

Disentangling

Tangles



*Upul Nishantha Gamase*

A mind devoid of mindfulness and self-awareness is restless and filled with unnecessary and frivolous thoughts. Hundreds and thousands of thoughts are tangled one by one in our head. As a result, we are confused more than a tangled ball of yarn. This tangle can be disentangled only by acquiring spiritual qualifications. Therefore, be patient, be virtuous, be wise and practise tranquilly and insight meditation in order to qualify for disentangling tangles.



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Light of Nilambe

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*Dhamma Dāna*

Dedicated to my brother,  
**Christopher Edward Perkins**  
in his 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday Year  
May he attain ultimate freedom!

**Khema Dhamma Meheninwahanse**  
Dhammavivekārāma  
Lewella

# **Disentangling Tangles**

Talk given by

**Upul Nishantha Gamage**

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Translated and transcribed by

Chamara Illeperuma

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For further information

**[upulnilambe@yahoo.com](mailto:upulnilambe@yahoo.com)**

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## 1. The power of words

*Dear Dhamma friends,* having come to a calm and quiet environment like this, and having started to unwind, the mind cools down by itself. Just being here helps you to put aside any mental burdens, at least for a while, so you don't need to make a big effort to relax your mind. Similarly, because you are not talking or thinking in a way which leads to confusion or distraction, you may naturally start to experience mental peace. On the one hand, this environment is calm and quiet. So we can easily experience mental well-being. On the other hand, we are also calm and quiet. From the time you arrived at the Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre this morning until about an hour or two ago, you may have spoken only a small number of words. Or you may have not spoken at all. Speaking can spark the fires of inner and outer wars and mental conflicts. At a place where there is no problem, one word can start a blazing fire bursting with sparks. Similarly, a single word can put out a blazing fire. **A word can do both these things: it can start a fire or it can put out a fire.**

## 2. The double-sided game of silence

Not only words but also silence can do both these things. Someone can hurt someone else by being silent. The person who is silent may say that s/he is blameless as nothing has been said or done. Though it is true that nothing has been said or done, one can create hell for another by not speaking or not listening or not answering. Therefore, keeping silent is not always a wholesome act. However, there may be situations where that is a wholesome act. Most of the time, silence is an unskill in ordinary life. For instance, **it is more of an unskill than a skill to have a long face or keep quiet at home or at work as such behaviour is a puzzle or a pain for others.**

Silence can also create an enormous amount of peaceful joy, freedom and consolation. Under such circumstances, silence is a skill. **Such a silence is called “Noble Silence.”** You are silent not because you are angry with somebody or with yourself. Sometimes, someone is silent while they are angry with someone else or disappointed with themselves. Most people who are distressed and depressed are silent. Such individuals suffer a lot in that silence. As a result, others also suffer a lot.

Much work or much therapy is needed to make such a person speak. Some kind of medicine has to be given to make a person who suffers silently speak. Similarly, medicine has to be given to make a non-stop talker keep silent. Without going to either of these two extremes, everybody in this meditation hall is experiencing the skill of silence at this moment. All of you are in silence very happily. All of you feel extremely happy. One can experience the happiness of silence only by being in silence happily. If a person is happily silent, s/he can feel the sweetness and beauty of silence. We also experience a sense of well-being at this moment.

### 3. Unnecessary thoughts

*Dear Dhamma friends*, when you are attentive and mindful and live in the present moment, you can recognize unnecessary thoughts and drop them immediately, not allowing them to drag on. As a result, you can experience an enormous sense of well-being within. At this moment, you are experiencing such a sense of well-being within. **You are not thinking about anything, not because you are angry with your mind or with the**

**thoughts, but because you have realized that such thoughts are not necessary for this moment or for this place or for this action.** Here is the wisdom of knowing what is needed and what is not needed at a particular time. **We need to look at three factors to decide whether something is necessary or not. One factor is time.** This is true in any situation. For instance, when you are sick you have to take medicine at the right time. Timing is also important regarding food, clothing and speaking. You need to eat when you are hungry and not when you are full. Different clothes are suitable for different occasions. There is a time to speak. There is a time to be silent.

