

# **Education Made Easy**

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translated by Robin Moore

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## Anumodana – Appreciation

For many years the Buddhist followers of Wat Nyanavesakavan have printed numerous books as a ‘gift of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-dāna*) for free distribution. Sometimes these faithful individuals have wished that people from other countries can be introduced to and learn about Buddhism by way of these books, and they have therefore translated them themselves or supported skilled and knowledgeable individuals to translate them on their behalf. As a result, many Dhamma books, both large and small, have been translated into foreign languages—in particular into English.

Several years ago, the Buddhist congregation (*buddha-parisā*) at Wat Nyanavesakavan, both monastics and close lay supporters, agreed that there should be a systematic, earnest, and ongoing effort and procedure for translating Dhamma books into English and publishing them for wider distribution. Establishing such a procedure will help to ensure that the study of Dhammavinaya and the propagation of Buddhism proceeds in a stable and secure way. Fortunately, a skilled and accomplished translator was at hand to perform this task on a regular basis, namely Mr. Robin Moore. In respect to funding this project, Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart has faithfully shouldered responsibility throughout, both in supporting Wat Nyanavesakavan and in providing financial assistance to the translator. This has been a tremendous act of generosity and dedication.

On this occasion, the book titled ‘Education Made Easy’ has been completed as an English translation.\* The initial impetus for translating this book came from a sincere request by Khun Anintita Posakrisna, the director of Siam Saam Tri School.

I wish to express my gratitude to Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart who has acted as patron and managed various tasks with devotion to the Triple Gem, wholesome enthusiasm for the threefold training, and great goodwill and kindness towards students and practitioners of Dhammavinaya, enabling this gift of Dhamma to bear fruit and meet with success. Furthermore, may I express thanks to Mr. Robin Moore, who has cultivated the Four Paths to Success—wholesome desire, effort, committed attention, and thorough investigation. He has used his skill and expertise to carry out this scholarly work to fulfilment, which will be of long-lasting value and benefit to people worldwide.

P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)  
8 January 2018

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\* Trans.: the Thai title of this book is การศึกษา ฉบับง่าย.

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# Education Made Easy

## Teacher's Day

Today is Teacher's Day. Members of Siam Saam Tri School<sup>1</sup> and Thawsi School have come to the monastery today to mark this occasion. In effect, your coming here is a reminder—a way to bear in mind the true significance of education, to remember the importance of children, to consider the future of the nation, and indeed to recollect any related subject pertaining to the improvement of human beings.<sup>2</sup>

It is often said that children are the nation's future. It is fitting that Children's Day falls close to Teacher's Day, as these two days honour the most intimate relationships for children, i.e. the relationship to their guardians.<sup>3</sup> Children's Day strengthens the bond between children and their parents. This is followed by Teacher's Day, which strengthens the bond between children and their teachers.

If children are the future of the nation, it is reasonable to say that teachers are the people who create the nation's future.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in the original talk, the author refers to this school by its original name: Nue Noy Kindergarten. Its name was later changed to Siam Saam Tri School.

<sup>2</sup> This Dhamma talk was presented to teachers and administrators of Siam Saam Tri School and Thawsi School, who came to Wat Nyanavesakavan on Teacher's Day, 16 January 2002, to offer a report on a Buddhist Curriculum and to listen to an exhortation.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: in Thailand, Children's Day is celebrated on the second Saturday in January; Teacher's Day is celebrated on January 16.

As it happens, this year our Supreme Patriarch offered a teaching on this subject. What I remember him saying is: ‘Children are the nation’s future; adults are the children’s future.’

This is a vital matter of consideration. The most important adults for children are their parents and teachers. Without a doubt, teachers have a direct influence on children, because the task of education shapes children’s futures. Saying that children are the nation’s future is equivalent to saying that the future of the nation lies in the hands of the teachers. Teachers create the nation’s future.

This subject is a reminder to us to try and fulfil our responsibilities to the best of our abilities. Today, we integrate Children’s Day with Teacher’s Day. They are united on this day. Children, parents, and teachers work in cooperation to enable children’s lives to prosper and flourish.

## Teachers’ Work – the Buddha’s Work

We are working together to create a decent and good quality life for children and for the entire society. Today, the administrators and teachers have related the origin and development of the two schools. From what I understand, Siam Saam Tri School was founded twenty-two years ago, in 1980. Thawsi School was founded twelve years ago, in 1990. And four years ago, in 1998, both schools adopted a Buddhist curriculum in a committed and earnest way.

May I express my gratitude to those of you who perform this pedagogic work with kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). These two qualities are part of a group known as the four sublime states of mind.<sup>4</sup> Occasionally, only these two initial qualities are mentioned, but for people to reach true success in their work all four qualities need be present: loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

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<sup>4</sup> *Brahmavihāra*.

Besides lauding your efforts as teachers and mentors, providing valuable assistance to children, I also wish to express my appreciation for your work in applying the Dhamma—the Buddha’s teachings—in a determined and dedicated way. This is a vital matter.

The Buddha’s teachings are based on a truth of nature<sup>5</sup> or a truth in line with natural laws.<sup>6</sup> Once we realize and understand this natural truth we apply it to benefit our individual lives and our entire society.

Although the Buddha presented clear teachings on this truth, it sometimes becomes faint or obscured. Due to a lack of study and training, people become estranged and alienated from it. Few people actually attend to and apply the Buddha’s teachings. Moreover, some people practise these teachings, but do so incorrectly and go astray, thus leading to a distortion or corruption of the teachings. Instead of succeeding at the practice, they fail; their efforts are wasted.

The two schools visiting here today have a keen interest in this matter. Having studied about the Buddha’s teachings, you apply it to your educational systems. This practical application of the teachings is essential for true success in providing an education to children.

Buddhism explicitly advocates this practical application of the teachings, for the benefit of all beings, according to the objective proclaimed by the Buddha himself: ‘Buddhism functions for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world.’

The Buddha spent forty-five years wandering around the Indian subcontinent spreading his gospel. For his deeds to truly bear fruit, however, we must sustain and transmit his teachings through authentic practice and application. The aspiration of the two schools to apply the teachings to educate children is thus praiseworthy. A decisive factor to consider now in relation to this practical application is, having studied the teachings, how clear and comprehensive is our understanding of them? From what I can gather, you have suitably grasped the chief Buddhist principles.

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<sup>5</sup> *Dhamma-jāti.*

<sup>6</sup> *Dhammatā.*

## Principles of Learning

Buddhism contains a great number of assorted principles or formal teachings. To genuinely receive the blessings that Buddhism has to offer, however, it is essential to be able to distinguish the chief principles and tenets.

The school teachers and administrators who have come today have mentioned standard teachings, e.g. the threefold training<sup>7</sup> and the four kinds of development,<sup>8</sup> which are key principles and pertain directly to education. In fact, these principles lie at the heart of Buddhism. Any accurate description of Buddhism automatically integrates the teaching of the threefold training into people's daily lives. In Buddhism the objective of the threefold training is to increase people's wellbeing and happiness.<sup>9</sup>

Birth as a human being requires making effort to bring about a decent life, beginning with the necessity of basic survival. Survival alone, however, is not enough for living well. What else is required for living a good and contented life? One essential ingredient to living a good life is education or learning.

Learning and acquiring knowledge is one aspect of the Pali word *sikkhā*, which means self-training and self-development, so that one acquires the capability to live a good and virtuous life.<sup>10</sup> True education implies improving and refining one's life, a task that requires continual effort and perseverance.

Our lives depend on learning and training. We are constantly encountering new situations, meeting new people, or meeting familiar people in new circumstances. All of these experiences require specific actions, behaviour, and responses. Even the process of wholesome thought and cognition—the aspiration to live one's life well and to

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<sup>7</sup> *Sikkhā*.

<sup>8</sup> *Bhāvanā*.

<sup>9</sup> Trans.: the threefold training (*sikkhā*): moral conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

<sup>10</sup> See endnote A.



cultivate virtue—requires a degree of effort. In relation to all of our experiences, we strive to live in harmony with our surroundings and to rectify any problems. This is the true meaning of education.

If one fails to make the effort to conduct oneself correctly and constructively in relation to one's surroundings and environment, one will fail to live a good life. Failing to make this effort is equivalent to being deprived of a true education. The Buddha referred to such people who neglect the endeavour to improve their lives as *bāla*: ignorant or foolish. They are considered to be alive simply because they are still breathing.

To live a good life one needs to make the effort to improve one's life, i.e. one needs to engage in study and training. Training or education is a lifelong pursuit, to be undertaken at all times. It is not limited to the classroom.

In this endeavour to improve one's life, one must attend to life circumstances in a way that is most fruitful and effective. Those individuals who effectively and constructively attend to their experiences—to those things and people with which they interact—will prosper and develop. This is called obtaining a good education.

