

**The Heart of Theravada Buddhism:  
The Noble Eightfold Path**

by

**David Holmes**

**Chulalongkorn Univesity**

**A paper originally presented in the Phi Theta Kappa Guest-Lecture Series,  
Fall, 1990, at the University of Maryland, Munich Campus.**

**This book explains the actual words that the Lord Buddha said and taught to his disciples, over 2500 years ago, about following the path to enlightenment and nibbana, with an emphasis on personal discipline, in daily Buddhist practice, in the thoughts and actions of life, avoiding causation of harm and developing the moral and spiritual purity needed for achieving higher-levels of concentraton and understanding on the path to the cecessation of the needs which cause the sufferings of the world.**

## Preface

Having compiled this text, it is appropriate that I say a few words in recognition and praise of my teachers:

I began my studies as an Honours Student at McMaster University, in Canada, in the Department of Philosophy, at the end of the 50's, where they gave me a sound foundation in the history of metaphysics and epistemology. Like many another raw youth of the so-called "beat generation," however, I also owned a copy of Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* without understanding what the author wanted to say.

In due course, after graduate work in Germany on philosophy and literature, I became a lecturer at the University of Maryland, Munich Campus, where I served 25 years, before joining the faculty of Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok, Thailand. During all this time, I had been continuing a study of Buddhism that I began, under Prof. George Grant, in the Department of Comparative Religion at McMaster.

Then, by coincidence, while in Munich, teaching for Maryland, I had the chance to participate in a seminar with Alan Watts, who was enjoying a final European speaking tour, a few months before he passed from this worldly world.

Whilst listening to Alan summarize western man's epistemological endeavours in the history of philosophy, I had a sudden illumination on the questions of nothingness and non-self. After fifteen years of fear and, trembling unto death, I passed through a gateless gate with hardly an "Ah Ha!," and my existential anxiety fell away, just like that.

"I've got it! I've got it!", I told Alan.

"Don't hang on too hard.", Alan said with an ironic twinkle in his eye. That was good advice. He was a good Zen teacher with a keen intellect.

After that, I read a bookcase full of books on Zen, Japanese and Mahayana Buddhism, but found the readings cryptic and largely inaccessible. I realized I needed

to advance but didn't know what path to take. The problem was that my understanding was still too intellectual and theoretical.

In the early 1980's, I owned a 40 foot, blue-water sailing yacht, in the South of France, and did a lot of cruising about the Mediterranean, single-handed, a hundred miles from shore, in an attempt to be at one with the universe. It was a good life, but it was only a stage. That kind of aloneness is not the answer.

One day, in Corsica, in the port of Bonifacio, again by coincidence (or was it?), I met an older couple from Holland, who owned a sturdy ketch, and who talked knowledgeably about Buddhism, and I told them I had long wanted to go to Asia to learn more, first hand.

"Go to Sri Lanka," the Dutch-Indonesian wife said. "My friend Tissa will take care of you. Just write and tell him why you want to come." She and her husband gave me Tissa's address. The husband, a retired sea-captain with the air of a man who knew the world, smiled kindly.

About a year later, I found myself waiting in the airport in Colombo for Tissa to pick me up. It was my first journey to the East, and I was tingling with anticipation. That was 1986, and as Ven. Ampitiya Sri Rahula Maha Thera, who was to become my one of my teachers, later remarked to me, I was still very "raw." I knew what I was looking for, but I hadn't found the correct path.

Tissa Amarasinghe was the first to help me change that. We visited many temples in the South of Sri Lanka by way of introduction, and then he took me to a withdrawn Meditation Center, where the monks lived in caves, and where there was a skeleton hanging out in the open air as a meditation object on the transience of life.

I was received by the head monk, seated in retreat in a hollow under a great overhanging rock. I could actually see radiant energy emitting, upward and outward, from around his shoulders and upper body. He spoke to me with reserve but gave me an English translation of the Buddha's Discourse on the Breathing Meditation and directed me to go and pay respects to an elderly German Monk in the Forest Hermitage

at Kandy, called Ven. Nyanaponika, who could answer my further questions. Little did I know what kindness I had been shown.

I was fortunate in having Tissa's guidance. Had I turned up in Sri Lanka on my own, just another western quester in search of Shangrila, I wouldn't have known where to go and who to talk to, and I would not have gained access in the places that I did.

Tissa opened doors everywhere, including gaining me admittance to the Inner-Sanctum of the Temple of the Holy Tooth at Kandy, one of the most sacred shrines of Theravada Buddhism. I don't know how he managed that, but, out of a sense of well-meaning generosity, he felt that my just being in the proximity of the Sacred Relic of the Tooth would bring spiritual blessing.

Tissa came from an old family. His father had been a respected Buddhist, with a large personal Buddhist library, and his grandfather had renovated the great Temple at Tissamaharama at his own expense, while he was a ranking government official there, three generations before. Tissa's family had expected that he would enter the monkhood at Tissamaharama, but he later decided to remain a layman. As we toured the country by car, Tissa would talk with me for days on end about the principles and precepts of Theravada Buddhism.

In due time, Tissa, took me to the Forest Hermitage, in Kandy, to pay respect to the Ven. Nyanaponika Maha Thera, who was, indeed, a most renowned monk, Pali scholar, and author of *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, plus a whole shelf of other books and translations of Pali texts. He was the head of and spiritual force behind the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), in Kandy and had been a delegate from Ceylon representing the Theravada Tradition at the Sixth World Congress of Buddhists, together with his teacher --The Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera (1878-1957)-- who was most- eminent Pali scholar and author of *The Word of the Buddha* and *The Path of Deliverance* and numerous texts and translations which have guided and influenced another three generations of Buddhists world-wide.

At the Forest Hermitage, I had the good fortune, as well, to meet Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American monk and scholar, working under the guidance of Ven. Nyanaponika, helping as editor of the Buddhist Publication Society. Bhikkhu Bodhi was the author of *The Noble Eightfold Path* and numerous other translation and explications on difficult Pali texts. The Forest Hermitage was another Inner-Sanctum, a haven of knowledge and wisdom.

They received me with a matter-of-fact warmth and loving-kindness which was a lesson in itself. Very much in awe, after some scattered questions, I asked how I could find the real heart of Buddhism. They said to start with the Ven. Nyanatiloka's translation of the *Word of the Buddha* and then go on to practice the discipline outlined in his *Path to Deliverance*. They stressed that the emphasis must be on actual practice of the Path, as opposed to study and theory, and that I would find it extremely difficult, not just at first but all the way along, even into an advanced stage, but if I followed the word of the Buddha and the practice, I would make progress.

In summation, when I asked them where I could discover the meaning of Buddhism, they answered, "Why look anywhere but in the actual words of the Master?" That's what Theravada Buddhism is all about and, to my amazement, the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), in Kandy, made it all available, in English, and there was nothing cryptic or inaccessible about it. I just hadn't known where to look. So I read another bookcase full of BPS publications, this time perhaps for the right reason, and, finally, realized that the path I had missed was the one of practical application and discipline, in applied the thoughts, feelings and actions of everyday life, as opposed to pure intellectual pursuit. If the mind is tuned but not in harmony with the body, then advancement will be blocked.

The starting place was Ven. Nyanatiloka's translation of the *Word of the Buddha*, which outlines the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path and which is the subject of the discourse in the body of this text.

**It's a wonderful paradox that once you understand the book, you no longer need it.**

**In due course, on a subsequent visit to Sri Lanka, I had the honor and privilege of staying, in retreat, at the Peradeniya University Forest Solitude, in the mountains above Kandy, at the invitation of the eminent teacher, Ven. Ampitiya Sri Rahula Maha Thera, to whom I owe the deepest debt of gratitude for his understanding, kindness, guidance and advice. The Ven. Sri Rahula taught me to apply and practice what I had learned from the books.**

**At this time, I had the opportunity, also, to discuss fine points of the Dhamma with Ven. Dhammavihari ( formerly Prof. Joyiya Dhirasekera, of the Dept. of Pali and Buddhism, at the University of Peradeniya, in Kandy) which helped to deepen and strengthen my understanding of the Path.**

**In conclusion, I would also like to thank Prof. Lily DeSilva, the highly respected Head of the Department of Pali Studies at the University of Peradeniya, who always received me with gracious warmth and attentiveness and gave me helpful insight on understanding how to pursue the path as a layman.**

## **Acknowledgments**

Although I alone am responsible for any shortcomings this small book may contain, I would like to thank my teachers for their generous editorial assistance and advice.

The text in the body of this book has been read and edited by the Venerable Ampitiya Sri Rahula, and by my brother in the Dhamma, the Venerable Dhammavihari, for which I am sincerely grateful. I would hardly dare to present it to a wider audience unless it had been checked by experts far more knowledgeable than I.

Then, after revising the text twice, I respectfully requested Bhikku Bodhi, through the BPS to do a final critique. He kindly took time and went through it with precision, fine-tuning and red-penciling it, where the exposition could be made more explicit. Then, I revised it again.

As with any work of scholarship, my text could benefit from further editing, explication and revision, perhaps in a later edition. Bhikku Bodhi's critical faculties are indeed acute. I have learned much from him on fine points of the Dhamma and cannot thank him enough.

Bhikku Bodhi also pointed out that where I had presented expansive detail on the steps of the Eight-fold Path, I might also have allowed equal and parallel balance for an elucidation of the Four Noble Truths. The reader who feels the need to do more reading in this area can consult the BPS booklist for appropriate titles, with attention to the Buddhist World of Samsara; the sufferings inherent in the round of rebirths implicit in the First Noble Truth; and how craving is the origin of suffering.

The textual detail on the Eight-Fold Path may, indeed, be overly- expansive for some readers, and the distinction between the mundane and supramundane stages might be rather subtle for those without a firm foundation in the Dhamma.

Such should not be seen as a problem, however. It may do no harm to include such explication, for information's sake, even if the general reader finds at some point,

that his personal experience no longer corresponds to what is being described. One should simply go back to the stage where one feels oneself on firm ground and practice, practice, practice.

I also learned, sitting at the feet of Ven. Nanaponika, that even though we may have a theoretical or intellectual comprehension of the the Absorptions or Jhana stages, only very few, even amongst accomplished monks, achieve these states. The text describes the highest discipline imaginable, and advancement on the path takes years and years of concentrated effort.

It is not enough to just believe what one reads. One should know it through actual practice of the steps in the path. If it feels right, one will want to keep doing it, and one step will lead to another and another.

If one feels hindered in the path to advancement, the influence and example of a good teacher should prove to be helpful. As the Venerable Sri Rahula reminds us, “So long as there are communities of true monks practicing the Dhamma as it was taught, Buddhism will never die.”

**Bangkok, 1997**

## **Introduction to the Phi Theta Kappa Lecture**

I should like to begin by expressing warm thanks to Dr. John Finkbohner, coordinator of the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society Guest Lecture Series, for inviting me to give this paper.

I must stress, however, that when he first approached me, I felt two reservations:

The first was that, within a Buddhist culture, such a talk should normally be given by a wise elderly monk, the abbot of a temple or monastery, who had spent perhaps fifty years practicing the Dhamma, 30 years of it meditating in preparation for deliverance and 20 or 30 years as a teacher, guiding younger monks on the path to enlightenment, he himself being a radiant example of what the Buddha taught.

It seemed inappropriate that a layman, especially a western layman, caught up in the stress of modern life, should be giving a talk on the Dhamma at all. The very prospect of giving such a lecture seemed humbling.

The second reservation was that you cannot summarize 2500 years of Buddhism into a 60 or 90 minute presentation. You cannot simplify the wisdom of the ages into a simple outline that a general audience will grasp and understand easily. The fact that many college lecturers simplify the body of knowledge and underestimate and talk down to their students is, indeed, one of the shortcomings of contemporary university education.

**BUT** having finally accepted the challenge to give the lecture, as a way of sharing the teaching and insight given me through Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ven. Nyanaponika Maha Thera, Ven. Sri Rahula Maha Thera and the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), at Kandy, in Sri Lanka, I decided to set myself four guidelines to avoid coloring the teaching of the Buddha through personal interpretation and to avoid giving a superficial gloss that does not represent the depth of the Buddha's wisdom. I decided

1. To stick to the actual words of the Buddha as much as possible, keeping myself out of the picture, to avoid the pitfalls of ignorance and speculation.

