

YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

Dhamma
books

• *Sabbadanam Dhammadanam jinati—
The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts* •
(Dhammapada, Gatha #354).

• *Spiritual wisdom is a gift that should be shared with insight and compassion,
not exploited for crass personal gain. When wisdom is commercialized,
labeled as a marketable commodity, it loses its purity and subjects
profound insights to evaluation, thereby undermining their
transformative power.* •

(Guy E. Dubois)

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YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

Guy Eugène DUBOIS
Foreword by dr. Herman K.T. de Jonge

*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah —
May all beings be happy*

*• Those with nothing stored up,
who have understood their food,
whose domain is the liberation
of the signless and the empty:
their path is hard to trace,
like birds in the sky. •*

*Dhammapada, Gatha #92
Translation Bhante Sujato*

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FOREWORD

It was a Thursday afternoon in April 2020. I was sitting at my desk, looking for scriptures and texts about the Buddha's teachings. That's when I came across the book 'Dhamma' by Guy Dubois. It was written in Dutch, which was surprising in itself since the vast majority is usually in English or French. I had never heard of the man before, but he seemed to be already known as an expert in early Buddhism.

I was immediately captivated by his foreword. Finally, someone who wrote in a language that was clear to me and expressed a socially critical vision close to my heart.

Years before, I took a 10-day Vipassana course out of curiosity and because I encountered social structures, especially work-related ones, that I no longer understood and found increasingly difficult to deal with. Perhaps such a course could provide insight into how to cope with this or deal with it differently.

Before the course, I delved into the subject of Vipassana—'seeing things as they really are.' That was something profound. What did it mean? How? Was I perceiving things incorrectly? Did I see everything distorted? I had no idea how to interpret all this or what it meant exactly.

So, I headed to Bogor, Indonesia, because they still had some spots left. It was a very interesting experience. The silence, the Dhammatalks, the Dhamma hall, all the people around you from all directions—what was their reason for coming here? Not a word was spoken, except occasionally by the teacher.

I knew very little about Buddhism at the time—Sīla, samādhi, pañña. I had never heard of it before, along with all the other terms I had to learn during those 10 days.

Sitting for long periods of time was something I wasn't used to. In between 'sessions of strong determination,' meaning sitting for an hour without moving an inch, I experienced pain in my legs, pain in my back—it all seemed to last for-ever. After the 10 days of noble silence, the noise outside was overwhelming.

I came home somewhat distraught, having no idea how to proceed. Likewise, I searched for relevant literature on Buddhism.

Where do I start? Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, Zen, Pure Land Buddhism—what is the difference between all these traditions? Buddhism is Buddhism, right?

Guy showed me the way with his book 'Dhamma.' A beginning had been made with my journey through the Dhamma and through the history of Buddhism. I have purchased his other books and many more study materials.

Now before you lies his latest book. It is a beautiful book that clearly reflects the essence of the Dhamma in the Theravada tradition. The message is crystal clear, and the insights provide a lot of food for thought, for contemplation.

It is the first book in English by this erudite scholar of early Buddhism. This book makes his knowledge and insight into the Dhamma accessible to a large group of interested practitioners outside the Dutch-speaking area.

The book begins with an analysis of the first two suttas of the Pali Canon, after which the Buddha's insights are step by step further explored. The book is full of landmarks that do not need to be read chronologically. Open any page, read it, take it in, and let your thoughts wander. It is made clear again and again that this is a teaching that you must master yourself—a teaching based on insight into the Three Marks of Existence, but also on wisdom, non-violence, and loving kindness. A teaching that can set you free from your suffering—a teaching that has nothing to do with prayers or following rituals.

In the Tevijja Sutta, Digha Nikaya 13, there is a story about two Brahmins that go to the Buddha to settle a dispute about how to achieve union with Brahmā. The two Brahmins believe that praying and exhorting to rituals will achieve this union but are puzzled which of the Brahmins they consulted was right. In the sutta, the Buddha uses an example of somebody beckoning to the other side of a river, calling, 'Come here other side!' and expecting the 'other side' to come to them.

A clear example where the Buddha shows that praying, wishing, wanting, or longing for is never going to solve the desire to achieve something.

It is up to you, the reader, to practice, to learn, to absorb, to contemplate in order to finally be able to see reality as it really is—Yatha Bhuta.

The scriptures of the monotheistic religions but also Hinduism condone, justify, and even sometimes encourage the use of violence.