This shows the vital relationship between people and their education. In the end, education (i.e. learning and training) becomes one and the same with living a good, virtuous life. Education becomes the primary activity of one's life.

Education thus enters into the life of an individual. Applying Buddhist terminology, the threefold training is utilized for teaching people; it is integrated into their lives. The result is a way of life comprised of eight attendant factors known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

*Sikkhā* is translated as ‘training’; *magga* is translated as ‘Path,’ as a ‘way of life.’ How do we undertake the training? We are guided by the Path: by a virtuous way of life. As we refine our training, our way of life becomes more closely aligned to the Path; we advance on the Path. The more we develop the threefold training, the further we progress on the Path. The Path is thus equivalent to the threefold training, or it is one essential aspect of the training.

From what has been mentioned so far, one can see that there are different ways to define true education. For instance, one can define it as developing the aptitude and skill for living an optimum life, or as developing a way of life in harmony with the Noble Eightfold Path and flourishing on the Path.

## Principles of Teaching

Learning is a lifelong task, to be pursued and undertaken by everyone. Hearing this one may feel somewhat heavy-hearted or weary. Many people are unskilled or unsuccessful at learning; and some people are almost inept at learning. It is the job of teachers to provide people with an education, to enable people to learn effectively. This is the vocation of schooling, of teaching, of helping others discover knowledge.

Immediately after birth, children begin to learn how to survive and to make their way in the world. At this stage they are introduced to their first teachers. For example, at first they cannot walk so they are taught how to walk; they are trained in walking. Those people who help children to learn and practise these basic forms of behaviour are the parents, who maintain the most intimate relationship to the children. In the scriptures, parents are therefore referred to as the primary teachers—the first teachers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Pubbācariya*. [Trans.: e.g. A. I. 132.]

As the fundamental responsibility of teachers is to teach, it is warranted to ask: 'What do they teach?' As a touchstone, let us look at what the Supreme Teacher—the Buddha—taught.

As mentioned above, the Buddha's teachings—the Dhamma—is a truth based on nature or on natural laws. As the Buddha said: 'Whether a Tathāgata arises or not, the truth exists according to its own nature.' The Buddha discovers this truth and reveals it to others, explaining it in a way that is easy to understand. In sum, the Buddha teaches a truth of nature.

Why is it important to understand this truth of nature? Given that our own lives and everything else in the world proceeds according to laws of nature, if we fail to comprehend these laws and how they function, e.g. the law of causality—the relationship between cause and effect—our conduct and behaviour will be faulty and incorrect. Even our own bodies depend on and follow these laws of nature. If we are to choose a suitable lifestyle, we must understand the essential dynamics of human life. To use an analogy, for a doctor to successfully cure a sick patient, he or she must undergo an extensive study of medicine and of anatomy, physiology, etc. It is fair to say that understanding truth in line with natural laws is the supreme task facing us as human beings.

Having said that, truly understanding the process of nature<sup>12</sup> is the most difficult of all accomplishments. Buddhism pertains directly to this process of nature, and it urges us to realize the truth of nature. Someone who has attained such realization<sup>13</sup> has reached fulfilment and perfection. This is the consummate form of understanding.

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<sup>12</sup> *Dhammatā*.

<sup>13</sup> Trans.: i.e. has realized Nibbāna.

When we comprehend natural laws we can attend to things appropriately. For instance, when we understand the truth about fire, we can relate to fire correctly and use it to our benefit.

Whenever the Buddha presented a teaching, he would base it on truths conforming to natural laws. In other words, he would base his teachings on reality.<sup>14</sup> He would teach: ‘The truth is this way.’ When faced with such a teaching, we can ask ourselves: ‘If the truth is like this, how can it assist us in living a good life?’ At this point reality—the truth of nature—compels us to act, calling out: ‘If you honestly want to live well and prosper, you must act in such a way, conduct your life in such a way, and generate the following causes and conditions.’

At this stage the second kind of instruction—commonly known as a code of ethical conduct—comes into being.<sup>15</sup> Ethical or moral codes of conduct can be described as a summons of truth—an appeal by natural laws—namely: ‘If you wish to prosper, you must act in such a way.’ Ethical codes thus pertain to the practical application of truth which follows on from an understanding of natural laws. Devising such codes is not dependent on the Buddha, nor should they be seen as his edicts or commands. To the extent that he did give instruction on systematic ethical conduct he based this on a direct realization of truth.

If one has not realized ultimate truth, it is impossible to give a complete or unblemished systematic instruction on ethical conduct. One’s level of realization and one’s teachings on ethics are intertwined. The practical teachings on the threefold training and the Noble Eightfold Path fall under this category of ‘ethical instruction.’

The Buddha’s instructions on training (*sikkhā*) and on the Path (*magga*) stem from his realization of ultimate truth—his awakening to a truth based on natural laws. To paraphrase his words, he proclaimed:

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<sup>14</sup> *Sacca-dhamma*.

<sup>15</sup> Trans.: the first kind of instruction is that on the truth of nature, as described above. Note that the Pali term *cariya-dhamma* (‘code of ethical conduct’) was coined later and is only common in Thailand (จริยธรรม; ‘jariya-tam’).

‘The truth of nature<sup>16</sup> is like this. If you practise accordingly you will live at ease and your community will prosper. If you agree with this instruction, you will benefit from your understanding of the truth of nature and act in harmony with it.’ This is how true education unfolds.

Learning or receiving an education is a necessary and indispensable part of life, but often we are unskilled at learning. Many people do not know how to learn—how to train themselves—and thus waste the opportunity provided by a human existence. They fail to learn what is essential and thus make no progress. Sometimes they deviate into harmful directions, leading to decline and downfall.

### Threefold Training

Since education is a vital aspect of people’s lives, that is, people must make a sustained effort to abide in wellbeing, it pertains to the entire scope of life. It is not possible to separate spiritual education or training into disparate, unconnected categories.

For this reason it must be emphasized that the threefold training is an integral part of one’s entire life. The Buddha divided this training into three factors to describe three dimensions of our lives, namely: conduct, focused attention, and wisdom.

Note that translating *sīla* as ‘conduct’ may lead to an incomplete understanding of this Pali term. Conduct here refers to people’s relationship to their surroundings and environment. In some cases the word ‘conduct’ in this context may be deemed imprecise or vague. For instance, *sīla* includes how one engages with the five senses—the eye,

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<sup>16</sup> *Dhammatā*.

ear, nose, tongue, and body—how one attends to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. Using the word ‘conduct’ here may be ineffective. To use scriptural language, all of these activities pertain to one’s relationship to the ‘world’ (*loka*).

The ‘world’ refers to everything that surrounds human beings. Today, this is referred to as the ‘environment,’ which is separated into the physical environment and the social environment. In the scriptures all of these surrounding conditions are referred to as the ‘world.’

Our lives are directly linked to the world. We use our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind to interact with the world, and we use the channels of body and speech to communicate with the world. For lack of a better word we can call this interaction ‘conduct.’<sup>17</sup>

Our first task in life is to establish a favourable and constructive interaction with the world—with our surroundings and external things. This interaction with the world—with other people and with material objects—is unavoidable; we should therefore strive to relate to these things positively and effectively.

On a deeper level, our interaction with these things, and the manner of the interaction, is dependent on our intention,<sup>18</sup> which is linked with various factors, e.g.: motivation, strength of mind, mental state, emotion, etc. Our intentions prompting how we relate to the world centre in particular around happiness and suffering.

Often, our physical and verbal behaviour, and how we use our senses—how we look at visual objects, listen to sounds, etc.—is determined by the gratification of desire, most notably by pursuing happiness and fleeing from suffering. Our state of mind—our intentions, desires, and impulses—thus exercises a direct and continual influence on the

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<sup>17</sup> Trans.: Pali: *vutti-kamma* (Thai: ‘preutigam’; พุทธิกรรม).

<sup>18</sup> *Cetanā*.

interaction with our surroundings. The mind plays a constant role in how we relate to the outside world through various forms of behaviour and through engagement with the sense faculties.<sup>19</sup>

Another dimension to our lives, operating at the same time as we make contact with the world, involves understanding and wisdom.<sup>20</sup> The range and extent of our interaction with the world is shaped by the nature of our understanding and views. Our relationships are based on our understanding. For instance, we may be of the opinion that acting in a certain way will be advantageous, by helping us to avoid suffering or to attain happiness. We will therefore behave or relate to things accordingly. We may believe that seeing attractive sights will provide us with pleasure; we thus act and engage with our senses to make contact with such sights.

## Teaching Children Proficiency in the Threefold Training

When we interact with external things, and are thus engaged in learning, all three factors of the threefold training—*sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*—work in unison:

1. *Sīla*: this refers to all of our interactions with the outside world. For want of a better word, we can translate this term as ‘conduct,’ even if this does not comprehensively cover the meaning of the Pali. Perhaps ‘interactive behaviour’ or ‘relational conduct’ would be more accurate.
2. *Samādhi*: underlying our conduct is our state of mind, or state of consciousness, with intention as the leading factor, determining how we interact with the world.

