Prelude to Buddhadhamma

Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature

P. A. Payutto
(Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)

Prelude to Buddhadhamma: Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature

by P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)

translated by Robin Moore

Original Thai version first published: 24 April 2016

Translated English version first published: November 2018 3,000 copies

Typeset in: Crimson, Gentium, Open Sans and TF Pimpakarn.

Cover design by: Phrakru Vinayadhorn (Chaiyos Buddhivaro)

Layout design by: Supapong Areeprasertkul

Printed by:

Phlidhamm Publishing, under Pet & Home Publishing House Co., Ltd.

23 Soi 6, Mooban Suanluanglaemthong 2, Pattanakarn Rd., Suanluang, Bangkok

Tel. 0-2750-7732, Email: petandhome@gmail.com, Website: petandhome.co.th

Anumodana – Appreciation

About five years ago, the Buddhist congregation at Wat Nyanavesakavan, both monastics and lay supporters, deemed that it was a fitting time to put concerted effort into translating Dhamma books into English and to publish them in a determined, systematic fashion. At that time, Mr. Robin Moore was entrusted with the responsibility of doing the translation work, with Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart faithfully and generously providing all financial assistance.

Before long, in 2016, two Dhamma books translated into English were completed, namely: *The Unheralded Value of the Vinaya* and *True Education Begins with Wise Consumption*.[1] In the next two years, these were followed by another two books: *Honouring the Claim: 'We Love the King'* and *Education Made Easy*.[2]

This year, 2018, four new books have been completed and are being prepared for publication, namely:

- *May the Days and Nights Not Pass in Vain*
- *Perfect Happiness*
- *Growing in Merit*
- *Prelude to Buddhadhamma: Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature*[3]

The study, teaching, and propagation of the Dhamma, along with its accompanying practice and realization, whereby the Dhamma becomes embodied in individuals and society, lies at the heart of Buddhism. Translating and publishing the Dhamma are key meritorious deeds enabling this process to reach success and fulfilment.

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Robin Moore for performing this important work with diligence and determination.

This wholesome work has been accomplished as a 'gift of the Dhamma' (*dhammadāna*) by way of the patronage and supervision of Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart. She has acted with devotion to the Triple Gem, enthusiasm for promoting the study and dissemination of Dhamma, and great goodwill and kindness towards practitioners of Dhammavinaya; indeed, towards all people. May I express my gratitude to Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart for her dedication and assistance, which has enabled this gift of the Dhamma to come to fruition. These efforts and achievements promote wisdom and truth, leading to long-lasting value and benefit.

P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)
21 September 2018

---

[1] Original titles: วินัย เรื่องใหญ่กว่าที่คิด & การศึกษาเริ่มต้นเมื่อคนกินอยู่เป็น.

[2] Original titles: ทำอย่างไร จะพูดได้เต็มปากว่า "เรารักในหลวง" & การศึกษาฉบับง่าย.

[3] Original titles: คืนวันไม่ผ่านไปเปล่า, ความสุขที่สมบูรณ์, ก้าวไปในบุญ & บทนำสู่ พุทธธรรม, respectively.

Preface
(From the First Edition)

This book *Prelude to Buddhadhamma: Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature* arose unexpectedly and spontaneously, and from no outside entreaty or appeal. What occurred was that an important organization posed a question on Dhamma, and I felt it necessary to send them an answer and explanation. Although this explanation was not lengthy, I felt that it summarized the key principles of Buddhism. Were I to elaborate on this text, I thought, it could be a supplement or companion volume to the book *Buddhadhamma*—a form of introduction or synopsis. I therefore, in a limited amount of time, edited and added to the text.

The entire subject matter of this book is already contained in the revised and expanded edition of *Buddhadhamma*.[1] Some readers new to the Buddha's teachings, however, may feel that, by reading the expanded edition of *Buddhadhamma*, they are in a sense jumping into a vast ocean without any sight of dry land, unable to piece together or arrange the material into any coherent shape. This book Prelude to *Buddhadhamma* may be of assistance to these readers, both as an introduction—providing a glimpse of essential points for study and understanding—and as a synopsis—leading to a practical application of the teachings in daily life and in society, whereby the world is our arena and the setting in which we live out our destiny.

Some people have expressed discomfort with having an excess of technical details in this book. For this reason, I have omitted most of the scriptural source references.[2]

The publication of this book was completed by relying on a government public fund under royal patronage, following royal tradition. This book published for free distribution is thus dedicated to the virtue of the royal family, similar to the occasion of obtaining support while preparing the revised and expanded edition of *Buddhadhamma* in 2012.

On the occasion of completing this gift of the Dhamma, may everyone who has participated in this auspicious deed flourish in peace and happiness, and grow in everything wholesome. May the true Dhamma prosper and endure for the wellbeing and happiness of all people.

P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)
13 April 2016

---

[1] Trans.: note that this book expands on some principles only covered in brief detail in *Buddhadhamma*.

[2] Trans.: where necessary, I have added references to source material, which do not appear in the original Thai text.

Preventing Future Dangers

The Pali Canon contains four consecutive groups of teachings by the Buddha on future dangers. In each of these groups he mentions five distinct dangers, warning the monastic community to make an effort to avert them.[1] In some of these teachings, the Buddha is cautioning specific kinds of individuals, while in others he is cautioning the community of monks on the whole, without exception.

The first group of teachings pertains to forest-dwelling monks. The second group of teachings pertains to all individual monks. In both cases, the Buddha is warning the monks to be vigilant, urging them to make effort to realize those states that remain unrealized. The third and fourth groups pertain to the entire monastic community; here, he is urging the monks to recognize five dangers that at that time had not yet arisen, but will arise in the future. The monks should endeavour to prevent them and rectify the situation if they have begun to arise.

Here, only the first factor of the third group of teachings is presented. It pertains directly to protecting the Dhammavinaya—to transmitting and preserving the Buddha's Doctrine & Discipline.

> *Monks, there are these five future dangers as yet unarisen that will arise in the future. You should recognize them and make an effort to prevent them. What five?*
>
> *In the future there will be monks who are undeveloped in body, undeveloped in morality, undeveloped in mind, and undeveloped in wisdom.*[2]
>
> *Despite being undeveloped in body, morality, mind, and wisdom, they will bestow full ordination to others*[3] *but will not be able to guide these ordainees in higher virtuous conduct, higher mind, and higher wisdom.*[4]

---

[1] A. III. 100-110.

[2] I.e., they lack mastery over the body (*bhāvita-kāya*), mastery in virtuous conduct (*bhāvita-sīla*), mastery over the mind (*bhāvita-citta*), and mastery in wisdom (*bhāvita-paññā*). In other words, they are deficient in physical development (*kāya-bhāvanā*), moral development (*sīla-bhāvanā*), mental development (*citta-bhāvanā*), and wisdom development (*paññā-bhāvanā*).

[3] I.e. they will act as preceptors.

[4] *Adhisīla*, *adhicitta*, and *adhipaññā*.

These ordainees too will be undeveloped in body, morality, mind, and wisdom. They in turn will give full ordination to others but will not be able to guide them in higher virtuous conduct, higher mind, and higher wisdom.

These ordainees too will be undeveloped in body, morality, mind, and wisdom.

Thus, monks, through corruption of the Dhamma comes corruption of the Discipline, and from corruption of the Discipline comes corruption of the Dhamma.

This is the first future danger as yet unarisen that will arise in the future. You should recognize it and make an effort to prevent it.

From Completion of the Threefold Training to Completion of the Fourfold Development

The Buddha's Teachings, known as Buddha-Dhamma, describe a truth of the world and of human existence in line with natural laws. When people understand this truth, they live correctly and develop their lives to perfection. They are able to attend to themselves, their communities, and the entire world in a wholesome, positive way, living in harmony and with dignity.

The Buddha's words quoted above describe the practice of the threefold training (the three *sikkhā*), culminating in a person gaining self-mastery in four aspects, i.e. to being 'fully developed' (*bhāvita*)—to having completed the fourfold development (*bhāvanā*). This term *bhāvita* conveys the goal of Buddha-Dhamma.[1] The relationship between the threefold training, the fourfold development, and the fourfold self-mastery, should be clearly understood.

This book *Prelude to Buddhadhamma* aims to clarify this relationship.

---

[1] Trans.: note that *bhāvita* is the past participle of the verb *bhāveti*. It can be used as an epithet for an arahant, in the sense of being an 'adept.'

Table of Contents

Prelude to Buddhadhamma:

Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature

1. Delightful Natural Environment

Birthplace of Buddhism

A significant series of events in the Buddha's life, acting as a key juncture in the origin of Buddhism, occurred during the time after the Buddha went forth into the homeless life (still as the Bodhisatta).[1] First, he travelled to renowned hermitages to practise the doctrines taught by the chief teachers residing there. Having completed his studies, he came to the conclusion that these doctrines do not lead to the final goal. He therefore abandoned these practices and followed his own path, looking for a suitable place to apply himself to his spiritual inquiries.

Finally, the Buddha was able to find such a suitable place at the village of Senānigama in Uruvelā. On this occasion, he uttered some verses, which are recorded in four suttas of the Tipiṭaka,[2] as follows:

> *This is a truly delightful place,*[3] *with sheltered, pleasant groves and a clear-flowing river with smooth banks, and nearby a village for alms resort. This will surely serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.*
>
> *Indeed, Monks, I sat down there determining: 'This place is suitable for striving.'*

In this delightful place of Uruvelā the Buddha realized awakening. It can thus be considered the birthplace of Buddhism, as confirmed by the passages in the Tipiṭaka:[4]

---

1 Trans.: Sanskrit: Bodhisattva.

2 In the Pāsarāsi Sutta (M. I. 160-75), Mahāsaccaka Sutta (M. I. 237-51), Bodhirājakumāra Sutta (M. II. 91), and Sagārava Sutta (M. II. 209-13), respectively. [Trans.: the Pāsarāsi Sutta is also known as the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta; the Sagārava Sutta is also known as the Sangārava Sutta.]

3 *Ramaṇīyo vata bhūmibhāgo*.

4 Vin. I. 1.

> *At that time, newly awakened, the Blessed One was dwelling at Uruvelā, sitting cross-legged at the foot of the Bodhi Tree, near the banks of the Nerañjarā River, enjoying the bliss of liberation for an entire week.*
>
> *On that occasion, throughout the first watch of the night, the Blessed One meditated on Dependent Origination, both the forward and reverse sequence, thus: 'With ignorance as condition, there are volitional formations....'*

It was here at Uruvelā that the dissemination of Buddhism had its roots, and it was from here that the Buddha set forth to spread his ministry far and wide.

(Artists commonly portray in paintings and illustrations this important incident in the Buddha's life, when he was sitting under the refreshing shade of the Bodhi Tree, enjoying the bliss of liberation. The image of the Bodhi Tree situated on the banks of the Nerañjarā River is an apt symbol for nature conservation and environmental protection. It can be summed up by the phrase: 'truly delightful region' (with pleasant groves and clear flowing water)—*ramaṇīyo vata bhūmibhāgo*.)

Soon thereafter, when the Buddha was proclaiming the Dhamma at the city of Rājagaha, the capital of the Magadha state, King Bimbisāra gained faith in the teachings and offered the royal park of Veḷuvana, known as the Bamboo Grove, as a residence for the Buddha and as a place for the bhikkhu sangha to practise the virtues of a renunciant.[1] The Buddha announced: 'Monks, I give permission for a monastery.'[2] This is the origin of the first Buddhist monastery.

In Pali, the word for 'monastery' here is *ārāma*, which can also be translated as 'park,' 'grove,' or 'garden.'[3] An *ārāma* is a delightful place (*ramaṇīya*). (These two terms have the same root: *ārāma* is a noun and *ramaṇīya* is an adjective.)

---

1 *Samaṇa-dhamma*.

2 *Anujānāmi bhikkhave ārāmaṃ*; Vin. I. 38-9.

3 Most frequently it is found in the terms *pupphārāma* (flower garden) and *phalārāma* (fruit orchard).

The royal park of Veḷuvana falls under the category of an *ārāma*. It was called Veḷuvanārāma.

After this time, other laypeople built and offered monasteries, or they offered woodland areas on which a monastery could be built. The number of Buddhist monasteries thus gradually grew in number. Every one of these monasteries had the distinctive feature of being a place of delight:[1] a beautiful, refreshing, and pleasing place.

