

the WINGS to  
AWAKENING

*An Anthology from the Pali Canon*

*Translated and Explained by*

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(Geoffrey DeGraff)

*for free distribution*

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*So this is what you think of me: “The Blessed One, sympathetic, seeking our well-being, teaches the Dhamma out of sympathy.” Then you should train yourselves—harmoniously, cordially, and without dispute—in the qualities I have pointed out, having known them directly: the four frames of reference, the four right exertions, the four bases of power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors for Awakening, the noble eightfold path.*

—MN 103

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I dedicate this book to all of my teachers, and in particular to Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, the teacher of my primary teacher, Phra Ajaan Fuang Jotiko. The example of Ajaan Lee's life has had a large influence on my own, in more ways than I can ever really repay. His teaching of the Buddhist path as a skill—as expressed in the *Wings to Awakening* and embodied in the practice of breath meditation—provided the original and on-going inspiration for writing this book. I offer it to his memory with the highest respect.

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# Abbreviations

## *Pali Buddhist Texts*

AN	Āṅuttara Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Iti	Itivuttaka
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Mv	Mahāvagga
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Sutta Nipāta
Thag	Theragāthā
Thig	Therīgāthā
Ud	Udāna

References to DN, Iti, and MN are to discourse (*sutta*). References to Dhp are to verse. The reference to Mv is to chapter, section, and sub-section. References to other texts are to section (*saṃyutta*, *nipāta*, or *vagga*) and discourse.

All translations are the author's own, and are based on the Royal Thai Edition of the Pali Canon (Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, 1982).

## *Other Abbreviations*

Comm	Commentary
lit	literal meaning
PTS	Pali Text Society
vl	variant reading

In the translated passages, parentheses ( ) enclose alternative renderings and words needed to make sense of the passage. Square brackets [ ] enclose explanatory information, cross-references, material summarized from longer passages in the text, and other material not found in the original text. Braces { } enclose material interpolated from other passages in the Canon; the source of this material is indicated in braces as part of the citation at the end of the passage.

Because Pali has many ways of expressing the word “and,” I have—to avoid monotony—used the ampersand (&) to join lists of words and short phrases, and the word “and” to join long phrases and clauses.

In passages where no speaker is identified, the words are the Buddha's.

# Preface

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Many anthologies of the Buddha's teachings have appeared in English, but this is the first to be organized around the set of teachings that the Buddha himself said formed the heart of his message: the Wings to Awakening (*bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma*). The material is arranged in three parts, preceded by a long Introduction. The Introduction tries to define the concept of Awakening so as to give a clear sense of where the Wings to Awakening are headed. It does this by discussing the Buddha's accounts of his own Awakening, with special focus on the way in which the principle of skillful kamma (in Sanskrit, karma) formed both the "how" and the "what" of that Awakening: the Buddha was able to reach Awakening only by developing skillful kamma—this is the "how"; his understanding of the process of developing skillful kamma is what sparked the insights that constituted Awakening—this is the "what."

With this background established, the remainder of the book focuses in detail on the Wings to Awakening as an expanded analysis of the "how." Part One focuses on aspects of the principle of skillful kamma that shaped the way the Wings to Awakening are formulated. Part Two goes through the seven sets that make up the Wings to Awakening themselves: the four foundations of mindfulness (here called the four frames of reference), the four right exertions, the four bases for power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors for Awakening, and the noble eightfold path. Part Three reduces all the terms in the seven sets to the five faculties and then deals with those faculties in detail. With the fifth and final faculty, discernment, the book concludes by returning to the "what" of Awakening, showing how discernment focuses on the Wings themselves as topics to be observed in such a way that they will spark the insights leading to total release.

Thus the organization of the book is somewhat circular. As with any circle, there are several points where the book can be entered. I would recommend two to begin with. The first is to read straight through the book from beginning to end, gaining a systematic framework for the material from Parts One and Two, which explain why the seven sets are organized as they are, and then focusing more on individual elements in the sets in Part Three. This way of approaching the material has the advantage of giving an overall perspective on the topic before going into the details, making the role and meaning of the details clear from the start. However, this approach is the reverse of what actually happens in the practice. A practicing meditator must learn first to focus on individual phenomena in and of themselves, and then, through observation and experimentation, to discover their inter-relationships. For this reason, some readers—especially those who find the discussion of causal relationships in Parts One and Two too abstract to be helpful—may prefer to skip from the Introduction straight to sections A through E of Part Three, to familiarize



themselves with teachings that may connect more directly with their own experience. They may then return later to Parts One and Two to gain a more overall perspective on how the practice is meant to deal with those experiences.

Regardless of which approach you take to the material, you should discover fairly quickly that the relationships among the overall patterns and individual elements in the Wings are very complex. This complexity reflects the non-linear nature of the Buddha's teachings on causal relationships, and is reflected in the many cross-references among the various parts of the book. In this way, the structure of this book, instead of being a simple circle, is actually a pattern of many loops within loops. Thus a third way to read it—for those familiar enough with the material to want to explore unexpected connections—would be to follow the cross-references to see where they lead.

Parts One through Three of the book are each divided into sections consisting of passages translated from discourses in the Pali Canon, which is apparently the earliest extant record of the Buddha's teachings. Each section is introduced, where necessary, with an essay. These essays are printed in sans serif type to distinguish them clearly from the translated passages. They are attempts to provide context—and thus meaning—for the passages, to show how they relate to one another, to specific issues in the practice, and to the path of practice as a whole. They are not meant to anticipate or answer every possible question raised by the passages. Instead, they are aimed at giving an idea of the kinds of questions that can be most fruitfully brought to the passages, so that the lessons contained in the passages can properly be applied to the practice. As the Buddha has pointed out, the attitude of “appropriate attention” (*yoniso manasikāra*), the ability to focus on the right questions, is one of the most important skills to develop in the course of the practice. This skill is much more fruitful than an attitude that tries to come to the practice armed with all the right answers in advance.

The context provided by the essays is threefold: doctrinal, placing the passages within the structure of the Buddha's teachings taken as a whole; historical, relating them to what is known of the intellectual and social history of the Buddha's time; and practical, applying them to the actual practice of the Buddhist path in the present.

The first and foremost sources for the doctrinal context are the discourses in the Canon itself. The Buddha and his noble disciples are by far the most reliable guides to the meaning of their own words. Often a teaching that seems vague or confusing when encountered on its own in a single discourse becomes clearer when viewed in the context of several discourses that treat it from a variety of angles, just as it is easier to get a sense of a building from a series of pictures taken from different perspectives than from a single snapshot.

This approach to understanding the discourses is instructive not only when discourse x explicitly defines a term mentioned in discourse y, but also when patterns of imagery and terminology permeate many passages. Two cases in point: in separate contexts, the discourses compare suffering to fire, and the practice of training the mind in meditation to the art of tuning and playing a musical instrument. In each case, technical terms—from physics in the first instance, from music theory in the second—are applied to the mind in a large

number of contexts. Thus it is helpful to understand where the terms are coming from in order to grasp their connotations and to gain an intuitive sense—based on our own familiarity with fire and music—of what they mean.

In a few instances, I have cited alternative versions of the discourses—such as those contained in the Sarvāstivādin Canon preserved in Chinese translation—to throw light on passages in the Pali. Although the Sarvāstivādin Canon as a whole seems to be later than the Pali, there is no way of knowing whether particular Sarvāstivādin discourses are earlier or later than their Pali counterparts, so the comparisons drawn between the two are intended simply as food for thought.

I have also drawn occasionally on the Pali Abhidhamma and commentaries, which postdate the discourses by several centuries. Here, however, I have had to be selective. These texts employ a systematic approach to interpreting the discourses that fits some teachings better than others. There are instances where a particular teaching has one meaning in terms of this system, and another when viewed in the context of the discourses themselves. Thus I have taken specific insights from these texts where they seem genuinely to illuminate the meaning of the discourses, but without adopting the overall structure they impose on the teachings.

To provide historical context, I have drawn on a variety of sources. Again, the foremost source here is the Pali Canon itself, both in what it has to say explicitly about the social and intellectual milieu of the Buddha's time, and in what it says implicitly about the way the intellectual disciplines of the Buddha's time—such as science, mathematics, and music theory—helped to shape the way the Buddha expressed his thought. I have also drawn on secondary sources where these do a useful job of fleshing out themes present in the Pali Canon. These secondary sources are cited in the Bibliography.

Because the Pali tradition is still a living one, the doctrinal and historical contexts do not account for the full range of meanings that practicing Buddhists continue to find in the texts. To provide this living dimension, I have drawn on the teachings of modern practice traditions where these seem to harmonize with the message of the Canon and add an illuminating perspective. Most of these teachings are drawn from the Thai Forest Tradition, but I have also drawn on other traditions as well. I have followed a traditional Buddhist practice in not identifying the sources for these teachings, and for two reasons: first, in many ways I owe every insight offered in this book to the training I have received from my teachers in the Forest Tradition, and it seems artificial to credit them for some points and not for others; second, there is the possibility that I have misunderstood some of their teachings or taken them out of context, so I don't want to risk crediting my misunderstandings to them.

In providing a more modern context for the passages presented in this book, however, I have not tried to interpret the teachings in terms of modern psychology or sociology. The Buddha's message is timeless and direct. It does not need to be translated into the passing fashions of disciplines that are in many ways more removed than it is from the realities of direct experience, and more likely to grow out of date. However, there are two modern disciplines that I have drawn on to help explain some of the more formal aspects of the Buddha's mode of speech and his analysis of causal principles.

The first discipline is phenomenology, the branch of philosophy that deals with phenomena as they are directly experienced, in and of themselves. There are many schools of modern phenomenology, and it is not my purpose to try to equate the Buddha's teachings with any one of them. However, the Buddha does recommend a mode of perception that he calls "entry into emptiness (*suññatā*)" [see MN 121], in which one simply notes the presence or absence of phenomena, without making further assumptions about them. This approach resembles what in modern philosophy could be called "radical phenomenology," a mode of perception that looks at experiences and processes simply as events, with no reference to the question of whether there are any "things" lying behind those events, or of whether the events can be said really to exist [see passages §230 and §186]. Because of this resemblance, the word "phenomenology" is useful in helping to explain the source of the Buddha's descriptions of the workings of kamma and the process of dependent co-arising in particular. Once we know where he is coming from, it is easier to make sense of his statements and to use them in their proper context.

I have made similar use of modern science—chaos theory in particular. There are many parallels between Buddhist theories of causation and modern deterministic chaos theory. Examples and terminology drawn from the latter—such as feedback, scale invariance, resonance, and fluid turbulence—are very useful in explaining the former. Again, in using these parallels I am not trying to equate Buddhist teachings with chaos theory or to engage in pseudo-science. Fashions in science change so rapidly that we do the Buddha's teachings no favor in trying to "prove" them in light of current scientific paradigms. Here I am simply pointing out similarities as a way of helping to make those teachings intelligible in modern terms. Deterministic chaos theory is the only modern body of knowledge that has worked out a vocabulary for the patterns of behavior described in Buddhist explanations of causality, and so it seems a natural source to draw on, both to describe those patterns and to point out some of their less obvious implications.

In doing so, I realize that I run the risk of alienating non-scientists who feel intimidated by scientific terminology, as well as scientists who resent the application of terminology from their disciplines to "non-scientific" fields. To both groups I can say only that the terms in and of themselves are not "scientific." Much of our current everyday terminology for explaining causal relations is derived from the science of the eighteenth century; I expect that it will only be a matter of time before the terminology of more recent science will percolate into everyday usage. For the purpose of this book, it is important to point out that when the Buddha talked about causality, his notion of causal relations did not correspond to our ordinary, linear, picture of causal chains. If this point is not grasped, the common tendency is to judge the Buddha's descriptions of causality against our own and to find them either confusing or confused. Viewing them in the light of deterministic chaos theory, however, helps us to see that they are both coherent and of practical use.

Another example of an analogy drawn from modern science is the term "holographic," which I have used to describe some formulations of the Buddhist path. When a hologram is made of an object, an image of the entire object—albeit fairly fuzzy—can be made from even small fragments of the hologram. In

the same way, some formulations of the path contain a rough version of the entire path complete in each individual step. In my search for an adjective to describe such formulations, “holographic” seemed the best choice.

If you are unfamiliar with the terminology of phenomenology, chaos theory, and holograms, read section I/A, on skillfulness, to find the doctrinal context in which these terms can be related to an immediate experience: the process of developing a skill. The approach of phenomenology relates to the fact that, on the night of his Awakening, the Buddha focused his attention directly on the mental process of developing skillful states in the mind, without referring to who or what was developing the skill, or to whether there was any sort of substratum underlying the process. Chaos theory relates to the patterns of causality that the Buddha discerned while observing this process, whereby the effects of action can in turn become causal factors influencing new action. Holography relates to his discovery that skillfulness is developed by taking clusters of good qualities already present in the mind and using them to strengthen one another each step along the way. Once these familiar reference points are understood, the abstract terms describing them should become less foreign and more helpful.

In providing doctrinal, historical, and practical context based on all the above-mentioned sources, the essays are meant to give an entry into the mental horizons and landscape of the texts they introduce. They are also meant to suggest how the texts may be used for their intended purpose: to help eliminate obstacles to the release of the mind. Although some of the essays address controversial questions, the textual passages are not meant to prove the points made in the essays. In assembling this anthology, I first gathered and translated the passages from the Canon. Only then, after contemplating what I had gathered, did I add the essays. For this reason, any reader who disagrees with the positions presented in the essays should still find the translations useful for his/her own purposes. I am painfully aware that some of the essays, especially those in Part I, tend to overpower the material they are designed to introduce, but this is because the themes in Part I play a pervasive role in the Buddha’s teachings as a whole. Thus I had to deal with them in considerable detail to point out how they relate not only to the passages in Part I but also to themes raised in the rest of the book.

Although the essays should go far toward familiarizing the reader with the conceptual world and relevance of the textual passages, there are other aspects of the passages that might prove daunting to the uninitiated, and so I would like to deal with them here.

