

The Nature of the Eight-factored Ariya, *Lokuttara Magga* in the *Suttas* Compared to the Pali Commentarial Idea of it as Momentary

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ABSTRACT: It is widely recognized that the key practice of Theravāda Buddhism is the 'Noble Eightfold Path' (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*). While this is sometimes loosely seen as encompassing all Theravāda Buddhist practices, the developed tradition, as expressed in the Pali commentaries, sees it as a momentary state, the culmination of prior practice, that glimpses the transcendent *Nibbāna* and is immediately followed by the attainment of 'fruit' consciousnesses that signifies becoming a stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner or *Arahat*. In the Pali *Suttas*, however, the noble path can be seen to be a specific kind of calm and open mind state that is a skilful, eight-factored method. Once it arises it is certain to bring stream-entry, and its seeing of *Nibbāna*, later in the present life, but for this it needs to be developed to full strength, which usually takes some period of time, as a person intently works to directly see the unconditioned.

KEYWORDS: *Abhidhamma*; emptiness; momentariness; Noble Eight-factored Path; stream-entry; Theravāda; transcendent.

In this article, I wish to investigate the idea of the Eight-factored Path as *ariya*, or noble. To begin, I just wish to note that though we are used to hearing of the 'Noble Truths', I think that the *ariya-saccas* are in fact 'true realities for the noble ones', that is, only the spiritually ennobled really see them in their fullness (Harvey 2009). This is why the Buddha only taught on the *ariya-saccas*, including the *ariya magga*, to those who were in a prepared state, with a calm and open mind, ready to benefit from having them pointed out.

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Before turning to the *ariya magga*, I will start by briefly looking at how certain persons are seen as ‘*ariya*’ in the Pali *Suttas*.

NOBLE PERSONS

MN I.280 explains:

And how is a *bhikkhu* a noble one (*ariyo*)? Evil, unskillful (*pāpakā akusalā*) states that defile (*saṅkilesikā*), bring renewal of being (*ponabhavikā*), give trouble, ripen in *dukkha*, and lead to future birth, ageing and death are far away from him (*ārakāssa*).

The same explanation is given for how a person is an *Arahat*. AN IV.145 says that by being far (*ārakā*) from the first three of the ten fetters, and from attachment, hatred, delusion and conceit, one is a noble one from ‘slaying [them], as an enemy’ (*arihatattā*), and one is an *Arahat* from being far from (*ārakattā*) them.² It is also said that the Buddha is ‘the Noble One (*ariyo*)’ (SN V.435), by implication the most noble one. *Vibh* 259 thus explains that noble ones are ‘Buddhas and Buddha-disciples (*Buddha-sāvaka*)’.

The above kind of explanation is taken up in the commentaries, and informs their explanation of the Noble Eight-factored Path:

Ariyo: it is noble because of being distant (*ārakattā*) from those defilements which are destroyed by the respective paths, because of making the noble state (*ariya-bhāva-karattā*), and because of making obtainable the noble fruition... ‘It is traced out (*maggiyati*) by those seeking *Nibbāna*, or it traces out (*maggiati*) *Nibbāna*, or it goes killing (*mārento gacchati*) the defilements’, therefore it is called ‘path’ (*maggo*). (*Vibh-a* 114; cf. Gethin 2001: 223)

Rupert Gethin (2001: 205) points out that ‘the term *ariya/ārya* in post-Nikāya literature...is applied to anything that is directly associated with the world-transcending (*lokuttara*) knowledge of the stream-attainer, the once-returner, the non-returner and the *arahant/arhat*’.

The members of the Buddha’s ‘community of disciples’ (*sāvaka-saṅgha*), which is ‘the unsurpassed field of *puñña* (karmic fruitfulness or “merit”) for the world’ are identified at AN IV.292 (cf. DN III.255) as:

The stream-enterer (*sotāpanno*), one practising for realisation of the stream-entry-fruit (*sotāpatti-phala-sacchikiriyāya paṭipanno*), the once-returner, one practising for realisation of the once-returner-fruit, the non-returner, one practising for realisation of the non-returner-fruit, the *Arahat*, one practising for *Arahatship*.

These are the kinds of people that came to be identified as the *ariya-puggalas*, noble persons.³ SN V.202 makes it clear that the least developed of the eight

2. Cf. AKB III.44c-d: ‘What is an Āryan? One in whom the Path arises, that is the taintless [*anāśrava*] Path. He is an Āryan because he “has gone far” (*ārād yātaḥ*) from evil, since he possesses disconnection (*visaṃyoga*, 2.55d) from the defilements.’

3. *Pug* 14. For a detailed discussion of these eight in the *Suttas*, see Harvey (2013), and see also Anālayo (2012b: 77–80).

is the one practising for realization of the stream-entry-fruit, that is, for the fruit that is stream-entry, and the highest is the *Arahat*. One who is not any of these kinds of person is an ‘ordinary person’ (*puthujjana*) (AN IV.372). The listing of *sāvaka* types at MN I.477-79 has them as *Arahats* and six types of ‘trainees’ (*sekhas*), the lowest two of which are the *Dhamma*-follower (*dhammānusāri*) and faith-follower (*saddhānusāri*). As the latter have not yet destroyed any taints (*āsavās*), they must be two forms of the person practising for realization of the fruit that is stream-entry, as no fetters are destroyed prior to stream-entry.

By implication, the above persons, other than the ordinary person, make up the ‘noble assembly’ (*ariyā parisā*), one in which the monks have understood, as it really is, ‘this is *dukkha*’ and so on. An assembly where this is not the case is an ‘ignoble’ (*anariyā*) one (AN I.71-72).

The above ideas imply that a ‘noble one’, in being far from defilements, is a ‘pure one’. While for Brahmanism, an *ariya/ārya* is ideally free from ritual impurity, for Buddhism an *ariya* is free from moral and spiritual impurity. As the Buddha is ‘the Noble One’, the practice he teaches is often referred to as the ‘discipline of the Noble One’ (*ariyassa vinayo*),⁴ and AN V.263-68 explains that in contrast to Brahmin purificatory rites, purification ‘in the disciple of the Noble One’ is abstaining from the ten unskillful ways of acting—three of body, four of speech and three of mind—and doing the opposite, including having right view, in the sense of belief in the principles of karma and rebirth and the possibility of direct spiritual insight (AN V.268).

For Brahmanism, it is clear from the *Manu Smṛti* 10.67-68 that only the top three *varṇas* are truly *ārya* ones. Members of one of these classes are ‘twice-born’ (*dvija*), as their males underwent the *upanayana* initiation, after which they could study the *Vedas* (Flood 1996: 49, 62-63). An echo of this, though with a different meaning, is seen in Buddhist texts, where it is said that those with unshakeable faith in the Buddha (i.e. stream-enterers etc.) are ‘born’ of his mouth, and born of the *Dhamma* (DN III.84) and where the one-time murderous bandit Aṅgulimāla refers to his change of life after having been taught by the Buddha as when ‘I was born with the noble birth (*ariyāya jātiyiyā jāto*)’ (MN II.103). Similarly, the *Arahat* is seen as the true Brahmin (*Dhp* 383-423). These are examples of how the Buddhist *Suttas* consistently took Brahmanical language and recast its meaning.