#### **4. A sense of time**

Time - not merely the time shown by a clock, but also time in the sense of this moment in time - is very important. What is this moment for? Is this moment for thinking? Is this moment for thinking about the past? Is this moment for entangling the past with the future? Is this moment for bringing up the grief and sorrow that you experienced in the past? Is this moment for experiencing non-existent suffering by inviting and visualizing

problems, griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts and anxieties that you have so far not even experienced but only imagined or anticipated? **A person who is mindful and wise questions himself/herself: “What is this moment for?”** A person who is not mindful does not know that there is something called “the present moment.” A person who is not mindful has no sense of time though s/he talks about it and measures it using clocks and calendars and in years. Even though they measure time, a person who is not mindful has no real experience or sense of time. Time just wears away. The hands of a clock keep turning. Days wear away. Years wear away. The person’s lifetime ends without knowing. A person who is devoid of mindfulness has no idea about the present moment. Therefore, s/he regrets about what s/he did or didn’t do. **Live in the present moment; be mindful!**

## **5. The beauty of a blank sheet of paper**

**When you are mindful, every moment is fresh and new. Every moment is a beautiful blank sheet of paper, not a scribbled-on one.** Have you seen the beauty of a blank sheet of paper? You may have seen beautiful drawings? You may have

seen gorgeous paintings. You may have seen multi-coloured designs, fashions and scenes. However, **a blank, white sheet of paper is more beautiful than all of these.** Do we have the patience, peacefulness, attentiveness and ease to see the beauty of a white, blank sheet of paper? One can experience the freedom and emptiness of the present moment through meditation. Likewise, the question or challenge or decision about “What is this moment for?” and “What should be written on this blank sheet of paper?” is in the hands of a person who is mindful.

**When a person is not mindful, every moment is full. See how every moment is filled with thoughts linked to past memories, future expectations, plans, regrets, fears and so on.** We have been dragging these griefs and sorrows around with us for years. There is no freedom. You can see how wonderful, sweet, beautiful and free this moment is, only if you see the present moment, stop for a moment and are attentive for a moment. **The present moment is not full. Nothing is written on the paper.**

## 6. Pointless scribbling

A little child with a pencil or a piece of chalk in his/her hand scribbles all over a sheet of paper. See how a sheet of paper can be filled with meaningless, senseless and ugly lines. The mother may see a certain beauty in such scribbles. However, the child scribbles pointlessly until the paper is filled with lines: one line on top of another or crossing another or in circles and straight lines, not only on the paper but also out of it and even on the floor and wall. A minute or two is sufficient for a little child to fill a beautiful white sheet of paper with lines. That child may see some meaning and joy in such scribbles. Similarly, a mind without mindfulness, thoughtfulness and self-awareness fills every moment with unnecessary thoughts. Such a mind draws scribbles or criss-crosses all the time. One thought arises on top of another. After one thought disappears, another thought appears going across or against the first one. **When we look at this fact, the scribbles of a little child seem nicer than the head and the mind of an adult. All these scribbling stop in meditation.**

## 7. Renouncing

You sit for meditation not to keep on thinking. The meditator is not angry with or against the thinking mind. The meditator lets go of thoughts after seeing their useless, meaningless, frivolous, dangerous, harmful and time-wasting nature. Meditation is about letting go. What do we let go of? **We let go of thoughts, not the world or our house. We let go of unnecessary and frivolous thoughts associated with the world or with the house.** There is no problem with the house or with the world. The problem is with the complex and unending thinking about the house over and over again. That is where the problem lies. Therefore, renounce the thinking mind; renounce the meaningless thoughts. Renunciation is explained as a concept or *Saṅkappa*. “Right Intention” (*Sammā Saṅkappa*), the second factor of the Noble Eight Fold Path, is explained in three parts: the intention of renunciation (*Nekkhamma Saṅkappa*), the intention of good will (*Avyāpāda Saṅkappa*), and the intention of harmlessness (*Avihimsā Saṅkappa*). **Renounce thoughts and intentions to do with ill-will - conflicts, clashes and quarrels.** Just let go of them. Don’t stay at such places. **Don’t stay with a mind full of**