A quote from Ezekiel 35:

'So I, the Almighty Lord, promise you this, as surely as I live. I will allow your enemies to kill you. If you run away from them, they will chase you and kill you. You were happy to see an enemy kill my people, so an enemy will kill you also. I will make Mount Seir become like a desert where nobody lives. I will destroy anyone who travels through that place. Dead bodies will lie all over your mountains. The bodies of men who have died in battle will lie on your hills and in your valleys. I will make you a desert forever, and nobody will live in your towns. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'

Or as stated in the Quran:

'The words of the Prophet Muhammad will be fulfilled: Judgment Day will not come before the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Jews will hide behind the rocks and the trees, but the rocks and the trees will say: Oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'

In Buddhist texts, it's just the opposite. The Dhammapada, Gatha #130, reads as follows:

'All trembling at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.'

This principle of non-violence is consistent throughout the Pali Canon but stands in strong contrast to the recent violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar, driven by Ashin Wirathu, a Burmese Buddhist monk.

The teachings of the Buddha are very profound and not always easy to grasp. They are for everyone but are not suitable for fools or for the lazy. Without perseverance (P. adhitthana), you will not get there. All suttas, and everything the Buddha taught, are solely an upaya, a tool that shows you the way—a direction indicator. Ultimately, you have to walk the path yourself.

This book is also a tool, an upaya. It is filled with pearls of wisdom. But again, it is up to you, the reader, to take the path that might lead you to yatha-bhuta—to see the process of impermanence—to see the true nature of things.

Finally, this is not a book to read in one sitting—not if you want to absorb the material in a serious way. Read; put away. Read, think about it. Read it and let it satiate you. Read and apply it, practice. And keep practicing.

'To truly make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe.' (Carl Sagan).

And what have I learned from all of this so far? Well,... I am now better able to deal with the vicissitudes of life—to deal with the ups and downs in life in a more patient way.

I am very, very grateful to Guy for that.

*Herman de Jonge
Berg a/d Maas, januari 2024*

Herman de Jonge, born in Jakarta, raised in Suriname, came to the Netherlands to study. Currently working as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

Due to my background, I have always been interested in the religions, history, and arts of the Far East. Passionate collector of tribal art from Africa, particularly Congo. Also, the publisher of the book: 'De Lunda en Tshokwe van Shaba'.

I live together with my love and four cats in South Limburg.

THE AUTHOR

Guy Eugène Dubois (born 1947) is the author of approximately twenty-five books on *Dhamma*.

He has also translated, illuminated, commented on, and annotated several early Buddhist *Pali* texts, including the *Atthakavagga* (The Buddha's Peace), the *Parayanavagga* (The Way to the Other Shore), the *Itivuttaka* (Thus it is said), the *Udana* (Inspired Sayings of the Buddha), the *Khuddakapatha* (Short Passages), the *Dhammapada* (The Way of Truth).

Additionally, he translated the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* from Sanskrit to Dutch.

Through his translations and annotations, the author delves deeply into the roots of early Buddhism, showcasing profound insight and erudition. His articles, contributions, and comments are published on various websites, including Sutta-Central, the Buddhist Center Ehipassiko Antwerp/Mechelen, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, the Buddho Foundation, Samita, Boeddhisme (NL/BE), Buddhist Dharma Study, The Universal Sangha, The Vipassana Group, Buddhism Dharma Study, Teachings of the Lord Buddha, Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhism, Zen, Tao & Meditation and Buddhism Stack.

Guy is also the initiator and driving force behind the Ehipassiko Academy Yatha-Bhuta (<https://yatha-bhuta.com>), a gift from the Ehipassiko Sangha—the Buddhist Center Antwerp-Mechelen ©—to the worldwide Buddhist community.

All of his books and contributions consistently and coherently cover aspects that are essential to the *Pali* Buddhist canon. These core ideas form the foundation of the Doctrine, avoiding unnecessary embellishments and staying focused on the main points.

As a *yogi*, the author remains completely independent from any Buddhist tradition, lineage ¹, or structure. He interprets *Dhamma*—the Teachings of the Buddha—with a free-spirited self-awareness, emphasizing freedom and liberation. His understanding of *Dhamma* is personal, based on his own experiences and intense practice. His practice of *Dhamma*, as he sees it, experiences it, and practices it intensely, prioritizes insight over formal sensation. It is a practice without attachment to any conceptual framework.

In this sense, he is, quite literally, a 'homeless person,' a mendicant, a *bhikkhu* ², who interprets and practices in an extremely personal way.