THE THREE ARIYA KHANDHAS AND THE STRUCTURAL PLACING AND NATURE OF THE ARIYA MAGGA

At DN I.206, Ānanda explains that the Buddha was a speaker in praise of the ‘noble collection of virtue’ (*ariyo sīla-kkhandho*), the ‘noble collection of *samādhi*’

4. ‘Death’ in this is said to be when the Buddha and fellow monks will not admonish a monk, due to his not submitting to training (AN I.112-13).

and the ‘noble collection of wisdom (*paññā*)’. These are respectively attained: (i) when a Buddha arises and teaches *Dhamma*, a person is inspired, ordains, and perfects *sīla* through restraint; (ii) when he guards the sense-doors and goes on to attain the four *jhānas*; (iii) when he develops various insights, and the higher knowledges (*abhiññās*) up to knowing the four true realities for the noble ones and ending the taints. At this stage, there is nothing more to be done.

Now we know that the first two factors of the *magga* are classified as *paññā*, the next three as *sīla*, and the last three as *samādhi* (*MN* I.301), which puts things in a different order from the usual *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, which can be confusing. However, the Noble Eight-factored Path is only part of the collections of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (*MN* I.301), albeit the most important part. Gethin (2001: 212) sees it as the ‘essential distillation’ of them.

The *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* order seems to be primarily the order in which these three aspects are fully perfected in those who utilize the Noble Eight-factored Path. This is seen from *AN* I.231-32, which explains that:

- stream-enterers and once-returners have completely fulfilled (*paripūrakārī*) *sīla*, so as to quickly re-establish their adherence to the monastic training rules after any small lapses from them, and they have some measure (*mattaso kārī*) of *samādhi* and wisdom.
- non-returners have also completely fulfilled their *samādhi*, and they have a measure of wisdom,
- and *Arahats* have completely fulfilled all three.

Stream-enterers have already experienced the *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, but having done so, only their *sīla* is, in their general conduct and not just when in *magga*-related states, perfected.

While the Eight-factored Path is not a sequence of eight steps, it is said that ‘right view comes first’ (*MN* III.71), and that ‘For one of right view, right resolve springs up. For one of right resolve, right speech springs up’, and so on up to the springing up of right concentration (*SN* V.2). This, however, seems to be an order of conditionality, an order in which the component factors of the *magga* are assembled, before—together—they can do their eight-factored work. Right view comes first, as one must begin with a clear vision and understanding of what factors one is going to assemble, and why. As Bhikkhu Bodhi puts it (1984: 12), the factors can be ‘described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all for maximal strength’.

The *magga*, then, is not a ‘path’ as a series of steps, but a particular way of approach, a way of operating, an orientation that is fully equipped only when it has eight factors. It can then do its work of perfecting noble *sīla*, then noble *samādhi* and then noble *paññā*.

The idea of a *magga* as a ‘way of approach’ seems supported by the *ariya magga* being a kind of skilful ‘method’ (*ñāya*). *SN* V.19 says that when anyone

undertakes right view through to right concentration—‘the right way of practice (*sammā-paṭipadā*)’—from this cause, he ‘attains the method, the *Dhamma* that is skilful (*nāyaṃ dhammaṃ kusalam*)’. *MN* II.181 seems to equate this with ‘the noble world-transcendent (*lokuttaram*) *Dhamma*’—and elsewhere ‘skilful *dhammas*’ is explained as right view to right concentration (*SN* V.18).

THE ABHIDHAMMA-CUM-COMMENTARIAL VIEW OF THE ARIYA MAGGA

In the developed Theravādin *Abhidhamma* view, as expressed in the commentaries, the noble path is *lokuttara*/world-transcendent and is something that lasts only one micro-moment immediately prior to when stream-entry is attained—and likewise before a person becomes a once-returner, non-returner or *Arahat*. Whenever any of the four *magga-cittas* arises, it simultaneously penetrates by four insight-penetrations: by understanding the first *sacca* (*dukkha*), by abandoning the second (craving), by experiencing the third (*Nibbāna*), and by development (*bhāvanā*) of the fourth (the Noble Eight-factored Path; *MN-a* II.338). The commentaries affirm that when a *magga* eradicates defilements, there is no *lokuttara* level which lasts for more than one moment:

This assiduous practice (*āsevanā*) is of one *citta* moment, this development (*bhāvanā*) is of one *citta* moment, this cultivation (*bahulīkammaṃ*) is of one *citta* moment. There is no *lokuttara magga*, going to destruction (*khayaḡāmi*), of many moments; it is of one *citta* moment.

(*MN-a* II.364 (on *MN* I.301), cf. *MN-a* II.230, *MN-a* II.404)

While a transcendent *magga* moment is followed by some transcendent ‘fruit’ (*phala*) moments—‘transcendent’ in that they have *Nibbāna* as their direct object—even noble persons then return to non-transcendent states of mind. They may re-experience ‘fruit’ moments of their level of spiritual nobility, but to experience the next world-transcendent, noble path moment, they must practise a path which is again *lokiya*, worldly, in not having *Nibbāna* as its object of awareness.

This commentarial view is expressed when Bhikkhu Bodhi says (1984: ch. 8, 125–26):

Because it still deals with the world of conditioned events, the Eightfold Path in the stage of insight is called the mundane path (*lokiyamagga*). This designation in no way implies that the path of insight is concerned with mundane goals, with achievements falling in the range of *saṃsāra*. It aspires to transcendence, it leads to liberation, but its objective domain of contemplation still lies within the conditioned world. However, this mundane contemplation of the conditioned serves as the vehicle for reaching the unconditioned, for attaining the supramundane. When insight meditation reaches its climax, when it fully comprehends the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of everything formed, the mind breaks through the conditioned and realizes the unconditioned, *nibbāna*. It sees *nibbāna* with direct vision, makes it an object of immediate realization.

The breakthrough to the unconditioned is achieved by a type of consciousness or mental event called the supramundane path (*lokuttaramagga*). The supramundane path occurs in four stages, four 'supramundane paths', each marking a deeper level of realization and issuing in a fuller degree of liberation, the fourth and last in complete liberation.

After the fruit moments of each of these, which have *Nibbāna* as their object, then the mind descends to the mundane level again (pp. 128–29).

This seems to imply that, as it is a momentary attainment of a prior path of practice, the Noble Eight-factored Path is not *itself* something that can be practised. Within one micro-moment, there is no time to 'develop' or practise anything, in spite of what the commentaries say; such a moment can only be the product of *prior* development. The world-transcendent *magga* is like a wafer-thin door, with an eight-lever lock, or eight-digit combination: all eight aspects need to be in place at the same time, and in sufficient strength, so that all is aligned simultaneously and noble energy, so to speak, momentarily flows.