**all these conflicts, clashes and quarrels. They are in the mind, nowhere else.**

*Dear Dhamma friends,* just see where each scenario of hatred and conflict actually exists. Each of them exists inside our thoughts - nowhere else. **The person who is inside these thoughts lives in conflict. The person who is inside these thoughts keeps on clashing.** Such a person may live far away at a distant place or they may live in isolation. However, there is no true distance and no real solitude at such a place. Such a person is so close to hostility and lives with hostility. Therefore, when the Noble Eight Fold Path is used as the path for liberation, this second factor called “Right Intention” is very important. Renounce thoughts associated with ill-will. Renounce non-stop thoughts rooted in desires. Just let go of such thoughts.

## 8. True weariness

One needs to make an effort to let go of such thoughts, as thinking takes place effortlessly. Thinking proceeds automatically with the help of our energy. Therefore, we feel tired. Life is so tiresome, not because of lifting weights or ploughing paddy fields or making roads or splitting wood, but because of non-stop thinking.

The world today is not as involved in physical work as it was in the past. There was a time when physical work was common. However, nowadays most of the hard work is done by various kinds of machinery, technology, science and gadgets. These days washing your face is not something tiresome. There is no need to draw water from a well, or to carry water pitchers any more. There is no need to grind or pound chillies by hand or to split firewood yourself and so on. Even though we live in an era where hard work is not required, we feel more tired and weary now than ever before. **True weariness is not physical but mental. Mental weariness is stronger than physical weariness, resulting in a tiresome life.**

## 9. The sleepless mind

A good sleep can get rid of physical tiredness. One can experience a very peaceful sleep after doing physically tiring work. A person who does physically tiring work does not need sleeping pills to have a peaceful sleep. Physical exercise gives rise to a peaceful sleep, and waking up the next day you feel so enthusiastic and energetic. You may feel you have the energy to do twice as much work as usual when you wake up after such a peaceful sleep. However, a mind which has got tired as a result of continuous thinking cannot rest even while sleeping. Such a mind is totally restless during the day. Such a mind continuously works even in sleep, which is a great crime. Sleep usually gives rest to the body, except in rare situations like sleepwalking. You can get a great deal of rest during sleep.

However, sleep cannot make the mind restful. Physical sleep cannot send the mind completely to sleep. But you can certainly take the time to make the mind restful before falling asleep. Falling asleep with a restful mind allows you to enjoy a good sleep and to wake up enthusiastically. However, **a complex**

**mind full of tangled thoughts cannot really sleep. Such a mind is only half-asleep as all the thoughts keep on getting more and more tangled up instead of disentangled during sleep. The results of entangled thoughts are dreams. Even if we don't dream or don't remember our dreams we are likely to wake up with a headache. Mental weariness is definitely stronger than physical weariness. Physical weariness is good and essential for health. However, mental weariness makes the body sick and it also creates dis-ease in life.**

