This paper is an uncorrected proof from The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics. Ed. by Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields. Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2018. Please cite published edition.

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CHAPTER 3

ETHICS, MEDITATION, AND WISDOM

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Introduction

The teachings of the Buddha are not merely a philosophical system to be understood or accepted, but rather are a soteriological path (*magga*) to be undertaken and completed. One common and early formulation of this path is the trio of ethics (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Another common formulation is the Eightfold Path (see Chapter 4 in this volume). Although these two formulations overlap substantially, they emerge from slightly different viewpoints.

The Eightfold Path has the pride of place of being set forth in what is accepted as the Buddha's first teaching, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN V.420). However, when asked by the layperson Visākha about the priority of these two formulations, the nun Dhammadinā, with approval of the Buddha, replied, 'the three categories are not arranged in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path, but the Noble Eightfold Path is arranged in accordance with the three categories' (MN I.299; Keown 2001: 38). Keown suggests that from this we might surmise that it is the Three Trainings rather than the eightfold enumeration that is of primary importance.

As Keown (2001) has demonstrated, reference to the Three Trainings is inconsistent in the early suttas, with variations on the terms used for each of the three as well as several versions that omit meditation altogether. An example of the latter is in the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* (DN I.111) wherein ethics and wisdom alone are discussed as the defining features of a great person. In the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN I.87), conduct (*caraṇa*) and higher knowledge (*vijjā*) are the dual factors to be perfected.

However, the combination of ethics, meditation, and wisdom appears numerous times in the Pāli suttas (DN I.47, AN II.1, AN IV.100, It 50, Thag 65, Ap i 302, Peṭ para 100). This threefold formulation also appears in the Abhidhamma and in commentaries on both the *Vinaya* and the suttas. Furthermore, it is part of the very structure of

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Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), the most influential commentary in Theravāda Buddhism. We should therefore keep in mind that a variety of formulations were employed in the early texts in different contexts and for different purposes while we concern ourselves with this version of the path.

The formulation of ethics, meditation, and wisdom is also expanded in numerous ways, as in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN I.110), where it is further broken down as a 'gradual instruction' (*anupubbikathā*), beginning with generosity (*dāna*), on ethics (*sīla*), and on heaven (*sagga*), followed by teachings focused on meditation, namely the disadvantages of sensuality (*kāma*) and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), and finally the particular Buddhist wisdom of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppāda*).

The *Sikkhā Suttas* (AN I.231–235, also AN I.236–239, AN III.444, DN III.219, MN I.324, and variously in the KN) put forth the same three-part structure as above, replacing meditation (*samādhi*) with mind (*citta*). Here they are taught as 'higher training in ethics' (*adhisīlasikkhā*), 'higher training in mind' (*adhicittasikkhā*), and 'higher training in wisdom' (*adhipaññāsikkhā*). The higher training in ethics, aimed at monks and nuns, includes living in accordance with the monastic rules of discipline (*pāṭimokkha*). The higher training in mind continues to advise on withdrawal from sensuality, following with a description of the states of meditative absorption (*jhāna*) culminating at equanimity (*upekkhā*) and mindfulness (*sati*). Finally, the higher training in wisdom is composed of discerning suffering as it really is (*dukkhanti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*); similarly recognizing the arising of suffering, the cessation, and the path leading to that cessation as they truly are. That is, the higher training in wisdom comprises a complete understanding of the Four Noble Truths as they truly are.

Anyone following the path will begin at their own starting point, and it will lead them towards the destination. The destination is awakening (*bodhi*), an experiential knowing that fulfils certain canonical criteria but defies complete description. As for the starting point, because it will be unique to each traveller, it is similarly difficult to pin down. Although the directions along the path will vary to some extent from person to person, the Buddha provides broad categories to describe the unawakened, as well as generalized descriptions of the path. Indeed, this threefold formulation is just such a generalization of what in practice is a complex and always entirely personal journey.

Given that we have a starting point, the state of being unawakened, a path of Three Trainings, and a goal of awakening, where shall we begin? One obvious place to start is right where we are, as unawakened beings. What did the Buddha teach about such beings?

The Path Begins: The Worldling (*puthujjana*)

The path begins with a very important binary: the lineage of ordinary worldlings (*puthujjana-gotta*) and the lineage of the noble ones (*ariya-gotta*), those who have

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reached any of the four stages of awakening. An ordinary worldling can be either a monastic or a layperson. He or she may be completely inexperienced or may have undergone a great deal of practice but have not reached the first stage of awakening, called stream-entry (*sotāpanna*), wherein one has overcome the first three of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind one to the cycles of rebirth. The fetters are commonly listed as: (1) self-identity views (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*); (2) doubt (*vicikiccha*); (3) attachment to rules and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*); (4) sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*); (5) ill-will (*vyāpāda*); (6) desire for material existence (*rūpa-rāga*); (7) desire for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*); (8) conceit (*māna*); (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*); and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). As one progresses in the Buddhist path, the fetters are overcome in a roughly linear sequence.

The worldling's experience, bound by these fetters, is driven by ignorance (*avijjā*), the first step on the wheel of dependent origination, making this an obvious topic to be addressed by the Buddha. In a teaching on 'the ignorant' (*assutavā*), the Buddha notes that a being, ignorant and ordinary (*assutavato puthujjana*), might grow weary and detached from the body, recognizing it as not the self (*attā*) (SN II.94). This is because the body is a relatively easy object in which to see the rise and fall of the elements or constituents. It is easy to see that we are not our bodies, in that food and water enter and pass through us, in that individual parts of us die and are replaced in an ongoing succession such that the physical 'us' of today may be made up of no part of the 'us' of a few years ago. However, notes the Buddha, the ordinary person seems unable to notice this same nature in the mind, thought, or consciousness (*citta, mano, viññāṇa*), even though the mind changes with much more rapidity than the body (SN II.94–95). Thus in the ignorant and ordinary person the mind, thought, or consciousness are often clung to as 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self' (*etaṃ mama, esohamasmi, eso me attā*). This is the state we find ourselves in as worldlings before entering upon the Buddhist path.

For the ordinary worldling, the path of overcoming clinging begins in generosity (*dāna, cāga*). While generosity may be considered *de facto* part of the traditional 'gradual training' (*anupubbasikkhā*) exemplified in texts such as the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN I.47), it is not explicitly mentioned as such. This is perhaps because accounts of the gradual training are aimed at the monastic context: training begins when the worldling gains faith in the Buddha and goes forth into homelessness. Generosity on the other hand is a practice confined to the lay context, since (the gift of *Dhamma* aside) only laypeople have possessions to give. Therefore, *in practice*, generosity is usually considered separate from the standard training in ethics (*sīla*) that one finds in the gradual training.

