

Sabbasava Sutta

Exegesis

BASED ON COMMENTARY

(an excerpt from “Mind overcoming its Cankers”)

by

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Discourse On All-Cankers

Thus have I heard:

Once the Blessed One was staying at the monastery of Anathapindika in jeta's Grove near Savatthi. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying 'Monks!' 'Most Venerable Sir,' the monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said: "Monks, I shall now expound to you the method of controlling all cankers. Listen and consider carefully. I shall now enunciate." "Yes, Most Venerable Sir," the monks replied to the Blessed One. And the Blessed One spoke thus:

"Only for him who understands, who comprehends, is there the destruction of cankers, so I say; not for him who does not understand, who does not comprehend. And, monks, understanding what, comprehending what, is there the destruction of cankers, do I say? There is the wise consideration and there is the unwise consideration. Monks, for one who unwisely considers, the unarisen cankers arise, and the unarisen cankers increase; and, monks, for one who wisely considers, the unarisen cankers do not arise and the arisen cankers are overcome."

"Monks, there are cankers to be overcome by Insight.
There are cankers to be overcome by Self-control.
There are cankers to be overcome by Judicious Use.
There are cankers to be overcome by Avoidance.
There are cankers to be overcome by Elimination.
There are cankers to be overcome by Development."

1. Cankers to be overcome by Insight

“And what monks, are the cankers to be overcome by Insight? Here, monks, an uninstructed ordinary person – one who does not pay respect (lit.see) to the noble ones, who is unacquainted with the Teachings of the noble ones, who is uninitiated in the Teachings of the noble ones; one who does not pay respect to the holy ones, who is unacquainted with the teachings of the holy ones, who is uninitiated in the teachings of the holy ones – does not understand things which should be considered, does not understand things which should not be considered. Not understanding things to be considered, not understanding things not to be considered, he considers those things which should not be considered, and does not consider those things which should be considered.

“And what monks, are the things which should not be considered, but which he considers? Monks, things regarding which, while considering, the unarisen canker of sensual desire arises, or the already arisen canker of sensual desire increases; or the unarisen canker of the continuation of becoming arises, or the arisen canker of the continuation of becoming increases; or the unarisen canker of ignorance arises, or the arisen canker of ignorance increases – these are the things which should not be considered, but he considers.”

“And what monks, are the things which should be considered, but which he does not consider? Monks, things regarding which, while considering, the unarisen canker of sensual desire does not arise, or the arisen canker of sensual desire is overcome; or the unarisen canker of the continuation of becoming does not arise, or the arisen canker of the continuation of becoming is overcome;

or the unarisen canker of ignorance does not arise, or the arisen canker of ignorance is overcome. These are the things that should be considered which he does not consider.

“By considering things which should not be considered, and by not considering things which should be considered, his unarisen cankers arise and the unarisen cankers increase.

“Thus he unwisely considers: - ‘Was I in the past? Or was I not in the past? Or what was I in the past? Or how was I in the past? Or what having been, what then was I in the past? Will I be in the future? Or will I not be in the future? Or what will I be in the future? Or how will I be in the future?’ He also becomes inwardly perplexed with reference to the present, thinking: ‘Indeed am I? Or am I not? Or what am I? Or how am I? Or whence has this ‘being’ come? Or where will it be going?’

“While unwisely considering thus, any one of these six wrong views arises in him: ‘There is self in me’, this wrong view arises in him as being true and real; or ‘There is no self in me’, this wrong view arises in him as being true and real; or ‘By myself alone do I know the self’, this wrong view arises in him as being true and real; or ‘By my non-self alone do I know the self’ this wrong view arises in him as being true and real; or again, the wrong view arises in him thus: ‘Whatever this self is in me, that speaks, that feels, that experiences, now here, now there, the result of the good and evil deeds, indeed, it is this self in me that is permanent, stable, eternal, beyond the scope of changefulness, and that will last as eternity itself.’

“Monks, this is called the hold of wrong views, the thicket of wrong views, the wilderness of wrong views, the wriggling of wrong views, the writhing of wrong views and the fetter of wrong views. Monks, fettered by the fetter of wrong views, the uninstructed ordinary person is not freed from birth, from ageing, from death, from sorrowing, from lamenting, from pain, from depression, from despair; indeed, he is not freed from suffering, so I declare.

“But, monks, the well-instructed noble disciple – one who pays respect to the noble ones, who is fully conversant with the teachings of the noble ones, who is an adept in the teachings of the noble ones, one who pays respect to the holy ones, who is fully conversant with the teachings of the holy ones, who is an adept in the teachings of the holy ones, - understands things which should be considered, understands things which should not be considered. Understanding things which should be considered and understanding things which should not be considered, he does not consider those things which should not be considered, and considers those things which should be considered.

“And what monks, are the things that should not be considered which he does not consider? Monks, things regarding which, while considering, the unarisen canker of sensual desire arises, or the already arisen canker of sensual desire increases; or the unarisen canker of the continuation of becoming arises, or the arisen canker of the continuation of becoming increases; or the unarisen canker of ignorance arises, or the arisen canker of ignorance increases – these are the things that should not be considered, which he does not consider.

“And what, monks, are the things which should be considered, and which he considers? Monks, things regarding which, while considering, the unarisen canker of sensual desire does not arise or the arisen canker of sensual desire is overcome; or the unarisen canker of the continuation of becoming does not arise, or the arisen canker of the continuation of becoming is overcome; or the unarisen canker of ignorance does not arise, or the arisen canker of ignorance is overcome; - these are the things which should be considered, and which he considers.

“by not considering things which should not be considered, and by considering things which should be considered, his unarisen cankers do not arise and the arisen cankers are overcome.

“This is suffering”, so he wisely considers. ‘This is the cause of suffering’, so he wisely considers. ‘This is the cessation of suffering’ so he wisely considers. ‘This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering,’ so he wisely considers. While thus wisely considering, his three fetters are overcome, viz. self-illusion, doubt, clinging to rules and rituals. Monks, these are called the cankers to be overcome by (supramundane) insight.”

2. Overcoming cankers by self-control

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by self control? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the sense organ of the eye. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control over the sense-organ of the eye, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the

sense-organ of the eye, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming.

“Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the ear. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control over the sense-organ of the ear, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the ear, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming.

“Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the nose. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control over the sense-organ of the nose, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the nose, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming,

“Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the tongue. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control over the sense-organ of the tongue, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the sense-organ of the tongue, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming.

“Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the sense organ of the body. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control over the sense-organ of the body, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the

sense-organ of the body, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming.

“Monks, here, wisely reflecting, lives self-controlled, by having control over the mental-organ of the mind. Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having self-control over the mental-organ of the mind, now, by living self-controlled, by having control over the mental-organ of the mind, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by living uncontrolled, by not having control (over the sense and mind), now, by living self-controlled, by having control (over the sense and mind), these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks, these are called the cankers to be overcome by self-control.”

3. Cankers to be overcome by judicious use

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by judicious use? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, uses the robe simply for warding off cold, warding off heat, warding off gadfly, mosquito, wind, sun-burn and the contact of creeping creatures, and only for the sake of covering nakedness.

“Wisely reflecting, he uses the alms-food, not for fun, not for indulgence, nor for show, not for good looks, but only for the sake of supporting and sustaining this body, for keeping it out of harm, and for upholding the holy life, thinking: ‘In this way do I get rid of the already existing feeling (of hunger), and will not allow the

arising of a new feeling (of hunger), and will not allow the arising of a new feeling of pain (through over-eating), so that it will conduce to my longevity and (a life of) blamelessness and comfort.

“Wisely reflecting, he uses the dwelling simply for warding off cold, warding off heat, warding off gadfly, mosquito, wind, sun-burn and the contact of creeping creatures, and only for the sake of dispelling the discomforts of the seasons as well as to delight in seclusion.

“Wisely reflecting, he uses the requisite of medicaments for health care, only for the sake of warding off uncomfortable feelings that have arisen, and for the maximum well-being.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise through injudicious use, now, by making such judicious use, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks, these are called the cankers to be overcome by judicious use.”

4. Cankers to be overcome by endurance

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by endurance? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, is an endurer of cold, heat, hunger and thirst. He is one who endures gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun-burn and the contact of creeping creatures, and such modes of speech that are harsh and unpleasant, and such bodily feelings, which arising, are painful, shooting, cutting, sharp, excruciating, miserable and life-threatening.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise through non-endurance, now, by such endurance, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks. These are called the cankers to be overcome by endurance.”

5. Cankers to be overcome by avoidance

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by avoidance? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, avoids a fierce elephant, horse or bull, a ferocious dog, a snake, a tree stump, a thorny brake, a deep hole, a precipice, a cesspool, a garbage pit. Wisely reflecting, he avoids sitting in such unbecoming seats, or resorting to such unbecoming resorts, or associating with such depraved friends, because of which his wise fellow-monks in the holy life would suspect him of depraved conduct.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise through non-avoidance, now, by such avoidance, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks. These are called the cankers to be overcome by avoidance.”