To begin with, the teachings on the Wings to Awakening are interrelated in very complex ways. Because books must be arranged in linear sequence, taking one thing at a time in a row, this means that no book can do justice to all the side avenues and underground passageways that connect elements in one set of teachings to those in another. For this reason, I have organized the material in line with the order of the sets as given in the Canon, but—as mentioned above—have extensively cross-referenced it for the sake of readers who want to explore connections that fall outside the linear pattern. Cross-references are given in brackets [ ], and take three forms. An example that looks like this—[§123]—is a reference to a passage from the Pali Canon translated in this book. One that

looks like this—[III/E]—is a reference to an essay introducing a section, in this case Section E in Part III. One that looks like this—[MN 107]—is a reference to a passage from the Pali Canon not translated here. The abbreviations used in these last references are explained on the Abbreviations page. Many passages falling in this last category are translated in my book, *The Mind Like Fire Unbound*, in which case the reference will include the abbreviation MFU followed by the number of the page on which the passage is located in that book. My hope is that these cross-references will open up useful lines of thought to whoever takes the time to explore them.

Another potential difficulty for the uninitiated reader lies in the style of the passages. The Pali Canon was, for 500 years, an entirely oral tradition. As a result, it tends to be terse in some areas and repetitive in others. I've made an effort to cut out as many of the repetitions as possible, but I'll have to ask your patience for those that remain. Think of them as the refrains in a piece of music. Also, when the Buddha is referring to monks doing this and that, keep in mind that his audience was frequently composed entirely of monks. The commentaries state that the word "monk" includes anyone—male or female, lay or ordained—who is serious about the practice, and this meaning should always be kept in mind. I apologize for the gender bias in the translations. Although I have tried to figure out ways to minimize it, I find myself stymied because it is so thoroughly embedded in a literature originally addressed to monks.

I trust, however, that none of these difficulties will prove insurmountable, and that you will find, as I have, that the teachings of the Pali Canon more than reward the effort put into exploring them. The reality of the *Wings to Awakening* lies in the qualities of the mind. The words with which they are expressed in the Pali Canon are simply pointers. These pointers have to be tested in the light of serious practice, but my conviction is that, of all the meditation teachers the human race has ever seen, the Buddha is still the best. His words should be read repeatedly, reflectively, and put to test in the practice. My hope in gathering his teachings in this way is that they will give you useful insights for training the mind so that someday you won't have to read about *Awakening*, but will be able to know it for yourself.

# A Table of the Wings to Awakening

## I. The Seven Sets

### The Four Frames of Reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*)

1. Remaining focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.
2. Remaining focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.
3. Remaining focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.
4. Remaining focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

### The Four Right Exertions (*sammappadhāna*)

1. Generating desire, endeavoring, arousing persistence, upholding & exerting one's intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen.
2. Generating desire, endeavoring, arousing persistence, upholding & exerting one's intent for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen.
3. Generating desire, endeavoring, arousing persistence, upholding & exerting one's intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen.
4. Generating desire, endeavoring, arousing persistence, upholding & exerting one's intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen.

### The Four Bases of Power (*iddhipāda*)

1. Developing the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion.
2. Developing the base of power endowed with concentration founded on persistence & the fabrications of exertion.
3. Developing the base of power endowed with concentration founded on intent & the fabrications of exertion.
4. Developing the base of power endowed with concentration founded on discrimination & the fabrications of exertion.

### The Five Faculties (*indriya*)

1. The faculty of conviction (*saddhindriya*).
2. The faculty of persistence (*viriyindriya*).
3. The faculty of mindfulness (*satindriya*).
4. The faculty of concentration (*samādhindriya*).
5. The faculty of discernment (*paññindriya*).

#### The Five Strengths (*bala*)

1. The strength of conviction (*saddhā-bala*).
2. The strength of persistence (*viriya-bala*).
3. The strength of mindfulness (*sati-bala*).
4. The strength of concentration (*samādhi-bala*).
5. The strength of discernment (*paññā-bala*).

#### The Seven Factors for Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*)

1. Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening (*sati-sambojjhaṅga*).
2. Analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening (*dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga*).
3. Persistence as a factor for Awakening (*viriya-sambojjhaṅga*).
4. Rapture as a factor for Awakening (*piti-sambojjhaṅga*).
5. Serenity as a factor for Awakening (*passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga*).
6. Concentration as a factor for Awakening (*samādhi-sambojjhaṅga*).
7. Equanimity as a factor for Awakening (*upekkhā-sambojjhaṅga*).

#### The Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-magga*)

1. Right view (*sammā-ditṭhi*).
2. Right resolve (*sammā-saṅkappa*).
3. Right speech (*sammā-vācā*).
4. Right action (*sammā-kammanta*).
5. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*).
6. Right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*).
7. Right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*).
8. Right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).

## II. The Factors of the Seven Sets classed under the Five Faculties

Conviction

Right Speech (Eightfold Path)

- Right Action (Eightfold Path)
- Right Livelihood (Eightfold Path)
- Desire (Bases of Power)

Persistence

Right Effort (Eightfold Path)

- Four Right Exertions
- Persistence (Bases of Power)
- Persistence (Factors for Awakening)

Mindfulness

Four Frames of Reference

- Right Mindfulness (Eightfold Path)
- Intent (Bases of Power)
- Mindfulness (Factors for Awakening)

Concentration

Four Bases of Power

- Right Concentration (Eightfold Path)
- Rapture (Factors for Awakening)
- Serenity (Factors for Awakening)
- Concentration (Factors for Awakening)
- Equanimity (Factors for Awakening)

Discernment

Right View (Eightfold Path)

- Right Resolve (Eightfold Path)
- Analysis of Qualities (Factors for Awakening)
- Discrimination (Bases of Power)
- Equanimity (Factors for Awakening)



## Introduction

The Wings to Awakening constitute the Buddha's own list of his most important teachings. Toward the end of his life he stated several times that as long as the teachings in this list were remembered and put into practice, his message would endure. Thus the Wings cover, in the Buddha's eyes, the words and skills most worth mastering and passing along to others.

### THE BUDDHA'S AWAKENING

When discussing the Buddha's teachings, the best place to start is with his Awakening. That way, one will know where the teachings are coming from and where they are aimed. To appreciate the Awakening, though, we have to know what led Prince Siddhattha Gotama—the Buddha before his Awakening—to seek it in the first place. According to his own account, the search began many lifetimes ago, but in this lifetime it was sparked by the realization of the inevitability of aging, illness, and death. In his words:

I lived in refinement, utmost refinement, total refinement. My father even had lotus ponds made in our palace: one where red lotuses bloomed, one where white lotuses bloomed, one where blue lotuses bloomed, all for my sake. I used no sandalwood that was not from Vārāṇasī. My turban was from Vārāṇasī, as were my tunic, my lower garments, & my outer cloak. A white sunshade was held over me day & night to protect me from cold, heat, dust, dirt, & dew.

I had three palaces: one for the cold season, one for the hot season, one for the rainy season. During the four months of the rainy season I was entertained in the rainy-season palace by minstrels without a single man among them, and I did not once come down from the palace. Whereas the servants, workers, & retainers in other people's homes are fed meals of lentil soup & broken rice, in my father's home the servants, workers, & retainers were fed wheat, rice, & meat.

Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: 'When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to aging, not beyond aging, sees another who is aged, he is horrified, humiliated, & disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to aging, not beyond aging. If I—who am subject to aging, not beyond aging—were to be horrified, humiliated, & disgusted on seeing another person who is aged, that would not be fitting for me.' As I noticed this, the (typical) young person's intoxication with youth entirely dropped away.

Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: 'When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to illness, not beyond illness, sees another who is ill, he is

horrified, humiliated, & disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to illness, not beyond illness. And if I—who am subject to illness, not beyond illness—were to be horrified, humiliated, & disgusted on seeing another person who is ill, that would not be fitting for me.’ As I noticed this, the healthy person’s intoxication with health entirely dropped away.

Even though I was endowed with such fortune, such total refinement, the thought occurred to me: ‘When an untaught, run-of-the-mill person, himself subject to death, not beyond death, sees another who is dead, he is horrified, humiliated, & disgusted, oblivious to himself that he too is subject to death, not beyond death. And if I—who am subject to death, not beyond death—were to be horrified, humiliated, & disgusted on seeing another person who is dead, that would not be fitting for me.’ As I noticed this, the living person’s intoxication with life entirely dropped away.

AN3:38

Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be), being subject myself to birth, aging, illness, death, sorrow, & defilement, I sought (happiness in) what was subject to birth, aging, illness, death, sorrow, & defilement. The thought occurred to me: ‘Why am I, being subject myself to birth... defilement, seeking what is subject to birth... defilement? What if I... were to seek the unborn, unaging, unailing, undying, sorrowless, undefiled, unexcelled security from bondage: Unbinding.’

So at a later time, when I was still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life, I shaved off my hair & beard—though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces—and I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

MN 26

These passages are universal in their import, but a fuller appreciation of why the young prince left home for the life of a homeless wanderer requires some understanding of the beliefs and social developments of his time.

Prince Siddhattha lived in an aristocratic republic in northern India during the sixth century B.C.E., a time of great social upheaval. A new monetary economy was replacing the older agrarian economy. Absolute monarchies, in alliance with the newly forming merchant class, were swallowing up the older aristocracies. As often happens when an aristocratic elite is being disenfranchised, people on all levels of society were beginning to call into question the beliefs that had supported the older order, and were looking to science and other alternative modes of knowledge to provide them with a new view of life.

The foremost science in North India at that time was astronomy. New, precise observations of planetary movements, combined with newly developed means of calculation, had led astronomers to conclude that time was measured in aeons,

incomprehensibly long cycles that repeat themselves endlessly. Taking up these conclusions, philosophers of the time tried to work out the implications of this vast temporal frame for the drama of human life and the quest for ultimate happiness.

These philosophers fell into two broad camps: those who conducted their speculations within the traditions of the Vedas, early Indian religious and ritual texts that provided the orthodox beliefs of the old order; and other, unorthodox groups, called the Sāmaṇas (contemplatives), who questioned the authority of the Vedas. Modern etymology derives the word Sāmaṇa from “striver,” but the etymology of the time derived it from sama, which means to be “on pitch” or “in tune.” The Sāmaṇa philosophers were trying to find a way of life and thought that was in tune, not with social conventions, but with the laws of nature as these could be directly contemplated through scientific observation, personal experience, reason, meditation, or shamanic practices, such as the pursuit of altered states of consciousness through fasting or other austerities. Many of these forms of contemplation required that one abandon the constraints and responsibilities of the home life and take up the life of a homeless wanderer. This was the rationale behind Prince Siddhattha’s decision to leave the home life in order to see if there might be a true happiness beyond the sway of aging, illness, and death.

Already by his time, philosophers of the Vedic and Sāmaṇa schools had developed widely differing interpretations of what the laws of nature were and how they affected the pursuit of true happiness. Their main points of disagreement were two:

1) Survival beyond death. Most Vedic and Sāmaṇa philosophers assumed that a person’s identity extended beyond this lifetime, aeons before birth back into the past and after death on into the future, although there was some disagreement as to whether one’s identity from life to life would change or remain the same. The Vedas had viewed rebirth in a positive light, but by the time of Prince Siddhattha the influence of the newly discovered astronomical cycles had led those who believed in rebirth to regard the cycles as pointless and restrictive, and release as the only possibility for true happiness. There was, however, a Sāmaṇa school of hedonist materialists, called Lokāyatans, who denied the existence of any identity beyond death and insisted that happiness could be found only by indulging in sensual pleasures here and now.

2) Causality. Most philosophers accepted the idea that human action played a causative role in providing for one’s future happiness both in this life and beyond. Views about how this causal principle worked, though, differed from school to school. For some Vedists, the only effective action was ritual. The Jains, a Sāmaṇa school, taught that all action fell under linear, deterministic causal laws and formed a bond to the recurring cycle. Present experience, they said, came from past actions; present actions would shape future experience. This linear causality was also materialistic: physical action created *āsavas* (effluents, fermentations)—sticky substances on the soul that kept it attached to the cycle. According to them, the only escape from the cycle lay in a life of non-violence and inaction, culminating in a slow suicide by starvation, which would burn the *āsavas* away, thus releasing the soul. Some Upanishads—post-Vedic speculative texts—expressed causality as a morally neutral, purely physical process of

evolution. Others stated that moral laws were intrinsic to the nature of causality, rather than being mere social conventions, and that the morality of an action determined how it affected one's future course in the round of rebirth. Whether these last texts were composed before or after the Buddha taught this view, though, no one knows. At any rate, all pre-Buddhist thinkers who accepted the principle of causality, however they expressed it, saw it as a purely linear process.

On the other side of the issue, the Lokāyatans insisted that no causal principle acted between events, and that all events were spontaneous and self-caused. This meant that actions had no consequences, and one could safely ignore moral rules in one's pursuit of sensual pleasure. One branch of another Sāmaṇa school, the Ājīvakas, insisted that causality was illusory. The only truly existent things, they said, were the unchanging substances that formed the building blocks of the universe. Because causality implied change, it was therefore unreal. As a result, human action had no effect on anything of any substance—including happiness—and so was of no account. Another branch of the same school, which specialized in astrology, insisted that causality was real but totally deterministic. Human life was entirely determined by impersonal, amoral fate, written in the stars; human action played no role in providing for one's happiness or misery; morality was purely a social convention. Thus they insisted that release from the round of rebirth came only when the round worked itself out. Peace of mind could be found by accepting one's fate and patiently waiting for the cycle, like a ball of string unwinding, to come to its end.

These divergent viewpoints formed the intellectual backdrop for Prince Siddhattha's quest for ultimate happiness. In fact, his Awakening may be seen as his own resolution of these two issues.

The Pali Canon records several different versions of the Buddha's own descriptions of his Awakening. These descriptions are among the earliest extended autobiographical accounts in human history. The Buddha presents himself as an explorer and experimenter—and an exceedingly brave one at that, putting his life on the line in the search for an undying happiness. After trying several false paths, including formless mental absorptions and physical austerities, he happened on the path that eventually worked: bringing the mind into the present by focusing it on the breath and then making a calm, mindful analysis of the processes of the mind as they presented themselves directly to his immediate awareness. Seeing these processes as inconstant, stressful, and not-self, he abandoned his sense of identification with them. This caused them to disband, and what remained was Deathlessness (*amata-dhamma*), beyond the dimensions of time and space. This was the happiness for which he had been seeking.

In one passage of the Pali Canon [§188], the Buddha noted that what he had come to realize in the course of his Awakening could be compared to the leaves of an entire forest; what he taught to others was like a mere handful of leaves. The latter part comprised the essential points for helping others to attain Awakening themselves. The part he had kept back would have been useless for that purpose. Thus, when we discuss the Buddha's Awakening, we must keep in mind that we know only a small sliver of the total event. However, the sliver we do know is designed to aid in our own Awakening. That is the part we will focus on here, keeping the Buddha's purpose for teaching it constantly in mind.