## **10. Pointless thinking**

*Dear Dhamma friends,* see the unnecessary thoughts as unnecessary, the frivolous thoughts as frivolous and the meaningless thoughts as meaningless. Don't value such thoughts. Each and every moment does not exist for us to keep on thinking. What do we do the most? Someone may say "sleeping." No. We sleep only for a short while. We spend more time thinking than sleeping. **Thinking is the action that a human being does most during his/her lifetime.** There are situations where you have to think. There are things that you

ought to think about. However, mostly we think unnecessarily. See how **we waste a lot of time in pointless thinking**. The very first thing we do to ‘kill time’ is thinking. **We just keep on thinking, dreaming and bringing up the past. We do not try to spit out the past and get rid of these thoughts – instead we swallow them again, only to bring them up again later.** This is repeated over and over. Is this life? Is this what we call human life? Is this the Dhamma? Is this meditation? So, the first thing we need to do is to see whether a particular thought is necessary for this particular moment. Is this moment for thinking about something in this manner? If the answer is “No,” just let go of such thoughts. This is how to apply the ‘Intention of Renunciation’ (*Nekkhamma Saṅkappa*). Reach that path called meditation.

**We do not need to let go of money - we need to let go of thinking endlessly about money. Just let go of such thoughts, which is more difficult to do than giving up money.** We keep on thinking about the money we had in the past; the money we now have; the money we need to earn; the money we spent, donated, lent, borrowed, saved and so on. You don’t have to be

rich to think like this. **The burden is not in the amount of money you have in your pocket or in the safe or in the bank but in the ideas in your head about money.** These ideas are a great suffering. Therefore, if one wants liberation, cessation or cooling down, s/he has to renounce such thoughts.

**Is your thinking necessary for the place you are in? This is the second factor to consider, the first being necessity regarding time.** When you are at the bus stop or in the kitchen, toilet, bathroom, meditation hall or temple, simply see whether your thoughts are relevant and necessary for that particular place. **Use these two criteria - the moment and the place - as a mirror, and see whether your thoughts are necessary, essential and useful.** If the answer is “No,” sweep aside those thoughts from that place itself or put a full stop at that point itself. One has to get used to doing this. One has to practise. One should practise. We have not practised renouncing thoughts nearly enough.

**In a world of thoughts, we are confused more than a tangled ball of yarn.** We have got lost like a droplet of water in the ocean. Water droplets in the ocean move around with the waves. Water droplets are dragged along by the current. If a water droplet were asked whether it wants to be thrown about, dragged along and evaporated, it would say “No.” However, it does not know how to escape. It is the same when you are caught up in a thought. **We become a tiny droplet of water in a world of thoughts.** A huge world of thoughts flowed from the fountain called ‘you’. The fountain is now completely covered by the world of thoughts, so it is impossible for the fountain to stand aside or be independent. This is the way to stand aside or set you free.

To repeat: first of all see whether the thoughts are necessary for the place where you are. If you can ask yourself this or contemplate like this, many thoughts can easily be dropped. Is it not surprising that all these thoughts can exist in such a small head? The heads of most animals are larger than ours. Though there are animals with smaller heads than ours, in general, animals have larger skulls than ours. However, even animals

with big heads do not have heavy thoughts like we do. Their heads are not filled with thoughts like our small heads are. **Therefore, all animals can sleep well and wake up fresh. They don't have psychosomatic illnesses.**

### **11. The most beautiful two words**

*Dear Dhamma friends,* see whether a particular thought is relevant to the place you are in. Is that particular thought necessary for that particular place? Is that thought useful or essential for that place? If the answer is “No”, accept it lovingly. Don't feel sad about it. Don't sigh about it. Be happy about the answer: “No need.” **There is nothing more valuable than this answer: “no need.”** Simply two words. **There are no other two words more beautiful than “no need.”** Similarly, there is no golden voice other than the voice of “no need,” which directs a person to the path of liberation. **Don't be scared of saying “no need.” Be scared of saying “Something is needed.”** There is no need to be scared of others, only of you. There are millions of people who are living without the things we think are necessary. From the origin of mankind and throughout its

history, trillions of people have lived without hearing of, seeing, eating or even thinking about certain things that we now think of as essential. Fear does not come because of lacking something but because of having something. **Fear comes with the thought of needing something. The feeling of ‘not having enough’ arises not because we don’t have something but because of the thought that we need to have something.**

## **12. Be rich and wealthy!**

*Dear Dhamma friends,* see clearly. Contemplate or think about it seriously. One thinks that s/he is lacking in something not merely due to not having something. If we were to make a list of things that we lack, the list would be endless. **One gets a feeling of not having something or of lacking in something, not because of not having something but because of the thought of “wanting to have something or the other.”** Look at the demanding or pleading or agitating mind. We have become a poor relation to such a mind. We are poor because of that. Therefore, poverty is something related to your state of mind, and not related to the contents of your pocket or the level of

your salary. Poverty is something related to needs and craving (*Taṇhā*). This is something very difficult to understand.