According to Joop Hoek, the editor-in-chief of the Dutch newspaper, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, '*Guy E. Dubois is among the foremost experts on early Buddhism in the Dutch-speaking region. He combines a vigorous liberal outlook with a deep affection for the profound insights of the Buddha.*'

Paul Van hooydonck, Barcelona & Antwerp: *'I love his non-dogmatic attitude. His contrarian and independent mindset. I love his freedom-creating, non-assuming, self-evaluating, and investigative approach. Guy is a true freethinker. So rare. And so good to meet people like him.'*

Matt Hays, Gahanna, Ohio, USA: *'I think of it as the path outside the temple... The path of discovery... Thank you so much for this. It touches me deeply. It resonates and immerses me. So beautifully put... I am blessed and taught by you.'*

Douglas Scholtz, Chicago, Illinois, USA: *'The best I've read about the Dhamma in a long time. Sadhu. Sadhu. Sadhu.'*

Nob Chow, Surabaya, Indonesia: *'Thank you for posting those highly valuable articles of the Dhamma.'*

Francis Desilva, Colombo, Sri Lanka: *'Words of wisdom.'*

Jaap Slurink, Holland: *'Directly towards liberation (redemption) without detours. Beautiful, thank you.'*

Rajeev Rauniyar, India: *'Excellentee!'*

True to the Buddha's statement that *Dhamma* is the greatest gift, the author finds marketing Buddha's wisdom disgraceful and infamous. Therefore, all his books can be freely downloaded, reproduced, used, and distributed through any medium or file format, as long as the copyright license (CC0 1.0 Universal) from *Creative Commons Zero* is respected.

If you prefer to have a physical copy of the book, you can order it through regular bookstores or online. However, the author maintains his initial objective of not seeking any profit from *Dhamma*. *'Whenever anything of profit is generated, it will inevitably go to dana* ³.*'*

The author expresses his hope that his works contribute to a deeper insight into the teachings of the Buddha, guiding readers towards wisdom and compassion, and enabling them enter the stream. He considers himself fortunate if even one word from his texts can bring insight to a single person.



INTRODUCTION

In several *suttas* of the *Pali Canon*, the Buddha refers to the Taste of Freedom: ⁴

• *Just as in the great ocean there is but one taste—the taste of salt—so in this Doctrine and Discipline (P. Dhammavinaya),* ⁵ *there is but one taste—the taste of freedom. Whether one samples water taken from the surface of the ocean, or from its middle region, or from its depths, the taste of the water is the same — the taste of salt.* •

Similarly, in the Buddha's Teaching, a single flavor—the flavor of freedom (*P. vimutti-rasa*) ⁶—pervades the entire Doctrine and Discipline, from its beginning to its end, from its gentle surface to its unfathomable depths.

Whether one engages with the *Dhamma* at its more elementary level—in the practice of generosity and moral discipline, acts of devotion and piety, conduct governed by reverence, courtesy, and loving-kindness—or at its intermediate level—in the taintless supramundane knowledge and deliverance realized by the liberated *arahant*—in every case, the taste is the same: the taste of freedom.

If one practices the *Dhamma* to a limited extent, leading a household life in accordance with righteous principles, then one experiences a limited measure of freedom. If one practices the *Dhamma* to a fuller extent, going forth into the homeless state of monkhood, dwelling in seclusion adorned with the virtues of a recluse, contemplating the rise and fall of all conditioned things, then one experiences a fuller measure of freedom. And if one practices the *Dhamma* to its consummation, realizing in this present life the goal of final deliverance, then one experiences a freedom that is measureless.

At every level, the flavor of the Teaching is of a single nature: the flavor of freedom. It is only the degree to which this flavor is enjoyed that differs, and the difference in degree is precisely proportional to the extent of one's practice. Practice a little *Dhamma*, and one reaps a little freedom; practice abundant *Dhamma*, and one reaps abundant freedom. The *Dhamma* brings its own reward of freedom, always with the exactness of scientific law.

Dhamma cannot be divided into diversity. There is only one law of nature—the Eternal Law: Immeasurable, impersonal, and impartial. *Dhammo Sanantano*.

The *Pali* word '*sanantano*' refers to the characteristics of originality, perpetuity, fundamentality, and absoluteness. These are attributes that, in theistic systems, are reserved exclusively for the gods.

Here, the Buddha associates these characteristics with *Dhamma*—the natural law, the cosmic law. In this way, the *Bhagavat* ⁷ confers a completely divine status on the natural process that governs existence.

There is no essential distinction to be made among the multitude of Buddhist schools, sects, movements, and traditions.

