



**From  
Topsy-turvydom  
To  
Wisdom  
Volume 1**

**Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda**

**From  
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to  
Wisdom**

(Volume 1)

An anthology of writings by  
**Bhikkhu K . Nāṇananda**

**ISBN 955-1255-00-3**

*Published by:*  
**Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bhāraya**  
Sri Lanka

**2008**

**Long is the night to the wakeful  
Long is the league to him who is weary  
Long is sansara to the foolish  
Who know not the truth sublime.**

**- Dhammapada. v. 60**

***Dhamma is priceless !***  
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*Cover designed by:*

**Chamith Hettiarachchi**  
of Lanka on line (Pvt) Ltd.

*Printed by:*

**Quality Printers (Pvt) Ltd**

17/2, Pangiriwatta Road, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.

Tel: 011-4870333

Fist Impression - 1998  
Second Reprint - 2003  
Third Reprint - 2005  
Fourth Reprint - 2008

Copies of this book may be obtained from :

1. Pothgulgala Aranyaya  
'Pahan Kanuwa'  
Kandededara,  
Devalegama.
2. Royal Institute  
191, Havelock Road,  
Colombo 05.
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422, Welipara,  
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5. Mrs. Hema Rupasinghe  
No. 26, Havelock Road, Galle.
6. The Department of Public Trustee  
No. 02, Bullers Road,  
Colombo 07.

*Printed by*  
**Quality Printers (Pvt) Ltd.**  
17/2, Pangiriwatta Rd, Gangodawila,  
Nugegoda.  
Tel : 4870333

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Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda is a Buddhist monk of Sri Lanka, presently residing in a forest hermitage in Devalegama. Before his ordination, he was an assistant lecturer in Pali at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. After entering the Buddhist Order in 1967 he has resided mostly in remote hermitages. He is the author of the world renowned book 'Magic of the Mind' in which he compares the illusory nature of consciousness to a magic show. Some of his other publications are "Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought", "Ideal Solitude", "Samyutta Nikaya Anthology Part II" and Towards Calm and Insight.

# 'Sabbadānam Dhammadānam jināti'

*'The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts'*

About the D. G. M. B. ....

Rare is the birth of a Buddha in this world. So rare too, is the opportunity to listen to his Dhamma. This conviction has inspired many a devoted Buddhist to cherish the Dhamma as something extremely precious.

The Buddha has declared that salutary friendship (Kalyāna-mittatā) is almost synonymous with his dispensation. The gift-of-Dhamma is the link that moulds the bond of this friendship. Dhamma deserves no price-tag precisely because it is price-less.

It is in this spirit that the D.G.M.B. launched its Dhamma-dāna movement in 1997. Many a parched traveller on the desert path has had a refreshing drink of the nectar of Dhamma free of charge ever since. Many an enthusiastic benevolent heart seized the opportunity to participate in a genuine act of Dhammadāna.

Should we always go for things that sport a price-tag? Is everything that comes free to us, necessarily worthless? What about the air and the sunshine?

It is in point of merit that the gift-of-Dhamma excels all other gifts. Dhamma is the nectar that quenches the insatiate samsāric thirst of beings. The gift of Dhamma is therefore of far greater merit than an ordinary gift of food or drink. For the magnanimous-Dhammadāna is for ever an unfailing source of altruistic joy.

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## *Preface*

(to the first edition)

This is a collection of short essays written by me for the Dhamma Web on the Internet - 'Beyond the Net'. I am glad that it now comes out as a book to be accessible even to those beyond the Internet.

The essays comprising this volume were written at the instance of Mrs. Y. Sirimane for 'Beyond the Net' - the website on Theravada Buddhism set up under the auspices of **B. P. De Silva Holdings (Pte) Ltd. of Singapore**. I am thankful to her for the initiative taken and for her dedication to the true spirit of Dhammadāna in bringing out this volume.

**May all those who had their share in the burden of offering this gift of Dhamma to the world, share in the accruing merits! May they attain the bliss of Nibbāna!**

**Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda**  
(April - 1998)

Pothgulgala Aranya  
Pahan Kanuwa,  
Kandededara,  
Devalegama.  
Sri Lanka.

## *Preface*

(to the fourth reprint)

This reprint has been sponsored by a small group of Dhamma enthusiasts who wish to remain anonymous. May the merits of this Dhammadāna conduce to their well-being and progress on the Path to Nibbāna!

**Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda**  
(April 2008)

## *List of Abbreviations*

- D.N. *Dīgha Nikāya*  
M.N. *Majjhima Nikāya*  
S.N. *Samyutta Nikāya*  
A.N. *Anguttara Nikāya*  
Dhp. *Dhammapada*  
Sn. *Sutta Nipāta*  
P.T.S. *Pali Text Society*

## Sight - seeing - From Views to Vision

**T**he sight-seer sitting on the crag is taking in a view of the landscape around him. His eyes are on the distant hills, dimly visible through the mist. Above him, an overhanging creeper is waving in the morning breeze. At one quiet moment, it comes to rest just in front of him. His view shifts from the distant scene to the dew - drop at the tip of the creeper. All is quiet and still.

The ruddy dawn breaks in through the mist. A ray of the rising sun alights on the dew-drop and the sight seer adjusts his perspective suitably. The dew-drop gets transformed into a spectrum and a view gets transformed into a vision.