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<sup>19</sup> *Indriya*.

<sup>20</sup> *Paññā*.

3. **Paññā:** over and above conduct and state of mind is the process of knowing; the manner and sphere of our interactions with the world is governed by our knowledge and understanding, including our views and opinions, and also by the way we identify with this knowledge.

These three factors function continuously and are inseparable. Classifying them into three distinct categories is only done to provide a basic understanding. For this reason, whenever we engage in an activity, either individually or as a group, we can examine our actions—either while we are performing them or afterwards—in light of these three aspects of learning:

1. **External interaction:** we consider whether our actions or behaviour are oppressive or exploitative of others in any way, whether they cause anyone distress or harm. Alternatively, we ask ourselves whether our actions are beneficial and supportive of others? At the very least we try not to perform any serious misdeeds that would cause affliction or damage to others.

2. **State of mind:** we consider our state of mind while we are engaged in activities. We ask the following questions: What is my intention behind this action? What is the purpose? What is the motivation? Am I acting out of goodwill and benevolence or out of malice? Is my mind bright or turbid? Am I experiencing joy or misery?

3. **Understanding:** we consider whether we have a sufficiently clear understanding of the activities we undertake. Do our actions accord with the law of cause and effect? Will they bring about our desired results in a complete way? What will be the advantages and drawbacks of our actions?



We are able to reflect on these three factors vis-à-vis all of our activities. Take the example of a student. She receives instruction from her teacher and contemplates: 'I'll spend a bit of time considering these three factors of learning and see whether they are well-integrated. My relationships seem fine; I'm not abusing or troubling anyone; rather, I'm being of help to others. My state of mind is good. I act with understanding and forethought.' Having examined clearly in this way and seen that her training and education is stable and unified, she is able to study with confidence.

## Two Facets of Training in Conduct

Having completed an activity we once more engage in inspection. This time we use the four kinds of development (*bhāvanā*) as a measure. The four kinds of development, however, are directly linked to the threefold training (*sikkhā*). We need to recognize that we are applying the four kinds of development to evaluate the three kinds of training.

Another thing to recognize is that, in a manner of speaking, the threefold training becomes the fourfold development. When speaking of the threefold training, one is looking at human activity as a unified system of (three) integrated factors.<sup>21</sup> In respect to the fourfold development, one is distinguishing each component factor for analysis and inspection.

Many of you will remember that the four kinds of development comprise: development of the body, development of virtuous conduct, development of the mind, and development of wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

When comparing these two teachings it is evident that the final three kinds of development correspond to the threefold training. In the fourfold development, however, an initial factor of physical development is added. To clarify this discrepancy, it needs to be pointed out that

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<sup>21</sup> Trans.: referred to collectively as *tisso sikkhā*; frequently in later texts: *sikkhāttaya*; rarely in later texts: *tisikkhā*.

<sup>22</sup> *Kāya-bhāvanā*, *śīla-bhāvanā*, *citta-bhāvanā*, and *paññā-bhāvanā*, respectively.

the first 'training,' i.e. *sīla*, is separated into two distinct factors in the fourfold development, namely 'body' and 'conduct.'

Why is this distinction made? In the teaching on development the aim is to examine each factor in more detail. *Sīla* as the relationship to one's surroundings is thus divided into two sub-factors: the relationship to one's physical environment and the relationship to one's social environment.

Here one may ask why *sīla* in the threefold training is all-inclusive, encompassing interactions both with physical and social environments. The answer is that the threefold training is describing the process whereby *sīla-samādhi-paññā* function in unison, without interruption. Here, *sīla* is thus all-inclusive, because at any one moment we are only able to interact with one thing at a time.

In sum, education and learning is part of all human activities. In order to lead a good life, we all must undergo an education from the time we are born. Buddhism thus encourages people to apply the teachings and train themselves, beginning in the context of everyday life. Take the simple example of eating: if we are unskilled at eating, or are unable to apply the threefold training to consuming things in general, our consumption of things will be unproductive or perhaps even harmful.

## Disciplined Consumption

How can we apply the threefold training to the simple act of eating? Eating is one way of interacting with our environment; it is one form of relationship to material things. When eating, we use our tongues, our palate, to connect with external, material food; eating is therefore one

aspect of ‘conduct.’<sup>23</sup> If by eating we generate advantageous, beneficial results, our conduct is considered accomplished; if, however, we generate ill-effects and cause harm, our conduct is defective.

Concurrently, while eating, we have various states of mind: contentment and discontent, pleasure and displeasure, cheerful and morose states, vigilant and heedless states, etc.

And on another level, our contentment and discontentment, happiness and suffering, etc. depends on our understanding. If we are aware that the true purpose of eating is to promote good health, we will experience a certain kind of satisfaction. But if we lack this awareness and wise reflection, seeking only to gratify the desires of the palate and taste delicious flavours, our pleasure and satisfaction will veer off in another direction.

Understanding is a supportive condition;<sup>24</sup> it acts as a guide for experiencing happiness or unhappiness. It determines our state of mind, e.g. contentment or dissatisfaction. The Buddhist teachings encourage us to apply our intelligence and insight to reflect on the question: ‘For what purpose, for what sake, are we eating?’

There is an ancient custom for ordination candidates to live in the monastery: memorizing chants and preparing for ordination. One of these chants, which has fallen into general obscurity, is known as the *Paṭisaṅkhāyo* Chant, because it begins with the verse: ‘*Paṭisaṅkhāyo niso piṇḍapātaṃ paṭisevāmi...*’ This first verse is a reflection on eating. It is the most widely known verse of this chant, although the chant itself encompasses reflections on all four of the requisites for life.<sup>25</sup>

This reflection on eating is such: ‘Wisely reflecting, I use almsfood: not for fun, not for pleasure, not for fattening, not for beautification,

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<sup>23</sup> *Sīla*.

<sup>24</sup> *Paccaya*.

<sup>25</sup> Trans.: in many monasteries in Thailand these verses are still chanted on a daily basis. Four requisites for life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, for keeping it healthy, for helping with the Holy Life; thinking thus, “I will allay hunger without overeating, so that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease”.<sup>26</sup>

This is an example of using wise reflection. Having reflected and gained clearer understanding, the mind experiences a different kind of satisfaction. Before, one may have encountered some food that was not to one’s liking or not as expected, and consequently one would reject it. But now, recognizing that the true value of food is to sustain the body and maintain good health, eating is simplified. Our eating behaviour becomes healthy and correct.

Being more content with eating simpler food is not the only benefit. One also learns to refrain from eating excessive amounts of food, overeating simply for the sake of delicious tastes. Instead one eats an optimum amount, which is referred to as ‘moderation in eating.’<sup>27</sup>

In relation to monks, this training is called ‘conduct connected to the four requisites’<sup>28</sup> or ‘conduct pertaining to the wise use of the requisites.’<sup>29</sup> This form of conduct is relevant to every person, but as a practice it has slipped into obscurity and become almost divorced from Thai people’s daily lives. In truth, however, it is a vital part of spiritual practice for householders, both within the home and at school.

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<sup>26</sup> Trans.: this translation is taken from the Amaravati Chanting Book (© 2015 Amaravati Buddhist Monastery).

<sup>27</sup> *Bhojane-mattaññutā*; ‘balanced consumption.’

<sup>28</sup> *Paccayasannissita-sīla*.

<sup>29</sup> *Paccayaapaṭisevana-sīla*.

## Intelligence and Attention Help to Guide Our Conduct

Conduct is directly related to the four requisites, to those things that we use and consume. Yet conduct is only perfected by way of wisdom and understanding. Understanding helps to regulate conduct and bring it to maturation. Conversely, conduct—our interactions with the outside world—is an arena for exercising wisdom and understanding. But because the prominent factor in this set of circumstances is our behaviour in relation to external people and things, this engagement is called *sīla* rather than *paññā*.

Having said this, it is clear that our conduct relies on the reflective ability of wisdom to use and consume things with proper understanding. Moreover, wisdom influences our state of mind, for instance by sustaining determination and contentment. The threefold distinction of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* is thus not a decisive or irrevocable split. It is simply useful for describing which factor, at any one period of time, is prominent.

Training in conduct is an everyday exercise; it is associated with the outside world, with material things and fellow human beings. It is a domain of activity that is relatively straightforward, basic, and conspicuous. While engaging in this activity we call upon the aid of the mind—of focused attention<sup>30</sup>—and of wise discernment.<sup>31</sup> This results in a synthesis of unified factors.

If one looks closely, one sees that, when living one's life, such a synthesis is unavoidable. If these three factors were to function independently, we would not be able to reach success in any of our activities. Through proper training and education, the smooth operation of these three factors occurs automatically. Simply by practising virtuous conduct, focused attention and wisdom come to join forces naturally. But for this to happen we must be skilled at

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<sup>30</sup> *Samādhi*.