While the idea of momentary breakthroughs is not problematic in itself, and the first of them seems to correspond to the arising of the *Dhamma*-eye in the *Suttas*, the question arises: what aspects of practice are seen as 'noble' and 'world-transcendent' in the *Suttas*? Are these understood as precisely or narrowly as in the developed *Abhidhamma*, or do they have a broader view, in which it makes sense to say that there is an Eight-factored Path that is truly noble and *lokuttara*, and yet exists for long enough to actually be practised?

THE TWO TYPES OF RIGHT VIEW IN THE *SUTTAS*

The developed *Abhidhamma* idea of a *lokuttara magga* seems to build on a point in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN 117), a discourse on 'noble right concentration (*ariyo sammāsamādhi*) with its supports and requisites (*saupaniṣaṃ saparikkāraṃ*)', that is, one-pointedness of mind equipped with right view through to right mindfulness (MN III.71). This *Sutta* makes a clear distinction between two kinds of right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*):

Right view, I say, is twofold: there is right view that is with taints (*sāsavā*), partaking of *puñña* (*puñña-bhāgiyā*), ripening on the side of attachment (*upadhi-vepakkā*); and there is right view that is noble (*ariyā*), taintless (*anāsavā*), world-transcendent (*lokuttarā*), a factor of the *magga* (*maggaṅgā*).

(MN III.72)

The first of these two is belief in the value of giving, in the results of actions, that there is another world, that some beings are reborn spontaneously, and that some people have direct knowledge of such things. The second is:

Wisdom (*paññā*), the faculty of wisdom, the power of wisdom, the investigation-of-states factor of awakening, the right view *magga*-factor (*maggaṅgā*) of one who, developing the noble *magga* (*ariya-maggaṃ bhāvayato*), is of noble mind (*ariya-cittassa*), of taintless mind (*anāsava-cittassa*), endowed with the noble *magga* (*ariya-maggassa samāgino*).

In this definition, there is clearly a reference to factors concerning wisdom that are found in the seven sets of qualities that came to be called the *bodhipakkhiya dhammas*: the four applications of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the Noble Eight-factored Path. Indeed *SN V.49* says that for a monk who ‘develops and cultivates’ the Noble Eight-factored Path, the previous six sets of qualities ‘go to fulfilment by development (*bhāvanā pāripurim gacchanti*)’. In the *Vinaya*, the ‘development of the *magga* (*magga-bhāvanā*)’ is explained as the seven sets (*Vin III.93*), and *Paṭi II.166-67* includes the above seven sets, along with the four ‘noble *maggas*’, four fruits and the *Nibbāna*, as the *lokuttara*.

Note that in the above, at first it is said only of the second kind of right view that it is a ‘factor of the *magga*’, though this right view is then said to be ‘the right view *magga*-factor of one who...is of noble mind’, implying that there can also be a ‘*magga*’ in one without a ‘noble mind’, that is, a non-transcendent *magga*—what came to be called the *lokiya*, worldly, *magga*. More importantly, the idea that one can be both ‘endowed with the noble *magga*’ and also ‘developing the noble *magga*’ suggests that such a *magga* is not momentary, as this would leave no time in which to develop it further.

In *MN 117*, right resolve, speech, action and livelihood are also divided in the above way (with taints etc. or noble and taintless etc.), with the first kinds being explained in the usual way as the three right resolves, the four forms of right speech, the three forms of right action, and having a right livelihood, but the second kind being the mental application (*vitakka*), or the abstinence from wrong speech, action or livelihood, of one ‘who, developing the noble *magga*, is of noble mind, of taintless mind, endowed with the noble *magga*’ (*MN III.73-75*). There is no explicit reference to two forms of the last three *magga* factors in this *Sutta*, though the introduction is about noble right concentration, and the *Sutta* sees right effort and right mindfulness, along with right view as aiding all the other factors.⁵

Now it is possible that the above description of two kinds of right view and so on is one that has itself been influenced by *Abhidhamma* concepts. Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that:⁶

5. Indeed, as mindfulness of *dhammas* includes mindfulness of the four *ariya-saccas* (*DN II.305*), this can occur at the time of the *lokuttara magga*, and the right effort that sustains skilful states can likewise exist at this time.

6. Email correspondence.

The counterpart in the Chinese *Madhyama Āgama* does not make a distinction between two kinds of path, *lokiya/upadhivepakka* and *lokuttara/anāsava*. This arouses a suspicion that the Pali sutta is actually the refurbished version of a more archaic original, modified under the influence of the emergent Pali *Abhidhamma* system. Look at the *Vibhaṅga*, chapter on the *Magga* [pp. 235–43]. Note that the *Suttanta* section simply gives the standard definitions of the path factors [on right view, as knowledge in regard to the four *saccas*], while the *Abhidhamma* section [pp. 237–37] gives definitions that correspond closely (almost fully) with those of *MN 117* (*MN III.71-78*) [as wisdom, etc.]. This suggests that this *Abhidhamma* way of treating the path factors had fed back into the older version of *MN 117* and resulted in the newer, modified version that we now have in *MN*.

Bhikkhu Anālayo (2005: 98–100; 2011b: 660–61) notes the same difference between *MN* and *Madhyama Āgama* as Bhikkhu Bodhi, but adds:

A somewhat similar exposition of the path factors in their supramundane manifestations can be found in a discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama* [*Samyukta-āgama* 785 at T II 203a21]...[showing] that different Buddhist traditions gave importance to this type of presentation. Its occurrence further supports the assumption that this type of treatment could stem from an early Indian exegetical tradition...

(Anālayo 2011b: 661)

Elsewhere, Anālayo (2012a: 312–24) translates the Chinese *Samyukta-āgama* passage, noting that this *Āgama* probably stems from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* tradition, and sees here and in the *MN* passage traces of ‘the beginning stages of Abhidharmic thought’ (2012a: 324). So this may not be a case of fully-formed *Abhidhamma* ideas feeding back into a *sutta*, but the ‘beginning stages’ of *Abhidhamma* influencing a *sutta*. Accordingly, while the wording on noble right view corresponds to developed *Abhidhamma* ideas on it, the meaning may not be the same. Certainly the idea that such a *magga* is momentary need not be intended, and hence the *lokuttara magga* may in *MN 117* refer to something that can be experienced as part of a practice over some period of time, at least when the mind is free of active taints. That practice involves time is seen at *MN I.301*, which says that the ‘assiduous practice, development, and cultivation (*āsevanā bhāvanā bahulikammaṃ*)’ of the four right strivings (‘the requisites of concentration (*samādhi-parikkhārā*)’) and the four applications of mindfulness (‘the basis of concentration (*samādhi-nimittā*)’) is the ‘development of concentration (*samādhi-bhāvanā*)’. That a person who still has taints can at least momentarily be ‘taintless’ is of course accepted in the developed idea of the momentary *magga*. The *Sabbāsava Sutta* says that people are without actively arising taints when there is wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*; *MN I.7*).

THE NOBLE AND IGNOBLE SEARCHES

The above *MN 117* passage on the two kinds of right view and so on is rich in terminology, so understanding it may well be aided by examining this, and

how it is used elsewhere in the *Suttas*. At *DN* II.216-17, right view through to right mindfulness are again the ‘supports and requisites (*saupanisam saparikkāraṃ*)’ of noble right concentration, and from teaching on this it is said that the ‘doors to the deathless are open’. ‘Noble’ right concentration, then, is that which leads to knowing the ‘deathless’, namely *Nibbāna*.