6. Cankers to be overcome by elimination

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by elimination? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality; he gets rid of it, makes an end of it, and liquidates it. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill-will; he gets rid of it, eliminates it, makes an end of it, and liquidates it. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of cruelty; he gets rid of it,

eliminates it, makes an end of it, and liquidates it. He does not tolerate any evil and unwholesome mental conditions; whenever they may arise, he gets rid of them, eliminates them, makes an end of them and liquidates them.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise by non-elimination, now, by such elimination, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks, these are called the cankers to be overcome by elimination.”

7. Cankers to be overcome by development

“Monks, what are the cankers to be overcome by development? Monks, here a monk, wisely reflecting, develops the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness, which is supported by detachment, dispassion and cessation, and which culminates in renunciation; wisely reflecting, he develops the enlightenment-factor of the investigation of truth, which is supported by detachment, dispassion and cessation, and which culminates in renunciation; wisely reflecting, he develops the enlightenment-factor of effort, which is supported by detachment, dispassion and cessation and which culminates in renunciation; wisely reflecting, he develops the enlightenment-factor of rapture, which is supported by detachment, dispassion and cessation, and which culminates in renunciation; wisely reflecting, he develops the enlightenment-factor of tranquility, which is supported by detachment, dispassion and cessation and which culminates in renunciation; wisely reflecting, he develops the enlightenment-factor of meditative concentration, which is supported by

detachment, dispassion and cessation, and which culminates in renunciation.

“Monks, whatever destructive and consuming cankers might arise due to non-development, now, by such development, these cankers do not become destructive and consuming. Monks, these are called the cankers to be overcome by development.”

*“In factors leading to Enlightenment
Whose minds have reached
The fullest excellence;
Who only delight in
Renouncing possessiveness and
In not clinging to things;
Having got rid of cankers
And glowing with wisdom
They have attained Nibbana in this very life.”*

-Dhammapada, 89

Exegesis

BASED ON COMENTARY

The Sabbasava Sutta was enunciated by the Buddha at Savatthi, while staying at Jeta's Grove in the monastery built by Anathapindika. While commenting on the circumstances in which the Sutta was enunciated, Acariya Buddhaghosa makes some very interesting observations. His remarks often tend to be quite extensive and are interesting in their own way in the context. For the purpose of this treatise, however, we shall stick only to certain pertinent points. For instance, commenting on the city of Savatthi, he says that (the name) Savatthi is so coined because it is a city which has everything in it – *sabbani atthi iti Savatthi* – 'Everything is found here' – hence the appellation "All found" (Savatthi). Similarly, remarking about Jeta and Anathapindika, he questions, "Why should their names appear in the body of the Sutta as if they need to be formally eulogised"? He answers it himself, saying that it is for the benefit of posterity: *punnakamanam ditthanugati apajjanatthaya* – 'to inspire and to provide a "living example" to those who seek to perform acts of merit in times to come.'

Why did the Buddha give this discourse, saying: "Monks, I shall now expound to you the method of controlling of all cankers"? In order to effect the total destruction of cankers in those monks, by cleansing their minds of the slightest of impurities and establishing them on the path leading to the total destruction of cankers. Here, "the method of controlling all cankers" means the technique which, by itself, acts to control and gets rid of all cankers. That is to say, the means by which the cankers are cleared and put away in a manner that they are destroyed abandoned and never recur, as

implied by the terms such as extinguished, irreversible etc. What is indicated by a 'method of controlling' is an effective practical device.

“Here, canker (*asava*) means whatever flows out. As it is said, it discharges, it oozes from the sense faculties; that is to say eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind. In terms of internal phenomena, i.e. states of consciousness, it flows until it reaches the threshold state of the supramundane path insight – the state of *gotrabu*. And in terms of external phenomena, i.e. the various planes of existence, it flows to the very end of the cosmos. Therefore it is called “canker”. The meaning is that it exudes all-inclusively by bringing these mental states, as well as these external cosmic dimensions, within its gamut. Thus, it is characterised by the quality of permeating everything.

“Alternatively, it is canker in the sense of something that has been fermenting for long, like liquor and such other spirits. Thus, because it is like a fermented stuff, it is ‘canker.’ In the world, fermented products such as vintage wine are considered alcoholic. In the same way, what is a long process of mental fermentation is a canker. It is in this context that the Buddha said: ‘Monks, the first beginning of ignorance is inconceivable. No one can say that before this there was no ignorance.’ (AN. X,61).

“Again, whatever extends or prolongs is also canker, in that it perpetuates the process of suffering in phenomenal existence. Of these definitions of canker, the first one stands for *asava* as defilement, the second for *asava* as *kamma*. Not only does canker connote defilement and *kamma*, but it also means varieties of distress or misfortune as implied by the last definition.

“In the discourses, the reference ‘Cunda, I don’t teach the Dhamma only for the riddance of cankers pertaining to the life here and now’ (D. III,

130) – implying something as the very root-cause of involvements or conflicts, stands for the cankers as defilements (*kilesa*).”

Or the reference:

‘Those whereby one is born among the gods,
Or as a gandhabba or as a bird,
Or whereby one goes to the realm of the yakkhas,
Or one finds a birth amidst human beings,
Those cankers they are demolished and annihilated.’

(AN. IV, 36)

“Here, *kamma* pertaining to the three realms of existence, as well as the unwholesome factors following thereof, are implied/

“Again the reference: ‘for the purpose of ridding the cankers pertaining to life here and now and for the purpose of warding off the cankers pertaining to life hereafter’ (Vin. III, 21) here, the various forms of misfortune, such as false accusations by others, or being guilty of crimes like murder, assault etc., or the innumerable oppressive forms of suffering as experienced in the various woe-ridden, fallen states of existence – these stand for *asava* as ‘misfortune.’ Whatever is the connotation of ‘canker,’ what is meant in a given context has to be identified and understood in the proper perspective.

“With regard to the various classifications of cankers, the text as found in the Vinaya, ‘for the purpose of ridding the cankers pertaining to life here and now, and for the purpose of warding off cankers pertaining to life hereafter’ implies *asavas* of two distinct types.

“Similarly, the text as found in the *Salayatana Vagga*, ‘there are these three types of cankers, bhikkhus: the canker of sensual desire, the canker of desire for the continuity of existence and the canker of ignorance’ (S. IV. 256) – implies three types.

“In several other suttas (discourses) as well as in the *Abhidhamma*, these three cankers, together with the canker of wrong view (*ditthi*), constitute a four-fold classification.

“The text, as found in the *Nibbedha-pariyaya Sutta* (The Penetration Methodology), mentions this five-fold classification: ‘Monks, there are cankers which lead to the animal kingdom, there are cankers which lead one to the realm of ghosts, there are cankers which lead one to the world of human beings and there are cankers which lead one to the divine sphere.’ (AN. VI, 63).

“The text, as found in the *chakka Nipata* (*Anguttara Nikaya*): ‘Monks, there are cankers to be overcome through self-restraint’ and so on, provides a six-fold classification of *asavas*’ (AN. VI, 58).

“In this sutta, these six coupled with ‘cankers to be overcome through insight’, form a seven-fold classification. Thus are presented the definitions as well as the classifications of the term *asava*, canker.”

“Now, with regards to the term ‘control’, it means to get rid of cankers, that is to say, to overcome, to ward off and not allow them to arise. As it is said in these texts: ‘I enjoin upon you monks to close the door of your rooms when you retire there to take rest’ (Vin, III, 39), and, ‘restraining currents of craving, do I exhort, with wisdom are they quelled.’ (Sn. Stz. 1041). In both of these text, the term control is used in the sense of overcoming. This control by virtue, by mindfulness, by wisdom, by patience and

by effort. There ‘he bides by the code of monastic conduct’ (Vibh, 246) implies control by virtue, for the monastic code of conduct as virtue is one form of control.

“Similarly ‘one living self-controlled by having control by mindfulness is meant. In other words mindfulness itself is a mode of control.”

“Again,
‘Restraining, do I exhort,
The currents of craving,
With wisdom alone
Are the quelled.’ (Sn. 1041).

“This refers to control by wisdom. Since wisdom controls in the sense of quelling the currents, it has been referred to as a mode of control.

“Again, ‘he is one who bears cold, heat, hunger and thirst.’ Etc., and ‘he does not endure an arisen thought of sensuality, he gets rid of it,’ (MN.2) etc. Imply control by endurance and by effort respectively. All these five modes of control are indicated by the phrase “The method of control of all cankers’. So is to be understood.

“Of the five modes of control incorporated in the *Sabbasava Sutta*, control by endurance and by effect have been already mentioned. Where it is said, ‘wisely reflecting he avoids sitting in such unseemly seats, or resorting to such unseemly resorts’ etc., there it refers to control by the monastic code of conduct. And, ‘wisely reflecting, he lives self-controlled by having control by mindfulness. Wherever the expression ‘wisely reflecting’ occurs, it stands for control by wisdom and by this token the three

methods, that is, overcoming by insight, by judicious use and by development, also stand for control by wisdom.”