In the scriptures, the term *ramaṇīya* is used frequently. In poetic verse, however, this term is relatively long and slightly clumsy. For this reason, the term *ramma* is used instead, reducing the number of syllables from four to two. But these two terms have identical meanings.

When the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika offered Jetavana Monastery to the sangha, the Buddha said to him: 'Build a delightful residence for the monks.'[2]

Ever since ancient times, rishis, hermits, and ascetics have given importance to—one can even say they have observed the standard and guideline of—seeking out and creating delightful abodes. Vessantara, for instance, built a hermitage of this description.[3] Even a simple leaf hut[4] is a refreshing, delightful abode close to nature.

In Pali, the definition for being a delightful, charming, and beautiful place is expanded to include the abodes of celestial beings, monarchs, and wealthy merchants. Here, the beauty and charm refers to a place abounding in ornate, imposing, and stately adornments and decorations.

But even in reference to a magnificent celestial mansion, for such a place to be considered 'delightful,' it must possess the essential feature of being set amongst a refreshing and revitalizing natural surrounding.

---

1 *Ramaṇīya*.

2 *Vihāre kāraye ramme*; Vin. II. 164.

3 Trans.: the Vessantara Jātaka tells the story of one of the Bodhisatta's previous lives, as Prince Vessantara. The story is often referred to as that of a birth in which the Bodhisatta's perfection of generosity (*dāna-pāramita*) reached its culmination.

4 *Paṇṇa-sālā*.

Abundant Water & Rich Flora

People's abode and residence should possess the essential characteristic of being delightful and refreshing. This holds especially true for monasteries. A monastery should have the following features: first, it is situated close to nature; and second, it is built conforming to the prescriptions outlined in the monastic disciplinary code (the Vinaya). By looking after the monastery and keeping it clean, safe, and pleasing, the monks experience a happiness marked by peace and tranquillity.[1] This differs from many laypeople, who adorn and decorate their dwellings as a means to show off their prestige and wealth. In this case, the sense of being delightful may simply mean amusing. The pleasure they derive is merely based on comfortable surroundings[2] or based on being entertained.[3]

The main attribute—one can say the minimum qualification or criterion—of a delightful place, frequently mentioned in the scriptures, is a plenitude of water and shade (a 'wealth of shade and water').[4]

As mentioned above, the Buddha described the village district of Senānigama as follows: 'With shady, delightful groves and a pleasant, clear-flowing river.'

The scriptural descriptions of delightful places abounding in water and shade are multiple and varied. Here is another example: 'Lotus ponds with clear, sweet, cool, pristine shimmering water, with smooth banks instilling delight, abounding with diverse trees casting shade.'

Following on from the essential attributes of water and shade, the next characteristic of a delightful place is 'completeness of region.'[5] This refers to a region, locality, neighbourhood, land, etc. that is clean, tidy, unpolluted, well-ordered, safe, pleasing on the eye, worthy of regard, and attractive, with smooth terrain conducive for walking. Uruvelā is an example of such a region, where the banks of the rivers were gentle and even.

---

1 *Passaddhi-sukha.*

2 *Utu-sukha.*

3 *Kīḷāhassa-sukha.*

4 *Chāyūdaka-sampatti*; *chāyā* = shade; *udaka* = water. This compound is also spelled *chāyodaka.*

5 *Bhūmibhāga-sampatti.*

Some scriptural descriptions mention wide sandy beaches or extensive beds of sand, as if the land was paved by silver sheeting or covered by gold leaf. These descriptions further embellish the landscape, adding details of the breeze, the sunlight, the sky, the bright moonlit nights, and the clear air free of dust and haze. These elaborate descriptions are the province of poets.

The next characteristic is 'completeness of coming and going':[1] the place is not too far from human habitation, nor is it too near; it is easily accessible and convenient to travel to.

This characteristic is linked with 'completeness of individuals':[2] the place is not inhabited by evil-minded people; instead it is inhabited by virtuous, wise, and trustworthy people, who are able to impart their knowledge and understanding. These two characteristics are especially important for the monastic sangha, whose residence should be quiet and peaceful, not crowded or congested, and suitable for solitude.

Buddhism gives great import to people's abode and place of residence. It encourages people to select and establish a residence that is delightful and refreshing, supporting good health and enhancing the spirit. This is a basic principle incorporated in the first main tenet, i.e. physical development,[3] as part of the overall system of human spiritual development.

(In a strict sense, physical development is defined as development of the 'body consisting of the five sense doors.'[4] The body is the assembly point of all pathways of cognition whereby we communicate with the world or the external environment. In a broader sense, this term thus refers to cultivating the entire spectrum of sense contact, by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. In this process, one develops sense-restraint,[5] associating with the world with mindfulness and thus generating success in one's spiritual practice.)

---

1 *Gamanāgamana-sampatti*.

2 *Puggala-sampatti*.

3 *Kāya-bhāvanā*.

4 *Phassadvāra-kāya*; 'body consisting of the five pathways of sense contact.'

5 *Indriya-saṁvara*.

People's dwellings and places of residence, including work places and surrounding environment, act as the platform and foundation for their lives. It is here that people earn their livelihood, undertake various activities, work on improving themselves, and experience the many joys and sorrows of life. Life begins and ends at home.

People's place of residence is the link between the human world and the natural world, which supports all human activity. It is thus of vital importance that people preserve and protect a refreshing, healthy, and flourishing natural environment.

There are many examples from human history of what happens when this essential state of wellbeing and completeness is severed—when people are deprived of shade and water—when the wellsprings dry up and the forests are felled. Very soon conditions become harsh and severe. People then need to migrate and move their settlements elsewhere. Prosperous lands turn into wasteland and become deserted. If the situation becomes critical, independent nation states are lost and entire civilizations collapse.

There are two ways of looking at human beings. First, one views people as separate personalities,[1] part of a social entity. Although these individuals derive various forms of pleasure from society, e.g. wealth, fame, praise, amusement, etc., these forms of happiness are relatively shallow and superficial. They can be seen as fabrications—as social embellishments. They have no reliable or enduring substance.

Second, one views people as living organisms,[2] part of a natural system. This refers to the essential nature of human beings. It is here, at the heart of this living organism, that we are able to witness and validate true, intrinsic happiness. To realize genuine satisfaction, people need to experience a spiritual happiness inherent in and connected to nature. This deeper form of happiness suffuses the heart and acts as a foundation for one's life.

---

1 *Puggala.*

2 *Jīvita.*

In sum, at a basic level, people should be provided with the opportunity to experience joy by abiding in a delightful and refreshing natural environment. This begins with the land—the forests, rich vegetation, numerous species of flowers, and mountains—and with clear, unpolluted lakes and rivers. Moreover, the region is endowed with sunshine, pleasant breezes, and fresh air.

Noble Beings Dwell in Delight

Those beings who have fully realized the Dhamma, i.e. the Buddha and the arahants, begin their spiritual journey in a delightful natural environment. When they have completed their spiritual work, they abide in constant, unfailing happiness at all times. They experience the basic joy of continuing to live in delightful natural environments; and furthermore, wherever they dwell, regardless of the region, they make this location a place of delight for others.

As mentioned above, the Buddha, before his awakening, discovered a delightful region and decided to remain there, engaging in meditation. And later in his life, three months before entering final Nibbāna, when he provided Ven. Ānanda with the opportunity to invite him to extend his life, he mentioned many places of delight:

> *Ānanda, the city of Rājagaha is delightful, Mount Gijjhakūṭa is delightful, Sattapaṇṇiguhā Cave is delightful, Tapodārāma Grove is delightful, the city of Vesāli is delightful ... the Pāvāla Sanctuary is delightful.*[1]

Earlier in his life, before the Buddha travelled to visit his relatives at Kapilavatthu, Ven. Kāḷudāyī uttered approximately sixty poetic verses describing the beauty and splendour of the path they would take through forested and mountainous regions. For example:

---

[1] D. II. 116.

> *Lord Great Hero, the trees are in delightful bloom, the fragrance of their blossoms pervading the entire forest. They cast forth their old leaves, preparing for new sprouts. Now is the right time to depart from here and travel forth.*[1]

Having listened to these verses, the Buddha accepted the invitation and set forth on the journey.

Those arahants who lived in forests and mountains would walk in the morning to a village for alms. When they returned to their dwellings, they would delight in the natural surroundings along the way. This is evident, for example, in the recorded verses of Ven. Mahā Kassapa:

Garlanded with sacred pear,
Echoing with the trumpet calls of elephants,
These uplifting crags are a place of delight;
These mountains do please me so![2]

Ever since the Buddha's time, there has been a custom of monks meeting one another while travelling, exchanging greetings, and inquiring whether their respective residences are comfortable and a place of delight. Acknowledging such a greeting, a monk will normally answer in the affirmative.

An example of this is seen in the Mahāgosiṅgasāla Sutta. Here, Ven. Sāriputta extends a spiritual greeting[3] to Ven. Ānanda:

> *The Gosiṅga Sāla-tree Wood is delightful, the night is clear and bright, the sāla trees are all in blossom, giving forth fragrant scents in all directions, similar to the scents of heaven. What kind of bhikkhu, friend ... could grace the Gosiṅga Sāla-tree Wood?*[4]

Soon after the Buddha's final passing away, the brahman Vassakāra—the chief minister of Magadha—was travelling around the city of Rājagaha on inspection, and by coincidence he met Ven. Ānanda. After a period of cordial talk, Vassakāra made the following inquiries:

---

1 ApA. 532; 'delightful' = *manorama*.

2 Thag. verse 1062.

3 *Dhamma-paṭisanthāra*.

4 M. I. 212.

> ***Vassakāra:*** *'Where is Venerable Ānanda living now?'*
>
> ***Ven. Ānanda:*** *'Now I am living at the Bamboo Grove, brahman.'*
>
> ***Vassakāra:*** *'Master Ānanda, is the Bamboo Grove still delightful, quiet, free of noise and congestion, suitable for seclusion, and favourable for retreat?*
>
> ***Ānanda:*** *'Indeed, brahman, the Bamboo Grove is still delightful, quiet, free of noise and congestion, suitable for seclusion, and favourable for retreat, because of such guardian protectors as yourself.'*[1]

The Mahā Vessantara Jātaka, also known as the Mahā Jāti, containing thirteen sections, devotes two of the sections to describing the splendour and beauty of two forested wilderness areas: the Cullavana and the Mahāvana.

The formal monastic discipline (Vinaya) contains prescriptions by the Buddha for the monks to look after their place of residence: to keep it clean, tidy, and pleasing to the eye, i.e. to maintain it as a 'place a delight.'[2] These rules are called 'duties pertaining to one's dwelling.'[3]

By living in close proximity to nature—to trees and woodlands—it is a regular duty for monks to sweep up fallen leaves. Monks sweeping leaves has become iconic in Thai culture, as is seen in the chanting books, which mention 'sweeping the monastic courtyard' in the list of monks' daily practices. In like manner, keeping the monastery clean, including sweeping the leaves, is considered a means of caring for one's preceptor and teachers.

The responsibility of the monastic community to keep the monasteries clean and tidy, ensuring that they are a place of delight, has become a distinct part of Thai tradition, passed down through generations. The inspiring image of a pleasant, delightful monastery has often been captured in Thai poetry.

---

1 M. III. 13.

2 *Ramaṇīya.*

3 *Senāsana-vatta.*

An example of this is the poem Niras Narin, written by Narinthibet,[1] praising the delightful atmosphere of monasteries and temples at the end of the Ayutthaya era and the beginning of the Rattanakosin era, e.g.:

Temples, cloisters, pillared sanctuaries, monastic chambers and gardens,
Pulpits, pavilions, courtyards, and Buddha images, shining resplendently;[2]
Scripture halls and temple bells chiming at eventide,
Crystal oil lanterns shimmering brightly, eclipsing the light of the moon.

Sense Restraint and Creating Places of Delight

According to the essential principles outlined by the Buddha, going forth into the renunciant life as a bhikkhu, or receiving a monastic training, involves upholding a code of discipline, called the Pāṭimokkha, which contains 227 training rules.[3]

This is similar to a set of regulations established by any community or institution. For instance, if one enters government service, one is obliged to uphold the discipline of a civil servant. Even children, when they enrol in a school, must observe school regulations and maintain proper decorum. Self-restraint in regard to the Pāṭimokkha[4] is considered the fundamental practice in moral conduct for monks.