The feeling or thought of not having something arises relative to craving. **The greater the craving, the greater the feeling of lacking in something.** The less craving there is, the greater the feeling of abundance or sufficiency. Thoughts associated with insufficiency and lack make a person feel stressed, oppressed, and poor. In this manner, becoming rich is not something difficult. **If someone wants to be rich, craving has to be reduced.** There is no need to make more money to become richer. **The more the craving is reduced, the richer the person. The more the craving is increased, the poorer the person. Therefore, craving is equal to suffering.**

This beautiful equation is presented in Buddhism. **Craving is equal to suffering and vice versa.** If someone wants to be rich, s/he has to reduce craving, even though the philosophy of the entire world goes in the opposite direction. According to this popular philosophy, if you wish to be rich, you need to have

more and more craving. Furthermore, you can become richer by acquiring more things and making more effort and more money. Just look at a person who has become rich in this manner. Just look at a person who claims to be rich and see whether that person is rich in happiness, pleasure, elation and ecstasy.

### 13. True bravery

Therefore, if you truly love yourself, are friendly with yourself and care about your own development, freedom and peaceful joy, **you don't need to be scared of saying "I don't need something. Don't even think twice about saying: "I don't need..."** But it is fine to think not only twice but 10 times before saying "I need something." Is something needed for this place? No. What is needed inside this meditation hall? Thinking like this, we can easily see that nothing is needed. What is inside this meditation hall is already more than enough. Some things are really not necessary. When one thinks in this manner, s/he does not get the feeling of insufficiency or lacking but of plenty.

## 14. Peeling an onion

So, the first and the second factors we looked at are ‘moment’ and ‘place’. The third factor is ‘action’ or ‘activity’. Think about the activity you are engaged in. Suppose you are peeling an onion, or driving a car, or sweeping the garden. Do you need all these thoughts arising in your head for sweeping the garden or peeling an onion? One has to look at the thoughts in relation to the activity. Are those thoughts necessary for such activities? Asking yourself this, you may come to understand that all those thoughts are not necessary. You can peel an onion well, drive a vehicle beautifully and sweep a garden clean without being burdened by thoughts. You can engage in many different activities and accomplish many things without thinking about last year or year 2014. **If it is possible to work well without such thoughts, why continue thinking?** Why not let go of unnecessary thoughts? If you do, you’ll realize how easy it is to peel an onion, or sweep a garden, or drive a vehicle - without tiredness. We think that we are tired because of cooking or sweeping or driving. Is this true? You certainly may feel a bit tired afterwards. But it is not true that the physical activity has tired you out. **The truth behind**

**tiredness is continuous thinking while working. The mind is free.**

The mind is a beautiful, blank, white sheet of paper. **The mind is a beautiful, blank, white sheet of paper when we are sweeping or peeling an onion or cooking or driving. It is possible for a person who is mindful to practise meditation at any place.** Not only mindfulness (*Sati*) but also self-awareness (*Sampajañña*) is needed for meditation. *Sampajañña* is the ability to assess and understand something fully. Both mindfulness and self-awareness are essential (*Sati-Sampajañña*). In the absence of mindfulness and self-awareness, our mind is like a little child who keeps on scribbling, covering a whole wall. Looking at scribbles on a wall makes us realize the state of our own mind and not a child's mind.