An illustration of the importance of generosity can be found in the *Sīha Sutta* (AN III.38). There, the layman Sīha visits the Buddha over the protests of his teacher, Mahāvīra, the head of the Jains (known in the Pāli Canon as Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta). Sīha quickly converts to Buddhism, but the Buddha accepts him on the condition that he will continue to support the Jains as he had previously. Thus, the sutta extols the benefits of generosity that are visible in the here and now (*sandiṭṭhikaṃ*). These benefits included being dear and charming to people, being admired by good people, having a

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good reputation spread far and wide, having a presence in society free from embarrassment, and obtaining a future rebirth in heaven.

The benefits of generosity also redound to oneself in the present life. One of generous mind is 'free from the stain of miserliness' (AN II.66); one has begun work towards lessening the greed of clinging to possessions. One also has begun work towards lessening hatred through gladdening the mind. Indeed, 'When a noble disciple recollects his generosity, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by lust, hatred, or delusion' (AN III.286). In this way, generosity is the proper base for practice, one that also not incidentally materially supports the *saṅgha* of monastics with food, clothing, and shelter, without which the *saṅgha* would not be possible.

From the development of generosity, one is directed to next develop *sīla*, or a broader ethical relationship with the world. This begins the gradual training, 'gradual' since it is expected to be slow and steady rather than immediate, although there are some exceptions to that rule (e.g. Ud 48).

There is both an ordinary (*lokiya*) and a transcendent (*lokuttara*) or noble (*arya*) version of the path. The difference between them involves the character of right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) one grasps at that stage of the path. The worldling will usually begin her ethical development at the ordinary level of understanding. She begins with a general, conceptual understanding of right view: that there is merit and demerit (*puñña, apuñña*) in terms of body, speech, and mind; that there are skilful and unskilful (*kusala, akusala*) ways of behaving; that skilful acts create kammic merit that ripens in future benefit; and that unskilful acts create kammic demerit that ripen in future sorrow. These make up the background of ethical conduct.

On the transcendent level, right view refers to 'transformative direct insight' into the Noble Truths, and at least first glimpses of *nibbāna* (MN I.48; Harvey 2013: 82–83). This insight is transformative in that it results in a relinquishing of the bonds of attachment. That is, a distinctive shift is made away from the particular content of views and towards *how* views are to be held by the agent, namely without clinging (Fuller 2005; Collins 1982: 85–144).

Ethics (*sīla*)

We have thus far been translating the Pāli term *sīla* as simply 'ethics'. This is a useful and accurate definition in most contexts. However, a fuller etymology and defence of this translation is in order. An early and influential etymology of the term comes from Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, wherein it is said that 'the meaning of *sīla* is the meaning "head" (*siras*), the meaning of *sīla* is the meaning of "cool" (*sītala*)' (Vism 1.19, quoted and translated in Keown 2001: 49). Thus one cultivating virtue or ethics literally cultivates a cool head. This points to a transcultural experience associated with the human physiology of anger versus opposite states of mind (Kövecses 1986: 11–38; cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Vasubandhu likewise describes the Sanskrit *śīla* as coming

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from the root *śī* in the sense of 'refreshing' or having a cooling effect (Keown 2001: 49). The importance of cool temperature resonates with the metaphor famously described in the Fire Sermon (SN IV.19) that the Buddhist goal of *nibbāna* is a 'putting out' of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion.

In this sense *sīla* should be seen as describing ethics in a manner similar to Western philosophy, primarily in terms of the inner mental states or intentions of the agent. Note that 'ethics' stems from the Greek *ethikos* and *ethos*, meaning 'moral character; habitual character and disposition'. This is the same internal state described by *sīla* that nonetheless shapes outward actions. As the first verse of the *Dhammapada* states:

> All experience is preceded by mind,
> Led by mind,
> Made by mind.
> Speak or act with a corrupted mind,
> And suffering follows
> As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.
> (Fronsdal 2005: 1)

In this regard, a person who has mastered *sīla* might rightly be called a virtuous person. In common usage, indeed even in specialized philosophical discussion, virtues are very often understood as a particular discrete set of enumerable traits (Honderich 1995: 900), but it is not entirely clear that there is any one such set in Buddhism. Dreyfus (1995: 44) suggests that the 'five faculties' (*indriya*) in the Abhidhamma could serve as Buddhist virtues, e.g. faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. However, as he points out, there are other, similar lists one could choose from.

Sīla's importance in the Buddhist path is emphasized in many canonical and commentarial sources that describe it as a foundation for all of one's successes in life. Buddhaghosa describes *sīla* as the 'root of all success' of which *nibbāna* is the 'fruit' (Keown 2001: 50). It provides an absence of regret (*avippaṭisāra*), since it is regret that clouds the mind (AN V.312). In the *Milinda-pañha, sīla* is called the 'basis and mark of all good things', including the path (*magga*) itself and *satipaṭṭhāna*, the very presence of or attention with mindfulness (see Anālayo 2006: 236 for a discussion of the etymology of *satipaṭṭhāna*). Furthermore, *sīla* is not always considered just the basis for more important work. As Buddhaghosa remarks: 'Where can such another stair be found that climbs, as *sīla* does, to heaven? Or yet another gate that gives one the city of nibbāna?' (Keown 2001: 53). For Buddhaghosa, *sīla* is not simply a stage to be passed along the way but is constitutive of the 'holy life to be lived'. Thus the Buddha says of himself, 'it is I who am the foremost in the highest morality (*adhisīla*)' (DN I.174).

Sīla is highly valuable even if it is not cultivated for the attainment of *nibbāna*. It leads to worldly goods in this life as well as guaranteeing heavenly rebirth. According to the Buddha, the first benefit of earnestness in *sīla* for the layperson is 'much wealth' (*bhogakkhandhaṃ*) (DN II.86, DN III.236; see also Vism I.23, Keown 2001: 45). Presumably this is because honesty and righteousness are good business. But honesty and righteousness are their own wealth as well: *sīla* is also listed along with the two key

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mental qualities of moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*) as three of the seven kinds of wealth (AN IV.5). In practice, *sīla* requires moral shame and moral dread as 'two bright qualities that protect the world' (AN I.51), and without which moral restraint would be impossible.