It is to be noted here that the seven methods of overcoming cankers, namely, by insight (into the Four Noble Truths), by self control, by judicious use (of the essential needs like food etc.), by endurance, by avoidance (of wrong company, place etc.), by elimination (of wrong thoughts) and by development of the Sabbasava Sutta), are anticipated by the five types of control already mentioned: that is to say, control by virtue, by wisdom, by mindfulness, by endurance and by effort. But these five modes of control cannot be really effective unless they are rooted in wise consideration. Wise consideration, therefore, constitutes the actual core and the operative tool of the entire technique.

That is why the emphasis is laid by the Buddha on the person “who understands, who comprehends” and not “who does not understand, who does not comprehend.” However, virtuous and devout a person may be, however self-controlled and abstemious, unless he or she has insights into the working of the mind and into the basically conditioned nature of things, he or she just cannot uproot the cankers because they are so tenacious, subtle and insidious.

It is also to be borne clearly in mind that the term ‘method’ does not mean system, in the sense of a convenient arrangement conventionally evolved, nor is it a stratagem, a mere expedient to achieve a certain result. It is not a scheme for work, but a working psychological tool, a dynamic state of consciousness.

These two are important points, namely, that ‘methos’ refers to the modes of control themselves, and that ‘method’ is not a static

system or plan, but a dynamic operative principle. It is a mental reality, which, by virtue of its dynamism, is in flux- arises and passes away like any other phenomenon. These points have been made explicit by the commentator in the following passage, lest this unique and eminently practical technique is sought to be rendered into a mere theory by lesser minds.

“And by the term ‘method’, these five types of control are signified, which, like all phenomena, are also subject to arising and passing away. Therefore, it is to be understood that ‘method’ implies a dynamic inner state. Thus far, whatever has to be made explicit concerning the phrase, ‘the method of control of all cankers’ has now been made.

“With reference to ‘only for him who understands, who comprehends, is there the destruction of cankers, so I say,’ the terms ‘understands’ and ‘comprehends’ are synonyms. They mean the same thing though in different words. However, specifically, i.e., in this context, ‘one who understands’ means ‘one who is able to rouse wise consideration’. And ‘one who comprehends’ means ‘one who comprehends in such a manner that unwise consideration may not arise.’ Wise consideration is thus the underlying purpose.’

With reference to the destruction of cankers, the commentary says that it is only the attainment of the supramundane path and fruition insights as well as the transcendental dimension of Nibbana, which is an occasion of destruction in the sense of the asavas being uprooted once and for all. This means that only the first and the last of the seven methods, comprising the destruction of the cankers.

Why then are the five remaining methods enunciated, when they cannot uproot the cankers? Destruction of cankers, in this specific sense, implies two distinct accomplishments:

- (i) An “uprooting”, which annihilates the cankers, so that they never arise again.
- (ii) An “overcoming”, which puts down the cankers and thereby restores mental harmony and purity, here and now, and makes way for the future uprooting, if and when cankers arise. By overcoming the cankers repeatedly, they become weakened, not fed, and made to atrophy and die of attrition.

Through overcoming by insight and by development in the sense of being uprooted.

Through the remaining five methods, namely, overcoming by self-control, judicious use, endurance, avoidance and elimination, the cankers are destroyed in the sense of overcoming, thus making way for uprooting ultimately. In technical terms, while the first two methods accomplish overcoming (*pahana*) by way of uprooting (*samuccheda*), the remaining five methods accomplish it by way of (replacement, *tadanga* by a positive alternative) and (calming down) *vikkhambhana*.

The Buddha’s teachings of universal flux or changefulness, ultimately boil down to the psychological reality of momentariness. Consciousness is a psychological unit, and it is basically momentary, consisting of three distinct stages – arising (*uppada*), continuity (*thiti*), passing away (*bhanga*). In the backdrop of momentariness, an act of overcoming (*pahana*) in whatever form amounts to destruction that is, the non-

reappearance of the same phenomenon. There is no such thing as identity; nothing is the same, though there is similarity. Whatever passes away or breaks down cannot reappear, though a similar condition may appear, not once, but indefinitely *until the cause is uprooted*.

The aforesaid seven methods thus constitute a total approach to an all-pervading problem.

The two operative terms on which not only this seven-fold method but the entire theme of the *Sabbasava Sutta* depends, are *yoniso* and *ayoniso manasikara* – wise and unwise consideration.

Only when one resorts to wise consideration, that is to say, one views everything according to reality, and not as it appears, can one possibly apply any of these techniques to get rid of a canker. In fact, the cankers arise essentially because the attention is focused wrongly and unwisely, conditioning thereby a whole range of warped and unwholesome mental activities, leading to ‘the arising of non-arisen cankers, and the stabilization of arisen cankers’. This then is the rationale, wholly objective and result-oriented, of wise consideration. This is how Acariya Buddhaghosa comments on these two crucial mental operations.

“There, ‘wise consideration’ means right thinking and attention according to reality. When a thing is impermanent and so on, one considers it as impermanent and so on; this turning of the mind to the actuality of things, the repeated dwelling thereon and the thinking in keeping therewith, - this is called the ‘wise consideration’.

“On the other hand ‘unwise consideration’, is considering in a lop-sided manner, in a basically wrong way. When a thing is impermanent, one considers it to be permanent; when a thing really means affliction, one considers it to be happiness; when a thing is unsubstantial, one considers it to be substantial; when a thing is repulsive, one considers it to be attractive. This kind of wrong consideration or perverted viewing, that is to say, that turning of the mind in contravention of actuality, the repeated dwelling thereon, inclining the mind thereto, the focusing of attention thereon, and thinking to controvert actuality – this is unwise consideration.

“When one understands how wise consideration arises, and one comprehends how unwise consideration does not arise, then does the destruction of cankers occur.

“Now, in order to show the fitness of the rationale, the Buddha has enunciated: “Monks, for one who unwisely considers, the unarisen cankers arise, and the already arisen cankers increase and monks, for one who wisely considers, the unarisen cankers do not arise and the arisen cankers are overcome.’

“What exactly is meant by this? Cankers arise because one attends to an object in a distorted or wrong way and similarly they are overcome when one attends to an object in a right way. Therefore, one who attends, i.e. is able to consider wisely, is one ‘who understands’ and likewise, one who attends in a way that unwise consideration does not arise is one ‘who comprehends’. Briefly, this is what is meant.

“The detailed explanation is as follows: obviously the entire discourse is based on two premises denoted by the terms ‘inwise’

and ‘wise;’ in other words, it has been enunciated by way of the round of repeated rebirths, and by way of cessation of the round. The round of phenomenal existence, or repeated birth, death and rebirth, is rooted in unwise consideration and the cessation of the round is rooted in wise consideration. How? Unwise consideration, when indulged in, produces ignorance and craving for becoming; and when ignorance arises then ‘conditioned by ignorance kamma-formations arise, conditioned by kamma-formations rebirth-consciousness arise’ and so on. ‘Thus, there comes about the genesis of the whole mass of suffering.’ Similarly, when craving occurs, then ‘conditioned by craving, clinging arises’ etc., and there comes about the genesis of the whole mass of suffering.’ (i.e., the law of Dependent origination).

“Just as a ship is broken, tormented by the fierce smashing of a hurricane, or just as a flock of cattle, while crossing the river, is caught in a whirlpool, or just as oxen tied to the yoke of an oil-mill endlessly circling, even so, a person, given much to unwise consideration, is tied down to and thoroughly enmeshed in the various phenomenal states of existence. He is born, now here, now there, in a certain plane or destiny of a living being, which means that his consciousness is established therein. Thus the round of repeated existence is rooted in unwise consideration.

“Contrarily, when wise consideration is cultivated, one develops the Noble Eightfold Path, spearheaded by Right Understanding, as indicated by the words of the Blessed One ‘monks, for a monk who is endowed with wise consideration, this is to be expected, namely, he will develop the Noble Eightfold Path, he will repeatedly practise the Noble Eightfold Path.’ Right Understanding here is the penetrating intuitive wisdom or insight. With the flash of this insight, there comes about the extinction of

ignorance. “With the extinction of ignorance, there comes about the extinction of kamma-formations etc.; thus there comes about the extinction,, without a remainder, of this whole mass of suffering.’ (i.e., the Law of Dependent Origination, in reverse as the mode of cessation). Thus the cessation of the round is to be understood as rooted in wise consideration. Therefore, the entire *Sabbasava Sutta* is founded on these two premises, denoted by unwise and wise consideration.”

It is to be noted here that the above text mentions unwise consideration first, followed by wise consideration. The underlying idea is that the former brings about origination while the latter brings about the cessation. As the theme is control, signifying cessation, naturally what originates is mentioned first, and, not vice versa.

The commentator makes a very pertinent and insightful observation with reference to how the *asavas* arise. He says that in this round of aimless wandering, repeated birth, death and rebirth, the starting point of which is inconceivable, there is no such thing as the first beginning of cankers. All the cankers, in all their myriad ramifications, and in all the varied shades of their pervasiveness, have found berth in a being, somewhere, sometime, repeatedly, in many lives.

So when it is said that an unarisen canker arises, it only means that in the stream of consciousness, characterised by universal flux, a canker arises dependent upon a concatenation of conditions, in a purely empirical sense. By the absence of certain conditions, i.e. unwise consideration of a particular nature, a certain canker of a given degree of intensity does not occur.