The nature of *upadhis*, the ‘attachment’ or perhaps ‘objects of attachment’⁷ that *MN* 117 sees the first kind of right view as linked to, is seen in the *Sutta* on the Noble Search (*Ariya-pariyesanā*, *MN* 26), where the Buddha talks of two kinds of ‘search’:

- The ‘ignoble search (*anariyā ca pariyesanā*)’: ‘Here someone himself being subject to birth (*jāti-dhammo*) seeks what is also subject to birth’—then likewise with respect to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, defilement (*saṅkilesa-*) (*MN* I.161-62). What is ‘subject to birth’ etc. are wife and children, slaves, various animals, gold and silver. ‘These objects of attachment (*upadhayo-*) are subject to birth; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them, and utterly committed to them, being himself subject to birth, seeks also what is subject to birth’ etc. (I.162). This is then repeated for ageing etc.⁸
- The ‘noble search (*ariyā pariyesanā*)’: ‘Here someone being himself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*; being himself subject to ageing, having understood the danger in what is subject to ageing, seeks the unageing supreme security from bondage, *Nibbāna*...seeks the deathless...’ (I.162–63).

The Buddha recounts that when he decided to seek the unborn, and so on, he went forth ‘in search of what is skilful (*kiṃ-kusala-gavesī*), seeking the supreme state of sublime peace (*anuttaraṃ santi-vara-padaṃ pariyesamāno*)’ (I.163).

Here, then, a ‘search’ or quest is ‘ignoble’ when directed at attaining what is subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, and so on, and ‘noble’ when directed towards what is beyond these, which are *dukkha*, to *Nibbāna*. It need not yet have attained any experience of *Nibbāna* (as with the developed *Abhidhamma lokuttara magga*), but it must be directed towards doing so.

The first kind of right view in *MN* 117 is also said to ‘partake of *puñña*’. *Puñña*, karmic fruitfulness (or ‘merit’) is of course that which leads to happy results within the round of rebirths, but not beyond this. When *Māra* tries

7. Nāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995: 1215 n. 299) say on *upadhi*: ‘The root meaning is foundation, basis, ground (*PED*)... I have tried to capture the several connotations of the word by rendering it “objects of attachment” where its objective meaning is prominent (as it is here) and as “attachment” where its subjective meaning is prominent. At *MN* 26.19 [*MN* I.167] *Nibbāna* is called “the relinquishing of all attachments” (*sabb’upadhipaṭinissagga*), with both meanings intended.’

8. Except that gold and silver are not mentioned as subject to sickness, death and sorrow.

to tempt Gotama to give up his quest, he suggests instead going for a Brahmanic holy life and generating *puñña* (*Sn* 428), but Gotama says he has no further need of *puñña* (*Sn* 431). Donors gain heavenly rebirths, but ‘when one has obtained the path (*maggañca laddhā*) that leads to no more renewed existence, having become broad in wisdom, one is not born again and again’ (*SN* I.174). Hence, *AN* II.236 (cf. *MN* I.389-91) sees the eight factors of the path as ‘action that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright ripening’: they lead to neither unpleasant nor pleasant rebirths. The path factors are truly factors of the noble path, world-transcendent, when they truly aim at abandoning *all* rebirths.

THE MEANING OF LOKUTTARA IN THE SUTTAS

In the word *lokuttara*, *loka* means ‘world’ and *uttara* is an adjective meaning either higher or beyond, or, in a different derivation, from *uttarati* (to cross over or go beyond), crossed over. The word logically has three potential referents: (i) the unconditioned, *Nibbāna* as that which is totally beyond the conditioned world; (ii) those conditioned states which directly see the unconditioned; (iii) anything aiming at attaining such a state. The commentaries in effect see only the first two of these meanings as applicable:

In the expression ‘worldly phenomena (*lokiyā dhammā*)’, the round (of rebirths) is called the world (*loka*) due to its dissolving and crumbling. Therein, what is joined (*niyuttā*) to the world by being included in it (*pariyāpanna-*) are worldly. To have crossed beyond (*uttiññā*), that is to be ‘beyond’ (*uttarā*). What are beyond (*uttarā*) the world by not being included in it (*pariyāpanna-*) are *lokuttara*.

(*Asl* 47-48)

If the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* uses the term *magga* only in the sense of what directly sees *Nibbāna*, then it shares this view, as it sees *lokuttara* states as the *maggas* that are not included (*apariyāpannā*), their fruits, and the unconditioned (*Dhs* 1094), these being also the states that are taintless (*Dhs* 1104); the ‘included’ are with-taint states and states of the sense-desire, form or formless realms (*Dhs* 1287). The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (II.166-67) lists *lokuttara dhammas* as the seven sets making up the *bodhi-pakkhiya dhammas*, including the ‘Eight-factored Path’, and the ‘four noble paths’, their fruits and *Nibbāna*—ambiguously listing the Eight-factored Path, without the descriptor ‘noble’, separately from the four noble paths. It then says that states are *lokuttara* as ‘they cross from the world...they do not stand in the world...they are purified from the world...they emerge from the world...they turn away from the world...’ This leaves it rather open as to which of the above three senses of *lokuttara* are encompassed by this explanation.

What kind of meaning is ascribed to *lokuttara* in the *Suttas*, though? At *SN* V.407 (cf. *SN* II.267), the Buddha urges the layman Dhammadinna to from time to time ‘enter and dwell upon those discourses spoken by the *Tathāgata* that

are deep, deep in meaning, *lokuttara*, dealing with emptiness (*suññata-*), but Dhammadinna says that it is not easy for laypeople to do this, so the Buddha urges him to develop the four factors of stream-entry (firm assurance in the refuges, and pure virtue), which Dhammadinna says he has already done. The commentary (*SN-a* III.291) says those *Suttas* that deal with the *lokuttara* are such as the *Asaṅkhata-samyutta* (*SN* 43), on the unconditioned, that is *Nibbāna*. At *SN* II.267, the Buddha laments that in future, his disciples will not be eager to listen to those *Suttas* that are ‘deep, deep in meaning, *lokuttara*, dealing with emptiness’, but will listen only to those composed by outsider poets or their disciples. The *lokuttara Suttas* should be the subject of questioning, to discern their meaning (*AN* I.72).

Note, here, that as *Suttas* can be ‘world-transcendent’, something being world-transcendent can be this in terms simply of aiming towards or concerning *Nibbāna* (i.e. sense (iii) above), without being a mind-state immediately aware of *Nibbāna* (sense (ii)), as in the developed Theravāda view.