When the Buddha later analyzed the process of Awakening, he stated that it consisted of two kinds of knowledge:

“First there is the knowledge of the regularity of the Dhamma, after which there is the knowledge of Unbinding.”

SN 12:70

The regularity of the Dhamma, here, denotes the causal principle that underlies all “fabricated” (*saṅkhata*) experience, i.e., experience made up of causal conditions and influences. Knowing this principle means mastering it: one can not only trace the course of causal processes but also escape from them by skillfully letting them disband. The knowledge of Unbinding is the realization of total freedom that comes when one has disbanded the causal processes of the realm of fabrication, leaving the freedom from causal influences that is termed the “Unfabricated.”

The Buddha’s choice of the word Unbinding (*nibbāna*)—which literally means the extinguishing of a fire—derives from the way the physics of fire was viewed at his time. As fire burned, it was seen as clinging to its fuel in a state of entrapment and agitation. When it went out, it let go of its fuel, growing calm and free. Thus when the Indians of his time saw a fire going out, they did not feel that they were watching extinction. Rather, they were seeing a metaphorical lesson in how freedom could be attained by letting go.

The first knowledge, that of the regularity of the Dhamma, is the describable part of the process of Awakening; the second knowledge, that of Unbinding, though indescribable, is what guarantees the worth of the first. When one has been totally freed from all suffering and stress, one knows that one has properly mastered the realm of fabrication and can vouch for the usefulness of the insights that led to that freedom. Truth, here, is simply the way things work; true knowledge is gauged by how skillfully one can manipulate them.

There are many places in the Pali Canon where the Buddha describes his own act of Awakening to the first knowledge as consisting of three insights:

- recollection of past lives,
- insight into the death and rebirth of beings throughout the cosmos, and
- insight into the ending of the mental effluents or fermentations (*āsaava*) within the mind [§1]. (As we will see below, the Buddha’s Awakening gave a new meaning to this term borrowed from the Jains.)

The first two insights were not the exclusive property of the Buddhist tradition. Shamanic traditions throughout the world have reported seers who have had similar insights. The third insight, however, went beyond shamanism into a phenomenology of the mind, i.e., a systematic account of phenomena as they are directly experienced. This insight was exclusively Buddhist, although it was based on the previous two. Because it was multi-faceted, the Canon describes it from a variety of standpoints, stressing different aspects as they apply to specific contexts. In the course of this book, we too will explore specific facets of this insight from different angles. Here we will simply provide a general outline to show how the principle of skillful kamma underlay the main features of this insight.

The Bodhisatta's realization in his second insight that kamma determines how beings fare in the round of rebirth caused him to focus on the question of kamma in his third insight. And, because the second insight pointed to right and wrong views as the factors determining the quality of kamma, he looked into the possibility that kamma was primarily a mental process, rather than a physical one as the Vedists and Jains taught. As a result, he focused on the mental kamma that was taking place at that very moment in his mind, to understand the process more clearly. In particular, he wanted to see if there might be a type of right view that, instead of continuing the round of rebirth, would bring release from it. To do this, he realized that he would have to make his powers of discernment more skillful; this meant that the process of developing skillfulness would have to be the kamma that he would observe.

Now, in the process of developing a skill, two major assumptions are made: that there is a causal relationship between acts and their results, and that good results are better than bad. If these assumptions were not valid, there would be no point in developing a skill. The Bodhisatta noticed that this point of view provided two variables—causes and results, and favorable and unfavorable—that divided experience into four categories, which he later formulated as the four noble truths (*ariya-sacca*): stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to its cessation [§189]. Each category, he further realized, entailed a duty. Stress had to be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed [§195].

In trying to comprehend stress and its relationship to kamma, the Bodhisatta discovered that, contrary to the teachings of the Jains, kamma was not something extrinsic to the cycle of rebirth that bound one to the cycle. Rather, (1) the common cycle of kamma, result, and reaction was the cycle of rebirth in and of itself, and (2) the binding agent in the cycle was not kamma itself, but rather an optional part of the reaction to the results of kamma.

The Bodhisatta analyzed the cycle of kamma, result, and reaction into the following terms: kamma is intention; its result, feeling; the reaction to that feeling, perception and attention—i.e., attention to perceptions about the feeling—which together form the views that color further intentions. If perception and attention are clouded by ignorance, craving, and clinging, they lead to stress and further ignorance, forming the basis for intentions that keep the cycle in motion. In his later teachings, the Buddha identified these clouding factors—forms of clinging, together with their resultant states of becoming and ignorance [§227]—as the *āsavas* or effluents that act as binding agents to the cycle. In this way, he took a Jain term and gave it a new meaning, mental rather than physical. At the same time, his full-scale analysis of the interaction between kamma and the effluents formed one of the central points of his teaching, termed dependent co-arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) [§§211, 218, 231].

The fact that it is possible to develop a skill suggested to the Bodhisatta, while he was developing his third insight, that the craving and clinging that cloud one's perceptions and attention did not necessarily follow on the feeling that resulted from kamma. Otherwise, there would be no way to develop skillful intentions. Thus craving and clinging could be abandoned. This would require steady and refined acts of attention and intention, which came down to well-developed concentration and discernment, the central qualities in the path to the cessation

of stress. Concentration gave discernment the focus and solidity it needed to see clearly, while discernment followed the two-fold pattern that attention must play in the development of any skill: sensitivity to the context of the act, formed by pre-existing factors coming from the past, together with sensitivity to the act itself, formed by present intentions. In other words, discernment had to see the results of an action as stemming from a combination of past and present causes.

As the more blatant forms of craving, clinging, and ignorance were eradicated with the continued refinement of concentration and discernment, there came a point where the only acts of attention and intention left to analyze were the acts of concentration and discernment in and of themselves. The feedback loop that this process entailed—with concentration and discernment shaping one another in the immediate present—brought the investigation into such close quarters that the terms of analysis were reduced to the most basic words for pointing to present experiences: “this” and “that.” The double focus of discernment, in terms of past and present influences, was reduced to the most basic conditions that make up the experience of “the present” (and, by extension, “space”) on the one hand, and “time” on the other. Attention to present participation in the causal process was reduced to the basic condition for the experience of the present, i.e., mutual presence (“When this is, that is; when this isn’t, that isn’t”), while attention to influences from the past was reduced to the basic condition for the experience of time, i.e., the dependence of one event on another (“From the arising of this comes the arising of that; from the cessation of this comes the cessation of that”).

These expressions later formed the basic formula of the Buddha’s teachings on causality, which he termed this/that conditionality (*idappaccayatā*) [§211] to emphasize that the formula described patterns of events viewed in a mode of perception empty of any assumptions outside of what could be immediately perceived.

After reaching this point, there was nothing further that concentration and discernment—themselves being conditioned by time and the present—could do. When all residual attachments even to these subtle realizations were let go, there thus followed a state called non-fashioning, in which the mind made absolutely no present input into experience. With no present input to maintain experience of time and the present, the cycle of fabricated experience disbanded. This formed an opening to the Unfabricated, the undying happiness that the Bodhisatta, now the Buddha, had sought. This was the knowledge of Unbinding, or total release.

#### THE BUDDHA’S TEACHINGS

The texts say that the Buddha spent a total of 49 days after his Awakening, sensitive to the bliss of release, reviewing the implications of the insights that had brought about his Awakening. At the end of this period, he thought of teaching other living beings. At first the subtlety and complexity of his Awakening made him wonder if anyone would be able to understand and benefit from his teachings. However, after he ascertained through his new powers of mind that there were those who would understand, he made the decision to teach, determining that he would not enter total Unbinding until he had established his

teachings—his doctrine and discipline (Dhamma-Vinaya)—on a solid basis for the long-term benefit of human and divine beings.

The two primary knowledges that constituted the Awakening—knowledge of the regularity of the Dhamma and knowledge of Unbinding—played a major role in shaping what the Buddha taught and how he taught it. Of the two, the knowledge of Unbinding was the more important. It not only guaranteed the truth of the other knowledge, but also constituted the Buddha's whole purpose in teaching: he wanted others to attain this happiness as well. However, because the first knowledge was what led to the second, it provided the guidelines that the Buddha used in determining what would be useful to communicate to others so that they too would arrive at the knowledge of Unbinding of their own accord.

These guidelines were nothing other than the three insights of which this knowledge was composed: recollection of past lives, insight into the death and rebirth of beings, and insight into the ending of the mental effluents. As became clear during the Buddha's teaching career, not all those who would reach the knowledge of Unbinding would need to gain direct insight into previous lifetimes or into the death and rebirth of other beings, but they would have to gain direct insight into the ending of the mental effluents. The mastery of causality that formed the heart of this insight thus formed the heart of his teaching, with the first two insights providing the background against which the teachings were to be put into practice.

As we noted above, the three insights taken together provided answers to the questions that had provoked Prince Siddhattha's quest for Awakening in the first place. His remembrance of previous lives showed on the one hand that death is not annihilation, but on the other hand that there is no core identity that remains unchanged or makes steady, upward progress through the process of rebirth. One life follows another as one dream may follow another, with similar wide swings in one's sense of who or where one is. Thus there is no inherent security in the process.

The second insight—into the death and rebirth of beings throughout the cosmos—provided part of the answer to the questions surrounding the issue of causality in the pursuit of happiness. The primary causal factor is the mind, and in particular the moral quality of the intentions comprising its thoughts, words, and deeds, and the rightness of the views underlying them. Thus moral principles are inherent in the functioning of the cosmos, rather than being mere social conventions. For this reason, any quest for happiness must focus on mastering the quality of the mind's views and intentions.

The third insight—into the ending of the mental effluents—showed that escape from the cycle of rebirth could be found, not through ritual action or total inaction, but through the skillful development of a type of right view that abandoned the effluents that kept the cycle of kamma, stress, and ignorance in motion. As we have seen, this type of right view went through three stages of refinement as the third insight progressed: the four noble truths, dependent co-arising, and this/that conditionality. We will discuss the first two stages in detail elsewhere in this book [III/H/i and III/H/iii]. Here we will focus on this/that conditionality, the most radical aspect of the Buddha's third insight. In terms of



its content, it explained how past and present intentions underlay all experience of time and the present. The truth of this content was shown by its role in disbanding all experience of time and the present simply by bringing present intentions to a standstill. Small wonder, then, that this principle provided the most fundamental influence in shaping the Buddha's teaching.

The Buddha expressed this/that conditionality in a simple-looking formula:

- “(1) When this is, that is.
- (2) From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
- (3) When this isn't, that isn't.
- (4) From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that.”

AN 10:92

There are many possible ways of interpreting this formula, but only one does justice both to the way the formula is worded and to the complex, fluid manner in which specific examples of causal relationships are described in the Canon. That way is to view the formula as the interplay of two causal principles, one linear and the other synchronic, that combine to form a non-linear pattern. The linear principle—taking (2) and (4) as a pair—connects events, rather than objects, over time; the synchronic principle—(1) and (3)—connects objects and events in the present moment. The two principles intersect, so that any given event is influenced by two sets of conditions: input acting from the past and input acting from the present. Although each principle seems simple, the fact that they interact makes their consequences very complex [§10].

To begin with, every act has repercussions in the present moment together with reverberations extending into the future. Depending on the intensity of the act, these reverberations can last for a very short or a very long time. Thus every event takes place in a context determined by the combined effects of past events coming from a wide range in time, together with the effects of present acts. These effects can intensify one another, can coexist with little interaction, or can cancel one another out. Thus, even though it is possible to predict that a certain type of act will tend to give a certain type of result—for example, acting on anger will lead to pain—there is no way to predict when or where that result will make itself felt [§11].

The complexity of the system is further enhanced by the fact that both causal principles meet at the mind. Through its views and intentions, the mind takes a causal role in keeping both principles in action. Through its sensory powers, it is affected by the results of the causes it has set in motion. This creates the possibility for the causal principles to feed back into themselves, as the mind reacts to the results of its own actions. These reactions can take the form of positive feedback loops, intensifying the original input and its results, much like the howl in a speaker placed next to the microphone feeding into it. They can also create negative feedback loops, counteracting the original input, much like the action of a thermostat that turns off a heater when the temperature in a room is too high and turns it on again when it gets too low.

Because the results of actions can be immediate, and the mind can then react to them immediately, these feedback loops can at times quickly spin out of control; at other times, they may act as skillful checks on one's behavior. For

example, a man may act out of anger, which gives him an immediate sense of dis-ease to which he may react with further anger, thus creating a snowballing effect. On the other hand, he may come to understand that the anger is causing his dis-ease, and so immediately does what he can to stop it. However, there can also be times when the results of his past actions may obscure the dis-ease he is causing himself in the present, so that he does not immediately react to it one way or another.

In this way, the combination of two causal principles—influences from the past interacting with those in the immediate present—accounts for the complexity of causal relationships as they function on the level of immediate experience. However, the combination of the two principles also opens the possibility for finding a systematic way to break the causal web. If causes and effects were entirely linear, the cosmos would be totally deterministic, and nothing could be done to escape from the machinations of the causal process. If they were entirely synchronic, there would be no relationship from one moment to the next, and all events would be arbitrary. The web could break down totally or reform spontaneously for no reason at all. However, with the two modes working together, one can learn from causal patterns observed from the past and apply one's insights to disentangling the same causal patterns acting in the present. If one's insights are true, one can then gain freedom from those patterns.

For this reason, the principle of this/that conditionality provides an ideal foundation, both theoretical and practical, for a doctrine of release. And, as a teacher, the Buddha took full advantage of its implications, using it in such a way that it accounts not only for the presentation and content of his teachings, but also for their organization, their function, and their utility. It even accounts for the need for the teachings and for the fact that the Buddha was able to teach them in the first place. We will take up these points in reverse order.

The fact of the teaching: As noted above, this/that conditionality is a combination of two causal modes: linear activity, connecting events over time; and synchronic causality, connecting objects in the present. The fact that the causal principle was not totally linear accounts for the fact that the Buddha was able to break the causal circle as soon as he had totally comprehended it, and did not have to wait for all of his previous kamma to work itself out first. The fact that the principle was not totally synchronic, however, accounts for the fact that he survived his Awakening and lived to tell about it. Although his actions created no new kammic results after his Awakening, he continued to live and teach under the influence of the kamma he had created before his Awakening, finally passing away only when those kammic influences totally worked themselves out. Thus the combination of the two patterns allowed for an experience of the Unfabricated that could be survived, opening the opportunity for the Buddha to teach others about it before his total Unbinding.

