

THE SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY – by Ven Dr M. Punnañi Maha Thera

From the **Paṭicca-Samuppāda** (Antecedental Concurrence) we learned that:

- Life originated unconsciously, which means the process of evolution of life continued when inanimate matter began to struggle for existence unconsciously;
- Life evolved until consciousness came into being with the evolution of the Human Being, but even the Human Being has not evolved to become fully conscious, though only partially conscious;
- The Human Being became conscious of the objective world through completion of sense experience (**Phassa**);
- The Subjective Self (**Atta**) came into being when the emotional reaction (**Taṇhā**) to sensations led to personalization (**Upādāna**) of the reaction as “mine” and alienating the Objective World (**Loka**) as “not mine”;
- With the SELF as a construct of the mind, we begin to think of the SELF in terms of a PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE – this means TIME is a construct of the mind, and so is SPACE;
- Because the emotional reaction is based on the BODY, personalising the emotional reaction became personalising the body. This means the BODY that was personalized became the SELF.
- The past, present, future of the SELF becomes the past, present, future of the BODY.
- Past of the body is BIRTH, the future of the body is DEATH, and in between birth and death there is AGING – this is also the birth, death, and aging of the SELF;
- This is the existence of a SELF in a WORLD that is subject to insecurity;
- This is the insecure **DREAM OF EXISTENCE**.

THE 3-FOLD NATURE OF EXISTENCE (“TI-LAKKHANA”)

We also learned from the **Paṭicca-Samuppāda** that all phenomenon arise dependent on conditions.

- What is dependent on conditions is unstable (**Anicca**);
- What is unstable is insecure (**Dukkha**);
- What is unstable and insecure is not as I want;
- What is not as I want is not under my power;
- What is not under my power is not mine;
- What is not mine is not my “SELF” (**Anattā**);
- This line of thinking is the awakening from the **Dream of Existence**.

CESSATION OF THE DELUSION

- The dream of existence is a DELUSION
- This delusion arose from the **AFFECTIVE PROCESS** of the **Paṭicca-Samuppāda**
- Cessation of this Delusion comes from the cessation of the **AFFECTIVE PROCESS**
- The cessation of delusion is the **LIBERATION** (**Vimutti**) from **SUFFERING** (**Dukkha**)
- What remains is **IMPETURBABLE SERENITY OF MIND** (**Akuppā-ceto-vimutti**) – this is **NIBBĀNA**
- **NIBBĀNA** is the return to the **ORIGINAL EQUILIBRIUM OF MIND** in such a way it can never be disturbed.

PARADIGM SHIFT

- To think in the **Samsāra** way is to continue the experience of EXISTENCE.
- To think in the **Nibbāna** way is to be AWAKEN from the dream of existence.
- The change of thinking from **Samsāra** to **Nibbāna** way is a **paradigm shift**.

FINDING THE BUILDER OF THIS HOUSE

**Anekajāṭisaṃsāraṃ – sandhāvissaṃ anibbisāṃ
Gahakāraṃ gavesanto – dukkhā jāti punappunāṃ.** [153]

**Gahakāraṃ diṭṭho’ si – puna gehaṃ na kāhasi
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā – gahakūṭaṃ visaṅkhaṭaṃ
Visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ – taṇhānaṃ khayam ajjhagā.** [154] (DHAMMAPADA)

Through many a cycle of birth and death, I ran,
Seeking but not finding the builder of this house.
Painful it is to be born again and again.

You are found, oh house-builder!
You will not build anymore!
All supports are broken, the structure destroyed.

The mind has stopped creating.
The emotional urge has ceased.