Before the advent of the Buddha, the seers were concentrating on as many as 62 views, but none of them saw the 'sight'. It was just above them - so near and yet so far. They never thought that it could be in the dew-drop of their Name - and - Form, too bland and uninviting to arrest their attention. But once their gaze got fixed on it in the correct perspective to catch the ray of the dawning Buddha Sun, **they saw the 'sight' - a vision, in contrast to views.**

## How to be Level-headed

**T**o walk the Buddha's Middle Path, one has to be level headed. Avoidance of extremes is the very essence of this practice. Avoiding clear -cut extreme standpoints does not necessarily mean vacillation. Rather, it is an effective means for being steady.

One illustration of this principle can be seen in the Buddha's teachings on the five controlling faculties included among the 37 Requisites of Enlightenment. The five faculties are - faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Faith and wisdom form a pair representing emotion and intellect. Energy and concentration form another pair signifying effort and relaxation. To be level - headed one has to balance each of these two pairs. But, where is the scale? It is right there in the middle.

Mindfulness is the scale. It is in itself a controlling faculty of which there cannot be too much - for **one cannot be too level-headed.**

## The Deserted Village

The Path to Deliverance lies through the development of the perception of 'not- self'. Generally, we attribute a self to each of our sense-bases - 'I see', 'I hear'; 'I smell'; 'I taste'; 'I touch'; 'I think'. Knock at any of 'My' sense-doors, and 'I' answer. How can one '*knock out*' the 'I'?

The Buddha compares every one of the six sense-bases to a deserted village. The universal law of impermanence expels all dwellers from the village. Sense objects come and go but they seem to stay for a while just to be able to answer the knock at the door.

"Hello! Who is there?"

"Ah! It's ME!"

Now, who is actually there? Is it 'Me'?

No. It is only the ECHO of your knock at the door!

**Listen:** '..... Rooted in *interest*, friends, are all things; born of *attention* are all things; arising, from contact, are all things .....

' - A.N. V 106f. (P.T.S.)

## Reflect rightly on the reflection

A dog is crossing a stream over a plank. Half way through, it looks into the water and sees another dog there. It wags its tail and the other responds. It snarls and the other reacts. It looks away to ignore, but when it looks again the water-dog is still there looking on.

The view of an existing self is also due to such an unwise attention. "I think, therefore, I am" is the resulting wrong conclusion. Neither narcissistic love, nor masochistic hate, can solve the problem. Ignoring with a cynical sneer, is to evade the problem. Therefore one has to thrash-down this problem of the elusive self-image to the basic confrontation between consciousness and name - and - form.

The self-image cannot be 'wished' away, because there is 'self' even in that wish. So one has to see *through* the delusion with penetrative insight.

Right attention, mindfulness, and full - awareness are the unfailing aids to the development of this saving insight.

## The Salt-Crystal

A salt crystal dissolved into a small vessel of water, makes the water salty. The same crystal dissolved into the river Ganges is unable to render its waters saline.

This is a simile brought up by the Buddha to highlight the value of a good life in minimising the effects of bad karma.

Like the small vessel with a little water, is the mean person who is undeveloped in virtue, concentration and wisdom. An evil deed done by him can easily take him to hell.

Like the river Ganges is that great man who is well developed in virtue, concentration and wisdom. The same evil deed done by him per chance, shows some effect here and now but leaves no residue whatsoever for a hereafter.

"It is this fact" says the Buddha, "which renders the Holy Life meaningful and makes an effective ending of all suffering, a possibility".

This is the blessing of a good life.

## Mother and Child

The birth of a child, is, at the same time, the birth of a mother into the world.

Child is the symbol of a mother. That love for the child, that tenderness of the heart which characterises a mother, is so significant that it is often associated with the change of red-blood into milk.

"Mettā" - usually rendered by that cross-bred term loving kindness, is the universal love for which the mother's love for her child is the unit. The Buddha speaking about mettā says for instance, "Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, so should one develop a boundless heart towards all beings".

A mother is not only born with the child she brings forth, she also grows up with the child she brings up. Her growth is in terms of the other three Divine Abidings or Brahma Vihāra- compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. In bringing up her child, sometimes a mother has to be stern and tactful. Her soft tender love matures into a compassionate sternness, when the child is passing through the unruly boyhood and reckless adolescence. But that hardness of her heart melts at the correct moment, like butter.

The child has now reached manhood. He can stand on his own feet with enviable self-confidence. The mother also grows

up with sympathetic joy enjoying the fruits of her labours. Her complacency, like curd, is serene and has nothing meddlesome about it.

The bringing forth and the bringing-up is over. The time comes now to let go - of the attachments and involvements regarding the child. But for that separation too, the mother, now mature in her experience, is fully prepared with equanimity. Like a pot of ghee, she is not easily upset.

Universal love, compassion, sympathetic-joy and equanimity are the four Divine Abidings a mother practises in a limited sense in the course of her motherly care for the child. Charity begins at home. These four are homely virtues in the first instance, to be remembered like milk, butter, curd and ghee. The four Divine Abidings are to be developed, however, in a boundless measure until one's heart is fully released in them. A mother bears testimony to the practicability and the reciprocal value of these Divine Abidings which hold the prospects of spiritual growth, peace and harmony for the society at large.

## The Six-based World

The world in all its astounding vastness takes off from the six sense-bases; the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.

The baffling complexity of the world's network of communications serves only to link up eye and forms, ear and sound, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and tangibles, mind and ideas. All the interminable problems of the world arising out of sense-contact are traceable to the eighteen elements at its base:

eye	- form	- eye-consciousness
ear	- sound	- ear-consciousness
nose	- smell	- nose-consciousness
tongue	- taste	- tongue-consciousness
body	- tangible	- body-consciousness
mind	- idea	- mind-consciousness

The Buddha puts across to us this deep truth in just four simple lines.