The need for the teachings: This/that conditionality, even though it can be expressed in a simple formula, is very complex in its working-out. As a result, the conditions of time and the present are bewildering to most people. This is particularly true in the process leading up to suffering and stress. As §189 states, beings react to suffering in two ways: bewilderment and a search for a way out. If the conditions for suffering were not so complex, it would be the result of a

simple, regular process that would not be so confusing. People would be able to understand it without any need for outside teachings. The fact of its actual complexity, however, explains why people find it bewildering and, as a result of their bewilderment, have devised a wide variety of unskillful means to escape from it: recourse to such external means as magic, ritual, revenge, and force; and to such internal means as denial, repression, self-hatred, and prayer.

Thus the complexity of this/that conditionality accounts for the lack of skill that people bring to their lives—creating more suffering and stress in their attempts to escape suffering and stress—and shows that this lack of skill is a result of ignorance. This explains the need for a teaching that points out the true nature of the causal system operating in the world, so that proper understanding of the system can lead people to deal with it skillfully and actually gain the release they seek.

The utility of the teachings: The fact that this/that conditionality allows for causal input from the present moment means that the causal process is not totally deterministic. Although linear causality places restrictions on what can be done and known in any particular moment, synchronic causality allows some room for free will. Human effort can thus make a difference in the immediate present. At the same time, the fact that the principle of this/that conditionality is expressed in impersonal terms means that the Buddha's insights did not depend on any power peculiar to him personally. As he noted in recounting his experience, the realizations he attained were such that anyone who developed the mind to the same pitch of heedfulness, ardency, and resolution and then directed it to the proper task would be able to attain them as well [§1]. For these reasons, the act of teaching would not be futile, because the mental qualities needed for the task of Awakening were available to other people who would have the freedom to develop them if they wanted to.

The function of the teachings: As chaos theory has shown in graphic terms, any causal system that contains three or more feedback loops can develop into incredible complexity, with small but well-placed changes in input tipping the balance from complex order to seeming chaos, or from chaos to order in the twinkling of an eye. A similar observation applies to this/that conditionality. Given the inherent complexity and instability of such a system, a simple description of it would be futile: the complexity would boggle the mind, and the instability would ensure that any such description would not be helpful for long. At the same time, the instability of the system makes it imperative for anyone immersed in such a system to find a way out, for instability threatens any true chance for lasting peace or happiness. The complexity of the system requires that one find a reliable analysis of the sensitive points in the system and how they can be skillfully manipulated in a way that brings the system down from within.

All of these considerations play a role in determining the function for which the Buddha designed his teachings. They are meant to act as a guide to skillful ways of understanding the principles underlying the causal system, and to skillful ways of manipulating the causal factors so as to gain freedom from them. The concept of skillful and unskillful thoughts, words, and deeds thus plays a central role in the teaching.

In fact, the teachings themselves are meant to function as skillful thoughts

toward the goal of Awakening. The Buddha was very clear on the point that he did not mean for his teachings to become a metaphysical system or for them to be adhered to simply for the sake of their truth value. He discussed metaphysical topics only when they could play a role in skillful behavior. Many metaphysical questions—such as whether or not there is a soul or self, whether or not the world is eternal, whether or not it is infinite, etc.—he refused to answer, on the grounds that they were either counterproductive or irrelevant to the task at hand: that of gaining escape from the stress and suffering inherent in time and the present.

Although the Buddha insisted that all of his teachings were true—none of his skillful means were useful fictions—they were to be put aside when one had fully benefited from putting them into practice. In his teachings, true but conditioned knowledge is put into service to an unconditioned goal: a release so total that no conditioned truths can encompass it. Because a meditator has to use causal factors in order to disband the causal system, he/she has to make use of factors that eventually have to be transcended. This pattern of developing qualities in the practice that one must eventually let go as one attains the Unfabricated is common throughout the Buddha's teachings. Eventually even skillfulness itself has to be transcended.

The organization of the teachings: The fact that the causal system contains many feedback loops means that a particular causal connection—either one that continues the system or one designed to disband it—can follow one of several paths. Thus there is a need for a variety of explanations for people who find themselves involved in these different paths. This need explains the topical organization of the Buddha's teachings in his discourses. In talking to different people, or to the same people at different times, he gave different accounts of the causal links leading up to stress and suffering, and to the knowledge that can bring that stress and suffering to an end.

Those who have tried to form a single, consistent account of Buddhist causal analyses have found themselves stymied by this fact, and have often discounted the wide variety of analyses by insisting that only one of them is the "true" Buddhist analysis; or that only the general principle of mutual causality is important, the individual links of the analyses being immaterial; or that the Buddha did not really understand causality at all. None of these positions do justice to the Buddha's skill as a teacher of this person and that, each caught at different junctures in the feedback loops of this/that conditionality.

As we will see when we consider the Wings to Awakening in detail, the Buddha listed different ways of envisioning the causal factors at work in developing the knowledge needed to gain release from the realm of fabrication. Although the lists follow different lines of this/that conditionality, he insisted that they were equivalent. Thus any fair account of his teachings must make room for the variety of paths he outlined, and for the fact that each is helpfully specific and precise.

The content of the teachings: Perhaps one of the most radical aspects of the Buddha's teachings is the assertion that the factors at work in the cosmos at large are the same as those at work in the way each individual mind processes experience. These processes, rather than the sensory data that they process, are

primary in one's experience of the cosmos. If one can disband the act of processing, one is freed from the cosmic causal net.

What this means in the case of the individual mind—engaged in and suffering from the processes of time and the present—is that the way out is to be found by focusing directly on the processing of present experience, for that is where the crucial issues play themselves out most clearly. Here and now is where everything important is happening, not there and then. At the same time, the skills needed to deal with these issues are skills of the mind: proper ways of analyzing what one experiences and proper qualities of mind to bring to the analysis to make it as clear and effective as possible. This boils down to the proper frame of reference, the proper quality of awareness, and the proper mode of analysis. These are precisely the topics covered in the *Wings to Awakening*, although as one's skill develops, they coalesce: the quality of awareness itself becomes the frame of reference and the object to which the analysis is applied.

The presentation of the teaching: Because the Buddha's listeners were already caught in the midst of the web of this/that conditionality, he had to present his message in a way that spoke to their condition. This meant that he had to be sensitive both to the linear effects of past kamma that might either prevent or support the listener's ability to benefit from the teaching, and to the listener's current attitudes and concerns. A person whose adverse past kamma prevented Awakening in this lifetime might benefit from a more elementary teaching that would put him/her in a better position to gain Awakening in a future lifetime. Another person's past kamma might open the possibility for Awakening in this lifetime, but his/her present attitude might have to be changed before he/she was willing to accept the teaching.

A second complication entailed by the principle of this/that conditionality is that it has to be known and mastered at the level of direct experience in and of itself. This mastery is thus a task that each person must do for him or herself. No one can master direct experience for anyone else. The Buddha therefore had to find a way to induce his listeners to accept his diagnosis of their sufferings and his prescription for their cure. He also had to convince them to believe in their own ability to follow the instructions and obtain the desired results. To use a traditional Buddhist analogy, the Buddha was like a doctor who had to convince his patients to administer a cure to themselves, much as a doctor has to convince his patients to follow his directions in taking medicine, getting exercise, changing their diet and lifestyle, and so forth. The Buddha had an additional difficulty, however, in that his definition of health—Unbinding—was something that none of his listeners had yet experienced for themselves. Hence the most important point of his teaching was something that his listeners would have to take on faith. Only when they had seen the results of putting the teachings into practice for themselves would faith no longer be necessary.

Thus, for every listener, faith in the Buddha's Awakening was a prerequisite for advanced growth in the teaching. Without faith in the fact of the Buddha's knowledge of Unbinding, one could not fully accept his prescription. Without faith in the regularity of the Dhamma—including conviction in the principle of kamma and the impersonality of the causal law, making the path open in principle to everyone—one could not fully have faith in one's own ability to

follow the path. Of course, this faith would then be confirmed, step by step, as one followed the teaching and began gaining results, but full confirmation would come only with an experience of Awakening. Prior to that point, one's trust, bolstered only by partial results, would have to be a matter of faith [MN 27].

Acquiring this faith is called "going for refuge" in the Buddha. The "refuge" here derives from the fact that one has placed trust in the truth of the Buddha's Awakening and expects that by following his teachings—in particular, the principle of skillful kamma—one protects oneself from creating further suffering for oneself or others, eventually reaching true, unconditioned happiness. This act of going for refuge is what qualifies one as a Buddhist—as opposed to someone simply interested in the Buddha's teachings—and puts one in a position to benefit fully from what the Buddha taught.

The Buddha employed various means of instilling faith in his listeners, but the primary means fall into three classes: his character, his psychic powers, and his powers of reason. When he gave his first sermon—to the Five Brethren, his former compatriots—he had to preface his remarks by reminding them of his honest and responsible character before they would willingly listen to him. When he taught the Kassapa brothers, he first had to subdue their pride with a dazzling array of psychic feats. In most cases, however, he needed only to reason with his listeners and interlocutors, although here again he had to be sensitive to the level of their minds so that he could lead them step by step, taking them from what they saw as immediately apparent and directing them to ever higher and more subtle points. The typical pattern was for the Buddha to begin with the immediate joys of generosity and virtue, followed by the longer-term sensual rewards of these qualities, in line with the principle of kamma; then the ultimate drawbacks of those sensual rewards; and finally the benefits of renunciation. If his listeners could follow his reasoning this far, they would be ready for the more advanced teachings.

We often view reason as something distinct from faith, but for the Buddha it was simply one way of instilling faith or conviction in his listeners. At several points in the Pali Canon [e.g., DN 1; MN95] he points out the fallacies that can result when one draws reasoned conclusions from a limited range of experience, from false analogies, or from inappropriate modes of analysis. Because his teachings could not be proven prior to an experience of Awakening, he recognized that the proper use of reason was not in trying to prove his teachings, but simply in showing that they made sense. People can make sense of things when they see them as similar to something they already know and understand.

Thus the main function of reason in presenting the teachings is in finding proper analogies for understanding them: hence the many metaphors and similes used throughout the texts. Faith based on reason and understanding, the Buddha taught, was more solid than unreasoned faith, but neither could substitute for the direct knowledge of the regularity of the Dhamma and of Unbinding, for only the experience of Unbinding was a guarantee of true knowledge. Nevertheless, faith was a prerequisite for attaining that direct knowledge. Only when the initial presentation of the teaching had aroused faith in the listener, would he/she be in a position to benefit from a less-adorned presentation of the content and put it into practice.

The need for various ways of presenting his points on a wide range of levels meant that the body of the Buddha's teachings grew ever more varied and immense with time. As his career drew to a close, he found it necessary to highlight the essential core of the teaching, the unadorned content, so that the more timeless aspects of his message would remain clear in his followers' minds. Societies and cultures inevitably change, so that what counts as effective persuasion in one time and place may be ineffective in another. The basic structure of this/that conditionality does not change, however; the qualities of the mind needed for mastering causality and realizing the Unfabricated will always remain the same. The Buddha thus presented the Wings to Awakening as the unadorned content: the timeless, essential core.

Even here, however, the principle of this/that conditionality affected his presentation. He needed to find principles that would be relatively immune to changes in society and culture. He needed a mode of presentation that was simple enough to memorize, but not so simplistic as to distort or limit the teaching. He also needed words that would point, not to abstractions, but to the immediate realities of awareness in the listener's own mind. And, finally, he needed a useful framework for the teaching as a whole, so that those who wanted to track down specific points would not lose sight of how those points fit into the larger picture of the practice.

His solution was to give lists of mental qualities, as we noted above, rather than any of the more abstruse, philosophical doctrines that are often cited as distinctively Buddhist. These mental qualities are immediately present, to at least some extent, in every human mind. Thus they retain a constant meaning no matter what changes occur in one's mental landscape or cultural horizons. The Buddha presents them in seven alternative, interconnected lists (see Table I). Each list—when all of its implications are worked out—is equivalent to all of the others in its effects, but each takes a distinctive approach to the practice.

Thus the lists provide enough variety to meet the needs of people caught in different parts of the causal network. As one searches the texts for explanations of the meaning of specific terms and factors in the lists, one finds that the lists connect—directly or indirectly—with everything there. At the same time, the categories of the lists, because they point to qualities in the mind, encourage the listener to regard the teachings not as a system in and of themselves, but as tools for looking directly into his/her own mind, where the sources and solutions to the problem of suffering lie.

As a result, although the lists are short and simple, they are an effective introduction to the teaching and a guide to its practice. From his experience with this/that conditionality on the path, the Buddha had seen that if one develops the mental qualities listed in any one of these seven sets, focuses them on the present, keeping in mind the four frames of reference and analyzing what appears to one's immediate awareness in terms of the categories of the four noble truths, one will inevitably come to the same realizations that he did: the regularity of the Dhamma and the reality of Unbinding. This was the happiness he himself sought and found, and that he wanted others to attain.

In addition to the seven lists, the Buddha left behind a monastic order designed not only so that the teachings would be memorized from generation to

generation, but also so that future generations would have living examples of the teaching to learn from, and a conducive social environment in which to put them into practice. This environment was intended as a gift not only for those who would ordain but also for those lay people who associated with the order, taking the opportunity to develop their own generosity, morality, and mindfulness in the process. Associating with others who are following a sensitive disciplinary code forces one to become more sensitive and disciplined oneself.

Although our concern in this book is with the Dhamma, or the teaching of the Wings to Awakening, we should not forget that the Buddha named his teaching Dhamma-Vinaya. The Vinaya was the set of rules and regulations he established for the smooth running of the order. Dhamma is the primary member of the compound, but the Vinaya forms the context that helps keep it alive. They meet in a common focus on the factor of intention. The Vinaya uses its rules not only to foster communal order, but also to sensitize individual practitioners to the element of intention in all their actions. The Dhamma then makes use of this sensitivity as a means of fostering the insights that lead to Awakening.

After he had placed the Dhamma-Vinaya on a sure footing, the Buddha passed away into total Unbinding. This event has provoked a great deal of controversy within and without the Buddhist tradition, some people saying that if the Buddha was truly compassionate, he should have taken repeated rebirth so that the rest of humanity could continue to benefit from the excellent qualities that he had built into his mind. His total Unbinding, however, can be seen as one of his greatest kindnesses to his followers. He showed by example that although the path to true happiness entails generosity and kindness to others, the goal of the path needs no justification in terms of anything else. The limitless freedom of Unbinding is a worthy end for its own sake. Society's usual demand that people must justify their actions by appeal to the continued smooth functioning of society or the happiness of others, has no sway over the innate worth of this level. The Buddha made use of the kammic residue remaining after his Awakening to make a free gift of the Dhamma-Vinaya to all who care about genuine happiness and health, but when those residues were exhausted he took the noble way of true health as an example and challenge to us all.

