

# Disentangling the Tangle

by



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# Contents

Bija Sutta — The Seed.....	2
Mundane Right-View.....	4
Three Gross Wrong-Views.....	6
Purification of View through Insight.....	8
Now, It's the Most Favourable Chance.....	8
Your Viewpoint is Neither Clear Nor Right.....	9
The Development of Concentration.....	11
The Four Guardian Meditations.....	12
The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.....	14
Purification by Overcoming Doubt.....	17
How Right-View Establishes Morality.....	18
Any Order of Practice is Good.....	19

# Disentangling the Tangle

The Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa’s famous work on meditation, begins with this verse from the Saṃyuttanikāya — the Connected Discourses:—

“When a wise man, established well in virtue,  
Develops consciousness and understanding,  
Then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious  
He succeeds in disentangling this tangle.”

This was said, but why was it said? While the Blessed One was living at Sāvathī, it seems, a certain deity came to him in the night, and in order to do away with his doubts, he asked this question:

“The inner tangle and the outer tangle—  
This generation is entangled in a tangle.  
And so I ask of Gotama this question:  
Who succeeds in disentangling this tangle?” (Si.13)

The author answers the question by expounding the Noble Eightfold Path in terms of morality, concentration, and wisdom. The inner tangle and outer tangle are craving and attachment to oneself or one’s own property, and craving or attachment to others or the property of others, respectively.

I wish to solve this puzzle from a different angle — by explaining how to get free from the tangle of views and opinions. The factor listed first in the Noble Path is right-view (*sammā-ditṭhi*). It is followed by right-thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*), right-speech (*sammā-vācā*), right-action (*sammākammanta*), right-livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right-effort (*sammā-vāyama*), right-mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right-concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). It is noteworthy that right-view is stated as the first factor of the path, and right-thought is the second — the two path factors of wisdom. These are followed by the three path factors of morality and the three path factors of concentration. The order of teaching in the Visuddhimagga is morality, concentration, and wisdom, and this is common in other discourses too.

If one’s view is wrong it won’t be possible to develop the Noble Eightfold Path. The inclination to do so won’t even be present, or if it is present, and one does practise meditation while still entertaining wrong-views, it is very likely that one will practise incorrectly, strive unskillfully, and pay attention to the wrong things. I will point out

some wrong-views, and how one goes about establishing right-view. With right-view as the foundation it will be possible to develop right-concentration, and maintain right-action, speech, and livelihood with the help of right-mindfulness and right-concentration.

In the Bija Sutta (and in several other places) the Buddha stresses the great importance of right-view.

### Bija Sutta — The Seed

“Monks, when an individual is of wrong-view, wrong-thought, wrong-speech, wrong-action, wrong-livelihood, wrong-effort, wrong-mindfulness, wrong-concentration, wrong-knowledge, and wrong-release, whatever bodily action he accomplishes and undertakes in accordance with that view, whatever the intention (*cetanā*), aspiration (*patthanā*), resolve (*paṇidhi*), or volition (*saṅkhārā*), all lead to what is undesirable (*aniṭṭhāya*), unenjoyable (*akantāya*), displeasing (*amanāpāya*), unbeneficial (*ahitāya*), and painful (*dukkhāya*). What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the view is evil (*pāpikā*).

“It is as if, monks, a seed of **neem**, **luffa vine**, or **bitter gourd** were planted in moist soil, whatever nutrients it would take up from the soil or the water, would lead to its bitter, acrid, and disagreeable taste. What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the seed is evil.

“Likewise, monks, when an individual is of wrong-view, wrong-thought, wrong-speech, wrong-action, wrong-livelihood, wrong-effort, wrong-mindfulness, wrong-concentration, wrong-knowledge, and wrong-release, whatever bodily action he accomplishes and undertakes in accordance with that view, whatever the intention, aspiration, resolve, or volition, all lead to what is undesirable, unenjoyable, displeasing, unbeneficial, and painful. What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the view is evil.

“Monks, when an individual is of right-view, right-thought, right-speech, right-action, right-livelihood, right-effort, right-mindfulness, right-concentration,

right-knowledge, and right-release, whatever bodily action he accomplishes and undertakes in accordance with that view, whatever the intention, aspiration, resolve, or volition, all lead to what is desirable (*iṭṭhāya*), enjoyable (*kantāya*), pleasing (*manāpāya*), beneficial (*hitāya*), and blissful (*sukhāya*). What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the view is good (*bhaddikā*).

“It is as if, monks, a seed of sugar-cane, rice, or grapes were planted in moist soil, whatever nutrients it would take up from the soil or the water, would lead to its agreeable, sweet, and delicious taste. What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the seed is good.