<sup>31</sup> *Paññā*.

cultivating and attending to these factors. This describes how the threefold training proceeds in a unified, uninterrupted way.

This is related to the Noble Eightfold Path<sup>32</sup> and a wholesome way of life. Take once more the example of eating. When we eat with correct understanding, we recognize that the true value and objective of eating is to nourish the body and to live at ease. Due to this insight and discernment, we give rise to right view.<sup>33</sup> This is the Path; the Path becomes part of the integrated process.

Right view arises naturally from skilful reflection, and it becomes the starting point of a pure and righteous way of life known as the Path. Spiritual training and growth unfolds in this manner. The threefold training and the Eightfold Path are united and act in concert. In other words, by fulfilling the threefold training we give rise to the Noble Eightfold Path. Once again, this points out how education and learning occur all the time.

## Skilful Consumption Leads to Skilful Reflection

Education begins with basic, everyday conduct, for instance with eating, using things, engaging with technology, etc. One asks oneself such questions as: For what purpose am I using this object? What is its true value? If children become proficient at such investigation they will naturally develop the skill of wise reflection.

Sometimes people equate education with developing ordinary thinking. The difficulty with this is that ordinary thinking occasionally becomes stifled or inert; we end up not knowing what to think about. To develop skilful, wise reflection we begin with everyday life and everyday interactions. If we can develop skilful consumption, wise reflection arises naturally. Conversely, if we lack wise reflection, we will be inept at consumption. Our daily lives thus become the starting point for education and spiritual practice. The Buddha pointed out how wisdom<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Magga*.

<sup>33</sup> *Sammā-ditṭhi*.

<sup>34</sup> *Paññā*.

is integrated with wholesome conduct,<sup>35</sup> and how wisdom and focused attention help to enhance and improve people's conduct. Here is where education begins.

A normal part of family life is providing food to one's children. At an opportune moment, a mother may say to her child: 'Dear, think about it: Why do we eat? What benefits to we get from eating?' Asking in this way, the child will begin to reflect. This is an example of contemplating a matter related to everyday life. Skilful reflection will arise accordingly.

Skilful reflection implies correct thinking, which is fruitful and productive. Wrong thinking, on the other hand, leads to bad results; by its very nature it is unskilful. Skilful reflection can thus also be called proper reflection. And it is applicable to everyday life. It can be applied to eating, for instance, which is a practical, everyday activity. Practising in this way is more coherent than getting caught up in an abstract notion of 'proper thinking,' but not knowing where to engage one's thoughts.

Everything we do that leads to success must be rooted in skilful reflection. These actions work in unison with our intelligence and focused attention, as an integrated dynamic within the context of daily life, beginning with such simple acts as eating.

Children will begin to reflect: 'I am putting on clothes. Let me consider this. What is the purpose of wearing clothing? What good comes from this?' Some people, though they have been wearing clothes for decades, have never really reflected on its significance. Often, people simply follow one another, conforming to cultural trends and values. If they follow one another in good ways and develop favourable habits, one can say that the traditions or customs of that society are positive and all is well. But if people fail to examine these matters with wisdom and lack skilful reflection, the situation becomes hazardous. People then begin to follow one another in deluded and muddled ways. As a consequence, people become degenerate and society falls to ruin.

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<sup>35</sup> *Sīla*.

## Setting Down a Code of Training

Generally, when people talk about ‘vinaya’ in the context of the Buddha’s teachings on spiritual training, they think about the monks’ code of discipline. Often, people fail to apply this important concept to the life of the laity. By doing this, one wastes a valuable asset. Granted, the monks are at an advantage because they have a clearly defined code of discipline.

The *vinaya* is a device for constructing a disciplined way of life. It helps people to draw upon the framework of the threefold training and make it applicable to their everyday lives. In other words, the *vinaya* is a formal system enabling the designs of nature to be effective in people’s lives.

An insight into reality and the laws of nature, combined with the wish to lead a wholesome way of life, leads to the recognition that the truth of nature<sup>36</sup> advocates or appeals to specific kinds of actions. This appeal by nature is precisely an appeal to engage in the threefold training. The question then follows: What methods are there to engage in this training or to live a wholesome lifestyle? The answer is that we establish a formal structure referred to as *vinaya*.

The *vinaya* is a way of setting up a framework conducive to having people act and conduct their lives in line with the principles of the threefold training. The *vinaya* is thus the closest link to virtuous conduct;<sup>37</sup> it is established in order to generate good conduct—to create a training at the level of good conduct. *Sīla* pertains to behaviour clearly expressed by speech and bodily actions. Setting up a concrete social system of conduct thus manifests as virtuous behaviour.

The meaning of *vinaya* goes beyond simply training in good conduct; it provides the opportunity to practise the complete threefold training. But it is most clearly apparent at the level of conduct. By training in accord with an established discipline, the outcome is conduct,

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<sup>36</sup> *Dhammatā; dhamma-jāti.*

<sup>37</sup> *Sīla.*



i.e. a standard behaviour expressed by actions and speech. One way to define *sīla* is 'basic virtuous behaviour.' Another way to define it is 'routine behaviour' or 'habitual behaviour'; in this context, however, it has the connotation of positive, wholesome behaviour.

## Habitual Behaviour and a Code of Ethics

As human beings, we chiefly resort to habitual patterns of behaviour. Who can deny that almost everything we do is governed by habit? Our desires, our pursuits, our choice of words, even the manner in which we walk, is more often than not dictated by habitual behaviour.

Habits are expressed by body, speech, and mind. An example of a mental habit is the way we direct our desire. Take for instance a group of people who enter a shopping mall. Generally speaking, their habitual traits will come to the fore: one person will visit the bookshop; another person will enter the household appliance shop; a third person will go to the amusement arcade, etc. This activity proceeds according to the accumulation of habitual mental disposition. We tend to repeat what is routine and familiar.

The Buddha emphasized the importance of habitual behaviour. Human beings have both good and bad habits. Negative or unwholesome habits are harmful and can lead to great misfortune.

If children are deprived of good guidance by 'virtuous friends,'<sup>38</sup> e.g. parents and teachers, they may act aimlessly and develop bad habits unintentionally. For instance, a boy may pick up a stick and for amusement use it to slash the tops off of flowers. The next day he is likely

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<sup>38</sup> *Kalyāṇamitta*.

to be inclined to repeat this action. Eventually, he may acquire a corresponding destructive habit that he carries with him into adulthood. At this point it becomes difficult to rectify.

For this reason, in regard to children, we strive to gain the upper hand—to vie for instilling wholesome habits, before unwholesome habits take root. This is done by introducing wholesome habits from the beginning. When good habits have been well established we can rest at ease. One of the vital aspects of moral conduct<sup>39</sup> is that it facilitates a training in favourable habits. Such favourable habits arise as a consequence of setting down a *vinaya*—a code of conduct or disciplinary system—inducing people to perform virtuous actions until such behaviour becomes ingrained.

What is the literal meaning of ‘*vinaya*’? In the scriptures, this term is defined as ‘leading to excellence.’ In practical terms it can simply be defined as ‘training.’ It is unfortunate and incorrect to translate this word as ‘commandment.’ Many people make this error. The essence of this word is ‘leading to excellence,’ that is, only by setting our lives on the right track will we achieve prosperity, excellence, and nobility.

If we have the good fortune of having exemplary teachers, valuable personal experiences, a suitable discernment of the way forward, and right view, then we will naturally be led to the correct path. We will then be ready to set down a *vinaya*: a system of training, a code of ethics.

Such conventional systems of training, or ethical codes, are vital. Although some people occasionally develop wholesome habits unconsciously, it is too much to expect for everyone in society to be conscientious and give thorough consideration to their actions. More often than not, people simply follow one another and conform to social habits. We cannot keep pace with them; before we know it they have already fallen in with others; there is no time to intervene. If they conform to immoral or unwholesome actions, their personal habits

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<sup>39</sup> *Sīla*.

will already be correspondingly unwholesome. Then we are faced with a very difficult problem.

This is why people create social traditions, namely, customs and routine forms of behaviour considered by the members of that society to be good and advantageous, and passed down to later generations. Such traditions, customs, codes of conduct, rules of etiquette, etc. are all matters pertaining directly to the concept of *vinaya*; they comprise the everyday way of life of the people in that society.

### Safeguarding and Imparting a Code of Ethics

The purpose of establishing a social discipline or code of ethics (*vinaya*) is to foster stable moral conduct (*sīla*). A way of life guided by a social discipline naturally gives rise to moral conduct. *Vinaya* is the starting point of this wholesome development.