Thus the Dhamma-Vinaya can be seen as the Buddha's generous gift to posterity. The rules of the Vinaya offer an environment for practice, while the Wings to Awakening are an invitation and guide to that practice, leading to true happiness. Anyone, anywhere, who is seriously interested in true happiness is welcome to focus on the qualities listed here, to see if this/that conditionality is indeed the causal principle governing the dimensions of time and the present, and to test if it can be mastered in a way that leads to the promised result: freedom transcending those dimensions, totally beyond measure and unbound.



# I. Basic Principles

## A. SKILLFULNESS

The Buddha's teachings, like the principles they describe, are inter-related in complex ways. It is difficult to point out any one teaching that underlies everything else, as all the teachings are mutually dependent. Nevertheless, there are a number of possible entry points into their pattern, and one of those points is the Buddha's observation that it is possible to master a skill.

Unlike many of his contemporaries—and many thinkers before and since—the Buddha did not try to reason from abstract principles down to direct experience. As we noted in the Introduction, the Buddha's contemporaries were influenced by the premier science of their time—astronomy—in the way they viewed experience, and it is easy to see prejudices derived from astronomy at work in their thought: that the universe is composed of discrete bodies acting in line with regular, linear causes; and that human knowledge of these processes has no impact on the way they behave. These prejudices, when applied to human experience, resulted in what the Buddha called theories of being, or what we today would call theories of order: that the processes of the universe can be totally explained in terms of physical principles that follow linear causal patterns unaffected by human intervention. The various conclusions that developed out of this approach differed primarily in how one's soul—viewed in various ways either as a discrete thing or as a more abstract principle—was to look for release from this vast cosmic machine. Some insisted that action was illusory; others, that action was real but totally determined by fixed rules, serving only to bind one to the impersonal cycle.

In reaction to the theories of being, the Lokayatans proposed a theory of non-being or absolute chaos that, like all reactionary ideologies, was defined largely by what it denied. Although it admitted the primacy of the physical universe, it denied that any causal laws operated on the observable, human level. Everything, the Lokayatans said, was totally spontaneous, random, and chaotic. No personal souls were observable, and thus human identity was composed only of the temporary conjunction of elements that made up the body, terminating when those elements separated at death.

In a manner typical of his approach to problems, the Buddha avoided both sides of this argument by focusing directly on the level of immediate experience and exploring the implications of truths that both sides overlooked. Instead of fixing on the content of the views expressed, he considered the actions of those who were expressing the views. The logic either of total determinism or of total chaos must end in the conclusion that purposeful action is pointless, and yet adherents of both schools continued to act in purposeful ways. The fact that each side advanced an interpretation of reality implied that both agreed that there were skillful and

unskillful ways of approaching the truth, for each insisted that the other used unskillful forms of observation and argumentation to advance its views. Thus the Buddha looked directly at skillful action in and of itself, worked out its implications in viewing knowledge itself as a skill—rather than a body of facts—and found that those implications carried him all the way to release.

We have already touched on how implications drawn from the fact of skillful action shaped the major outlines of the Buddha's teachings. It will be useful to review those implications here. To begin with, the fact that skills can be developed implies that action is not illusory, that it actually gives results. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as skill, for no actions would be more effective than others. The fact of skillfulness also implies that some results are preferable to others, for otherwise there would be no point in trying to develop skills. In addition, the fact that it is possible to learn from mistakes in the course of developing a skill, so that one's future actions may be more skillful, implies that the cycle of action, result, and reaction is not entirely deterministic, and that acts of perception, attention, and intention can actually provide new input as the cycle goes through successive turns.

The important element in this input is attention. Anyone who has mastered a skill will realize that the process of attaining mastery requires attention to three things: (1) to pre-existing conditions, (2) to what one is doing in relation to those conditions, and (3) to the results that come from one's actions. This threefold focus enables one to monitor one's actions and adjust them accordingly. In this way, one's attention to conditions, actions, and effects allows the results of an action to feed back into future action, thus allowing for refinement in one's skill. By working out the implications of these requirements, the Buddha arrived at the principle of this/that conditionality, in which multiple feedback loops—sensitive to pre-existing conditions, to present input, and to their combined outcome—account for the incredible complexity of the world of experience in a way similar to that of modern theories of "deterministic chaos." In this sense, even though this/that conditionality may seem somewhat alien when viewed in the abstract, it is actually a very familiar but overlooked assumption that underlies all conscious, purposeful action. The Buddha simply explored the implications of this assumption much further than anyone else, all the way to the disbanding of space, time, and the present, together with their inherent stress.

These implications of the fact of skillfulness account for the main framework of the Buddha's doctrine as expressed in the teachings on the four noble truths, dependent co-arising, and this/that conditionality. Other facets of skillful action also account for more detailed points within this framework. For instance, the Buddha's exploration of stress and its origination, in the light of skillful action, provided the analysis of mental and physical events ("name-and-form," *nama-rupa*) that played a central role in the second noble truth as expressed in terms of dependent co-arising.

The first lesson of skillfulness is that the essence of an action lies in the intention motivating it: an act motivated by the intention for greater skillfulness will give results different from those of an act motivated by greed, aversion, or delusion. Intention, in turn, is influenced by the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the act of attention to one's circumstances. The less an act of attention is clouded by delusion, the more clearly it will see things in appropriate terms. The combination

of attention and intention in turn determines the quality of the feeling and the physical events that result from the act. The more skilled the action, the more refined the feelings and physical events that result. Perceptions arise with regard to those results, some more appropriate than others. The act of attention selects which ones to focus on, thus feeding back into another round in the cycle of action, with all its inherent instabilities and uncertainties. Underlying the entire cycle is the fact that all its factors are in contact with consciousness. This constellation of factors came to form the central causal connection in one of the Buddha's most basic formulations of dependent co-arising, in which the mutual dependence of "name" (attention, intention, feeling, perception, and contact) and "form" (physical events) on the one hand, and consciousness on the other, accounted for the arising of all stress [§§218, 228].

The interplay of name, form, and consciousness also plays a role in the formulation of the third and fourth noble truths, providing an answer to the quandary of how the stress and suffering inherent in the cycle of action can be ended. If one tried simply to stop the cycle through a direct intention, the intention itself would count as a factor to keep the cycle going. This double bind can be dissolved, however, if one can watch as the contact between consciousness and the cycle naturally falls away. This possibility requires, not an attempt at inaction, but even greater skillfulness in all the factors of action. Convinced that the only way to true happiness would be to find a way out of the cycle, that there had to be such a way, and that this was it, the Bodhisatta developed each of the factors of skillful action to an even higher degree of skill. The most skillful form of attention, he discovered, was to view all of experience in terms of the four noble truths: stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path of practice leading to its cessation.

These truths not only formed his most basic teaching [§188], but also played a role in the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress, as the factor of right view. The most skillful form of intention was to engage in the directed thoughts and evaluations that would lead the mind to the stillness of mental absorption. These factors played a role both as aspects of the path factor of right concentration and as the highest form of path factor of right resolve [§106]. The most refined forms of feeling and perception were the feelings of pleasure and equanimity and their accompanying levels of perception in the highest states of mental absorption [DN 9; §164], later included in the path factor of right concentration as well [§102].

The Wings to Awakening—as alternate expressions of the path to the cessation of stress—are also shaped by the implications of the fact of skillfulness. These implications account directly for the main factors in the Wings—the qualities of equanimity, concentration, and discernment that are needed to develop skillfulness—and indirectly for all the other qualities on which these qualities depend. As expressed in the non-linear pattern of this/that conditionality, these implications also account for the way in which the factors in the Wings must act as supports for one another in a pattern of mutual feedback. And, in the most general terms, the fact that skillfulness leads ultimately to a dimension where skillfulness is transcended, accounts for a paradoxical dynamic common to all seven sets that form the Wings: the meditator must intentionally make use of qualities from which he/she wants to escape, gaining familiarity with them in the course of mastering them to the point where they are naturally stilled. There the transcendent paths and their fruitions take over. This is the sense in which even the path of right practice

must eventually be abandoned, but only after it has been brought to the culmination of its development.

Many people have misunderstood this point, believing that the Buddha's teachings on non-attachment require that one relinquish one's attachment to the path of practice as quickly as possible. Actually, to make a show of abandoning the path before it is fully developed is to abort the entire practice. As one teacher has put it, a person climbing up to a roof by means of a ladder can let go of the ladder only when safely on the roof. In terms of the famous raft simile [§§113-114], one abandons the raft only after crossing the flood. If one were to abandon it in mid-flood, to make a show of going spontaneously with the flow of the flood's many currents, one could drown.

When the factors of the path *are* mutually brought to a state of consummation, however, there occurs a point of equipoise called "non-fashioning" (*atammayata*) [§179], in which their contact with consciousness—still fully conscious—naturally becomes disengaged. In terms of chaos theory, this compares to a point of "resonance," where the equations defining a non-linear system interact in such a way that one of their members is divided by zero, meaning that anything entering such a point would be undefined in terms of the system, and so released. The moon, for instance, if it entered one of the resonances in the combined gravitational fields of the earth and the sun, would be freed from its orbit around both. And just as the forces of gravity would be required to bring the moon to this freedom from gravity, in the same way the path of skillful action would be required to bring the mind to the point of non-fashioning, where the cycle of action is brought to an end. This is how all experience of stress, suffering, and the entire cosmos conditioned by time and the present is brought to an end as well, leaving the limitless freedom of "consciousness without feature" [§235], the endpoint of all human striving.

Thus we can say that the Dhamma—in terms of doctrine, practice, and attainment—derives from the fully explored implications of one observation: that it is possible to master a skill. This point is reflected not only in the content of the Buddha's teachings, but also in the way they are expressed. The Buddha used many metaphors, explicit and implicit, citing the skills of craftsmen, artists, and athletes to illustrate his points. The texts abound with explicit similes referring to acrobats, archers, bathmen, butchers, carpenters, farmers, fletchers, herdsmen, musicians, painters, etc., pointing out how their skills correspond either to the way the mind fashions stress and suffering for itself, or to the skills a meditator needs to develop in order to master the path to release. On the implicit level, the passages dealing with meditation are filled with terms derived from music theory. In his younger days as a prince, the Bodhisatta—like other young aristocrats of his time—was undoubtedly a connoisseur of the musical arts, and so was naturally familiar with the theory that lay behind them. Because the terminology of this theory is so pervasive in the teachings he formulated as a Buddha, it will be useful to discuss it here briefly.

Unfortunately, we do not have a full treatise on the theory of musical performance as practiced during the Buddha's time, but there are enough references to music scattered through the texts for us to piece together the outlines of that theory. The first step in performance was to tune one's instrument, "establishing" one's tonic note (literally, "base," *thana*) to make it on-pitch ("even," or *sama*), then to fine-tune or attune ("ferret out" or "penetrate") the remaining notes

(again, “bases”) of the scale in relation to the tonic. This required a great deal of skill, sensitivity, and some mathematical knowledge, as the well-tempered scale had not yet been developed, and many different ways of calculating the scale were in use, each appropriate to a different emotion. The musician then picked up the theme (*nimitta*) of the composition. The theme functioned in several ways, and thus the word “theme” carried several meanings. On the one hand it was the essential message of the piece, the image or impression that the performer wanted to leave in the listener’s mind. On the other hand, it was the governing principle that determined what ornamentation or variations would be suitable to the piece.

These musical terms recur throughout the Buddha’s discussion of meditation [§§66, 74, 86, 150, 161, etc.]. For instance, in one context the Buddha says that one should establish one’s persistence to the right pitch, attune the remaining faculties to that pitch, and then pick up one’s theme. In other contexts, he says that one should become attuned to a particular theme, or that one should develop meditation in tune with a particular object. Impossibilities are said to be “non-base,” analogous to tones that cannot function as musical notes. There are enough passages to show that the Buddha used this terminology conscious of its musical connotations, and that he wanted to make the point that the practice of meditation was similar to the art of musical performance. We should thus try to be sensitive to these terms and their implications, for the comparison between music and meditation is a useful one.

In the most general sense, this comparison underlines the fact that the knowledge needed for release from suffering is the same sort as that involved in mastering a skill—a continued focus on the present, a sensitivity to one’s context, one’s own actions, and their combined consequences, rather than a command of an abstract body of facts. To develop the path is to become more and more sensitive to the present—in particular, more sensitive to one’s own sensitivity and its consequences. This is similar to the way in which a musician must learn to listen to his/her own performance, a process that ultimately involves listening to the quality of one’s listening itself. The greater one’s sensitivity in listening, the more profound one’s performances become. In the same way, the greater one’s sensitivity to one’s own mind in the development of skillful qualities, the more one abandons the causes of suffering and realizes its cessation.

In addition to this general observation, the comparison between music and meditation highlights a number of practical points in the development of meditative skill. First, it underscores the need for flexibility and ingenuity in the practice, tempered by an awareness of the limits of how far that flexibility can go. A skilled musician in the Buddha’s time had to master not one but many tuning systems so as to handle a full range of musical themes, while simultaneously knowing which ways of tuning were unworkable. In the same way, a skilled meditator should know of many valid ways of tuning the mind to the theme of its meditation—and should have a command of them all so as to deal with various contingencies as they arise—but at the same time must be aware that some varieties of meditation simply do not lead to Awakening. In this light, the seven sets of the Wings to Awakening can be viewed as the Buddha’s complete list of workable systems for tuning the mind. (There is evidence suggesting that seven is the number of musical tuning systems (*gramaraga*) recognized in the Buddha’s time.) The implication here is that any path of practice deviating from these systems would be like an instrument tuned

to a discordant scale, and would not be in harmony with the way of the contemplative (*samana*) who aims at a life in tune (*sama*) with the Dhamma.

A second point is that the musical analogy makes vivid the need for balance in meditative practice, a lesson that appears repeatedly in the texts [§§66, 86, 97, 161]. Just as a musical instrument should neither be too sharp nor too flat, the mind on the path has to find a balance between excessive energy and excessive stillness. At the same time, it must constantly watch out for the tendency for its energy to slacken in the same way that stringed instruments tend to go flat. The “rightness” of right view and other factors of the path thus carries the connotation not only of being correct, but also of being “just right.”