Having explained restraint in regard to the Pāṭimokkha, the Buddha would then link this principle to sense restraint,[5] by using the expression *indriyesu guttadvāro*, meaning that one guards, protects, and gains mastery over the sense doors.[6]

---

1 Trans.: Narinthibet was the son of a Mon chief; he served in Ayutthaya's Front Palace Pages Corps, until Ayutthaya was captured by the Burmese in 1767. He was later promoted to the rank of Phraya Racha Songkhram under Chaophraya Chakri (later to be King Rama I), and he witnessed the dynastic transition in 1782. The Niras Narin is an example of conventional *nirat* poetry: long, reflective and lyrical poems written in verse form.

2 Trans.: some of the Thai terms in this poem remain obscure. This second verse can also be translated as 'Pulpits, pavilions, and courtyards, polished and swept clean by the monks.'

3 *Sikkhāpada*; in the vernacular, they may be referred to as 227 moral precepts (*sīla*).

4 *Pāṭimokkha-saṁvara*; known colloquially as 'keeping moral precepts.'

5 *Indriya-saṁvara*.

6 In the Tipiṭaka, this expression is found in approximately forty-five locations.

Sense restraint refers to knowing how to skilfully apply the doorways of cognition, i.e. the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—the channels by which we engage and communicate with the external world—in a fruitful way, thus creating a foundation for personal improvement. Sense restraint is the dawning of all aspects of spiritual development.

The human body is the meeting point of the five kinds of sense contact—contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. The five senses are the pathways by which we perceive and cognize the external world. For this reason, the body is referred to as the 'body of the five doorways'[1] or the 'body of the five doorways of sense contact.'[2]

Physical development[3]—developing the 'body of the five doorways'—is undertaken by sense restraint. Here, one develops skill in using the senses, taking heed while the eye sees forms, the ear hears sounds, the nose smells odours, the tongue savours tastes, and the body touches tangibles. One engages in sense contact without getting stuck in sensations of pleasure and displeasure, which often lead to fascination, infatuation, annoyance, despondency, bewilderment, etc.

One observes forms, listens to sounds, etc. with mindfulness, investigation, and discernment. And one increases such wholesome mental qualities as joy, delight, inner peace, contentment, love, kindness, enthusiasm, aspiration for knowledge, eagerness to act, constructive thinking, etc.

For monks, skilful sense restraint facilitates maintaining moral discipline and staying true to the Pāṭimokkha. Physical development is thus linked to and supports moral development.[4] Careful attention to the doorways of sense contact,[5] i.e. effective physical development, is the starting point for

---

1 *Pañcadvāra-kāya.*

2 *Pañcaphassadvāra-kāya.*

3 *Kāya-bhāvanā*; 'development of the body.'

4 *Sīla-bhāvanā.* The commentaries refer to both kinds of restraint as forms of moral conduct, i.e. *pāṭimokkhasaṁvara-sīla* and *indriyasaṁvara-sīla.*

5 *Phassa-dvāra.*

attending to the channel of bodily action[1] and the channel of verbal action,[2] i.e. for effective moral development.[3]

Careful attention to the sense doors, i.e. sense restraint—the mainstay of physical development—is thus a pivotal part of spiritual practice, going hand in hand with moral development.

In Thailand it is common to speak about the composure and restraint (or lack of restraint) of the monks. This indicates that sense restraint has traditionally been given great importance. These days, however, it appears as if only an abstract notion or ritual structure of this principle remains. People see only the external form; they do not understand the true significance and practical application of sense restraint. We should therefore make the effort to revive this important principle, not only amongst the monastic community, but across the board, integrating it into the general education and development of people in the wider society.

The sense faculties,[4] also known as the doorways of sense contact, are constantly engaging with the external world. We should strive to make contact with favourable things, which lead us in positive directions and induce wholesome states, e.g., joy, serenity, contentment, and the inclination to do good.

---

1 *Kāya-dvāra*.

2 *Vacī-dvāra*.

3 Trans.: the author here is combining the two definitions of the term *dvāra*—the doorways or channels for making contact with the world—namely:

1) Engagement with the world by way of the six 'sense doors' (*phassa-dvāra*; 'doorways of sense contact'; 'sense bases'): the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These sense doors cognize various properties and attributes of the world, namely, the six sense objects (*ārammaṇa*): forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects.

2) Response to the world relying on the three 'channels of action' (*kamma-dvāra*): the body channel (*kāya-dvāra*), speech channel (*vacī-dvāra*), and mind channel (*mano-dvāra*), resulting in physical actions (*kāya-kamma*), verbal actions (*vacī-kamma*), and mental actions (*mano-kamma*).

Note that because the subject here pertains to physical and moral development, the 'mind door' in the first definition, and the 'mind channel' in the second, are not included in the discussion.

4 *Indriya*.

This stands in contrast to aimlessly and indiscriminately reacting to stimuli without end.

Living in a healthy environment greatly facilitates the progress of physical development, and it reinforces and enhances the advancement of the other areas of development.[1] There are thus guidelines for selecting and creating a place of residence—a person's regular and established surroundings—making it delightful.

These guidelines are especially pertinent to monks, whose regular duty it is to train themselves in physical development. They are encouraged to seek out and establish delightful abodes. As mentioned above, the Buddha, in the context of maintaining basic monastic discipline, combined sense restraint—part of physical development—with moral development.

Indeed, everyone should apply these principles. We should all choose and create a delightful abode, including our homes, offices, etc., keeping it clean, tidy, elegant, and pleasing. The land, water, air, and overall natural surroundings will thus be refreshing, satisfying, safe, and conducive to growth and improvement.

In sum, effective development of the body, leading to skilful and beneficial interaction with the world, begins with the principle of delight.[2]

The emphasis so far has been on physical development: the basic stage of spiritual development. Although this is a rudimentary stage of practice, it is essential and tends to get overlooked. It involves establishing a supportive environment and promotes the readiness in people to advance in the complete set of four factors of human development.

---

[1] *Bhāvanā*. In Pali, the word *bhāvanā* refers specifically to human development or cultivation; in contrast, the word *vaḍḍhanā* is used in a general sense, referring to any form of development, increase, or growth (one can even say that a rubbish heap is 'growing'— *vaḍḍhanā*).

[2] *Ramaṇīya*.

2. Performing Good Deeds & Fostering a Harmonious Community

Preserving Traditions – Protecting Buddhism

I have a vivid memory from my childhood. When I was a young novice living in the countryside, I observed the old tradition of the monks giving Dhamma talks about the god Indra[1] and his seven practices.[2] They told the story of the young man Magha and his group of friends who, with zeal and determination, performed meritorious deeds, in the end being reborn as Indra and the host of devas in Tāvatiṁsa heaven. This the Buddhist rendering of the legend of Indra.

In later times, however, this legend of Indra seems to have vanished or to have been forgotten. Most Thai people have heard of the name Indra, and many people perform good deeds, but a large part of the population are unfamiliar with the story of Magha and the deeds he performed before being reborn as Indra. The reason I have brought this matter to attention is because I would like to obtain more clear and reliable testimony and understanding on ancient Thai traditions.

Assuming that 60-70 years ago the tradition of delivering a Dhamma sermon on the legend of Indra and his seven exceptional practices was still common and alive, this shows that the Thai people before 2500 BE (1957 CE) had a much clearer and more precise understanding of merit and merit-making than the majority of people today.

In the intervening years, Thai people have become more divorced from the Buddha's teachings, and Thai traditions have gradually ebbed away. The practice known as Buddhism or Thai heritage remains primarily as a collection of ceremonial conventions followed perfunctorily. Within this

---

[1] Trans.: Pali: Inda; often referred to as Sakka. Beginning students of Buddhism may be surprised that Buddhist cosmology includes clearly outlined celestial realms and that the Buddha spoke about divine beings and praised their good qualities. As the venerable author points out in chapter 9 of *Buddhadhamma* on the supernatural and the divine, a proper relationship to celestial beings is based on friendship, lovingkindness, and mutual respect, rather than on entreaty and supplication.

[2] *Vatta-pada*.

state of affairs, many aspects of the Buddhist teachings identified with and practised by the Thai people today have become distorted or corrupted. At the very least, the body of teachings recognized by them is more narrow and restricted.

Besides failing to provide people with wellbeing and security, as is the genuine purpose and objective of the Buddhist teachings, a distorted understanding and practice may cause damage on many levels: for the Buddhist religion, for Thai culture and heritage, for individuals, and for the nation as a whole.

In any case, it seems useful here to recount the legend of Indra, to restore people's understanding of merit and the Buddhist principle of merit-making, and to redress the defects in Thai society.

In Thai society, going back to ancient times, Indra has played a highly significant role and has been greatly venerated, by royalty down to the common people. He has therefore been the source of many popular beliefs and customs. For example, Indra has four celestial pleasure parks: Cittalatāvana, Pārusakavana,[1] Missakavana, and Nandavana.[2] These names have consequently been used in Thailand for royal palaces, aristocratic manors, and important government centres.

Names pertaining to Indra that are familiar to the Thai people and that convey a meaning of splendour and majesty include: Phra Vajiravudh,[3] Prasat Vetchayan,[4] Vetchayanta Royal Chariot, the elephant Erāvaṇa,[5] Nandāpokkharaṇī,[6] and the celestial tree native to Tāvatiṁsa heaven called Pāricchattaka.[7]

---

1 Trans.: alternative spellings: Phārusa; Phārusaka.

2 This last park is also spelled Nandanavana. [Trans.: Nandavana is even the name of a popular group of gated communities in Bangkok.]

3 Trans.: Vajirāvudha (Sk.: Vajrāyudha): 'thunderbolt-armed.' A name of Indra. Also the name of King Rama VI.

4 Vejayanta: the name of one of Indra's palaces, and also the name of one of his chariots.

5 Erāvaṇa: Sakka's elephant.

6 Nandāpokkharaṇī: a lake in Tāvatiṁsa Heaven.

7 It is sometimes spelled Pāricchatta or Pārijāta.

Indra has been an important and distinguished deity ever since the age of the Vedas. When the Aryans invaded the Indian subcontinent, Indra was worshipped as the highest deity—the supreme warrior.[1] However, when the Aryans had gained a firm foothold in India, engaging in warfare was no longer the greatest priority. Consequently, Indra's importance waned, and the god Brahma grew in prominence. The brahmans claimed that Brahma through divine edict had separated human beings into four castes. They also established a system of elaborate sacrificial rituals, asserting that these are essential for union with God.

After the Buddha's awakening, he taught that the valid object of people's veneration and worship is the truth inherent in nature—the Dhamma. He urged people to abandon the caste system and to stop making blood sacrifices. He stated that humans and celestial beings live independently from one another. Both are capable of realizing the absolute truth by undertaking their respective modes of spiritual practice, leading to complete enlightenment.[2]

Therefore, those individuals who voluntarily walk the noble path and take higher ordination as bhikkhus have no formal obligations in relation to celestial beings. The engagement or accountability is limited. In some cases, devas wishing for spiritual progress may come and ask for teachings from virtuous monks. Otherwise, faithful devas may offer their service to monks. Moreover, if monks have unrestrained and erroneous thoughts and conduct themselves incorrectly, pure-minded devas may come and offer admonishment and positive reminders. (Granted, there are some unscrupulous devas; in respect to these, the Buddha encouraged the monks to maintain a heart of lovingkindness.)

---

[1] Trans.: The Aryans (a self-designation) are also referred to as the Indo-Aryans, who stemmed from the Proto-Indo-Iranians, identified with the descendants of the Proto-Indo-Europeans. Most historians consider the invasions by the Aryans of the Indian subcontinent to have taken place between 2,000-500 BC.

[2] Trans.: Note that the Buddha did advocate offerings to devas (*devatā-bali*) by lay Buddhists. Again, these offerings are made in the spirit of respect, kindness, or assistance, not as a propitiatory offering, a supplication, or a request for favours.

Looking at the Buddhist lay community, it appears that many people have an insufficient understanding of the Buddhist path, and are still anxiously preoccupied with divine power and intervention.