The Buddha provides several lists of the elements of *sīla*. The most widely known are the five (lay) precepts and their monastic counterparts in the 'gradual training': to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. One is also to avoid livelihoods that involve harm, such as trading in weapons, living beings, meat, intoxicants, or poison (AN III.208). But occasionally the Buddha gives a broader picture. For example (AN IV.281), when asked by the layman Dīghajāṇu to teach the *Dhamma* 'in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness in this present life and in future lives' the Buddha elaborates upon eight actions for the layperson, four that will lead to welfare and happiness in this life and four that will ensure better future lives. For this life one is to be skilful and diligent in earning a living, to guard one's wealth assiduously, to associate with good people, and to balance one's expenditures to one's income. For one's future lives, one is to place trust in the Buddha as an awakened being, to behave in accordance with the five precepts, to be generous and charitable, and to pursue wisdom.

Because accomplishment in wisdom eventually leads to the awakened state associated with the end of *dukkha, sīla* can be seen to encompass the entire practice, not becoming perfected until one becomes an *arahant*. Until that point, the practice of *sīla* is a training that one undertakes conceptually, with effort (e.g. MN I.446).

The Buddha also recommended an expanded list of eight precepts for the laity on Uposatha days, including abstaining from sexual intercourse, eating only one meal a day, and eschewing entertainments and high beds (AN IV.248–251). This is an expanded practice of renunciation, giving lay followers a taste of monastic living. It might, therefore, function as the thin end of a wedge for attracting some to monastic life. This would be for the best, for lay life, according to the Buddha, is ethically difficult. It is 'a path of dust ... It is not easy for one dwelling at home to lead the perfectly complete, perfectly purified holy life, bright as a polished conch' (DN I.63).

The monk in training also follows rules, but they are part of a 'higher training in ethics' (*adhisīlasikkhā*) according to the stricter and more complex Pāṭimokkha rules. These involve the abandoning of certain activities of lay life, most famously sexual activity and handling money, but also dancing, attending shows, playing games, enjoying luxurious beds and fancy clothes, using makeup, telling fortunes, and so on (DN I.63–69; Bodhi 1989: 13). In addition 'higher training' involves sense restraint in which one guards one's actions by withdrawing oneself from situations that might promote 'evil unwholesome states such as covetousness and grief' (DN I.70). That is to say, such rules, indeed all ethical rules one finds in Buddhist practice, are aimed at minimizing harm and thus *dukkha* on a gross social level.

Although rules form a central part of ethical training, there is a danger that one can become dogmatically attached to them (Anālayo 2003: 220 n. 12). Believing that rules are the essence of training is just as extreme as claiming that there is no harm in sensual desires (Ud 71). The fetter of 'grasping to rules and rituals'

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(*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) is exemplified by those who aspire to higher rebirth through ethical conduct (MN I.102) or by those who undertake ritual ascetic practices such as the dog- or ox-duty, whereby renunciants would behave as dogs or oxen to gain liberation (MN I.387ff.).

Meditation (*samādhi*)

The second training is variously referred to as meditation or concentration (*samādhi*), mind (*citta*), or cultivation (*bhāvanā*). These Pāli terms are tied together by the late Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1989: 26): 'constraining the mind to remain in the condition most conducive to success'. This points to the nature of meditation in early Buddhism as a mental training that bridges the trainings in ethics and wisdom. This placement has allowed some scholars (notably Keown 2001: 38) to explain the Buddhist soteriology in terms of a 'binary model' of ethics (*sīla*) and wisdom ('insight', *paññā*), apparently leaving meditation to one side. However, Keown relies on the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta*, which explicitly links the development of *paññā* to states of absorption (*jhāna*) and meditative insight (DN I.124ff.). In that text, the Buddha tries to bring a brahmin around to an understanding of the *Dhamma*. Hence the Buddha's agreement that ethics and wisdom alone comprise 'the highest thing in the world' should be seen in the context of introductory pedagogy and not as a definitive description of the relative worth of meditation as compared to the other two limbs of this triad.

Others (Dreyfus 1995; Mills 2004) see meditation as playing a crucial role in the Buddhist path, even though the relative importance of various types of meditation continues to be debated (Anālayo 2016b, see below); canonical texts use several terms for the types of meditation that may be undertaken as well as for the states of absorption (*jhāna*) that might thereby be achieved. Here, however, we will discuss only a few of the terms most salient to the 'Three Trainings' model, beginning with *samādhi*.

Meditation and Ethics

How does ethics affect meditation? *Sīla* aims at non-harming, one benefit of which is that it prevents regret, which can become a hindrance to successful meditation practice. Lack of regret (*avippaṭisāra*) (AN V.312) is critical to the development of open, clear, and focused mindfulness. It is also essential for right concentration, since achievement of *jhāna* requires that we overcome the five hindrances of sense desire, ill will, restlessness, sloth, and doubt (AN III.428–429). In particular, behaving in a way that harms others will tend to increase one's restlessness, both because moral shame (*hiri*) will disturb one's mind and because moral dread (*ottappa*) will make one worried about the consequences of unethical actions. A mind that is restless and worried is not conducive to concentration, hence not conducive to *jhāna*.

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In the *Bāhiya Sutta* (SN V.165–166), ethics and upright or clear view form the basis of wholesome states. These, when taken into the practice of mindfulness meditation, lead the ascetic Bāhiya to awakening: 'What is the start of wholesome states (*kusala dhamma*)? Ethics thoroughly purified, and upright view.' In the discourse, Bāhiya is instructed to then practise the four 'attendings with mindfulness' (*satipaṭṭhāna*) and, having done so, gains complete awakening, thus becoming an *arahant*.

How, in turn, does meditation affect ethics? Keown (2001: 77–78) considers that calming meditation (*samatha-bhāvanā*) 'cultivates moral virtue' by suppressing sense desire and ill will. Of course, calming meditation requires a modicum of ethical awareness, for without it, calm would prove inaccessible, but at the same time concentration practice makes one less prone to becoming snared by sense desire and ill will into acting unethically. Mills (2004) argues that calming meditation cultivates ethical concern through practice of the divine abodes (*brahmavihāra*s) in particular. That is, Mills suggests it may be the calming practices of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) that work to rid the mind of unskilful and unethical mind states related to harming oneself and others rather than the calming states of *jhāna*.