**2. To write everything out, word for word, and read it aloud to avoid distorting the facts, even though I normally lecture freely, based on an outline.**

**3. To explicate the Eightfold Path in full detail, even if I know I won't have time to get through it all in the actual oral-presentation.**

**4. To type and distribute an expanded copy of the lecture to those who may afterwards wish to work through it more carefully, as understanding the Eightfold Path takes time, comprehension, practice, and continued-effort.**

**For this, we must thank my student-assistant, LaVette Shackelford, who will produce the copy, complete with a Bibliography from the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS).**

## Theravada Buddhism

There is some terminology I'd like to go over, so the reader will better understand what is meant by the Theravada Tradition:

*Pali* was the dialect of Sanskrit spoken by the Buddha and the language of the sacred literature of Buddhism, the so-called Pali Canon. This body of writings is also called the *Tripitaka* [three baskets] because it is divided into three parts: *Vinayapitaka*, which deals with the tenets of how monks should comport themselves in the monastic life; *Suttapitaka*, a collection of suttras and dialogues of the Buddha and his disciples; and *Abhidhammapitaka*, a more purely philosophical elaboration of the sayings of the Buddha. The word of the Buddha was recited and passed on from one generation of monks to another through oral tradition after the Buddha's death. The Pali Canon is said to have been written down between the 5th and 3rd centuries B.C.

The use of Pali eventually died out in India, but it moved to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) where it was kept alive by the Sangha, who continue to chant the Dhamma in Pali to the present day. As long as the Sangha lives, Buddhism will never die. It is also worthy of note that the Buddha's use of Pali, which as we have said, was a dialect of Sanskrit, represents a break from Indian Brahmin tradition; Buddhism may arise out of the Hindu tradition, but it takes its own direction.

*Sanskrit* was the classic language of the Brahmins in India. It's earliest form was Vedic (ca. 1500-200 B.C.) and it is in this language that the most ancient and sacred scriptures of Hinduism were recorded. There is a large body of literature including the *Vedas* the *Rig-Veda*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bagavad Gita*, but they need not concern us here because they have little or nothing to do with *Buddhism*.

After the Pali Suttras were lost in India, they were rediscovered in Ceylon and translated back into Sanskrit, returning to India and eventually travelling the northern route going over Tibet and China, through Korea to Japan. Hence, the different renderings of words like the Sanskrit, "Nirvana" or "Karma" substituting for the Pali,

"Nibbana" and "Kamma." The Theravada Tradition prefers the Pali renderings as being closer to the actual words of the Buddha.

*Theravada*, literally translated, means the "Elders' Teachings" or the teaching of the original followers of Buddha based upon the original Pali Texts which when they were eventually written down, travelled from Ceylon to Burma, Siam, Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam, and took firm hold in that part of the world. Simply put, Theravada means staying close to traditional Buddhism as it was practiced by the Sangha during the lifetime of the Buddha. It means sticking to the original forms.

*Hinayana*, literally translated, means "The Narrow Way." It denotes exactly the same path as that of Theravada Buddhism. Hinayana means keeping to the path of individual salvation through the practice of self-discipline following the Doctrines of the Elders (Theravada). This is the path of the Sangha. The narrow path means keeping close to the monastic path.

*Mahayana*, literally translated, means "the Broad Way," not the traditional Theravada path, but a more common, general approach with less monastic asceticism and less stress on individual self-discipline and more emphasis on the world, life, nature, culture, the common everyday acts of the moment, and on the common and general good and man in society at large. It is not the path of the Sangha; it is a path more suitable to the layman and the householder.

There is nothing wrong with Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddha had many different ways of teaching according to the level of awareness of the person(s) before him. There are many dialogues where he talks with laymen and attempts to assist them on the path (See *The Buddha and His Teachings*, by Narada Maha Thera, Kandy: BPS, 1980.)

The Buddhism that went the northern route, was Mahayana Buddhism, which became predominant in China, Korea, Japan and Tibet. This does not mean that strict monasticism was not practiced in those places, though it is interesting to note that Buddhism did not come to Tibet until about 630 A.D. when it was combined with

**Tantric practices and the monks had wives and children. It wasn't until the 14th century that celibacy was re-introduced and the dynasty of the Dalai Lama was founded, in an attempt to purify Tibetan Buddhism (*Noss Man's Religions*).**

**Similarly, it was not until 522 A.D. that Buddhism was introduced by Prince Shotoku as the national religion of Japan and mixed with influences from the Tang Dynasty of China, Shintoism and emperor worship, militaristic nationalism and extreme self discipline, individualistic Zen Satori and other influences, until in 1955, a total of 32 different sects attended the 3rd Buddhist Congress, representing the Broad Path at its broadest point. What they discovered, however, was that they weren't so far apart as one might have expected and that there was a general desire to come more in-line-with Theravada Buddhism. There are no ultimate contradictions between the different forms of Buddhism; the differences are simply in stress and emphasis according to the form of the teaching and to whom it is directed (*Malalasekera 2500 Years of Buddhism*).**

**It may be of interest to mention, as a final point, that at the Temple of the Holy Tooth in Kandy, there is a conspicuous great temple bell which has been donated by Japanese Buddhists as a way of emphasizing their ties to the original roots of Buddhism and the Teaching of the Elders in-the Theravada Tradition.**

## **The Heart of Theravada Buddhism: The Noble Eightfold Path**

**Buddhism concerns itself with pain, suffering, moderation, balance, equanimity, self-discipline, purification, wisdom, virtue, Kamma, rebirth, tolerance, loving-kindness, meritorious action, selflessness, universal compassion, the law of opposites, non-attachment, meditation, freedom, enlightenment, nothingness, nibbana, and all of these aspects blend together into one, immeasurable, harmonious whole.**

**But "If a Buddhist [were] asked, 'What did the Buddha teach?', he would rightly reply: 'The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path.'**

**If then questioned further, he should be able to define them accurately without uncertainty, ambiguity or recourse to his own ideas.**

**[In other words, it is] “ very important that the words of the Buddha are not distorted, either through ignorance or through one's own speculation” (From Bhikkhu Khantipalo's introduction to *The Noble Eightfold Path*, by Ledi Sayadaw). This is what today's discourse is going to attempt to achieve.**

**First, however, let us address the life of Siddhartha Guatama, who by his own effort, became a Buddha, or Enlightened One, at age 35, after meditating under a Bo tree, and achieving the perfect embodiment of all virtues.**

**Having attained Buddhahood, he chose to come back into the world, out of boundless compassion and loving-kindness for others, particularly the fellow ascetics who had deserted him in the Deer Park near Benares, to SHARE his wisdom, teaching the path to enlightenment.**

**He devoted the rest of his life to serving humanity through his own example, teaching the path to deliverance from suffering, through selfless-love for others, for the next forty-five years, until he succumbed to the laws of nature and passed-away in his eightieth year.**

**The Lord Buddha was a human being, albeit an extraordinary one, who was born, lived, and died, just like anyone else. He was not a divine being or a god, but**

through his own striving, without supernatural help, he became a perfect example of virtuousness, to show others the way to deliverance, through the path of righteousness, through self-reliance, self-dependence, and self-discipline, following the path to enlightenment.

Anybody may strive to achieve this state, but you have to find it within yourself, and not even the Buddha can make this effort for you. He can only tell you the way. The rest depends on you. The only hindrances are delusion and attachment.

The first step to removing these hindrances is through moral self purification (sila)--an aspect of Buddhism which is sometimes understressed by seekers who concentrate too much on meditation and insight and not enough on developing purity in everyday moral actions. One cannot reach the final step without taking the first step of developing purity, goodness, and virtue through observing the precepts of right action, speech and livelihood. One must first purify oneself to arrive at higher insight.

The Buddha was not only the perfect example of wisdom but also of virtue, and his followers had the chance to be in his proximity during a ministry of 45 years and learn by his word and example: an example which was even more convincing because of his inner-tranquillity and outward-radiance and the loving-kindness and universal wisdom that accompanied his presence (Narada Thera, *Buddhism in a Nutshell*).

Once he achieved enlightenment, the Buddha could have turned his back on a world of sorrow, but he did not. He chose, through love and compassion for humanity, to help those still suffering in a world of temporality impermanence and spiritual pain.

We have a very good record of what the Buddha said, after he came back and during his lifetime as a teacher. The Buddha's discourses were, in fact, rehearsed and codified by his followers a few month's after his passing away, and then transmitted scrupulously by bands of monks especially-trained for this task. The documentation is comprehensive and exact. Indeed, Buddhist scriptures taken together constitute a body of literature eleven times the length of the Christian *Bible*, the difference being that in

the Buddhist scriptures everything emanates from one mind and thus coheres consistently together.

As every Buddhist knows, the basis of the Buddha's teaching is to be found in the Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering
2. The Cause of Suffering
3. The Extinction of Suffering
4. The Middle Way: Noble Eightfold Path as the way to the extinction of suffering.

He said that supreme and unsurpassed enlightenment had only come to him after the realization of these four truths (Nyanatiloka *The Word of the Buddha*):

The first was the Noble Truth of Suffering: Man is born into a world of suffering. Birth is suffering. Decay, disease, old age and death are suffering. Life is full of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Not getting what one desires is suffering. Being exposed to unpleasantness is suffering. Being cut-off from desired-objects and pleasures is suffering, to make us sometimes wish we had not been born.

The Second Noble Truth is the Cause of Suffering which is Craving. The root of suffering is craving the delights and pleasures of the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. Where such craving arises and takes root, there will be suffering. Craving for delight and pleasure of the mind causes suffering. Craving eternal-existence, higher forms of existence, continued-existence, immaterial existence, and craving the continued-existence of the self all bring suffering. Craving the cessation of pain brings suffering.

The Third Noble Truth is the Cessation of suffering. What may bring about the extinction of suffering? The complete fading away and extinction of craving. Liberation and detachment from craving, that craving may vanish and be extinguished. The forsaking of desire for delightful and pleasurable things. Breaking free of the cankers of attachment and seeing the things of this world as impermanent, miserable,

transitory, and elusive will bring about the annihilation of sorrow. Freedom from desire will bring about the extinction of suffering.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the truth of the Path that Leads to the Extinction of Suffering. It is the MIDDLE WAY that avoids the two extremes -- the base, vulgar, unholy, unprofitable path of SENSUAL PLEASURE in opposition to the painful, unpleasant, unholy unprofitable path of SELF-MORTIFICATION. It is the MIDDLE PATH beyond those two extremes which leads to liberation, peace, discernment, enlightenment and Nibbana.

Further, the Noble Eightfold Path leads to the extinction of suffering, namely:

- |                        |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Right Understanding |                 |
| 2. Right Thought       | } Wisdom        |
| 3. Right Speech        |                 |
| 4. Right Action        | } Morality      |
| 5. Right Livelihood    |                 |
| 6. Right Effort        |                 |
| 7. Right Mindfulness   | } Concentration |
| 8. Right Concentration |                 |

These eight factors of the Middle Way are steps to be followed in sequence and practiced concurrently in preparation for the extinction of suffering and ultimate release from the sorrows of this world. It makes sense to practice them more-or-less in order, as later stages assume mastery over earlier ones, though continued-practice on the level of mindfulness or concentration brings a deepening of understanding on the initial level.

To re-cap, the Buddha is saying that to be free from suffering and attain Nibbana one must begin by developing--

**RIGHT UNDERSTANDING**, which means being free from wrong views and attitudes which block the right way of seeing. It is knowing the difference between right and wrong. What is a good action and what is a bad deed. It means knowing what is morally good and why. The same way one knows it is right to care, to give, to love and

feel compassion. Right understanding leads to willing the good, through actions of body, speech, or mind.

The mind's willing an action is called "KAMMA." Another word is "volition," a mental force seeking to actualize the mind's will. Kamma is an action of the will that results in something wholesome or unwholesome arising. Right Understanding is knowing what is a wholesome action and what is an unwholesome action (see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path*).