In the Buddhist scriptures, the god Brahma remains in the background and generally does not get involved in human affairs. The old, powerful god Indra, however, still plays a dominant role in the world of human beings. But here, Indra, the formidable god of the ancient Vedic religion, is transformed into Indra of the Buddhist pantheon, whereby his relationship to people radically changes. His behaviour changes from displaying might and subjugating others to his rule, to protecting the virtuous and assisting the righteous.

Indra in the Buddhist scriptures thus manifests as two archetypes. First is the original god from the ancient Vedic tradition, who jealously guards his supremacy, fearful that someone may usurp his power. For instance, if a hermit or rishi was practising intense austerities, Indra's throne would heat up, forcing him to inspect who it is possessing competitive psychic powers, capable of toppling him from his lofty pinnacle. He would thus seek a means to disrupt this person's practice and ruin his austerities.

Second is the god Indra who venerates the Buddha. If virtuous people—those devoted to doing good—are being persecuted or obstructed, or they are subject to injustice, Indra's throne heats up. Inspecting and verifying the cause, Indra intervenes and offers assistance. Not far in the past, Thai people were widely familiar with the relevant verses from the royal composition titled 'The Golden Conch':[1] 'In times of yore, the cushioned celestial throne suddenly grew hard as stone. Bewildered, [Lord Indra] cast his divine eye

---

[1] สังข์ทอง. Trans.: this is a famous Thai folktale based on a story from the Suvaṇṇasaṅkha Jātaka. The hero of the story is Prince Saṅkha (also known as Jao Ngaw—เจ้าเงาะ). He and his mother were banished from the kingdom; he later puts on a magic disguise, covering himself with black skin. Seeing the golden skin beneath his disguise, Racanā (also spelled Rochana), a princess from another kingdom, falls in love with him. Her father is outraged and banishes them to live at the edge of the forest. His wrath grows until he decides to execute Jao Ngaw. As a result, Indra intervenes. The story ends with Saṅkha (having transformed back into his graceful appearance), accompanied by his mother and Racanā, reclaiming his original kingdom.

searching for the cause. Discerning the danger befalling on Princess Racanā, he saved her from certain death.'

In the Buddhist narrative, Indra supports people in their Dhamma practice. One can even say that this is the chief task and responsibility of the hosts of Tāvatiṁsa heaven, who discuss and examine this matter in the Sudhamma Assembly Hall.

As recounted in the scriptures, on the full-moon Uposatha day—the 15th day of the waxing moon—the Four Divine Kings[1] visit the human world on inspection, taking note of how many people are caring for their parents, providing service to renunciants and brahmans, respecting the elders in their community, upholding the Uposatha day observances, and performing meritorious deeds. On the 14th day Uposatha, they send their sons to make this inspection, and on the 8th day Uposatha they send members of their divine entourage. Following these inspections, they give a report to the devas of Tāvatiṁsa heaven at the Sudhamma council hall.[2]

Promoting a Land of Delight & Fostering a Healthy Community

As mentioned above, fifty years ago, Thai people were familiar with the seven exceptional practices of Indra—Indra's constant endeavours.[3] The Tipiṭaka describes how Magha was reborn as the god Indra by undertaking these seven practices.[4] It goes on to define a 'good man'[5] as precisely someone who observes these seven practices.

The seven exceptional practices are as follows:

One makes a lifetime vow:

---

1 *Cātumahārāja.*

2 A. I. 142-44.

3 *Vatta-pada.* In the Burmese and Roman script Tipiṭakas, this term is spelled *vata-pada.* [Trans.: also known as the seven 'vows.']

4 Three consecutive suttas present a version of this story, varying slightly in detail: S. I. 228-231. For commentarial stories, see: DA. III. 710; DhA. I. 264; JA. I 198-204 (Kulāvaka Jātaka); MA. II. 301.

5 *Sappurisa.*

1. To look after and care for one's parents.
2. To sustain an attitude of humility and respect towards the elders in one's community.
3. To speak gently and politely.
4. To refrain from speaking divisively; instead one speaks in a way that unites people and promotes harmony.
5. To maintain the household life with a heart free from miserliness; to delight in relinquishment and sharing.
6. To speak honestly.
7. To refrain from anger; if anger does arise, one dispels it immediately.

The scriptures recount the story of the young man Magha, who performed meritorious deeds, creating a delightful environment and fostering social harmony. This story of merit-making was passed down over centuries in Thailand and was, until recently, well-known in Thai society.

This moral tale now has been widely forgotten in Thailand. Yet it conveys an essential message. Because it helps to clarify the meaning of the term *puñña* ('merit'; 'goodness'), it seems warranted here to provide an in-depth narrative of this story.[1]

A long time ago, in the village of Macalagāma in the Magadha country, the villagers were working together to improve their homes and neighbourhood. Amongst them was a young brahman man named Magha. He disposed of litter and tidied up his personal residence, thus making it into a place of delight. Having finished his work he rested.

Another villager coveted his property and forcefully evicted Magha, dispossessing him of this land. Although forced to leave, Magha did not become angry. Instead, he cleared a new property, making this too into a place of delight. But here also someone came and forced him off the land. Again, Magha refrained from getting angry and instead settled in a new location, making it into a refreshing, delightful spot.

---

[1] In the following account, note the use of the terms 'merit' (*puñña*), 'merit-making' (*puñña-kamma*), and '(place of) delight' (*ramaṇīya*).

This sequence of being evicted from his land occurred several more times. Yet Magha would never become angry. He would simply move on and create a new residence elsewhere. Moreover, he would think to himself that it is fortunate that these other people can experience joy by living in these delightful areas. He would reflect: 'Their happiness is a result of my actions. My actions thus surely count as meritorious, and they will bear fruit as happiness for myself as well.'

In the mornings, Magha would take his hoe and clear out open spaces, turning them into delightful places, where the villagers, both old and young, could sit and rest. Wherever people would congregate, e.g. in the village square, Magha would sweep and tidy the area, making it a comfortable and relaxing place, thus providing joy to the general public. In the cold season he would build fires for people to warm themselves; in the hot season he would set out water for people to slake their thirst.

Magha further reflected that every person loves and appreciates refreshing, delightful places. No-one is averse to beautiful, tranquil environments. He therefore decided to get up early each morning, and, shouldering his hoe and blade, depart his home to level out the public pathways and clear them of any tangled branches and vegetation.

When the workload increased, Magha was required to work all day, returning home late in the evening. One day a neighbour—another young man—asked him what he had been doing all day. Magha replied that he had been making merit, clearing the road to heaven. The young man asked whether he could be his companion and share in this merit-making. From that point on they worked as a pair.

Soon thereafter, other young men from the village inquired about their activities, and consequently joined their merit-making endeavours. This continued until the group of companions grew to thirty-three members, who actively travelled around performing good deeds. Besides improving the roads leading into the village, they built rest-pavilions at road junctions, dug ponds, and erected bridges.

Magha, who was the leader of the group, eventually earned the respect and trust of the wider community. He then encouraged the villagers to practise generosity and to abstain from unwholesome actions, e.g. drinking intoxicants and gambling. Before long, the majority of the villagers were engaging in charitable acts and observing moral precepts.

Using their array of tools, the group of young merit-makers cleared and evened the roads leading out of the village for many kilometres.

The village headman saw this group of young men doing their work and became agitated. Formerly, when the villagers were drinking alcohol, hunting, fishing, etc., he made a healthy profit from levying taxes on alcohol and collecting other duties. Yet once they had begun to follow Magha in performing meritorious deeds, his income had dried up. He thus plotted a way to interfere.

He called these young men for a meeting and asked them: 'What are you doing on your excursions?' They replied: 'Sir, we are building a road to heaven.' The village headman said: 'You are householders. You shouldn't be doing this kind of work. You should be making a living by hunting and fishing in the woods, and distilling alcohol for your pleasure and amusement. Now go off and get on with such normal kind of work.'

Magha and his comrades objected and refused to follow this advice. Although they were repeatedly rebuked by the village headman, they rejected his pleas. In the end, the headman was furious, and thought up a way to eliminate these pesky rivals. He thus lodged a formal allegation, petitioning the local king, claiming: 'Sire, I have spotted a band of thieves passing through my land.' When the king replied: 'You must capture them and bring them here,' he obeyed the royal command, apprehending Magha and his comrades and taking them to the royal hall.

Without due investigation, the king ordered all of these men to be executed by having an elephant trample them to death. But as a result of their lovingkindness, the elephant refused to trample them. The king thought that the elephant was probably anxious about the large number of convicts, so he ordered that the men lie prostrate, covered by reed matting. Yet the elephant still baulked.

The king was bewildered. Making inquiries and discovering that these men worked together to perform meritorious deeds, e.g. looking after roads, building rest pavilions, digging ponds, and erecting bridges, the king was full of praise and offered his patronage.

Instead of being punished, the king bestowed the entire village as a gift to the thirty-three young men for them to take charge of and manage. He ordered that the village headman act as their servant, and for their convenience and comfort he donated the elephant to be their means of transportation and conveyance.

This group of young men were overjoyed—they recognized the blessings of making merit, plus they acquired a royal elephant to assist with their work. They decided to increase their merit-making activities, and after mutual consultation, they began work on a solid-structure resting hall at the crossroads near the village. This was a big building project, involving the help of professional carpenters and builders. In their meritorious activities, however, they had not yet provided the opportunity for women to participate—they had not yet allowed women to have a share in the merit.[1]

This building project was an illustrious merit-making occasion, whereby the women of the village participated in making merit. For instance: Sudhammā was the building supervisor for the hall—she directed the carpenter to carve her name Sudhammā on the gable apex, thus naming the building;[2] Sunandā oversaw the digging of a lotus pond; and Sucitrā directed the creation of a delightful flower garden.[3]

---

[1] This merit refers to the *patti* in the term *patti-dāna*. [Trans: 'sharing one's goodness with others.' This is one of the ten bases of meritorious action (*puññakiriyā-vatthu*): 1) giving; 2) moral conduct; 3) mental cultivation; 4) respectful behaviour; 5) serving others; 6) sharing one's goodness with others; 7) rejoicing in the goodness of others; 8) listening to the Dhamma; 9) teaching the Dhamma; 10) making one's views upright.]

[2] The celestial assembly hall in Tāvatiṁsa heaven is called the Sudhammā-sabhā (alternatively: Sudhamma-sabhā).

[3] *Pupphārāma*. [Trans.: Magha had four wives: Sudhammā, Sunandā (also known as Nandā), Sucitrā (also known as Cittā), and Sujātā (also known as Sujā). Preoccupied by adorning herself, Sujātā took no part in the meritorious activities and was later reborn as a crane in a mountain cave.]

Magha upheld the seven practices throughout his entire lifetime, and along with his companions he performed constant meritorious actions. They were all reborn in Tāvatiṁsa heaven, with Magha—the leader of the group—being reborn as Sakka (Indra).

The merit-making described in this story of Magha—the legend of Indra—emphasizes doing wholesome deeds, creating a delightful environment, and fostering a peaceful community, in which each individual lives in harmony and develops virtue.

This conforms to the principle in the Buddha's teaching:

> *Those who plant orchards and woodlands, build bridges,*[1] *set out drinking-water, dig wells and ponds, and provide lodging and shelter—the goodness of such persons increases continually both day and night. Steadfast in righteousness, accomplished in moral virtue, they walk the path to heaven.*[2]

Buddhist Customs Benefit Thai Society and Protect Buddhism

The reason for presenting such a long account about merit is because this matter is a vital part of both Thai society and Buddhism as a whole.

As is commonly known, many aspects of Thai culture and tradition stem from Buddhist origins, whereby Thai people have drawn upon, applied, and passed down Buddhist principles over centuries, for the wellbeing and prosperity of Thai society. In order to preserve and carry on these traditions, it is essential to accurately understand the underlying Buddhist principles that have been applied and brought into practice.

If people's understanding of these principles fades, and people's practice becomes distorted or radically changes in structure, besides damaging (rather than improving) Thai society, the fabric of Buddhism may potentially be destroyed. But if people are grounded in correct understanding and practice, besides the inherent wholesome traditions of Thai society being passed on to new generations, genuine Buddhist teachings will be protected and preserved.

---

[1] This includes providing ferries to transport people across rivers.

[2] S. I. 33.