Similarly, focusing on *mettā*, Gombrich argues that the Buddha taught that *brahmavihāra*s have the power to bring about liberation in the practitioner (see discussion of Lance Cousins and Anālayo on *jhāna* [section 'Absorption (*jhāna*)']). As Gombrich puts it, 'the Buddha saw love and compassion as means to salvation—in his terms, to the attainment of nirvana' (2009: 76). Gombrich has made this argument in previous works, based on analysis of early Buddhist texts as well as *Upaniṣads* (the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*) with which the Buddha was likely familiar and to which he was therefore likely responding (1996: 58–64; 1998). Gethin has termed this interpretation 'something of a puzzle' (2012). It is contradicted by several canonical passages that put attainment of the *brahmavihāras* below that of liberation (e.g. MN I.38, MN I.351, AN I.180–185), and has therefore been criticized for diverging from the Theravādin Buddhist tradition (Bodhi 1997).

Effort (*vāyama*)

In general, effort belongs to the meditation division of the path because it is a practice of active cultivation (*bhāvanā*) of wholesome states and avoidance of unwholesome states, but effort and meditation, like ethics and meditation, have a reciprocal relationship. Effort is also related to ethics. The *Vibhaṅga Sutta* (SN V.8ff.) offers four aspects of right effort: (1) generating desire (*chanda*), and so on, for the sake of the non-arising of evil (*pāpakā*) and unskilful qualities (*akusalā dhammā*); (2) generating desire, and so on, for the abandonment of evil and unskilful qualities; (3) generating desire, and so on, for the sake of the arising of skilful qualities; and (4) generating desire, and so on, for the maintaining of non-confusion and cultivation (*bhāvanā*) of skilful qualities that have arisen. In this sense, right effort is as much a matter of ethics as it is of meditation. Without a

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developed sense of right and wrong, of skilful and unskilful, right effort will be misdirected or ineffective at achieving its proper end of producing wisdom and awakening.

A second discourse on right effort brings the topic of meditation to the forefront. In the *Soṇa Sutta* (AN III.374), the monk Soṇa is having trouble with striving in his secluded meditation (*paṭisallīna*). The Buddha comes to him with an analogy, pointing out that a lute is not 'well tuned and easy to play' either if its strings are too loose or too tight.

> In the same way, Soṇa, overly exerted effort leads to restlessness, overly loose effort leads to idleness. Therefore you, Soṇa, should determine the correct effort and, having comprehended thus, attune the [five] faculties, and there take hold of the object [of meditation].

Here the Buddha links right effort and the meditative hindrances, in particular the hindrances of restlessness (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and sloth-and-torpor (*thīna-middha*). All effort, but particularly that in *jhān*ic meditation, requires one to overcome these hindrances in order to achieve a mind that is clear, unified, and focused enough to enter absorption. (Indeed, the former of these hindrances, restlessness, is not abandoned completely until full awakening.) Gauging one's intensity of effort therefore is a critical aspect of progress along the path.

Meditation also enhances effort. Certain mind states that are beneficial for formal meditation are also beneficial for right effort generally. The practice of mindfulness meditation (*sati*) includes making an effort to act in full awareness 'when going forward and returning; … looking ahead and looking away; … eating, drinking … defecating and urinating … walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent (etc.)' (MN I.57). That is, one is to make the effort to cultivate the skilful quality of mindful attention essentially at all times during one's life. Thus one should understand right effort as being ideally continuous and constant, even when occurring in a practice usually considered that of formal meditation, i.e. mindfulness.

Meditative effort or cultivation (*bhāvanā*) extends beyond the cultivation of concentration or mindfulness. Cousins (1996: 41) makes the point that 'such monastic activities as studying or teaching the *dhamma* as well as chanting *sutta*s or repetition of *gāthā* may equally be forms of *bhāvanā*'. Similarly, Gethin (2004: 215) points to chanting and recollection practices as canonical examples of meditative cultivation. Thus, lay participation in meditation may have been more widespread than some scholars assume, since traditional categories of *bhāvanā* were quite accommodating.

In summation, in both the case of formal mindfulness meditation and in wider social practices such as studying, chanting, or recollecting we see that right effort is a field of practice wider than ordinarily assumed. In the case of the monastic engaged in right mindfulness, effort should ideally be unstinting. In the case of the lay practitioner it may involve practices of ethical restraint such as the five or eight precepts, but also meditative practices with a more devotional flavour. In recent times, with the advent of the *vipassanā* movement begun by Ledi Sayadaw in modern Burma (Braun 2013), right

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effort for the layperson has expanded to encompass most of traditional mindfulness practice.

Absorption (*jhāna*)

The Buddha's first recorded experience with meditation was as a young boy under a rose-apple tree. There he says he entered the first *jhāna*, an experience of 'pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states' (MN I.246–247). Later on in his days of wandering and experimentation before the attainment of awakening the Buddha says he learned techniques of deep meditative absorption from two masters, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. There is scholarly disagreement over whether these masters taught Jain (Bronkhorst 2009: 49–56) or Brahminical (Wynne 2007) techniques, but it is sufficient to say that the Buddha did not consider them liberative. In any case, these historical vignettes demonstrate that techniques of meditative concentration were not uncommon in a pre-Buddhist milieu; they may even have been considered essential aspects of the Indian renunciant's path.

The Buddha taught meditative absorption as the 'four *jhāna*s' or 'four form (*rūpa*) *jhāna*s' (SN V.10). These constitute a process of absorption into progressively calmer, subtler, and more pleasant states of mind that retain a subtle experience of form, unlike the techniques of meditative absorption canonically known as the 'formless spheres' (*āyatana*s) he had learned earlier from his two teachers as a *bodhisatta*. While these 'formless spheres' became known also as states of *jhāna* in later tradition, they are always treated separately from *jhāna* in the canonical texts, and therefore should not be run together in the early tradition (e.g. Norman 1997: 31; Gethin 2001: 347). Indeed, there is scholarly disagreement as to whether formless sphere meditation was practised by the historical Buddha (e.g. Gethin 2001, Wynne 2007) or whether it is a later interpolation (Bronkhorst 1985; Vetter 1988: xxii).

Each state of absorption is considered a 'superhuman state (*uttari manussa dhammā*), a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones' (MN I.207ff.), in that it involves wholesome pleasures. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN I.47ff.) the Buddha's awakening is said to have taken place soon after exiting the fourth *rūpa jhāna*, which is absorption into equanimity. Here as elsewhere the fourth *jhāna* is said to provide the mental power necessary to provide mundane (*lokiya*) powers such as the ability to disappear or walk through walls, the ability to hear things not normally heard, the ability to read minds, to remember past lives, and to see the effects of kammic reward (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 37). More importantly, achievement of the fourth *jhāna* often precedes the supramundane (*lokuttara*) power of knowing the extinction of the defilements (*āsavas*) that correspond to *nibbāna*.