“Likewise, monks, when an individual is of right-view, right-thought, right-speech, right-action, right-livelihood, right-effort, right-mindfulness, right-concentration, right-knowledge, and right-release, whatever bodily action he accomplishes and undertakes in accordance with that view, whatever the intention, aspiration, resolve, or volition, all lead to what is desirable, enjoyable, pleasing, beneficial, and blissful. What is the reason for that? Because, monks, the view is good.

It should be clear from this discourse that it is crucial to understand the distinction between wrong-view and right-view, to abandon the former, and to cultivate the latter. Wrong-views are evil because they inevitably lead to wrong-thoughts, wrong-speech, wrong-action, wrong-livelihood, *etc.* In brief, they lead one who holds them into greater suffering and farther from nibbāna. It is like someone lost in a desert who believes that north is south, or that east is west. The harder they strive, the farther away from safety they go. They would be better off remaining wherever they are and waiting for rescue than wandering off in the wrong direction, wasting energy and reducing their chances of being found.

Not everyone who is born into a Buddhist family will be free from wrong-views. Even those who are pious Buddhists who have faith in the Buddha’s Enlightenment and the veracity of his teachings may hold some wrong-views. Only those who are Noble Ones who have realised nibbāna are fully endowed with right-view.

To attain right-view everyone has to start from wherever they are now; wishful thinking and pious hopes do not liberate anyone from wrong-views. Careful study of the teachings and wise reflection on them is sufficient to establish mundane right-view, but to gain the supramundane right-view of a Noble One it is vital to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path and to realise nibbāna for oneself. At the very least, one should develop insight on the preliminary path and attain **purification by overcoming doubt**.

A brahmin student named **Dhotaka** approached the Blessed One and said:-

“I see in the world of gods and humans, a saint owning nothing. I pay homage to the Omniscient One. If possible, please free me from doubts.”

“I am not able to liberate anyone having doubts in the world, Dhotaka. When you understand the excellent Dhamma, thus you will cross the flood.”

### **Mundane Right-View**

Most pious Buddhists are like Dhotaka. They greatly admire the Blessed One and believe in his teachings, but they are unable to escape from doubts. Some of them may entertain wrong-views that keep them remote from the right path. To be free from wrong-views, they should acquire mundane right-view regarding ten matters:-

1. That giving alms is wholesome kamma.
2. That making offerings is wholesome kamma.
3. That giving even trifling gifts and presents is wholesome kamma.
4. That there are definite and appropriate results from wholesome and unwholesome actions.
5. That there is wholesome kamma in looking after one’s mother, and unwholesome kamma in treating her badly.
6. That there is wholesome kamma in looking after one’s father, and unwholesome kamma in treating him badly.
7. That there is this human world.
8. That there are also other worlds such as the hell realms and the celestial worlds of devas and Brahmas.
9. That there are beings born spontaneously.



10. That there are recluses and brahmins in the world with genuine attainments through right practice, who, having realised through direct knowledge the truth regarding this world and the other worlds, make it known to others.

These ten matters are clearly understood by all wise men as within the scope of their mundane knowledge. Such right-view, commonly attainable (even without encountering the Buddha or his teaching), is the basic attainment in one who calls himself a Buddhist.<sup>1</sup>

One could summarise mundane right-view as acceptance of the law of kamma, *i.e.* everyone is the owner of their own actions and will inherit the results of their own actions, plus the belief that it is possible to gain psychic powers to view other realms of existence and living-beings passing from one realm to another due to their kamma. The first aspect of this mundane right-view is, I hope, not too hard to accept as one can know for oneself that there is a significant difference in how one feels on reflection about:-

1. Gaining £100 by theft or fraud,
2. Earning £100 by honest labour or skilful trading,
3. Donating £100 to help others in some way.

Although it is not possible, without psychic powers, to know the post-mortem results of one's own actions, pious Buddhists accept the doctrine on faith or by logical inference. Many people, of different religious persuasions and of none, also accept moral responsibility for their own actions.

The second aspect of mundane right-view is more difficult to accept as psychic experiences are rare, or those that do have them don't usually talk about them for fear of being disbelieved. No rigorous scientific proof has ever been offered to explain heavens, hells, or other invisible realms of existence. A small percentage of individuals claim to recollect previous lives or to having had contact with beings from other realms. Pious Buddhists accept the doctrine out of faith by listening to talks or reading books about the Buddha's teachings. There may be many Buddhists who are sceptical about such teachings since they cannot be personally verified without developing deep concentration and psychic powers. The Buddha did warn us about accepting anything merely on hearsay.