What is the ‘emptiness’ that is associated with what is world-transcendent? In the *Cūlasuññata Sutta* (*MN* 121), the Buddha explains that he often abides in emptiness (*suññatā*), and then explains various ‘genuine, undistorted, pure descents into emptiness’ (*MN* III.105):

- a monk in the forest knows that his field of perception is empty of the perception of village or of people, but that the ‘singleness (*ekattaṃ*) dependent on the perception of the forest’ is a non-emptiness (III.104).
- the parallel applies when he no longer perceives the forest, but only ‘earth’ (as his meditative object), then each of the four formless states.
- then, further, he attains ‘singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind (*animittaṃ samādhiṃ*)’ (III.107), where the non-emptiness aspect is ‘that connected with the six bases that are dependent on the body and conditioned by life’ (i.e. the senses, though not their objects).
- then further he realizes that the signless concentration of mind is conditioned and impermanent, so that he is liberated from the three taints.⁹ His field of perception is empty of the taints, and the non-emptiness aspect remains ‘that connected with the six bases that are

9. Relating to sense-pleasures (*kāma*), continued being in the conditioned world, and ignorance. An interesting question for further consideration is whether these three are themselves *āsavas*, or whether the *āsavas* are ‘tainting inclinations’ *flowing towards* these three. Otherwise, why should *bhava*, ‘being’, be a ‘taint’, and why should ignorance be both an *āsava* and what conditions and is conditioned by the *āsavas* (*MN* I.54-55)? It makes sense, though, to say that ignorance conditions tainting inclinations towards various things, including ignorance, which would of course lead to further ignorance. Anālayo (2012b: 80–82), though, argues for *āsava* as an ‘inflow’, based on such passages as *MN* I.180 and *Dhs* 1097, and takes *kāma*, in the sense of ‘sensuality’, as itself an *āsava*, though *Dhs* 1098 says *bhavāsava* is attachment (*rāga*) to *bhava*.

dependent on the body and conditioned by life'. This is the 'supreme and unsurpassed descent into emptiness'.

Here, then, 'emptiness' concerns emptying the mind of gross, then subtle inputs, and, ultimately, of the taints. It is an inner stillness's lack of what it is empty of.

The following *Mahā-suññata Sutta* (MN 122) begins by explaining that a monk who delights in company will not easily obtain the bliss of seclusion, peace and enlightenment (MN III.110). When the Buddha is surrounded by people, his mind 'enters and abides in emptiness internally by giving no attention to any (perceptual) signs...inclining to seclusion, withdrawn...done with things that are a basis for taints' (III.111). Then (III.111-15), he explains that a monk concentrates his mind by developing the four *jhānas*, then gives attention to emptiness, both internally and externally. If his mind does not enter into internal or external emptiness, or imperturbability, he has full awareness (*samajāno*) of this. If it does so enter into these, he has full awareness of this. Abiding thus, he knows that whether he walks, stands, sits or lies down, he has no unskillful states, and has full awareness of this. He resolves to avoid low, ignoble talk, and, when he talks, to talk of things related to disenchantment, peace and *Nibbāna*, and has full awareness of this. When thinking, he avoids the three kinds of wrong, ignoble thought (on sense-pleasures, ill-will or cruelty) and resolves on the three right thoughts, that are 'noble and emancipating and lead the one who practises in accordance with them to the complete destruction of *dukkha*'; and he has full awareness of this. He has full awareness of whether desire and lust for the five sense-objects that may excite these is still sometimes present in him, or completely abandoned. He abides contemplating the rise and fall of the *khandhas*, and thus ends the 'I am' conceit, and has full awareness of this. Accordingly, 'These states have an entirely skilful basis (*ekanta-kusalāyatikā*); they are noble, *lokuttara*, and inaccessible to *Māra*' (MN III.115). Here, the context implies that this statement applies to all the above forms of full awareness.

The 'emptiness' of this *Sutta* is likely to be both the lack of ordinary sensory input in subtler states, as in MN 121, and also the state of knowing things as empty of Self or what pertains to it (SN IV.54), this being 'liberation of mind by emptiness (*suññatā cetovimutti*)' (SN IV.296-97); moreover the *Arahat*'s unshakeable liberation of mind is empty of attachment, hatred and delusion (SN IV.297). The relevant states in MN 122 are 'world-transcendent' in that they tend beyond the world, not that they are themselves beyond the world or necessarily include direct awareness of *Nibbāna*, as with the developed *Abhidhamma lokuttara magga*, though they may do.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO KINDS OF RIGHT VIEW

The MN 117 distinction between two kinds of right view sees them as about that which aids a good rebirth, and that which leads beyond rebirths. How-

ever, in which of these two camps is one to log the kinds of insight developed by Buddhist practice that falls short of direct seeing of that which is deathless, beyond the world? Is it of the first or the second kind? For the commentaries, it remains of the first kind. The commentary on MN 117 (MN-a IV.131) distinguishes between right view that is concerned with ordinary *vipassanā* and that concerned with the path—the *lokuttara magga*. Elsewhere, the commentaries expand the two kinds of right view into four, those of: the ownership of karma (*kammassasakata-*), *jhāna*, *vipassanā*, and *magga* and fruit (AN-a II.24 and 162). That is, the second kind at MN III.72 is seen as *magga* and fruit right view, and MN III.72's first kind, that affected by taints, has two kinds added, to include the right view of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditative states which lead up to attainments of *magga* and fruit states. Similarly, *Paṭi* I.167 talks of four kinds of 'singleness (*ekattā*)', with only the last being noble—those: (i) 'consisting in the will-to-relinquish a gift'; (ii) 'consisting in establishing (*-upaṭṭhān-*) the sign of *samatha*'; (iii) and 'consisting in establishing the characteristic of falling away (*vaya-*)' which 'belongs to those practising insight (*vipassakānaṃ*)'; and (iv) 'consisting in establishing cessation' which 'belongs to noble persons'.

WHEN AND HOW DOES NOBLE RIGHT VIEW, A FACTOR OF THE PATH, ARISE?

The above commentarial view sees the right view pertaining to *samatha* and *vipassanā* as not yet of the level of the right view of the noble *magga*. This builds on a *Sutta* passage at AN II.156–57, where Ānanda says that those who have become *Arahats* have done so by one of four ways: (i) 'he develops (*bhāveti*) *vipassanā* preceded by *samatha*'; (ii) 'he develops *samatha* preceded by *vipassanā*'; (iii) 'he develops *samatha* and *vipassanā* yoked together (*yuganaddham*)'; or (iv) 'his mind is gripped by *Dhamma* excitement (*dhammuddhacca-viggahīta-manā*)'.¹⁰ 'There is, friend, (later) a time (*so āvuso samayo*) when his *citta* is internally steadied, composed, unified and concentrated (*santiṭṭhati sannisīdati ekodihoti samādhīyati*).¹¹ In each case, for the person doing this, 'the *magga* is born (*sañjāyati*). He pursues, develops and cultivates (*āsevatī bhāvetī bahulikaroti*) that *magga*. For him pursuing, developing and cultivating that *magga*, the fetters are abandoned and the latent tendencies eliminated.'

10. But as quoted at *Paṭi* II.93, *-viggahītaṃ mānaṃ*.

11. The fourth of these most likely refers to what happens in the preparation for the arising of the *Dhamma*-eye (usually meaning stream-entry) when the *Dhamma*-eye only arises at a later time. At *Udāna* 49, after the *Dhamma*-eye has arisen to Suppabuddha, the Buddha says that the latter had been one 'who had been made to bristle with excitement (*sampahaṃsito*)'. Perhaps with most people for whom the *Dhamma*-eye arises, there is an initial excitement that is quickly calmed, allowing the *Dhamma*-eye to arise, but for others this takes time. The four ways are discussed at *Paṭi* I.93–103.