An action of the mind is UNWHOLESOME when it is harmful or blameworthy, when it can be hurtful to something or someone when it can cause suffering for oneself, for others or for the world or when it is detrimental to spiritual development for oneself or others. In short, unwholesome KAMMA does harm and should be avoided. In Buddhist teaching, anything that does harm should be avoided.

The Buddha said we should avoid unwholesome Kamma and avoid the following bad actions:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| bodily{ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Destroying life</li> <li>2. Taking what is not given</li> <li>3. Wrong sexual conduct</li> </ol>        |
| speech{ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. False speech</li> <li>5. Slanderous speech</li> <li>6. Harsh speech</li> <li>7. Idle chatter</li> </ol> |
| mental{ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Covetousness</li> <li>9. Ill will</li> <li>10. Wrong views</li> </ol>                                   |

Unwholesome Kamma must be grasped and extinguished at its root before it has a chance to take hold and grow. One who seeks to have a wholesome motive rather than an unwholesome motive should be on the path of right understanding. There can be wholesome deeds without right view, however, and one should avoid doing the right thing for the wrong reason.

**GREED, AVERSION, and DELUSION** are particular enemies of wholesome Kamma and must be resisted wherever they have the chance to arise in the mind. Resisting negative thoughts is not easy. In fact, it is one of the hardest things in the world. The secret lies in turning away from negative Kamma and willing the contrary. It means abstinence, self-control and mind-control. This takes intensive training based on denying what is not good for one and one's spiritual development and replacing it with its opposite.

Right Understanding leads to meritorious action which leads to accrued merit which opens the way to a deepening in understanding the nature and cause of suffering, its cessation, and Nibbana.

Wrong Understanding leads to wrong views, wrong motives, wrong actions, and more-and-more bad Kamma, and more-and-more suffering. Right Understanding of the effects of bad Kamma is enough to make one want to stop it. Delusion leads to more-and-more evil (see Ledi Sayadaw *The Noble Eightfold Path*).

One is the owner of the Kamma one makes. This means one reaps the fruit of one's actions in this life or the next.

The second factor in the Noble Eightfold Path is called **RIGHT THOUGHT**, but a more effective translation from the original Pali word might be **RIGHT INTENTION**.

Pali translates only with difficulty and one reason is that these ideas existed 2000 years before English became a literary language. As there is almost no cultural overlap, English equivalents are hard to find, and the words that we use have connotations, within a western cultural context, which tend to confuse and obscure the original meanings in Pali. That's why Theravada Buddhists learn Pali and study original Pali texts.

Deeper understanding sets the mind moving towards goals seen through the new vision of right understanding. **RIGHT INTENTION** is the application of the mind towards these goals.

The Buddha explains that Right Intentions are three-fold: intentions of Renunciation; intentions of Good Will; and intentions of Harmlessness.

These three Right Intentions are the OPPOSITE of the Wrong Intentions of Desire, Ill-will, and Harmfulness. Just as thought is the forerunner of action, so right thought is the forerunner of right action. Similarly, suffering will be the result of wrong thought or wrong intention.

The Buddha has told us (Majjhima Nikaya 19) that, whilst meditating prior to enlightenment, he found his thoughts could be divided into two opposite classes. Whenever he noticed thoughts of desire, ill-will, and harmfulness arising, he replaced them with thoughts of renunciation, good will, and harmlessness. He understood that the former kind of thoughts lead to harm for oneself and others and obstruct the path to wisdom. Hence, he developed the wisdom to eliminate the obstruction and open the path (see Bhikkhu Bodhi *Eightfold Path*).

Ven. Ledi Sayadaw gives us another important insight when he writes that one may claim to be a Buddhist and even espouse Right Understanding but that does not mean one will put it into practice automatically. To know the good is not to do it. Such a would-be Buddhist can still have enmity for others and speak slanderously about them. "All one's book learning will not change harmfulness into loving kindness." Only actual application and practice can bring this about. As Ledi Sayadaw concludes: "This means hard work on oneself which may be painful emotionally but then the result of accomplishing just a little here is that one becomes a 'solid' Buddhist" (Sayadaw 44).

The Buddha, at the time of his enlightenment saw that everything contains its opposite. He saw the DUALITY in NATURE. In a moment of insight, he realized that everything can be replaced by its opposite; that intentions of good will and harmlessness offer the ANTIDOTE to aversion, ill-will and suffering, He saw that thoughts of anger, hostility, and resentment lead to cruelty, aggression, and destruction, and he saw that replacing intentions of harmfulness with intentions of harmlessness opened the path to wisdom (Bodhi 33). The Buddha once said that his

teachings are contrary to the way of the world. The way of the world is one of unenlightened desire, of seeking happiness by seeking the objects of desire, whilst imagining that the attainment of these objects will bring fulfillment and happiness.

The Buddha says the exact opposite of this: unfulfilled desire is the **ROOT** of unhappiness and dissatisfaction and the way to get rid of such suffering is to get rid of the Craving or Desire, to pull out the root of unwholesome desire through **RENUNCIATION**. The Buddha goes against the stream. He flows the opposite way, breaking free of craving and finding happiness in lack of desire.

The mind is in the habit of grasping. We have to break this habit and teach it to let go. If we examine the root of desire and see the unhappiness it leads to, we should, eventually, with effort and practice, learn to resist and abandon desire. If we learn that freedom from the hold of attachment is the key to happiness, then, one-by-one, we should be able to get unwholesome desires under control and ultimately rise above the level of such bondage.

This does not mean we must all run off to the monastery and abandon the household-life. It means that each, according to the level of his understanding and the power of his will, should strive as best he can to eradicate the root of craving and rise above the suffering that it causes. It becomes a very personal and individual thing, and you make progress only in accordance with the level of your understanding. Another reason why it's personal is no one can make the effort for you. You must understand it and do it yourself.

It is one thing to know you have to let go of attachment, but quite another to do it. The mind meets a powerful inner-resistance. It seems impossible to overcome this resistance through an act of the will. This is sometimes called the problem of how to break the **SHACKLES** of **DESIRE**. Just to **REPRESS** our desires doesn't work, because it only drives them below the surface to rise again at some other opportunity.

One device the Buddha taught us is to subject desire to analytic investigation and observation. Instead of unrealistically imagining the gratification of desire and the

pleasure and happiness it would bring, we look realistically at the desire and the unhappiness that eventually follows in its wake. If we explore the roots and motives of our mental actions and see that they do not lead to the expected results, sooner or later we become wise to the truth of the matter and alter our behavior accordingly.

"When desire is scrutinized close-up, we find it is constantly shadowed by dukkha"(Bodhi 35). "Dukkha" means suffering. When you stop to think of it, the moment a desire arises, we sense a lack of fulfillment, an emptiness, a strain of discontent. Wanting is just another form of pain we would be better-off without. When desire is not fulfilled, there is "frustration, disappointment, sometimes despair" (Bodhi 36).

Even fulfilled-desire does not guarantee happiness. What if it does not last? What if we lose the object of desire? What happens when the gratification is over with? What will fill this void? This is called GRASPING. Sometimes we hang on too hard and become the cause of our own unhappiness. We must realize that the fulfillment of desire is impermanent, that nothing lasts, whether it be sensual pleasure or wealth or fame or power. The pursuit of such pleasures brings pain, and the pain of separation from the desired object increases in intensity in proportion to the degree of attachment.

Another device the Buddha taught us is to counteract ill-will with its opposite, which Buddhists call "metta" or loving-kindness. Feelings of ill-will can cause rancor, resentment, hatred, irrationality and violence which are harmful both to the object of ill-will and the subject feeling intentions of ill-will. The answer is to play a trick on nature and slow the flow of negative feeling through directing "metta" towards the object. Depending on the strength and force of the sense of universal love we are able to develop in ourselves, eventually we may be able to slow the effects of ill-will down to a trickle or stop them altogether.

The secret to success in using this device is the more you can develop the feeling of metta and make it a habit-of-mind and the less you allow yourself to feel ill-will towards others, the easier it will be to direct loving-kindness to such an object of anger

or resentment. Experience will show that greater happiness arises from this mode of practice and it thus becomes motivated and strengthened. Remember, this is the same loving kindness felt by the Buddha and in practicing "metta," you are emulating him and following the right path.

A valuable technique which can help one develop feelings of loving-kindness is to consciously set aside time each day for the development of thoughts of loving-kindness. This is a form of meditation which proves most useful to seekers who have problems overcoming feelings of aversion and ill-will. One begins with thoughts of kindness for oneself, because one must value oneself before one can value others. Then one develops feelings of loving-kindness for those who are closest to one: family members, those who depend on one for support, etc. Then, one thinks about those who are neutral to oneself, and eventually, to thoughts of loving-kindness for all living beings.

One begins with oneself at the center and expands outward in ever-widening circles until one has developed feelings of love for every living being in the universe, in awareness of the world's need for love; loving the other as you love yourself.

One form of this meditation is to contemplate as follows:

"May I be well and healthy  
 May those near to me be well and healthy  
 May those neutral to me be well and healthy  
 May all living beings be well and healthy."

It must be noted that "metta" is a generalized, selfless, non-personalized love. It is not self-love even though it begins with self. It simply means you love yourself in the same way that you love everything else in the world, no more or no less. It is a feeling of great benevolence and magnanimity for all things. It is not to be confused with egocentric love or selfish attachment.

Another device which helps overcome cruel, aggressive or violent thoughts towards and object of repulsion is COMPASSION. Instead of having unwholesome

feeling towards someone because of his unwholesome intentions, we place ourselves subjectively in his position and wish that he be freed from the sufferings caused by his unwholesome Kamma.

Developing compassion may be practiced as a meditative exercise: one thinks of a person whom one knows to be suffering because of misguided views or intentions and one imagines that this person wishes to be free of this suffering. One identifies with the person's suffering until a strong feeling of compassion swells up in one's heart. Then one uses the same method applied to other individuals who cause themselves suffering, and one wishes that they too may be freed from that suffering. Once one gets in the habit of mind of feeling compassion, one can catch oneself reacting with resentment to certain persons and replace the resentment with compassion. Feeling compassion for those who would be your enemies is also very disarming.

"The unwholesome thought is like rotten peg lodged in the mind; the wholesome thought is like a new peg suitable to replace it. The actual contemplation functions as the hammer used to drive out the old peg with a new one" (Bodhi 43).

To use another analogy, through renunciation and methodological contemplation, thoughts of greed and aversion may be shed like leaves from a tree. The change is not sudden and spontaneous. It comes only through persistent and continued-practice, dislodging one leaf at a time until the branches are finally bare.

This is why Buddhists world-wide do meditation exercises, practicing renunciation, metta, and compassion as a way of going against the stream.

The Buddha has warned us that "whatever one reflects upon frequently becomes the inclination of the mind. If one frequently thinks sensual, hostile, or harmful thoughts, desire, ill-will, and harmfulness become the inclination of the mind" (Bodhi 44). That's not quite the same as saying, "You are what you think," but it comes close. How much better it is to train the mind to become positive in its inclinations, for the direction we take always comes back to us. The merit we attain reflects the course of our lives. The evil we do returns to us.

The first two factors of Right Understanding and Right Intention are perhaps the most difficult to grasp. The three factors that follow: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, are easier to comprehend because they are less-abstract and have to do with the direct practice of right intentions in everyday behavior. Simply put, we are talking about acts of speech and MATTERS OF THE BODY in daily life.

We must not forget, however, that this is the Buddha talking, telling us how to purify ourselves through our actions as a means to progress towards higher understanding. The purpose of practical ethics is ultimately spiritual. It is no coincidence that Bhikkhu Nanamoli's translation of the classic manual of Buddhist doctrine and meditation (Visuddhi Magga) is called *The Path of Purification*.

A monk once asked the Buddha for a brief summary of his teaching and the Buddha said: "First, establish yourself in the starting point of wholesome states, that is, in purified moral discipline and in Right View. Then when your moral discipline is purified and your view straight, you should practice the four foundations of mindfulness" (Samyutta Nikaya XLVII 3) --in other words: follow the Noble Eightfold Path, being sure you purify yourself in accordance with good Kamma as a preparation to deeper insight through meditation. The problem is if you don't have that purity, you'll encounter the greatest of difficulty in going forward.