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<sup>1</sup> These ten wrong-views are listed in the [Saleyyaka Sutta](#) (M.i.288).

There may be some Buddhists who dismiss these teachings as false, as being remnants of Hinduism, or as corruptions of the original teaching over the centuries since the Buddha's demise. Those who are non-believers in other realms of existence, and rebirth in those realms after death (and are not just sceptical about them), are holders of wrong-views. In effect, they deny the consequences of their own intentional actions (kamma), adopting one of **the three gross wrong-views** (*visamahetu-dit̐thi*) that obstruct any possibility of finding the right path and attaining nibbāna in this life. Clinging to such views guarantees rebirth in the animal realms or in hell after death.

### Three Gross Wrong-Views

These three gross wrong-views are:–

1. Everything that happens to a person is the will of an Almighty God (*issaranimmānahetu-dit̐thi*),
2. Everything that happens to a person is the result of previous kamma, *i.e.* fatalism (*pubbekatahetu-dit̐thi*),
3. There is neither cause nor reason for whatever happens to a person. It is all just blind chance (*akiriyahetu-dit̐thi*).

One who holds the first wrong-view will pray to God in the hope that doing so will ensure freedom from harm in this life and eternal happiness after death. Such prayers are psychological props at best, and appeasement at worst. Sincere remorse after doing evil deeds, whether one is caught or not, is wholesome kamma that mitigates the effects of unwholesome kamma, but begging for forgiveness only when caught and confronted with evidence of one's wrong-doing is the sign of a weak-minded person who lacks any wholesome qualities.

One who holds the second wrong-view may perform various rituals or austerities in the hope of warding off dangers. They may bathe in the Ganges, worship fire or nature spirits, or perform rituals in the hope of purifying past evils. The naked ascetics (*Ājīvaka*) who were the followers of **Makkhali Gosāla** were criticised by the Buddha for holding the most blameworthy views of all non-Buddhists.

The wanderer **Moliyasivaka** also believed in predestination caused by past kamma. The Buddha acknowledged that past kamma was one cause, but that to attribute everything to past kamma goes too far. Suffering arises from various causes such as bodily disorders, the weather, and accidents.

Materialists of the modern age do not completely deny causation. However, they look to attribute present effects to predominantly physical causes of the present existence, thus denying the law of kamma. If someone is killed by in a road accident, it is often right to charge the driver with causing their death, even assuming that they had no intention of killing anyone. We should not blame it on the past unwholesome kamma of the deceased.

If a child is born with a congenital deformity, materialists will blame it on genetics, or on the mother who may have been drinking, smoking, or taking drugs during pregnancy. The Buddha's teaching does not deny those causal factors, but it asks a further question, "Why was this child born with these genetic defects," or "Why was this child born to a mother who was not careful during pregnancy?"

The Buddha's teaching about this is found in the [The Lesser Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma](#). Killing living-beings leads to hell. If reborn in the human realm, it leads to a short life. Injuring living-beings leads to hell. If reborn in the human realm, it leads to many diseases.

"Here, brahmin youth, a certain woman or man is a killer of living beings, cruel, bloody-handed, established in killing. Due to that kamma, on the breakup of the body after death he or she arises in a state of woe, in a bad destination, in hell. If not reborn in hell, if he or she is reborn as a human-being he or she is short-lived. This, brahmin youth, is the result of killing living beings.

"Here, brahmin youth, a certain woman or man is given to injuring living beings with the hand, stones, sticks, or knives. Due to that kamma, on the breakup of the body after death he or she arises in a state of woe, in a bad destination, in hell. If not reborn in hell, if he or she is reborn as a human-being he or she has many ailments. This, brahmin youth, is the result of injuring living beings."

One who does not accept this teaching may say that it is the Will of God or blind chance, or that it was fate. Causality is not fatalism either. Past kamma is one factor only, present actions also affect the outcome. Kamma does not have a fixed outcome or there could be no escape from the suffering of the cycle of existence. In the infinite

past we have all performed the unwholesome kamma of killing and injuring living beings at one time or another, yet we do not all have to suffer congenital defects, injuries, or a premature death. The Buddha's discourse on **The Ladle of Salt** explains how the effects of kamma differ for different individuals.

Careful study of these key discourses and questioning the learned about the meaning will gradually clarify one's understanding. This effort to gain a clear intellectual grasp of the teachings is the wholesome kamma of straightening one's view (*diṭṭhūjukamma*).