Taigu says:

• *Buddhism is available in a variety of appearances to suit everyone's personal preference, with or without devotion, with bodhisattvas as real-existing supernatural beings or bodhisattvas as symbols or archetypes, with grace (Pure Land) or without, with or without karma and reincarnation, with or without esotericism (like tantra), with or without celestial realms in which buddhas hold their 'ultimate' teachings in readiness until human comprehension is ripe to receive them.* 9

Fortunately, Joseph Goldstein, a teacher of the Theravada tradition, writes in one of his books that you don't have to believe in Buddhist cosmology to participate in the liberating effect of the original insights that gave birth to Buddhism (the Four Noble Truths).

Historical and philosophical criticism is not a substitute for the personal experience of salvation; it is only a conversation partner, an inner voice that warns you of the power of self-deception and can keep you on the right course in the subtle play of form and emptiness.

You can give *Dhamma* another name. You can use a different method to interpret *Dhamma*. But despite all these so-called different experiences, the finality of the *Buddhasasana* 8 remains the same. Always.

This indicates that the various Buddhist schools are only skillful aids (*P. upayas*) 9 for awakening. They are vehicles (*P. yanas*) towards self-realization (*P. nibbana-sacchikiriya*) 10 — vehicles that can lead to *Dhamma*.

But let it be clear: in essence, they are not *Dhamma*, although they may pretend to be with firm conviction. All these Buddhist schools, tendencies, lineages, structures and traditions are like fingers pointing at the moon, but they are not the moon. A practitioner who considers them as the moon is guilty of sectarian dogmatism, running in wide curves around the essence of *Dhamma*.

Starting from the same source, all these Buddhist schools, tendencies, lineages, and traditions approach the *Buddhasasana* from different perspectives. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as the *dhammanuvatti* 11 clearly comprehends that they are interpretations of what the Buddha preached—different expressions of what *Dhamma* is and entails. In this way, an alert practitioner values them for their proper worth.

These different interpretations and explanations are a direct result of the free inquiry that the Buddha preached, as outlined in, among others, the *Kalama Sutta*. Viewed in this way, the various Buddhist tendencies not only provide insightful support but also contribute to the propagation of the *Dhamma* as carriers of the message. But no more than that.

It is mainly through rituals, religious practices, hierarchy, structures, and overarching organizational forms that they distinguish themselves.

The outer forms they use to represent the *Dhamma* do not touch the essence. Ceremonial pomp and pageantry do not lead to insight, nor are these formal representations a criterion for the magnitude of acquired insight. Moreover, they are in stark contrast to what the Buddha taught (*P. silabbata-paramasa*).¹²

Structures and lineages do not point to the teachings of the Buddha, who categorically refused to designate a successor. In various *suttas*, the Buddha emphasized personal responsibility to liberate oneself from *dukkha*, far away from structures and lineages.

As a practitioner, how do you deal with this discrepancy between *Dhamma* and the overwhelming decorum of rituals, religious practices, hierarchy, structures, and overarching organizational forms?

Only attentive observation offers solace—forensic observation, meditation, reflection. Without a head above your head.

Decoration and decorum¹³ don't help. The *dhammanuvatti* who sees through all this embellishment discovers the unity of *Dhamma*, the quintessence of the Doctrine—the aspects that truly matter, transcending decor and decorum, surpassing the dogmatic, the sectarian, the unintended, the misunderstood, the conditioned. In short, beyond the 'I'..

The teachings of the Buddha are simple for the practitioner who musters the courage to rid them of the nonsense of structures, interpretations, metaphysical speculations... Words and concepts only diffuse, woolly, and muddle the *Dhamma*.

Bhante Sumedho:

• *Suttas are not meant to be 'sacred scriptures' that tell us what to believe. One should read them, listen to them, think about them, contemplate them, and investigate the present reality, the present experience with them. Then, and only then, can one insightfully know the truth beyond words.* •

Only sustained practice leads to the experiential experience (*P. paccanubhoti*)¹⁴ of liberating insight. It comes down to determined practice (*P. adhitthana*)¹⁵. Meditation is the fuel that initiates the process of self-realization, i.e., the process of extinction—a contradiction in terminis.

The *buddhavacana*¹⁶—the word of the Buddha—represents the experiential insight of this process, the natural law, the cosmic law. Thus, *Dhamma* is wisdom *beyond* words and *beyond* concepts, *beyond* time, and thus *beyond* any manipulated historical interpretation and any socially opportunistic self-interest. *Buddhavacana* = *ekayana*. Universal *Dhamma*.¹⁷

Dhamma is experiential insight (*P. paccakkha-nana*)¹⁸. As a result, it cannot be confined within structures—neither in organizations, traditions, and lineages. These are merely interpretations of words and concepts, externalities without insight into *Dhamma*.