In his translation of *The Word of the Buddha*, Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thera informs us the Buddha said one should abstain from lying and tell the truth, be reliable and worthy of confidence. Never deceive. Always tell what one knows and admit when one knows nothing. One should tell what one has seen and what one has not seen. One should never knowingly speak a lie for one's own advantage or the advantage of others, or for any advantage whatsoever (Anguttara Nikaya X 176).

**This is the Buddha's first statement on the subject of Speech. Condensed to one short maxim, it means abstain from FALSE SPEECH. (Note the emphasis on ABSTENTION which implies replacing bad Kamma with good Kamma.) Speech can give wisdom, heal division, and create peace, but, falsely used, it can break lives, create enemies and start wars. The law of opposites works where speech is concerned, as well.**

**One should never have the intention to deceive or to lie because of motives of greed or hatred. Never delude others for any reason, not even when exaggerating, joking, or jesting because deception can lead to ill-effects and cause harm. Lying corrupts society. Lies lead to more lies and affect one's credibility. Lies lock one in a cage of falsehood, creating a corrupt world from which it is almost impossible to escape.(Bodhi 51)**

**The Buddha also said that when you lie, you lose merit and go backwards rather than forwards. He illustrated the point, talking to his son and disciple, Rahula, taking a bowl with a little bit of water in it and turning it upside down.**

**"Do you see how the water has been discarded? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie discards whatever spiritual achievement he has made," said the Buddha. "In the same way he turns his spiritual achievements upside down and becomes incapable of progress" (Majjhima Nikaya 61).**

**The second statement on the subject of Speech made by the Buddha was to ABSTAIN from SLANDEROUS SPEECH. In other words, one should not repeat the bad things one has heard about others: one should not repeat things that cause dissension. Instead, one should use speech to unite those who are divided, create agreement and harmony, and good will instead of disagreement.**

**One should ABSTAIN from speech motivated by cruel intentions or by resentment; speech which tears down another's image, questions his virtue or success; or is intended to hurt others by getting-ahead of them, or to hurt them just for the sake of perverse satisfaction. The root of slander is hate, and hate is one of the most unwholesome forms of Kamma, a pitfall very much to be avoided.**

**"The opposite of slander," as the Buddha indicates, "is speech that promotes friendship and harmony. Such speech originates from a mind of loving-kindness and sympathy. It wins the trust and affection of others" (Bodhi 54-55). When you feel like saying something slanderous about your neighbor, catch yourself and turn that impulse into loving-kindness. More good will come of it.**

**The third statement the Buddha made about Right Speech is that one should ABSTAIN from HARSH SPEECH uttered in anger and intended to cause pain. Instead, one should use speech that is gentle, soothing to the ear, loving and readily reaches the heart. Speech that is courteous, friendly and agreeable.**

**One should ABSTAIN from motives that provoke language that is angry or abusive, reproving, bitter, insulting, hurtful, offensive, demeaning, sarcastic, or ironic with intent to injure. There is no good reason for such language, and the main argument against it is that it arises out of anger and aversion. It is an impulsive action without deliberation which can lead to destructive consequences for oneself and others. The impulse has to be restrained to avoid the HARM it can do.**

**The opposite of anger is PATIENCE. The ANTIDOTE to anger is TOLERANCE for the shortcomings of other's criticisms, comments and actions. One should, in fact, learn to tolerate abuse without the need to retaliate (Bodhi 55).**

**The Buddha once gave a remarkable example:**

**"Even, o monks should robbers and murders saw through your limbs and joints, whoever should give way to anger thereat would not be following my advice. For thus ought you to train yourselves: 'Undisturbed shall our mind remain, with heart full of love, and free from hidden malice; and that person shall we penetrate with loving-thoughts, wide, deep, boundless, freed from anger and hatred'"(Majjhima Nikaya 21).**

**The fourth statement of the Buddha about Right Speech was to ABSTAIN from IDLE CHATTER. In other words, to avoid frivolous speech and pointless talk that has no depth. Instead, one should speak appropriately at the right moment in accordance**

with the facts, saying what is useful, speaking of subjects like the Dhamma and the discipline.

One should **ABSTAIN** from talking and listening to chatter which is shallow and only stirs up defilements and restless thoughts which can lead one astray. One should abstain from any sort of loose talk or valueless patter which leaves the mind vacant and sterile. This is especially true of frivolous entertainments which block development on a higher, spiritual, aesthetic, contemplative level.

The opposite of idle chatter is to make every word have meaning, so that speech becomes like a treasure, uttered appropriately, at the right moment, accompanied by moderation, reason, and good sense, inspiring listeners in matters of good conduct and the pursuit of the path. Another thing to remember is that while speech has its place, meditation leaves the limits of speech behind. Calm is the opposite of restless chatter. Thus ends the discussion of Right Speech.

Next, comes a consideration of **RIGHT ACTION**: Having learned to discipline ourselves with regard to right speech, we turn to bodily actions:

The Buddha subdivided the fourth factor of Right Action into three categories: 1. Abstaining from killing living creatures. 2. Abstaining from taking what is not given, and, 3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct.

In the words of the Buddha, one should **ABSTAIN** from killing living beings, without stick or sword. One should be conscientious, full of sympathy and desirous of the welfare of all living beings (Anguttara Nikaya X 176).

This means one should **ABSTAIN** from the killing or destroying of beings either by physical action or by verbal incitement, ranging from killing the eggs of bugs and lice to causing abortion or the slaughter of living sentient beings, especially human beings (Sayadaw 49). This means to refrain from destroying any form of life, for all living beings love life, fear death, seek happiness, and avoid pain; it applies even to animals and insects, not including plants which lack full-fledged consciousness, which explains the monk's primarily vegetarian diet.

**It is of interest to note here that the Buddha did not require a fully vegetarian diet of his monks. They were to accept whatever was given them as almsfood. Fish (and even meat) were allowable provided that they had not been killed especially for oneself (see Jivoka Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 55).**

**It should be obvious that one should avoid killing oneself by suicide and harming and/or torturing sentient beings without killing them. Killing by accident is not accompanied by any degree of negative Kamma, as there is no intention. The higher the sentient being, the more negative is the Kamma. The MOTIVE for killing also carries grave weight, and killing because of greed, hatred and delusion is of the worst kind (Bodhi 58-59).**

**The ANTIDOTE for abstaining from taking-life is loving-kindness and compassion for all sentient beings, identifying with such beings with heartfelt sympathy and wishing their welfare. Right intention here means good will, harmlessness and concern for others. One who feels this concern will be so imbued with feelings of love for other sentient beings that he will not be able to harm them.**

**The next subdivision is ABSTAIN from TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN: another way of saying to avoid stealing in any of its forms. On this point, the words of the Buddha are clear:**

**He tells us to ABSTAIN from taking, with intention to steal, living beings or non-living materials which have an owner. Refrain from removing or appropriating them without the owner's consent either by physical effort or by inciting another to do so (Sayadaw 49).**

**We should not take with thievish intent what another possesses whether it be in the village, outside in the woods, or nature, although it is not wrong to take things like wood, stones, earth, or gems in the earth which do not have an owner. It is equally wrong to withhold from others what ought to be rightfully theirs. Similarly, stealing,**

robbery, snatching, fraudulence, and deceit, carry bad karmic weight and hinder spiritual development.

The ANTIDOTE is honesty, having respect for the property of others and their rights, having contentment with one's livelihood, showing generosity of heart, not coveting the wealth and possessions of others, and even giving away one's own wealth and possessions to benefit others.

The third subdivision is ABSTAIN from SEXUAL MISCONDUCT and here again the word of the Buddha is clear:

The Buddha tells us to ABSTAIN from wrong sexual conduct in sensual pleasures which will cause pain for others. Examples would be adultery, rape, intercourse with minors, and the perversion of others (Sayadaw 51). Laymen should avoid sex with illicit partners such as those who are married or betrothed or still under the protection of the family. The point is to curb sexual desire so it does not lead to moral transgression. One should avoid a banal attachment to promiscuity because it blocks the path to PURIFICATION.

Instead, it is the ANTIDOTE that must be stressed. The opposite of desiring somebody as an object to fulfill one's sensual NEEDS is to see that person for what he/she really is, a sentient human being worthy of care -- regard, compassion -- feeling a form of loving kindness and that transcends the limits of mere grasping and desire. The point is to protect such persons from the negative effects of unwholesome Kamma and to protect marriage and the family as a way of avoiding suffering for a great many, promoting trust, confidence, union and harmony, and last but not least promoting progress on the path to spiritual development by removing hindrances from the PATH. Still, sensual pleasure wreaks havoc in the lives of laymen and householders, and monks and nuns avoid distraction by living celibate lives. This brings our discussion of Right Action to an end and leads us on to the next factor:

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD is the fifth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, and it explains the practice of right intentions in the acts of the layman in daily life where

earning a living is concerned. The Buddha, who thought of everything also gave us a code of economic conduct to follow: In short, he said we should **AVOID** gaining a livelihood by doing anything harmful to others: by acting illegally, using coercion, violence, trickery or deceit, dealing in weapons, or human beings, like animals to be slaughtered, poisons, intoxicants, soothsaying, trickery, usury, or any livelihood that violates an understanding of right speech and right action.

The **ANTIDOTE** is to gain one's living by doing no harm and benefiting others, in a righteous way, legally, peacefully, honestly, openly, courteously in such a way as to gain merit and avoid the pitfalls of greed and delusion. Similarly, workers should fulfill their duties in an honest and trustworthy manner, avoiding idleness, deceit, and pocketing the employer's goods. One should show respect and consideration for customers and colleagues and employers, and employers should follow the same practice with employees. Articles should be represented and sold honestly without deceptive representation of quality, quantity, etc. (Bodhi 65-66).

The Buddha also says: "When the noble disciple, avoiding wrong living, gets his livelihood by a right way of living, this is called 'Mundane Right Livelihood' which yields worldly fruits and brings good results."

But the avoidance of wrong livelihood, the abstaining, desisting, refraining therefrom, the mind being holy, being turned away from the world, and conjoined with the path, the holy path being pursued: this is called the "Supramundane Right Livelihood" which is not of the world, but is supramundane and conjoined with the path" (Majjhima Nikaya 117).

The point of the above is that once you have got Right Livelihood in order, and you combine it with the practice of Right Understanding, Right Effort, and Right Mindfulness, you are on your way to supramundane understanding on the path to wisdom. To understand this, however, we must understand the next three factors, which have to do primarily with **MATTERS OF THE MIND**.

**RIGHT EFFORT** is the sixth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. If you are to reach a supramundane state beyond the mundane state, you must do it through effort of the mind. What kind of effort is Right Effort?

First, it is an effort that no one can make for you. You must make it for yourself. It means making the effort to arouse the energy of the mind and focus it on cleansing the mind of its impurities through **SELF-DISCIPLINE** so that it may be **LIBERATED** to work on a **SUPRAMUNDANE LEVEL**.

It sounds like the exercise of mind over matter, but it's not as difficult as it may appear. The Buddha explains Right Effort in systematic disciplined steps, which Bhikkhu Bodhi's book on *The Eightfold Path* explains as follows:

In Anguttara Nikaya IV 13-14, the Buddha says we must practice mental control:

First prevent the arising of **UNWHOLESOME MENTAL STATES BEFORE THEY ARE AWAKENED**. Which is to say that we must stem the arising of the **FIVE HINDRANCES**: of sensual desire, ill will, dullness, restlessness, and doubt before they arise, so they are not awakened.

These are explained as follows:

1. **SENSUAL DESIRE** means lust for pleasurable states: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or for wealth, power, position, fame, and their accompanying pleasures.

2. **ILL WILL** means hatred, anger, resentment, and repulsion.

3. **DULLNESS** means mental inertia and accompanying **DROWSINESS** or mental sinking into heaviness of the mind.

4. **RESTLESSNESS** or **WORRY** means states of agitation, excitement, frenzy, stress which keep the mind from focus.

5. **DOUBT** means lack of resolution and indecisiveness which hinder right effort.