A third point is that this analogy helps clarify passages in the texts that speak of attaining the goal without effort [§62]. Taken out of context, these passages seem to contradict or totally negate the many other passages that focus on the need for effort in the practice. Viewed in context of the music analogy, however, they make perfect sense. Like a musical virtuoso, one develops skill to the point where it becomes effortless, but the perfection of the skill does not negate the fact that it took a great deal of effort to reach that level of mastery.

In fact, the Buddha’s path is a meta-skill—the full art or science of skillfulness, in and of itself—in which one focuses on the mind as the source of what is skillful and unskillful, learns to deal skillfully with unskillful states of mind, then to deal more skillfully even with skillful states to the point of focusing not on the skill, but on the skill of acquiring a skill, so that one ultimately sees what lies both in the skillfulness and beyond [§61].

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The passages included in this first section cover three themes: (1) how the distinction between what is skillful and not is fundamental to the practice; (2) how to determine what is skillful and not; and (3) how to become skillful in developing skillful states of mind. Because these issues are so basic, the passages are fairly self-explanatory. A few of their facets, however, are easy to overlook.

First, it is important to note that the definition of skillful states of mind as free of greed, aversion, and delusion, provides a convenient rule of thumb for distinguishing between intentions that are merely good and those that are actually skillful. Sometimes good intentions are colored by ignorance, as when one tries to help another person without knowing the true source of that person’s problem. This would qualify as a good but not a skillful intention. As we have noted, the processes of causality are sensitive and complex. Thus there is no getting by on well-meaning intentions alone. One must monitor one’s actions continually to make sure that they are, in fact, appropriate to the present situation and not based on ignorance. Delusion, even well-meaning delusion, is a source for unskillful acts. For this reason, one needs to be constantly observant of one’s actions and their effects [§6] so that one’s good intentions can truly become skillful, and one’s actions can actually do justice to the specific conditions in the here and now produced by the process of this/that conditionality.

Second, the distinction between skillful and unskillful provides an insightful explanation for the causes for good and evil behavior. This distinction is not limited to the values of any particular society, and it avoids the issue of whether beings are inherently good or bad. When people act in evil ways, it is because they lack skill in

the way they think; when they think in skillful ways, they naturally will do good. Because skill is something that can be acquired, the way to goodness is open for all people who want to be good, no matter how badly they have behaved in the past. The Canon tells of people who had committed misdeeds and, upon realizing their mistakes, confessed them to the Buddha. The most striking instance was King Ajatasattu [DN 2], who had killed his father in order to secure his position on the throne. In spite of the gross nature of the deed, the Buddha approved of the king's confession, and—instead of playing on any feelings of guilt the king might have had—encouraged him in his determination to mend his ways, adding that it is a cause for progress in the noble way if one realizes one's mistakes as such and resolves not to repeat them. Thus it is always possible to make a fresh start in life, aware of one's past bad kamma and resolving to mend one's ways, unburdened with any feelings that one might be inherently unworthy or bad.

Third, it is important to note the two basic factors, internal and external, that enable one to tell what is skillful and unskillful. The main internal factor is "appropriate attention," [§53] which is well illustrated in §1. One learns to view one's thoughts objectively, without partiality, in terms of their actual consequences. As this factor develops from a sense of conviction in the principle of kamma [§§9-17], it turns into the ability to view all of experience in terms of the four noble truths [§51].

The main external factor is friendship with admirable people [§54], defined as those who live by the principle of kamma. From their teachings, one can learn the advisability of trying to develop skillfulness in the first place; in their behavior, one can see skillfulness in action. These internal and external factors reinforce one another, in that skillful attitudes lead one to seek out admirable people to begin with, and admirable people lead one by word and example to see the less obvious advantages of skillful attitudes. Fortunately, every human being alive has some skillful qualities in his or her mind, as well as access to people who are admirable on at least some level. Thus no one consciously starting on the Buddhist path is starting from scratch. Rather, each person is advised to make the most of opportunities that have already been present and to search for further opportunities to develop the mind in a skillful direction.

The two prerequisites for skillfulness are amplified in §2. The discourse from which this passage comes—the Discourse to the Kalamas—is often referred to as the Buddha's charter of free inquiry, because of the emphasis it lays on seeing the truth for oneself, without reliance on outside authority. This interpretation, however, misses one of the important clauses in the discourse, where the Buddha says that one must take note of what wise people censure and praise. In other words, one must check one's own perceptions against those of people of upright character and solid experience, for until one gains Awakening, one's perceptions are bound to be partial and biased. This is why the Buddha says [§115] that friendship with admirable people—which begins with the ability to recognize admirable people—is the whole of the life of practice.

The interaction between appropriate attention and friendship with admirable people in mastering skillful mental qualities is well-illustrated in §6. This passage, in which the Buddha shortly after his Awakening is instructing his seven-year-old son (who was born just before Prince Siddhattha left home), shows very explicitly how one develops appropriate attention by reflecting on the consequences of one's actions before, while, and after acting. If one realizes, after acting, that what looked

like a proper action before and while acting actually turned out to have unfavorable consequences, one should confess the mistake to one's experienced friends on the path. This allows one to benefit from their counsel and also to make public one's resolve not to make the same mistake again. In this way, although one is responsible for treading the path oneself, one can benefit from the wisdom and encouragement of those already familiar with the way.

§ 1. Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me: 'Why don't I keep dividing my thinking into two classes?' So I made thinking imbued with sensuality, thinking imbued with ill will, & thinking imbued with harmfulness one class, and thinking imbued with renunciation, thinking imbued with non-ill will, & thinking imbued with harmlessness another class.

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. [Similarly with thinking imbued with ill will & harmfulness.]

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. [Similarly with thinking imbued with ill will & 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 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. [Similarly with thinking imbued with non-ill will & harmlessness.]

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. [Similarly with thinking imbued with non-ill will & 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 mental 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 (mental) qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. 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 aeons of cosmic contraction, many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons 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 their karma: ‘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 their kamma.

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 the effluents. 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 effluents.... This is the origination of effluents.... This is the cessation of effluents.... This is the way leading to the cessation of effluents.’ My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the effluent of sensuality, released from the effluent of becoming, released from the effluent 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

§ 2. As they were sitting to one side, the Kālāmas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One, ‘Venerable sir, there are some contemplatives & brahmins who come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, & disparage them. And then other contemplatives & brahmins come to Kesaputta. They expound & glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, & disparage them. They leave us simply uncertain & doubtful: Which of these venerable contemplatives & brahmins are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying?’

‘Of course you’re uncertain, Kālāmas. Of course you’re doubtful. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, “This contemplative is our teacher.” When you know for yourselves that, “These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when undertaken & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering”—then you should abandon them....

'What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?'

'For harm, lord.'

'And this greedy person, overcome by greed, his mind possessed by greed: Doesn't he kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, and induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm & suffering?'

'Yes, lord.'

[Similarly for aversion & delusion.]

So what do you think, Kālāmas? Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?'

'Unskillful, lord.'

'Blameworthy or blameless?'

'Blameworthy, lord.'

'Criticized by the wise or praised by the wise?'

'Criticized by the wise, lord.'

'When undertaken & carried out, do they lead to harm & to suffering, or not?'

'When undertaken & carried out, they lead to harm & to suffering...'

'...Now, Kālāmas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when undertaken & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness"—then you should enter & remain in them.

'What do you think, Kālāmas? When lack of greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?'

'For welfare, lord.'

'And this ungreedy person, not overcome by greed, his mind not possessed by greed: He doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare & happiness—right?'

'Yes, lord.'

[Similarly for lack of aversion & lack of delusion.]

So what do you think, Kālāmas? Are these qualities skillful or unskillful?'

'Skillful, lord.'

'Blameworthy or blameless?'

'Blameless, lord.'

'Criticized by the wise or praised by the wise?'

'Praised by the wise, lord.'

'When undertaken & carried out, do they lead to welfare & to happiness, or not?'

'When undertaken & carried out, they lead to welfare & to happiness...'

AN 3:65

§ 3. Now what is unskillful? Taking life is unskillful, taking what is not given... sexual misconduct... lying... abusive speech... divisive tale-bearing... idle chatter is unskillful. Covetousness... ill will... wrong views are unskillful. These things are termed unskillful.

And what 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 termed the roots of what is unskillful.

And what 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 termed skillful.

And what are the roots of what is skillful? Lack of greed is a root of what is skillful, lack of aversion is a root of what is skillful, lack of delusion is a root of what is skillful. These are termed the roots of what is skillful.

MN 9

§ 4. The Tathāgata, the Worthy one, the Rightly Self-awakened One has two Dhamma discourses given in sequence. Which two? 'See evil as evil.' This is the first Dhamma discourse. 'Having seen evil as evil, become disenchanted there, dispassionate there, released.' This is the second Dhamma discourse....

...See evil.

Be dispassionate there toward evil.

Then, with a mind dispassionate

you will put an end to suffering & stress.

Iti 39

§ 5. 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 and pain, I would not say to you, 'Abandon what is unskillful.' But because this abandoning of what is unskillful is conducive to benefit and pleasure, 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 and pain, I would not say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.' But because this development of what is skillful is conducive to benefit and pleasure, I say to you, 'Develop what is skillful.'

AN2:19

§ 6. The Buddha: What do you think, Rāhula? What is a mirror for?

Rāhula: For reflection, sir.

The Buddha: In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

Whenever you want to perform a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I want to perform—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do.

[Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

While you are performing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.

[Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

Having performed a bodily action, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful qualities.

[Similarly with verbal actions.]

Having performed a mental action, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with it. Feeling horrified... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful mental action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful qualities.

Rāhula, all the contemplatives & brahmins in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

All the contemplatives & brahmins in the course of the future... All the

contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

Therefore, Rāhula, you should train yourself: 'I will purify my bodily actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my verbal actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my mental actions through repeated reflection.' Thus you should train yourself.

That is what the Blessed One said. Glad at heart, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One's words.

MN 61

§ 7.   The non-doing       of any evil,  
        the performance   of what's skillful,  
        the cleansing       of one's own mind:

This is the Buddhas' teaching.

Not disparaging, not injuring,  
 restraint     in line with the Pāṭimokkha,  
 moderation   in food,  
 dwelling     in seclusion,  
 commitment to the heightened mind:

This is the Buddhas' teaching.

Dhp 183, 185

## B. KAMMA & THE ENDING OF KAMMA

The Buddha's doctrine of kamma takes the fact of skillful action, which can be observed on the ordinary sensory level, and gives it an importance that, for a person pursuing the Buddhist goal, must be accepted on faith. According to this doctrine, skillful action is not simply one factor out of many contributing to happiness: it is the primary factor. It does not lead simply to happiness within the dimensions of time and the present: if developed to the ultimate level of refinement, it can lead to an Awakening totally released from those dimensions. These assertions cannot be proven prior to an experience of that Awakening, but they must be accepted as working hypotheses in the effort to develop the skillfulness needed for Awakening. This paradox—which lies at the heart of the act of taking refuge in the Triple Gem—explains why the serious pursuit of the Buddhist path is a sustained act of faith that can become truly firm and verified only with the first glimpse of Awakening, called stream-entry. It also explains why a strong desire to gain release from the stress and suffering inherent in conditioned existence is needed for such a pursuit, for without that desire it is very difficult to break through this paradox with the necessary leap of faith.

The basic context for the doctrine of kamma was provided by the first two

insights on the night of the Buddha's Awakening—remembrance of previous lives, and insight into the death and rebirth of beings throughout the cosmos [§1]. This context was expressed in terms of personal narrative (the story of the Bodhisatta's own journey from life to life) and cosmology (general principles underlying the workings of the cosmos as a whole). The possibility of rebirth accounted for the way in which kamma could shape experiences in life, such as the situation into which a young child is born, for which no kammic cause in the present lifetime could be found. The pattern of death and rebirth for all beings, in which the quality of the state of rebirth depends on the moral quality of actions performed in previous lifetimes, presented the possibility that moral standards, instead of being mere social conventions, were intrinsic to the workings of any and all experience of the cosmos.

Essential to the Buddha's second insight was his realization of the mind's role in determining the moral quality of actions. His analysis of the process of developing a skill showed him that skillfulness depended not so much on the physical performance of an act as on the mental qualities of perception, attention, and intention that played a part in it. Of these three qualities, the intention formed the essence of the act [§10]—as it constituted the decision to act—while attention and perception informed it. Thus the skillfulness of these mental phenomena accounted for the act's kammic consequences. The less greed, aversion, and delusion motivating the act, the better its results. Unintentional acts would have kammic consequences only when they resulted from carelessness in areas where one would reasonably be held responsible. Intentional actions performed under the influence of right view—which on this level means conviction in the principle of kamma [II/E; III/A; §106]—led inherently to pleasant states of rebirth, while those performed under the influence of wrong view led to unpleasant states. Thus the quality of the views on which one acts—i.e., the quality of the perception and attention informing the intention—is a major factor in shaping experience. This observation undercuts the radical distinction between mind and material reality that is taken for granted in our own culture and was also assumed by many of the Samana schools of the Buddha's time. From the Buddha's viewpoint, mental and physical phenomena are two sides of a single coin, with the mental side of prior importance [§8].

Most descriptions of the Buddha's teachings on kamma tend to stop here, but there are many passages on kamma in the Canon—and included in this section—that do not fit into the neat picture based merely the first two insights on the night of the Awakening. The only way to account for these passages is to note the simple fact that Buddha's teachings on kamma were shaped not only by these two insights, but also by the third insight and the resulting knowledge of Unbinding. The third insight explored the possibility of a fourth kind of kamma—in addition to good, bad, and a mixture of the two—that was skillful enough to bring about the ending of kamma [§§16-17]. At the same time, in the course of developing the level of skillfulness needed to bring kamma to an end, the Buddha learned a great deal about the nature of action that forced him to recast his understanding of kamma in much more subtle terms. The knowledge of Unbinding—which followed on the full development of this fourth type of kamma and the realizations that accompanied it—acted as proof that the understandings comprising the three insights were true. To explore these points will not only help give us a more complete understanding of the Buddha's teachings on kamma, but will also show why conviction in the principle of skillful kamma is essential to Buddhist practice.