The world has arisen in the six.

The world has commune in the six.

Holding on to these very six.

The world finds itself in a fix.

"The World" - S.N.I. 41 (P.T.S.)

## From Topsy - turvydom to Wisdom

The Buddha pointed out that there are four pervert notions deeply ingrained in all beings. They are:-

1. Seeing permanence in the impermanent
2. Seeing pleasure in what is unpleasurable
3. Seeing beauty in what is repulsive
4. Seeing self in what is not - self

These perversions prevail at three levels: in one's perceptions, in one's thoughts, and in one's views. The mirage-like perception implants the seed of these illusions and delusions. Thoughts nurture them and views strengthen them. The final outcome is a wrong perspective on life which keeps one in bondage to samsaric suffering.

This is the topsy-turvydom that the world finds itself in. In order to correct this lop-sided view of the world, the Buddha had to recommend four trained perceptions as contemplations.

1. The perception of Impermanence
2. The perception of the Unpleasurable
3. The perception of the Repulsive
4. The perception of Not-self.

These trained perceptions require a high degree of clarity and a depth of vision for their development. When systematically developed they lead one from this topsy-turvydom to wisdom which assures the freedom from bondage to samsaric suffering.

## Let - goism

All what is transient and impermanent arise only to pass away. They come only to go away. But we invite them, entertain them, and insist on them to stay with us. When our hopes are shattered, we grieve and lament.

To be able to accept the reality of the situation, we have to attune ourselves to the rhythm of nature. "Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease". Things come our way only in transit; and so we have to let them go. It is our hold on them that brings stress and distress.

One has to practise 'let-goism', as a detached observer of an inevitable law of nature. Then 'things' fade away into the nature of things. The realization will finally dawn that these "things" are of our own creation - or rather the creation of our ignorance and craving. This insight into the interplay of mental phenomena brings home the truth that 'I' is only a view and 'am' is only a conceit, which bolster up an imagined Self as 'I-am'.

## Mechanics of Mind Control

**T**o dam a swiftly flowing stream, a fourfold effort is required. It has to be a dynamic effort to:-

Retard and block the on-rush of water.

Remove the in-flowing water getting collected at the site

Lay the foundation for the dam.

Reinforce and stabilize it by steadily building up the dam.

The swiftly flowing thought stream also calls for a fourfold effort if it is to be dammed. We have to:-

Restrain and check the influx of unwholesome thoughts.

Abandon unwholesome thoughts already arisen.

Arouse wholesome thoughts not yet arisen.

Stabilize and develop wholesome thoughts already arisen.

The effort, in each case, has to be an all-out one. It has to pick up intensity in keeping with the seriousness of the task. For the fourfold effort of restraint, abandonment, development and stabilizing, one has to arouse an interest, make an exertion, put forth energy, make up one's mind and give of one's best in endeavour.

This is the Right Effort that matures into Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration to complete the Noble Eightfold Path leading to Wisdom and Deliverance.

'Whatever streams are there in the world Ajita,so said the Lord. Mindfulness keeps them in check.

This, I say, is restraint of streams

By wisdom 'tis that they are dammed'. - Sn.v.1035

## The Mirror

The mirror is something that reflects. Now this is a matter for some reflection. When the mirror reflects, one has to reflect on the mirror. One can reflect wisely or unwisely on the mirror. When one looks into the mirror and it reflects, one has to be fully aware that it is merely a reflection. Otherwise there will be delusion and unwise reflection.

The Greek youth Narcissus had never looked into a mirror. He never knew how handsome he was. One day he saw the reflection of his own face in a shady pond as he bent down to wash his face. He fell in love with the image, imagining it to be a nymph. He stretched his arms to embrace but the image disappeared through the ripples. He tried again and again but it was all in vain. Day after day he came to the pond and tried and tried and tried until he pined away and embraced Death.

Now this is the proverbial tragedy of self-love, born of unwise reflection. Sometimes we see a little bird pecking again and again at our dusty window panes. It is imagining a mate there, but all its attempts to get at the mate, end up in a stalemate.

What that little bird does from outside, we have been doing throughout our samsaric existence, from inside our little house with its six dusty windows - the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. We look out on the world from our little house through these six windows. Everytime we look, we seem to see a self. "Lust is the real dust, not the common dust" - says the Buddha, and this is the dust on our window-panes. This dust

together with the murk of ignorance around, acts like mercury on the reverse of a mirror so we can't see through. Like the shady pond of Narcissus our window-panes reflect our own prejudices - 'I', 'ME' and 'MINE'.

The cumulative effect of all our efforts in samsara to look out on the world through our dusty windows, is the five grasping groups-form, feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness.

Grasping or holding on to these five groups, one unwisely reflects, hoping to sort out the identity of the self, with the question 'Who am I?' One does not realize that one is simply begging the question. So one comes back again and again to the same question in the form of repeated birth in its three dimensions of decay, disease and death.

The Arahant, the Venerable Punṇa Mantāniputta takes up the simile of the mirror to expose the fallacy of such questions as 'WHO AM I?' He explains to Venerable Ānanda that 'AM' is a conceit born of the very dependence in holding on to the five groups.