We often forget to consider that laypeople also require a code of ethics. It needs to be underscored that the *vinaya* does not only pertain to the monks; the laity also require a *vinaya*. When encountering this Pali word, many people only think of the monks. Otherwise, they may think of military discipline or some other formal disciplinary code.<sup>40</sup> A lay Buddhist discipline—a code of conduct for householders—also falls under the umbrella of the word *vinaya*. And it is essential.

The Buddha taught the monks to uphold a virtuous way of life based on moral discipline;<sup>41</sup> he therefore set down a formal disciplinary code.<sup>42</sup> If monks undertake and adhere to this code with understanding and wisdom, accompanied by such mental qualities as contentment, willingness, enthusiasm, and determination, their practice will proceed well. But if they do not combine these factors of wisdom and wholesome mental states, all that remains is a formal convention.

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<sup>40</sup> Trans.: the Thai form of this Pali word is 'vinai' (วินัย), which is often used in such contexts as 'prison discipline,' 'military discipline,' 'classroom discipline,' 'political party discipline,' etc.

<sup>41</sup> *Vinaya*.

<sup>42</sup> Trans.: this monastic code is usually spelled with a capital letter: *Vinaya*.

Having said this, it is still fortunate that an external code of ethics or social discipline remains. As long as we have a bottle, we have a vessel in which to pour water; as long as we have a jug we can scoop up water to drink. If we arrive at a point where we have no water, the vessel cannot be utilized. But it is still fortunate to have the vessel. At an opportune moment, we realize: ‘Hey, I shouldn’t carelessly throw this vessel away. It has the potential to be quite useful for storing drinking water. Why don’t I make use of it now?’

This is similar to the framework or format of the monastic Vinaya. In the course of time, people’s understanding of its purpose and significance is lost. All that remains is its formal structure, which has been preserved and safeguarded. For instance, many of the formal acts of the sangha<sup>43</sup> are now no more than rituals or ceremonies. Only the formal structure remains. They are performed without understanding their objective or true significance. Many people consider them to be sacred rituals and perform them without any genuine understanding. Sometimes, their ideas about these rituals even stray off into bizarre directions. But from one perspective, we are fortunate that these basic structures have been preserved, as they often help to generate wholesome habits.

As mentioned earlier, the Buddha taught the monks a training in moral conduct pertaining to the four requisites.<sup>44</sup> In the olden days, ordination candidates were invited to live in the monastery to memorize specific chants, including the Paṭisaṅkhāyo Chant: a reflection on the requisites. There are two versions of this reflection on the four requisites:<sup>45</sup> a chant for reflecting in the present moment and a chant for reflecting past actions. If while eating or using another requisite one has been inattentive or absentminded, one reflects after the fact, especially during the evening chanting service. This can be used as an exhortation, providing one with the opportunity for review and self-evaluation.

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<sup>43</sup> *Saṅghakamma.*

<sup>44</sup> *Paccayapaṭisevana-sīla.*

<sup>45</sup> *Paccaya-paccavekkhaṇa.*

These days, memorizing this chant has become a ritual for the monks. At mealtime, they are reminded: ‘Reflect!’ In the end, however, this reflection has become like a magic spell. When sitting down to eat, the monks believe that chanting these verses makes the food holy or something of this manner. Eventually, the laypeople follow suit and begin to refer to this chant as a ‘magic food charm.’

With the passing of time, this chant has been discontinued; in many monasteries it has been abandoned. As young men are ordained for shorter and shorter periods of time, many of them never become familiar with it. In some places it has been completely forgotten. The Paṭisaṅkhāyo Chant is an instance of how divergence, incongruity, dissolution, and ambiguity can occur—and has occurred—to traditional structures and practices.

### Fourfold Practice in Moral Conduct

The benefits of a social discipline, or code of ethics, have been touched upon above. Yet if one is unskilled at applying and preserving such a discipline, it gradually deviates or falls into decline, until its essential meaning is lost. Its purpose or significance may even become distorted, until it is used contrary to its original goal.

Here, let us focus on how training or education is outlined in the Buddhist teachings. Training oneself and others begins in the context of ordinary, everyday life, which can be easily overlooked. Cultivating a good life is the essence of training or education,<sup>46</sup> and living a good life is equivalent to the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>47</sup> Education is developing the skill at living a good quality life, and it begins with skilful consumption.

By consuming things wisely and skilfully, one’s education begins straight away. I wish to highlight how everyone in family life, including the parents of children, should apply this level of virtuous conduct.<sup>48</sup> Our practice in conduct needs to be complete. Do not make the mistake

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<sup>46</sup> *Sikkhā*.

<sup>47</sup> *Magga*.

<sup>48</sup> *Sīla*.

of thinking that moral conduct is comprised simply of keeping the five precepts.<sup>49</sup>

The Buddha classified moral conduct (*sīla*) for monks into four categories:

1. Moral conduct as restraint in regard to the Pāṭimokkha.<sup>50</sup> This refers to a main ethical code or a master template for moral conduct. In other words, it refers to virtuous conduct (*sīla*) arising from a standard disciplinary code (*vinaya*) observed by a specific community or society.

Every society has conventions and rules of conduct pertaining to communal life. These rules and conventions direct members of that society to follow a similar model of virtuous behaviour, and regulate how people's lives are conducted in harmony with the goal and objective of such a model. For example, within a society, the questions will be raised: 'What is the objective of family life?' 'How can we support family life so that it receives the benefits in line with these objectives?' There will thus be a mutual consent to formulate principles of conduct, social conventions, etc.

For householders, or for the wider public, we determine the five precepts as the *sīla-pāṭimokkha*: the master template or main ethical code, ensuring a harmonious society. They act as a foundation, helping each individual in society to progress to higher spiritual ends.

2. Moral conduct as sense restraint.<sup>51</sup> This is another vital form of moral conduct. The entire domain of engaging with the sense faculties<sup>52</sup>—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—is a crucial subject for contemplation. In particular, we need to develop skill and proficiency in seeing, hearing, tasting, etc.

Lack of sense restraint is a big problem in the present age. This is particularly true in our age of technological advancement, because many people are unskilled or heedless at using technology. This heedlessness

<sup>49</sup> Trans.: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants.

<sup>50</sup> *Pāṭimokkhasaṁvara-sīla*. [Trans.: Pāṭimokkha: the core disciplinary code for monks and nuns.]

<sup>51</sup> *Indriyasaṁvara-sīla*.

<sup>52</sup> *Indriya*.

stems from an absence of this kind of moral conduct. If people fail to apply sense restraint, they will not know how to properly use technology to its greatest advantage. When watching television, listening to audio recordings, using computers, etc. they will tend to be reckless and inattentive.

A skilful engagement with the sense faculties refers to using them mindfully and using them to develop understanding. This is a way of applying the teaching on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness<sup>53</sup> to daily life. This teaching contains the important principle that by properly seeing, hearing, smelling, etc. one obtains two things: 1) *nāṇa*: one gains understanding and insight into the true nature of the sense object engaged with, and 2) *sati*: one gains mindfulness, which in effect means one acquires data and information.<sup>54</sup> One does not act simply by following likes and dislikes, nor is one caught up in pleasurable and enchanting sensations.

If we introduce the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to children, we can check whether they successfully obtain these two qualities of insight and mindfulness. If they obtain these two things, they have accessed and comprehended the Four Foundations of Mindfulness; their minds will not be overly swayed by likes and dislikes, preferences and aversions. They will be less prone to infatuation and delusion. This skilful engagement with the senses is equivalent to sense restraint.<sup>55</sup> If children lack this principle of sense restraint, when they come into contact with sense impressions, e.g. when they watch television, they are undone. They get caught up in fascination, obsession, and indulgence. They miss out on the true benefits of such interactions.

Providing children with entertainment and amusement is not blameworthy. But do not make this the mainstay of education. Fun and amusement are just minor, supporting factors. We should ask ourselves whether children are accessing the heart of education—whether they

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<sup>53</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna*. (Trans.: mindfulness as regards the body, feelings, states of mind, and mind-objects.)

<sup>54</sup> See endnote B.

<sup>55</sup> *Indriyasamvara-sīla*.

are truly profiting from education. We can provide entertainment as an accessory, but we need to ensure that children obtain knowledge and constructive material for recollection.

## **Skilful Sense Engagement as a Basis for the Threefold Training**

When engaging with sense objects, we encourage them to acquire understanding, by looking for and recognizing causes and conditions. For instance, they may follow this line of inquiry: ‘What is this?’ ‘How does it function?’ ‘How did it come into existence?’ ‘What sustains it?’ ‘Why was it created?’ ‘What are its advantages and disadvantages?’ ‘How should it be utilized?’ etc. Such an inquiring mind is encouraged. This way they acquire knowledge<sup>56</sup> and useful material for recollection based on mindfulness.<sup>57</sup>

If children are able to develop sense restraint and apply the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, they will discover contentment and wellbeing. They will become mature. And they will not behave in ways that cause harm for themselves or for their parents and relatives.