It is clear from this passage that, even in the *Suttas*, the cultivation of meditative calm and insight are not themselves necessarily the same as practising the path—here, presumably meaning the noble path. This accords with the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, in which a practitioner does not know ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*’ till after he has attained the *jhānas* and developed various preliminary insights (*DN* 1.83). Calm and insight prepare the way for the ‘birth’ of the path, which must then be further developed in order for fetters to be abandoned. They are then part of this: at *SN* IV.360, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are the path to the unconditioned.

The above passage on the birth of the path shows that the ‘development’ of it is distinct from its initial ‘birth’—unlike in the commentarial view, where both are simultaneous, in one moment. That said, the path’s ‘birth’ in the passage might either mean that the noble path arises at stream-entry, with all the remaining fetters destroyed by the time of Arahatsip, or that it arises *prior* to stream-entry, so that its development then destroys the first three fetters in the state that brings stream-entry, before going on to destroy the remaining fetters, up to Arahatsip. That the Noble Eight-factored Path *does* exist prior to stream-entry is indicated by *SN* V.26, which says that it is what the ‘holy life’ (*brahmacariya*) is, and leads to the four fruits, stream-entry up to Arahatsip. Moreover, in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the middle way which is the Noble Eight-factored Path is said to ‘give rise to vision (*cakkhu-karaṇī*), give rise to knowledge (*ñāṇa-karaṇī*)’ (*SN* V.421), which surely means that the arising of the *Dhamma*-eye (*dhamma-cakkhu*), typically at stream-entry, comes after the path has done its work, and is not something simultaneous with the arising of the path.

The noble path prepares for stream-entry, and *samatha* and *vipassanā* prepare for the arising of the noble path. The minimum mental state that is open to experiencing the four true realities for the noble ones, including the noble path, seems to be the suspension of the five hindrances.¹² In *Suttas*, this is already within the first *jhāna*, though the later tradition came to divide the initial hindrance-free state into first *jhāna* ‘proper’, as a full ‘absorption’ in the object of contemplation, and a state immediately leading up to this, called by the Theravādins access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*, *Vism* 126) and the Sarvāstivādins ‘not(-yet)-arriving’ (*anāgamyā*, *AKB* VI.47). On many occasions in the *Suttas*, a person attains the *Dhamma*-eye, that is, at least stream-entry, when the Buddha talks to them on the four *ariya-saccas* after he had talked them into a state without the hindrances:

Then the Blessed One gave the householder Upāli a step-by-step discourse, that is, talk on giving, talk on moral virtue, talk on the heaven worlds; he made known the danger, the inferior nature and tendency to defilement of sense-pleasures, and the advantage of renouncing them. When the Blessed One knew that the

12. Desire for sense-pleasures, ill-will, dullness and lethargy, restlessness and worry, and vacillation.

householder Upāli's mind was ready (*kalla-*), pliable (*mudu-*), without hindrances (*vi-nīvaraṇa-*), inspired (*udagga-*), calm and clear (*pasanna-*), then he expounded to him the *Dhamma*-teaching special to the buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sāmukkamsikā*): *dukkha*, (its) origin, (its) cessation, the path.

(MN I.379-80)

That a state free of the hindrances is conducive to attaining stream-entry accords with the above MN I.280 idea that noble ones are far from unskilful states that defile.

When might the mind be hindrance-free and imbued with insight so as to be poised for the birth of the noble path? We see that DN III.241-43 describes five domains in which liberation (*vimutti*) may be attained, namely when gladness (*pāmojja*), joy (*pīti*), bodily tranquility (*passaddha-kāya*), happiness (*sukha*) and then *samādhi*¹³ arise when: listening to someone else teach *Dhamma*, while teaching it oneself, while making a detailed repetition (*vittārena sajjhāyam karoti*) of *Dhamma*, while thinking and pondering on and attentively considering (*anuvitakketi anuvicāreti manasānupekkhati*) *Dhamma*, or when a *samādhi-nimitta* (a 'sign' or mental image in *samatha* meditation¹⁴) is grasped, well attended to and is penetrated with wisdom.

Within meditation, penetration of the four true realities is often from *jhāna*. In the *Vibhaṅga*, in its *Abhidhamma* analysis of the path-factors, as with the *Dhs* 277 on the first kind of *lokuttara citta*, it is said (236-37):

At the time when a monk develops *lokuttara jhāna* that is emancipating (*niyyānikam*), going to diminution (*apacaya-gāmin*) (of rebirth); he, for the abandoning of being gone to (wrong) view, for the entering of (*pattiyā*) the first stage (*bhūmiyā*, i.e. stream-entry),¹⁵ secluded from sense pleasures...attains and dwells in the first *jhāna*...at that time there is the Eight-factored Path.

In the *Suttas*, penetration of the four *ariya-saccas* is often from the *fourth jhāna*, when open to 'knowing and seeing', so that a person's mind is: 'serene, purified, cleansed, flawless, free from corruptions, become pliable, workable, firm, imperturbable (*samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mūdū-bhūte kammaniye ṭhite ānejjappatte*)' (DN I.76). The aspects of being 'purified, cleansed, flawless, free from corruptions' is also found in right view through to right concentration (SN V.15), which are also seen as without taints (AN V.242), though these right factors must add something more, as the *jhānic* flawless state is one from which the psychic powers are practised, these still being not yet noble or free from taints (DN III.112-13).

Rupert Gethin comments that '*nibbāna* can be understood in some sense as standing in the same relationship to the conditioned world in its entirety,

13. This list includes several of the seven factors of awakening.

14. Though at MN I.301, the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are described as the *samādhi-nimitta*, in the sense of the cause of *samādhi*. My thanks to Ven. Anālayo for pointing this out.

15. *Vibh* 265 makes it clear that the 'first stage' must mean stream-entry, rather than simply the first *jhāna*, as the phrase is used also in relation to the second *jhāna*, when this is *lokuttara*.

as the first *jhāna* stands in relation to the world of the five senses' (2001: 204). The suspension of the five hindrances ('access concentration') is the transition from the world of the five senses to that of (full-strength) first *jhāna* and also seems to be the minimum state from which the noble *magga*—that is the transition state for knowing *Nibbāna*—can arise. The noble *magga* can itself be seen as a kind of world-transcendent 'access' state, that builds on the five-sense-world-transcending access *samādhi*. While in what came to be called 'access concentration', the five factors of *jhāna* are present but need to be developed to full strength before full-strength first *jhāna* is attained. In the case of the noble *magga*, the eight path factors are present but need to be developed to full strength before stream-entry can be attained, when the four true realities for the noble ones are first directly seen and known. Just as the Theravāda tradition came to see only full absorption as '*jhāna*', excluding what it called 'access concentration', it reserved the title of 'noble *magga*' for the moment when fetters are broken, excluding the level of practice that leads to this.