If we concede that cultural heritage is a crucial part of any society, a unique feature of a country, and an essential national mark of identity, we can conclude that members of society have a responsibility to safeguard cultural traditions. If Thai people are capable of doing this—to the extent of actualizing these traditions on the level of conduct, mental composure, and wise understanding[1]—Buddhism as an integral part of Thai society will be preserved. In addition, Buddhism will continue to protect and benefit Thai society.

Moreover, preserving these traditions prevents the harm from limited, obfuscated, or distorted understanding.

In sum, the responsibility of the Thai government and of the Thai people vis-à-vis the Buddhist religion and Thai cultural traditions is intimately linked to preserving the wellbeing of Thai society as a whole.

As is still clearly evident, the traditional Buddhist social structure, as passed down in Thai culture, is divided into two main social groups or communities, namely: the renunciant order[2]—the monastic sangha—and the laity[3]—the wider society comprised of householders. This separation accords with the original Buddhist template.

Although these two main Buddhist communities have clearly distinguishable ways of life and fields of activity, they share a common basis—a foundation upon which their distinct modes of practice both securely rest. Moreover, their paths are regularly intertwined, and their goal and destination merge at a single point.

Previous generations in Thailand have held to a simple format, namely: the monastic community—the sangha—aims directly for Nibbāna; the lay community aims for Nibbāna as the final goal, while aspiring to heaven as an intermediate haven.

As clear manifestations in people's lives, the two factors of mental

---

1 Trans.: this refers to the threefold training of virtuous conduct (*sīla*), mental collectedness (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

2 *Pabbajita*.

3 *Gahaṭṭha*.

composure and wise understanding (both aspects of mentality)[1] result in visible and distinct conventions and traditional forms of behaviour. In this context, the structure of the monastic sangha is aligned directly with the path to Nibbāna.[2] The structure of the lay community, on the other hand, emphasizes the path to heaven;[3] here, walking the path to Nibbāna is valid and praiseworthy, but is seen more as an individual or personal endeavour.

(We should persevere in advancing Thai lay culture from the restricted path to heaven, elevating it to the elementary stages of the path to deliverance.)

Observing closely, one sees this dual pathway inherent in Thai culture, which also has a bearing on traditional forms of merit-making in Thailand. It is also related to the previous story of Magha, i.e. the legend of Indra. Because this story has grown dim in the collective memory of the Thai people, and some of the historical facts pertaining to it remain unclear, I have had to use some conjecture in presenting this account.[4]

In brief, it is very likely that in former Thai tradition, the monks would present two accompanying sermons, namely:[5]

Sermon of the Great Birth: a sermon on the story of Vessantara (known as the 'Great Birth').[6] This teaching focuses on the Bodhisatta's development of the perfections,[7] i.e. the path of knowledge of awakening,[8] leading to the realization of Nibbāna. This story presents the Buddhist ideal, whose supreme importance needs to be reiterated and carefully preserved in people's awareness.

---

1 *Nāma-dhamma.*

2 The path to deliverance: *mokkha-magga.*

3 *Sagga-magga.*

4 Granted, this conjecture draws on some basic principles for reference. Enthusiastic scholars can do more research on this subject.

5 This hypothesis is substantiated by examining other Thai customs and rituals.

6 *Mahājāti.* [Trans.: 'Thet Mahachat' is the name given to a Buddhist festival in Central Thailand. There are similar celebrations in other parts of Southeast Asia. During this festival the monks give a sermon of all chapters of the Vessantara Jātaka, accompanied by rituals and cultural performances. It is usually celebrated after the end of the Rains Retreat.]

7 *Pāramī* or *pāramitā.*

8 *Bodhi-ñāṇa.*

Sermon on Indra's Seven Exceptional Practices: this teaching focuses on the merit-making of Magha and his companions. This represents the path of meritorious action[1] performed by householders—the general lay community—those who live amidst worldly conditions,[2] often take refuge in divine power and external influence, and still aspire to celestial joy and splendour.

Regardless of whether this historical analysis is accurate or not, we can still, without a doubt, derive great benefit by examining this subject of merit and merit-making.

Making merit, or performing good deeds, is a key Buddhist tenet. Throughout the centuries, the making of merit has acted as an essential feature and a driving force in Thai culture. In addition, the principle of merit-making is linked directly to people's close relationship with nature. It promotes the responsible stewardship and care of the natural environment.

We should thus make the effort to rekindle an appreciation and understanding of merit-making, supporting a practice by the lay community that accords with the Buddhist teachings. The tradition of merit-making will thus be reformed, aligning itself once again with genuine Buddhist principles. As a result, it will continue to benefit individuals and society, consistent with its true purpose.

Monks and Laypeople: Working Together in Goodness

Although a person may be endowed with kindness and charity, performing numerous meritorious deeds like Magha and his companions, such behaviour and resolve remains centred on physical and moral development,[3] which, when viewed from a wider perspective, is still insufficient.

One should progress to the stages of mental development[4] and wisdom development.[5] Within the formal system of meritorious action of the laity,[6]

---

1 *Puñña-kiriyā.*

2 *Loka-dhamma.*

3 *Kāya-bhāvanā & sīla-bhāvanā.*

4 *Citta-bhāvanā.*

5 *Paññā-bhāvanā.*

6 *Puñña-kiriyā.*

these two factors are jointly referred to as 'cultivation';[1] yet one should be aware that in this context this term encompasses these two higher stages of development.

Generally, spiritual training relies on the guidance, counsel, and close companionship of wise and experienced teachers, acting as virtuous friends.[2] Members of the monastic community, whose life is designed to promote wisdom, have traditionally been expected—and respected—to be spiritually mature and able to fulfil this duty as teachers and wise companions.

The monastic sangha, whose way of life is devoted to wisdom development, act as a receptacle, preserving and transmitting the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma). The monks pass on the 'light of truth,'[3] and share the teachings with the wider public, guiding people in all facets of spiritual development. They do this without seeking or accumulating material belongings.

The monks depend on only a small amount of material possessions in order to survive; their wealth is their accumulated virtue and wisdom, which they impart to the wider society. Moreover, the monks refrain from indulging in sense pleasure.[4] This is the traditional, simple life of the monks, who rely on just enough of the four requisites offered by the laity to sustain life, e.g. by gathering food on almsround. In return, the laypeople listen to the Dhamma teachings by the monks, who provide them with the opportunity to cultivate wisdom.

According to the Buddha's words on mutual dependence,[5] the Buddhist custom of an interdependent relationship has been established, whereby the laypeople provide material offerings[6] and the monastic community provides the gift of the Dhamma:[7]

---

1 *Bhāvanā.*

2 *Kalyāṇamitta.*

3 *Dhamma-padīpa.* [Trans.: here, the word 'monk' is used to refer to monastics in general, including both monks and nuns.]

4 *Sāmisa-sukha.* Indeed, the monks do not expect to derive true happiness from material things.

5 *Aññoññanissitā.*

6 *Āmisa-dāna.*

7 *Dhamma-dāna.*

> *Monks, the brahmans and householders provide you with a great service, supporting you with robes, almsfood, lodging, and medicinal requisites for the sick.*
>
> *You too provide the brahmans and householders with a great service, by teaching them the Dhamma, beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end, by proclaiming the holy life, perfect in spirit and letter, utterly pure and complete.*
>
> *Monks, the laity and the monks thus live mutually dependent,*[1] *practising the holy life to escape from the flood of defilements, to make a right end to misery.*
>
> *Householders and the homeless, in mutual dependence, reach the True Dhamma, the unsurpassed safety from bondage.*
>
> *From the laity, the monks aspire only for robes, alms, medicine, and shelter, just enough to alleviate discomfort.*

Householders—the laity—rely on virtuous monks who practise well, faithfully devoted to the arahants, reflecting with noble wisdom, engaging in the Dhamma of this dispensation—the way to a happy bourn. Still longing for and enchanted by sense pleasure, they delight in the celestial world.[2]

When the Buddha first began to teach, he and his disciples did not yet have monastic buildings,[3] e.g. monastic huts[4] or other solid shelters. Instead, they rested at the foot of trees, in open spaces, and in haystacks.

Later, certain laypeople developed faith in the monks' conduct, revealing their accomplishment in the fourfold development.[5] Inspired by Dhamma teachings, these lay followers offered to build monastic huts as residences for the monks. The Buddha gave his permission for the monks to accept such an 'offering of a monastic building.'[6] Beginning with these small monastic

---

1 By way of material offerings and the gift of Dhamma.

2 It. 111-12.

3 *Vihāra.*

4 *Kuṭī.*

5 *Bhāvita.*

6 *Vihāra-dāna.*

dwellings, entire monasteries were later established. In this context, the Buddha uttered verses of approval and gratitude:

> *[Dwellings] ward off cold and heat and wild beasts,*
>
> *And snakes and biting insects and chilly rains.*
>
> *Gusty winds and scorching sun betiding, they too are warded off.*
>
> *Building a dwelling for the Order*[1]*—a residence for easeful abiding, meditation, and insight—the Buddhas praise as the supreme gift.*
>
> *Therefore, a wise person, looking to his own true weal,*
>
> *Should have delightful dwelling-places built,*
>
> *So that those monks of great knowledge can stay therein.*
>
> *With devotion he should offer food and drink, robes and lodgings,*
>
> *To those practising in accord with the Dhamma and Discipline.*
>
> *These venerable monks will teach him the Dhamma, dispeller of every ill;*
>
> *He, clearly discerning that Dhamma, here realizes the end of anguish, taintless and serene.*[2]

These passages help to depict the typical Buddhist way of life and community spirit. This way of life is anchored in a delightful natural environment, conducive to physical development. In addition, Buddhists engage in meritorious deeds, enhancing the quality of communal life and facilitating moral development as a concerted effort by all members of society.

When a society is firmly established in virtuous conduct, its members are at liberty to develop their lives further, by way of mental development and wisdom development.[3]

Provided with the lucid guidance of kind and knowledgable monks, and endowed with the personal skill of wise reflection, people are primed to grow in all four areas of development. As a consequence, they realize truth, goodness, beauty, and genuine happiness.

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Vin. II. 164.

[3] On these different kinds of development, see below.

3. Development Leading to Fourfold Mastery

The unique and outstanding attribute of human beings is that they are trainable; they are able to train themselves and to train to the point of spiritual perfection. Those individuals who are well-trained and spiritually cultivated —who have reached a stage of sublime spiritual development—are considered peerless and supreme.

Human self-improvement and self-training follows a fourfold path of development (*bhāvanā*):

1. Physical development (*kāya-bhāvanā*): developing the five sense doorways[1] when interacting with the outside world.

2. Moral development (*sīla-bhāvanā*): developing social behaviour; developing conduct in respect to communal living.

3. Mental development (*citta-bhāvanā*): developing the mind by making it more stable, virtuous, and joyous.

4. Wisdom development (*paññā-bhāvanā*): developing wisdom in order to penetrate the truth and realize deliverance.

People's spiritual development occurs in diverse modes of living, surroundings, and circumstances. For this reason, each person's development is unique.

The scriptures separate the manner of human development into two main principles or systems, depending on people's mode of living and distinctive community:

1. Threefold meritorious action:[2] for householders; for laity.

2. Threefold training:[3] for renunciants; for the monastic sangha.

These two systems contain essentially the same content. They are both part of a single overarching system of human development in accord with nature. Their subsidiary stages of development, however, vary in detail corresponding to people's mode of lifestyle, namely: one group of people are

---

1 *Pañcadvāra-kāya.*

2 *Tividha-puññakiriyā.*

3 The three *sikkhā.*

primarily engaged with material things and physical activities; the second group of people are primarily engaged with spiritual work. One group emphasizes materiality;[1] the other mentality.[2] This is outlined as follows:

Householders (three meritorious actions):

dāna (giving/sharing)	*sīla* (steadfast moral discipline/ non-harming)	*bhāvanā*	1. *citta-bhāvanā* (mental development) 2. *paññā-bhāvanā* (wisdom development)

(Laypeople utilize material things to foster moral conduct, thus creating a non-oppressive society promoting the optimum state of mind- and wisdom development for its individual members.)

Monks (three trainings):

sīla (established in a code of ethics)	*samādhi/citta* (mental development)	*paññā* (wisdom development)

(The monks are easy to support, relying on a modest amount of material offerings by the laity. They follow a discipline shaping a way of life committed to spiritual development, and they transmit the truth they have realized with the laypeople, who in turn apply it to progress in the threefold meritorious action.)