These days, however, many people lack these basic standards. Their actions are primarily driven by likes and dislikes, preferences and aversions. When there are likes and dislikes, there is love and hate. When there is love and hate, there is mental proliferation conforming to love and hate. This is the source of delight and sorrow, happiness and suffering. Fascination, infatuation, greed, hatred, and delusion, etc. follow in their wake.<sup>58</sup>

We should use this traditional model as our guideline: ‘Only to the extent necessary for knowledge and recall.’<sup>59</sup> That is, we should ask ourselves whether, through any particular sense contact, we obtain knowledge and useful lessons for recollection. If the answer is ‘Yes’

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<sup>56</sup> *Ñāṇa*.

<sup>57</sup> *Sati*.

<sup>58</sup> Trans.: note that ‘love’ and ‘happiness’ here refer to those emotions fed and conditioned by their opposites (i.e. hate and suffering); this is not true love or true happiness.

<sup>59</sup> *Ñāṇamattāya satimattāya*; in full: *ñāṇamattāya paṭṭissatimattāya*.



then any amount of watching, listening, etc. will lead to favourable ends. Sadly, however, many people fail to apply this practice in moral conduct.

If children in Thailand are endowed with this dimension of moral conduct, they will face life undaunted. No matter what forms of technology are invented and unveiled, they will quickly possess a level of mastery to meet these new innovations. They will gain a competence and know how to benefit from them. This skilful application in itself can be seen as a kind of virtuous conduct.<sup>60</sup>

With skilful sense engagement, no matter what technological breakthroughs come from the West or from Japan, children will be prepared to respond to them without difficulty. They will use them to their advantage. These things will not lead to children's downfall or to moral decline in society.

Presently, however, Thai people are being swept away and drowned by the currents of material progress and prosperity. They fail to apply wise reflection, their hearts are corrupted, they lack morality, and they fall into heedlessness. They flounder under the tides of progress. If only they could adopt these new technological advances from abroad and preserve self-mastery, without being overwhelmed—that would be a great accomplishment. Then we could claim that their education has been truly effective.

Having said this, material progress and technological advances has already occurred, and we have no choice but to interact with these things. We can use them in a skilful way, deriving their full value and worth, and thus generating benefit to ourselves and our communities. Moreover, whatever material progress or technological advances are introduced, we should respond to them by considering how to produce them ourselves and improve on their designs. This way, we surpass these achievements and use them as a platform for trailblazing our own progress.

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<sup>60</sup> *Sīla*.

How can we help people become established in this course of action? How can we embrace the technological advances from abroad and use them as a foothold for rising up and moving forward, instead of getting bogged down and engulfed by them? Thai people on the whole are still unequipped to rise above material progress and to truly capitalize from it. If we can practise the virtuous conduct of sense restraint, however, we will have a guideline and anchor, and we will be able to use the technological advances created by others for our own progress.

### **Skilful Consumption and Personal Growth**

3. Moral conduct pertaining to wise use of the four requisites.<sup>61</sup> In the scriptures, this is the final of the four factors on moral conduct, but because we are talking about the education of children, allow me to list it as the third factor.

As mentioned earlier, the wise use of the four requisites refers to using material things and consumer products skilfully. When eating food, wearing clothing, etc. one understands the purpose of such actions and recognizes the true advantages of these things.

Even while using a computer, we should consider and examine the true benefits provided by such technology. If we are established in the practice of wise consumption, we will already have the disposition to reflect in this way when using technology. This reflection will arise immediately, no matter with what we engage. Wise reflection is always linked to wise consumption. While using a computer, we reflect: ‘What are the actual benefits of this device?’ We do not simply use it to play video games. By possessing this form of moral conduct, such activities can be an opportunity for learning and creativity.

I once asked a child who came to the monastery: ‘How many hours per day do you watch television? In total, how many hours do you watch television each week? And for what purpose do you use a computer?’

I went on to ask: ‘What percentage of your watching TV is done for amusement, and what percentage for learning?’ This child had

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<sup>61</sup> *Paccayapaṭisevana-sīla.*

never made this distinction. At first she looked a bit bemused. When she was able to distinguish between these two functions, she answered: '99% of the time I watch for amusement.' This is troubling. I then asked her: 'Do you think that watching 99% of the time for amusement, and almost never for learning, is correct?' She answered that no, it is not. I then replied: 'What do you think you should do about this?' She answered: 'I'll have to turn things around and make it right.'

By saying that she would make things right, it showed that she was examining this matter. I asked further: 'How are you going to make things right?' She said: 'I'll have to increase the amount of time that I watch TV in order to learn.' 'What proportion of time do you think would be good?' '50/50—I'll watch for entertainment 50% of the time and watch to learn 50%.'

'Dear me,' I said, 'I feel sorry for you. You don't have to make such a radical change. From 1% to 50% is quite an extreme jump.' I told her to gradually think about it. Social trends exert a pressure towards indulgence and amusement; it is better to make a gentle and gradual change.

Finally, she said: 'Okay, I'll watch to learn for 30% of the time; and watch for fun 70%.' That's good. The process of learning was kicking in.

This is an example of Buddhist education, complete with the threefold training, occurring in everyday life. One develops skilful consumption and skilful reflection. One's state of mind is wholesome and one delights in doing that which is correct. When we follow the right track, all necessary factors are present as a matter of course.

In sum, moral conduct pertaining to wise use of the four requisites<sup>62</sup> is the ability to use and consume things, including technological gadgets, with wise and skilful reflection. At the very least, one knows their true purpose, benefit, and value.

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<sup>62</sup> *Paccayaṭṭisevana-sīla*.

## The Important Role of Livelihood in Personal Development

4. Purity of conduct as regards livelihood.<sup>63</sup> Earning one's livelihood, or making one's living, refers to obtaining the four requisites to enjoy and consume. As mentioned above, in the scriptures, moral conduct pertaining to wise use of the four requisites<sup>64</sup> is placed as the final factor, because we must first work and make a living, before we can enjoy the fruits of our labour. Once we have obtained the requisites, we are encouraged to consume them with wisdom. But children obtain consumable things from their parents without having to work. For this reason, I have highlighted wise consumption.

In any case, children should conduct themselves and fulfil their responsibilities in a way that is fitting and deserving for obtaining material things from their parents to enjoy. Therefore, children too have a just 'occupation,' and they are advised to observe the kind of moral conduct known as 'purity as regards livelihood.'<sup>65</sup> In the Noble Eightfold Path, this kind of virtuous conduct is referred to as 'right livelihood,'<sup>66</sup> an essential element of the Path. It is common for people to overlook the importance of this factor of livelihood. Remember that it is one of the pivotal factors of the Eightfold Path.

In the scriptures, the eight precepts are outlined in two versions: the first group is known as the 'precepts to be observed on the Observance Day';<sup>67</sup> and the second group is known as the 'set of eight precepts of which pure livelihood is the eighth.'<sup>68</sup> This second version highlights earning a living in a righteous way.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ājīvapārisuddhi-sīla.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ājīvapārisuddhi-sīla.*

<sup>66</sup> *Sammā-ājīva.*

<sup>67</sup> *Uposatha-sīla.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ājivatthamaka-sīla.*

Every kind of human livelihood or profession is established for the sake of attending to personal or social challenges, or for the sake of creating or improving something. Therefore, when pursuing a livelihood we need to work in a way that generates results corresponding to the objectives of the task at hand.

Take the simple example of practising medicine. What is the mission and goal of the medical profession? That is quite easy. The goal is to treat people's illnesses, to heal the sick, and to promote good health. Doctors who earn a living correctly by fulfilling the aims of this profession thus consider how they can best perform their medical work. They consider how they can best heal sick patients and sustain people in an optimum state of good health. Financial remuneration is secondary.

This is similar to the teaching profession. The goal of this vocation is to provide children with a good education, to nurture and support their personal growth. If we reflect on the true purpose of this profession, ethical conduct and professional success will arise almost automatically. We will have a passion for the goal of teaching and will find delight in our work. Everything will be in harmony. We will live our lives in harmony with the truth, without discord or conflict. We will experience a sense of balance, ease, and joy. And our work will bear good fruit. The implications of this is that our work creates no harm or injury to others. It is intrinsically complete.

The next aspect to consider is how we can make our professions and careers, which take up a large proportion of our time—often eight to ten hours of each day—into a domain for spiritual development. Self-development and self-improvement requires time and labour. Our daily work and occupation is an activity taking up much of our time. If we misdirect our efforts we lose a great opportunity and waste much of our

time. For this reason we use our work as an arena for self-improvement, for instance by cultivating the threefold training.

The most basic interpretation of purity of conduct as regards livelihood<sup>69</sup> is that our work and profession does not cause affliction or hardship for others, and it does not damage society. Moreover, it does not lead us to squander opportunities for personal development or lead us to spiritual decline.