'Owing to dependence, friend Ānanda, comes the conceit 'AM' - not without dependence. Depending on what, comes the conceit 'AM'? Depending on form, on feeling, on perception, on preparations, on consciousness. Just as, friend, Ānanda, a young woman or young man fond of self adornment, in gazing at the image of her or his face in a clean spotless mirror or in a bowl of clear water, does so, depending on something, and not without depending, even so, friend, Ānanda, depending on form comes the conceit AM, not otherwise. Depending on feeling, on perception, on preparations, on consciousness, comes the conceit AM, not otherwise"

The emphatic assertion, 'not without dependence,' is a pointer to those who raise such fallacious questions as "Who Am I?" . They are not aware of the mirror they are looking into.

This obsession with self is so powerful, that it easily impels one to transgress the moral laws prevailing in the universe. Un-wise reflection prompts one to seek one's own selfish ends by hook or by crook. The inevitable result is suffering brought about as moral retribution by the law of kamma or karma. Wise reflection is therefore essential for ethical perfection. The Buddha once instructed the little novice Rāhula on the simple criterion of wise reflection in one's bodily verbal and mental action, making use of the mirror-simile.

"What do you think Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?"

"For the purpose of reflection, Venerable Sir"

"Even so, Rāhula, after repeated reflection you should do an action with the body; after repeated reflection you should do an action by speech after repeated reflection, you should do an action by mind."

"Rahula whenever you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that same bodily action - 'Would this action that I wish to do with the body, lead to my own affliction or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Is it an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results?' Upon reflection if you know that it is such an action then you should definitely not do such an action with the body. But if you know upon reflection that it would not lead to your

own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both, that it is a skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results, then you may do such an action with the body".

The Buddha advises that this form of reflection should also be done while doing an action and even after the action is done. While doing an action if the reflection reveals those negative aspects, the action should be suspended then and there. After the action is done, if the reflection reveals the negative aspects, confession and restraint for the future must be undertaken.

The same procedure is to be followed in the case of verbal and mental action. This detailed programme of repeated reflection is obviously meant for narrowing down the margin of error and for checking self-deception. With small beginnings as from the little novice Rāhula it can go a long way and this is precisely the final assurance of the Buddha.

"Rāhula, whatever recluses and brahmins in the past purified their bodily action, their verbal action and their mental action, all did so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the future will purify their bodily action, their verbal action, their mental action, all will do so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the present are purifying their bodily action, their verbal action and their mental action, all are doing so by repeatedly reflecting thus. Therefore Rāhula, you should train thus: "We will purify our bodily action, our verbal action and our mental action by repeatedly reflecting upon them.

Ambalatthika Rāhulovāda Sutta M.N.I. 415 f (P.T.S.)

## Intention goes a long way

"Oh! I'm sorry. Honestly, I had no intention" - so we apologize when something goes wrong. If the other is convinced that we are not responsible, we stand a good chance of being excused, unless there is a trace of negligence or irresponsibility on our part.

"Intention, monks, I say, is action. Intending, one does action by body, speech and mind" - so says the Buddha. The word "action" here stands for that morally responsible action called 'Karma'. This declaration shows the far - reaching implications of the word "intention" in regard to the question of moral responsibility. Body, speech, and mind are the three doors of action for which we could be held responsible. To be a good door-keeper, one has to know what the door-knob is. Intention is the door-knob.

The Buddha's teachings on 'karma' reveal the immense importance attached to our duties as door-keepers. The dimensions of karma are so deep, and its results so far-reaching, that the Buddha cautions us again and again to guard our three doors of action. Quite a lot of circumspection is required before we turn the door-knob.

As a ready-reckoner for this circumspection, the Buddha draws our attention to the mainsprings of all karma. Greed, hate and delusion are the three mainsprings of all evil or unskillful action.

Non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion are the three mainsprings of all good or skillful action. In broad outline, this shows the gamut of all what is evil and good. So, before one turns the door-knob one has to weigh pros and cons with this ready-reckoner, whether to allow or not, action to issue out of the three doors.

The result of action is called 'vipāka', which is the ripening of karma in time and space. It is an unfailing law of nature. Action born of greed, hate and delusion ripens wherever one is reborn in samsara, into a bitter fruit of suffering. Action, born of non-greed, non hatred and non-delusion leads one towards the very removal of greed, hate and delusion. That way lies freedom from samsara and supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

## The Peerless Healer

**T**True to the art of healing, the Four Noble Truths are presented in a way that inspires the confidence of those who wish to be healthy. The Noble Truths of suffering, its arising, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation, follow the pattern of a doctor's presentation of the nature of a disease, its cause, the cure and the treatment.

The Buddha himself claimed to be the incomparable physician - cum - surgeon (anuttaro bhisakko sallakatto). True to his claims as a physician he recommended a course of medicine that is prophylactic, therapeutic as well as cathartic.

"Sila", or virtue has the prophylactic quality of prevention of disease by its 'keep-fit' program of living up to the precepts. The thought of abstinence from evil, acts as an energizing factor. It creates the necessary antibodies against the mental viruses rampant in the society at large.

"Samādhi" or concentration expels the drainers of mental energy-the five mental hindrances of sensuality, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry and doubting. From 'dis-ease' it leads to 'ease' both of body and mind.

"Paññā", or wisdom has the curative effect of a purgative. It purges the mind of the cankers or influxes of sensuality, becoming and ignorance. Like a herbal decoction of eight ingredients administered in four doses, it brings health to those who aspire

to that supreme health of Nibbana in four stages of saint-hood - the Stream-winner, the Once - Returner, the Non-returner and the Arahant.