Although the practices outlined in these two systems differ in detail, in accord with the lifestyle and objective of the two groups or communities, when undertaken correctly, they both equally act as a catalyst for growth in all four areas of human development.

Moreover, the fourfold development is used to verify and evaluate individual people's spiritual training, as will be discussed below.

A. Physical Development Does Not Refer to Fortifying the Body

Physical development (*kāya-bhāvanā*) literally refers to the development of the 'body of the five sense doorways.' It is a development of human beings,

---

1 *Rūpa-dhamma.*

2 *Nāma-dhamma.*

who, from one angle, can be seen as a collection of sense doors,[1] i.e. the five doorways of cognition: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body.[2] People utilize these channels to engage with the outside world effectively, giving rise to a deepening and maturity acting as a foundation for all other forms of human development.

Every creature in the world recognized for its skill and proficiency gains such recognition because of some outstanding and superior sense faculty. Its distinction is usually not based merely on physical size or strength. Take the example of insects, many of whom possess an extraordinary sense of smell, or birds of prey, who possess great sight, able to detect movement in the blink of an eye and see things clearly from great distances.

This also holds true for human beings. In every profession requiring some form of physical refinement, e.g. in respect to doctors, soldiers, athletes, etc., strength and size are not the only key factors. Such individuals also need to train their five sense doors—to increase the range of their sense faculties—so that their senses cognize sense data with more precision, expertise, agility, dexterity, subtlety, and penetration. This way they expand their capacity for sense perception, gain ever greater mastery over their field of activity, and reach success.

By itself, however, this proficiency in using the sense faculties is not sufficient for complete human development, because people sometimes become enthralled by sense impressions or become enslaved by their own emotions.

The Buddhist teachings thus encourage people to apply sense restraint[3] while developing the body of the five sense doorways. We should train at engaging with the senses (i.e. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching) without falling subject to feelings of pleasure and displeasure—without getting stuck at infatuation, indulgence, delusion, intoxication, indignation, confusion, etc. Instead, we should see, hear, etc. mindfully, acquiring insight

---

1 *Phassa-dvāra*.

2 Eye sense-door (*cakkhu-dvāra*), ear sense-door (*sota-dvāra*), nose sense-door (*ghāna-dvāra*), tongue sense-door (*jivhā-dvāra*), and body sense-door (*kāya-dvāra*).

3 *Indriya-saṁvara*.

and knowledge, and increasing wholesome qualities, e.g. joy, delight, happiness, and inner peace. People will thus experience genuine love, amity, and compassion, and they will grow in enthusiasm, the desire for knowledge, and the wish to make a constructive contribution.

In sum, one cognizes sense impressions without getting bogged down by craving (*taṇhā*); instead, one makes progress by applying wholesome desire (*chanda*).

On a basic level, training the sense faculties begins with coming into contact with and living amongst delightful external conditions. Besides seeking out delightful natural environments, one makes the effort to create one's residence (home, monastery, village, etc.) into a delightful abode. This effort is represented by the monks' custom of sweeping leaves in the monastery courtyard and collecting discarded rubbish. This daily observance symbolizes living peacefully with nature.

Everyone should help with the task of keeping the local land, lakes and rivers, roads and pathways, woodlands, and quality of air in a state of cleanliness, orderliness, beauty, serenity, and quiet—in a state refreshing and delightful for the body and mind. Living in contact with such a delightful environment, people's minds naturally incline towards wholesome mental states, e.g. joy, brightness of mind, tranquillity, and gentleness. It is conducive to a good quality of life, promoting higher mental and wisdom development.

The crux of physical development rests with one's intention while responding to or engaging with those things that pass through one's channels of cognition—those things one experiences from the outside world. In short, one receives sense impressions with insight and understanding. For instance, while eating, one simply discerns the flavours of food; and one aims for the true benefits of eating, namely, to maintain good health and strength for performing one's responsibilities and generating virtue. Rather than indulging in food and engaging in self-destructive behaviour, by hankering after delicious tastes or by overeating, one eats in moderation. In sum, one consumes material things by recognizing with wisdom their true value, thus bringing about the optimum amount of benefit for oneself and

others. This is the domain of physical development.

If, however, a person's intention is marked by seeking out and acquiring things to consume in order to gratify desire, this lies in the domain of external behaviour. It goes beyond the domain of physical development and falls into the category of the next stage, i.e. moral development.[1]

Another aspect to this subject is that when one listens mindfully to teachings, conversations, discussions, etc.—even to the sound of music—one consequently acquires knowledge and insight, and one generates wholesome states, e.g.: sympathy, mutual understanding, love, and compassion. Moreover, one gains new perspectives on how to live one's life well.

In the scriptures, there are many stories of monks, while walking on almsround or travelling longer distances on public byways, hearing the songs sung by villagers, including by young women, and as a result gaining insight into the truth of life. Many bhikkhus attained arahantship by listening to people sing. This level of insight and self-mastery is part of the domain of physical development.

Having said this, if a monk were to get news that a musical group will play in a specific location, and, wishing to listen to the music, he were to go see the entertainment, this behaviour would go beyond the proper limits dictated by sense-restraint in the domain of physical development. This would be deemed improper conduct, as outlined in the principle of moral development.[2]

(Note that at the stage of arahantship, such awakened individuals have mastered the stage of 'sense development'[3] to the extent that they can perceive the beauty in non-beautiful things, and likewise can perceive the non-beautiful in beautiful things.)[4]

---

1 *Sīla-bhāvanā*.

2 Trans.: this applies of course only to monks, who have determined to live blamelessly according to the monastic discipline.

3 *Indriya-bhāvanā*. [Trans.: as the venerable author points out in chapter 7 of *Buddhadhamma*: 'Physical cultivation' (*kāya-bhāvanā*) is essentially identical to the cultivation of the sense faculties (*indriya-bhāvanā*).']

4 Trans.: for more on this subject see chapter 7 in *Buddhadhamma* on awakened beings.

Physical development (accompanied by sense restraint) can be summed up as skilful sense cognition (seeing, hearing, etc.) and skilful, balanced consumption—knowing how to consume things in moderation. Although it is classified as the first stage, it is a fundamental and crucial form of development.[1]

Especially for the wider public, this stage of development should be given great emphasis. Besides inducing people to establish a beautiful and refreshing natural environment, the people themselves will abide in happiness and conduct their lives well, beginning with a wise use of material things. This marks the starting point of human spiritual training.

This conforms to the adage: 'True education begins with wise consumption.' Alternatively, one can say: 'Training and self-improvement begins with skilful application of the sense faculties.'

Being well-grounded in this initial stage of physical development, one is prepared to progress in all the remaining stages.

B. Moral Development and Social Improvement

Moral development (*sīla-bhāvanā*) is customarily defined simply as 'developing conduct,' with an emphasis given on developing kind and supportive actions for fostering a healthy society.

Physical development differs from moral development in that it focuses on the 'channels of cognition,'[2] i.e. the five sense doors: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. It thus pertains to receiving or experiencing sense objects.

Moral development, on the other hand, focuses on the 'channels of volitional action,'[3] i.e. the two pathways of action: the pathway of the body, by which people perform physical actions, e.g.: killing, stealing, performing kind deeds for others, sharing one's possessions, etc.; and the pathway of

---

[1] Note that while undertaking this stage of development, this training is incorporated into the principle of moral conduct (*sīla*), described as 'moral conduct as sense restraint' (*indriyasaṁvara-sīla*) and 'moral conduct relating to the wise use of the four requisites' (*paccayapaṭisevana-sīla*; also known as *paccayasannissita-sīla*).

[2] *Phassa-dvāra*.

[3] *Kamma-dvāra*.

speech, by which people perform verbal actions,[1] e.g.: lying, uttering coarse speech, speaking the truth, speaking polite and courteous words, etc. Generally, this stage of development pertains to outward expressions of body and speech, to performing external actions.

Moral development is directly linked to the specific intention of conduct connected those individuals on the receiving end. The focus here is on volitional action.[2] This stage of development is frequently associated with abandoning or refraining from certain activities (i.e. from a perspective of negation). For instance, in the context of the five precepts,[3] the word used is 'abstaining' from killing living creatures, taking what is not freely given, sexual misconduct, false speech, and consuming alcoholic beverages. This wording is used here because such restraint and abstention is the basic means for improving and protecting society.

Although not frequently mentioned, a positive or affirmative perspective on this stage of development is of vital importance. One of the most prominent examples of this perspective is the teaching on the four bases of social solidarity,[4] namely: giving, kindly speech, acts of service, and impartiality.[5]

As described earlier, the stage of physical development pertains to the entire domain of interacting with the outside world—it pertains to everything with which people come into contact. It focuses primarily on nature, whether this be the 'world of beings,'[6] the 'world in space,'[7] or the 'world of

---

1 Pathway of the body: *kāya-dvāra*; physical action: *kāya-kamma*; pathway of speech: *vacī-dvāra*; verbal action: *vacī-kamma*.

2 *Kamma*. [Trans.: most people are familiar with the Sanskrit version of this term: *karma*. Because of numerous misunderstandings of the Buddhist concept of 'karma,' the Pali version has been used in this text.]

3 In the scriptures these are referred to as the five training rules (*sikkhāpada*).

4 *Saṅgaha-vatthu*.

5 *Dāna* (relinquishing; generosity), *piyavācā*, *atthacariyā*, and *samānattatā* (e.g. being a friend in good times and bad), respectively. The teaching on the ten bases of meritorious action (*puññakiriyā-vatthu*) also contains noteworthy affirmative moral practices, in particular the factor of *veyyāvacca*: 'providing active service to others,' 'kind assistance.'

6 *Satta-loka*; also referred to as *jīva-loka* or *manussa-loka*.

7 *Okāsa-loka*; the universe. Also referred to as *avakāsa-loka*.

formations.'[1] Here, a person experiences and investigates things in the world in a constructive and beneficial way. This stage acts as a foundation, promoting growth in all other areas of development, all the way up to wisdom development, leading to a clear insight into conditioned reality—the world of conditioned phenomena.

Moral development pertains directly to society—to human relationships. This is a matter that is close to people's hearts, having a distinct and pronounced impact on their lives. Consequently, this stage of development is given special emphasis in the context of spiritual training, to the extent that physical development has, in recent times, been overlooked, obscured, or forgotten.

Because of the traditional abundance of teachings on this subject, I will leave the discussion of moral development to this short presentation.

C. Three Aspects of Mental Development

Mental development (*citta-bhāvanā*) has a broad and expansive definition, encompassing the cultivation of the following mental qualities: fortitude, enthusiasm, perseverance, patience, mindfulness, and concentration. As a result, one grows in kindness and compassion, purity, joy, and happiness.

Mental development is focused on the mind-door,[2] which is the meeting point—the juncture—of both sets of 'doorways'[3] mentioned earlier. By the same token, the mind is the arena or point of engagement for physical and moral development.

Physical development focuses on the five channels of contact—contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Here, one applies sense restraint, i.e. one sees, hears, etc. with mindfulness. Instead of simply experiencing pleasure or displeasure when encountering sense impressions, one gains knowledge and understanding, and fosters wholesome mind states and constructive modes of thinking.

---

[1] *Saṅkhāra-loka*; the world of conditioned phenomena. Note that *saṅkhāra-loka* covers or encompasses the other two 'worlds.'

[2] *Mano-dvāra*.

[3] *Dvāra*. [Trans.: on the two sets of 'doorways' or 'channels,' see below.]

Moral development focuses on the two channels of volitional action:

1) The body channel: the doorway for performing physical actions. Here, one abstains from unwholesome, oppressive acts, e.g. killing, stealing, etc., and instead one performs wholesome, supportive acts, e.g. helping others, renouncing, sharing, doing good, etc.

2) The speech channel: the doorway for performing verbal actions. Here, one abstains from unwholesome, oppressive speech, e.g. lying, gossiping, malicious speech, teasing, swearing, senseless prattle, etc., and instead one engages in wholesome, supportive speech, e.g. speaking the truth, speaking politely, speaking in ways that promote harmony, and speaking profitable, meaningful words, suitable to the circumstances.