### **Buddhist Social Discipline Is Conducive to Education**

These four kinds of moral conduct should be highlighted in Buddhist circles. Buddhists should recognize that moral conduct is not comprised simply of keeping the five precepts. Although the five precepts are vital, they are only a basic, rudimentary part of Buddhist training. They act as the minimum standard for communal life and for preventing the world from falling into turmoil. If one wishes to develop spiritually, truly prosper, and discover real happiness, the five precepts are insufficient. The five precepts are a foundation for protecting society, a basic guarantee of safety, preventing social distress and establishing a minimum level of social harmony.

To be genuine Buddhists, and to promote personal and social development, we must adopt an authentic Buddhist social discipline. As mentioned earlier, it is not only the monks who have a *vinaya*; householders too have a *vinaya*. I think it is time to revive a Buddhist social discipline, which in Pali is called *gihi-vinaya*: a layperson's code of ethics. This code is clearly outlined in the *Siṅgālaka Sutta*, which the Buddha taught to the young brahman student *Siṅgālaka*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ājīvaṇṇāpārisuddhi-sīla*.

<sup>70</sup> Trans.: *Dīgha Nikāya sutta* 31.

I have now restructured and published this sutta as a short book, titled ‘The Buddhist’s Discipline.’<sup>71</sup> Reading the original sutta word-by-word, some people will find it difficult to understand, because the Buddha presented this teaching in an informal way. If it is not set down with clear headings and arranged into a formal structure, it may appear abstruse. I have therefore organized this teaching into a list of main topics and established clear sections.

I will not go into this teaching in detail here. Let me simply say that if as Buddhists we have such a code of ethics, it will promote a way of life conducive to training and education. If we fail to establish such a code of ethics, however, training and education will likely be ineffective and deficient.

### **True Education Leads to a Good Quality Life, Progress on the Path, and the Fourfold Mastery**

The threefold training and the Eightfold Path must proceed in unison. In our daily lives, we engage in learning and training, and for this purpose we incorporate the threefold training. By doing this our lives naturally assume the form of the Path. As we live the Path, our lifestyles are conducive to further progress in the threefold training. The Path and the threefold training are thus developed in tandem.

In sum, these two factors are connected: the threefold training is comprised of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*; and the Eightfold Path can likewise be outlined in a nutshell as *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

When named in full, the three factors of the threefold training are: *adhisīla-sikkhā*, *adhicitta-sikkhā*, and *adhipaññā-sikkhā*.<sup>72</sup> The second factor here is not referred to as *samādhi*; the term *samādhi* is only used in the simple, concise description of the threefold training: *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. The formal designation of this second factor in the scriptures is *adhicitta-sikkhā*, referring to all matters pertaining to

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<sup>71</sup> In Thai: วินัยชาดกพุทธ.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Training in higher virtue,’ ‘training in higher mind,’ and ‘training in higher wisdom.’

a person's state of mind, or state of consciousness, which includes the quality of *samādhi* ('concentration'; 'focused attention').

The Noble Eightfold Path is arranged into three 'divisions,'<sup>73</sup> namely: the division on conduct,<sup>74</sup> the division on concentration,<sup>75</sup> and the division on wisdom.<sup>76</sup>

After the Buddha's final passing away, a layman came to converse with Ven. Ānanda, and asked him what subject was frequently taught by the Buddha.<sup>77</sup> Ānanda replied that the teaching regularly reiterated by the Buddha was the value and significance of the threefold division on conduct, concentration, and wisdom,<sup>78</sup> which embraces the entire Buddhist doctrine on practice and training. These principles are to be steadfastly observed by all people.<sup>79</sup>

Training in this way naturally gives rise to the fourfold development<sup>80</sup>—the four dimensions of improving and developing our lives. As mentioned above, the act of training or practising is referred to as the threefold training,<sup>81</sup> but when examining the fruits of practice the classification of the fourfold development is applied. In the latter case, the first training is divided into two factors: interaction with one's physical environment<sup>82</sup> and interaction with one's social environment.<sup>83</sup>

In any single mind moment, the complete set of three trainings is operational, working in chorus. Why are there not four factors functioning simultaneously? Because in any single mind moment it is

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<sup>73</sup> *Khandha*.

<sup>74</sup> *Sīla-khandha*.

<sup>75</sup> *Samādhi-khandha*.

<sup>76</sup> *Paññā-khandha*.

<sup>77</sup> *Subhā Sutta*; D. I. 204-206.

<sup>78</sup> *Sīla-khandha*, *samādhi-khandha*, and *paññā-khandha*.

<sup>79</sup> See endnote C.

<sup>80</sup> *Bhāvanā*.

<sup>81</sup> *Sikkhā*.

<sup>82</sup> *Kāya-bhāvanā*.

<sup>83</sup> See endnote D.



only possible to interact with either a material object or with another person—it must be one or the other.<sup>84</sup>

The scriptures make this distinction: in any single mind moment a person only relates to a single external condition. Training is therefore classified as a threefold process. When evaluating or assessing our practice, however, we examine all the distinct factors more clearly. We need not focus on a single instant of time. Thus the division of the fourfold development.

When measuring the level of people's success in education and training, we apply the fourfold development (*bhāvanā*). Having performed this evaluation, if we discover that they have truly completed their training, their development is determined as 'self-mastery' (*bhāvita*; 'fulfilled development').

The term *bhāvanā* refers to the act or deed of development. When someone has developed an aspect of training, he or she is said to be 'fully developed' (*bhāvita*) in that particular domain. In total, there are four such areas of self-mastery: to be developed in body, developed in virtuous conduct, developed in mind, and developed in wisdom.<sup>85</sup>

Traditionally, this term *bhāvanā* can be used in other contexts to denote 'development,' 'cultivation,' 'practice,' etc. For example: 'practising insight meditation,'<sup>86</sup> 'practising tranquillity meditation,'<sup>87</sup> 'cultivating loving-kindness,'<sup>88</sup> etc.

*Bhāvanā* means 'development'; *bhāvita* means 'to have perfected one's development'—'to be fully developed.' The Buddha said that anyone who is fully developed in the four aspects of development is an arahant.

The ultimate goal of education and training is to be a fully awakened being—an arahant. Someone who has gained the fourfold mastery has fulfilled the fourfold development. And this development can be

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<sup>84</sup> See endnote E.

<sup>85</sup> *Bhāvita-kāya*, *bhāvita-sīla*, *bhāvita-citta*, and *bhāvita-paññā*, respectively.

<sup>86</sup> *Vipassanā-bhāvanā*.

<sup>87</sup> *Samatha-bhāvanā*.

<sup>88</sup> *Mettā-bhāvanā*.

measured. A person's degree of training and spiritual cultivation bears fruit as a corresponding degree of personal progress, accomplishment, and healthy existence, culminating in a perfection of spiritual development. One can say that he or she has completed the Buddhist 'syllabus' or 'course of study.' Very simple, no? From one angle it looks easy. This is the heart of Buddhism.

## **Insightful Implementation of Child-Centred Education**

We must face the reality that we live surrounded by social trends. It is important that we stay abreast of social developments, especially in the area of education. We should address such questions as: 'What is the historical background of educational movements?' 'How have specific educational movements or systems undergone growth or decline?' 'How has Child-Centred Education competed with Teacher- and Subject-Centred Education?' 'Which has been in the ascendancy during various periods of recent history, and for what reason?'

Thailand adopted Child-Centred Education from the United States:

- Child-Centred Education was introduced as a pedagogical method in 1875, which is considered the year that it was first applied in schools. It was significantly advanced by John Dewey, who is known as the pioneer or spearhead of Progressive Education.
- After 1900, Child-Centred Education took a turn for the worse, in particular after the Russians launched Sputnik 1.<sup>89</sup> In 1957, Child-Centred Education in America fell into rapid decline. People criticized it for making children intellectually deficient, of weak character, irresolute, and lacking in fighting spirit. They said it pampers children and gives too much import to gratifying their

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<sup>89</sup> Trans.: In 1957 the Soviet Union launched the first artificial Earth satellite. This surprise success precipitated the American Sputnik crisis and triggered the Space Race, a part of the larger Cold War.

desires. After this date, Teacher- and Subject-Centred Education once again grew in popularity.

- In 1980, however, the situation changed once more. American people observed that children harboured a sense of self-alienation; their minds were in a state of dis-ease, desolation, stress, etc. People claimed that Teacher- and Subject-Centred Education was to blame, so they switched back to Child-Centred Education. Westerners thus oscillated between one method and the other.