WHAT IS NIBBĀNA

- There are 4 ways to explain **Nibbāna**:
 - i. In terms of the evolution of the Human Being, the **Buddha** being the ultimate point in this evolutionary process
 - ii. Reaching the state of ultimate perfection in **Goodness**
 - iii. Reaching the state of ultimate **Happiness**
 - iv. **Awakening** from the **Dream of Existence**
- **Nibbāna** is not a “Presence” of something – it is an Absence
- We are not seeking a goal of pleasure nor going towards a destination
- We are speaking of withdrawal from a disastrous experience called “**Dukkha**”
- The method of withdrawal is to awaken from the dream of existence and suffering
- The gradual way to awaken from the dream of existence is the **SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY**

MANGALA SUTTA

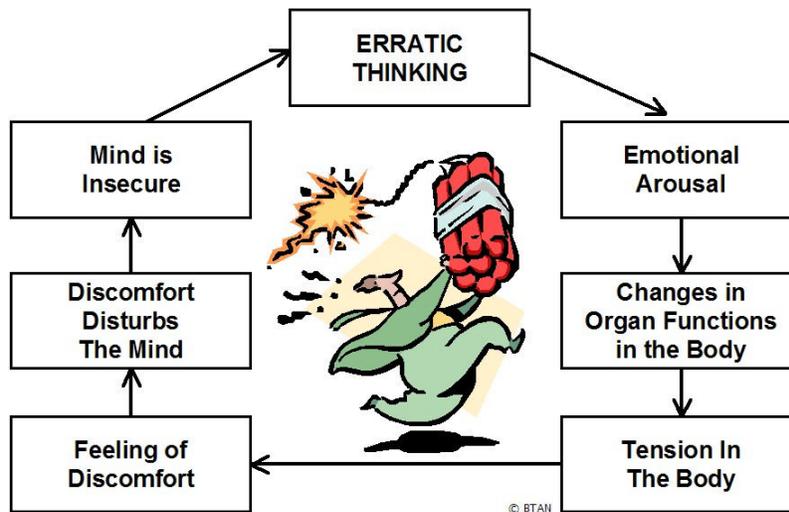
**Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammeḥi cittaṃ yassa na kampati
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ etaṃ maṅgalaṃuttamaṃ**

When faced with the changing vicissitudes of life,
if the mind can be kept undisturbed,
free from worry, lust, and fear,
this is the supreme bliss.

THE VICIOUS AND VIRTUOUS CYCLES OF THINKING

- Erratic thinking is unpredictable, it causes emotional thoughts in the mind
- Emotional thoughts in our mind invariably produce emotional arousal and physical tension
- Emotional arousal causes hormonal secretion which affects organ functions in the body
- This results in tension in the body which makes us feel uncomfortable physically
- This discomfort disturbs the mind and the mind is insecure
- The mind affects the body and the body affects the mind
- This starts a vicious cycle we call the **“Vicious Cycle of Erratic Thinking”**

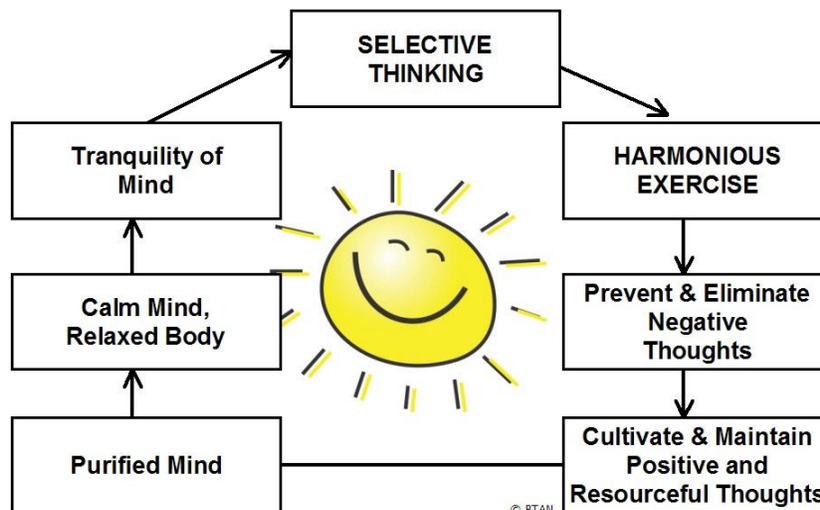
VICIOUS CYCLE OF ERRATIC THINKING



This Vicious Cycle can be broken at two points: at the mind and at the body. We break the Vicious Cycle at the mind by calming the mind and applying **Selective Thinking** to refocus our thoughts positively and in a resourceful manner. We break the Vicious Cycle at the body by learning to relax the body through **Harmonious Exercise**.