THE FIRST ARISING OF THE PATH AS 'ENTERING THE FIXED COURSE OF RIGHTNESS'

What else, though, do the *Suttas* say on the first arising of the noble path? An important passage at SN III.225, in a short *saṃyutta* on 'entering (*okkanti*)', talks of a state that guarantees the attainment of stream-entry later in the present life. It says that the six senses are impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise, and then that:

One who places faith in these teachings and resolves on them (*saddahati adhimuccati*) is called a faith-follower (*saddhānusāri*), one who has entered the fixed course of rightness (*okkanto sammatta-niyāmaṃ*), entered the plane of genuine persons (*sappurisa-bhūmiṃ*), transcended the plane of ordinary persons (*puṭhujjana-bhūmiṃ*). He is incapable of doing any deed by reason of which he might be reborn in hell, in the animal realm, or in the domain of ghosts; he is incapable of passing away without having realised the fruit that is stream-entry (*abhabbo ca tāva kālaṃ kātuṃ yāva na sotāpatti-phalaṃ sacchikaroti*).

One for whom these teachings are accepted with a measure of appreciative understanding through his wisdom (*ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*) is called a *Dhamma*-follower (*dhammānusāri*), one who has entered the fixed course of rightness...he is incapable of passing away without having realised the fruit that is stream-entry.

One who knows and sees (*jānāti passati*) these *dhammas* thus is called a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny (*niyato*), with awakening as his destination (*sambodhi-parāyano*).

Here, the faith- and *Dhamma*-follower are the kind of persons who have 'entered the fixed course of rightness' and are certain to become stream-enterers at some time later in their current life. During this time they are

‘practising for the realization of the fruit that is stream-entry’. While the commentaries¹⁶ see this kind of person as only lasting one moment, the moment of the *magga*, this implausible idea is belied by the fact that they last at least long enough to be able to abstain from doing a bad action. Moreover, the above quote sees stream-entry as not coming in the next moment, but simply some time later in the present life.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, in discussing SN III.225, says:

At a certain point in the course of contemplation, when insight becomes sharp and penetrative, the disciple enters the fixed course of rightness (*sammattaniyāma*), the supramundane path, either as a faith-follower or a Dhamma-follower, and thereby becomes one bound to win the fruit of stream-entry within this life itself. Now he or she is described as one practising for the realization of the fruit of stream-entry.... When the practice of the path is fully ripe, all eight factors converge and join forces, setting off the ‘breakthrough to the Dhamma’ by which the disciple directly sees the Four Noble Truths and cuts off the three lower fetters.

Now the disciple has truly plunged into the stream of Dhamma, the transcendental eightfold path, which will bear him or her onwards to the great ocean of Nibbāna. But the disciple must continue to cultivate the eight path factors until the remaining fetters are eradicated and the underlying fetters uprooted.

(Bodhi 2000: 1496)

In the above, it seems that ‘supramundane’ means *lokuttara* in the sense of aiming to see beyond the world, and ‘transcendent’ means *lokuttara* in the sense of actually doing so. However, in the 1984 quote on p. 35 above, when explaining the commentarial view, Bodhi uses ‘supramundane’ only for what he means by ‘transcendent’ here.

In the SN III.225 passage, the ‘fixed course of rightness’ (*sammattaniyāmaṃ*) is ‘fixed’ or ‘certain’ in that it will certainly lead to stream-entry in the current life.¹⁷ The ‘fixed course’ is the noble *magga*, its eight ‘right’ factors being its ‘rightness’; ‘rightness’ is not something that arises at stream-entry. This is shown when Sn 55 says ‘attained the fixed course (*niyāmaṃ*), having gained the *magga*’, and it is said that the Buddha taught for the benefit of the person who will ‘enter the fixed course that is rightness in regard to skilful *dhammas* (*okkamati niyāmaṃ kusalesu dhammesu sammattam*)’ (AN I.122)—with ‘skilful *dhammas*’ being explained as right view to right concentration (SN V.18), which is also the meaning of ‘rightness’ (SN V.18). Hence the ‘fixed course of rightness’ that the person practising for the realization of stream-entry has entered is itself the Noble Eight-factored Path.

16. E.g. SN-a II.346, on this passage, which sees it as meaning that the faith-follower and Dhamma-follower are in the (momentary) noble *magga*, such that there is no cause that can prevent the immediate (*anantarāya*) arising of the stream-entry-fruit. Cf. Pug I.20 (p. 13) says that a world eon cannot end before one practising for the realization of the stream-entry-fruit attains that fruit, such that this may even hold up the end of an eon.

17. Cf. AN III.441-42, which says that one cannot experience the fruit that is stream-entry unless one has ‘entered the fixed course of rightness’.

They have the ‘the right way of practice’ (*sammā-paṭipadā*), ‘the method, the Dhamma that is skilful (*ñāyaṃ dhammaṃ kusalaṃ*)’ (*SN V.19*).

Moreover, the person ‘practising for the realization of the fruit that is stream-entry’ is already on the noble path as he or she is clearly one who is ‘rightly practising’ (*sammā-paṭipanno*), who is in turn ‘of right view’ (*sammāditṭhiko*) through to ‘of right concentration’ (*SN V.23*), with the next *Sutta* identifying these as the ‘Noble Eight-factored Path’. He has the five faculties (*indriyas*) in some measure (*SN V.202*), and of these, wisdom (*paññā*) is defined as being noble: ‘Here, monks, the disciple of the Noble One is wise; he possesses wisdom directed to arising and passing away, which is noble and penetrative (*ariyāya nibbedhikāya*), leading to the complete destruction of *dukkha*’ (*SN V.197*). The ‘practising’ person must be included in those who are a trainee (*sekho*), one who ‘possesses a trainee’s right view (*sekhāya sammāditṭhiyā sammannāgato hoti*)...a trainee’s right concentration’ (*SN V.14*).

That said, *SN V.347-48* says that a stream-enterer is ‘one who possesses (*samannāgato*) this Noble Eight-factored Path’, which is ‘the stream’, implying that one who is not yet a stream-enterer does not yet possess this ‘stream’. Now *MN III.72* says that the second kind of right view is had by one ‘who, developing the noble *magga* (*ariya-maggaṃ bhāvayato*), is...endowed with (*samaṅgino*) the noble *magga*’. Perhaps the person practising for the realization of stream-entry is the first to be ‘endowed with’ the path, but the stream-enterer fully ‘possesses’ it. The ‘practising’ person is on the noble path, but the stream-enterer is one who ‘knows and sees’, implying that he or she has directly *seen* that the noble path actually *does* lead to that which is beyond *dukkha*, the unconditioned. Both kinds of persons should be ‘developing’ the path, though.

Prior to stream-entry, the right view of the Noble Eight-factored Path, which is a noble wisdom, need not include direct ‘knowing and seeing’ of that which is the cessation of *dukkha*, as it is often explained simply as knowledge (*ñāna*) concerning *dukkha* and the other three *ariya-saccas*, with the objects of knowledge being in the locative case: for example, *dukkhe ñāṇaṃ* (*SN V.8-9*; similarly *DN II.311-13*, *MN III.251-52*, *Vibh 235-36*). It is also explained as seeing as impermanent the five *khandhas* (*SN III.51*) or the six senses and their objects (*SN IV.142*), in which cases its objects are still conditioned ones.

One with the ‘fixed course of rightness’ has the factors of the noble path, and this course will definitely lead to stream-entry in this life. This makes it very unlikely that it could consist of the non-noble, non-*lokuttara* path factors of *MN 117*. It is far more likely to be the *lokuttara* one, though not only in the later sense of this as a momentary state that sees *Nibbāna*.

The person ‘practising for the realization of the fruit that is stream-entry’, being on the ‘fixed course of rightness’, and endowed with but not fully possessed of the Noble Eight-factored Path, is a kind of trainee for Arahatsip. He or she is on an apprenticeship course that will definitely lead, in this life, to the training stages that will then definitely lead to Arahatsip within

seven lives. He can perhaps also be seen as a trainee noble person, attuned to and absorbing *Dhamma* in a way that in some ways paralleled how, in Brahmanism, an *ārya-varṇa* boy had his *upanayana* ceremony that rendered him 'twice-born' and then studied the *Vedas* in his *brahmacarya* stage.

WHAT ONE ON THE NOBLE PATH DOES PRIOR TO STREAM-ENTRY

As to how those practising for stream-entry conduct themselves, they must clearly have the four factors for stream-entry (*sotāpattiyaṅgas*¹⁸), which 'when developed and cultivated lead to the realization of the fruit that is stream-entry', or to the other three noble fruits, or to the growth of wisdom. These four factors, which must surely arise in sequence, are (*SN V.410-11*): association with genuine persons (*sappurisas*), hearing the true *Dhamma* (*sadhamma*), wise attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*), that is, probing attention in meditative practice or mindful reflection, and practice of *Dhamma* in accordance with *Dhamma* (*dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti*) (*SN V.347, DN III.227*). It 81-82 explains a *dhammānudhamma-paṭipanna* monk as one who speaks only of *Dhamma* when he speaks, and thinks only of *Dhamma* when he thinks (*vitakketi*), so as to have equanimity and be mindful and with clear comprehension. Hence he is delighting in *Dhamma* (*Dhammārāmo*) and one who ponders (*anuvicintayam*) and recollects (*anussaram*) *Dhamma*. Whatever he is doing, he causes his *citta* to settle internally.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that in the *Suttas*, the Noble Eight-factored *Magga* is neither the general practice of Buddhism, including ordinary levels of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation, nor, as in the developed *Abhidhamma*-cum-commentarial view, only the instant prior to stream-entry. It is a specific eight-factored way of approach, or skilful method that can arise when the mind is free of the five hindrances, especially during a sermon on the four *ariya-saccas* or when there is *samatha* and strong *vipassanā* into the three marks, especially impermanence. As the Noble Eight-factored Path is one of the four 'True Realities for the Noble Ones', and one that needs to be both understood (*SN V.414*) and developed (*SN V.422*), it is important to understand what exactly it is.

The noble *magga* is a basic orientation in a state of open readiness. It is a 'fixed course of rightness' that is certain to bring stream-entry at some time in the current life. It is like a plane revving its engines and then start-

18. *DN III.227* makes clear that the four 'factors of stream-entry', also *sotāpattiyaṅgas*, mean factors of the stream-enterer (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*): serene faith in the three refuges, and pure virtue.

ing to take off from its runway, or perhaps better, like the *Star Trek* space-ship powering up its warp-drive engines and the first moment of their use as the space-ship zooms off; or it is like a wedge being skilfully driven into a block of stone, then its starting to split, or a person calmly singing ready for the sound to shatter a glass, up to the moment of its splintering. The take-off, splitting of the stone or shattering of the glass are the moment when the first three fetters are, in a flash, being destroyed, and *Nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*, is briefly glimpsed through the ‘crack’ in *saṃsāra*, so to speak; by contrast, the conditioned realm is recognized as that which is *dukkha*. In this respect, the ‘noble *magga*’ is also like a ticking happiness-bomb, primed to explode, up to moment when the detonator goes off.

For the developed *Abhidhamma*, the term ‘noble *magga*’ is reserved for the fetter-destroying moment, but in the *Suttas* this moment is the final one of the Noble *magga*, immediately prior to the moment when a person is first a stream-enterer, one free of the first three fetters. The *Suttas* seem to see the noble *magga* as a whole as lasting some time, as experienced by the faith-follower and *Dhamma*-follower who are those who are ‘practising for the realization of the fruit that is stream-entry’. As this is a state in which a person is wholly taken up with *Dhamma*, it seems that the noble *magga* is a persistent state, rather than one that is periodically re-entered, such that it will not be left until stream-entry is attained. This suggests that, while it may not be momentary, it may well not last a very long time. This is also suggested by the fact that MN II.95-96 says that for a monk with faith, wisdom, honesty, good health and energy for abandoning unskilful states, then when taught by a *Tathāgata*, the entire spiritual transition up to Arahathship will only take from seven years down to half a day, where, ‘being instructed in the morning, he attains distinction (*visesam*) in the evening’.

As an approach or method, the noble path of the *Suttas* is compared to a forgotten forest path to a forgotten city (SN II.105-106). It also seems akin to a previously obscured passageway or tunnel that has been opened up and that leads to a ‘door’ to the deathless, and its unlocking. For the developed *Abhidhamma* and commentaries, the noble *magga* is the door itself (SN-a II.59), or rather the moment when it unlocks and clicks open to allow a few following moments of ‘fruit’ consciousness before the door closes (though remaining unlocked so as to allow further ‘fruit’ glimpses).

Being a stream-enterer does not mean that one is necessarily a person practising for a higher realization, for a stream-enterer may be negligent (SN V.398). To reach a higher state, a person must not only revisit what they have already experienced—what came to be called the ‘fruit’ of the relevant path—but must bring about and develop the path to a new level. In terms of the above passageway analogy, they need to not only look through the door they have previously opened, but also to enlarge the door using the skilful method of the Noble Eight-factored Path. Ajahn Sucitto (2011: 240–41) gives the graphic image of a stream-enterer as like a prisoner who has made a small

hole in his prison wall, so as to enjoy the fresh air and daylight from outside; a once-returner is like a prisoner who has enlarged the hole and got his head through it; the non-returner is like a prisoner who has got out through an even larger hole, but keeps returning to the prison 'to rest, eat and do business'; the *Arahat* is like a prisoner who gets out and stays out: 'It is only this last type, who perseveres and develops the confidence to get out, walk away and live outside the prison, that is truly free'.

ABBREVIATIONS

AKB	<i>Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Asl	<i>Atthasālinī</i> : commentary on <i>Dhs</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
MN-a	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> commentary: <i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Paṭi	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
PED	<i>Pali-English Dictionary</i> (Rhys Davids and Stede 1921–1925).
Pug	<i>Puggala-paññati</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
SN-a	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> commentary: <i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Vibh-a	<i>Vibhaṅga</i> commentary: <i>Sammohavinodanī</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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