The **ANTIDOTE** is to **BLOCK** the **FIVE HINDRANCES** before they have a chance to arise in the mind. This is, in fact, a form of Buddhist meditation: to watch

the workings of the mind and check the five hindrances before they arise. To nip them in the bud, so to speak, though, if one analyzes carefully, one sees that to sever at the root would be a more appropriate analogy. You have to watch the workings of your mind and when you observe one of the five hindrances in the process of arising, you have to catch it and drive it out of the mind.

The secret is to check uncontrolled response with a controlled response. The goal is to evoke the **OPPOSITE RESPONSE**; for example, equanimity and focus in the place of unfulfilled desire and agitation. Practice this for long enough, and you begin to feel the positive effect of **MIND CONTROL**, which is reason enough to keep doing it. When this is working it's time to consider the next step:

Second, **PREVENT THE ARISING OF UNWHOLESOME MENTAL STATES**: Replace unwholesome thoughts with equal and opposite thoughts, the way the carpenter uses a new wooden peg to drive out an old one. A device you can use, for example, when your mind is agitated by a stressful worrying thought is to say: "I drive out this old peg with a new peg," and picture a new peg pushing out the old one. The picture in your mind will replace the worrying thought and push it out. This is a simple trick but it works.

In fact, there are many forms of Buddhist Meditation which replace unwholesome thoughts with wholesome ones. The Buddha taught his disciples how to ward-off unwanted attachment to objects of the senses, replacing or pushing them out with thoughts of the **IMPERMANENCE of LIFE** or with thoughts of change and **DETERIORATION AND DECAY OF THE BODY**. In fact, meditation subjects such as these are good **ANTIDOTES** for those who are stuck on gratification of the senses.

**LOVING KINDNESS** is a good antidote for hate, aversion, rancor, etc.

Meditating on a **BALL of LIGHT** is a good antidote to counteract dullness and drowsiness and mental inertia.

**BREATHING** Meditation is an antidote for calming the agitated mind.

**INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS or inquiry is a good antidote for doubt, and so on.**

**Yet another device for countering unwanted-thoughts is to direct the mind away from an unwholesome thought, the way you might look away from an undesirable sight, or the way you might change the subject when an undesirable topic is brought up. Catch the thought and change the subject.**

**Monks often change the topic when sensual and unsavory questions are brought up. It's not that they want to avoid a question they can't answer. Avoiding the topic is the answer, which the questioner will figure out if he is perceptive.**

**There are in fact, numerous meditation topics and devices which wise and caring older monks give to struggling younger monks to help them along the path, but we would stray from the purpose if we dwelt on them here. Instead, we must continue on to the next step in Right Effort.**

**Third, AROUSE UNARISEN WHOLESOME STATES. In other words, strive to stop unwanted mental states from arising and strive to replace them with WHOLESOME MENTAL STATES.**

**The Buddha is very specific about how this works. He explains the SEVEN STEPS TO ENLIGHTENMENT as follows:**

- 1. Mindfulness**
- 2. Investigation**
- 3. Energy**
- 4. Rapture**
- 5. Tranquillity**
- 6. Concentration**
- 7. Equanimity**

**1. Through MINDFULNESS or MEDITATION, clear the mind of delusion and wandering and focus clearly on objects of nature in the now.**

**2. Through INQUIRY or INVESTIGATION analyze the true nature of**

phenomena. In other words, once you SEE the object of THOUGHT clearly, make a new step to investigate its nature: "What is this thing really, that fascinates me this much?"

3. Quicken the ENERGY of the effort of your inquiry, shaking-off lethargy and inertia, awaking enthusiasm, gathering momentum, and using PERSEVERANCE, so the power of motion overcomes inertia and cannot be stopped. You push hard until you have overcome all obstacles, and you see the true nature of things the way they really are, without delusion.

4. Enthusiasm builds to RAPTURE, ascending to ecstatic heights, but this is a rapture that is accompanied with an excitement and restlessness of mind which, first, has to calm down so the restlessness is subdued.

5. Rapture then becomes a TRANQUILLITY in which the work of CONTEMPLATION proceeds with self-possessed SERENITY.

6. Tranquillity brings CONCENTRATION to ripeness and the seeker achieves ONE-POINTED UNIFICATION OF MIND.

7. The final state is one of EQUANIMITY in which the mind through deepening concentration, free from inertia and excitement, becomes balanced and stays that way on its own, without effort or restraint, watching the play of phenomena (Bodhi 79-81).

This brings us to the last step in the discipline of Right Effort:

Fourth, MAINTAIN ARISEN WHOLESOME STATES. What this means is to guard the balance of the mind and concentration on the positive state, so it is not lost but continues on constantly at the forefront of the mind, until the mind reaches its ultimate goal or fulfillment. In other words, keeping the mind controlled and directed on positive states.

Keeping the positive balance of the mind takes constant practice. It is not as simple as it may sound. It's easier to lose that balance than it is to get it, and that's where Right Mindfulness comes in.

In talking about Right Mindfulness, to avoid the hindrances of ignorance and delusion, and in order to explain accurately, without uncertainty or recourse to our own ideas, we shall adhere to the words of the Buddha as they are translated and expounded by respected PALI scholars and teachers of the DHAMMA.

In *The Road to Inner Freedom*, Ven. Nyanaponika writes:

Right Mindfulness is the quality of awareness. It insures complete awareness of all activities of the body as they occur, complete awareness of all sensations and feelings as they occur, complete awareness of all activities of the mind as they occur and complete awareness of all mental objects when the appropriate situations arise. This attitude of complete awareness brings about powerful results. It sharpens to the finest degree man's powers of observation, induces the deepest calm and insures that nothing is said or done or thought unguardedly or hastily, mechanically or without deliberation. He who develops this factor is able to take count of every single and minute activity of the mind, even such activities as are generally considered to occur when the mind is passive and receptive; so penetrating and powerful is his sense of awareness (70).

The point of the exercise is to realize a total awareness of the true nature of phenomena as objects of thought the way they really are. This takes mind-training and can only be realized by disciples advanced in this discipline, which, incidentally, the Ven. Nyanaponika Maha Thera outlines in *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (London: Rider, 1983.)

Ledi Sayadaw explains the problem of focusing such awareness:

The minds of most beings are never steady but fly about here and there. They have no control over their minds and so cannot fix them steadily on a subject of meditation. As they cannot control their minds, they resemble mad or mentally deranged persons . . . To eliminate the unsteady and flighty mind and to fix it continuously on the meditation subject one has to practice the Four Applications of Mindfulness (Sayadaw 56).

The Ven. Nyanatiloka translates the words of the Buddha on this

particular subject (*Word of the Buddha* 61):

"The only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right

path and the realization of Nibbana, is by the **FOUR FOUNDATIONS of MINDFULNESS.**"

We will, of course, want to know what these foundations are, and the Buddha tells us:

"Herein the disciple dwells in contemplation of the Body, in contemplation of Feeling, in contemplation of the Mind, in contemplation of the Mind-Objects; ardent, clearly comprehending them and mindful after putting away worldly greed and grief."

What this means is that the disciple should examine the root of his bodily perceptions, his feeling perceptions, his mental perceptions, and the objects of contemplation of the mind, bring them out in the light and examine them in the immediacy of the present to determine if they are confounded with delusion and attachment. Nothing is what it seems because the mind embellishes experience.

**Bhikkhu Bodhi helps when he writes:**

Clearing up the cognitive field is the task of right mindfulness. Mindfulness brings to light experience in its pure immediacy. It reveals the object as it is before it has been overlaid with interpretations. To practice mindfulness is thus a matter not so much of doing but of undoing: not thinking, not judging, not associating, not planning, not imagining, not wishing. All these "doings" of ours are modes of interference, ways the mind manipulates experience and tries to establish its dominance. Mindfulness undoes the knots and tangles of these doings by simply noting. It does nothing but note, watching each occasion of experience as it arises, stands, and passes away. In the watching there is no room for clinging, no compulsion to saddle things with our desires. There is only a sustained contemplation of experience in its bare immediacy, carefully precisely and persistently (Bodhi 86).

In other words, the mind observes, free of meanderings, the clear nature of every experience, by separating the original experience from its embellishments, and examining it closely to see what it really is.

Buddhists practice clearing the cognitive field in four ways which can be worked on concurrently or on a step-by-step basis. The first is to examine the material side of existence through the **CONTEMPLATION OF THE BODY.**

To enable us to quiet or calm the mind, so it is in a stable state to contemplate the body's actions, the Buddha tells us (Nynanatiloka 61) about **BREATHING MEDITATION**:

Herein the disciple retires to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to a solitary place, seats himself with legs crossed, body erect, and with mindfulness fixed before him, mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out. When making a long inhalation, he knows: "I make a long inhalation"; when making a long exhalation, he knows: "I make a long exhalation." When making a short inhalation, he knows: "I make a short inhalation"; when making a short exhalation, he knows: "I make a short exhalation." "Clearly perceiving the entire (breath-) body, I shall breathe in: thus he trains himself; clearly perceiving the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out: thus he trains himself." "Calming this bodily function, I shall breathe in": thus he trains himself; Calming this bodily function, I shall breathe out: thus he trains himself.

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the body either with regard to his own person or to other persons or to both. He beholds how the body arises; beholds how it passes away; beholds the arising and passing away of the body. A body is there . . .

Mindfulness of Breathing has several uses. It is used for tranquilization and calming the body, preparatory to the achievements of higher states called **ABSORPTIONS** (jhana) and preparatory to the development of Insight Wisdom.

It makes the disciple realize that he is not the body he is contemplating and that the personality he thought he was contemplating does not really exist. Through examination of the origin of the breath, he gains a physical stability or composure in which state he has a better control over his mind. Eventually, as development continues, he realizes there is a mental process outside of self, watching the arising and passing away of breath, and this brings him closer to an understanding of non-ego.

There are other forms of Mindfulness of the Body besides breathing. The Buddha also recommended concentrating on the **FOUR POSTURES OF THE BODY**,

whilst **WALKING, STANDING, SITTING, and LYING**, until the disciple realizes that there is no "real" self who walks, stands, sits, etc.

Similarly, the Buddha recommended mindfulness of acts such as bending and stretching, eating, drinking, chewing, tasting, discharging excrement and urine, and other bodily actions to give the disciple a clear conception that an action of the body is an impersonal process devoid of an actual ego-entity.

Another exercise is the contemplation of **LOATHESOMENESS** of the body from the top of the hair to the tip of the toes, the sack-of-skin stretched over the frame, filled with impurities: . . . sinews, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, skin oils, saliva, mucus, urine, etc. The purpose of this meditation is freedom from the illusion of the attractiveness of the human body by concentration on its opposite. It helps to counter infatuation with the body and sexual desire.

A similar exercise is to imagine the parts of the body the way a butcher might slaughter and prepare a cow into separate portions, until you no longer see it as a unified body but just as so many parts. Then, you must dissect the body mentally until you no longer see it as a material entity with existence of its own, when it is in fact nothing more than a compilation of the four elements of solid, gas, heat, and liquid.

Another is **CEMETERY MEDITATIONS** which help the disciple overcome the idea that he is never going to die. Imagine your corpse thrown on a charnel ground, one, two or three days, dead, swollen-up, blue-black in color, and full of corruption and decay, until you realize the opposite and you are free of delusion of infallibility.

There are more such meditations on the body which can be studied in the Pali Canon. These exercises may sound grotesque, but their purpose is not to develop aversion, but rather, to explode false illusions which keep a tenacious hold on the mind.

Once contemplation of the body begins to take effect, the result is **POSITIVE**. The disciple will develop mastery over discontent, anxiety, exposure, deprivation,

slandorous attacks and even physical pain. He will develop the four ABSORPTIONS (jhana) which purify the mind and bestow happiness (Nynanatiloka 67).

The second of the four foundations of mindfulness is the CONTEMPLATION OF FEELING.

The Buddha said (Digha Nikaya 22), "in experiencing feelings" the disciple knows: "I have an agreeable feeling," or " I have a painful feeling" or "I have an indifferent feeling . . ."

Thus he dwells in contemplation of the feelings, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or to both. He beholds how feelings arise, beholds how they pass away . . .

The word "feeling" here means how the mind is disposed when it encounters an object of experience. When a pleasant feeling arises, it may have its origin in greed and desire. An unpleasant feeling may arise out of fear, hate, or aversion. Neutral feelings may arise out of delusion.