With **Selective Thinking** we break the Vicious Cycle and with **Harmonious Exercise** we transform into what we call the **“Virtuous Cycle of Selective Thinking.”**

VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF SELECTIVE THINKING



THE SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY

- 1) Harmonious Perspective (**sammā-ditthi**)
- 2) Harmonious Orientation (**sammā-sankappa**)
- 3) Harmonious Speech (**sammā-vācā**)
- 4) Harmonious Action (**sammā-kammanta**)
- 5) Harmonious Lifestyle (**sammā-ājīva**)
- 6) Harmonious Exercise (**sammā-vāyāma**)
- 7) Harmonious Attention (**sammā-sati**)
- 8) Harmonious Mental Equilibrium (**sammā-samādhi**)

1) HARMONIOUS PERSPECTIVE (sammā-ditthi)

Harmonious Perspective is to become aware of:

- The insecurity of life (**dukkha**)
- The cause of this insecurity (**samudaya**)
- The end of this insecurity (**nirodha**)
- The way to end this insecurity (**magga**)

This is the realization of the **The 4 Supernormal Realities of Life**.

- Normally people think of “happiness” as the gratification of emotions
- “Goodness” is seen as the suppression of emotions
- This creates a conflict that causes **vacillation** of mind or “**cognitive dissonance**” (**vicikicchā**)
- We have to choose between being “happy” and being “good”
- The **Buddha** points out that Goodness is the **Way to Happiness**
- This means that Happiness comes not from gratifying emotions but from relaxation of body and tranquility of mind
- This is the **Medial Way** between being carried away by emotions and suppressing emotions
- This Medial Way resolves the conflict
- Understanding this is the Harmonious Perspective

Understanding this **Harmonious Perspective** is to be free from the notion of **SELF**, and also to understand that emotion is the cause of suffering from the insecurity of life.

This also leads to the serious decision to work towards the elimination of self-centered emotion from our life.

2) HARMONIOUS ORIENTATION (sammā-sankappa)

- Reorganize one's life by turning in a new direction, turn towards calmness as the solution to the problem of life.
- This is the pursuit of relinquishment, relaxation, and tranquility of mind as the way to true goodness, happiness, and wisdom.
- Harmonious orientation is knowing that Happiness comes from serenity of mind and calmness of body, not from experiencing pleasant sensations or satisfying desire for sensual pleasures
- The aim is to gain control over our emotions, instead of being carried away by them.
- Harmonious orientation is the turning of our mind towards the imperturbable serenity of mind (akuppā-ceto-vimutti) which is free from self-centered Emotions.
- This is like making a U-Turn where if one was going East now one turn to go West.

Once the Harmonious Orientation has been achieved, one begins to practice the next 3 steps in the **SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY** automatically, which is called "**Sīla**" (avoiding bad) and "**Bhata**" (doing good).

3) HARMONIOUS SPEECH (sammā-vācā)

This is speech that does not create conflict between oneself and others, but instead creates happiness wherever we go.

4) HARMONIOUS ACTION (sammā-kammanta)

This is our behaviour which is always pleasant to ourselves as well as to others.

5) HARMONIOUS LIFESTYLE (sammā-ājīva)

Here we are referring to our lifestyle, more than the jobs we do to earn a living, or our occupation. The harmonious life style is the unselfish, socially oriented, honest, compassionate, and tolerant way of living that is helpful but not harmful to anyone in the world. This is the automatic consequence of the harmonious disposition.