## **Purification of View through Insight**

One who has gained mundane right-view through careful study and wise reflection on the teachings should be alarmed and invigorated with spiritual urgency to escape from this terrifying cycle of existence that throws living-beings into the high and low realms of existence according to their kamma. As the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw said in his **Manual of Profound Meaning** (*Gambhīra Dipanī*):—

“Now, it's the most favourable chance,  
 five rare attainments to enhance.  
 Oh! You're a man of international fame,  
 and you've plenty of affairs all the same.  
 They seem important and substantial,  
 but they are not useful nor essential.  
 Your viewpoint is neither clear nor right,  
 in charcoal-room at dark cloudy midnight.  
 You perform good actions occasionally,  
 according to your whims, traditionally.  
 Time is steadily passing without stopping,  
 as to death, the leveller, you're approaching;  
 as a gift or fee for the executioner,  
 with various foods, to present or to offer.  
 Resting in the aggregates of wealthy chamber,  
 you are waiting to die with satisfaction  
 enjoying the worldly assumed perfection.”

### **Now, It's the Most Favourable Chance**

What are the **five rare attainments**? 1) It is rare for a Buddha to arise in the world. 2) It is rare to meet an individual who can

expound the Dhamma and Vinaya. It is rare to find an individual who can understand its meaning properly when it is taught. Among those who do understand it properly when it is taught, it is rare to find someone with the ability to put it into practice. It is rare to find an individual who is thankful and grateful.<sup>1</sup>

### **Your Viewpoint is Neither Clear Nor Right**

In another sense, it is rare to gain a fortunate human rebirth with all mental and physical faculties intact. Among intelligent and healthy human beings, the majority are not followers of the Buddha, or they are followers of heretical sects of Buddhism that teach and practise what is not Dhamma. Among those who call themselves Buddhists, many do not keep the five precepts religiously. For some, the precepts are just a traditional undertaking that is forgotten before they have left the temple grounds. They are still in **the charcoal room at dark cloudy midnight**, unable to see at all what is wholesome or unwholesome. They **perform good actions occasionally** such as offering alms to monks, paying homage to the Buddha's image, reciting precepts or verses, helping others by cleaning up after an almsgiving ceremony, *etc.*, but they are more interested in the delicious food offered for the devotees than they are in listening to the Dhamma. They never reflect on death **the leveller**, and so **time is steadily passing without stopping** while they line up and await **the executioner and leveller** who treats all people the same — pious or not, intelligent or not, virtuous or not, ordained or not — executing each person when their turn arrives. They are **waiting to die with satisfaction enjoying the worldly assumed perfection**.

Those pious Buddhists who sincerely strive to keep the precepts and support the community of monks, do listen attentively to Dhamma discourses, but the meaning is not clear to them. It is quickly forgotten and not reflected on thoroughly. Some do question the monks, study the texts, and penetrate the meaning to grasp a clear intellectual understanding. We can say that they have attained the mundane right-view regarding the genuine teachings of the

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<sup>1</sup> There are several different passages to which the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw may be alluding. These five are derived from S.iii.168. Another list of five might be: 1) It is rare for a Buddha to arise, 2) It is rare to be reborn as a human being, 3) It is rare to be born in a suitable locality where one can hear those teaching, 4) It is rare to understand them properly, and 5) It is rare to practise in accordance with them.

Buddha. However, they still need to practise meditation to apply those teachings and to integrate them fully into their daily lives. This is called practising in accordance with the Dhamma (*dhammānu-dhammappaṭipanno viharati*) as taught by the Blessed One in the **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** when explaining to the Venerable Ānanda how a disciple properly respects, reveres, honours, venerates, and worships the Tathāgata with the highest reverence.

Anyone who has really attained mundane right-view can no longer remain content with mundane meritorious deeds such as almsgiving, reciting discourses, and performing sacred rituals. They will realise that the only way to ensure freedom from suffering is to develop the Noble Eightfold Path by establishing mindfulness regarding the body, feelings, consciousness, and mental phenomena to gain the insight knowledge that leads to nibbāna.

It is not a trivial task, but neither is it something beyond the ability of an ordinary person with a job and a family. There are meditation classes where one can spend a few hours to learn and practise the technique, and meditation centres where one can attend intensive retreats for ten days or a month, while relinquishing the comfort and familiarity of family life. Most people manage to take a vacation to go site-seeing or visit relatives for a week or two. They may even go on pilgrimage to the holy places. The usual vacations only serve to increase defilements, and even pilgrimages will not lead to insight knowledge unless one combines such trips with intensive meditation practice at the holy sites.

If one holds mundane right-view it will be clear that with only a few weeks to spare in a year one should devote all of one's efforts to the cultivation of mindfulness. After three or four days of continuous and diligent practice the mental restlessness will subside, and one can focus the attention on whatever mental and physical phenomena arise in the present moment. Concentration may not last for long, but if one continues to strive one can gain **purification of mind**, where the mental defilements are temporarily suppressed. It amounts to access concentration.