Conversely, by the presence of those very conditions, the canker arises. So it is all a question of conditionality, the occurrence in a given relation of certain conditions, leading to the presence or absence of cankers.

It is only when the canker is ‘burnt out’, so to say, by exposure to intuitive insight, that it ceases one and for all, never to recur, in the same way as a seed, when boiled or burnt, can never sprout again. The Seed signifies continuity by its inherent power of reproduction. So has a canker. The analogy of “one whose seed of birth is destroyed” (*kina-bija*) is just what is meant by the Buddhist concept of the *summum bonum* – Nibbana – which literally means the “blowing out” of mundane consciousness. This happens when the cankers are totally burnt out (*anasava*).

Where it said, “an unarisen canker does not arise”, it refers to an ever-present flow of wise consideration, as it has been, for instance, in the case of Thera Mhaha Kassapa, as well as Theri Maha Kapilani, who were husband and wife in their lay life. It is said that they were reborn as human beings from the exalted state of the radiant Brahma gods. Therefore, from their very childhood, they were exceedingly pure in their thought and conduct. Not even in a dream, not even once, did they experience a thought of sensual desire. That is how, though they were compelled to marry because of the social obligations of the two very well-to-do and aristocratic families, the moment they met, they immediately entered into a pact on living life of celibacy.

Spiritual purity was a natural bent, a predisposition with them. They just could not be otherwise. Accordingly, on the death of their parents, they distributed all the immense wealth they inherited, became a monk and nun in the dispensation of the

Buddha, and attained to the highest state of sainthood. On gaining the supramundane path and fruition-insights (*lokuttara magga and phala*), when their dormant cankers had been totally destroyed, even this possibility of the non-arisen of hitherto 'non-arisen canker,' ceased.

On the other hand, there is the case of a monk, Maha Tissabhuta Thera by name, a resident of Mandalarama monastery. It seems that, motivated by a tremendous spiritual urge, he had entered the Holy Order and was living an exemplary life of spirituality. Once, on his alms-round, he was confronted with the sight of a female that momentarily disturbed the purity of his mind, affecting it by sensual thought. However, he quickly put down the wrong thought. But he was overcome by a sense of remorse that he had become a victim of sensual thought, despite all his sincere and energetic spiritual applications, just because of a momentary lapse in the tempo of mindfulness.

So deeply was he moved at what could have been the painful consequence of a thought if it were allowed to grow, that he forthwith made a vow of uprooting the canker of sensual desire once and for all.

He told himself, "this canker, which had not made its appearance before, has now showed itself: if it allowed to arise again and again, it will develop and ultimately overpower the mind in such a way that will culminate in my being reborn in the sub-human plane of animals, ghosts etc. This means an endless wandering and a painful involvement in *samsara* (phenomenal existence)."

Thus, seized with a sense of urgency, he plunged himself in meditation as soon as he reached the monastery, and it is said that he soon developed the supramundane insights and became a saint. Thus he exemplifies the master's teaching: "the arisen canker is destroyed."

What is the criterion whereby one could determine whether a given object or a theme is worthy to be considered or not? Since it is entirely a subjective process, a consideration becomes wise or unwise depending entirely on one's degree of understanding reality. That is to say, one's degree of understanding and comprehending truth in a given set of conditions. Here, it all depends on the individual's discernment, based on his mental perspicuity vis-a-vis the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self or the unsubstantiality underlying all material and mental phenomena.

For a mind properly oriented towards the Dhamma, even a wrong thought or mental object or a wrong conduct, that is, a momentary lapse into something that is unwholesome, can become an incentive for further spiritual edification, as we have seen in the case of Maha Tissabhuta Thera. Contrarily, a man who does a lot of good, now deliberates wrongly on his good thought or conduct, and thus lapses into a state of self-righteousness and self-deception. Just as in the previous case an unwholesome mental object (*arammana*), through wise consideration, conduces to wholesome states, so also in the latter case, an *akusala arammana*, instead of leading one to further *kusala*, only conduces to unwholesome states, because of unwise consideration. What matters, then, is how one considers a given object or theme.

Therefore the commentator rightly says: “whether these things are worthy of consideration or not, there is no definite criterion in terms of their intrinsic quality, though there is in terms of how they are considered.”

With reference to the three types of cankers the commentary says: “Here the canker of sense-desire means lust or sensuality based on fivefold objects of sense pleasures. The canker of becoming means that form of desire which hankers after rebirth in the divine realms of the Brahmas (high divities) with subtle forma and beings who are formless. It also means those self-deceptive mystic deviations or wishes (*nikanti*) associated with the attainment of the *jhanas* (meditative absorptions), in that one induces *jhana* only to enjoy it, as well as those perverted ideological views and dogmas known as the eternalistic belief and annihilistic belief. Thus a fourth canker, that of wrong view, is included here under the canker of becoming. The canker of ignorance means nescience or incomprehension, with reference to the Four Noble Truths.

“There, when one considers in a way that one enjoys the pleasures of the senses, then the unarisen canker of sensual desire arises, and the arisen canker grows. When one considers in a way that one enjoys the sublime or divine states, then the unarisen canker of becoming arises and the arisen canker grows. When one considers all the things pertaining to the three realms of existence on the basis of the fourfold mental distortions (*vipallasa*) the impermanent to be permanent etc., then the unarisen canker of ignorance arises, and the arisen canker grows. Thus should the arisen of the cankers be understood. Likewise, the converse also is true, that the threefold *asavas* do not arise by wise consideration.”

Basically, a canker is a dormant unwholesome tendency or inclination which is an inborn disposition. These tendencies in the mind, continuing since time immemorial, constitute the ingredients of this canker.

A psychological 'seed', with the presence of congenial conditions, sprouts in the form of thoughts, and become stabilized as certain views and adherences. These adherences, in time, get crystallized into dogmas or mental fixations. This mental process, from that of a dormant tendency, *anusaya*, to that of an unshakable dogma, *ditthi*, is expressed by a very meaningful Pali term, *abhinivesa*: adherence.

Since *abhinivesa* lays the track of this endless becoming, it is called the 'very stuff' of *samsara*, the vicious circle (*vatta*) of mundane existence, of birth, death and rebirth. If the mundane is characterized by *kammic* activities rooted in *abhinivesa* or in *anusaya*, the transcendent (*vivatta*), the dimension of the freedom of Nibbana, is characterized by the very absence of *abhinivesa* and *anusaya*.

The supramundane insights, with Nibbana as object, are thus states of consciousness that systematically uproot and demolish the *abhinivesa* and *anusaya*. *Samasara* can be compared to a stagnant pool, with rotting mire at the bottom which, due to chemical action, constantly sends forth gaseous bubbles to the surface. The mind at the mundane level, with the *asava* as *abhinivesa*, is very much like such a stagnant rotting pool.

A river with crystal clear water and a swift current never allows any deposit. Its bed is constantly swept clean. The supramundane stream of consciousness performs an analogous function.

Abhinivesas cannot find a foothold in the dynamic, penetrating insight-stream of the supramundane. And it is for the same reason that no concept, theory or dogma can have any relevance at the supramundane level.

Therefore to cultivate the supramundane, one has to cultivate a rigorous discipline of clear comprehension based on the intuitive penetrative approach, otherwise called “insight meditation.” *vipassana*. The Four Noble Truths constitute the field of *vipassana*, not as intellectual base, but as an intuitive experience.

It must be emphasised that the Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha discovered and made known out of compassion, constitute essentially a meditative experience. They are never considered a theory, much less a dogma or scriptural commandment. It is here that Buddhism radically departs from the usual religious stand, in that it bases its main premise on personal experience of the Four Noble Truths, as distinct from divine grace or salvation attained through the intervention of others, whether a God, Teacher, messiah, Prophet etc.

The first of the seven methods, namely, overcoming through insight, consists of the following:

“This is suffering,’ so he wisely considers; ‘this is the cause of suffering,’ so he wisely considers; ‘this is the cessation of suffering,’ so he wisely considers; ‘this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering,’ so he wisely considers. While thus wisely considering, his three fetters are overcome, viz., self-illusion, doubt and clinging to rules and rituals.

“These, monks, are called the cankers to be overcome through (supramundane) insight.”

To be successful in developing the supramundane insight, the mind requires to be appropriately oriented. For there is no such thing as ‘sudden enlightenment’ or sudden access unto the supramundane. The orientation refers to certain basics connected with *vipassana* meditation. These are:

1. *Sila-visuddhi* – Purification of morality. This means value orientation, therewith disciplining one’s mind and conduct, leading to purification of one’s actions, *kamma*, in deed (*kayena*), word (*vacaya*) and thought (*manasa*). It is *kamma* that involves one in the vicious circle of phenomenal existence, *samsara*. Therefore it is the cleansing of *kamma*, that forms the first step towards the achievement of spiritual excellence.