6) HARMONIOUS EXERCISE (sammā-vāyāma)

HARMONIOUS EXERCISE comprises four parts:

- I) Prevention (*samvara*)
- II) Elimination (*pahāna*)
- III) Cultivation (*bhāvanā*)
- IV) Maintenance (*anurakkhana*). IV

I) Prevention (samvara)

- The impurities enter the mind through the senses
- They enter when we focus our attention on the sensory objects
- To prevent this we withdraw our attention from sensory objects
- We stop reflecting on the pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutral sensations of the objects
- Prevention is guarding the senses.

II) Elimination (pahāna)

- If any emotional excitement remains in the mind, it is due to carrying an image in the memory, which produces the emotional excitement.
- This emotional excitement is removed by withdrawing our attention from the memory image and focusing our attention on the reaction that is going on inside us.
- Ecstasy (*jhāna*) can be reached even after the practice of the first 2 exercises – Prevention (*samvara*) and Elimination (*pahāna*).
- This purity of mind (Ecstasy or “*jhāna*”) reached can be polluted, therefore it is unstable.
- It is only by practicing the next two exercises Cultivation (*bhāvanā*) and Maintenance (*anurakkhana*) that it can be brought to the point that it can never be polluted.

III) Cultivation (bhāvanā)

- This is the cultivation of the “**Seven Steps to Awakening**” (*satta bojjhanga*).
- Cultivation is the systematic cultivation of calm introspection unhindered by emotions.
- This is achieved by withdrawing attention from external objects and memories, as it was done at the first two exercises above, and then focusing attention on the experience within, which is the emotional reaction to the object.
- The reaction to the object, which we focus on in this exercise, is in three stages:
 - i. Cognitive (thinking)
 - ii. Affective (feeling)
 - iii. Active (speaking and acting)

The Seven Steps to Awakening (satta bojjhanga):

1. Introversion of Attention (*sati*)
2. Conscious Awareness of the Unconscious Reaction (“subjective experience”) (*dhamma vicaya*)
3. Willpower (*virīya*)
4. Rapture (*pīti*)
5. Relaxation (*passaddhī*)
6. Mental Equilibrium (*samādhī*)
7. Introspection (*upekkhā*) resulting in apperception (*abhiññā*) and full comprehension (*pariññā*) ending in awakening from the dream of existence (*sammā-sambodhī*) through a paradigm shift.

(**Bojjhanga Samyutta**)

One who has completed the Cultivation (*bhāvanā*) of the **Seven Steps to Awakening (satta bojjhanga)** is a **Breaker of Bonds (Arahat)**.

IV) Maintenance (*Anurakkhana*)

- The effort to maintain the state of calm and relaxation is the effort to keep focusing on what is going on within the body and the mind, instead of focusing on external objects.
- What is going on within is the reaction to the object perceived.
- When one focuses on external objects we react to them.
- When one takes one's attention away from external objects, the reaction stops and we calm down. This is because the reaction occurs only unconsciously.
- When one becomes conscious of the reaction, it stops because it cannot go on consciously.
- This practice has to be done every moment in one's life, while one is in any of the four postures: (i) Walking, (ii) Standing, (iii) Sitting, and (iv) Lying down.
- When one enters the Fourth Ecstasy by maintaining this purity and tranquility of mind, it becomes possible for one to become aware of the process of perception in the form of the **Five Cumulatives (*panca khanda*)**:
 1. Feelings (***Vedanā***)
 2. Sensations (***Saññā***)
 3. Mental Constructions (***Sankhāra***)
 4. Perceptions (***Viññāna***)
 5. Mental Images (***Rūpa***)

By becoming aware of the **Five Cumulatives** one begins to fully comprehend subjectively the "experience," which is in 3 parts: (i) the Subjective, (ii) the Objective, and (iii) the Experience.

(For explanation, please refer to notes on "**EXPERIENCE**" sutta lesson of 31st January 2011.)