The secret to this meditation exercise is to look at experience and cut off the root of unwholesome volition when it begins to arise and interact in feeling. If we just let the mind play in an uncontrolled manner, the defilements will exert a role in coloring experience. If, however, through mindfulness, we watch an experience as it arises and as it passes away, we can catch unwanted Kamma and defuse the attachment, aversion or indifference. Through mindfulness we can turn the experience back into a bare mental event, shorn of subjective interplay.

The secret is to learn to let the flow of events arise and dissolve without being subjectively involved. When the unwholesome root of feeling loses its hold on events, events lose their illusory sense of permanence and become part of the impermanent flux of the stream of events. With subjective feeling thus suppressed in connection with observation, there is no sense of a permanent ego interacting with events. This is what non-involvement means. It is the detachment necessary for right mindfulness.

**The third of the four foundations of mindfulness is CONTEMPLATION OF THE MIND.**

**The Buddha said:**

**HEREIN the disciple knows the greedy mind as greedy; knows the hating-mind as hating, and the not-hating mind as not-hating; knows the deluded-mind as deluded, and the undeluded-mind as undeluded. He knows the cramped mind as cramped, and the scattered mind as scattered; knows the developed-mind as developed and the undeveloped mind as undeveloped; knows the surpassable-mind as surpassable, and the unsurpassable-mind as unsurpassable; knows the concentrated-mind as concentrated, and the unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; knows the freed-mind as freed, and the unfreed mind as unfreed.**

**The word "mind" here means consciousness and should not be confused with "thinking" which would necessitate a verbalization and/or discursive thinking. Mind is a sequence of momentary mental acts as opposed to being an enduring separable entity. Neither is it connected to a sense of self or belonging to a self. Mind is a bare state of consciousness free of subjective association.**

**As meditation practice deepens, the sense of the "observer" becomes more and more detached and there is more and more sense of detachment until all there is is detached mind.**

**As this happens, the unwholesome roots of greed, aversion, and delusion become less-and-less capable of interacting in consciousness, and it becomes less-cramped and scattered and more-developed, concentrated, and free. The mind becomes more-and-more pure.**

**"As contemplation deepens, the contents of the mind become increasingly rarefied. Irrelevant flights of thought, imagination, and emotion subside, mindfulness becomes clearer, the mind remains intently aware, watching its own process of becoming . . . The mind itself -- the seeming solid, stable mind -- dissolves into a stream of "cittas" flashing in and out of being, moment-by-moment, coming from nowhere and going nowhere, yet continuing in sequence without pause"(Bodhi 99-100).**

**The last of the four foundations of mindfulness is CONTEMPLATION OF THE MIND-OBJECTS:**

**The Buddha said:**

Herein the disciple dwells in contemplation of the mind-objects, namely of the Five Hindrances:

He knows there is LUST in him: "In me there is lust."; Knows when there is ANGER in him: "In me is anger."; Knows when there is TORPOR and SLOTH in him: "In me is torpor and sloth."; Knows when there is RESTLESSNESS and MENTAL WORRY in him: "In me is restlessness and mental worry."; Knows when there are DOUBTS in him: "In me are doubts." He knows when these hindrances are not in him: "In me these hindrances are not." He knows when they come to arise; knows how once arisen they are overcome; and he knows how they do not rise again in the future.

The term "MIND-OBJECTS" here means the bare facts of events colored by the FIVE HINDRANCES of lust, anger, sloth, restlessness, and doubt.

The purpose of the exercise is to free the event from the effects of the five hindrances through the ANTIDOTE of the seven FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT. The Ven. Nyanaponika puts it concisely when he points out that it deals "with qualities to be abandoned and qualities to be acquired" (*The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* 73). Again, we counter negative factors by replacing them with positive ones.

For example, lust arises through unskilled-consideration of the agreeable and delightful, but it may be suppressed through the skilled-application of the seven factors: Mindfulness, Investigation, Energy, Rapture, Tranquility, Concentration, and Equanimity, as we have discussed them earlier. Through mindfulness, we block unwholesome arisen states and, through concentration, bring the mind to one-pointedness and balance. Right mindfulness is a matter of maintaining this clarity and balance, so the mind can concentrate purely on the path to enlightenment and Nibbana.

Stress must perhaps here be placed upon the importance of the disciple's mindfulness of how unwholesome states arise and pass away, how consciousness arises and passes away, how investigation takes place and passes away, how energy, rapture, and restlessness come into play and pass away, how tranquillity, concentration come into play and pass away, how knowledge of these states arises and is further developed,

how it is in oneself and when it is not, how one can continue to develop the path and how one can be hindered in advancement on the path (see Nyanatiloka 72-74).

The disciple contemplates how the mind-objects arise and pass away . . .  
 "and he lives independent unattached to anything in this world. Thus does the disciple dwell in the contemplation of the mind-objects. . . entering upon the right path, and the realization of Nibbana . . ." (Nyanatiloka *The Word of the Buddha* 73).

Remember, the Buddha only points out the steps in the path. It is up to the disciple to follow those steps. As we said before, no one can do it for him. It would behoove him, however, to have a good teacher to guide him on the path to keep him from going astray through ignorance and delusion. The teacher's loving-kindness will also serve as a factor to guide him on the path. This is why disciples take REFUGE in the Buddha, the Sangha and the Dhamma -- the Holy Triple Gem. Instances have been recorded, however, of laymen achieving Nibbana, also, so joining the SANGHA is not the only way, though it is possibly the least-difficult of difficult alternatives. Thus ends the discussion of the seventh factor of the EIGHTFOLD PATH.

The final factor of the Eightfold Path is RIGHT CONCENTRATION.

In *The Road to Inner Freedom*, Ven. Nyanaponika writes:

Right Concentration . . . ensures one-pointedness of mind. It is the ability to focus steadily one's mind on any one object and one only, to the exclusion of all others. There are many exercises in mind concentration. Long-continued practice of mental concentration makes the mind highly-penetrative. It becomes like a high-powered light which can thoroughly illuminate any object on which it is focused. Hence any object of thought which presents itself to such a mind is thoroughly penetrated and comprehended . . . Now this concentration of the mind like virtue is not an end in itself. The purpose of developing this Samadhi or Concentration is to make use of its penetrative power to understand existence and thereby realize the Highest Wisdom.

We now come to . . . Panna or Wisdom. When this highly-concentrated mind, abiding in Samadhi, is made to focus its attention on the three great characteristics of existence, namely Impermanence, Suffering, and Egolessness . . . the mind is able to see things as they actually are. The result is the dawning of the Highest Understanding, which is the first factor of the Eightfold Path, and, when perfected, its culmination, one sees Reality. This realization coincides with the cessation of Craving and the attainment of Nibbana (72).

**This the goal of the path, which may be broken-down and explained in further detail:**

**The Buddha said, "What now is Right Concentration? Having the mind fixed to a single object (one-pointedness of mind) : this is concentration"(Majjhima Nikaya 44).**

**Right Concentration depends on one-pointedness, but there are different levels of one-pointedness. Just being able to concentrate on one mind-object to the exclusion of all else is not enough. It may help to sort-out the tangle, but one-pointedness is not an end in itself. It must be directed to higher-purposes and right understanding, so the mediator should avoid concentration on bodily or unwholesome mind states. Someone practicing tantra sensuality may have one-pointedness; a warrior about to kill with his sword may have one-pointedness, but they are missing the point of Buddhist Meditation. One has to transcend the level of worldly states and concentrate on an object in a manner that causes wholesome states to arise.**

**Right Concentration reflects the achievements of all the factors of the Eightfold Path, playing a role simultaneously in helping to maintain the right kind of one-pointedness, but it also looks forward to the achievement of new mental states.**

**It looks back to and draws upon Right Understanding  
Right Effort  
Right Intentions  
Right Mindfulness**

**It reflects the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:**

**Contemplation of Body  
Contemplation of Feeling  
Contemplation of the Mind  
Contemplation of the Mind-Objects**

**It requires the Four Great Efforts:**

**I. Abandon Unwholesome Mental States Before They Arise by  
blocking The Five Hindrances:**

**Sensual Desire  
Ill-Will**

**Dullness/Drowsiness  
Restless Worry  
Doubt**

**II. Abandon Arisen Unwholesome States through concentration upon**

**The Impermanence of Life  
Deterioration of the Body  
Loving-Kindness  
Compassion  
Breathing Meditation  
Investigative Analysis  
and other meditation forms  
suggested by the Buddha.**

**III. Arouse Wholesome Unarisen States through the Seven Steps to Enlightenment:**

- 1. Mindfulness**
- 2. Investigation**
- 3. Energy**
- 4. Rapture**
- 5. Tranquillity**
- 6. Concentration**
- 7. Equanimity**

**IV. Maintain Arisen Wholesome States through illuminating the Four Noble Truths:**

**The Nature of Suffering  
The Cause of Suffering  
The Extinction of Suffering  
The Middle Way.**

**This is where Right concentration looks forward to a realization through Right Mindfulness of**

**Impermanence of the Moment  
Fleeting Nature of Existence  
Transitory Nature of Being  
The Vanity of Grasping  
The Illusory Nature of Consciousness  
Freedom from the Delusion of Self  
Deliverance from Worldly Desire  
Detached-Concentration**

**Rapture  
Tranquillity  
Equanimity**

Accompanying detached observation, watching the play of events, after extended practice, the mediator comes to learn about two methods of concentration:

In the first one, **INSIGHT MEDITATION**, he "does not deliberately attempt to exclude the multiplicity of phenomena from his field of attention. Instead, he simply directs mindfulness to the changing states of mind and body, noting any phenomenon that presents itself; his task is to maintain a continuous awareness of whatever enters the range of perception, clinging to nothing. As he goes on with his noting, concentration becomes stronger moment-after-moment, until it becomes established one-pointedly, on the constantly changing stream of events" (Bodhi 117). When this technique is practiced sufficiently, it leads to a breakthrough to the final stage of the **PATH TO FREEDOM, INSIGHT , and WISDOM**.

The second method is called **TRANQUILLITY MEDITATION**:

In this discipline, the mediator concentrates firmly upon one object, presumably the meditation object given to him by his teacher. While doing his breathing meditation, "he focuses his mind on the object and tries to keep it there, fixed and alert. If the mind strays, he notices this quickly, catches it and brings it back gently but firmly to the object, doing this over and over as often as it is necessary"(Bodhi 109).

This is called initial application. Sustained-application anchors the attention on the object and holds it there until the mediator begins to experience **RAPTURE** (delight or joy) which accompanies having achieved pure concentration and **HAPPINESS** (pleasure) which accompanies the restful and refreshing nature of continued-concentration. The process culminates in one-pointedness.

As one continues to meditate, these factors combine, complement one another and pick-up-power to steer the mind to mental states called **ABSORPTIONS** which are "beyond the reach of the five-fold sense activity, attainable only in solitude and by unremitting perseverance. In these states, all activity of the five senses is suspended.

No visual or audible impressions arise at such a time, no bodily feeling is felt. But although all other sense impressions have ceased, the mind remains active, perfectly alert, fully awake”(Nyanatiloka 79).

The term ABSORPTION has been improperly translated as a "state of trance," but this rendering is vague and misleading, and Pali scholars call the FOUR ABSORPTIONS the JHANA STATES.

The Buddha speaks explicitly on this subject:

"Detached from sensual objects, detached from evil things, the disciple enters into the first Absorption, which is accompanied by Thought, Concentration, and Discursive Thinking, is born of detachment, and filled with Rapture and Happiness" (Digha Nikaya 22).

This is the first of the Absorptions. "It is attained when, through strength of concentration, the five-fold sense activity is temporarily suspended, and the five hindrances are likewise eliminated" (Nyanatiloka 80).

"This first Absorption is free from five things and five things are present. When the disciple enters the first Absorption, there have vanished the five hindrances: Lust, Ill-will, Torpor and Sloth, Restlessness and Mental Worry, Doubts; and there are present: Thought Conception, Discursive Thinking, Rapture, Happiness, Concentration" (Majjhima Nikaya 43).