2. *Citta-visuddhi* – Purification of mind. This means development of *jhanas* (absorptions), which is possible only by overcoming the five mental barriers or hindrances (*nivarana*). These mental barriers are like the high walls which keep one incarcerated within the *kamaloka*, the world of sense-desires. As soon as these barriers are overcome, one enters into an entirely new sublime realm, the various stages of ecstatic absorption (*jhana*) of the divine realm of subtle form (*rupa-brahma-loka*). This is a multidimensional realm of the high *Brahma* gods whose consciousness corresponds to the various stages of *jhana*, attainable through *citta-visuddhi*. One who develops the *jhanic* states, and retains this supernormal attainment, is reborn in the realm of the *rupavacara* *Brahma* gods.

Before one reaches the *rupavacara* (sphere of subtle form) states of *jhanas* or *samadhis*, one has to pass through several stages of mental purification of mind. It starts as one begins to meditate. The object on which one initially applies one's mind in meditation is known as *parikamma-nimitta*, initial mental image. The mental onepointedness and composure resulting from this application on the initial object is known as *parikamma-samadhi* – initial concentration.

With increased internalization and mental integration, as unwholesome thoughts and distracting mental images are removed, the mind becomes more and more purified and settled. At this stage, the initial image automatically changes into a pure mentalized image, *uggaha-nimitta*.

For instance, if one is practising the meditation known as *anapanasati*, mindfulness of breathing, the initial object is the breath as tactile sensation. It is a purely sensory object. When this initial object changes into a mentalized one, it is no longer a sensation but the awareness of the sensation which means of a mental object, one step removed from the original.

With the attainment of the mentalized object, the concentration also grows in strength and intensity. This brings greater calmness and inward stillness leading to a further change of the object, and therewith in the level of consciousness. This final change is known as *patibhaga-nimitta*, reflex image, which appears in various forms, such as, orb of the sun, bright full moon, twinkling stars, cluster of gems, or just light etc.

The *patibhaga-nimitta*, thus ushers in the second stage of *samadhi*, known as *upacara-samadhi* – threshold concentration.

From this stage onwards, the five factors of *jhana* are cultivated, leading to *appana-samadhi*, ecstatic meditative absorption. There are five stages of *appana-samadhi*, corresponding to the five *rupavacara* states of consciousness.

There are two distinct systems of meditation in Buddhism. One leads to the ecstatic absorptions and supernormal powers. The other leads to the attainment of the supramundane insights, with or without supernormal powers. The former is known as *samatha* – tranquillity meditation – and the latter as *vipassana*, insight meditation.

Samatha literally means ‘calmness,’ With the attainment of the *jhanas*, the mind acquires profound tranquillity in which the cankers subside or go underground, that is, become dormant. It is like a disturbed and turbid pool becoming calm and clear. All the impurities subside and settle down in the form of sediment. Though the water becomes clear and cool, yet when the pool is whipped up by a storm or disturbed otherwise, the water turns turbid again.

In the same way, though the mind becomes tranquil and pure by means of *samatha* meditation, yet, since the cankers have not been uprooted by supramundane insights, it can become disturbed and revert into unwholesome states. It is only cultivating the supramundane insights through *vipassana* meditation the cankers are uprooted once and for all, and the consciousness transformed. It is like removing the sediments so as to preclude the possibility of the pool turning turbid again.

To recapitulate, *sila-visuddhi*, the first of the basics, purifies the mind as the ethical level. And *citta-visuddhi* purifies the mind

in its entirety, short of transforming it. Transformation occurs only at the supramundane level through the purification of insight (*nana-visuddhi*).

The third of the basics starts with the purification of understanding (*ditthi-visuddhi*). This implies right understanding born of the direct experience of the Four Noble Truths; in twelve modes as enunciated by the Buddha in his first discourse, known as Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth – *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

To purify understanding through *vipassana*, one has to determine things from the standpoint of ultimate truth, as they really are, and not as they appear to be. That is to say, one views life and everything connected therewith, not in the conventional way, but in its fundamentals.

Vipassana means direct knowledge i.e. knowing in the sense of experiencing. This is different from indirect knowledge i.e., knowing with the aid of concepts, words, symbols, language etc., without actually experiencing the object which one purports to know. While the former is intuitive, the latter is intellectual.

Intellectual or indirect knowledge essentially is information and data, while intuitive or direct knowledge means formation of character and wisdom. With the arising of intuitive insight (*vipassana*), one directly knows the object, and not about the object; there is a ‘flash’ which illuminates the consciousness, and one actually experiences and penetrates into the object.

Thus, when life is viewed as an object through *vipassana*, it is seen (experienced) as *namarupa* – mind and body, not as man, woman, Indian, Chinese, white man, black man etc.

This psychophysical combination is again experienced or seen in terms of certain aggregations known as *khandhas*. These are: *rupa-khandha*, the aggregate of corporeality; *vedana-khandha*, the aggregate of feelings; *sanna-khandha*, the aggregate of perceptions; *sankhara-khandha*, the aggregate of mental formations; *vinnana-khandha*, the aggregate of consciousness.

The term aggregate has been very meaningfully employed to describe exactly what life is, as an immensely complex and intricate mechanism. This complexity is not intellectually conceived, but seen in actuality intuitively. Further, these five *khandhas* are seen as phenomena constantly arising and passing away, as basically unstable. This dynamic situation, where everything is changing moment to moment (*anicca*), produces the illusion of something that is constant. Continuity itself is mistaken to be constant.

Through the purification of understanding, this illusion is cleared in the same way that mist disappears with the rising of the sun. Insight into the essential instability also opens the actuality of involvement, and involvement means affliction (*dukkha*), one way or the other. Insight into momentariness and affliction unfolds the truth of unsubstantiality, (*anatta*), that there is no permanent entity underlying all that is changing, *all* that involves and afflicts. Thus, the basic characteristics (*lakkhanas*) or the fundamental features of life, being changeful, affliction-prone and unsubstantial, are intuited as an experience, which profoundly shakes one's very being.

And every time one has this *vipassana* intuition of life, in terms of the *panca-khandhas* and the three *lakkhanas*, there is a flash within and therewith an electrifying experience. The meditator,

with such *vipassana* experiences, undergoes a change which makes him a different person altogether. No longer can he harbour the familiar illusions, and he hugs no more to false values.

He sees life in terms of the Four Noble truths, i.e., as the *panca-khandhas*, subject to the three characteristics which reflect the truth of suffering, the cause of which is a built-in mechanism of the mind itself in the form of the *asavas*. The dimension of freedom, Nibbana, is where both suffering and its cause craving, cease and this freedom is reflected during *vipassana* when the mind is free, at least temporarily, from the *asavas* and the illusions. Nibbana is the third truth, the fourth being the Noble Eightfold path leading unto it which, is meditation (*bhavana*) itself supported by morality (*sila*). Thus, all the Four Noble Truths constitute an integral meditative experience, and not a theory or an intellectual formulation.

The commentary describes the *vipassana* experience thus: “since all dormant tendencies (*asavas*) occur only in this process of becoming and not in cessation thereof, one should determine to make this personality, that is, the aggregates, canker-free, beginning with the aggregate of corporeality in this manner: ‘in this so-called body there are only the elements of earth, water and the rest.’ Having determined one’s own personality in terms of the four primary elements, and the derived corporeality arising therewith, one should examine the consciousness and the mental factors which arise making this body their object, and thus comprehend also the four immaterial aggregates (feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness). Thereafter, all these five aggregates are intuitively penetrated in terms of the truth of suffering.

“These five aggregates automatically get reduced to the two principle phenomena of mind and body and understanding arises that this psycho-physical combination, *nama-rupa*, is causally originated, comes into being dependent on conditions, by actually identifying the factors, such as ignorance, craving for becoming, mental volition (*manosance-tana*), acting as the psychic nutriment etc., thus: ‘this is the cause, this is the condition, dependent on which the *nama-rupa* originates.’ That is, he penetrates into the underlying characteristics and the functions of both the causative factors and the phenomena arising conditionally therefrom.

“Then he intuitively understands the characteristic of transitoriness by seeing through the changefulness of the phenomena under scrutiny. Then (based upon this experience) he determines the characteristic of suffering by intuiting affliction intrinsic in the oppressive condition of ceaseless rise and fall. Following this experience, he then determines the characteristic of unsubstantiality by intuitively understanding the substancelessness intrinsic in a condition over which one has no hold or control (something that happens on its own, based upon certain conditions, which do not admit intervention of any self or soul). Thus, having grasped the three characteristics, he brings about the arising of the various stages of intuitive insights, one after the other, and thus attains to the supramundane path-insight of Stream-Entrance.

“At the moment of gaining the supramundane path-insight, all the Four Noble Truths are presented at once, as an integral experience. This is a victory that is achieved at one stroke of conquest. In that unique moment one penetrates into the truth of suffering by fully and directly comprehending it, penetrates into the cause (of suffering) by uprooting it, penetrates into the

cessation (of suffering) by realising it, and penetrates into the path (leading to the cessation of suffering) by developing it.

“In other words, he conquers suffering by means of the conquest of direct knowledge, conquers the cause of suffering by means of the conquest of uprooting craving, conquers the realisation of Nibbana by means of the conquest of cessation of suffering, and conquers the path leading to the cessation of suffering by means of the conquest of development of the Noble Eightfold Path.