- ❖ This analytical awareness of the "experience" helps one to make the paradigm shift from Existence to Experience thereby awaken from the Dream of Existence resulting in **Liberation (*Vimutti*)** and **Imperturbable Serenity Of Mind (*Akuppā-ceto-vimutti*)** – this is **NIBBĀNA**.

7) HARMONIOUS ATTENTION (*sammā-sati*)

We have already spoken about **Harmonious Attention (*sammā-sati*)** when discussing **Cultivation (*bhāvanā*)** and the Seven Steps to Awakening (*satta bojjhanga*).

8) HARMONIOUS MENTAL EQUILIBRIUM (*sammā-samādhi*)

Ecstasy (*jhāna*) is a state where the body is fully relaxed and the mind is fully awake and alert. With full awareness one experiences a state of mental bliss and bodily ease, free of emotional excitements and tensions. The First Ecstasy has five parts to it: **Inference (*vitakka*)**, **Inquiry (*vicāra*)**, **Rapture (*pīti*)**, **Comfort (*sukha*)**, and **Stillness of mind (*ekaggatā*)**.

There are four different levels of tranquility (***jhāna***):

1. **First Ecstasy** – inference, inquiry, rapture, comfort, stillness
2. **Second Ecstasy** – rapture, comfort, stillness
3. **Third Ecstasy** – comfort, stillness
4. **Fourth Ecstasy** – stillness, introspection

THE SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY – by Ven. Dr M. Punnañi Maha Thera

When discussing the Seven Steps to Awakening (*satta bojjhanga*) the *samādhi* and *upekkhā* refer to the First through the Fourth Ecstasy.

This Ecstasy is different from the First Ecstasy experienced through the development of **Prevention** (*samvara*) and **Elimination** (*pahāna*).

The difference is that after the development of the Seven Steps to Awakening the mind will not be polluted anymore by the return of hindrances, thereby remaining in **Imperturbable Serenity Of Mind** (*Akuppā-ceto-vimutti*) which is **NIBBĀNA**.

This is the completion of the **THE SUBLIME EIGHTFOLD WAY**.

***Natthi jhānañ apaññassa, paññā natthi ajhāyato,
Yamhi jhānañ ca paññā ca sa ve nibbānasantike.***

There is no ecstasy (*jhāna*) for one who has no insight (*paññā*)
There is no insight (*paññā*) for one who has no ecstasy (*jhāna*)
One who has both ecstasy (*jhāna*) and insight (*paññā*),
Is in the proximity of **Nibbāna**.

(Dhammapada verse #372)

THE GRADUAL PROCESS OF AWAKENING

There are 10 fetters (*Samyojana*) that bind one to the **DELUSION OF EXISTENCE**.

1. Personality perspective (*Sakkāya-ditṭhi*)
2. Cognitive dissonance (*Vicikicchā*)
3. Heteronomous morality (*Silabbata-parāmāsa*)
4. Sensual lust (*Kāma-rāga*)
5. Hatred (*Paṭigha*)
6. Lust for mental images (*Rūpa-rāga*)
7. Lust for vacuity (*Arūpa-rāga*)
8. Sense of Self (*Māna*)
9. Agitation (*Uddhacca*)
10. Unconsciousness (*Avijjā*)

There are 4 stages in the process of Awakening from the DELUSION OF EXISTENCE:

- I) At the 1st stage of Awakening which is **Stream Entrant** (*Sotāpanna*), the first 3 fetters are broken.
- II) At the 2nd stage of Awakening which is **Once-Returner** (*Sakadāgāmi*), the 4th and 5th fetters are reduced to a minimum.
- III) At the 3rd stage of Awakening which is **Non-Returner** (*Anāgāmi*), the 4th and 5th fetters are fully eradicated.
- IV) At the 4th stage of Awakening which is **Breaker of Bonds** (*Arahat*), the last 5 fetters are fully eradicated.