As the peerless surgeon, the Buddha wielded his forceps of mindfulness and his scalpel of wisdom to locate and extract the thorn of craving embedded deep in the hearts of beings. In his discourse to Sunakkhatta in the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha even recommends a period of convalescence to the patient to get over the germs of ignorance left by the poisonous thorn of craving - true, again, to the art of healing.

## At your fingertips

Some seers of ancient India held that it is impossible to understand consciousness itself, because it is with consciousness that we get to know everything else. They thought that it is like trying to touch one's finger-tip with the same finger-tip.

The Buddha understood their difficulty when he compared consciousness to a magical illusion or *māyā*. But he pointed out a way out of it. Instead of taking seriously the worldly notions of 'I' and 'mine', he analyzed experience in terms of an interdependence between 'consciousness' on the one hand and 'name and form' on the other.

Now what is this 'Name' and 'Form'. Venerable Sāriputta, the Chief Disciple of the Buddha explains it for us. "Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact, Attention - these O! friends, are called 'Name'. The four great primaries and Form dependent on them, these O! friends are called Form."

Feeling, Perception, Intention, Contact and Attention, are collectively, called 'Name' because they are the primaries of all what is named. The four great elements of solidity, liquidity, heat and motion, represented by earth, water, fire and air are the primaries of all what has to do with 'Form'.

Between Name and Form themselves, there is a reciprocal relationship. It is with Name that one understands Form and it is Form that gives a content to Name. Name is such that it conjures up a Form and Form is such that it calls forth a Name.

But we have to get more acquainted with the five representatives of Name. Let us have them at our fingertips. In fact one can even count them on one's fingers. Feeling is the little finger - small but mischievous. Perception is the ring-finger, both popular and notorious. Intention is the - middle finger, prominent and intrusive. Contact is the fore-finger - fussy and busy all the time - Attention is the thumb - standing apart, but approachable to the rest.

Now out of the whole lot, who is going to be our witness of the back-stage workings of the magic-show of consciousness. Attention, of course. He is the most competent. When there are no witnesses to prove a case of murder or theft, sometimes judges give 'free pardon' to one of the alleged culprits under the oath "You have to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

So it is in this case of the tragic drama of consciousness. Though himself culpable, attention is dependable as a witness, provided he does his duty as Right Attention.

Now attention will gradually disclose what feeling felt, what perception perceived, what intention intended, what contact contacted and last but not least, what attention attended to.

This is why all insight meditators single out attention for preferential treatment when they want to get the full inside story of the tragic drama of consciousness.

## Purity leads to Clarity

**F**or clarity of vision, the mind has to be cleansed of the five mental hindrances.

They are - 1. sensual lust, 2. ill-will, 3. sloth and torpor, 4. restlessness and worry, 5. doubt.

Freedom from these hindrances is basic for all levels of concentration and insight. Therefore one who wishes to attain the calm of concentration and the clarity of insight, has to go on purifying the mind from these hindrances.

In order to illustrate to the Brahmin Sangāra, how these hindrances impair calm and clarity of the mind, the Buddha once used the simile of a bowl of water.

If one wishes to use a bowl of water as a mirror to see one's face in it, the water in the bowl has to be clear enough to reflect it. When some colour like red, yellow, blue or brown has already been mixed into the water, it will lack the clarity to mirror the face. Even so lust is a colouring agent in the case of the mind.

When the water in a bowl is boiling and bubbling, it can hardly reflect one's face in it. The fire of ill-will keeps the mind boiling, hindering its reflective capacity.

A bowl of water covered with moss will never serve as a mirror. A mind inert and drowsy with sloth and torpor cannot reflect properly.

If a bowl of water is shaken by the wind so that the water is rippling, disturbed and unsteady, it will not be possible to see clearly one's face in it. Restlessness and worry affect the mind in a similar way.

A bowl of muddy water placed in a dark corner lacks the property of reflection. A mind in the grip of doubt and wavering is likewise muddled and murky. It lacks the property of proper reflection.

When the mind is free from these five hindrances, memory, mindfulness, concentration, calm and insight come in unhindered. One sees things as they are in the mirror of the mind.

## The Miracle of Instruction

A lay-disciple called Kevaddha, a resident of Nālandā, repeatedly requested the Buddha to assign a monk for the conversion of the people of Nālandā by showing miracles. The Buddha firmly refused the request. He pointed out that there are three kinds of miracles-

1. The miracle of performing psychic feats
2. The miracle of mind-reading
3. The miracle of instruction.

Out of these three, he did not encourage the first two, because they are common even to ordinary magic-workers. It is the miracle of instruction that he sanctioned to his monks because it is peculiar and more convincing. This miracle of instruction he sums up in just three pairs of short injunctions.

1. Think thus - do not think thus
2. Attend thus- do not attend thus
3. Give up this - live up to this.

The Do's and the Don'ts here, cover the entire range of ethical training in Buddhism leading to the perfection of morality, concentration and wisdom.

## Listen to the beat of the Ear-drum

**T**he most fascinating of all musical instruments is the eardrum. But we rarely take time off to listen to the beat of the ear-drum. Next to the eye, the ear is the biggest source of distraction in our lives. Every time we sit down to enjoy a spell of quietude, we are dragged by the ear and forced to listen to many things that distract us.