In fact, there are six channels of cognition, but in the teaching on physical development, only the first five channels are mentioned. This is because the sixth channel, i.e. the 'mind channel,' is incorporated in the teaching on mental development.

Similarly, there are three channels of volitional action, but in the teaching on moral development, only the first two are mentioned. This is because the third channel, the 'mind channel,' likewise is incorporated in the teaching on mental development.

For comparison, here are the two sets of 'channels' or 'doorways':

1. Six channels of cognition: eye channel, ear channel, nose channel, tongue channel, body channel, and mind channel.[1]

2. Three channels of volitional action: body channel, speech channel, and mind channel.[2]

In simple terms, the 'mind channel' refers to the mind, which is the point of convergence of the two sets of channels.

In the set of cognitive channels, which function to receive or experience sense impressions, the mind door is placed at the end of the list. When one makes sense contact by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, the particular sense impression or sense data is collected or registered at the

---

[1] *Cakkhu-dvāra*, *sota-dvāra*, *ghāna-dvāra*, *jivhā-dvāra*, *kāya-dvāra*, and *mano-dvāra*, respectively.

[2] *Kāya-dvāra*, *vacī-dvāra*, and *mano-dvāra*, respectively.

mind door. The mind door is responsible for many functions: the choice to receive or block out sense impressions, the specific response to sense data, the way of dealing with and managing sense data, etc. All of these activities stem from the mind and are classified as 'mental volitional action,'[1] as part of the second set of channels.

The set of *kamma* channels function as mediums of expression; they are the doorways for action. Although the mind channel is placed at the end of the list, in fact it is the initiator of all forms of action.

By way of the mind door, people perform mental actions[2]—they engage in thinking. Based on these thoughts, they proceed to perform two kinds of actions: 1) by way of the body door, they perform physical actions—they express themselves by way of the body—by standing, walking, swimming, cradling, embracing, striking, seizing, relinquishing, etc.; 2) by way of the speech door, they perform verbal actions—they express themselves through speech—by speaking politely, speaking rudely, telling the truth, telling lies, etc.

As mentioned above, of these three kinds of actions—physical, verbal, and mental—it is at the mind channel that all actions are initiated and set in motion; the centre of all volitional actions lies at the mind. Although sense impressions and sense stimuli—i.e. sense objects[3]—are received by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, the act of selecting or rejecting such sense data, the mental stance one takes towards them, and the reactions and responses to them—all of these actions occur at the mind.

The first five channels of cognition simply make contact with and receive sense impressions. No volitional action occurs at these sense bases. For instance, there is no such thing as 'eye kamma.' All volitional action connected to such cognition occurs at the mind channel. Kamma is always associated with the mind; only mental kamma exists.

---

1 *Mano-kamma*; 'mental activity.'

2 Ibid.

3 *Ārammaṇa*.

The mind channel is found in both sets of channels—the cognitive channels and the kamma channels. Moreover, it is the most important operative factor—the core of activity—of both of these sets of channels. The mind channel is the point of convergence of these two sets of channels. It links the functionality—operational activity of these two sets—combining them into a single system, a single dynamic.

For instance, when the eye makes contact with ('cognizes') a visible object, the sense data is processed at the mind door, giving rise to pleasant or unpleasant sensations. The mind then engages in mental activity, thinking of how to respond to this sense stimuli by way of physical or verbal actions. These responses may be positive or negative, according to the thoughts and directives initiated by the mind. All kammic activity thus stems from the mind.

Sometimes, new or additional information from the first five sense channels is required. The mind thus directs these channels (the eye, ear, etc.) to gather this additional data, to be further processed by the cognitive activity of the mind. This mental activity is then applied and expressed by way of physical and/or verbal activity.

In sum, both the cognitive and kamma channels are linked and integrated at the mind channel, resulting in a unified process of activity.

At the mind channel, it is thinking that is the main agent of activity, gathering and processing the data received from the other five senses. Thinking selects and applies this data, governing how people deal with it and how they satisfy their needs and desires. This mental activity is the impetus and source of consequent physical and verbal actions. Thinking also directs how people engage with the other five senses to find satisfaction and gratification. In Pali, this main agent of mental activity is called *citta*.

Normally, in general parlance, the word *citta* is used in a broad and general sense, referring to the 'mind': to the natural phenomenon that is aware and engages in thought, including all mental qualities, attributes, properties, modes of activity, etc.

The 'mind' (*citta*) relies on the mind-channel to perform mental activity.

These actions are not limited to simply engaging in thought; the mind also directs the functioning of the other five cognitive channels to meet the needs of and answer to mental activity. Moreover, when mental activity is set in motion, it extends outwards, by linking up with physical and verbal actions.

In the context of mental development, there are several vital attributes and qualities of the mind that should be highlighted here.

The first quality is intention,[1] which determines what things people engage with, what actions they perform and the manner in which they are performed, people's aims and objectives, etc. This is a vital mental factor, because it creates kamma; it is the catalyst for all mental actions, leading to physical actions and verbal actions. It is precisely this factor of intention that determines whether actions are good or bad. It is even possible to judge a person according to his or her intentions.

Intention—the creator of kamma—is the principal agent in making decisions. It is the leader of all mental processes, orchestrating all other mental factors in accomplishing volitional activity. It chooses the direction and manner of people's actions, including whether the acts are good or bad. Good and bad kamma results from how intention is partisan to, or falls under the influence of, the myriad wholesome and unwholesome qualities in the mind.

For instance, if intention gets mixed up with and falls under the sway of such pernicious qualities as greed, hatred, and delusion,[2] it will trigger bad kamma and cause harm. If, on the other hand, it aligns itself with such qualities as kindness, compassion, relinquishment, and wisdom, it will initiate good kamma, i.e. skilful, constructive, and beneficial actions.

Here, the vital importance of mental development becomes clear. One cultivates wholesome, advantageous mental qualities, strengthening and boosting them. In addition, one dispels all forms of impure and harmful qualities, beginning with the triad of greed, hatred, and delusion, and the

---

1 *Cetanā* (volition).

2 *Lobha*, *dosa*, & *moha*.

triad of craving, conceit, and fixed views,[1] and extending to such qualities as laziness, jealously, and miserliness.[2]

When, through mental development, harmful qualities are reduced and wholesome qualities increase, three positive attributes of the mind become clearly apparent:

1. Mental virtue: virtuous qualities in the mind increase, e.g.: faith, sense of shame, fear of wrongdoing, lovingkindness, generosity, etc.

2. Mental capability: the mind is endowed with strength, stability, steadfastness, and composure; it is intent on developing wholesome qualities; it is free from discouragement—unwavering and imperturbable.

3. Mental health: the mind is endowed with serenity, contentment, joy, delight, brightness, and ease.

Concentration (*samādhi*): a Keyword for Mental Development

Of all the many virtuous mental qualities, there is one essential quality that must be cultivated as an anchor and support for all others. In Pali, this quality is called *samādhi*, which is usually translated as 'concentration.' It refers to mental stability and steadfastness, whereby the mind is not disturbed, distracted, or beclouded. As a result, the mind gains a degree of self-reliance and is focused on its work and activities; it remains settled on its chosen object of attention and is optimally primed for work. The Buddha referred to this state of preparedness as *kammanīya*: the mind is wieldy and suitable for work, particularly the work performed by wisdom.[3]

A concentrated mind is stable, composed, tranquil, and still. This is similar to water in a vessel or container, which has not been shaken or disturbed; its surface does not undulate. Such a peaceful mind is free from agitation, restlessness, and anxiety; and it is endowed with intrinsic happiness.

Still water is clear because all the silt and sediment has settled to the

---

[1] *Taṇhā* (covetousness), *māna* (desire for personal distinction at the expense of others), & *diṭṭhi* (stubborn adherence to personal beliefs and opinions).

[2] *Kosajja*, *issā*, and *macchariya* (possessiveness), respectively.

[3] *Paññā*.

bottom; it no longer obstructs or impedes one's view. One's vision is clear, enabling one to clean up and remove any undesirable elements.

A concentrated mind remains one-pointed and firmly established on a desired object of attention. It is endowed with power and strength. This is similar to a strong current of water flowing down a single channel, which is able to remove or pass through all obstacles. Such a mind is able to vanquish all base and tantalizing distractions, and is able to accomplish all desired tasks without difficulty.

In the endeavour to abandon unwholesome qualities and cultivate wholesome qualities, concentration is assisted by two leading mental factors, namely: effort[1] and mindfulness.[2] When the mind is strong and primed for work, it is ready to cultivate all other virtuous qualities, culminating in wisdom.

In mental development, concentration is cultivated as the primary and essential factor. For this reason, mental development is also known as 'tranquillity meditation.'[3]

As mentioned earlier, when mental development proceeds correctly—giving rise to effective concentration—the mind is endowed with three qualities: mental virtue, mental capability, and mental health.

Although there are many details pertaining to this stage of development, all told, the aim of mental development is to act as a foundation for wisdom development. And in this cultivation of wisdom, there are several mental factors that should be underscored.

One vital factor in this process is desire (*chanda*),[4] as confirmed by the Buddha's words: 'All things are rooted in desire.'[5] Alternative translations include: 'The source of all things is desire,' and 'The wellspring of all things is desire.'

---

[1] *Viriya*; stemming from the word *vīra*, meaning 'courageous,' 'undaunted'; the catalyst for effort is wholesome desire (*chanda*).

[2] *Sati:* recollection; recall; attentiveness; heedful attention on one's activities; focused, unwavering attention on one's goal.

[3] *Samatha-bhāvanā. Samatha* = 'tranquility'; this is a synonym of *samādhi.*

[4] 'Affinity,' 'preference,' 'wishing,' 'aspiration.'

[5] *Chandamūlakā ... sabbe dhammā*; A. V. 107.

It is essential to point out that there are two kinds of desire (*chanda*). The first is unwholesome desire, which is usually distinguished by the term *taṇhā* ('craving'). The second kind is wholesome desire, which may be referred to as *dhamma-chanda* ('desire for truth'), and is often designated by the single term *chanda*. Simply speaking, all adverse, unwholesome things stem from craving; all positive, wholesome things stem from wholesome desire.

Craving is a desire serving in the interests of a sense of self,[1] resulting in a desire to obtain, seize, or become something in order to achieve personal gratification. Wholesome desire is a desire serving the interests of the objects or living beings involved, i.e. one wishes that these things or beings abide in a natural state of wellbeing, fulfilment, and excellence. Moreover, one wishes to engage in action in order to achieve this fulfilment. In this latter dynamic, no 'I'—no sense of a fixed, separate self—need be involved.

Take the example of a place of natural beauty. A person endowed with wholesome desire, e.g. an awakened being, will pass through such an area, seeing the colourful flowers in bloom and experience delight and satisfaction, wishing that this environment exists in a healthy, prosperous state of wholeness. He or she will perform no actions, e.g. severing or damaging the plants, in order to indulge craving.

Craving should be abandoned by preventing it from arising. *Chanda*, on the other hand, should be abandoned by bringing one's desires and aspirations to completion. *Chanda* can thus also be translated as a desire to act (in order for something or someone to abide in wholeness and fulfilment).

It is of paramount importance that people are able to distinguish between these two kinds of desire. Having made this distinction, they should then establish and cultivate wholesome desire, consummated by perfecting wisdom and realizing liberation. During this process of spiritual practice, they can express the nuances of wholesome desire, i.e. lovingkindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity,[2] as is suitable to the circumstances.

---

1 *Attā:* self-identity.

2 *Mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. These four qualities are known as the four sublime states of mind or the four divine abidings (*brahmavihāra*). [Trans.: note that these four qualities are not simply private or concealed emotions—they are forms of desire and have an active role in a person's relationship to the outside world.]

Another vital quality is faith,[1] which links people to outside factors, in particular to virtuous friends.[2] In Buddhism, faith must be connected to wisdom: it must apply a degree of wisdom or lead to the deepening of wisdom.