"And further: after the subsiding of Thought Conception and Discursive Thinking, and by the gaining of inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he enters into a state free from Thought Conception and Discursive Thinking, the second Absorption, which is born of concentration, and filled with Rapture and Happiness.

And further: after the fading away of Rapture, he dwells in equanimity, mindful, with clear awareness: and he experiences in his own person that feeling of which the Noble ones say: 'Happy lives he who is equanimous and mindful';--thus he enters the third Absorption.

**And further: after the giving-up of pleasure and pain, and through the disappearance of previous joy and grief, he enters into a state beyond pleasure and pain, into the fourth Absorption, which is purified by equanimity and mindfulness.**

**The four Immaterial Absorptions which are based on the fourth Absorption are produced by meditating on their respective objects from which they derive their names: Sphere of Unbounded Space, of Unbounded Consciousness, Nothingness, and of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception"(Nyanatiloka 82).**

**These absorptions, reached by the path of serenity meditation, as exalted as they are, still lack the wisdom of Insight and so are not yet sufficient for gaining deliverance"(Bodhi 116).**

**TRANQUILLITY Concentration does not guarantee freedom from unwholesome states and does not lead as a matter of course to the sort of breakthrough that can be expected with INSIGHT CONCENTRATION.**

**THE WAY TO WISDOM is fulfillment of the Eightfold Path through Understanding and Right Intention, making a final Effort to overcome the Root of Suffering. The key achievement of this goal of the Mind is to find its resolution in the OPPOSITE extreme of the Body, in the Root of Worldly KAMMA. It means a final realization of the significance of the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS: realizing the path to Freedom from Suffering by breaking the final Shackles of Desire; it means bringing about the EXTINCTION OF SUFFERING and letting go of the world to be free to enter NIBBANA.**

**The Root of Suffering is a simple and powerful truth and should be obvious to the perceptive disciple. But Understanding the ROOT is one thing and ERADICATING it is quite another. The problem is that the source of the affliction is latent and dormant, and we can't get at it if we don't know about it. Even highly developed and very advanced-disciples can have hidden-remnants of desire below the level of awareness which hold them back from making the final step to freedom. In**

other words, **IGNORANCE** of deep-seated powers that dominate volition can hold back even the most strong and gifted.

Ignorance distorts perception and causes **DELUSION**; thus the disciple, in spite of his good intentions, seeks permanence in the impermanent, satisfaction in the unsatisfactory, self in the selfless, and gets a distorted-view of reality which hinders his progress on the path. In spite of knowing better, he unconsciously perceives himself as a self-contained ego which has the innate right to pleasure (Bodhi 120).

**WISDOM** is the **ANTIDOTE** to ignorance and delusion because the most pernicious of cognitive distortions is a sense of a permanent self that craves permanent pleasures in a permanent world, the solution is to focus the burning light of concentration on illuminating the delusory nature of cognitive perception.

Trapped in a dichotomy where the mind has the volition to go in one direction but the innate tendency to go in the opposite direction, the disciple must catch the mind in its tendency to take the path of least resistance and force it through intense effort to go the other way: to go against the stream.

Wisdom centers on the development of **INSIGHT**, "a deep and comprehensive seeing into the nature of existence which fathoms the truth of . . . being" (Bodhi 120). This necessitates **DISCURSIVE THOUGHT** and **ANALYSIS** of the true nature of being, getting at the root of experience before it is colored by unconscious defilements, through the powerful light of the mind to reduce experience to the bare fact without any subjective involvement.

Eventually, if the disciple pushes investigation to its end, he will discover that there is really no independent self observing. There is only the bare fact arising. There is mere detached observation. Similarly, he will discover there are no permanent facts of existence to grasp onto for pleasure or any other reason.

The **ANTIDOTE** to the dissatisfaction connected to ideas of permanence, pleasure, and self is through **INSIGHT MEDITATION** to observe or concentrate upon **IMPERMANENCE**      **UNSATISFACTORINESS**      and      **SELFLESSNESS**

**Impermanence means that things are in constant flux and perish as soon as they arise. The objects of perception are mere strings of momentary sensation, bubbles about to pop that can't be grasped. The stream of mental events is made up of images that are constantly breaking-up.**

**Unsatisfactoriness means that if nothing lasts, there is nothing to hang on to that will give lasting pleasure. Selflessness means that if we are not the owners of the perceptions which we try to grasp and hold, then the very idea of SELF is just another such TRANSITORY perception which has no lasting permanence.**

**"When the course of insight practice is entered, the eight path factors become charged with an intensity previously unknown. They gain force and fuse together into the unity of a single cohesive path heading towards the goal. . .The factors of the concentration group keep the mind firmly fixed upon the stream of phenomena"(Bodhi 125).**

**As the wisdom of insight deepens, Right Understanding deepens and Right Intentions intensify in an effort to penetrate the world of arising events. This stage is called THE MUNDANE PATH: contemplation of the events of a conditioned-world. When insight meditation pushes beyond the mundane world, it enters THE SUPRAMUNDANE PATHS, which mean contemplation and realization on unconditional-levels.**

**The Supramundane truths of IMPERMANENCE, UNSATISFACTORINESS, and SELFLESSNESS are the ANTIDOTE to the inherent defilements of the Mundane Path. The mind breaks through worldly delusions and realizes that the opposite of the natural inclinations of the mind represent the truth of nature. It frees the mind from the root of delusion about permanence, pleasure, and self and brings the mind to the point where it is finally ready to comprehend the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS -- the starting point and the culmination of the Buddha's teaching.**

**The mind sees the nature of suffering, the cause of suffering, the extinction of suffering, and the way to the extinction of suffering, through the Middle Way and the**

**Noble Eightfold Path. When all the factors of the path are functioning without hindrance, the mind works with powerful intensity through Right Understanding and Right Intention to focus on attainment of Nibbana.**

**When the SUPRAMUNDANE PATHS are entered, the EXTINCTION of the latent tendencies to defilement is implicit:**

**Theravada teaching classifies these FETTERS as follows:**

**personality view  
doubt  
clinging to rites and rituals  
sensual desire  
aversion  
desire for fine-material existence  
desire for immaterial existence  
conceit  
restlessness  
ignorance**

**The FOUR SUPRAMUNDANE PATHS eliminate certain layers of defilement (Bodhi 128). The first supramundane path, which is called STREAM ENTRY, strikes at the roots of the first three fetters: (1) Personality View is cut-off when one begins to see that a permanent self is illusory; (2) Doubt is eliminated when through a sense of accomplishment, one gains firm confidence in pursuit of the path; (3) Clinging to Rules and Rites is abandoned when one realizes that truth is not imposed through outside conventions but must come from within.**

**The second stage, which is called the path of the ONCE-RETURNER, does not eradicate the defilements entirely but greatly reduces the roots. In this stage, the practitioner reaps the FRUIT of stream entry, enjoying a sense of peaceful bliss which accompanies momentary release from the first three fetters, giving a glimpse or insight into Nibbana before the mind sinks back into defilement. The disciple who has experienced this FRUIT can never turn back. He has finally entered the stream leading to deliverance and Nibbana. He may have to be reborn to do it, but he will eventually**

overcome these impurities. He has acquired the essential REALIZATION needed to achieve

Nibbana, and there will be no turning him back from that ultimate goal.

The third stage is the path of the NON-RETURNER in which the disciple cuts-off the roots of the fourth and fifth fetters: (4) Sensual Desire and (5) Ill-Will. Never again will he feel the need to be reborn in a human state of existence. Instead, he will be reborn in a higher state in a "fine-material world" and there attain deliverance (Bodhi 130).

The fourth state is the path of ARAHATSHIP, in which the aspirant cuts-off the five remaining fetters: Desire for (6) fine-material existence (7) immaterial existence; and the bonds of (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance. He has practiced the Eightfold Path and followed it to FULL FRUITION. "Endowed with its eight factors in full-PERFECTION, he lives in the enjoyment of their fruits, enlightenment and final deliverance" (Bodhi 130). He is free from all bondage in the round of Samsara. Fulfillment of the Path is transcending and going beyond the need for it.

"The understanding of the relaxation of endeavour is Knowledge of Fruition" (Patisambhidamagga 171). The Path performs the task of breaking-up defilements, which leads to the bliss of Nibbana when this demanding exertion subsides.

As we have been following Bhikkhu Bodhi's outline of *The Noble Eightfold Path*, we shall also quote one of his concluding statements:

"The higher reaches of the path might seem remote from our present standing, the demands of practice difficult to fulfill. But . . . [the] only requirements for reaching the final goal are two: to start and to continue" (Bodhi 131).

Certainly, talking about the final stages of the path is difficult, as it is like navigating uncharted waters. Certainly talking about the higher states is unsuitable material for teaching, as they must be EXPERIENCED rather than thought-about and discussed, but therein lies the answer: the aspirant must practice the factors of the path step-by-step, stage-by-stage, through gradual practice and gradual progress, until he

begins to reap the fruit of his efforts. "Experience" of the higher states will come even if progress seems slow and the need for effort seems relentless.

Progress in the path is like rubbing two sticks together to make fire. If you stop for a rest, you'll lose most of the progress you've made and have to start over, but if you continue in an unrelenting manner, you will eventually succeed. Start and continue and you will see where your effort leads.

It starts with Right Understanding of Suffering and the Origins and Cessation of Suffering and the Middle Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering. It continues through Right Intentions of Renunciation of Unwholesome Kamma and Wholesome Intentions of Good Will and Harmlessness, Abstaining from false, slanderous, harsh or idle speech, Abstaining from taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct and Abstaining from earning one's livelihood by Unwholesome Means. It continues through Right Action into Right Effort of restraining and abandoning the defilements and developing and maintaining wholesome states, with the help of Right Mindfulness, Contemplation of the body, the feelings, the mind, and the objects of perceptions of the mind, so that the aspirant achieves Right Concentration, passing through the stages of Jhana and the Four Supramundane States directed towards final deliverance from the round of Samsara and release into a state of Nibbana.

It is difficult to conceive of something more difficult than continued and unrelenting adherence to the path. Rubbing two sticks together to make fire is actually child's play by comparison. A more-appropriate analogy would be to say that following the path is like trying to put out a fire which has spread everywhere and seems to be out of control. It's harder to put out such a fire than it is to start one, YET that is what Buddhist practice concentrates upon -- blowing out the fire of desire little-by-little, bit-by-bit, until the last flicker disappears, bringing release and achievement of Nibbana. Start and continue and see where effort leads.

Before concluding, we must leave the reader with one final thought. The approach in this explication of the Noble Eightfold Path has been strict and rigorous,

**grasping the discipline of the path, and going at it with unrelenting fervor, hanging-on hard with a determination that is extreme. Here, it is good to be reminded that perception of the opposite of every extreme helps to bring perspective into balance. You won't achieve Nibbana while in a state of stress. Thus the aspirant will realize that having followed the rigors of the path to fruition, he must learn to let go. It's a paradox, but in the resolution of that paradox is the answer: the aspirant will only be able to achieve Nibbana when he learns to let go.**

**While there is more that could be said about DELIVERANCE FROM SUFFERING and ACHIEVEMENT OF NIBBANA, this brings the present exposition to an end. More detailed explications by eminently qualified scholars on difficult points of practice may be found in the booklist of the Buddhist Publication Society (BPS). The student who wants to know more should find the guidance he needs in these sources. The rest is practice and experience.**

**Speaking of qualified scholars, we shall conclude with a quotation from Prof. T.W. Rhys Davids, founder and first president of the Pali Text Society of London, which seems eminently appropriate: "Buddhist or not Buddhist, I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness, the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that Path."**

### Works Cited

**Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Noble Eightfold Path*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1984.**

**Ledi Sayadaw. *The Noble Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1977.**

**Malalasekera, G.P. *2500 Years of Buddhism*. Columbo: Lanka Buddha Mandalaya, [no date]**

**Nanamoli, Bhikkhu. *The Path of Purification(Visuddhi Magga)*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1975.**

**Narada, Mahathera. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1980.**

----- ***Buddhism in a Nutshell*. Pondicherry, India: Ashram Press, 1959.**

**Nyanaponika, Mahathera. *The Road to Inner Freedom*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1982.**

----- ***The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Rider, 1983.**

**Nyanatiloka, Mahathera. *The Word of the Buddha*. Kandy: B.P.S., 1967.**

**Note: For those who are interested, The Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to making known the word of the Buddha by publishing scholarly and authoritative translations from the Pali Tipitaka, the earliest Buddhist scriptures, in the Theravada tradition, as well as later commentarial literature, and other writings by highly-regarded Buddhist-scholars, including contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought.**

**The BPS booklist is available upon request from the <[www.bps.lk](http://www.bps.lk)>**

**Buddhist Publication Society Inc.  
P.O. Box 61, Kandy,  
Sri Lanka.**

**Reminiscences of Buddhist Teachers upon Revisiting the BPS in Kandy**

by

David Holmes

**I have been asked to write a personal reminiscence about my teachers in Sri Lanka, of fifteen to twenty years ago, and to say a few words about the BPS, which I shall now do:**

**Having had a predilection towards Buddhism from the time I was a teenager in the 1950s and through university and later as an English lecturer for twenty years — one day, I ended up in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in the late 1980s, where the BPS had kindly arranged for me to visit the Forest Hermitage at four o'clock in the afternoon, during prescribed visiting hours.**

From the very first moment I entered the door of the Forest Hermitage, I was met with loving-kindness, both from the Venerable Nyanaponika, who was then in his eighties, and Bhikku Bodhi, who was staying at the Forest Hermitage and looking after him. In due course, I was allowed to be seated on a low wicker chair near the window just inside the door before Venerable Nyanaponika who was sitting in an armchair, while Bhikku Bodhi was seated at a table to the left of the door but facing towards me. I can still see it as though it were yesterday.