There is some question as to whether or to what extent achievements in *jhāna* are actually necessary to attain awakening (Vism I.6, Gunaratana 1980: 17, Anālayo 2015: 13, Cousins 1984, 1996). For example in the *Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (MN I.435) the Buddha

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describes a process of awakening that seems only to require attainment of the first *jhāna*. The *Susima Sutta* (SN II.119ff.) seems to support this because it presents a number of *arahant* bhikkhus who are without the mundane powers typically said to result from attainment of the fourth *jhāna*. When asked how this could be, they reply that they are 'liberated by wisdom' (*paññavimuttā*). While this does not establish that they entirely lacked the experience of *jhāna*, it suggests that *jhāna* was not the focus of their efforts, and that perhaps they had not perfected their way to the fourth *jhāna* in particular. This would be a path of so-called 'dry insight', or awakening without the perfection of at least certain of the *jhāna*s. However, as Anālayo points out, none of the versions of the *Susima Sutta* 'supports the assumption that a purely intellectual approach could lead to full awakening, without having cultivated a level of tranquillity that at least borders on absorption attainment' (2015: 13).

Anālayo also notes that *jhāna* is not without its 'potential drawbacks' (2016: 45). One's attachment to the pleasures of *jhāna* can divert one from the path. One can also mistake *jhān*ic states for states of awakening. These constitute two of the 'doctrines of *nibbāna* here and now' (*diṭṭhadhammanibbānavāda*) mentioned as wrong views in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*.

Mindfulness (*sati*)

Mindfulness is perhaps the most famous of the Buddha's suggested practices. It is best seen as a large suite of practices oriented around breath meditation. These are sketched out in the *Ānāpānasati* (MN III.78), *Satipaṭṭhāna* (MN I.55), and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna* (DN II.290) suttas, in four general categories.

The first of these is mindfulness of the body. This refers to breath following and being aware of one's body and bodily position, posture, motion, and indeed all of one's daily activities. It even includes awareness of the parts of the body, including the internal organs, awareness of the four elements in the body, and nine various charnel ground contemplations of dead bodies and bodily remains. Notably, although mindfulness is often characterized as a practice of non-conceptual awareness of the present moment, several of these body-oriented practices involve active, even creative contemplation. To meditate upon one's kidneys and intestines, or upon the solid and gaseous parts of one's body, or upon the fact that one's body will end up a bloated corpse, is to engage in an active, conceptually mediated process of analysing one's body into physical and temporal parts.

The second category of mindfulness practice is that of feeling (*vedanā*). Here one is to become aware of feelings as being pleasant, painful, or neutral. In the schema of dependent origination, feeling precedes craving (*taṇhā*), which in turn is the proximate cause of *dukkha*. Since one key aim of practice is to break the link between feelings and the craving they produce, awareness of feelings as they occur is key to developing skilful habits.

The third category of mindfulness practice is that of mind. That is, one is to become aware of the character of one's mind: is it filled with greed, lust, hatred, or confusion? Is

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it free of these characteristics? Here we can think of the verses from the *Dhammapada* cited above that suffering follows from speaking or acting with a corrupted mind whereas happiness follows from speaking or acting with a peaceful mind. In order to make use of such advice, one must practise attending to one's own mental state: if one does not know the character of one's own mind, one will be without the capacity to mitigate its ill effects.

The last category of mindfulness practice involves mindfulness of *dhamma*s, which Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (2009) translate 'mind-objects', Gethin (1998: 195) 'physical and mental processes', and Anālayo (2006) leaves untranslated. This is a broad basket of practices (enlarged somewhat in DN II.290ff.) that essentially involve training oneself to view phenomena according to Buddhist categories. As Anālayo (2006: 186) says,

> contemplation of *dhammas* skillfully applies *dhammas* (classificatory categories) as taught in the *Dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha) during contemplation in order to bring about an understanding of the *dhamma* (principle) of conditionality and lead to the realization of the highest of all *dhammas* (phenomena): Nibbāna.

In particular, when practising mindfulness of *dhamma*s one trains oneself to be aware of the five mental hindrances to meditation practice, i.e. to be aware of when they are present or when they are absent. By right effort one can work to eliminate them and keep them from returning. Similarly, one trains oneself to be aware of the five aggregates and their arising and passing; of the six sense bases and the fetters that they create, attaching one to objects of desire; of the factors that accompany awakening; and of the Four Noble Truths themselves. It is again notable that in this type of mindfulness one is not merely being aware of the present moment. There is a strong conceptual overlay at work, analysing and categorizing phenomena in categories relevant to awakening.

The practices of the four mindfulness categories are described with an accompanying refrain: one is to contemplate the matter at hand internally, externally, and both internally and externally. One is to contemplate its arising, passing, and arising and passing. One is to be aware of it 'to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness' (*ñaṇamattāya paṭissatimattāya*). One is to do all of this 'abiding independent, not clinging to anything in the world' (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). All of these directions suggest that one should take an objective attitude to the practices, seeing them as revelatory of the universal character of experience in the world. One is also to take an objective attitude towards the practices in the sense that one does not allow oneself to be carried off by proliferations of thought nor by dependencies of clinging.

Mindfulness and Insight (*vipassan*ā)

In the early texts meditative practices are most generally described in terms of mindfulness or absorption. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Ledi Sayadaw, a Burmese

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Theravāda monk, began a revitalization of insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. (Braun 2013). Although the early texts do at times speak of meditation in terms of insight, Ledi's goal was to make insight practice the focus of effort. This subtle shift in emphasis occurred in the context of Western colonialism. To compete with Christian proselytization, Ledi aimed to promote a path tailored to a broad audience of laypeople as well as monastics. To this end he deemphasized *jhāna* in favour of direct awareness of the changing, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of reality. He also made a number of other subtle innovations in emphasis that revitalized Buddhism, such as translating the teachings into vernacular languages and bringing about a modest levelling of the lay/monastic distinction (Braun 2013: ch. 3). Nevertheless, as Braun notes (139), Ledi's approach to Buddhist meditation had canonical grounding. Essentially, he was supporting the practice of 'dry insight', i.e. to pursue awakening without benefit of (or at least with less emphasis upon) the *jhāna*s.

A few early texts describe insight. For example, in the sutta of the Kiṃsuka Tree (SN IV.191ff.) the Buddha gives a parable comparing the person to a walled city with six gates that correspond to the senses. The gatekeeper is mindfulness (*sati*), recognizing who should and should not be allowed into the city. The gatekeeper admits two messengers from outside, serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*), who provide information to the lord of the city, consciousness (*viññāṇa*). We may assume that 'serenity' refers to the concentration practice of *jhāna*, and 'insight' to the wisdom gained through mindfulness practice (see, e.g., Cousins 1984: 58). If so, these messengers can also be seen as corresponding to meditation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). The route the messengers take is the Eightfold Path, and the message provided by the messengers is awakening itself.

This parable suggests a tight interrelation between serenity and insight and between these both and mindfulness: mindfulness allows for the development of serenity as well as insight, and serenity and insight arrive by the same route. So for example we find the pair 'serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*)' listed as the 'things to be developed by direct knowledge (*abhiññā*)' (SN V.52, AN II.247). In this sense, in the early texts insight should not be seen a practice so much as the result of practice. So if mindfulness is the practice, insight is its goal, a goal that can be seen as essentially identical to wisdom (*paññā*) itself. While Ledi's so-called 'insight practice' was canonical in its details, its name has something of an oxymoronic flavour. Nevertheless his aim was towards practices he saw as most directly aimed at promoting wisdom, that is practices (themselves recommended in the canonical texts) of attending to the changing, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of phenomena, rather than (e.g.) *jhāni*c practices *per se*.

Wisdom (*paññā*)

The Buddha uses many metaphors to illustrate the key importance of wisdom to the path. 'Just as, bhikkhus, among animals the lion is declared to be their chief, so too, among the states conducive to enlightenment the faculty of wisdom is declared to be

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their chief, that is, for the attainment of enlightenment' (SN V.228). 'Just as, bhikkhus, the footprints of all living beings that walk fit into the footprint of the elephant ... so too ... the faculty of wisdom is declared to be their chief' (SN V.231). So too heartwood (SN V.231). So too various trees chief in their realms (SN V.237–239).

If wisdom is a mental faculty in early Buddhism, it is also a suite of practices aimed at strengthening or reinforcing that faculty. Among these are the so-called 'insight' practices recommended in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* such as the contemplation of the arising and passing of phenomena in experiences that were highlighted by Ledi Sayadaw. One comes to be wise by such practices, which lead to full understanding of the truth of the Noble Truths by immediate experience: by seeing and understanding not only that suffering exists, but that its cause is craving, and that craving and hence suffering can be extinguished by proper development along the path. This seeing and understanding cannot merely be conceptual; it must be transformative.

When asked the purpose of wisdom, Sāriputta responds that its purpose 'is direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), its purpose is full understanding (*pariññā*), its purpose is abandoning (*pahāna*)' (MN I.293). On the standard pericope, wisdom is a faculty (*indriya*) 'directed to arising and passing away, which is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering' (e.g. SN V.197). This is full understanding of each of the Four Noble Truths 'as it really is' (*yathābhūtaṃ*) (SN V.199). These descriptions jointly imply that wisdom cannot merely be a form of propositional knowledge, although it is compatible with the possession of such knowledge. Instead, wisdom is essentially liberative: one who is truly wise abandons craving. In so doing, the wise one destroys suffering.

Wisdom is a faculty of perceiving the world 'as it really is' whereas (ordinary) perception (*saññā*) is distorted by ignorance born of kammic residue (Bausch 2015: 166, 170). Wisdom pierces through the four inversions or distortions of perception: perceiving the impermanent to be permanent, the suffering to be pleasurable, the non-self to be self, and the unattractive to be attractive. Rather, wisdom, 'by the acquisition of right view' (*sammādiṭṭhisamādānā*), perceives the world as it really is: that all conditioned things are impermanent, suffering, non-self, and unattractive. People who see the world in this way are considered wise (*sappaññā*) (AN II.52).

Wisdom also is a form of supramundane right view, i.e. one that encompasses propositional forms of right view such as that all conditioned things are impermanent without thereby clinging to such views. In the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN III.72) wisdom is described as 'right view that is noble, taintless, supramundane, a factor of the path' (*sammādiṭṭhi ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggaṅgā*). That is, wisdom is a kind of right view that in Paul Fuller's (2005) sense transcends all views by relinquishing attachment to them. Wisdom can be seen as that faculty that sees through all attachments and relinquishes them as unskilful and productive of suffering. One who really sees directly that all conditioned things are impermanent will cease clinging to them, since (at least in the Buddha's view) all beings wish to avoid suffering (cf. SN I.75).

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Wisdom and Ethics

As we have mentioned, the uninstructed worldling's first glimmers of wisdom (*paññā*) consist in so-called mundane right view (MN III.72; Ñāṇamoli 1991: 47): that actions have kammic consequences that can lead one to better or worse future outcomes. Mundane right view is an understanding that rejects the 'nihilist' or 'annihilationist' views of thinkers such as Ajita Kesakambalī (MN I.402, DN I.55) that there is no such thing as ethical action. The contrasting view of ethical efficacy then becomes one of the supports for correct action in the world. These first glimmers of mundane wisdom become the early foundations of ethical behaviour.

Conversely, behaving ethically lays the groundwork for wisdom. Ethical behaviour is claimed to have beneficial kammic results that may include rebirth into a condition where awareness of the *Dhamma* becomes possible. Indeed, human birth is considered surpassingly rare and special (SN II.263, SN V.456–457), so the kamma required to achieve it must be substantial. Even more so must be the kamma required to put one into contact with the Buddha *Dhamma*, and to achieve success in practice within this very life.

In the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, Sāriputta identifies one of right view as 'a noble disciple who understands the unwholesome, the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome, and the root of the wholesome' (MN I.46). One who fully understands these ethical dualities and the unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion also understands that those roots must completely be abandoned through ongoing effort to cultivate the wholesome (MN I.47). In that abandonment lies wisdom, since one abandons greed and hatred through an abandonment of self-directed conceit and through a complete penetration of the Noble Truths that leads eventually to an abandonment of clinging in all its forms.

Wisdom and Meditation

The various practices of mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) also prepare the mind for wisdom. In this process, effort (*vāyama*), mindfulness (*sati*), and concentration (*samādhi*) are necessary. Given a base of ethical behaviour, the practice of concentration becomes tenable, since the various hindrances to such meditation can be overcome.

The practice of concentration and eventually absorption (*jhāna*) calms and focuses the mind, a process aimed at making it 'purified, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability' (MN I.22). Having a mind thus perfected makes mindfulness practice clearer, easier, more precise, and more effective. While this description implies a perfection of concentrative attainment, perfection is only the ultimate goal. A process of training will always begin and persist while perfection remains well out of reach.

With a mind made malleable, wieldy, and steady by such practice, one can mindfully turn to observe and investigate the world as presented in sense experience. When one

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confronts this experience one becomes aware of its instability, of its continual arising and passing, of the lack of any permanent or controlling self. Further, one becomes aware of the role of craving and clinging in producing *dukkha*. This combined awareness of impermanence, non-self, and the source and production of *dukkha* constitutes insight (*vipassanā*), and lays the groundwork for eventual breakthrough into awakening. However, as Keown (2001: 80) notes, the wisdom thus gained cannot be glossed simply as a knowledge of facts. Instead it must essentially involve ethical transformation, a process whereby one has become trained to see and act in the world skilfully through the practice of mental cultivation.

Turning the matter around, the attainment of wisdom (*ariyañāṇa*) is said also to progressively stabilize mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*) (SN V.228). In this formulation, however, wisdom is probably intended to be more akin to wise propositional knowledge: if one knows intellectually that all things change, or that *dukkha* arises from clinging, one will be better equipped to confront the phenomena of meditative practice.

Unity or Disunity of Practice?

Western scholars disagree as to whether the forms of practice in early Buddhism comprise a unified path or whether there are in effect two competing paths: that of absorptive concentration (*jhāna*) and that of intellectual insight (*paññā*). The claim that there are two competing paths in the old texts apparently goes back to de La Vallée Poussin (Anālayo 2016b: 39); however, this claim has been more recently supported by Schmithausen (1981), Vetter (1988), and Polak (2016) among others. Bronkhorst (1986: 77) has argued, following Schmithausen (1981: 204), that in the 'old discourses' (Bronkhorst 2009: 130; also Norman 1997: 29) liberation occurs in the fourth *jhāna*. This raises the possibility that originally *jhāna* meditation may have been understood more as access to some 'mystical dimension' (Bronkhorst 2009: 55) than as a method of concentrative meditation *per se*. If this is correct, it may then be that descriptions of the content of liberating insight, e.g. as an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, as an understanding of dependent origination, or as confirming the unstable, unsatisfactory, and selfless character of lived reality, are later interpolations (Bronkhorst 2009: 36). Originally liberation might have been thinly described or undescribed: 'simpler, non-intellectual' (Wynne 2007: 124). The content of liberating knowledge might then have been formulated at a later date, even after the Buddha's demise, perhaps in response to competing philosophico-religious ideologies' own theories regarding such knowledge (Bronkhorst 2009: 36, 43 n. 81, 57). In that case, the complex theoretical edifice of articulated Buddhist *paññā* might in fact have played no essential role in the Buddha's own awakening, and could be seen even to amount to a species of otiose, *ex post facto* rationalization.

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In contrast, Swearer (1972: 369), Gethin (2004: 209), Cousins (2009), and Anālayo (2015, 2016b), among others, argue that the path of meditative practice encompassed by the concentrative techniques of *jhāna* and the insight techniques of mindfulness practice are essentially unified. Both appear to be necessary for the attainment of awakening. Without some degree of concentration (although the precise degree remains a point of contention) one cannot effectively do the investigative work necessary to bring insight wisdom to fruition. Anālayo (2016: 41) traces concerns over disunity of practice back to 'an erroneous projection of the Western contrast between the thinker and the mystic', a contrast which did not exist as such in ancient India. It may also be that the threefold distinction of ethics, meditation, and wisdom hardened into a more rigid difference of practice during later Buddhist history, where some monastics saw themselves as specializing in one or another aspect of the path (Anālayo 2016a: 18; Cousins 2009).

If this picture of the unity of practice in early Buddhism is correct, then as we have noted the insight gained from such practice cannot be understood as mere intellectual acceptance of certain propositions (Anālayo 2003: 90). While awakening may indeed result in the acceptance of propositions, those should be understood as 'retrospective descriptions' of the state of awakening, in Anālayo's (2016: 44) terms, rather than as intellectual discoveries that constitute that state of awakening. This leaves open the possibility that early descriptions of the Buddha's awakening might indeed have been thin and non-intellectual without that necessarily having any bearing on the truth or falsity of later descriptions thereof. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine that a system as complex and profound as that of early Buddhism might have required many years to fully describe, irrespective of the precise character of the Buddha's original experience of awakening.

The Path Ends: The Worthy One (*arahant*)

The culmination of the Three Trainings constitutes awakening. In the Pāli Canon, four levels of awaking are given: the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgami*), non-returner (*anāgāmi*), and *arahant*. All who have achieved one of these levels qualify as members of the noble (*ariya*) *saṅgha*. The levels are sequential and, as mentioned above in the section on the *puthujjana*, involve abandoning a series of five lower and five higher fetters en route to awakening (*bodhi*) or *nibbāna*, which is the state of the *arahant*.

Regarding the initial attainment of wisdom, the practices leading to stream-entry are fourfold:

> Association with superior persons … is a factor for stream-entry. Hearing the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. Careful attention is a factor for stream-entry. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. (SN V.347)

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At stream entry one is said to obtain the 'eye' or 'vision' of the *Dhamma* (*dhammacakkhupaṭilābha*) (SN II.134). This vision of *nibbāna* makes clear the efficacy of the path and thus erases doubt. It also is said to erase the other two lower fetters of 'self-identity views' and 'attachment to rules and rituals'. In short, to be a member of the *ariya saṅgha* one must have abandoned any doubt about the validity of the path, one must have abandoned all views of there being a substantial self, and one must have abandoned any notion that awakening comes from rule-following or ritual observance.

The once-returner will additionally have substantially reduced sensual desire, ill will, and ignorance. The non-returner will have abandoned sensual desire and ill will, while further reducing ignorance (DN I.156). (Thus, the non-returner has abandoned the five lower fetters and has attenuated ignorance, which is one of the five higher fetters.) Finally, the *arahant* will have entirely abandoned the remaining five higher fetters of desire for material existence (*rūparāgo*), desire for immaterial existence (*arūparāgo*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).

While it is instructive to consider this progress from the bottom up, as it were, it is also illuminating to consider it from the top down. For example, all members of the noble *saṅgha* who are not yet fully awakened may still display conceit, restlessness, and desire for some form of rebirth. Additionally, stream-enterers and once-returners may display sensual desire and ill will. This underlines the gradual nature of the path in early Buddhism: one should expect even relatively advanced members of the noble *saṅgha* to have unskilful mental states and display unskilful verbal and bodily behaviour.

The final stage of this progression is that of the *arahant*, exemplified by the Buddha himself. Indeed, the first stage of the gradual training involves the arising of just such an awakened Buddha, described thus:

> [H]ere a Tathāgata appears in the world, accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed. He declares this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people, which he has himself realised with direct knowledge. He teaches the Dhamma good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing, and he reveals a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure. (MN I.179)

To what extent has one who has mastered the path either abandoned a sense of agency or transcended ethics entirely (see Finnigan 2011, Garfield 2011)? Several sutta passages suggest an end to agency for those who have attained awakening. Passages in two suttas say that 'no new action is done' (*navañca kammaṃ na karoti*) by one who is awakened (AN I.221, AN II.198). However, these suttas involve the Buddha or his disciples speaking with Jains; indeed, Bronkhorst (2009: 48–49) believes that both may have been interpolated at a later date by Buddhist followers under Jain influence. A similar passage can be found in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (Sn 953):

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> For one who knows, who has no agitation,
> There is no accumulation.
> Abstaining from activity,
> One sees safety everywhere. (Adapted from Fronsdal 2016)

The traditional interpretation of these passages is that an awakened being *does* act, i.e. *has* agency, but without laying down kammic accumulations. Thus, Bodhi translates *navañca kammaṃ na karoti* as 'he does not create any new kamma', and Fronsdal interpolates 'karmic' in front of 'accumulation' and 'activity'. Presumably this is because such accumulations depend upon the actions being accompanied by delusional volitional formations related to some subtle conceit or desire for existence. Once delusion has been uprooted by wisdom, and all subtle conceit has been extirpated, action is no longer kammically efficacious, and hence kamma ceases to accumulate with action.

If this is correct, such passages do not imply that an awakened person lacks agency or has transcended ethics. Indeed, such a position would run contrary to the example of the Buddha in the canonical texts, who is plainly one who acts carefully, decisively, and ethically. His actions are moral not out of any calculated adherence to rules or ideals, but 'spontaneously virtuous' (Anālayo 2003: 258). In the *Bhaddāli Sutta* (MN I.437) the Buddha clarifies this with the simile of a thoroughbred colt. The colt's trainer begins by placing a bit in the thoroughbred's mouth. This is uncomfortable at first, but eventually the colt calms and accepts it peacefully. Then the trainer introduces a harness. Again, the colt displays some discomfort, but comes to accept it. Finally, the trainer leads the colt through a series of developmental steps until he becomes 'worthy of the king'. At no time does the colt transcend or abandon the bit or harness. In the same way a bhikkhu is trained towards awakening, with ethical rules as bit and harness. 'Hence the *summum bonum* of the Buddha's path entails not an escape from ethics, but rather its lived perfection' (Smith and Whitaker 2016: 529). Such an embodiment of ethics is taken up at length in Keown (2001: 83–105). There, Keown quotes Winston King as proposing an interpretation similar to his own:

> One cannot say that Sila is first perfected and then left behind when one reaches Samadhi and Paññā stages—even though there is talk of rising above mere morality as one progresses in the meditative life. For even the meditating saint remains moral in his actions. Indeed his saintliness, at least in part, is the perfection of his morality, the turning from mere observance of external standards to the spontaneous exercise of inward virtues. So it is that morality is never left behind (1964a: 188). (Keown 2001: 90)

Keown continues, 'in the condition of *kilesa-parinibbāna* the Buddha remains a moral subject and member of the moral community' (91). Keown notes that 'it was through [his contemporaries'] interaction with him as a moral agent that the foundation of Buddhist ethics was laid' (91). For instance, the Buddha scolds wayward monks for wrong view (e.g. MN I.130ff.).

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Notwithstanding his role as ethical exemplar, the Buddha exhibits recognizably human traits in the early texts. He undergoes strong physical pain (DN II.127–128). He is visited by Mara, the Buddhist personification of doubt and other negative emotions (DN II.104). He also at one point dismisses a group of monastics because of the noise they are making (MN I.457). Although the Buddha's action should be understood as exemplifying a species of ethical perfection, the early texts nevertheless depict him as human rather than a kind of idealized theoretical placeholder or automaton.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on the Pāli material from early Buddhism and Theravāda in order to illuminate the nature of the Three Trainings (*tisikkhā*) of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. These trainings are found in other schools of Buddhism as well, however those lie outside the scope of this work.

The Three Trainings comprise a complete and concise statement of the Buddhist path. Ethics forms the foundation, necessary for the development of meditation and wisdom, and meditation constitutes a complex suite of mental practices aimed at inculcating wisdom, but any of the three can be cultivated at any time as one traverses the path. The three together form and inform the character of the individual, much as virtues do in Western forms of virtue ethics. Thus, we might think of them as constitutive of the holy life (*brahmacarya*) according to the early Buddhist texts. Any one may be emphasized or separately developed, but none can be left out in a successful pursuit of the good life.

A passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN II.81) suggests that progression along the Three Trainings from ethics to meditation to wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*) is linear:

> This is ethics, this is meditation, this is wisdom. Meditation, when cultivated with ethics, brings great fruit and profit. Wisdom, when cultivated with meditation, brings great fruit and profit. The mind, cultivated with wisdom becomes completely free of the mental influxes, that is, from the influx of sensuality, of becoming, and of false views and ignorance.

The ethics developed in the early portion of the path may appear to be merely rule based, but such rules when practised regularly become part of the character of the individual. Ethics are also cultivated in meditation, as when one cultivates states conducive to ethical conduct such as the *brahmavihāra*s, wherein one promotes positive mental states aimed at all sentient beings and thereby changes one's emotional responses and behaviour towards them. As one achieves higher stages of wisdom one likewise expands one's sphere of ethical development, until the final liberative insight that includes the realization of non-self and resulting connection (to greater or lesser extents) to all beings in the world. Buddhaghosa wrote of this as 'the breaking down of the barriers

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(between oneself and others)' as a result of successful meditation on loving-kindness (Vism 9.40–43). He cites the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN I.122), wherein the Buddha tells his monks that should they be assailed by bandits demanding a sacrifice of one of their lives, they should be unable to choose any among their group, including themselves, to be sacrificed. In this way, meditation on loving-kindness links the ethical goals of non-harm and the philosophical wisdom of non-self. We might say, following the metaphor given by the brahmin Soṇadaṇḍa, that ethics, meditation, and wisdom are like three hands washing each other, and that this combination is 'the highest thing in the world'. While we can separate them out analytically and definitionally, they come together in complex ways in the lives of practitioners.

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