### **15. Thoughts are like tangled threads**

Think of each memory or each thought as a ball of yarn. One thought drags you along for a while and then slips away. Another thread coming from another ball of yarn drags you

along somewhere else and then slips away. Then another thread pulls you along. As a result, all these threads become tangled-up. Not only the threads from just one ball of yarn, but the threads from many balls of yarn get tangled in our head. Hundreds and thousands of thoughts are entangled one by one in our head.

Once a deity came and told the Lord Buddha: “Entangled inside and entangled outside, or knotted within and knotted without (*Anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā*), there is no place where there is no entanglement. The whole community, not only humans but deities also, have become more and more confused and entangled (*Jaṭāya jaṭitā pajā*). Though nobody has tied knots on purpose, when the threads of different balls of yarn are pulled from here and from there, they simply get tangled up one by one. I ask you, Lord Buddha, **“Who is going to disentangle these tangles?”** (*Taṃ taṃ Gotama pucchāmi, Kho imaṃ vijataye jatam*).

This question is very famous in traditional Buddhism. One reason for its popularity is the massive thesis named “The Path of Purification” (*Visuddhimagga*) written in Pali by Venerable Buddhaghosa. Having ordained and studied Buddhism in his homeland, this South Indian monk came to the Great Monastery (Mahāvihāra) at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, which was considered the world centre of Theravāda Buddhism at that time. Venerable Buddhaghosa asked permission to translate the *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries, which were written in Sinhala, into Pali. Until that time, Venerable Arahant Mahinda had been delivering Dhamma discourses in Sinhala. And so everybody easily understood the Dhamma - the teachings of the Lord Buddha - without having to learn a different language. In any case, learned monks at Mahāvihāra questioned Venerable Buddhaghosa about his qualifications for attempting this difficult task. This was a very important question. Afterwards, the following verse was given as a topic for Venerable Buddhaghosa to work on for an experimental thesis, covering the whole *Tipiṭaka*:

*“Anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā, Jaṭāya jaṭitā pajā, Taṃ taṃ Gotama puchchāmi, Kho imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭam”*

Based on this stanza written on palm leaves, Venerable Buddhaghosa wrote a detailed study, which was given the title “Visuddhimagga” or “The Path of Purification.” However, the book disappeared or was lost before it could be submitted to the Board of Examiners at Mahāvihāra. And so, Venerable Buddhaghosa had to rewrite the book. The second book, however, also disappeared. And so, he rewrote it a third time. Finally, the third book he wrote was submitted to the Board. Then the two books which had disappeared were found. All the three books shared the same viewpoint. Based on his study, the monks were convinced that Venerable Buddhaghosa was qualified to translate the *Tipiṭaka* and commentaries written in Sinhala into *Pali*.

In any case, the Lord Buddha’s answer to the verse given above is as follows:

*“Sīle patitṭhāya naro sapañño, cittaṃ paññaṃ ca bhāvayaṃ,  
ātāpi nipako bhikkhū, so imam vijaṭaye jaṭam”*

A wise human being needs to be virtuous and patient first in order to disentangle the tangles. A person who is impatient finds it difficult to disentangle even a couple of tangled threads. Therefore, one has to learn to be patient prior to disentangling anything tangled. A person who is impatient tends to make more and more knots. When an impatient person tries to solve a problem, they only make it worse. Therefore, be patient!

**Having become patient and virtuous, one can disentangle any tangle with the help of self-awareness. You need to improve your ability to look at a problem attentively and analytically.** Exactly which skills need to be developed or practised? Mental composure or one-pointedness; the ability to think about only what ought to be thought about; the ability to pay attention to only what ought to be paid attention to; the ability to look at something in a balanced way. It is essential to not merely look at something but also to understand it. Therefore one has to find out the cause of any problem.