After some preliminary exchange, I posed the question I had come to ask, which was, “What is the heart of Theravada Buddhism?” Venerable Nyanaponika smiled and said, ‘Why look anywhere but in the words of the master?’ and then he told me to read, *The Word of the Buddha* and *The Path to Deliverance* by his teacher, Venerable Nyanatiloka. Bhikku Bodhi, who could see I would have trouble remembering the titles, wrote them down for me and explained that I would find these two texts in the BPS book shop near the lake. Through this introduction, they set me on The Noble Eightfold Path.

In many subsequent visits during the next five years it was always like this. The seating-arrangement remained the same. I would ask a question and the Venerable Nyanaponika would answer in a few words, usually quoting the Buddha from the texts, and Bhikkhu Bodhi would explain, usually telling me where I could find appropriate references and resources.

In those days, the Venerable Nyanaponika was still walking and not showing visible signs of deteriorating health. He was a model of loving-kindness and benevolence who became a model for many others who followed his example. Bhikkhu Bodhi, at that

time, seemed to me to be very a bright, young (relative to me at least) Ph.D in philosophy who happened, not by coincidence, to be in the right place at the right time with the right skills and aptitudes to carry on in the tradition of the Venerables Nyanaponika, Nyanatiloka and, of course, Nanamoli, and others.

In those days, there was still a formidable amount of work to be done in translating and explicating the Pali texts in accordance with the Theravada Tradition as a guide to the practice for monks and for lay practitioners, for those who were ready to understand. Those who were in a position to benefit may not have been many at that time, but, now, in 2006, after a quarter of a century has passed and we are well into the new millennium, the influence of these Lankan texts in English is reaching around the world, especially now that a lot of BPS texts and Wheels and Bodhi Leaves are slowly appearing on the BPS Internet site [www.bps.lk](http://www.bps.lk) as work continues in proof-reading and editing.

Disseminating wider knowledge of original Pali texts was Venerable Nyanatiloka's declared mission in the early part of the last century and, now, it seems to be coming to fruition in a way that no one, then, could ever have imagined. This gives those who have followed in his footsteps great joy and satisfaction, and great praise is due to Bhikkhu Bodhi who was able to finish the work by doing what had to be done.

Bhikkhu Bodhi was always very kind to me personally. In addition to his talking to me warmly and patiently about the practice, in the Forest Hermitage, I occasionally corresponded with him during those years, and, in particular, he helped me, at a time when he was very busy with other work, to edit the text of a lecture I had been asked to

give on *The Noble Eightfold Path*, which followed the line of his own book of the same name, combined with observations from Ledi Sayadaw and Venerable Nyanatiloka.

One cannot but be amazed at the quantity and quality of scholarly output produced by Bhikkhu Bodhi and those who preceded him. The huge amount of work that Bhikkhu Bodhi has done, often on the most difficult texts, will put him down in history alongside his venerable teachers. These monks are, indeed, World Treasures.

Historically, Bhikkhu Bodhi's and Nyanaponika's selfless contributions in making the Dhamma better-known in English for the benefit of others have become synonymous with the development and fulfillment of the noble and meritorious mission of the BPS, a mission that is still being carried on to this day.

Few people know that much of this early BPS work was done by lamplight at night at the Forest Hermitage at a time when there was no electricity and very cold and damp in the rainy season. It was only relatively recently, under Bhikkhu Bodhi, that Solar Panels with battery storage were installed to give at least 12 v. light and limited power to run a laptop if one is careful. One would not think that these famous monks, so well-known world-wide, have often had to live and work where even water was, at times, in short supply. Such matters have not, however, curbed their ardent devotion. Their lives serve as brilliant examples of the noble skills of teaching and educating people.

On one of my visits to the Forest Hermitage, it was suggested that it would be of great benefit for me to gain an introduction to the Venerable Ampitiya Sri Rahula at Peradaniya University Vihara, nearby, and, in due course, this came to pass. It was a

great blessing as well, for, in addition to having a thorough knowledge of the Buddha-Dhamma, the Venerable Sri Rahula was a monk devoted to the practice of loving-kindness and a well-respected and much-revered mentor of many younger monks. He was a teacher, who was more devoted to showing and pointing the way than he was to reading or writing about it. He was yet another radiant example of his time. Many who were influenced by him went on and became great teachers themselves.

From the first, the Venerable Sri Rahula took me under his wing and seemed to know just what to do for the greatest benefit in helping me deepen my understanding. I clearly remember that, when The Forest Solitude, first opened (which he intended as an international center for practicing the Dhamma) he invited me to come and stay as a layman in white. I lived with the monks as though I were a monk, and he taught me the monastic practice.

He used to say that as long as there was a group of monks practicing the Dhamma the way it was practiced by the Lord Buddha and his disciples, Buddhism would never die. Every morning, he would take time to teach me what he could see I was on the point of being ready to understand. One day, he took me out into the forest and sat me down on a massive log and taught me the meditation on loving-kindness. During this time I came to feel that, although I was already a teacher, I wanted to be the same kind of teacher and practice the same kind of loving-kindness as him, and, from that time on, I changed my attitude towards teaching and speaking and interacting with others. Later, when visiting in other temples and monastic sanctuaries, I often thought of the purity and routine with which the Venerable Sri Rahula regulated life in the Forest Solitude Monastery at Bolawatte.

At that same time, Venerable Dhammavihari had just ordained and was also resident in the Forest Solitude. Being university lecturers, we found we had much in common. He called me his brother in the Dhamma and was, by character, always warm and kind. One would never have known by his manner that he was a famous scholar, except that he retained the distinctive voice of the professor. Every morning, we would walk together and talk about the Dhamma.

Earlier, at the University in Peradiniya, I had also met Professor Lily de Silva and often visited with her and benefited from her wide knowledge and seemingly boundless kindness. She had recently been lecturing at Harvard on her sabbatical year and was now back at her regular job. The main thing I remember is that she told me a layman could also become an Arahant without necessarily having to be a monk. I often wondered what made her say that. Her knowledge of the texts was profound, and I also gained much from her unspoken wisdom. I have always thought that she and the Venerable Piyadassi have been the foremost in transliterating the Dhamma into an English that normal people can understand.

Another thing that stands out in my memory, from the early days, in the Forest Hermitage, is the time that Bhikku Bodhi and Venerable Nyanaponika told me that reaching the first jhanna state was very difficult and very few monks ever managed to do that. I think this was intended to serve as a warning to keep me from getting my expectations up, only to be discouraged later, at times when the practice might not appear to be bearing fruit.

They also stated to me very clearly that knowledge and study alone were not enough, and knowing the suttas had to be balanced with the practice in the way the

Buddha had explained it. I remember asking the Venerable Nyanaponika how he could write a whole shelf full of books without it interfering with the practice, and he said, “Just don’t hang on to it.” Scholars should balance study with practice; otherwise, they get lop-sided.

Thus far, I have shared some reminiscences from the past to pay respect to my teachers as I then knew them. But the past has passed, and what is left is the moment leading into the future. So now, I’ll go on to make some comments on what I know about BPS present publishing activities and projected plans for the immediate future. I shall limit my observations only to things that I have seen and experienced personally.

After Bhikkhu Bodhi went to America to stay in Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey, where he is closer to medical help for his chronic headache condition, it obviously took a while for the BPS to regain its balance and re-establish a solid position. Physically, the building and staff remain in place and do what they are intended to be doing.

Bhikkhu Bodhi remains President in name and still gives advice to the Board of Directors and Venerable Nyanatusita, a monk of Dutch origin, who has been serving as BPS editor with the essential vigor and energy and devotion needed to carry out the mission. He is working hard to get new books printed and old ones reprinted and to put as many books and Wheels and Bodhi Leaves as he can on the BPS Internet site for free download.

This webpage task takes time, however, as each and every text has to be scanned and re-formatted and proof-read for digitalization and other errors by two or three (volunteer) readers and finally checked for Pali language by a competent scholar. At the

moment, a hundred Wheels are in preparation to go on the web, and more later, but Venerable Nyanitusita is careful about catching all errors, so that things may not be going onto the net as quickly as some enthusiasts might like.

Some people, who wish to repay a debt of gratitude to the BPS for the positive influence it has had on their lives, have been coming forward to offer expertise in various areas, but, as may be expected, there is a shortage of Pali scholars, so this part of the process becomes a bottleneck. Perhaps someone with Pali skills who reads this article and knows the BPS may come forward to offer assistance.

It must be said that many people who have long been close to the BPS are getting on in years, including the present writer, and one of the things the BPS needs most is an injection of fresh blood. No system can carry on efficiently that does not prepare and train new people to take over when the old ones are ready to go, for one reason or another. The best way for members and friends to help is not to come to Sri Lanka, physically, but to work from an Internet station at home where one can be in touch with the editor from any place in the world just as through one were working in the same location. That's also the best way to keep track of all the documents that are coming and going. In one day for example, there might be proof-read documents arriving from America, Canada, Britain, Thailand and Australia.

The BPS is financially sound, based on donations from the past, and the Board of Directors has things firmly in hand to be sure things continue that way. The noble virtues and intentions of Venerable Nyanaponika are still the guiding- light.

When one walks into the BPS bookstore these days, one is amazed to see the great number of books now published in Sinhalese on sale along side the range of

English editions listed in the BPS booklist. New Sinhalese translations of standard BPS texts are now being made available at subsidized prices. The library in the back of the shop is packed with thousands of Theravada books many of them now rare editions or in bound sets of early publications. There is also a computer there with an e-library and sound files of Dhamma talks from well-known Theravada teachers from around the world.

Upstairs are the offices and a spacious meditation hall that could easily accommodate more than a hundred meditators. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the annual Dana was held there for fifteen Lankan and foreign monks with about fifty lay supporters attending. Among the themes discussed was our respect for the memory of Venerable Nyanaponika and those noble friends in the Dhamma who founded the Buddhist Publication Society almost half a century ago. Coming soon, a bicentennial edition is planned with a collection of essays on the importance of the Dhamma for the present day. Bhikku Bodhi's good name will hopefully encourage a number of well-known writers on Theravada Buddhism to contribute to this book.

After the Dana, a Sri lankan gentleman said to me that

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**In closing, I would like to share an experience with fellow practitioners. I have spent most of the past month at the Forest Hermitage, sleeping in the room formerly occupied by the Venerable Nyanaponika, proof-reading texts by the Venerable Nyanamoli and other earlier scholars, either upstairs, where Bikku Bodhi used to stay, or across the way in the room in the monestary where the Venerable Piyadassi used to write. “What did I learn from this experience?” the reader might ask. The answer is that what is left in the end is only the empty moment.**