Instead of searching for an ear-plug in such a situation, we could, for a change, listen to the beat of the ear-drum. But how? The beat of the ear-drum is usually drowned by the chatter of the mind about the sounds. Whether it is euphony or cacophony, mind grabs a talking-point, and there we are - praising and cursing.

If we switch off the mind's commentary, we can listen to the beat of the ear-drum. It strikes only three notes- 'COME' -'STAY' and 'GO' . The more we listen to it the deeper we go into the three notes. The conflict between euphony and cacophony is no longer there to distract us. We are now listening to the rhythm of nature, attuning ourselves to Reality. That way lies Peace Sublime.

## The Three Eyes

**A**ccording to the Buddha, there are three eyes in the world. They are:-

1. The fleshly eye
2. The divine eye
3. The wisdom eye.

The fleshly eye one gets by birth, has a very limited range of vision. It is mostly addicted to surface-seeing and its claims to vision are rather superficial.

The divine eye aroused by developing higher levels of concentration goes beyond those limits. It enables one to see even hells and heavens and events happening outside the normal range of vision. Still, it cannot claim to be the perfect vision.

It is the wisdom-eye developed through insight meditation that is supreme in the world. It gives a perfect vision of the world in its true perspectives of impermanence and conditionality. The hidden law of Dependent Arising is revealed to that penetrative dustless stainless eye of truth with a certitude that prompts the exclamation:-

'Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease'.

## Learning to Un-learn

"Suchness" is a term for the nature of things as-they-are. To see things as-they-are is so very difficult because of the great mass of details that beclouds our vision. The purpose of insight is to penetrate into this suchness with the help of a simple program like:-

'In the seen, there will be to you just the seen: in the heard, just the heard: in the smelt, just the smelt: in the tasted, just the tasted; in the touched, just the touched; in the thought, just the thought.' That way, sense-objects simply become object - lessons for understanding the event called seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking.

When that event is understood, one comes to know that there is nothing substantial, that everything is circumstantial. that every specific event is such and not otherwise.

The Buddha compared perception to a mirage. Throughout Samsara, for countless aeons we have been running after this mirage, in search of something substantial. All what we got was stress and distress. So the Buddha asks us to 'STOP' and cleanse our vision to see the mirage for what it is.

**Breathe as if every breath were your last -  
then you will never be breathless**

**R**eflection on Death is a meditation-subject leading to the bliss of Nibbāna called 'The Deathless.' According to the Buddha the most effective way of developing this meditation, is to bring it in line with the rhythm of our breath. He says that the one who is keenly aware that death can occur between two breaths, is steadily approaching the deathless state. How can that be?

Death is the last thing we wish to think about, and when we think about it at last, we are too late. Very often, when it knocks at our door we are fully unprepared to receive it. The result is utter confusion and terror. We are breathless and we have to depart with a heavy heart.

But if on the other hand we become as familiar with death as with our breath and hear its unavoidable approach as with the tick-tock of our clock, we will be better prepared to receive it. And when the time comes to depart, we leave with a lighter burden and a lighter heart.

## Cow and Post

**A** cow tethered to a post with a rope, is grazing near a field. At first, it is not well aware of its proper range. So from time to time it tries to reach out to the luscious corn in the nearby field. But then the rope at its neck reminds it of its tether, with the warning - 'keep-off.' Pulled back by the rope at every unmindful attempt to out-reach, the cow at last comes to know the ambit of its tether. Then it goes on grazing peacefully in its proper pasture unhampered. Once it has had its fill, it comes to rest near the post and starts chewing its honest cud with closed eyes.

Even like the cow, the meditator is tethered to the post of his meditation-subject with the rope of mindfulness. In the early stages of his practice, he is not fully aware of his proper range. He may sometimes forget all about the fact that he is a meditator. He may do things which defeat his purpose, which are not conducive to his progress, which fall outside the scope of his meditation subject and which lead to a deluded state of mind. Worldly temptations are so alluring that the rope of mindfulness will have a hard time warning, 'keep-off!'

However, by dint of effort, the meditator grows wiser as to his proper range and learns to be fully aware of his 'post' and the 'rope' at all times. Then he is feeding himself in his proper field and having had his fill he comes to sit peacefully with his eyes closed to chew his honest cud.

## The Egg shell

**A** chick is called a 'twice born'. First it is born in to the shell and then it is born into the world - out of the shell. After the period of incubation, a chick breaks through the egg-shell, prodding with its beak or nails.

The Buddha calls himself the first chick in the world to burst through the egg-shell of ignorance. He had a long period of incubation-six years of rigorous asceticism. Matured by that austere heat, he prodded the egg-shell of ignorance that enveloped him, with the 'three signs' - impermanence suffering and not-self. He burst out of it to see the world as-it-is. It was not a sight but an insight.

He had aroused a dustless stainless eye-of-truth- the Dhamma-eye that transcends the world. "The world is blind" - says the Buddha, because the worlding is encompassed by ignorance.

Insight meditation helps one to break through that thick egg-shell of ignorance. Passing through a series of insight knowledges one attains the supra-mundane state of a "Stream-winner" . It is equivalent to a birth into the lineage of the Noble Ones. Already in this first stage of sainthood the prospect of possible births in this endlessly agonizing samsara is reduced to seven. Encouraged by this immense initial relief, the stream-winner courses along the stream of Dhamma, progressively reducing the prospects of possible births to become a 'Once-returner', a 'Non-returner' - and finally - an Arahant who puts an end to all births and deaths. With this attainment of ambrosial Deathlessness, the turmoil of Samsara subsides into the tranquillity of Nibbāna. A whirlpool disappears into the sea.