“it should be understood that all these victories are not gained by separate insights, but by just one single insight, which has the truth of cessation, Nibbana, as the object, and which penetrates the remaining Truths, both as a function and as a conquest. At that moment of victory a thought such as this never occurs to him: ‘here I am comprehending suffering, I am uprooting craving, I am realising Nibbana, I am developing the Noble Eightfold Path, one by one.’ But, by making it the object of his insight, as he realises Nibbana, the very same insight simultaneously comprehends the actuality of suffering, uproots the cause thereof, and develops the path leading to the cessation thereof.

“By means of this insight meditation, as he exercises ‘wise reflection,’ these three fetters are also instantaneously severed: self-illusion (*sakkaya-ditthi*), comprising the twenty types of wrong views (see SN. XXII 1, 12-16); sceptical doubt (*vicikiccha*), comprising the eight kinds, (as shown in the *Sabbasava Sutta*); and superstitious belief in rules and rituals (*silabbata*), by way of the blind adherence to dogmas and external practices, saying ‘purification is brought about only by these rules and these rituals (Sn. 1084) and so on.

“Regarding the four cankers: since self-illusion and superstitious belief in rites and rituals are already included in the canker of wrong views, they are both cankers as well as fetters. Sceptical doubt is only a fetter, not a canker. But since it has been included within the method of overcoming through supramundane insight, it is also to be construed as a canker (that is, as a component of the canker of ignorance).

“Now, when the canker of wrong view is overcome, the cankers of sensual desire and of ignorance, which coexist with it in four unwholesome states of consciousness accompanied by wrong view, are also overcome...”

Thus by *dassana* (lit. Direct vision or experience of Nibbana), which uproots (*samuccheda*) the first three fetters, the saint attains the first stage of the supramundane path – *Sotapattimagga*. Having found access into the transcendental dimension of Nibbana, through this first supramundane stage, the saint then strives to climb onto the highest of supramundane paths attaining to the three remaining stages of supermundane path insights, namely: *Sakadagami-magga*, *Anagami-magga*, and *Arahata-magga*.

Emancipated from the ten fetters, which tie a being to the various realms of worldly existence, the Arahant becomes the great victor over all cankers, which lay the track into this endless *samsaric* existence. He is therefore crowned as the Canker-Freed One, who truly is worthy of the highest reverence, offerings and adoration, for he now becomes the “incomparable field of merit for the world,” *anuttaram punnakkhattam lokassa*.

Here, the question can be legitimately put: 'If the purpose of freeing the mind of cankers is achieved by the two methods, why then did the omniscient Buddha enunciate five more methods? Do they not become redundant under the circumstances'? The venerable commentator, Acariya Buddhaghosa resolves this question in his inimitable way. The five remaining methods constitute, what he calls, *pubbabhaga-patipada*, the preparatory training or practice. These methods, therefore, are 'applications' that weaken and attenuate the existing fetters and the cankers. They prepare the seeker's mind in a manner as to enable him to undertake his further arduous climb upon the supramundane ranges, crossing peak after peak, each one higher than the previous, until the summit state of spiritual excellence (Arahatahood) is reached, opening up the ineffable vista of Nibbana in all its glory. The four path-insights are the four great peaks of supramundane achievements which provide the utterly perfect and indescribable prospect of Nibbana. The Path-insights bring about deliverance from *samsara* through the transformation of the consciousness, from the mundane to the supramundane.

An analysis of the five methods constituting the preparatory training have been analysed in the *Visuddhimagga* by way of these five types of *samvara* (control or self-mastery), namely: (1) *Sati-samvara* (control through mindfulness); (2) *Nana-samvara* (control through wise consideration); (3) *Khanti-samvara* (control through enduring patience); (4) *Sila-samvara* (control through undertaken of precepts); (5) *Viriya-samvara* (control through preserving self-effort).

These five types of control are to be understood in the sense of both prevention and fulfilment. By the application of these five methods, each with its specific form of control, (mindfulness,

etc.), one secures the mind, protects it from all external dangers and influences. Prevention, therefore, is in the sense of shielding the mind, screening it off from unwholesome factors. A mind thus sheltered from danger becomes easily amendable to a process of cleansing and immunization, brought about by ‘fulfilment.’

Thus the various controlling techniques do not amount to “suppressing” oneself, but to resorting unto one’s mental health and harmony, and immunizing it from the dangers of the cankers. It is therefore rightly emphasized by the commentator that by these five methods one achieves *vikkhambhanapahana*, overcoming through subduing, a prerequisite for the attainment of the supramundane stages.

Each of these five methods is practised only after “wise reflection,” which refers to an insightful grasp of the pros and cons of a given situation and a sagacious choice of a technique to deal with it. For instance, when “wisely reflecting, one lives self-controlled by having control over the sense-organ of the eye,” and thereby nullifies “cankers which might become destructive and consuming”, all one is doing is guarding one’s mind, and therewith one’s senses. So, “self-control over the sense” does not mean physically controlling or manipulating the various sense-organs. Now, whoever in the world blindfolds himself so that he may have mastery over the faculty of seeing: All he has to do is just be alert mentally; that is, being mindful of what he is seeing, so that he does not allow wrong thoughts to arise based upon what he is seeing. The mindfulness-control, therefore, is basically a psychological technique to be applied sagaciously throughout one’s waking hours, in order to keep the mind composed and pure, a pre-requisite for the attainment of the supramundane insights.

The application of mindfulness over the sense and the self-mastery resulting therefrom, when viewed from the proper self-mastery resulting therefrom, when viewed from the proper perspective, will reveal a very complex and intricate process of mental development. To begin with, it will unfold, in broad outline, an underlying philosophy determining the choice of these methods because the seeker profoundly understands the consequences by way of unenviable suffering now and later, if these methods are not applied. He or she practices a given technique to meet a challenge.

Therefore, to the seeker no inconveniences, difficulties and sacrifices are too great *vis-a-vis* the grim alternative that would await for failing to practice these methods. The gates of the nether worlds would be wide open with all their unmitigated woes, if the unwholesome states of consciousness are allowed to have their way.

It is this philosophy penetrating into the law of moral causation (*paticca-samuppada*) that ultimately becomes the foundation of all the spiritual endeavour reflected by these methods. If one is advised to make judicious use of the basic needs of life or patiently to endure harsh and unpleasant experiences, even acute physical suffering, or avoid evil association, unseemly places and wild creatures, or eliminate any unwholesome or wrong thought, it is because only by doing so the “cankers which might become destructive and consuming”, do not become destructive and consuming owing to these applications.

Clearly, then, there are two very practical objectives which are aimed at by these applications. The five methods of self-control (*samvara*) being the five applications, each with the two

objectives of prevention of the arising of canker on the one hand and fulfilment through the attainment of canker-free state. Cankers are like fires in the mind. One needs to extinguish this fire. For, if not promptly put out, it would grow into a mighty conflagration and swallow everything that falls in its raging path: that is, become destructive and consuming.

By applying these fivefold methods, one averts a would-be calamity, the magnitude of which cannot be conceived. This is like taking prompt and timely action to put out a fire. But such action as one prevents the cankers from arising, one also fulfils the task of purifying and composing the mind, thus rendering the cankers and the concomitants ineffective. Once the cankers are made ineffective by not being fed, their power is attenuated, so much so that with the cultivation of the *vipassana* insights, these greatly weakened mental effluents and fetters get destroyed by the arising of the supramundane path-insights.

The venerable commentator also provides instances to show the effectiveness of these methods. They are case-histories of Buddhist yogis who, through sheer sincerity of purpose and unreserved commitment, succeeded in practising these methods under very trying circumstances and attained to the summit spiritual state of the Arahant. For instance, there is the case of Venerable Lomasanaga Thera. He practiced patient endurance in its most acute form and stuck to his meditation never giving up effort even for a moment. Perspiring profusely in midsummer and undergoing difficulties of all kinds unbendingly he pursued his noble pursuit. To practise endurance he would contemplate by mentally visualizing the innumerable times during his endless wandering in the circle of becoming (*samsara*) he was swallowed by other creatures. Living in the midst of cruelly competitive world

ruled by the law of tooth and claw, how many times he had been beheaded by enemies; suffering life after life. And he would wonder, “Still this recurring existence continues in all its might, and laden by the mystery of unpredictability! How long must I go through this?” Thinking this way, he endured great difficulties in fulfilment of his spiritual pursuit until he became an Arahāt.

“There is further the case of Venerable Padhaniya Thera. Though he had suffered the murderous sting of a poisonous snake, he cheerfully continued in his efforts, notwithstanding the sharp and shooting pains, until his endeavours were crowned with success, right at the penultimate moment before he actually passed away as an Arahāt.

These great yogis preferred death to compromises and to the machinations of a deceptive mind. This only highlights the need for a total dedication to these methods, based upon a clear comprehension of their purpose and possibilities. A lukewarm undertaking only fouls up one’s pursuit.