In his effort to master kamma in such a way as to bring kamma to an end, the Buddha discovered that he had to abandon the contexts of personal narrative and cosmology in which the issue of kamma first presented itself. Both these forms of understanding deal in categories of being and non-being, self and others, but the Buddha found that it was impossible to bring kamma to an end if one thought in such terms. For example, narrative and cosmological modes of thinking would lead one to ask whether the agent who performed an act of kamma was the same as the person experiencing the result, someone else, both, or neither. If one answered that it was the same person, then the person experiencing the result would have to identify not only with the actor, but also with the mode of action, and thus would not be able to gain release from it. If one answered that it was another person, both oneself and another, or neither, then the person experiencing the result would see no need to heighten the skill or understanding of his/her own kamma in the present, for the experience of pleasure and pain was not his or her own full responsibility. In either case, the development of the fourth type of kamma would be aborted [§§228-229].

To avoid the drawbacks of the narrative and cosmological mind-sets, the Buddha pursued an entirely different tack—what he called “entry into emptiness,” and what modern philosophy calls radical phenomenology: a focus on the events of present consciousness, in and of themselves, without reference to questions of whether there are any entities underlying those events. In the Buddha’s case, he focused simply on the process of kammic cause and result as it played itself out in the immediate present, in the process of developing the skillfulness of the mind, without reference to who or what lay behind those processes. On the most basic level of this mode of awareness, there was no sense even of “existence” or “non-existence” [§186], but simply the events of stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to its cessation, arising and passing away. Through this mode he was able to pursue the fourth type of kamma to its end, at the same time gaining heightened insight into the nature of action itself and its many implications, including questions of rebirth, the relationship of mental to physical events, and the way kamma constructs all experience of the cosmos.

Because the Buddha gained both understanding of and release from kamma by pursuing the phenomenological mode of attention, his full-dress systematic analysis of kamma is also expressed in that mode. This analysis is included in his teachings on this/that conditionality, dependent co-arising, and the four noble truths: the three levels of refinement in the type of right view without effluents that underlay his mastery of the fourth type of kamma. Here we will consider, in turn, how each of these teachings shaped the Buddha’s teachings on kamma, how the knowledge of Unbinding confirmed those teachings, and how the success of the phenomenological mode of analysis shaped the Buddha’s use of narrative and cosmological modes in instructing others. We will conclude with a discussion of how these points show the need for conviction in the principle of kamma as a working hypothesis for anyone who wants to gain release from suffering and stress.

To begin with **this/that conditionality**: This principle accounts not only for the complexity of the kammic process, but also for its being regular without at the same time being rigidly deterministic. The non-linearity of this/that conditionality also accounts for the fact that the process can be successfully dismantled by radical attention to the present moment.



Unlike the theory of linear causality—which led the Vedists and Jains to see the relationship between an act and its result as predictable and tit-for-tat—the principle of this/that conditionality makes that relationship inherently complex. The results of kamma experienced at any one point in time come not only from past kamma, but also from present kamma. This means that, although there are general patterns relating habitual acts to corresponding results [§9], there is no set one-for-one, tit-for-tat, relationship between a particular action and its results. Instead, the results are determined by the context of the act, both in terms of actions that preceded or followed it [§11] and in terms one's state of mind at the time of acting or experiencing the result [§13]. As we noted in the Introduction, the feedback loops inherent in this/that conditionality mean that the working out of any particular cause-effect relationship can be very complex indeed. This explains why the Buddha says in §12 that the results of kamma are imponderable. Only a person who has developed the mental range of a Buddha—another imponderable itself—would be able to trace the intricacies of the kammic network. The basic premise of kamma is simple—that skillful intentions lead to favorable results, and unskillful ones to unfavorable results—but the process by which those results work themselves out is so intricate that it cannot be fully mapped. We can compare this with the Mandelbrot set (see the cover of this book), a mathematical set generated by a simple equation, but whose graph is so complex that it will probably never be completely explored.

Although the precise working out of the kammic process is somewhat unpredictable, it is not chaotic. The relationship between kammic causes and their effects is entirely regular: when an action is of the sort that it will be felt in such and such a way, that is how its result will be experienced [§13]. Skillful intentions lead to favorable results, unskillful ones to unfavorable results. Thus, when one participates in the kammic process, one is at the mercy of a pattern that one's actions put into motion but that is not entirely under one's present control. Despite the power of the mind, one cannot reshape the basic laws of cosmic causality at whim. These laws include the physical laws, within which one's kamma must ripen and work itself out. This is the point of passage §14, in which the Buddha explains that present pain can be explained not only by past kamma but also by a host of other factors; the list of alternative factors he gives comes straight from the various causes for pain that were recognized in the medical treatises of his time. If we compare this list with his definition of old kamma in §15, we see that many if not all of the alternative causes are actually the result of past actions. The point here is that old kamma does not override other causal factors operating in the universe—such as those recognized by the physical sciences—but instead finds its expression within them.

However, the fact that the kammic process relies on input from the present moment means that it is not totally deterministic. Input from the past may place restrictions on what can be done and known in any particular moment, but the allowance for new input from the present provides some room for free will. This allowance also opens the possibility for escape from the cycle of kamma altogether by means of the fourth type of kamma: the development of heightened skillfulness through the pursuit of the seven factors for Awakening and the noble eightfold path—and, by extension, all of the Wings to Awakening [§16-17].

The non-linearity of this/that conditionality explains why heightened skillfulness, when focused on the present moment, can succeed in leading to the end of the

kamma that has formed the experience of the entire cosmos. All non-linear processes exhibit what is called scale invariance, which means that the behavior of the process on any one scale is similar to its behavior on smaller or larger scales. To understand, say, the large-scale pattern of a particular non-linear process, one need only focus on its behavior on a smaller scale that is easier to observe, and one will see the same pattern at work. In the case of kamma, one need only focus on the process of kamma in the immediate present, in the course of developing heightened skillfulness, and the large-scale issues over the expanses of space and time will become clear as one gains release from them.

The teaching on **dependent co-arising** helps to provide more detailed instructions on this point, showing precisely where the cycle of kamma provides openings for more skillful present input. In doing so, it both explains the importance of the act of attention in developing the fourth type of kamma, and acts as a guide for focusing attention on present experience in appropriate ways [III/H/iii].

Dependent co-arising shows how the cosmos, when viewed in the context of how it is directly experienced by a person developing skillfulness, is subsumed entirely under factors that are immediately present to awareness: the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental fabrication, and consciousness, and the six sense media [§§212-213]. Included in this description is the Buddha's ultimate analysis of kamma and rebirth. The nexus of kamma, clinging, becoming, and birth accounts for the realm in which birth takes place [§220], whereas the nexus of name-and-form with consciousness accounts for the arising and survival of the kammically active organism within that realm [§231]. Also included in dependent co-arising is a detailed analysis of the way in which kamma can—but does not necessarily have to—lead to bondage to the cycle of rebirth. Unlike the Jains, the Buddha taught that this bondage was mental rather than physical. It was caused not by sticky substances created by the physical violence of an act, but by the fact that, when there is ignorance of the four noble truths [III/H/i] (a subtle form of delusion, the most basic root of unskillfulness), the feeling that results from kamma gives rise to craving (a subtle form of greed and aversion), clinging, and becoming; and these, in turn, form the conditions for further kamma.

Thus the results of action, in the presence of ignorance, breed the conditions for more action, creating feedback loops that keep the kammic processes in motion. For this reason, the Buddha defined the effluents as clinging—expressed in some lists as sensuality, in others as sensuality and views—together with becoming and the ignorance that underlies them all. If ignorance of the four truths can be ended, however, feeling does not form a condition for craving or clinging, and thus there is no becoming to provide a realm for further kamma. Thus the mastery of the fourth type of kamma requires discernment of the four noble truths.

It is important to note that dependent co-arising makes no statements as to the existence or lack of existence of any entity to which these events pertain or to whom they belong [§230]. As we noted above, such terms of analysis as “being,” “non-being,” “self,” or “other,” pertain properly to the modes of cosmology and personal narrative, and have no place in a radically phenomenological analysis. Questions and terms that derive from the conventions of narrative and the construction of a worldview have no place in the direct awareness of experience in and of itself. This is one reason why people who have not mastered the path of practice and who thus function primarily in terms of a worldview or a sense of their own personal

story, find the teaching of dependent co-arising so inscrutable. Even though the Buddha's phenomenological approach answered his questions as to the nature of kamma, it also reshaped his questions so that they had little in common with the questions that most people bring to the practice. As with all insights gained on the phenomenological level, dependent co-arising is expressed in terms closest to the actual experience of events. Only when a person has become thoroughly familiar with that level of experience is the analysis fully intelligible. Thus, although the detailed nature of dependent co-arising is one of its strengths, it is also one of its weaknesses as a teaching tool, for the subtlety and complexity of the analysis can be intimidating even to advanced practitioners.

For this reason, the Buddha most often expressed the right view underlying the fourth type of kamma in terms of **the four noble truths**. These truths provide a more congenial entry point into the phenomenological mode of awareness for they focus the analysis of kamma directly on the question of stress and suffering: issues that tie in immediately with the narratives that people make of their own life experiences. As the Buddha noted in his second insight, his memory of previous lives included his experience of pleasure and pain in each life, and most people—when recounting their own lives—tend to focus on these issues as well. The four truths, however, do not stop simply with tales about stress: they approach it from the problem-solving perspective of a person engaged in developing a skill. What this means for the meditator trying to master the fourth type of kamma is that these truths cannot be fully comprehended by passive observation. Only by participating sensitively in the process of developing skillfulness and gaining a practical feel for the relationship of cause and effect among the mental factors that shape that process, can one eradicate the effluents that obstruct the ending of kamma [II/B; III/E; III/H]. This point is underscored by a fact noted above: the ignorance and craving that are needed to keep the cycle of kamma in motion are subtle forms of the roots of unskillfulness. Thus, only through developing skillfulness to the ultimate degree can the cycle be brought to equilibrium and, as a result, disband.

The truth of the Buddha's understanding of the processes of kamma—as informed by this/that conditionality, dependent co-arising, and the four noble truths—was proven by **the knowledge of Unbinding** that followed immediately on his mastery of the fourth type of kamma. He found that when skillfulness is intentionally brought to a point of full consummation, as expressed in the direct awareness of this/that conditionality, it leads to a state of non-action, or non-fashioning, that forms the threshold to a level of consciousness in which all experience of the cosmos has fallen away. When one's experience of the cosmos resumes after the experience of Awakening, one sees clearly that it is composed entirely of the results of old kamma; with no new kamma being added to the process, all experience of the cosmos will eventually run out—or, in the words of the texts [S225], “will grow cold right here.” This discovery proved the basic premise that kamma not only plays a role in shaping experience of the cosmos, it plays the primary role. If this were not so, then even when kamma was ended there would still remain the types of experience that came from other sources. But because no experience of the cosmos remained when all present kamma disbanded, and none would resume after all old kamma ran out, kamma would have to be the necessary factor accounting for all such experience. This fact implies that even the limiting factors that one encounters in terms of sights, sounds, etc., are actually the fruit of past kamma in thought, word, and deed—committed not only in

this, but also in many preceding lifetimes. Thus, even though the Buddha's development of the fourth type of kamma focused on the present moment, the resulting Awakening gave insights that encompassed not only the present but also all of time.

Having used the phenomenological mode to solve the problem of kamma and reach Unbinding, however, the Buddha was not limited to that mode. After his Awakening, he was free to return at will to the narrative and cosmological modes of thought and speech, without being caught up in their presuppositions [DN 9]. For most people, he found, even the four noble truths were too alien to form an entry point into the teaching. Thus he had to use the narrative and cosmological modes of discourse to bring such people, step by step, to the point where they were ready to comprehend those truths. What he had learned in the final stage of his Awakening did not negate the validity of the first and second insights into kamma and rebirth; instead, it perfected them. The main change that the experience of Awakening made in his view of personal narrative and cosmology is that it opened them both to the dimension of release. The drama of kamma in the cosmos is not a closed cycle; the principles of kamma can be mastered to the point where they open to the way out, just as the gravity of the sun and earth could bring the moon to a point of resonance where it is freed from their power. The narrative of a person's course through the cosmos is not doomed to aimless and endlessly repeated death and rebirth; the person can tread the path of practice to Unbinding and so bring the narrative to an end.

Thus the Buddha used narrative and cosmological explanations to persuade his listeners to explore the phenomenology of skillful action so that they too might gain release; his descriptions of the role of action in shaping the vast expanses of space, time, and existence was designed to focus the listener's attention on the liberating potential of what he/she was doing in the here and now. Some of his most poignant teachings are narratives devoted to just this purpose:

What do you think, monks? Which is greater, the tears you have shed while transmigrating & wandering this long time—crying & weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, from being separated from what is pleasing—or the water in the four great oceans?... This is the greater: The tears you have shed.... Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning, monks, comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, although 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—long enough to become disenchanted with all fabrications, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.

SN 15:3

The cosmological discourses—such as DN 26, DN 27, MN 129, and MN 130—are aimed at a similar point. DN 26 describes how the evolution and devolution of the cosmos derive from the skillful and unskillful kamma of the beings who inhabit it, and ends with the admonition that one should make an island for oneself, safe from the process of the ups and downs of the cosmos. This island is nothing other than the practice of the four frames of reference, which, as we will see in II/B, are precisely the training aimed at familiarizing oneself with the

phenomenology of skillful action. DN 27 shows how kamma accounts for the evolution of human society, ending with the statement that the most exalted member of society is the Arahant who has gained release through highest discernment. MN 129 and MN 130 give graphic descriptions of the levels of heaven and hell into which beings may be reborn after death through the power of good and bad kamma, MN 130 ending with a verse on the need to practice the path to non-clinging to escape the dangers of birth and death entirely.

Thus the experience of his Awakening gave a new purpose to narrative and cosmology in the Buddha's eyes: they became tools for persuading his listeners to adopt the training that would lead them to the phenomenological mode. This accounts for the ad hoc and fragmentary nature of the narratives and cosmological sketches in his teachings. They are not meant to be analyzed in a systematic way. It is a mistake to tease out their implications to see what they may say about such metaphysical questions as the existence or lack of existence of entities or identities underlying the process of kamma and rebirth, the relationship between the laws of kamma and the laws of the physical sciences, or the nature of the mechanism by which kamma makes its results felt over time [see the discussion of appropriate questions in II/G]. The search for systematic answers to such issues is not only invalid or irrelevant from the Buddhist point of view, it is actually counterproductive in that it blocks one from entering the path to release. And, we should note, none of the modes of discourse—narrative, cosmological, or phenomenological—is capable of describing or even framing proper questions about what happens after Awakening, for such issues, which lie beyond the conditions of time and the present, cannot be properly expressed by the conventions of language and analysis, which are bound by those conditions. Only a person who has mastered the skill of release has the mental skills needed to comprehend such matters [AN 4:173, MFU pp. 31-32]. The Buddha reserved his systematic explanations for the particular phenomenological mode to be used in viewing the process of kamma in its own terms, as it is being mastered, so that the actual problem of kamma and its retribution (as opposed to the theoretical questions about them) will be solved. The right way to listen to the narratives and cosmological sketches, then, is to see what they imply about one's own need to master the kammic process on the level of awareness in and of itself.