## The Skinless Cow

'Seeing is believing - but touch is the real thing'

When we can't believe our eyes we ascertain by means of touch. A blind man is forced to depend on touch out of sheer necessity.

Touch is so fascinating that it keeps the world enslaved to it. The Buddha has declared that out of the five senses, the sense of touch is the most infatuating. He says that those beings who are spell-bound by touch, are fully in bondage.

Touch is also regarded as one of the four nutriments which sustain beings, and the other three are: material food, willing of mind and consciousness. The Buddha gives a '*touching*' simile to make us ponder deeply on the nature of touch - the simile of the skinless cow.

If a skinless cow should stand leaning against a wall, the creatures that live on the wall would bite her, If she leans against a tree, the creatures that live on the tree would bite her. Wherever she stands, her skinless body would be the target of pricks and bites.

The skinless cow has to suffer because she has a wound as big as her body. We need not consider ourselves more fortunate than that cow simply because we have a **bandage** on the wound - *the skin!*

## Sharpening the Razor

There is a special technique in sharpening a razor on a whetstone. One must hold the razor in such a way that there is some flexibility at one's wrist. The razor-blade is held between the thumb and the fore-finger as if one is ready to throw it away at any time. If the grip is tight and the wrist is tense, any attempt to sharpen will only make the razor-edge blunt.

So, holding the razor in that 'let-go' fashion, one sharpens it on the oiled surface of the whetstone to the rhythm:

up - up - up  
 down - down - down  
 up - down  
 up - down

This dynamic up and down process is the most decisive. phase of the sharpening. At this stage, a wrong grasp of the blade would have made it blunt.

Now the same technique has to be followed in sharpening the razor of one's insight on the whetstones of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness-the contemplations of body, feeling mind and mind-objects. One must not grasp or cling to any of these foundations but develop a 'let-go' attitude towards them. Setting up mindfulness on some aspect or other of one's body, for instance, (say, breathing), one sweeps one's full awareness over it, to sharpen the razor edge of insight into impermanence. The rhythm is the same.

rising	-	rising	-	rising
falling	-	falling	-	falling
rising	-	falling		
rising	-	falling		

Here too, the last dynamic phase of contemplating both rise and fall, is decisive. It sharpens one's penetrative insight into impermanence, leading to disenchantment, dispassion, detachment and deliverance.

## The Lotus

The lotus symbolizes the Buddhist ideal of transcendence of the world. The lotus petal and the lotus leaf both have a striking quality of aloofness. They do not get smeared or stained by the water and mud around them. When, for instance, a drop of water falls on a lotus leaf, it receives it as a '*drop*' until it rolls away and drops with a pearly grace.

The released mind has a similar quality of aloofness towards the sensory data that normally tend to smear and stain it. It receives the data '*as-they-are*' with a full awareness that insulates against shocks. It follows the dictum:

'In the seen, just the seen  
 In the heard, just the heard  
 In the smelt, just the smelt  
 In the tasted, just the tasted  
 In the touched, just the touched  
 In the thought, just the thought.

The mind is not swept away by them. It remains uninfluenced by the signs and significances of the sensory data which infiltrate and condition the undeveloped worldly mind. With an equanimity born of a penetrative insight into the law of impermanence, it sees the sense data as *such* and '*not-otherwise*'.

The distance, then, between the worldly and the transcendental, is the same distance between the lotus leaf and the drop of water on it. *So near-and yet-so far!*

## The Elephant-look

Once a hunter had the rare opportunity of seeing a fight between a lion and an elephant. The lion, the acclaimed King of Beasts, was trying hard to get at the elephant's head. But the elephant kept on leaping around at a terrific speed always facing the lion fairly and squarely. The lion could not catch the elephant unawares because it never turned its neck. At last the elephant gored the lion with its tusks and trampled it to death.

What decided victory in this battle was the peculiarity in the elephant's neck. Every time the lion tried to approach it from a side, the elephant answered with a full-bodied response. The steadiness of its neck stood it in good stead.

As an interesting side-light, it may be mentioned that in a certain Canonical figure of the Buddha as an elephant, his neck is compared to the quality of MINDFULNESS. (A.N.IV 107). Turning the whole body when looking back, is said to be a mark of the Buddhas. It is called 'The Elephant-look'.

## What you grasp-that you are

The Buddha tells us that existence is dependent on grasping. The so-called 'being' asserts his existence on the basis of his five groups of Grasping - form, feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness. The very tenacity of his grasping on each of these five groups gives him a notion of something compact, which he thinks justifies his assertion. So he identifies himself with one or the other of these five groups in four ways, whenever the question of his self identity arises. He might say for instance, "form is my self or my self has form, or form is in my self, or my self is in form". Altogether there are twenty such possible assertions. The Buddha declares that all possible theories of self in the world are traceable to one or the other of these 20 modes of assertion.

The tragedy however, is that everyone of these 5 groups is disintegrating. There is nothing permanent or substantial in them, to be prided on as self. They betray the trust one puts on them as 'I and Mine'. In the face of change and disintegration the very existence of the self is threatened. This is the dreadful predicament of the self-oriented being.