In the portion dealing with the elimination of wrong and unwholesome thoughts, the *Sabbasava Sutta* mentions three specific wrong thoughts, i.e., thoughts of sensual pleasure, ill-will and cruelty, which a seeker “gets rid of, eliminates, makes an end of and liquidates.” The Sutta also mentions “He does not endure any evil and unwholesome mental states, whenever they may arise.” The Commentary specifies “any evil and unwholesome mental condition,” in terms of six wrong unwholesome thoughts.

These are:

(1) *Nati-vitakka*, a thought concerning one's relatives and dear ones; i.e. a thought rooted in attachment, possessiveness, infatuation, fear, worry, resentment etc.,

(2) *Janapada-vitakka*, a thought concerning one's native land, that is a thought rooted in pride, false views, attachment, sentimentalism etc.,

(3) *Amara-vitakka*, a thought or speculation concerning the deathless, that is, a thought rooted in ideological perversity, bigotry, intolerance etc.,

(4) *Paranudayata-patisamutta-vitakka*, a thought concerning other's kindness etc. That is, a thought rooted in sentimental and sensual attachment, worldly affection etc.,

(5) *Labha-sakkara-siloka-patisamyutta-vitakka*, a thought concerning gain, honour and reputation; that is, a thought rooted in acquisitiveness, greed, arrogance, pride etc.,

(6) *Anavannatti-patisamyutta-vitakka*, a thought of not being despised, surpassed; that is, thought rooted in inferiority complex or conceit, arrogance, egotism etc..

A careful analysis of these types of thought will throw tremendous light on the working of the human mind. In fact, these are the thoughts which, when allowed a free rein, grow into blind prepossessions and obsessions the invariably lead to various mental ailments. The causes for schizophrenia and paranoia are to be found in these wrong thoughts and mental conditions.

The seeker, the commentator says, does not allow wrong thoughts because he clearly sees the dangers inherent in such

mental activities. He comprehends how one thing leads to another, and how the mind itself is rendered sick and utterly debilitated, unless one consciously and deliberately gets rid of, eliminates of, and liquidates, makes an end of such thoughts whenever they may arise. Thus the elimination is brought about not through some theory, sentiment or ideology, but through tight understanding and unrelenting application. The practical lessons arising from many such observations of the commentator, thus, are indeed priceless. Right thought leads to right aspiration, and both these are based on right understanding. The psychological importance of a method, which enables one through all one's normal routine activities to develop insight, the highest wisdom, therefore, can never be emphasized adequately.

Asavas die hard. Even though rendered inactive by *vikkambhana-pahana*, overcoming through meditative elimination of mental hindrances, that is, though stripped of their active and ominous power, they continue to smoulder as dormant tendencies or compulsions (*abhinivesa*) in ever so many mysterious and confusing guises. That is how they create self-deceptions and predispose the consciousness towards extremes, in one way or the other. Until the supramundane path-insight is attained by the transformation of consciousness, enabling one to transcend the possibility of falling back to the mundane, the *asavas*, even as latent forces, pursue the seeker in afflictions (*upaddava*).

In fact, one of the definitions of the term *asava* is *upaddava*: affliction, distress, calamity, misery etc. That the *asava* in their active, potent form, i.e., as unwholesome *kamm*s, wreak on oneself all the havoc, misfortunes and sufferings, is clear enough.

However, what the *asavas*, as dormant forces, are capable of inflicting is not evident.

It is like the case of a toothless and clawless tiger turned man-eater. Though the beast has been deprived of its weapons, by sheer brute-force it can still overwhelm and frighten away formidable foes. By causing the mind to fluctuate between extremes of all kinds – now becoming slothful, now restless; now rigid, now loose; now prone to self-indulgence, and now to self-mortification, now given to eternalism, now to nihilism – these dormant, unwholesome tendencies afflict the seeker right up to the very bounds that separate the supramundane from the mundane.

It is only by wielding the almighty armour of the seven Enlightenment Factors of Mindfulness, Investigation of Dhamma, Effort, Rapture, Tranquility, Meditative Concentration and Equanimity that the seeker is able to get rid of these afflictions. The Enlightenment Factors, being diametrically opposed to the wholesome cankers and defilements, represent the wholesome equivalents or antipodal good forces (*dhamma-samaggi*), and it is by virtue of this capacity that they can withstand, resist, and effectively counteract the afflictions in all forms.

Why are these seven factors so specifically given this meaningful and reverential appellation of Enlightenment Factors? Because these seven factors, when fully developed and orchestrated, climax into that supreme, self-transforming spiritual experience called Enlightenment,

The implications are that they are factors both contributory to, as well as concomitants of, Enlightenment. Therefore, it is said,

sati, dhammavicaya, viriya, piti, passaddhi, Samadhi, upekkhasankhataya dhammasamaggiya-aritasavako bujjhati'ti bodhi – “it is Enlightenment in that noble disciple awakens unto ‘truth’ by the orchestration of enlightenment factors of mindfulness, investigation of Dhamma, effort, rapture, tranquillity, meditative concentration and equanimity.”

The Commentator defines the term “awakens” thus:

(a) *kilesa-santana-niddaya uttahati'ti* – “Awakens means one wakes up from the slumber of the defilements.”

(b) *cattari va ariyasaccani pativijjhati ti* – “One penetrates into or fully comprehends, the Four Noble Truths.”

(c) *nibbanameva va sacchikaroti'ti* – “One realizes (directly experiences) Nibbana, the Summum Bonum.”

Thus, awakening or becoming enlightened, which reflects the crescendo, so to say, of the orchestration of the seven *Bojjhargas*, signifies a very unambiguous and clear cut summit of spiritual experience. It means that at the moment when Enlightenment takes place, as one dispels the slumber of defilements, that is, uproots the cankers, one also simultaneously penetrates into, i.e., discovers, the Truths concerning both the state of bondage and its cause, and the dimension of liberation and the means thereunto; and this happens with the direct experience of Nibbana.

The unique role of the Enlightenment Factors, both as instruments leading to Nibbana and as components of the supramundane insights, is clear from this succinct definition: *bodhi bodhissa va angoti bijjhango*, “because it leads or

contributes to Enlightenment it is the component of Enlightenment, it is called an Enlightenment Factor.”

The most significant concept underlying these definitions is that of *dhammasangani* – the orchestration, concordance, unity or harmony of seven distinctly independent spiritual elements. Like the combination of simultaneous notes, these spiritual elements form, so to say, that chord or harmony called Enlightenment. Though a single experience, Enlightenment is the confluence of spiritual insights forming the fourfold facets of the Noble Truths. In other words, it is the climatic moment that converges onto Nibbana, that is to say, realizes Nibbana as the transcendent object of the supramundane consciousness.

The uniqueness of the teachings of the Buddha lies also in this concept of orchestration, signifying a spiritual discovery, a self-realization, to be attained by each seeker through unreserved commitment and self-effort. In theistic religions, the emphasis is on the grace or intervention of a supernatural agency or God, which renders self-effort and individual spiritual discovery superfluous. On the contrary, this concept of orchestration underlines the need for individual excellence coupled with self-discovery, thereby making extraneous influence irrelevant.

Whereas the intervention of an external agency is always rooted in fear and blind faith, leading to bigotry and religious wars, the Buddha’s teachings of orchestration of an individual’s spiritual endowments are always rooted in hope, self-confidence and rational approach and have never led to bigotry or sectarian violence. The practical and the social importance of this concept of orchestration, therefore, can never be highlighted enough.

The next question is, “Why must these spiritual endowments be only seven, not less, not more”? This is directly related to what may be called the dichotomous nature of life and the world, and therewith the dichotomous working of the mind, conditioned as it is by the world around. Mind, by its very nature, tends to swing between pairs of opposites-love-hate, hilarity-depression, immobility-overactivity etc. A little thoughtfulness should be more than enough, even for the most unsophisticated and unlettered mind, to discern the bipolar nature of one’s mental inclinations.

Supremely realistic as the Buddha was, he formulated these Enlightenment Factors in keeping with this basic dualism. Wisdom lies in taking the line of least resistance. So, instead of fighting against a tendency that is well-entrenched in one’s mind, it is always better to make use of the same force in a way as to further one’s spiritual growth. Having this in mind, the Buddha enunciated not only these corresponds precisely to the realities and needs of spiritual development.

It is to be clearly understood that the mind swings contrariwise exactly in response to the mutually opposing psychological forces of what may be called contraction and distraction, or immobility (*lina*) and over-activity (*uddhacca*). While the former induces a constricted, shrunken and dull condition, the latter produces a dilated, restless and excited state. Whether it is the unresponsive or sluggish condition or the over-enthusiastic or agitated one, both signify an unbalanced and muddled state and it is only the Enlightenment Factors which can lift the mind from this distorted, uncreative and dichotomous situation.

Says the Commentator:

Kasma pana Bhagavata satteva bojjhanga vutta anuna anadhikati. Linuddhacca-patipakkhato sabbatthikato ca. Ettha hi tayo bojjhanga linassa patipakkha. Tayo uddhaccassa patipakkha. Eko panettha sabbatthiko.