From these points it should become clear why kamma, as an article of faith, is a necessary factor in the path of Buddhist practice. The teaching on kamma, in its narrative and cosmological forms, provides the context for the practice, giving it direction and urgency. Because the cosmos is governed by the laws of kamma, those laws provide the only mechanism by which happiness can be found. But because good and bad kamma, consisting of good and bad intentions, simply perpetuate the ups and downs of experience in the cosmos, a way must be found out of the mechanism of kamma by mastering it in a way that allows it to disband in an attentive state of non-intention. And, because there is no telling what sudden surprises the results of one's past kamma may still hold in store, one should try to develop that mastery as quickly as possible.

In its phenomenological mode, the teaching on kamma accounts for the focus and the terms of analysis used in the practice. It also accounts for the mental qualities needed to attain and maintain that level of focus and analysis. In terms of focus, the principle of scale invariance at work in the complexities of kamma means

that their essential processes can be mastered by focusing total attention on them right at the mind in the immediate present. This focus accounts for the practice of frames-of-reference meditation [II/B], in which attention is directed at present phenomena in and of themselves. These phenomena are then analyzed in terms of the four noble truths, the phenomenological terms in which appropriate attention and discernment direct and observe the experience of developing the qualities of skillful action.

The most immediate skillful kamma that can be observed on this level is the mastery of the very same mental qualities that are supporting this refined level of focus and analysis: mindfulness, concentration, and discernment, together with the more basic qualities on which they are based. Thus, these mental qualities act not only as supports to the focus and analysis, but also as their object. Ultimately, discernment becomes so refined that the focus and analysis take as their object the act of focusing and analyzing, in and of themselves. The cycle of action then short-circuits as it reaches culmination, and Unbinding occurs. These elements of focus, analysis, and mental qualities, together with the dynamic of their development to a point of culmination, are covered by the teachings on the Wings to Awakening discussed in detail in Parts II and III. Thus the Wings can be viewed as a direct expression of the role of skillful kamma in the path to release.

It is entirely possible that a person with no firm conviction in the principle of kamma can follow parts of the Buddhist path, including mindfulness and concentration practices, and gain positive results from them. For instance, one can pursue mindfulness practice for the sense of balance, equanimity, and peace it gives to one's daily life, or for the sake of bringing the mind to the present for the purpose of spontaneity and "going with the flow." The full practice of the path, however, is a skillful diverting of the flow of the mind from its habitual kammic streams to the stream of Unbinding. As the Buddha said, this practice requires a willingness to "develop and abandon" to an extreme degree [AN 4:28]. The *developing* requires a supreme effort aimed at full and conscious mastery of mindfulness, concentration, and discernment to the point of non-fashioning and on to release. A lack of conviction in the principle of kamma would undercut the patience and commitment, the desire, persistence, intent, and refined powers of discrimination [II/D] needed to pursue concentration and discernment to the most heightened levels, beyond what is needed for a general sense of peace or spontaneity. The *abandoning* involves uprooting the most deeply buried forms of clinging and attachment that keep one bound to the cycle of rebirth. Some of these forms of clinging—such as views and theories about self-identity—are so entrenched in the narrative and cosmological modes in which most people function that only firm conviction in the benefits to be had by abandoning them will be able to pry them loose. This is why the Buddha insisted repeatedly—and we will have occasion to return to this theme at several points in this book [II/E; III/A]—that conviction in the fact of his Awakening necessarily involves conviction in the principle of kamma, and that both forms of conviction are needed for the full mastery of the kamma of heightened skillfulness leading to release.

The Canon contains many well-known passages where the Buddha asks his listeners not to accept his teachings simply on faith, but these remarks were directed to people just beginning the practice. Such people need only accept the general principles of skillful action on a trial basis, focusing on the input of their actions into the causal system at the present moment, and exploring the connection between

skillful intentions and favorable results. The more complex issues of kamma come into play at this level only in forcing one to be patient with the practice. Many times skillful intentions do not produce their favorable results immediately, aside from the sense of well-being—sometimes clearly perceptible, sometimes barely—that comes with acting skillfully. Were it not for this delay, the principle of kamma would be self-evident, no one would dare act on unskillful intentions, and there would be no need to take the principle on faith. As we noted in the Introduction, the complexity of this/that conditionality is the major cause for the confusion and lack of skill with which most people live their lives. The ability to master this process takes time.

As one progresses further on the path, however—and as the process of developing skillfulness in and of itself comes more and more to take center stage in one's awareness—the actual results of developing skillfulness should give greater and greater reason for conviction in the principle of kamma. Except in cases where people fall into the trap of heedlessness or complacency, these results can spur and inspire one to hold to the principle of kamma with the increasing levels of firmness, focus, and refinement needed for Awakening.

§ 8. Phenomena are preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.

If you speak or act with a corrupted heart,  
then suffering follows you—  
as the wheel of the cart,  
the track of the ox  
that pulls it.

Phenomena are preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.  
If you speak or act with a calm, bright heart,  
then happiness follows you,  
like a shadow  
that never leaves.

Dhp 1-2

§ 9. Beings are owners of kamma, heir to kamma, born of kamma, related through kamma, and have kamma as their arbitrator. Kamma is what creates distinctions among beings in terms of coarseness & refinement....

There is the case where a certain woman or man is one who takes life—brutal, bloody-handed, violent, cruel, merciless to living beings. From performing & undertaking such kamma, then on the breakup of the body, after death, this person re-appears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. Or, if he/she does not reappear in the plane of deprivation... in hell, but instead returns to the human state, then wherever he/she is reborn, he/she is short-lived. This is the way leading to short life, namely being one who

takes life....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life, dwelling with rod laid down, knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. From performing & undertaking such kamma, then on the breakup of the body, after death, this person re-appears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world. Or, if he/she does not reappear... in the heavenly world, but instead returns to the human state, then wherever he/she is reborn, he/she is long-lived. This is the way leading to long life, namely being one who, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man has a tendency to injure living beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife.... On the breakup of the body, after death, this person re-appears in the plane of deprivation.... in hell. Or, if he/she... instead returns to the human state, then wherever he/she is reborn, he/she is sickly. This is the way leading to being sickly, namely being one who has a tendency to injure living beings....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man does not have a tendency to injure living beings.... This is the way leading to being healthy....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man has an angry & irritable nature. Even when lightly criticized, he/she gets offended, provoked, hostile, & resentful, and displays annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.... This is the way leading to being ugly....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man does not have an angry & irritable nature. Even when heavily criticized, he/she does not get offended, provoked, hostile, or resentful, and displays no annoyance, aversion, or bitterness.... This is the way leading to being beautiful....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man has an envious nature—envying, resenting, & begrudging the fortune, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration received by others.... This is the way leading to having little authority....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man does not have an envious nature—neither envying, resenting, nor begrudging the fortune, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration received by others.... This is the way leading to having great authority....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man does not give food, drink, clothing, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lamps to contemplatives or brahmans.... This is the way leading to being poor....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man gives food, drink, clothing, vehicles, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, & lamps to contemplatives & brahmans.... This is the way leading to being wealthy....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man is obstinate & arrogant, not paying homage to those who deserve homage, not rising up for those in whose presence one should rise up, not offering a seat to those who deserve a seat, not making way for those for whom one should make way, not honoring, respecting, revering, or venerating those who should be honored... venerated. This is the way leading to being reborn in a low birth....



But there is the case where a certain woman or man is not obstinate or arrogant, who pays homage to those who deserve homage, rises up for those in whose presence one should rise up, offers a seat to those who deserve a seat, makes way for those for whom one should make way, honors, respects, reveres, & venerates those who should be honored... venerated. This is the way leading to being reborn in a high birth....

Furthermore, there is the case where a certain woman or man, having approached a contemplative or brahman, does not ask, "What, venerable sir, is skillful? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What is to be cultivated? What is not to be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my long-term harm & suffering? What kind of action will lead to my long-term welfare & happiness?".... This is the way leading to having weak discernment....

But there is the case where a certain woman or man, having approached a contemplative or brahman, asks, "What, venerable sir, is skillful? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What is to be cultivated? What is not to be cultivated? What kind of action will lead to my long-term harm & suffering? What kind of action will lead to my long-term welfare & happiness?".... This is the way leading to having great discernment....

Beings are owners of kamma, heir to kamma, born of kamma, related through kamma, and have kamma as their arbitrator. Kamma is what creates distinctions among beings in terms of coarseness & refinement.

MN 135

§ 10. '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 leading to the cessation of kamma should be known.' Thus it has been said. Why was it said?

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

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

And what 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 heavenly worlds. [In Buddhist cosmology, sojourns in hell or in heaven, as in the other realms, are not eternal. After the force of one's kamma leading to rebirth in those levels has worn out, one is reborn elsewhere.]....

And what 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....

And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the path of practice 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.

'Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play... The diversity in kamma... The result of kamma... The cessation of kamma... The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.' Thus it has been said, and this is why it was said.

AN 6:63

§ 11. There are four kinds of persons 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 harshly, engages in idle chatter; is covetous, has a hostile mind, & 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, does not have a hostile mind, & 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, does not have a hostile mind, & 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 acquired & adopted 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 acquired & adopted 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

§ 12. These four imponderables are not to be speculated about. Whoever speculates about them would go mad & experience vexation. Which four? The Buddha-range of the Buddhas [i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha].... The jhāna-range of one absorbed in jhāna [i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while absorbed in jhāna].... The results of kamma.... Speculation about [the first moment, purpose, etc., of] the cosmos is an imponderable that is not to be speculated about. Whoever speculates about these things would go mad & experience vexation.

## AN 4:77

§ 13. The Buddha: ‘For anyone who says, “In whatever way a person makes kamma, that is how it is experienced,” there is no living of the holy life, there is no opportunity for the right ending of stress. But for anyone who says, “When a person makes kamma to be felt in such & such a way, that is how its result is experienced,” there is the living of the holy life, there is the opportunity for the right ending of stress.

‘There is the case where a trifling evil act done by a certain individual takes him to hell. There is the case where the very same sort of trifling act done by another individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

‘Now, a trifling evil act done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in the body [i.e., pleasant feelings can invade the mind and stay there—see MN 36], undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind [i.e., painful feelings can invade the mind and stay there], undeveloped in discernment: restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with suffering. A trifling evil act done by this sort of individual takes him to hell.

‘Now, a trifling evil act done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in the body [i.e., pleasant feelings cannot invade the mind and stay there], developed in virtue, developed in mind [i.e., painful feelings cannot invade the mind and stay there], developed in discernment: unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the unlimited. A trifling evil act done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

‘Suppose that a man were to drop a salt crystal into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the salt crystal, and unfit to drink?’

‘Yes, lord....’

‘Now suppose that a man were to drop a salt crystal into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the salt crystal, and unfit to drink?’

‘No, lord....’

'In the same way, there is the case where a trifling evil act done by one individual [the first] takes him to hell; and there is the case where the very same sort of trifling act done by the other individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.'

AN 3:99

§ 14. Moliyasivaka: There are some contemplatives & brahmins who are of this doctrine, this view: 'Whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before.' Now what does Master Gotama say to that?

The Buddha: There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [i.e., diseases and pains that come from a malfunctioning gall bladder]. You yourself should know how some feelings arise based on bile. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise based on bile. So any contemplatives & brahmins who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmins are wrong.

There are cases where some feelings arise based on phlegm... based on internal winds... based on a combination of bodily humors... from the change of the seasons... from uneven ['out-of-tune'] care of the body... from attacks... from the result of kamma. You yourself should know how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. So any contemplatives & brahmins who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmins are wrong.

SN 36:21

§ 15. What, monks, 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.

And what is the cessation of kamma? Whoever touches the release that comes from the cessation of bodily kamma, verbal kamma, & mental kamma. That is called the cessation of kamma.

And what is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma? Just this noble eightfold path.... This is called the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

SN 35:145

§ 16. These four types of kamma have been understood, realized, & made known by me. Which four? There is kamma that is black with black result; kamma that is white with white result; kamma that is black & white with black & white result; and kamma that is neither black nor white with neither black nor white result, leading to the ending of kamma.

And what is kamma that is black with black result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an injurious bodily fabrication... an injurious verbal fabrication... an injurious mental fabrication.... He rearises in an injurious world where he is touched by injurious contacts.... He experiences feelings that are exclusively painful, like those of the beings in hell. This is called kamma that is black with black result.

And what is kamma that is white with white result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an uninjurious bodily fabrication... an uninjurious verbal fabrication... an uninjurious mental fabrication.... He rearises in an uninjurious world where he is touched by uninjurious contacts.... He experiences feelings that are exclusively pleasant, like those of the Ever-radiant Devas. This is called kamma that is white with white result.

And what is kamma that is black & white with black & white result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a bodily fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious... a verbal fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious... a mental fabrication that is injurious & uninjurious.... He rearises in an injurious & uninjurious world where he is touched by injurious & uninjurious contacts.... He experiences injurious & uninjurious 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 black & white with black & white result.

And what is kamma that is neither black nor white with neither black nor white result, leading to the ending of kamma? The intention right there to abandon this kamma that is black with black result, the intention right there to abandon this kamma that is white with white result, the intention right there to abandon this kamma that is black & white with black & white result. This is called kamma that is neither black nor white with neither black nor white result, leading to the ending of kamma.

AN 4:232

[A related discourse repeats most of the above, defining black kamma with black result with the following example: "There is the case of a certain person who kills living beings, steals what is not given, engages in illicit sex, tells lies, and drinks fermented & distilled liquors that are the basis for heedlessness," and white kamma with white result with the following example: "There is the case of a certain person who abstains from killing living beings, abstains from stealing what is not given, abstains from engaging in illicit sex, abstains from telling lies, and abstains from drinking fermented & distilled liquors that are the basis for heedlessness."]

AN 4:234

§ 17. And what is kamma that is neither black nor white with neither black nor white result, leading to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

AN 4:237

[The discourse immediately following this is identical to this except that it replaces the above factors of the noble eightfold path with the following seven factors for Awakening: mindfulness as a factor for Awakening, analysis of qualities... persistence... rapture... serenity... concentration... equanimity as a factor for Awakening.]

AN 4:238