What is the cause of this illness? What is the origin of this problem? Where did the basic cause of this crisis come from? One has to develop this ability to see causes and effects. **Having**

**been patient and virtuous, when a wise person practises tranquillity and insight meditation, this tangle can be disentangled.** Such a monk can disentangle this tangle. So it is very clear. To repeat: **“A person who is mindful and patient needs to first prepare to solve the problem without jumping into it. By improving his composure and wisdom, learning to be patient and allowing inner impulses to settle down; by becoming tolerant and having a ready wit, a monk will disentangle this tangle.”** A monk is a person who possesses all these good qualities. A tangle can be disentangled only if we gain such spiritual qualifications. So, please acquire such qualifications. Acquiring such qualifications is called meditation.

## **16. Piles of dirt**

*Dear Dhamma friends,* in this manner, a person needs to empty his/her head with the help of wisdom. This mental exercise is not possible through surgery. It has to be done mindfully with wisdom. What is needed? What is not needed? The ability to understand these two clearly is called *Sammā Ditṭhi* or ‘Right View’.

I have talked about **three factors which are helpful for developing Right View: necessity regarding the moment; necessity regarding the place; and necessity regarding the present activity.** Just see. Acquire right view! If thoughts are not needed, let go of them without being fearful and stingy. Unnecessary thoughts are like piles of dirt. Therefore, you need to get rid of such thoughts. Renounce such thoughts. **Don't forget that this moment is a blank, white sheet of paper.** If it is a scribbled-on piece of paper, nothing can be written on it. And even if you do write something in a tiny space on a scribbled-on piece of paper, later on you may not be able to find what you wrote. One can experience a pure mind at this very moment. If the sheet of paper is blank, you can write whatever you want on it. It is impossible to verbalize the well-being of such a moment.

## **17. The greatest experience**

Buddhism is a story about comfort, not about suffering. The message of the Dhamma is about well-being, elation and ecstasy. Buddhism is the story of the cessation of suffering,

which is a genuine experience. The cessation of suffering or the non-existence of suffering is an experience. To make a comparison, the absence of an illness can be called health. Health goes together with well-being and illness goes together with suffering. Just as the end of an illness comes together with well-being, the cessation of suffering is in itself well-being. How can we describe well-being? We cannot talk about it as something absolute. The idea of well-being exists only in relation to illness – when there is no throbbing headache or *toothache*. Similarly, Buddhism refers to well-being in comparison to suffering. **According to the Dhamma, one cannot experience any well-being or comfort greater than the cessation of suffering. It is something that you can experience for yourself.** We always refer to pleasure as something we experience. In our world, we are not aware of any pleasure other than what we experience. We make money, quarrel, go to court, cry and suffer for the sake of experiencing pleasure. Pleasures that we experience never end as pleasure. All pleasures experienced by us end as suffering, which we also experience.

**The cessation of suffering is beyond all the pleasures that we experience.** Such blissfulness cannot be bought with money. A person who experiences such blissfulness is truly rich. In the Four Noble Truths of the Dhamma, the Lord Buddha explains the truth of *Dukkha* (suffering) as something to be clearly and fully comprehended (*Parikkhayam*). The truth of suffering is not something for us to fight against but to learn to comprehend. We need to come to understand this truth like we can come to understand an illness. We need to fully comprehend the suffering we experience. We need to fully comprehend the suffering we create.

## **18. Uprooting the cause**

As suffering is an “effect,” its cause needs to be found and let go of. According to the Dhamma, the second Noble Truth or cause/origin of suffering has to be overcome. There is no point in nourishing the cause of suffering. It has to be uprooted or overcome. The origin of suffering is craving. As I said before, **craving is equal to suffering**. The truth of the origin of suffering is explained as craving, which is divided into three parts: craving for sense pleasures (*kāma-tanhā*), craving for

existence or becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*), and craving for non-existence or self-annihilation (*vibhava-taṇhā*). Craving is everywhere, no matter where we look. We need to overcome this tricky craving.