“But why have only seven Enlightenment Factors been enunciated by the Blessed One, not less and not more? By way of their antithetical to the extremes of dullness and disquiet, as also by way of being the common factor beneficial to all. Now, while three factors of Enlightenment are diametrically opposed to the dull or inactive inclination, three others counteract the disquiet or over-active tendency of the mind, and one functions as the common factor beneficial to all,”

The tendency towards dullness or the inactivity or immobility of mind is characterised by these three features:

- (1) mental blindness, stupidity, ignorance, delusion.
- (2) Sluggishness, laxity, indolence.
- (3) Dejection, depression, sadness, melancholia.

Mental blindness naturally produces doubt, cynicism, scepticism, confusion and inner incertitude. The only antidote for this is discernment and comprehension arising from objective evaluation and investigation of the phenomena causing doubt. In *Dhamma-vicaya* the term *Dhamma* (phenomena), to be precise, refers to *namarupa*, the psycho-physical complex called personality and this factor is the one sure panacea for the removal of mental blindness. Sluggishness and indolence can be

overcome only by effort. Dejection and depression are easily destroyed by cultivating rapture.

The tendency towards the disquiet or the over-activity of mind is characterised by these three features:

- (1) Agitation, excitement, restlessness.
- (2) Distraction, or a fragmented, scattered state (of mind).
- (3) Disequilibrium, instability, changefulness.

Agitation is removed by the cultivation of tranquillity, distraction by meditative concentration and instability by equanimity.

Dullness and disquiet respectively signify under-balanced and over-balanced conditions hence lack of equilibrium. They are both unbalanced states of consciousness, which must necessarily produce disharmony and bewilderment. The six factors which counteract these two extremes with their specific features, as mentioned above, are able to do so because of the support of mindfulness which acts as an equaliser. This fact is made abundantly clear by the Enlightened One himself in the following discourse found in the Samyutta Nikaya. (S.V, 114).

Yasmin ca kho bhikkhave, samaye linam cittam hoti, kalo tasmin samaye dhammavicaya-sambojjhangassa bhavanaya, kalo Samadhi-sambojjhangassa bhavanaya, kalo upekkha-sambijjhangassa bhavanaya.

Satinaca kvaham, bhikkhave, sabbatthikam vadamiti

“Monks, when the mind is in a state of dullness, then that is the time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Investigation of Dhamma, time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Effort, time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Rapture.

“Monks, when the mind is in a state of disquiet, that is the time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Tranquility, time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Meditative Concentration, time for the development of the Enlightenment Factor of Equanimity.

“Monks, Mindfulness is what I call the common factor beneficial to all.”

This is how the Enlightenment Factors in the context of universal dichotomy occasion equilibrium and harmony, and then are orchestrated to climax into Enlightenment. Mindfulness has been very significantly placed as the first of these Enlightenment Factors, since it the equalizer between pairs of opposites – between the credulous and the cynical, the indolent and the over-active, the introvert and the extrovert etc.

Sati acts as the ballast of the ship of mind upon the sea of *samsaric* existence. Arising out of this is the unique Buddhist concept of *indriya samatha* – equalization of the spiritual faculties. A person given overmuch to devotional practices tends towards blind faith. Similarly, a person given overmuch to purely intellectual pursuit of religion tends towards cynicism and hypocrisy. But, when a person integrates devotion with wise consideration, based upon investigation of *Dhamma*, he or she

brings about an equalization of the spiritual faculties and thereby a harmonious development.

Likewise if a seeker, due to an excess of zeal, exerts too much, he or she will only succeed in becoming over-anxious, excited and irritable, thereby mismanaging the spiritual life thoroughly. On the contrary, if he or she is too easy-going and expects spiritual excellence through external aids, he or she will surely end up in frustration and superstition.

Here equalization of spiritual faculties would mean a fusion of the devotional approach with right understanding, of exertion with equipoise, of self-confidence with self-effort. This can be done only when one is fully committed to the development of mindfulness. Mindfulness and clear comprehension, it is to be reminded, are twins. One is always accompanied and supported by the other, leading to what the commentator call “Awakenment.”

When one awakens to the Truth, one becomes wide awake to the realities represented by this Truth. Enlightenment is never a sudden affair, though it may appear to be so. It is always the culmination of a process of development and self-culture. Thus, when one is wide awake, the consciousness, like an ever-widening spiral, keeps an waking to a vision of Nibbana, and this waking becomes clearer with each higher step in the attainment of path-insights, and when consciousness, by this progressive unfoldment of the supramundane prospect of Nibbana reaches full awakenment, it reaches the peak of Arahathood.

The *patisambhida-magga*, as quoted by the commentator, describes this process of progressive awakenment in the following manner:

1. *Bujjhati'ti bodhi* – “One awakens unto truth, therefore it is Enlightenment.” This may be construed as representing *sotapatti-magga* – the supramundane path-insight of Stream-entry.

2. *Anubujjhati'ti bodhi* – “One is wide awake unto Truth, therefore it is Enlightenment.” This may be construed as representing *sotapatti-phala* – the supramundane fruition-insight of Stream-entry.

3. *Patibujjhati'ti bodhi* – “One, keeps on walking unto Truth, therefore it Enlightenment.” This may be construed as representing five more *lokuttara* supramundane-stages of path and fruition-insights (*sakadagami-magga* and *phala*, *anagami-magga* and *phala*, and *arahatta-magga*).

4. *Sambujjhati'ti bodhi* – “One is fully awakened unto Truth, therefore it is Enlightenment.” This may be construed as representing the summit state of fruition-insight of Arahathood (*arahatta-phala*).

Thus, like an ever-widening spiral, at four distinct levels, from *Sotapatti* to *Arahatta*, through the dual viewpoints, so to say, of path and fruition-insights, *magga-phala-nana*, the process of awakenment is orchestrated by the seven Enlightenment Factors.

It is interesting to note that each of these even Factors of Enlightenment “is based” upon detachment, dispassion, and cessation, and matures to abandonment.” The Pali words for detachment etc., are *viveka*, *virago*, *nirodha* and *vossagga*

respectively. Tremendously meaningful, each term again signifies a specific mode of mental freedom and spiritual liberation.

It has been mentioned that there are various modes of overcoming (*pahana*), representing a process of release of the mind from the bondage created by the fetters, which are overcome. These are overcome by way of substituting the evil with good etc.

The commentator also divides detachment, dispassion and cessation into five distinct modes, which are identical with those explained under overcoming. These are as follows:

1. Tadanga-viveka –

By substituting evil with good, one conduces detachment.

2. Vikkhambhana-viveka –

By substituting the five mental hindrances (*nivarana*) one composes the mind and therewith conduces detachment.

3. Samuccheda-viveka –

By uprooting the fetters (*samyojana*), through *magga-nana* one conduces detachment.

4. Patippassaddhi-viveka –

By tranquillization of the mind through *phala-samapatti*, one conduces detachment.

5. *Nissarana-viveka* –

By “escaping” from the hold of the cankers, and thus of worldly existence, through the realization of *Nibbana*, one conduces detachment.

The first two modes of detachment are mundane, *lokiya* while the remaining three are supramundane, *lokuttara*. As in the case of *viveka* (detachment), *virago* (dispassion) and *nirodha* (cessation) too are identically fivefold.

In terms of the seven methods, the first and last, being *lokuttara*, correspond to the last three modes, (*samuccheda* etc.) while the five intermediate methods, as preparatory or *lokiya* steps, correspond to the first two modes (*tadanga-vikkhambhana*).

The *Bojjhangas* are said to “mature into abandonment.” Here abandonment is two-fold:

(1) By way of giving up (*pariccaga*) defilements and therewith worldly bondage.

(2) By way of advancement upon the supramundane way, as one leaps forward (*pakkhandana*) towards Nibbana.

In other words, as the commentator says, *Yattha kilese pariccajati-nibbabaca pakkhandati* – “As one gives up, abandons, one also advances towards Nibbana,” both processes being correlative.

The seven methods of the *Sabbasava Sutta* succeed quite well in revealing this progressive unfoldment through the development and orchestration of individual spiritual endowments and excellences, by presenting them in the order it does. The first method of overcoming through supramundane insight represents *sotapatti-magga*. The last method of overcoming through development of the *Bojjhangas* represents the seven remaining *lokuttara-nanas* (supramundane insights). The five methods in-

between represent a preparatory course of cleansing and strengthening of consciousness.

Now, what exactly is meant by the term “development” of the *Bojjhargas*? That is, how are the *Bojjhargas* developed? A *Bojjhanga* basically is a mental factor (*cetasika*). Out of the seven *Bojjhargas*, three i.e., *viriya*, *piti* and *samadhi* (*ekaggata*), are common to all states of consciousness (*annasamana*). The remaining four, i.e., *sati*, *dhammavicaya* (*panna*), *passaddhi*, *upekkha* (*tatra-majjhata*), pertain only to wholesome (*kusala*) states of consciousness. Development of these mental factors, which co-exist with consciousness, should be understood only in the sense of repeatedly aroused by appropriate spiritual practise. Says the commentator:

Bhaveti'ti vaddheti, attano cittasantane punappunam janeti abhinibbatteti'ti attho – “One develops’ means one cultivates them. That is, one rouses them, brings them to being repeatedly in one’s stream of consciousness.”