The Buddha's solution to this chronic feeling of insecurity, is the development of the perception of impermanence. Taking a more realistic view of the five groups as impermanent, made-up, dependently arisen, and of a nature to waste away, pass away, fade away, and cease, one has to go on attending to their rise-and-fall with mindfulness and full-awareness. The perception of the compact will gradually give way to the perception of the heap. In one's contemplation of the rise and fall, one will discern not only the breakers of the ocean of impermanence but also the waves, the ripples and the vibrations. This leads to disenchantment. One turns away from one's deeply ingrained samsaric habit of grasping, holding and clinging on to the five fleeting groups which promise no security. Giving up the attachment to the five groups, one sees as the only security, the clinging free deliverance of the mind - the sublime peace of Nibbāna.

## The Conquest of Self

The ideal of conquest has always kindled man's imagination. There is a warrior in every one of us. All too often we take up the challenge that comes from outside - to conquer our fellowmen, wealth, earth and even space. We think we can be victorious that way. But the Buddha on the other hand, reminds us of a challenge that comes from within - a challenge we have been too timid to take up. According to him, **"Though one conquers thousands and thousands of men in the battle-field, yet he is the noblest victor who conquers himself"**.

For this conquest of self, one has to battle with the forces of evil within - the hordes of Māra - the Evil - One - as they are called. To awaken the warrior in man and to turn him towards this conquest, the Buddha uttered a stirring battle-cry, "Get set, go forth, and fight the inward battle in the Buddha's dispensation. Crush the forces of Māra even like an elephant a house of reeds."

Inspired by this battle cry, even robbers, murderers and prostitutes gave up their bloody and shady avocations to put on the saffron armour with a shaven head and go forth for the conquest of self. **Many a battle has been fought and won at the weakest point in one's fortress.** So they left behind their degradations to march out for inward conquest on the Noble Eight-fold Path with its correct stress on the **'Right': Right** View, **Right** Thought, **Right** Speech, **Right** Action, **Right** Living, **Right** Effort, **Right** Mindfulness and **Right** Concentration. They emerged victorious, winning the ambrosial bliss of Nibbāna.

## Watch the scenes on the eye - screen

Walking through an art gallery, we sometimes get lost in the appreciation of a painting done on a huge canvas. The setting is so natural and the figures so realistic that for a while we project ourselves into the picture. But as soon as we become aware of its framework, we realize that after all it is something unreal.

Throughout our lives, we are walking through an art gallery. On the vast canvas of the world around us, there are the objects and beings so realistic and life-like that we live fully immersed and involved in them. The mysterious four elements - earth, water, fire, air - with colour and form to deceive us, keep the panorama on the move, so we are spellbound.

Insight into Name and Form helps us to throw off the spell produced by sight. Contemplation of the four elements within and without us forming the warp and woof of the world-canvas, gives flashes of insight into the unreality of the 3-dimensional world we live in. This is the 'form' aspect of the picture. Feeling, perception, intention, contact and attention with which we are enthralled by the panorama, constitute the "name" aspect of the picture. Practising full awareness with regard to them we become detached observers of our framed-up world.

Being aware of this framework of name-and-form, we can watch the scenes on the eye-screen as they come, stay, and go away as if we are **watching a movie - unmoved**.

Just see a world with all its gods  
 Fancying a self where there is none  
 Enmeshed in name and form it holds-  
 The conceit - Ah! 'tis a real one.'

- Dvayatānupassanā Sutta, Sn

## Put the world within inverted commas

The purpose of insight meditation is to arouse that clarity of vision which enables one to see things as they are. It requires uninvolved detached observation free from biases and prejudices. One's involvement with the world is so subtle that it cannot be seen and eliminated by means of any demonstrative apparatus. It can only be done through insight and wisdom.

The way to insight lies through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness outlined in the Satipatthāna Sutta. The setting up of mindfulness implied by the term 'satipatthāna', is an objective approach to understand the subjective in one's experience. The 'search needle' of mindfulness has to come down right on the present moment so that one can be fully aware of it. Full awareness that goes hand in hand with mindfulness acts as a searchlight revealing the subjective in one's experience. Attachments, aversions and delusions could then be seen for what they are.

While mindfulness stands guard at the six sense-doors, full-awareness attends to the impinging sense-objects, noting them mentally. This method of mental noting opens an avenue of detached observation leading to deeper levels of insight. The world arising at the six sense-bases is put within inverted commas. With serene equanimity one stands apart and sees its rise and fall.

"Transient indeed are preparations  
 Their nature it is, to rise and fall  
 They arise only to pass away  
 Their calming down is Bliss Supreme'.

-Mahā Parinibbāna S.D.N.

## Be a Well - wisher to the World

We are surrounded by three fences. There is one fence between us and those dear to us, another between them and those neutral to us and a third separating those neutral from our enemies.

A fence is generally regarded as a source of protection. But it can be a source of fear as well, because **where there is a 'fence' there is both 'defence' and offence'**. To be surrounded by three fences can even be taken as an imprisonment.

..

As a matter of fact, it is an imprisonment of the heart. That magnanimous capacity of our hearts to feel for others, to wish for others, remains imprisoned. We remain selfish, stingy, mean and resentful. What if we let go of the fences one by one, with the help of mettā or loving-kindness? It will be a blissful experience of the deliverance of the heart. There will then be neither defence nor offence. In that large - heartedness, there will be a recognition of the truth that all beings wish for happiness. Then one's heart can throb for others and feel for others in sympathy with their wish for happiness. Like a beacon it will beam the radiant message of 'mettā' in all directions: **'May all beings be well and happy - be well and happy - be happy, happy, happy!'**



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\* *Buddhist Publication Society, P.O.Box 61, Kandy*

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