It is worthy of consideration whether both of these methods of education can potentially fall into an extreme. A preferable pedagogical system more likely lies as a middle path<sup>90</sup> between these two. A ‘middle path’ here refers to practice and conduct in harmony with the truth of nature. True education must be in accord with natural truth.<sup>91</sup>

Natural truth is to be discerned with wisdom, otherwise known as ‘right view.’<sup>92</sup> Knowing the truth of nature, one is able to adjust one’s conduct in line with this truth. Such behaviour is called *majjhimā*: balanced, optimum, and conforming to reality. This is the middle path.

Buddhist education follows a middle path. It is neither Child-Centred Education nor Teacher- and Subject-Centred Education. Or if one wishes to include these terms in Buddhist education, one can say that it is a balanced integration of these two methods.

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<sup>90</sup> *Majjhimā-paṭiṭṭhāpāda*.

<sup>91</sup> *Dhammatā*.

<sup>92</sup> *Sammā-ditṭhi*.

By following one of these methods of education exclusively, one can fall into an extreme form of behaviour.

Take the example of the wish to discover the potential within every child. In response, it is reasonable to say: 'Be careful.' Yes, it is good to discover children's individual potential, but one should balance this with a recognition of human potential. This need to be distinguished. Sometimes our vision and perspective is too narrow.

Another example is that Child-Centred Education tends to emphasize the differences in individual children's skills and abilities. But we should not forget that children differ in other important ways.

The Buddhist teachings distinguish two domains in which individual people differ:

1. *Adhimutti*: personal potential: the domain of aptitude, skill, interest, preference, along with various aspects of past conditioning, including 'innate disposition.'<sup>93</sup> Returning to the example mentioned earlier: when entering a shopping mall, one person will enter the amusement arcade, another the bookstore, etc. This is an example of following one's innate disposition.
2. *Indriya*: human potential: the domain of spiritual faculties and degree of spiritual development. For example, each person differs in his or her level of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

Before the Buddha would teach people, he would apply two forms of knowledge to recognize their unique differences:

1. Knowledge pertaining to differences in aptitude, preference, innate disposition, etc.<sup>94</sup>
2. Knowledge pertaining to differences in spiritual faculties.<sup>95</sup>

Often, in reference to the differences between children, the emphasis is on aptitude and skill. This is a one-sided perspective. It is necessary

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<sup>93</sup> *Vāsanā*.

<sup>94</sup> *Nānādhimuttika-ñāṇa*.

<sup>95</sup> *Indriyaparopariyatta-ñāṇa*.

to recognize children's differences in both domains. Training in the domain of developing spiritual faculties to the highest degree is also essential.

In some cases, children's individual potential differs from human potential. Although it is a worthy endeavour to help children realize their individual potential, as teachers or mentors we should also help children realize the apex of human potential.

The matter discussed above is just one example from the field of education. To sum up, we need to stay abreast of various pedagogical trends, theories, etc. introduced from abroad and be able to analyze them. Understanding historical and contemporary circumstances is thus of chief importance.

## **Refining Foreign Educational Systems**

It would be useful to engage in the following discussions: 'What are the contemporary Western viewpoints on education?' 'Who champions these ideas?' 'What are their pros and cons—their strong and weak points?' 'What is the essence and importance of contemporary pedagogical methods?' 'What are their inconsistencies?'

Take the example of Child-Centred Education. When academics and educators speak about this method of education, I often hear them focus on responding to the personal choices and preferences of children. One provides whatever the children want. But by taking this one-sided approach, one may be neglecting other important areas of development and growth.

There are also complications with language. In English the expression 'needs' of children is used, but this term is often interpreted by teachers in Thailand as 'desire.' Equating 'need' with 'desire'

can cause confusion.<sup>96</sup> As this example shows, certain concepts can get lost in translation.

Furthermore, satisfying desire and cultivating desire are not the same things. According to the Buddhist teachings, desire can be cultivated and developed. Therefore, education does not involve merely satisfying or fulfilling desire, but it also involves cultivating desire.

Proponents of this system say: 'Make children happy.' As Buddhists, we respond: 'Let us foster the causes and conditions for happiness.' Instead of getting caught up in making children happy, we help them foster the conditions for happiness. This way, children discover happiness by themselves. Moreover, they are able to enhance and transform their happiness.

Some educators create a fixed concept of happiness for children; they then apply this preconceived form of happiness as a goal in their educational methods. But doing this is simply a way of satisfying and indulging personal views and notions.<sup>97</sup> It also limits children to this form of happiness. Children fail to discover that there are many kinds and levels of happiness. As human beings we should establish the causes and conditions for enhanced degrees of happiness, along with dispelling the causes and conditions for suffering. This is of vital importance.

Failing to appreciate human potential, educators get preoccupied with fixed opinions on children's happiness and suffering, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The result is that children lose a valuable opportunity and asset, and education fails to develop the essential spiritual qualities of the individual.

This subject is worthy of much more consideration and discussion. But today, our time has come to a close. If any of the teachers have unanswered questions, let us leave them until the next opportunity to meet and discuss.

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<sup>96</sup> Trans.: note the important distinction in Pali between different kinds of desire, in particular the difference between 'wholesome desire' (*chanda*) and 'covetous desire' or 'craving' (*taṇhā*).

<sup>97</sup> *Ditṭhi*.

May I express my gratitude to all the teachers, administrators, and school patrons who have come today with wholesome intent to visit the monastery, to visit the monks, and to visit myself, on this year's Teacher's Day—a special day for all schools and teachers.

According to the Buddha's teachings, the definition of 'blessings' or 'good fortune'—*maṅgala*—is a pure and wholesome mind. Today, we have generated blessings. A pure, bright, joyous, and contented mind is a supportive condition for true happiness and prosperity to blossom and flourish.

May I take this opportunity to share in the spirit of goodness. I call upon the power of the Triple Gem to generate success, good fortune, and protection to all the honourable guests today—to the teachers, administrators, and school benefactors, to the parents and guardians, and especially to all the children—so that you may grow in the fourfold victorious blessing,<sup>98</sup> abide peacefully in the Dhamma, and realize ever greater degrees of happiness.

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<sup>98</sup> Trans.: fourfold blessing (*catubbidha-vara*): long-life (*āyu*), radiance (*vaṇṇa*; bright complexion); happiness (*sukha*); and good health (*bala*; strength).

## Endnote

- A Trans.: in Thai the Pali word *sikkhā* has been transformed into ‘seuksah’ (เสือกษา). *Sikkhā* has a broad range of meaning, including ‘education,’ ‘learning,’ and ‘spiritual training.’ Although it can be translated as ‘education,’ this term goes far beyond simply absorbing information at school. True education, or spiritual training, continues throughout one’s entire life.
- B Trans.: connected to an answer the venerable author kindly sent in reply to a doubt I had about the original passage here, he added the following comments: ‘At the time of cognition, if people do not possess mindfulness, they are absentminded and lack an understanding of the sense object with which they come into contact; one can say that the moment passes in vain. This resembles a careless gatekeeper: he does not pay attention to or inspect the people passing through the gate; he fails to obtain the important information about these people, e.g. their identity and character. But when mindfulness ‘grabs hold of’ a sense object, the cognitive process functions as mindfulness opens the way or initiates. For instance, perception (*saññā*) perceives accurately and comprehensively. As a result, people obtain the information aimed for and designated by mindfulness.
- C In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (e.g. D. II. 82), there are approximately eight passages recounting the Buddha’s frequently spoken Dhamma discourse (*bahuladhammi-kathā*), whereby he describes the benefits of moral conduct, concentration, and wisdom.
- D *Sīla-bhāvanā*. [Trans.: although the term *kāya-bhāvanā* can be translated as ‘cultivation of the body’ or ‘physical development,’ this should not be interpreted as ‘physical exercise,’ ‘working out,’ etc. In the book *Buddhadhamma*, the venerable author explains this factor thus: ‘People develop a relationship to their physical environment and to their physical bodies; they have a healthy, contented, and respectful relationship to things and to nature; in particular, they experience things by way of the five senses, e.g. by seeing or hearing, mindfully and in a way that fosters wisdom.’]
- E This teaching is most commonly outlined in the Abhidhamma, which describes how specific mental factors (*cetasika*) arise, or fail to arise, in particular states of mind. In each moment of analysis or study, it is possible to be equipped with all three factors of the threefold training (although sometimes these three factors are incomplete). Thus, in a single mind-moment, or single moment of consciousness, during which time a person is practising the threefold training: 1) *samādhi* (= the mind): the mind is endowed with wholesome qualities, e.g. faith, lovingkindness, compassion, mindfulness, etc.; 2) *paññā*: wisdom may be present or absent in that specific moment; 3) *sīla* (positive interaction with a person or object, whereby this person or object is the ‘sense object’): there can only be one such sense object in a single moment of consciousness (if the person cognizes a new sense object, a new mind-moment has begun). Therefore, while practising the threefold training, we may possess two or three things, namely: 1) mental qualities (*cetasika*); 2) an external person or object as a sense object (*ārammaṇa*); 3) wisdom (*paññā*), which may be present or absent.



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