Therefore, do not identify yourself with structures. Walk away from them resolutely. They don't align with insight. They don't conform to the true nature of things. They don't correspond with *yatha-bhuta*.¹⁹

Don't give ignorance a chance. Don't get carried away by any dichotomy, never. Do not follow such loud shouters in the desert.

They do not follow the Buddha's way; they have a different agenda. A dogmatic, sectarian approach is not the Buddha's Path, is not the Middle Way.

Dhamma is one. *Dhamma* transcends every Buddhist school, every tradition, every lineage. *Dhamma* is not bound by words and concepts, nor by opinions, ideas, or viewpoints. *Dhamma* spontaneously reveals itself in every moment through the '*ten thousand things that arise*' (Ehei Dogen).

The distinction between a worldling (*P. puthujjana*) and a noble follower (*P. ariya-puggala*) is a matter of perception.²⁰

The worldling engages with the world—the '*ten thousand things*'—from the perspective of the self. Due to this narrow viewpoint, he remains in a state of perpetual ignorance (*P. avijja*).

The noble follower sees and knows (*P. janami passami*)²¹ the process of dependent origination that characterizes the '*ten thousand things*.' Through this open approach, the *dhammanuvatti* realizes himself.

Dhamma is one. *Dhamma* has only one taste: the subtle taste of liberation—*Vimutti*²².

Keep the Path undefiled, pure. Observe and experience how healing it is to look over the (artificial) walls, see what connects us. Don't argue about what (supposedly) separates us.

Verify for yourself if something contributes to your liberation from *dukkha*, if it is a skillful tool or just useless ballast. You decide, only you. No one else can do this for you. Practice, develop insight, trust only yourself.

Self-realization refers to the process of becoming aware of one's true nature, potential, or purpose in life.

Realize that self-realization must be taken literally: a personal achievement. It cannot be achieved by someone else on your behalf—emphasizing personal responsibility and agency in the journey towards self-discovery and understanding.

The introspective and transformative aspects of self-discovery and self-realization are inherently personal and must be undertaken by the practitioner themselves.

Someone else can't realize it for you, never ever.

In the *Saundarananda*,²³ the Buddha says:

‘... Among all tastes, the taste that really satisfies is that of internal sight. The highest happiness can only be found in yourself...’

Self-realization means 'insight,' seeing your 'original face' as you really are, not as you dream, wish, or just don't wish to be.

What is this 'original face'?

It means not being a duplicate of any god or *guru*,²⁴ not a docile follower of any religion or denomination, but one who gains insight like a master, a true Master, with quiet composure and strong determination, '*surpassing men, following the gods.*'

To realize ourselves—i.e. to liberate ourselves from *dukkha*—we meditate. We sit quietly on our *zafu*²⁵ because we realize that through this raft of *bhavana*,²⁶ we can see the flow and reach the Other Shore, enter the stream (*P. sotapatti*),²⁷ and experience the Ultimate Void.

In that blissful space, drenched in silence, we can discover 'our original face'²⁸ experience that we are the flow—an inherent part of the process of arising and passing away.

In the Buddhist worldview, the profound nature of reality is explored through key principles that shape the understanding of existence. These principles are encapsulated in the Three Marks of Existence (*P. tilakkhana*) and the concept of Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*). The fundamental aspects that define the true nature of reality are:

Impermanence (*P. anicca*): Impermanence underscores the dynamic and ever-changing nature of all phenomena. Everything, from tangible matter to mental states, is subject to continuous transformation. Embracing impermanence is crucial for comprehending the nature of suffering and fostering detachment.

Suffering or Unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*): *Dukkha* encompasses a spectrum of suffering, dissatisfaction, and the innate sense of unsatisfactoriness. Life is inherently marked by various forms of suffering, both physical and mental. Acknowledging the pervasive nature of *dukkha* is the foundational step in the Four Noble Truths.

Non-Self or No-Self (*P. anatta*): *Anatta* challenges the concept of a permanent, unchanging self or soul. According to Buddhism, there is no independently existing, permanent self within the aggregates of an individual. *Anatta* dismantles the illusion of a fixed and enduring self, emphasizing interdependence and conditioned existence.

Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*): Dependent Origination elucidates the intricate web of interdependence and conditioned arising of all phenomena. *Paticca samuppada* illustrates how one condition gives rise to another, perpetuating the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It serves as a roadmap to understanding the causes of suffering and the path to liberation.