### **19. Be a worthy witness!**

The next Noble Truth is the truth of the cessation of suffering. You need to be a witness to this Noble Truth. You need to perceive it. We have been a witness to suffering throughout *saṃsāra*. We have lived long enough as a witness to anger, fear, illness, and so on. If somebody were to ask you about the number of illnesses which you have witnessed, the answer could well be many. Nobody can give us a certificate with the number of illnesses that we are going to witness in future written on it. It is impossible to work out how many times we have been witnesses to illnesses throughout *saṃsāra*.

The Lord Buddha says “you have had enough of being a witness to illnesses. Therefore, be a witness to the cessation of suffering. Be a witness to wholesomeness.” It is impossible to be a witness

by reading a book. It is impossible to testify in court by merely reading a book. You can testify only about your own experience, and you can do this only if you have seen or heard some actual evidence yourself. Let's make cessation of suffering a real experience. **To become a witness to the cessation of suffering, one has to take the path leading to the cessation of suffering, which is the Noble Eightfold Path.** I have talked about some factors associated with the Noble Eightfold Path such as effort, mindfulness, right view/understanding and letting go of thoughts.

## **20. The basic message of Buddhism**

It should be clear to you by now that Buddhism is a message or story about wholesomeness or well-being, nothing else. When people ask about the basic message of Buddhism, the following answer is often given:

## Dhammapada Verse 204

*Ārogya paramā lābhā* (Health is the greatest gain)  
*santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanaṃ* (contentment is the greatest wealth)  
*vissāsa paramā ñātī* (a trustworthy person is the best kinsman)  
*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* (*Nibbāna* is the highest bliss)

Health is the utmost gain. Not only a healthy body but also a healthy life. Nobody can acquire a 100% healthy body. **A healthy mind and healthy inner nature is the greatest gain.** Whatever we gain, it is a loss for suffering. **If you experience suffering, there is no gain but loss. There is no gain better than a non-suffering mind or a mind not afflicted by any illness. The greatest wealth is happiness, not gold or silver or diamonds or properties.** The greatest wealth is happiness. Happiness is equivalent to wealth. You need to acquire that wealth. Buddhism tells us to be wealthy by becoming a happy person. The utmost wealth is happiness. **The greatest happiness is *nibbāna*, which is a state where there is no craving.**

At any particular instant, if you feel that you do not need anything for that particular moment, place and activity; and if you feel no anger or hatred, no distress caused by not getting what you asked for and no negative thoughts, such an instant is the happiest you can possibly experience. **If a person can honestly say that s/he is free from all wants and needs at a particular moment, such a moment is the happiest possible moment.** The utmost happiness is there.

*“Yo tassā yeva taṇhāya asesavirāgaṇirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo”*

No matter what kind of craving you are experiencing at a particular time, if possible, let go of it. Don't allow a trace of it to remain due to stinginess or fear. Completely let go of all wants and needs without holding onto or clinging to any of them, without colouring the view or conditioning the mind. Put a full stop to journeying with them. Give back things belonging to others without waiting for the owners to ask. Let go, be free from such needs. Don't be a prisoner of your own needs - you have been a prisoner to them long enough. **Therefore, be free. Just let go of the loveable journey taken with craving.** We have not clung to anything more than craving. We cling to other

things only as much as we cling to craving. Don't cling to craving. **One might have needs but don't cling to them.** If one experiences happiness under such circumstances, that is the greatest happiness.

**Letting go of craving is the utmost happiness. The utmost wealth is happiness. The utmost happiness is the happiness experienced at a moment where nothing is needed.** This is the path of the Dhamma. This is the basic and essential message of the Lord Buddha. This is the path shown to us by the Lord Buddha to whom we pay homage in the morning and evening by offering flowers and lamps while we repeatedly recite His nine special qualities. One can experience a sense of well-being by following this path. Let's follow this path. We have suffered enough. We have lived long enough as poor people. **Be happily rich, let go of craving and happily experience spiritual well-being!**

**May the Triple Gem Bless You!!!**