In relation to concentration, there is one very significant group of five factors frequently taught by the Buddha. These factors are used as a means to evaluate a person's spiritual development or Dhamma practice, to examine whether it is progressing well or not. Each factor corresponds to a state of mind, arising as a natural sequence, culminating in concentration. They are as follows: 1) joy; 2) rapture; 3) tranquillity; 4) happiness; and 5) concentration.[3]

Concentration is the apex of mental development, preparing the mind for wisdom development. At the early stages of mental development, however, one should embrace the initial factor of joy,[4] promoting and cultivating it in a consistent way, until it becomes one's inherent disposition of mind. Joy facilitates all aspects of spiritual development, as confirmed by the Buddha's words: 'Thereby, a person infused with joy will make an end of suffering.'[5]

D. Wisdom Development: Wisdom Comes, Problems Go Cessation of Suffering & the Bliss of Liberation

Broadly speaking, wisdom development (*paññā-bhāvanā*) refers to developing an understanding of the truth of things, an insight into the world and into human nature, and a clear discernment into conditional phenomena. As a result, one gains inner freedom, purifies the mind of mental defilements, and is released from all suffering. Moreover, one applies wisdom to solve any problems that one may encounter.

---

1 *Saddhā.*

2 *Kalyāṇamitta.*

3 *Pāmojja* (gladness; cheerfulness), *pīti* (delight), *passaddhi* (relaxation), *sukha*, and *samādhi*, respectively.

4 *Pāmojja.*

5 *Tato pāmojjabahulo dukkhassantaṃ karissati*; Dh. verse 376.

Wisdom is a supreme virtue and it has unique and outstanding attributes, distinguishing it from other mental qualities. Its mode of operation and development also has its own distinctive features. For this reason it is classified as a separate heading. Indeed, it is the pinnacle of spiritual development.

These words by the Buddha reveal the importance of wisdom: 'Of all things, wisdom is supreme.'[1] It is by way of wisdom that the goal of Buddha-Dhamma—liberation—is reached.

Regardless of how lofty and refined they are, all other mental qualities are still associated with emotion (*citta*)[2] and coloured by forms of sensation. If the mind lacks wise discernment, no matter how skilled and accomplished it may be, and imbued with virtuous qualities, it is still bound to the domain of feeling and sensation. If one encounters agreeable things, either internal or external, one will experience delight and feel happy; if one encounters disagreeable things, one will experience aversion and feel unhappy. One's feelings will be dependent on these sense impressions. But when one has developed wisdom and has realized the truth of conditioned phenomena, both inner and outer, one is proficient at engaging with these things; one's attitude and bearing is balanced and correct, until one reaches the goal: freedom from all suffering.

Wisdom is present at all stages of development, beginning with physical development—the stage of sense contact—helping to release the mind from entanglements, to solve problems, and to arrive at liberation. When seeing, hearing, etc., wisdom prevents us from getting ensnared by likes and dislikes, preferences and aversions. It helps lift us above these feelings. Even if we experience resentment or annoyance, we learn from it and transform it into understanding, empathy, and compassion. Likewise, if we encounter misfortune, we are able to recognize potential advantages of it or aspects of it that may lead to our wellbeing.

---

1 *Paññuttarā sabbe dhammā*; e.g.: A. V. 107.

2 Trans.: although 'emotion' is an unusual translation for *citta*, it fits the context; moreover, after consultation, the venerable author approved of this translation.

On the level of moral development, at times when one feels to be at a dead-end—confused about what one should do—wisdom acts as a guide, shedding light on how to proceed and how to bring one's actions to success.

On the level of mental development, at times when the mind is beset by problems and no clear solution is apparent—when one is distressed—wisdom provides clarity; it recognizes the source of the suffering and discerns the way to bring it to an end. When wisdom arises, problems cease and suffering is dispelled. One discovers inner freedom and true happiness.

The heart of Buddha-Dhamma lies with wisdom, which every person is capable of cultivating, culminating in awakening.[1] Here, the system of the Four Noble Truths is brought to completion; one becomes a 'buddha': a fully realized one.

Wisdom relies on a steady, concentrated mind as a platform for engagement. Here, mindfulness[2] cooperates in the process. Mindfulness is like a gatekeeper, checking those individuals wishing to enter or exit a city. Wisdom then carefully examines these people, deciding whether to let them pass or to detain them. Similarly, mindfulness is like a hand that grasps onto a chosen object, enabling the 'eye' of wisdom to investigate it clearly and comprehensively.

Skilful reflection[3] is an instrument for priming the mind—for orientating the mind in a direction leading to the successful functioning of wisdom. It is a leading internal factor, helping to generate wisdom and to discern effective solutions to life's quandaries.

Skilful reflection can be applied in every circumstance, beginning with the activity of sense contact. It enables us to transform misfortune into good fortune. Here, our wisdom increases in proportion to the challenges and difficulties we face. In times of crisis, we see an opportunity for growth; in times of adversity, we seek a way to grow and evolve. Hearing the melody of song or the sobs of weeping—both provide an insight into the truth. This factor of skilful reflection should thus be given great emphasis.

---

1 *Bodhi*; technically speaking, wisdom culminates in the knowledge of awakening (*bodhi-ñāṇa*).

2 *Sati*.

3 *Yoniso-manasikāra* (skilful attention; wise reflection).

Wisdom development is a task of utmost importance, encompassing a broad and extensive range of stages and methods. In the case that a reference is being made to developing wisdom to the extent of gaining clear insight into the truth of all phenomena, instead of calling this 'wisdom development,' it is described more specifically as 'insight development.'[1]

Someone who has completed these four stages of development (*bhāvanā*) has achieved four stages of mastery (*bhāvita*), i.e.:

1. Mastery of the body (*bhāvita-kāya*); completion of physical development (*kāya-bhāvanā*).
2. Mastery of moral conduct (*bhāvita-sīla*); completion of moral development (*sīla-bhāvanā*).
3. Mastery of the mind (*bhāvita-citta*); completion of mental development (*citta-bhāvanā*).
4. Mastery of wisdom (*bhāvita-paññā*); completion of wisdom development (*paññā-bhāvanā*).

Such people are perfected in spiritual development. They are free from all affliction and distress. They abide in a constant state of happiness. They spend their time helping to solve other people's problems and lead them to a similar state of peace and joy. They are filled with light, bringing a radiance into the world. They are 'noble'[2] in the truest sense.

Other terms used to describe such individuals include *arahant* ('worthy') and *sekha* ('adept').

There is a common fourfold classification for awakened beings[3]—referring to the four stages of enlightenment—namely: stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arahant.[4] This division is dependent on the number and degree of fetters[5] that an individual has cast off and abandoned.[6] Someone who has abandoned all ten fetters is called an arahant.

---

1 *Vipassanā-bhāvanā*. *Vipassanā* = 'insight,' 'penetrative wisdom.' This is a synonym for *paññā*, referring to clear insight into and understanding of reality (*sabhāva*).

2 *Ariya*.

3 *Ariya-puggala* ('noble one').

4 *Sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī*, and *arahant*, respectively.

5 *Saṁyojana*.

6 Trans.: for more on this subject, see chapter 7 on awakened beings in *Buddhadhamma*.

The abandonment of the fetters is a standard based on factors that a person has removed or brought to an end, i.e. a perspective of negation. Another perspective, is to look at those factors that a person is endowed with or has completed, i.e. a perspective of affirmation. Notably, this refers to the four factors of spiritual mastery, based on the four stages of development, as described above.

Appendix 1: Scriptural Source Material for the Four Kinds of *Bhāvanā* & Four Kinds of *Bhāvita*

Although a great amount of interesting source material exists pertaining to the four kinds of *bhāvanā* and the four kinds of *bhāvita*, here only a basic outline will be presented. In regard to this subject, the Buddha most often spoke in the context of assessing or evaluating practitioners, and thus more often used the term *bhāvita*. This is evident, for instance, in his warning to the monks to prevent future dangers.[1] This passage also shows how the threefold training[2] is a factor leading to *bhāvanā/bhāvita*.

In another passage, the Buddha states that a person devoid of the four kinds of self-mastery[3] may go to hell having performed only a small amount of evil. A person endowed with self-mastery, however, may make minor mistakes, but only with minimum harmful consequences.[4]

Some scriptural texts combine and integrate the Noble Eightfold Path with the four kinds of development, as follows: physical development = 4th & 5th Path factors; moral development = 3rd & 6th Path factors; mind development = 2nd & 8th Path factors; and wisdom development = 1st & 7th Path factors.[5]

In general, however, the scriptures explain these two terms in the same manner as they define *bhāvita-kāya* as 'one who has gained physical self-mastery by developing the five sense doors.'[6]

Appendix 2: Fourfold Development

In English, the term *bhāvanā* is often translated as 'development,' and the four kinds of *bhāvanā* are translated as 'fourfold development,' 'four spheres of development,' 'four aspects of development,' etc. For more than a century, a separation into four kinds of human development has been made in the English language, especially in the field of progressive education in the United States, pioneered by

---

1 A. III. 105-108.

2 Three *sikkhā*.

3 *Bhāvita*.

4 A. I 249-53.

5 Peṭakopadesapakaraṇa 186.

6 *Pañcadvārabhāvanāya vā bhāvitakāyo*; AA. II. 360.

John Dewey (1859-1952).[1]

Although, in name, the fourfold development described in the West corresponds to the Buddhist teaching on spiritual development, the essential meaning of these two separate traditions varies.

This matter becomes more confusing when these English terms are translated into Thai. This has caused problems for some time, so it seems appropriate to address this issue here. These are the English terms from the field of education:

1. Physical development.
2. Mental development (sometimes referred to as 'intellectual development' or 'cognitive development').
3. Emotional development.[2]
4. Social development.

Using this list for comparison, we can assign more accurate English translations to the fourfold development outlined in the Pali Canon:

1. *Kāya-bhāvanā*: physical development.
2. *Sīla-bhāvanā*: moral development (or 'social development').
3. *Citta-bhāvanā*: mental development (alternatively, 'emotional & volitional development').
4. *Paññā-bhāvanā*: wisdom development (or 'cognitive development').

To sum up, although the terms and designations used here may be the same for the two sets of development, the essential meanings of these terms are not identical. This is particularly true for the first factor of physical development. In modern education, this term focuses on physical education, promoting suitable physical growth and health, including developing athletic skill and agility, learning how to dance, scout training, etc. In the Buddhist teachings, however, this factor must also encompass a development of the 'body of the five sense doorways,'[3] within the context of relating to the outside world, i.e. to contact and associate with one's external environment, as described above.

---

[1] In comparison, the fourfold development outlined in Buddhism is more than 2,000 years old.

[2] I have discussed at length the problems arising from translating the second and third terms inaccurately or inconsistently in the book สุขภาวะองค์รวมแนวพุทธ ('Buddhist Approach to Holistic Health'); September 2005; 34th printing – December 2014.

[3] *Pañcadvāra-kāya*. This development is known as *pañcadvāra-bhāvanā*.

Memorandum on Translation Copyrights

This statement is hereby made to serve henceforth as guidelines for prospective translators. As all my books are meant to be gifts of the Dhamma for the welfare and happiness of the people, and are already royalty free, when anyone on seeing their merits wishes, out of good intention, to translate them for publication, whether from English into Thai or from Thai into English or any other language, it is deemed as helping with the promulgation of the Dhamma and furtherance of the public good.

Those working on translation projects must, of necessity, apply their knowledge and ability in their undertakings by putting in no small amount of effort and time. If their translation outputs are produced with attentiveness and are credible or reliable, and since I do not accept any royalties for my source texts, then the respective copyrights of those translations are to be acknowledged as belonging to the translators as proprietors of the translated texts. The translators themselves are to be in charge of and responsible for their own translations, and it is also at their own discretion as they see fit to grant permission to any party concerned to make any use of their translations, whether it be publishing for free distribution as gifts of the Dhamma or publishing for sale, in this country and abroad.

In this connection, what the translators are advised to cooperate to do, as a gesture of courtesy, is to make things clear so as to prevent the misunderstanding that I accept remunerations or any other benefits. They are also requested to notify me, as the original author, every time such a publication takes place. If possible, approximately ten copies of each published work should be given to me as evidence of the publication and for record keeping purposes.

In addition, the translators might further show their generosity by pledging to do any one or all of the following:

a) allow me, the original author, or Wat Nyanavesakavan to publish the translations for free distribution as gifts of the Dhamma;

b) allow me to grant permission to any party concerned to publish the translations exclusively in the case of publishing for free distribution as gifts of the Dhamma;

c) allow me or Wat Nyanavesakavan to grant permission to any party concerned to publish the translations exclusively in the case of publishing for free distribution as gifts of the Dhamma.

Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto)
November 7, 2009