Emptiness (*P. sunnata*): Emptiness does not denote nothingness but signifies the absence of inherent, independent existence in all phenomena. Recognizing the emptiness of inherent existence unveils the interconnectedness of all things. It is a pivotal insight for cultivating wisdom and progressing towards liberation.

In summary, the true nature of reality in Buddhism involves embracing impermanence, acknowledging the pervasive nature of suffering, dismantling the illusion of a fixed self, understanding interdependence through Dependent Origination, and recognizing the emptiness that transcends inherent existence. These insights form the foundation for the transformative journey toward liberation and enlightenment.

Guy
Beerzel, January 2024

YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

DHAMMA EYE

I. The Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta

This chapter delves into the core of the Doctrine, the quintessence of the *Buddhasasana*, the essence known as the *Dhamma Eye*, or *Dhamma-cakkhu*.²⁹

The *Dhamma Eye* can be metaphorically likened to the 'eye' of a hurricane, a tropical cyclone. In the eye of such storm there is no wind, the air pressure is lowest and the sea level rise is greatest. It is a place of relative tranquility amidst an otherwise turbulent environment.

The sole intention the Buddha had, was to liberate us from our suffering (*P. dukkha*), freeing us from the permanent dissatisfaction that we, as humans, carry throughout our lives.

He defined this suffering (*P. dukkha ariya sacca*),³⁰ its cause (*dukkha samudaya ariya sacca*),³¹ its termination (*P. dukkha nirodha sacca*),³² as well as the Path leading to its termination (*dukkha nirodha gamini patipada sacca*).³³

These are the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*), or rather, the Four Truths or realities of the Noble Follower. This is the Teaching, the bequest of the Buddha—the core, nothing more, nothing less. Everything else attributed to the Buddha is explication, interpretation or mere decoration.

In this sense, the *Dhamma Eye* is where the *dhammanuvatti*—the practitioner who lives according to the *Dhamma*—enters the stream and becomes a noble follower (*P. ariya puggala*), a *sotapanna*.³⁴

The *Dhamma Eye* is the 'place' (better understood as the 'moment' or 'experience') where the *dhammanuvatti* attains liberation (*P. vimutti*) from suffering, from *dukkha*. It is the place where he gains insight into the true nature of phenomena, experiences, *dhammas*—*yatha-bhuta nana dassana*. With equanimity and acceptance of this insight, he finds inner peace.

In the *Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta*, the Buddha states:

• *And while the explanation of the Four Noble Truths was being given by the Exalted One, in the Venerable Kondanna appeared the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye: Everything subject to arising is subject to decay.* •

The real reality is impermanence, variability, instability—*Anicca*.

The Buddha advises observing attentively the process of creation and the passing of all things, of all *dhammas*. Look at it rigorously, witness this process of arising and passing—a perpetual cycle to which all phenomena are subject.

Examine this permanent natural law of change, observe the continuous transformation and perpetual mutation, where nothing is ultimately lost—only undergoing permanent transition, metamorphosis.

Until the end of his life, the *Exalted One* ³⁵ continued to emphasize this wisdom:

• *Everything that is subject to creation is subject to decay.* •

In these ten words • *the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye* • is summarized.

What matters is that the practitioner focuses his attention on the essential, unambiguously, and not on trivial matters. Do not focus on external decoration or sensory praxis, as they only distract the *dhhammanuvatti* from the Path and keep him trapped in the cycle of *samsara*, driven by ignorance, desire, and aversion. A practitioner goes straight for the 'goal' which, upon closer examination, is not a goal but an insight—an experiential experience—*Paccakkha-nana*.

In other words, a *dhhammanuvatti*, a 'noble person' (*P. ariya puggala*), takes the direct and unparalleled way—*Ekayana magga*—realizing the limited time he has.

In the *Sabbasava Sutta* ³⁶ the Buddha says the following:

• *The Dhamma Eye opens at the stream-enterer when it cuts the first three chains. The Dhamma Eye opens as he gains insight into the causal principles governing the genesis and decay of dukkha.*

By carefully observing [of the Four Noble Truths] he realizes within himself:

• *This is dukkha... This is the origin of dukkha... This is the cessation of dukkha... This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha...* •

When he continues to observe this attentively, he destroys the first three chains: belief in personality (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*); ³⁷ doubt (*P. vicikiccha*) ³⁸ and attachment to rites and rituals (*P. silabbata-paramasa*). ³⁹

• *Thus the Dhamma Eye opens to the stream-enterer.* •

The Buddha's teachings are summarized in the first two sermons he gave to the Five Companions at Isipatana, the Deer Park, in Sarnath. ⁴⁰ These two lectures were delivered over a period of five days.

With the first recitation—the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* ⁴¹—the Buddha set the Wheel of the *Dhamma* in motion. The second lecture was the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* ⁴² illustrating the selflessness and instability of all phenomena, things, *dhammas*... but also their interconnectedness ⁴³.

In the last 45 years of his life, the Buddha crisscrossed the Middle Country (*P. majjhimadesa*)⁴⁴ to explain and clarify his teachings. This period was a time of explanation, interpretation and fulfillment.

But let there be absolutely no doubt about it. What has been said in the first two lectures is the essence of the *Buddhadhamma*. What is said here is the Doctrine. Nothing more, nothing less.

If there had been something more or different, the Buddha would have said it here, at this moment, at this place.

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

In his first lecture—the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*⁴⁵—the Buddha sets '*the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion*'.

The historical story is vividly depicted in colors and smells in this *sutta* of the *Pali Canon*. The text brims with verbal adoration, utilizing every element. However, even here, amidst the *summum bonum*, it is crucial to distinguish the essence from the decoration.

But before we delve into the analysis of the *sutta*, let us take a step back for a moment to maintain the proper perspective...

... After attaining Self-realization in Bodhgaya, according to tradition, the Buddha remained in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree for seven weeks. He contemplated how to convey his awakening through words and concepts, despite his firm conviction that truth can never be fully expressed in such forms.

He pondered on how to elucidate the profound realization of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) and the cessation of continuous 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), which inevitably leads to old age, disease, and death—hence, to *dukkha*.

After deep and extensive contemplation, the Buddha ultimately decided to share the insight he had gained with those '*who have little dust in their eyes*.'

Initially, the Buddha considered approaching his two former teachers, Alara Kalama and Udakka Ramaputta. However, both masters had passed away by that time.

He then journeyed west to Sarnath, situated to the north of Varanasi—the sacred city of India, located on the holy River Ganges. The journey from Bodhgaya to Varanasi encompassed approximately 260 km, traversing challenging terrain. The travel took place in daily segments of around 10 kilometers on average.

In Sarnath, the Buddha sought out the Five Companions (*P. Panca Vaggiya*)⁴⁶ with whom he had shared the ascetic path for five years in the caves of the Dugeswari Mountains.

The Deer Park (*P. Migadaya*) of Isipatana (Sarnath)⁴⁷ was the location where his former companions continued their pursuit of asceticism along their respective paths.

The *suttas* describe how the Five Companions who saw the Buddha approaching in the distance agreed among themselves not to greet him. They felt he had broken his promise by leaving the extreme path of asceticism.

However, as the Buddha drew closer, they were struck by the tranquility emanating from his eyes and his demeanor. According to the *suttas*, as if compelled by a force, they rose to pay him the customary homage.

The *sutta* continues as follows:

• *When the Buddha entered the gate of the Isipatana Park, the ascetic comrades were so impressed by his radiant demeanor that all five immediately stood up. It seemed as if the Buddha was surrounded by a garland of light. Kondanna ran over to him and took his begging bowl.*

Mahanama went to fetch water so that the Buddha could wash his hands and feet. Bhaddiya set a stool for him to sit on. Vappa found palm leaves and began to fan it. Assaji stood aside, not knowing what to do. After the Buddha washed his hands and feet, Assaji suddenly realized that he could fill a bowl with cold water and give it to him. The five friends sat in a circle around the Buddha who looked at them kindly and said, "My brothers, I have found the Way and I will show it to you." •

And then the Buddha began his first lecture. The orthodox doctrine assumes that after his awakening in Bodhgaya, the Buddha revealed the entire teaching in a straightforward and unambiguous manner. It is believed that he held nothing back, and this is not to suggest '*this mystical experience of Enlightenment, which surpasses ordinary thinking and rational understanding, gave rise to other or new formulations.*'

Let there be absolutely no doubt: this is the doctrine. What is being conveyed here is the *buddhasasana*. It is nothing more, but also nothing less. If there were anything additional or different, the Buddha would have expressed it here, using these words, in this very place.

But, *mutatis mutandis*, let's be serious: What is not said here is not worth making a doctrinal point out of. What is not said here is not the essence of *Dhamma*.

This first lecture consists of five topics (which I have numbered for simplicity). For each of these five topics, I will first provide my translation of the *Pali* text into English, followed by my analysis.

I. The Two Extremes and the Middle Path (P. majjhima patipada):

• *Monks, a bhikkhu—one who has renounced worldly life—should not indulge in the following two extremes.*

Which two?

The pursuit of happiness through sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects, which is base, vulgar, ignoble, unprofitable, and does not lead to well-being.

The pursuit of strict asceticism, which is painful, futile, ignoble, unprofitable, and does not lead to well-being.

The Blessed One has, by avoiding both extremes, awakened to the Middle Way, which produces seeing and knowing, leading to direct knowledge, inner peace, self-awakening, unbinding, and nibbana.

And what is this Middle Way—realized by the Tathagata ⁴⁸—that produces seeing, knowing, leading to inner peace, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding, and nibbana?

It is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

*Monks, this is the Middle Way that produces seeing and knowing, leading to inner peace, immediate understanding, awakening, and Nibbana. **

This is a clear text that, aside from the concept of the 'Middle Way' itself, requires little explanation but demands a lot of practice. The Middle Way refers to the Eightfold Path that leads to Awakening.

The Middle Way lies between indulging in physical and emotional desires on one hand and extreme asceticism on the other. Both extremes are equally destructive and do not lead to liberation from suffering (P. *dukkha*).

Regarding the meaning of the term 'Middle Way,' the *Majjhe Sutta* ⁴⁹ provides us with the answer. This ancient *sutta* presents six interpretations given by six *Thera-bhikkhus* of the Buddha's expression '*the middle*.' Since the six *Theras* do not arrive at a common definition, they consult the Buddha to determine which of the six positions is closest to the truth.

Upon hearing the six definitions, the Buddha affirms all six statements and resolves the monks' remaining doubts by explicitly reaffirming the first interpretation.

In summary, these six definitions can be condensed as follows: (a) termination of contact, (b) the present moment, (c) absence of displeasure or pleasure, (d) and (e) awareness (mentioned twice in the six interpretations), and (f) the cessation of personal existence.⁵⁰

Contact represents one extreme, the initiation of contact represents the second extreme, and the cessation of contact represents the middle.

The past signifies one extreme, the future signifies the second extreme, and the present signifies the middle.

Pleasure embodies one extreme, displeasure embodies the second extreme, and the absence of displeasure or pleasure embodies the middle.

Name represents one extreme, form represents the second extreme, and consciousness represents the middle.

The six senses embody one extreme, the six sense objects embody the second extreme, and consciousness embodies the middle.

Personal existence represents one extreme, the arising of personal existence represents the second extreme, and the cessation of personal existence represents the middle.

The Middle Way is the path of harmony, of being in balance, which the Buddha proclaimed he had followed to its conclusion, leading him to the cessation of suffering (*P. dukkha*).

II. The Four Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccāni*):

• *This, Monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (P. dukkha sacca): Birth is suffering. Old age is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Sorrow, mourning, pain, sadness, and misery are suffering. Being with enemies is suffering. Being separated from loved ones is suffering. Not attaining what one desires is suffering. In summary, the five aggregates (P. khandhas) are suffering.*

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (P. samudaya sacca): It is the craving that leads to further existence, associated with sensual pleasure and lust, seeking gratification here and there. It can be succinctly described as the craving for sense pleasures (P. kama tanha), the craving for existence (P. bhava tanha), and the craving for non-existence (P. vibhava tanha).

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (P. nirodha sacca): It is the complete fading away and cessation of craving; the relinquishment, letting go, renunciation, and liberation from craving.

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (P. magga sacca): It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

In summary:

The Noble Truth of Suffering (P. dukkha sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (P. samudaya sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (P. nirodha sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (P. magga sacca). •

This second topic gives the description of the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*). They are referred to as 'truths': *saccani* → *sacca* = 'truth.' These truths are followed by a noble person (*P. ariya-puggala*).

They are not esoteric truths. They are not dogmatic truths. They represent what is 'real,' what constitutes natural law—relevant in the past, in the present, and in the future. Therefore, truth can never be the exclusive domain of any changing and perishable religion or philosophy.

Truth requires no label. A label only obstructs the independent understanding of Truth. Labels create detrimental prejudices in the minds of individuals. The frequent religious conflicts among so-called 'universal' religions are the violent consequences of this. By its very nature, truth cannot be sectarian. This also implies that the *Dhamma* is unified, free from divisions, free from structures.

To comprehend the law of nature—the true nature of things (*P. yatha-bhuta*)—it is not even necessary to know whether the teachings come from the Buddha or from someone else. What matters is to perceive this truth, to know and understand what is true, and to experience this truth.

Stephan Bodian ⁵¹ expresses it as follows:

• Truth is seeking to awaken to itself through you, to see itself everywhere through your eyes and taste itself everywhere through your lips. •

What does this mean? We can understand it by breaking it down: