, since you went forth (into homelessness)?"

"Not long, friend. Three years."

"Then what now should I say about the elder monks, when a junior monk would suppose that his Teacher is to be defended in this way? Having intentionally done an action with body, with speech, or with mind, what does one experience?"

"Having intentionally done an action with body, with speech, or with mind, one experiences stress."

Then Potaliputta the wanderer neither delighted in nor scorned Ven. Samiddhi's words. Neither delighting nor scorning, he got up from his seat and left.

[Ven. Samiddhi then went to Ven. Ānanda to report this discussion. Ven. Ānanda then went, together with Ven. Samiddhi, to see the Blessed One and told him what had happened.]

When this was said, the Blessed One said, "I do not recall even having seen Potaliputta the wanderer, much less having that sort of discussion. And his question, which deserved an analytical answer, has been given a categorical answer by this worthless man, Samiddhi."

When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to the Blessed One, "But what if Ven. Samiddhi was speaking in reference to this: 'Whatever is felt comes under stress'?"

When this was said, the Blessed One said to Ven. Ānanda, "Look, Ānanda, at how this worthless Udāyin interrupts. I knew just now that he would interrupt in an inappropriate way. From the very beginning, Potaliputta the wanderer was asking about the three kinds of feeling. When this worthless Samiddhi was asked by him in this way, he should have answered, 'Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pleasure, one experiences pleasure. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pain, one experiences pain. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as neither-pleasure-nor-pain, one experiences neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Answering this way, this worthless Samiddhi would have rightly answered Potaliputta the wanderer.'"

[The Buddha then analyses four cases, one in which a person performs an unskillful action and after death is reborn in a bad destination, one in which a person performs an unskillful action and after death is reborn in a good destination, one in which a person abstains from unskillful action and after death is reborn in a good destination, and one in which a person abstains from unskillful action and after death is reborn in a bad

destination. In each case, a contemplative develops the clairvoyant ability to see this happening, and from the individual case announces that what he saw happens in all cases, and that anyone who claims otherwise is wrong. Thus in the first and third case, the contemplatives announce categorically that good and bad actions do bear results and always lead to immediate reward or retribution in the next life; in the second and fourth cases, they announce categorically that good and bad actions are barren and lead to no reward or retribution at all. The Buddha then gives an analytical explanation to cover all the four cases:]

“There are four kinds of person to be found in the world. Which four? There is the case where a certain person takes life, takes what is not given (steals), engages in illicit sex, lies, speaks divisively, speaks abusively, engages in idle chatter; is covetous, malevolent, & holds wrong views. On the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell.

“But there is also the case where a certain person takes life... holds wrong views, [yet] on the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“And there is the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given... is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views. On the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“But there is also the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given... is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views, [yet] on the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell....

“In the case of the person who takes life... [yet] on the breakup of the body, after death, reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world: either earlier he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or later he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out right views. Because of that, on the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world. But as for the results of taking life... holding wrong views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that....

“In the case of the person who abstains from taking life... [yet] on the breakup of the body, after death, reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell: either earlier he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or later he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out wrong views. Because of that, on the breakup of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But as for the results of abstaining from taking life... holding right views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that.” — *MN 136*

§ 67. Then, early in the morning, Ven. Bhūmija put on his robes and, carrying his bowl & outer robe, went to the residence of Prince Jayasena [his nephew]. On arrival, he sat down on a seat made ready. Prince Jayasena went to Ven. Bhūmija and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Bhūmija, “Master Bhūmija, there are some contemplatives & brahmins who espouse this teaching, espouse this view: ‘If one follows the holy life, even when having made a wish [for results], one is incapable of obtaining results. If one follows the holy life even when having made no wish, one is incapable of

obtaining results. If one follows the holy life even when both having made a wish and having made no wish, one is incapable of obtaining results. If one follows the holy life even when neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, one is incapable of obtaining results.' With regard to that, what does Master Bhūmija's teacher say, what is his view, what does he declare?"

"I haven't heard this face to face with the Blessed One, prince, I haven't received this face to face with the Blessed One, but there is the possibility that the Blessed One would answer in this way: 'If one follows the holy life inappropriately, even when having made a wish [for results], one is incapable of obtaining results. If one follows the holy life inappropriately, even when having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, one is incapable of obtaining results. [But] if one follows the holy life appropriately, even when having made a wish, one is capable of obtaining results. If one follows the holy life appropriately, even when having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, one is capable of obtaining results.' I haven't heard this face to face with the Blessed One, I haven't received this face to face with the Blessed One, but there is the possibility that the Blessed One would answer in this way."

"If that is what Master Bhūmija's teacher says, if that is his view, if that is what he declares, then yes, Master Bhūmija's teacher stands, as it were, having struck all of those many contemplatives & brahmans down by the head."

Prince Jayasena then served Ven. Bhūmija from his own dish of milk rice.

Then Ven. Bhūmija, after his meal, returning from his alms round, went to the Blessed One [and reported the entirety of his discussion with Prince Jayasena]. "Answering in this way when thus asked, lord, I trust that I am speaking in line with what the Blessed One has said, that I am not misrepresenting the Blessed One with what is unfactual, that I am answering in line with the Dhamma, and that the legitimate implications of what I say give no grounds for criticism."

"Certainly, Bhūmija, in answering in this way when thus asked, you are speaking in line with what I have said, you are not misrepresenting me with what is unfactual, and you are answering in line with the Dhamma and that the legitimate implications of what you say give no grounds for criticism. For any contemplatives or brahmans endowed with wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, & wrong concentration: If they follow the holy life even when having made a wish [for results], they are incapable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when having made no wish, they are incapable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when both having made a wish and having made no wish, they are incapable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, they are incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results.

"Suppose a man in need of oil, looking for oil, wandering in search of oil, would pile gravel in a tub and press it, sprinkling it again & again with water. If he were to pile gravel in a tub and press it, sprinkling it again & again with water even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results....

"Suppose a man in need of milk, looking for milk, wandering in search of milk, would twist the horn of a newly-calved cow. If he were to twist the horn of a newly-calved cow even when having made a wish [for results]... having made

no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results....

“Suppose a man in need of butter, looking for butter, wandering in search of butter, would sprinkle water on water in a crock and twirl it with a churn-stick. If he were to sprinkle water on water in a crock and twirl it with a churn-stick even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results....

“Suppose a man in need of fire, looking for fire, wandering in search of fire, would take a fire stick and rub it into a wet, sappy piece of wood. If he were to take a fire stick and rub it into a wet, sappy piece of wood even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results.

“In the same way, any contemplatives or brahmans endowed with wrong view, wrong resolve, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, & wrong concentration: If they follow the holy life even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, they are incapable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an inappropriate way of obtaining results.

“But as for any contemplatives or brahmans endowed with right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, & right concentration: If they follow the holy life even when having made a wish, they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when both having made a wish and having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results.

“Suppose a man in need of oil, looking for oil, wandering in search of oil, would pile sesame seeds in a tub and press them, sprinkling them again & again with water. If he were to pile sesame seeds in a tub and press them, sprinkling them again & again with water, even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be capable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results....

“Suppose a man in need of milk, looking for milk, wandering in search of milk, would pull the teat of a newly-calved cow. If he were to pull the teat of a newly-calved cow even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be capable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results....

“Suppose a man in need of butter, looking for butter, wandering in search of butter, would sprinkle water on curds in a crock and twirl them with a churn-stick. If he were to sprinkle water on curds in a crock and twirl them with a churn-stick even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be capable of obtaining results.

Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results.

“Suppose a man in need of fire, looking for fire, wandering in search of fire, would take a fire stick and rub it into a dry, sapless piece of wood. If he were to take a fire stick and rub it into a dry, sapless piece of wood even when having made a wish [for results]... having made no wish... both having made a wish and having made no wish... neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, he would be capable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results.

“In the same way, any contemplatives or brahmans endowed with right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, & right concentration: If they follow the holy life even when having made a wish [for results], they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when both having made a wish and having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. If they follow the holy life even when neither having made a wish nor having made no wish, they are capable of obtaining results. Why is that? Because it is an appropriate way of obtaining results.

“Bhūmija, if these four similes had occurred to you in the presence of Prince Jayasena, he would have naturally felt confidence in you and—feeling confidence—would have shown his confidence in you.”

“But, lord, how could these four similes have occurred to me in the presence of Prince Jayasena, as they are natural to the Blessed One and have never before been heard from him?”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Bhūmija delighted in the Blessed One’s words. — *MN 126*

#### ON THE BUDDHA AS TEACHER

§ 68. Then the Blessed One went to the brahman Lohicca’s home. On arrival, he sat down on a seat made ready. The brahman Lohicca, with his own hand, served & satisfied the Blessed One & the community of monks with choice staple & non-staple foods. Then, when the Blessed One had eaten and had removed his hand from his bowl, the brahman Lohicca took a lower seat and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “Is it true, Lohicca, that an evil viewpoint to this effect has arisen in you: ‘Suppose that a contemplative or brahman were to arrive at a skillful doctrine. Having arrived at a skillful doctrine, he should not declare it to anyone else, for what can one person do for another? It would be just the same as if, having cut through an old bond, one were to make another new bond. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?’”

“Yes, Master Gotama.”

“What do you think, Lohicca? Don’t you reign over Sālavatikā?”

“Yes, Master Gotama.”

“Now, suppose someone were to say, ‘The brahman Lohicca reigns over Sālavatikā. He alone should consume the fruits & revenues of Sālavatikā, and not share them with others.’ Would someone speaking in this way be a creator of obstacles for your subjects, or would he not?”

“He would be a creator of obstacles, Master Gotama.”

“And, being a creator of obstacles, would he be sympathetic for their benefit or not?”

“He would not be sympathetic for their benefit, Master Gotama.”

“And in one not sympathetic for their benefit, would his mind be established

in good will for them, or in animosity?"

"In animosity, Master Gotama."

"When the mind is established in animosity, is there wrong view or right view?"

"Wrong view, Master Gotama."

"Now, for one of wrong view, Lohicca, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb.

"What do you think, Lohicca? Doesn't King Pasenadi Kosala reign over Kasi & Kosala?"

"Yes, Master Gotama."

"Now, suppose someone were to say, 'King Pasenadi Kosala reigns over Kasi & Kosala. He alone should consume the fruits & revenues of Kasi & Kosala, and not share them with others.' Would someone speaking in this way be a creator of obstacles for King Pasenadi's subjects—you & others—or would he not?"

"He would be a creator of obstacles, Master Gotama."

"And, being a creator of obstacles, would he be sympathetic for their benefit or not?"

"He would not be sympathetic for their benefit, Master Gotama."

"And in one not sympathetic for their benefit, would his mind be established in good will for them, or in animosity?"

"In animosity, Master Gotama."

"When the mind is established in animosity, is there wrong view or right view?"

"Wrong view, Master Gotama."

"Now, for one of wrong view, Lohicca, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb.

"So then, Lohicca, if anyone were to say, 'The brahman Lohicca reigns over Sālavatikā. He alone should consume the fruits & revenues of Sālavatikā, and not share them with others,' he, speaking in this way, would be a creator of obstacles for your subjects. Being a creator of obstacles, he would not be sympathetic for their benefit. In one not sympathetic for their benefit, the mind would be established in animosity for them. When the mind is established in animosity, there is wrong view. For one of wrong view, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb. In the same way, if anyone were to say, 'Suppose that a contemplative or brahman were to arrive at a skillful doctrine. Having arrived at a skillful doctrine, he should not declare it to anyone else, for what can one person do for another? It would be just the same as if, having cut through an old bond, one were to make another new bond. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?'—he, speaking in this way, would be a creator of obstacles for those children of good family who, coming to the Dhamma & Vinaya revealed by the Tathāgata, attain the sort of grand distinction where they attain the fruit of stream-entry, the fruit of once-returning, the fruit of non-returning, the fruit of arahantship; and for those who ripen deva wombs for the sake of bringing about the deva state. Being a creator of obstacles, he would not be sympathetic for their benefit. In one not sympathetic for their benefit, the mind would be established in animosity for them. When the mind is established in animosity, there is wrong view. For one of wrong view, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb.

"And if anyone were to say, 'King Pasenadi Kosala reigns over Kasi & Kosala. He alone should consume the fruits & revenues of Kasi & Kosala, and not share them with others,' he, speaking in this way, would be a creator of obstacles for King Pasenadi's subjects—you & others. Being a creator of obstacles, he would not be sympathetic for their benefit. In one not sympathetic

for their benefit, the mind would be established in animosity for them. When the mind is established in animosity, there is wrong view. For one of wrong view, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb. In the same way, if anyone were to say, ‘Suppose that a contemplative or brahman were to arrive at a skillful doctrine. Having arrived at a skillful doctrine, he should not declare it to anyone else, for what can one person do for another? It would be just the same as if, having cut through an old bond, one were to make another new bond. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?’—he, speaking in this way, would be a creator of obstacles for those children of good family who, coming to the Dhamma & Vinaya revealed by the Tathāgata, attain the sort of grand distinction where they attain the fruit of stream-entry, the fruit of once-returning, the fruit of non-returning, the fruit of arahantship; and also for those who ripen deva wombs for the sake of bringing about the deva state. Being a creator of obstacles, he would not be sympathetic for their benefit. In one not sympathetic for their benefit, the mind would be established in animosity for them. When the mind is established in animosity, there is wrong view. For one of wrong view, I tell you, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal womb.

“Lohicca, there are these three sorts of teachers who are worthy of criticism in the world, and when anyone criticizes these sorts of teachers, the criticism is true, factual, righteous, & unblameworthy. Which three?

“There is the case where a certain teacher has not attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. He, not having attained that goal of the contemplative life, teaches his disciples, ‘This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness.’ His disciples don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t put forth an intent for gnosis [*añña*]. They practice in a way deviating from the teacher’s instructions. He should be criticized, saying, ‘You, venerable sir, have not attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. Not having attained that goal of the contemplative life, you teach your disciples, “This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness.” Your disciples don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t put forth an intent for gnosis, and practice in a way deviating from the teacher’s instructions. It’s just as if a man were to pursue [a woman] who pulls away, or to embrace one who turns her back. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?’ This is the first teacher who is worthy of criticism in the world, and when anyone criticizes this sort of teacher, the criticism is true, factual, righteous, & unblameworthy.

“Then there is the case where a certain teacher has not attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. He, not having attained that goal of the contemplative life, teaches his disciples, ‘This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness.’ His disciples listen, lend ear, put forth an intent for gnosis, and practice in a way not deviating from the teacher’s instructions. He should be criticized, saying, ‘You, venerable sir, have not attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. Not having attained that goal of the contemplative life, you teach your disciples, “This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness.” Your disciples listen, lend ear, put forth an intent for gnosis, and practice in a way not deviating from the teacher’s instructions. It’s just as if a man, neglecting his own field, were to imagine that another’s field should be weeded. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?’ This is the second teacher who is worthy of criticism in the world, and when anyone criticizes this sort of teacher, the criticism is true, factual, righteous, & unblameworthy.

“Then there is the case where a certain teacher has attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. He, having attained that goal of the contemplative life, teaches his disciples, ‘This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness.’ His disciples don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t put forth an intent for gnosis. They practice in a way deviating from the teacher’s instructions. He should be criticized, saying, ‘You, venerable sir, have attained the goal of the contemplative life for which one goes forth from the home life into homelessness. Having attained that goal of the contemplative life, you teach your disciples, “This is for your benefit. This is for your happiness,” but your disciples don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t put forth an intent for gnosis, and practice in a way deviating from the teacher’s instructions. It’s just as if, having cut through an old bond, one were to make another new bond. I say that such a thing is an evil, greedy deed, for what can one person do for another?’ This is the third teacher who is worthy of criticism in the world, and when anyone criticizes this sort of teacher, the criticism is true, factual, righteous, & unblameworthy.”

When this was said, the brahman Lohicca said to the Blessed One, “But is there, Master Gotama, any teacher who is not worthy of criticism in the world?”

“There is, Lohicca, a teacher who is not worthy of criticism in the world.”

“But which teacher, Master Gotama, is not worthy of criticism in the world?”

“There is the case, Lohicca, where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened. He teaches the Dhamma admirable in its beginning, admirable in its middle, admirable in its end. He proclaims the holy life both in its particulars & in its essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure.

“A householder or householder’s son, hearing the Dhamma, gains conviction in the Tathāgata and reflects: ‘Household life is confining, a dusty path. The life gone forth is like the open air. It is not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

“So after some time he abandons his mass of wealth, large or small; leaves his circle of relatives, large or small; shaves off his hair & beard, puts on the ochre robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

“When he has thus gone forth, he lives restrained by the rules of the monastic code, seeing danger in the slightest faults. Consummate in his virtue, he guards the doors of his senses, is possessed of mindfulness & alertness, and is content....

“Endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue, this noble restraint over the sense faculties, this noble mindfulness & alertness, and this noble contentment, he seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

“Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic with the benefit of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty....

“When these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, he regards it as unindebtedness, good health, release from prison, freedom, a place of security.

Seeing that they have been abandoned within him, he becomes glad. Glad, he becomes enraptured. Enraptured, his body grows tranquil. His body tranquil, he is sensitive to pleasure. Feeling pleasure, his mind becomes concentrated.

“Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters and remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. When a disciple of a teacher attains this sort of grand distinction, Lohicca, that is a teacher not worthy of criticism in the world, and if anyone were to criticize this sort of teacher, the criticism would be false, unfactual, unrighteous, & blameworthy.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna.... the third jhāna.... the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness. When a disciple of a teacher attains this sort of grand distinction, Lohicca, that is a teacher not worthy of criticism in the world, and if anyone were to criticize this sort of teacher, the criticism would be false, unfactual, unrighteous, & blameworthy.

“With his mind thus concentrated, purified, & bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge & vision... to creating a mind-made body... to the modes of supranormal powers... to the divine ear-property... to knowledge of the awareness of other beings... to knowledge of the recollection of past lives... to knowledge of the passing away & re-appearance of beings... to the knowledge of the ending of fermentations. He discerns, as it has come to be, that *‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are fermentations... This is the origination of fermentations... This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.’* His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the fermentation of sensuality, the fermentation of becoming, the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.... When a disciple of a teacher attains this sort of grand distinction, Lohicca, that is a teacher not worthy of criticism in the world, and if anyone were to criticize this sort of teacher, the criticism would be false, unfactual, unrighteous, & blameworthy.” — DN 12

§ 69. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary.

Then Prince Abhaya went to [the Jain teacher] Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta said to him, “Come, now, prince. Refute the words of Gotama the contemplative, and this admirable report about you will spread afar: ‘The words of Gotama the contemplative—so mighty, so powerful—were

refuted by Prince Abhaya!"

"But how, venerable sir, will I refute the words of Gotama the contemplative—so mighty, so powerful?"

"Come now, prince. Go to Gotama the contemplative and on arrival say this: 'Venerable sir, would the Tathāgata say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others?' If Gotama the contemplative, thus asked, answers, 'The Tathāgata would say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others,' then you should say, 'Then how is there any difference between you, venerable sir, and run-of-the-mill people? For even run-of-the-mill people say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others.' But if Gotama the contemplative, thus asked, answers, 'The Tathāgata would not say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others,' then you should say, 'Then how, venerable sir, did you say of Devadatta that "Devadatta is headed for destitution, Devadatta is headed for hell, Devadatta will boil for an eon, Devadatta is incurable"? For Devadatta was upset & disgruntled at those words of yours.' When Gotama the contemplative is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up. Just as if a two-horned chestnut were stuck in a man's throat: he would not be able to swallow it down or spit it up. In the same way, when Gotama the contemplative is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up."

Responding, "As you say, venerable sir," Prince Abhaya got up from his seat, bowed down to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, circumambulated him, and then went to the Blessed One. On arrival, he bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he glanced up at the sun and thought, "Today is not the time to refute the Blessed One's words. Tomorrow in my own home I will overturn the Blessed One's words." So he said to the Blessed One, "May the Blessed One, together with three others, acquiesce to my offer of tomorrow's meal."

The Blessed One acquiesced with silence.

Then Prince Abhaya, understanding the Blessed One's acquiescence, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, and left.

Then, after the night had passed, the Blessed One early in the morning put on his robes and, carrying his bowl and outer robe, went to Prince Abhaya's home. On arrival, he sat down on a seat made ready. Prince Abhaya, with his own hand, served & satisfied the Blessed One with fine staple & non-staple foods. Then, when the Blessed One had eaten and had removed his hand from his bowl, Prince Abhaya took a lower seat and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, would the Tathāgata say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others?"

"Prince, there is no categorical answer to that."

"Then right here, venerable sir, the Nigaṇṭhas are destroyed."

"But prince, why do you say, 'Then right here, venerable sir, the Nigaṇṭhas are destroyed?'"

"Just yesterday, venerable sir, I went to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and... he said to me... 'Come now, prince. Go to Gotama the contemplative and on arrival say this: "Venerable sir, would the Tathāgata say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others?" ... Just as if a two-horned chestnut were stuck in a man's throat: he would not be able to swallow it down or spit it up. In the same way, when Gotama the contemplative is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up.'"

Now at that time a baby boy was lying face-up on the prince's lap. So the Blessed One said to the prince, "What do you think, prince: If this young boy, through your own negligence or that of the nurse, were to take a stick or a piece of gravel into its mouth, what would you do?"

“I would take it out, venerable sir. If I couldn’t get it out right away, then holding its head in my left hand and crooking a finger of my right, I would take it out, even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have sympathy for the young boy.”

“In the same way, prince:

[1] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial [or: not connected with the goal], unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[2] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[3] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & displeasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

[4] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[5] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[6] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & pleasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has sympathy for living beings.” — MN 58 [§79]

§ 70. On one occasion the Blessed One, while wandering on tour among the Kosalans together with a large community of monks, arrived at Nālandā. There he stayed at Nālandā in Pāvārika’s Mango Grove.

Now at that time Nālandā was in the midst of famine, a time of scarcity, the crops white with blight and turned to straw. And at that time Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta was staying in Nālandā together with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas. Then Asibandhakaputta the headman, a disciple of the Nigaṇṭhas, went to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta said to him, “Come, now, headman. Refute the words of Gotama the contemplative, and this admirable report about you will spread afar: ‘The words of Gotama the contemplative—so mighty, so powerful—were refuted by Asibandhakaputta the headman!’”

“But how, venerable sir, will I refute the words of Gotama the contemplative—so mighty, so powerful?”

“Come now, headman. Go to Gotama the contemplative and on arrival say this: ‘Venerable sir, doesn’t the Blessed One in many ways praise kindness, protection, & sympathy for families?’ If Gotama the contemplative, thus asked, answers, ‘Yes, headman, the Tathāgata in many ways praises kindness, protection, & sympathy for families,’ then you should say, ‘Then why, venerable sir, is the Blessed One, together with a large community of monks, wandering on tour around Nālandā in the midst of famine, a time of scarcity, when the crops are white with blight and turned to straw? The Blessed One is practicing for the ruin of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the demise of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the downfall of families.’ When Gotama the contemplative is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won’t be able to swallow it down or spit it up.”

Responding, “As you say, venerable sir,” Asibandhakaputta the headman got up from his seat, bowed down to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, circumambulated him, and then went to the Blessed One. On arrival, he bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Venerable sir, doesn’t the Blessed One in many ways praise kindness,

protection, & sympathy for families?"

"Yes, headman, the Tathāgata in many ways praises kindness, protection, & sympathy for families."

"Then why, venerable sir, is the Blessed One, together with a large community of monks, wandering on tour around Nālandā in the midst of famine, a time of scarcity, when the crops are white with blight and turned to straw? The Blessed One is practicing for the ruin of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the demise of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the downfall of families."

"Headman, recollecting back over 91 eons, I do not know any family to have been brought to downfall through the giving of cooked alms. On the contrary: Whatever families are rich, with much wealth, with many possessions, with a great deal of money, a great many accoutrements of wealth, a great many commodities, all have become so from giving, from truth, from restraint.

"Headman, there are eight causes, eight reasons for the downfall of families. Families go to their downfall because of kings, or families go to their downfall because of thieves, or families go to their downfall because of fire, or families go to their downfall because of floods, or their stored-up treasure disappears, or their mismanaged undertakings go wrong, or in the family a wastrel is born who squanders, scatters, & shatters its wealth, and inconstancy itself is the eighth. These are the eight causes, the eight reasons for the downfall of families. Now, when these eight causes, these eight reasons are to be found, if anyone should say of me, 'The Blessed One is practicing for the ruin of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the demise of families. The Blessed One is practicing for the downfall of families'—without abandoning that statement, without abandoning that intent, without relinquishing that view—then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell."

When this was said, Asibandhakaputta the headman said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the community of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life." — *SN 42:9*