If all goes well, and the concentration becomes stronger and more sustained they will begin to gain insight into true nature of mental and physical phenomena and into conditionality. One will realise that they are not a person, a self, a soul, but just ever-

changing phenomena that arise and pass away dependent on conditions. The ardent meditator may attain the next stages of **purification of view** or **purification by overcoming doubt**.

These are only the early stages of insight knowledge, but they are profoundly different to intellectual knowledge. It is like someone who has learnt to swim for the very first time, and is able to keep their feet off the bottom of the pool, or swim confidently without buoyancy aids. They may be slow, and they may tire after a short distance, but they are able to rescue themselves if they should fall into the water, unlike someone who has no ability to swim.

## The Development of Concentration

Once mundane right view has been firmly established one will be inclined towards nibbāna, and no longer interested in the accumulation of wealth for the sake of enjoying sensual pleasures. One will become disenchanted with the usual worldly activities and turn away towards solitude, seeking out quiet places suitable for the development of concentration.

The cultivation and development of concentration and insight is a lifetime job that won't be finished until one gains the final goal of Arahantship, but one who has developed insight on the path has acquired some precious seeds of wisdom. Whenever one encounters suffering, one will know that the only way to remove suffering is to return to the practice of insight meditation and develop more awareness. One won't resort to unskilful means such as indulging in self-pity, drinking, or pointless distractions. One will address the problem at its root by looking within at the root causes of suffering — craving and ignorance — which lie within one's own mind. It does not help to blame others for one's own deficiencies. Even if others are at fault, oneself is one's sole refuge when it comes to purifying one's own mind. No one else can do that vital task for us, not even the Buddha could if he were still living.

There are many types and grades of concentration. There is the wrong-concentration of a hunter who is aiming to kill his prey or the concentration required to achieve worldly tasks. The right-concentration acquired through meditation is of two kinds: concentration for tranquillity (*samatha*) and concentration for insight (*vipassanā*). Prior to his Enlightenment, the Bodhisatta practised tranquillity meditation

with two recluses and developed very deep concentration of the kind needed to gain psychic powers. On the eve of his Enlightenment he used this deep concentration to recollect his own previous lives back for many thousands of lives, for many aeons without any limit. He then used it to observe the previous lives of other living beings, and saw how kamma led to rebirth in the various realms of existence. Thus he had perfected concentration for tranquillity (*samatha*). Not finding any beginning to this cycle of existence, he then turned his deeply concentrated attention to examine his own body and mind, leading to a clear understanding of the **Law of Dependent Origination** and the **Law of Conditional Relations**. When he had fully understood causality, he had perfected concentration for insight (*vipassanā*).

In the Visuddhimagga one can find detailed instructions for the development of **forty subjects for meditation** for the development of concentration and insight. One who wishes to develop concentration should approach a meditation teacher and receive instructions on how to practise concentration on the chosen meditation subject. It is preferable to practise with the guidance of someone who has practical experience rather than mere academic knowledge. Every individual's abilities and weaknesses are unique, and the meditation methods that suit one may not suit another. A skilled teacher will be able to offer many different approaches to overcome any obstacles that a meditator may encounter, providing encouragement when the pupil is hesitant and warning of the need for equanimity when the pupil becomes over-confident.

### **The Four Guardian Meditations**

To begin with, one should familiarise oneself with the four guardian meditations, which are to be used before undertaking a course of insight meditation (*satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā*), or to restore one's equanimity whenever the mind gets out of balance.

1. Recollection of the Buddha's qualities (*Buddhānussati*) to inspire the mind with joy and confidence. The Blessed One is worthy of respect due to being free from all defilements, he gained full Enlightenment through his own efforts, he is endowed with both wisdom and morality, he is well-spoken and fortunate, he can see all the realms of existence and knows the kamma that leads to each destiny, he is the incomparable guide



of trainable individuals, teacher of gods and men, enlightened, and blessed with great disciples and powerful supporters.

2. Contemplation of loving-kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*) to overcome anger and aversion. May all beings be free from free from anger, may they be free from enmity, may they be free from affliction, may they be happy, may they be free from suffering, may they not be parted from the good fortune they have attained. All beings are the owners of their kamma and inherit its results.
3. Contemplation of the 32 parts of the body to overcome lust. This body is composed of head hairs, body hairs, finger and toe nails, teeth, and skin. It is filled with flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidney, heart, liver, mesentery, spleen, lungs, bowels, intestines, gorge, excrement, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, snot, synovial fluid, and urine. The meditator may contemplate any of these body parts that appears vividly to the mind's eye, and focus on any mental image that might arise. Lust will then disappear.
4. Recollection of death (*maraṇānussati*) to arouse a sense of urgency regarding the practice. The meditator should contemplate the many ways in which death occurs to living beings of all ages. It can happen due to a multitude of different causes, in any place, and at any time. No one is free from the danger of death no matter how strong, healthy, wealthy, powerful, or intelligent they may be. When death comes, whatever work or enjoyment we were doing or had planned is interrupted. Relatives can do nothing to bring the deceased back to life, and can only perform the funeral rites and share merits if we are reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts. Some may rejoice at our death while others may grieve.

These four guardian meditations should be practised at least briefly before undertaking a course of insight meditation to make the mind strong and determined to progress with the maximum effort that one can muster. If one's enthusiasm wanes during a course of meditation, or if the mind gets so defiled that one can no longer contemplate effectively, then one should again contemplate whichever of these four methods is appropriate for one's present state of mind. They are like medicines to be taken when sick, but if one is mentally healthy then one can practise *vipassanā* as usual.

## The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

When the mind has been purified of coarse defilements and one is ready to begin cultivating mindfulness one should take up one or more of the meditation objects for mindfulness of the body (*kayānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

The first method described therein is mindfulness of respiration (*ānāpānasati*). However, the method taught by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw is paying attention to the four elements (*dhātumanasikāra*). A meditator should begin by fixing their attention of the element of motion (*vāyodhātu*) in the rising and falling movements of the abdomen as one breathes in and breathes out. The element of motion, commonly known as the air element, manifests as movement, pressure, or vibration. As one breathes in, the diaphragm pushes down, sucking air into the lungs, and pushing the abdomen out. As the diaphragm pushes up, pushing stale air out of the lungs, the abdomen falls back down. The meditator should observe these abdominal movements making a mental note of “rising,” and “falling,” while breathing in a normal, relaxed manner. The purpose of the mental noting is to apply the attention to the meditation object, preventing it from just wandering here and there, as it is inclined to do without mental effort to restrain it. This mental factor of noting is known as initial application (*vitakka*), which is the first of the five factors of concentration (*jhāna*). At first, the meditator will only be able to sustain attention on the rising and falling movements for very brief and intermittent periods, but with continuous and sustained effort in performing the exercise their attention will remain fixed on the abdominal movements for a few breaths. When the attention remains fixed on the meditation objects it is called sustained application (*vicāra*), which is the second mental factor of concentration.

After sitting for a long time, the meditator may feel some sensations of pain or discomfort in the lower limbs or in the back due to not yet being accustomed to sitting still for long periods. These feelings should be noted as “pain,” “stiffness,” “hardness,” or however they manifest to the meditator. This should be done without wishing them to go away, but to observe them closely and understand their true nature. Mindfulness of feelings (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), is the second foundation of mindfulness. As it says in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, a meditator should know when an unpleasant feeling arises,

“I feel an unpleasant feeling,” or when a pleasant feeling arises, one should know, “I feel a pleasant feeling,” and so on. Whatever kind of feeling arises, a meditator should know it as it is, when it occurs.

If a sensual thought arises during meditation, a meditator should know, “A sensual thought is present.” If a thought of anger arises, a meditator should know, “An angry thought is present.” Whatever kind of thought arises during meditation, a meditator should know it as it is, when it occurs. One should not adopt an analytical approach as might do in a psychotherapy therapy; one should simply observe the thoughts with bare awareness to see them in their true nature, and to understand that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, *i.e.* they are not subject to one’s wish or control. They arise and pass away according to conditions. Mindfulness of thoughts (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) is the third foundation of mindfulness.

It is not unusual, indeed it is quite normal, that a meditator will experience many mental distractions. The untrained mind is like a wild animal that has been snared in a trap, and struggles to get away to go wherever it wishes as it is accustomed to do. The longer a meditator is obliged to sit and repeat the basic meditation exercises, the more powerful these mental distractions will become. One should understand that they are hindrances to the development of concentration, and patiently note and observe them until they subside. There are five of them:-

1. Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*),
2. Anger or ill-will (*byāpāda*),
3. Sloth and torpor (*thinamiddha*),
4. Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and
5. Doubt (*vicikicchā*).

Mindfulness of these five hindrances whenever they arise is one aspect of mindfulness of mental states (*dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*). Positive mental states such as joy, tranquillity, bliss, or vigorous effort should also be contemplated whenever they occur.

Mindfulness of the rising and falling movements in sitting meditation is not the only manifestation of the element of motion. It can clearly be perceived in the movements of the limbs, especially while walking back and forth. After sitting for an hour, or less if the pain and discomfort becomes unbearable, or if one is falling asleep, one should slowly and mindfully get up from sitting, noting all of

the movements involved in standing up. Then, going to the place for walking meditation, one should walk back and forth (five or ten metres is adequate), noting the movements of the feet as “lifting,” “moving,” “dropping.” Meditators should walk *very* slowly, paying close attention to each movement of the feet. One should gaze at the floor about two metres ahead — not paying attention to any details on the floor, but merely restraining the eyes from looking here and there — while maintaining attention on the movements of the feet. Nor should one look at the feet — that will soon lead to a stiff neck, and misses the purpose of paying attention to the element of motion.

In all daily activities, too, the meditator should maintain this awareness of the movements of the limbs in going and coming to the bathroom or the dining hall, sitting down on one’s cushion, bowing to the Buddha image or the teacher, and so forth. All daily activities including eating, washing, and using the bathroom should be done in the same manner — *very* slowly, and with clear comprehension, being fully attentive to each small or large movement. One section of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta on mindfulness of the body is dedicated to clear comprehension of daily activities. Whether one is practising the Mahāsi method, or some other method, meditators should not neglect this practice of clear comprehension. It is like the mortar in a wall that holds the individual bricks together and makes it strong. If one is careless while performing daily activities, any concentration gained through sitting or walking meditation will quickly dissipate and the development of concentration will progress slowly.

Another section of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is mindfulness regarding the four postures of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. At first, one may not be able to sit straight with a firm cross-legged posture, but gradually one gets accustomed to it. One should try to maintain an erect posture while sitting, standing, or walking. While lying down to rest or sleep, one should lie on the right side in a composed posture, not tossing and turning, or lying on one’s back. An exception may be made regarding postures in the case of meditators who have physical disabilities, or health issues of various kinds. It is alright to sit on a chair or stool if it helps the meditator to maintain a stable posture for a longer time.

It may take many days or weeks of practice before the mind remains mindful of mental and physical phenomena arising in the

present moment and no longer wanders elsewhere. However, in time, if the meditator practises diligently, the restlessness will subside and the mind will settle down on the objects of meditation. Continuous and uninterrupted mindfulness leads to deep concentration.

Please note that in the practice of insight meditation there are many objects of attention, not only a single object. However, there is a marked difference between the distracted state of mind when one first takes up the practice and the bright, unconfused, and focused state of mind that is the result of continuous development. This non-distracted and highly purified state of mind is called access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), or concentration for insight. It has similar qualities to absorption concentration (*jhāna*), i.e. the presence of the five factors of initial application, sustained application, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness. At the higher levels of insight, especially **knowledge of equanimity about formations** (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), bliss will be replaced with equanimity (*upekkhā*). This is the **fourth vipassanā jhāna**.

### Purification by Overcoming Doubt

Even at the lower stages of insight such as **Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind**, and **Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality** the mind is purified to some extent and free from the five hindrances. The **Knowledge of Comprehension** brings the purification by overcoming doubt to maturity and the **Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away** brings great joy and tranquillity. Discursive thinking subsides and the second *vipassanā jhāna* is reached.

Although these stages are only the lower stages of insight they are not trivial achievements. The development of right-concentration on the preliminary path of insight takes strenuous and continuous effort for many days, weeks, or months. Only individuals with excellent perfections will reach these stages within a short retreat. Nevertheless, the right-view established by developing insight on the preliminary path is different to the mundane right-view that is gained from the arising of faith through careful study and critical reflection on the Buddha's teachings. The insight gained is empirical and personal. A meditator who has reached these stages is known as a lesser Stream-winner (*cūlasotāpanna*), and is a committed follower of the Buddha. Someone who has accepted a view after

reading and reasoning might be convinced to change their view after listening to other teachings. Individuals who converted from Buddhism to other religions are not hard to find. Their confidence in the Dhamma was not very strong, and they may vacillate back and forth, or lose faith in religion altogether.

However, someone who has gained insight by personal realisation of the true nature of mental and physical phenomena by diligent practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation has seen directly that these phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. They could not be persuaded to relinquish their right-view by others. They are described as “attained to view,” and are incapable of doing any serious evil deed that would lead to the lower realms.

### **How Right-View Establishes Morality**

After establishing mundane right-view by careful study, questioning, and reflection, an individual takes up the practice of insight meditation in earnest and develops right-concentration. When this concentration becomes firmly established on mental and physical phenomena, the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self are penetrated and rightly understood. Thus right-view on the preliminary path is established. Although the temptation to do wrong might sometimes arise in the mind because he or she is not yet a Noble One, due to right-view and right-concentration the meditator is able to relinquish that desire, and maintain unbroken morality. If, because concentration and insight are still immature, a meditator does do something wrong, they reflect wisely on their wrong-doing, admit their fault, and determine not to repeat it. Renewing the precepts re-establishes morality.

One who holds wrong-view does not see any harm in wrong-action, wrong-speech, or wrong-livelihood. The only restraint on their behaviour is fear of punishment by the law, or censure from right-minded people. They do wrong both in public and in private. They conceal their actions or refuse to acknowledge their faults when reprimanded. Thus they continue to behave in ways that are harmful to themselves and others without any remorse or compunction.

One who holds mundane right-view wants to behave well, but is not always able to do so due to lack of mental development. One who has not developed concentration or insight to any significant

extent is easily swayed by peer pressure to do misdeeds such as killing and injuring living-beings, dishonest trading, telling lies, committing sexual misconduct, or drinking intoxicants.

That is why, even in Buddhist countries, the ignorant majority are easily incited to acts of violence, taking the law into their own hands, raising animals for slaughter, gambling, telling lies, or doing other misdeeds that are harmful to their own welfare and that of others. They are Buddhists in name only who lack a clear understanding of the teachings. They are therefore unable to benefit from their very rare and precious human rebirth during the era of the current Buddha. Due to their lack of morality, they will not meet the next Buddha, and will miss the last opportunity of this fortunate aeon. Metteyya will be the fifth and last Buddha of this aeon. After him, there will be many aeons without any Buddha, and therefore without any opportunity to learn or practice the Noble Eightfold Path.

All Buddhists should study the translations of the texts, and question the learned to establish right-view. Then they should apply right-effort to the development of right-concentration, striving to attain insight into the three characteristics, which is right-view on the preliminary path, thus planting the wholesome seeds of wisdom for liberation from suffering when their efforts bear fruit in this very life or in some future existence.

### **Any Order of Practice is Good**

Some may think that there is no point in practising meditation if one is a Buddhist fisherman, or in the habit of breaking the precepts for other reasons. This should not be said. Morality, concentration, and wisdom are all wholesome and each should be developed to the maximum extent of one's ability. It is not essential to perfect morality before taking up meditation exercises. Anyway, one fulfils morality during the period that one is engaged in full-time meditation practice.

If one takes up the practice of insight meditation in earnest, the greater awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and intentions will gradually straighten out any wrong-views that one may hold. When right-view is established by cultivating the preliminary path of insight, and the mental defilements are expelled by the development of concentration, the meditator will naturally be inclined to observe

morality and will feel remorse regarding immoral deeds, speech, and thoughts that were habitual before taking up the practice of meditation. Someone who has a wrong livelihood will be repulsed by the thought of doing evil deeds and will want to get free from that after a meditation course. For example, a Buddhist who ran an off-license might sell that business and buy a green-grocery. If the insight gained is deep, the transformation of one's life will also be deep. If the insight gained is only shallow, the changes to one's life-style will be minor. However, if a meditator continues to practise daily, they will transform their life in a positive way and become a genuine and devoted follower of the Buddha.

We might rewrite the opening verse thus:-

“When a good person, well established in right-view,  
 Develops concentration and insight,  
 Then as a virtuous meditator, ardent and sagacious  
 He or she succeeds in disentangling this tangle.”

There is only one way to get free from suffering, and that is to develop the Noble Eightfold Path. One cannot achieve the goal if any factor of this path is neglected. The three groups of the path are morality, concentration, and wisdom. Right-speech, right-action, and right-livelihood are the path factors of morality (*sīla-maggaṅga*); right-effort, right-mindfulness, and right-concentration are the path factors of concentration (*samādhi-maggaṅga*), right-view and right-thought are the path factors of wisdom (*paññā-maggaṅga*).

Therefore, read books and listen to discourses on insight meditation, but then put them down and go to a meditation class or retreat centre to learn the right method with the help of a teacher experienced in meditation. Make sure that you have understood the method correctly, then perform the basic and progressive meditation exercises diligently. If one wishes to make fire by rubbing two sticks together, one should ensure that they are dry, and one must rub them very vigorously without letting up. If one wishes to gain insight, one must rub mindfulness and concentration together with mental and physical phenomena very vigorously without a break. A little effort, or intermittent effort, is not sufficient. The effort must be vigorous, continuous, persistent, and prolonged. Mental and physical phenomena are thoroughly entangled. They need to be teased apart to understand them as they truly are. Only that will lead to liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth.