

The Dhamma in Brief: The Graduated Discourse (Class 2 of 3)

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Review and Reflections on the Dhamma in Brief

Kim Allen

Okay, so last time we considered the 44 suttas where the Buddha gives the Dhamma in brief as a teaching to someone who's going on retreat. And we saw that the two main topics for meditation were the five aggregates and the six sense bases. And then the wisdom aspect was most often some version of the three characteristics. That's a bunch of technical terminology, but we went over that last time. And even though that's all technical sounding, I gave some fairly mundane examples of how we could touch into these practices in our daily life, such as looking at the permanence of taste or looking at the uncontrollability, which is part of not-self, of sound.

And I'm curious if anyone has any comments about trying any of those, or anything that you may have noticed in daily life that somehow relates to the main topics of what the Buddha was teaching in the Dhamma in brief. Just wanted to make space for winding things up from last week.

Questioner

You know, my emotional states change, thank God. And then they change back. And I keep thinking, this is going to change. And it does.

Kim Allen

And is that helpful to be aware of that?

Questioner

yes. It keeps me from getting excessively depressed and also not overly excited.

Kim Allen

And not overly excited either. Yeah, that's great. That is a perfect everyday example. And as you know, emotional states are part of **sankhara**, the fourth of the five aggregates. So you're right in there with one of the teachings that the Buddha was offering.

And, yeah, I do want to highlight that seeing that things change helps us kind of mitigate the highs and the lows, right? And we'll actually see a reference today also to someone understanding the nature of change. It was a deep teaching given by the Buddha, even though it's also fairly everyday. So thanks, Wayne. Yeah. Yeah.

The Graduated Discourse: Context and Structure

Kim Allen

Okay. So in the suttas, when we looked at them, the **Dhamma in brief** is a form of teaching that's given to a monastic. And probably related to the fact that it's about going off on retreat. And that wasn't something that lay people really did in the time of the Buddha. They didn't have the space in their life.

So we live in a very special and interesting time where lay people can actually do that. There's an interesting history to lay people learning how to go on retreat, but that's not the subject of this class, so don't get me on it. But it's fairly recent, actually, and we are the beneficiaries of that. So we also saw that from the Dhamma in brief, this person going on retreat may or may not attain full awakening from it. It seems to depend mostly on the person.

The **Dhamma in Brief** is a deep Dharma teaching that's aimed at being able to awaken the mind completely. And it kind of encapsulates the full depth of the Buddha's teaching into this one summary, if you will, that he gives to these people. And as far as we can tell, that is in the cases where we actually know who the person was that he gave it to, these people were pretty far along in their practice. He gave it to people who were dedicated practitioners, even among monastics. They had a lot of experience.

So what about us? For lay people, there's a teaching, a form of teaching, that's called the **graduated discourse**. I mentioned this at the end of the last class. It's also called the **progressive discourse** or the **step-by-step discourse**. It all depends how you translate the word **anupubba**, which means something like following in turn, successive or gradual.

And just as I mentioned this before, but this is not the same as the **gradual training**, which is in itself kind of an encapsulated teaching that's talked about in many suttas, and it goes through what happens to a person from when they embark on the path through all the different things they would have

to train in in order to awaken. This is a different idea. This is one single discourse. It's a single Dharma talk that's delivered to a layperson that takes them through a standard set of topics that we're going to look at today, which leads to **stream entry** in Pāli suttas. And stream entry is the first of the stages of awakening, so it's not full awakening.

That's the fourth. So it seems, though, that the Buddha gave this special talk to someone whom he knew was ready to have some kind of a deep dharmic insight. He saw that their mind was kind of ready for it. So it's not that the discourse itself is guaranteed to have some kind of powerful effect by its own nature, but instead it's the intuition of the Buddha that the person was ready. So I just want to make that clear.

Although we will go through the topics today, and if you listen carefully, you never know, right? So it could have been different. The implication, and so the graduated discourse, could have been different each time in length or style. All we know is the list of topics, and we don't know how the Buddha went through them or how long it took. So I'll get to that list in a moment.

The implication, I think, from reading the text that I've read that include it, is that it wasn't super long either. I mean, he usually gives it to a layperson who's kind of standing there or sitting there with him, sometimes even with other people present. And so the implication is probably not like a three or four hour long lecture with diagrams and charts and sorts of things. It's kind of something that he goes through and highlights various topics in the person's mind and leads them along a path. So it's an interesting concept, right?

As we're talking about this sudden versus gradual, here we have a case where a person has a significant change from hearing one discourse. So we'll talk about context a little bit more as it goes along. But let's get into it a little bit. There are three general parts to these graduated discourse teachings. There are the preliminary conditions.

There's the topics of the talk. and there's the result in the layperson. And as far as I know, this talk was given in nine suttas, and we'll talk later about who the recipients were. But for now, let's say a little bit about each of these parts. So the preliminary conditions.

Preliminary Conditions and Expressions of Confidence

Kim Allen

So these always include some kind of expression or indication of deep confidence in the Buddha from the lay person. So this is always described in some way in the text that precedes when the Buddha starts giving this discourse. And it varies a bit from sutta to sutta. So it's not like there's a formula just for this part. But there are, I can name a few of the various ways.

A common one is that the person declares that they are going for refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. You may have said the refuges if you've been on retreat. In our tradition, we often say the three refuges at the beginning of the retreat as part of the setting, the container. It's where you say, I go for refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and the Sangha for a second time, for a third time. You may have done that in Pāli or heard it.

So people actually do that in the teachings. They don't use exactly that formulaic language. They don't use exactly the same language that we use at the beginning of retreats, but they use a stock phrase that's very similar to that, just a little bit more elaborate. I think I'll read it later. And then also there are some cases where the person sees, it's hard to describe this to a modern audience, but a couple of the people were Brahmins who were looking for what are called the **32 marks of a great man**, which are like the 32 marks that are supposed to show that somebody is enlightened according to their tradition.

And the Buddha apparently had these marks. And so they would come and they were looking for the marks. And there comes a point, you know, when they're interacting with the Buddha that they realize that he has all 32 marks. And so then that's their understanding of it. Then they have confidence in him because that's what their tradition says is useful.

So that happens in a couple of cases. And then there's a couple of cases of kind of several cases of what we call instant devotion, where somebody says, you know, upon seeing the Buddha, my heart acquired confidence. And, you know, there's the idea that the Buddha had a very special kind of bearing, somebody who was enlightened and people who were attuned to that could see that. And then there was also the case of a kind of an exceptional case, one of them, where a person who was a very marginal in society, he was a leper, came to, he saw a big gathering of people and he thought maybe there's going to be food given out there. and so he went and it turned out not to be food but to be a dharma talk and he um so he nominally his reason for being there ended but he got intrigued and he saw that people were listening and he said i think i can listen to the dharma also and so he kind of sits down and you can see that he's kind of drawn to what's going on and he ends up being a recipient of this discourse so we'll talk more about this quality of confidence or faith later because it's actually very rich and not very well understood necessarily we tend to have a different idea about it in our own culture but there's it's very important it's clear when you read these suttas it's common to all of them is that the person slowly or quickly develops some kind of confidence, such that their mind is open and receptive and has faith in that moment.

So then, seeing this and realizing that not only they had faith, because a lot of people came with faith, but they not only had faith, but they had the conditions in their mind for being able to receive the Dharma at that moment, the Buddha realizes this. The text says,

Then the Blessed One gave the householder Upāli progressive instruction. That is, talk on giving, talk on virtue, talk on the heavens. He explained the danger, degradation, and defilement in sensual pleasures and the blessing of renunciation. When he knew that the householder Upāli's mind was ready receptive free from hindrances elated and confident he expounded to him the teaching special to the buddhas, dukkha its origin its cessation and the path there you go that's the discourse um it starts with donna and it ends with the Four Noble Truths.

And so that's fairly indicative of other patterns you may have seen in the suttas, where **dana** is almost always the foundational quality that we need to have. And then the **Four Noble Truths** somehow encapsulate and point toward awakening in a way that was considered unique to the Buddha. Some of you know that the **Turning of the Wheel discourse** is about the Four Noble Truths, where the Buddha first expounds those. And so that was considered his first discourse. And so this was when he established his modern language, established his brand.

That's a terrible thing to say, isn't it? But that was his thing. And so here it's labeled as the teaching special to the Buddhas. So I want to go through these topics and kind of frame them in a progressive way. Why do these form a progression?

And this is now my interpretation because we're never told what that is. I just read the text of what it says. It doesn't say how the Buddha talked about each of these things, how he strung them together. Maybe that would have been clearer to somebody in that culture. Maybe there's some obvious link between all of these.

But I don't think so. I think it was a unique talk that he gave, and we can interpret it based on knowing his teachings in general. So he starts with giving, **dana**, and that is really considered the foundational quality for a follower of the Buddha. So not only is it a literal giving in the sense of supporting teachers, sanghas, monasteries, this is built right into the structure of the teachings where the monastics are dependent upon the lay people for their livelihood. Monastics in the Theravada Buddhist tradition can't cook, store food, or grow it.

So you don't eat unless somebody gives you food, and it has to be every day because you can't store it. So it was built in that the monastics were dependent on lay people. This was wise. They couldn't be kind of elite and off by themselves. They had to be in association with people who were living in the world.

So that's kind of the foundational understanding is that there's this mutual dependence between the monastics and the lay people, and that's the foundation of dana. So everyone would have understood that. Everyone who was interested in the Buddhist teachings would have understood that. But a little bit more subtly, we have giving. We're going to see renunciation coming up.

Giving or letting go as an ongoing thing that we do all along the path. Maybe there's literal giving, but there's also then giving up of the hindrances, sitting in meditation, being willing to train the mind.

What do we have to give up in order to practice the path? And eventually, letting go of deep views that we carry about how things work, understandings about ourselves, understandings about so many things that end up being insights on the path. Those are all letting go of various kinds.

So I think it's not just accidental that giving is first, and it's not just literal, like Buddha is trying to get more donations or something. It's a quality of mind and heart that's going to serve all along the path. Then he talks about virtue, **sīla**, also very commonly near the beginning of lists, *dāna*, *sīla*. And in this case, you know, he means that the mind has to be well-directed. So at the most basic form for lay people, virtue is the five, keeping of the five foundational precepts, which are common to many spiritual traditions and religions the world over.

The first four of them, I think, being common, yeah, to nearly all of them, not killing, not stealing, not sexual misconduct and not lying. Those are quite basic. And then the fifth for lay people in this tradition is non-intoxication, mind and body. And so this is also foundational. People tend to frame it as I'm supposed to be a good person.

Sometimes in the West we get confused with other religious ideas that talk about what will happen to you after you die based on your behavior here. And that's true in the realm of rebirth also, but in a more immediately practical sense, virtue is the basis for sound meditation. You can't really easily get the mind settled and concentrated and directed toward insight if there's a lot of churning around in the system because we haven't been behaving in line with wholesome qualities. So whatever your motivation is for wholesome qualities, the Buddha had a very practical reason for pointing in that direction. And also remember he's giving a talk to somebody who has faith and he's trying to lead them along toward being able to have an insight.

And so we see here that having wholesome qualities of mind is going to be very supportive for the mind to be able to awaken, to have insight. So talk on virtue. And also virtue feels good, right? For, you know, if you have a theoretical idea of it, sometimes people think, oh, virtue, ethics, reminds me of, you know, times in the past where this was put on me as an obligation or something. But when we actually touch into the experience of wholesomeness, it feels so good, you know, to know that we've acted in line with these virtuous qualities.

So this person is also starting to feel really good through this talk being given to them. And then we have talk on the heavens. Where did that come from? So this is about the **deva realms**. And in this case, I think what's being pointed to is not so much sort of a belief or an idea that there's what's going to happen to this person after they die or something like that.

In the Buddhist cosmology, the deva realms are occupied by beings who have cultivated a lot of good qualities in their life. And you can be reborn in heaven by being a good person and also by cultivating concentration and other meditative qualities. And the heavens are a lot better than the human realm in terms of how they feel. You don't have such bodily pain. You exist for a very long time.

Things are generally tranquil, easier to be with. So it's something that would have been appealing. It's

appealing enough for us here. It would have been very appealing to somebody in Iron Age India. It was this notion of living in the heaven realms, being reborn as a deva.

Yeah, and here, so he's pointing, he's reminding people, essentially, that they're part of a much bigger cosmological picture. You know, we tend to get ourselves focused in on our little world, our problems, what we're going to do today, what we need to do by tomorrow, all the little day-to-day things that we have to occupy ourselves with. He's painting a bigger picture of there being a whole cosmos, and there's a lot of potential through goodness and virtue to experience much better living conditions and better life conditions. And even in this life, we can start to partake of some of those. So the person feels even more inspired.

You know, all the heavens, yeah, the bigger picture, these wonderful, amazing realms that are possible and are part of the universe. And then we get to the fourth topic. He explained the danger, degradation, and defilement in sensual pleasures. Yeah, right. So this is classic Buddhism, right?

Then we get to the downer part about the sense pleasures that sometimes overly characterizes us, let me say. But essentially, I can see this following on from the prior ones in that if we're wrapped up in sensual pleasures of various kinds, we're not really able to access these higher states of mind. We know that the first of the five hindrances that prevent wisdom and concentration on the cushion is sensual desire, which means sitting there on cushion and fantasizing about what you're going to have for lunch after this meditation is over, or imagining your trip to Hawaii and why that would be more interesting than having to sit here for half an hour being quiet, these kinds of things.

And, you know, even if we're not overly focused on sensual pleasures in our life, I think all of us have had sits where it was really thinking about, you know, something that is essentially what I'm going to get, what I'm going to get sometime in the future or what I had in the past. Wasn't it great when I was, you know, hanging out with my friends last weekend at that restaurant? Oh, that was such a good dish we had. Maybe I could cook that. Did I ever get that recipe online? I was going to look it up, you know.

So the mind is kind of wandering around in that territory. And so the Buddha reminds the person, you know, this is a limited way of living compared to *dāna*, *sīla*, the potential for these higher mind states. And so the person realizes, oh, yeah, okay, so it's true. These don't really go anywhere. And you see people with more of these or fewer of these, but everybody seems unhappy.

And the process of pursuing them takes a lot of energy and effort, right? So then he goes on to the blessing. That word could also be translated as benefit or advantage of renunciation. And here, the word renunciation is always problematic. That's the standard one.

So I said it, but, and I think we should revive this word a little bit and have a different understanding of it than it's gotten in Western society, let's say. But the renunciation is offered as the escape from being enslaved to our senses, you know, to our smaller drives, internal drives that we have for food

and sex and things like that. So renunciation is the wisdom to choose how to do those things wisely. I mean, obviously, we're still going to eat and relate people. We're going to reproduce.

It's fine to have a vacation. And, you know, it's all those things. But renunciation includes the wisdom of being able to say when it's the right time for each of those things. Sometimes renunciation is associated with leaving the household life and ordaining as a monastic. That's another meaning of the term.

I don't think that's what's meant in this graduated discourse because it's given to a lay person. And in general, they don't ordain afterward. There's one case where they do, but it's a special case.

Kim Allen

It wasn't the Buddha Gautama that induced the person to ordain. It's a story about a prior Buddha, the Buddha Vipassī. There were other Buddhas. And so I'm going to take that one as an exception and say that for the Buddha Gautama, nobody who got this discourse ended up ordaining. So that's not what renunciation means here.

It just means that this is an alternative. Having enough wisdom to be able to say yes to say no to the more animal side is a benefit. And generally, the blessing of renunciation is meant to have two sides to it. One is that you get the blessing of not being enslaved to the sensual pleasures. You get the blessing of whatever challenges were coming because of that, whatever difficulties with expending your energy and so forth.

All those are gone. And you also gain a bunch of space in your life to have more good things come in. The classic example I give is that the deepest, maybe one of the deepest forms of sense pleasure addiction we have is literal addiction to alcohol or drugs in our society, fairly well known. And the blessing of not doing that is twofold. One is that you're no longer being damaged by the alcohol, literally.

And the other is that you suddenly have more money, more time, more ability to work, better friends. New good things come into your life through giving up that addiction. So somehow the Buddha conveys all of those ideas in this first part. And then the person is poised. And the text says, when he knew that this householder's mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident.

So there's five qualities that we could see as conditions. Remember, I always talk about conditionality in these transformations. These are the conditions that are there. And these are the conditions where the Buddha says, okay, now this person's ready for the Four Noble Truths. And then he teaches them *dukkha*, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

So there I think he points maybe quite deeply to, he's not just talking anymore about sort of ordinary sense pleasures. He's talking about all kinds of stress and suffering and difficulty and unsatisfactori-

ness that there is in life. And not to say that life is those things, but that they exist. And when you really look at it, it is hard. It's hard to be a human.

And people have a sense of it. If you've spent your life just trying to have the job and the house and the family and the dog and trying to keep all that stuff going, there comes a point where you realize this is kind of tiring. And what is all this for? What am I aiming for in all of this? So the Buddha points out, yeah, there is an underlying drive in us that's kind of fueling all of this activity.

And unless we see that that drive can be released, there will be no end to the ongoing struggle, those things. But there is a way to end that push underneath, which is the craving, origin, the craving to get more, do more, be more, be different, anything, or not be anymore, to stop being. All those things are part of craving. And when we see sort of the root underneath all of that frenetic activity that we do, it's possible to, he says, it's possible to release that. And the person gets a glimpse of, ah, that would be great.

And then he tells them there's a path to do that. And so during this, we have, the person gets it. And they, so now we move on to the result of this teaching. And I'll read again the text. And it's always the same.

Just as a clean cloth with all marks removed would take dye evenly, so too, while the householder Upāli sat there, the spotless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in him. All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation. That's interesting in and of itself. We'll get back to that, but I'll just finish it off. Then householder Upāli saw the Dhamma, attained the Dhamma, understood the Dhamma, fathomed the Dhamma. He crossed beyond doubt, did away with perplexity, gained intrepidity, and became independent of others in the teacher's dispensation.

Wow. So that's the stock phrases around this attainment of **stream entry** in the case of the graduated discourse. So the spotless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma also could be said dustless or stainless. I'm not sure I like the word immaculate. It has implications from other religions, sounds like.

But this vision of the Dhamma, or sometimes eye of the Dhamma, it said, the word is literally eye, but vision, I think, is appropriate also. So they see something. And the insight is all that is subject to arising is subject to cessation. Or we could also say, based on the Pāli, anything that is of the nature to arise is of the nature to cease. So that's interesting.

The realization is **impermanence**. And we may not immediately perceive this conclusion as following logically from what came before, from this graduated discourse. And, you know, I would say, I'm going to say that that's explained because, you know, it's an insight. It's not a logical deduction. It's just not something that it was all explained in a certain way.

And the person says, oh, I get it. Finally, I understand what, you know, what a covalent bond is instead of, you know, before I only understood ionic bonds. But now you've explained it so clearly. It's not really like that. I just pulled that out of a hat.

But it's more like an insight. So the person listens to this whole thing and their mind shifts in a certain way such that they have this understanding of impermanence. But I would say it is in line with the flow of the graduated discourse which points the person toward essentially higher potentials. First, the ordinary higher potentials that come from giving, from virtue, from letting go of all the sense pleasures and being wise about living in a restrained way, the potential for heaven, and then the potential for really letting go of a whole concept of what it is that we're doing in life. And that is the little turn or the big turn that comes in the mind with stream entries to understand it's not actually about me.

It's not actually about me. There isn't an eternal soul that we could call that, and there's a process going on that isn't about that. So it's a big change in understanding, in a sense. I think I don't want to go too much farther into that. Oh, and then maybe I'll add that typically after the person has this realization,

They do something reverential like offer a meal to the Buddha or something like that, or say some inspired verses. Sometimes people take refuge after the graduated discourse, by the way. They have some other act of faith beforehand. They get the discourse, and then they declare refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. So there it is.

That's the graduated discourse. and how it unfolds and the effect of the person wakes up, essentially. They're not fully awakened, but their life has been irrevocably changed by understanding what the Buddha was explaining about the Four Noble Truths. So maybe I'll pause there and just ask for questions at this point.

Questioner

I'll just ask briefly, is it that sort of compacted? Because it seems like, for example, the Buddha could say quite a bit about the danger, degradation, and defilement of sense pleasures to really help the person get it, for example.

Kim Allen

That's a good point. There are whole suttas where he lists long lists of disadvantages of engaging in the pursuit of sense pleasures. And like I said, I don't really know how long this discourse was. The implication doesn't seem to be that it was hours and hours long. So my guess is he probably, maybe he chose, this is now my interpretation, maybe he knew the person enough or could look into their mind and chose particular examples that would be meaningful for them and pointed them just through a couple of examples toward understanding that.

Remember that their mind was very faithful and very poised toward wanting to hear this teaching. So yeah, I would guess that he summarized it in some compact way.

Questioner

I'm just curious, would you mind naming another one of those pseudorots, unpacked just like I'd love to go read the kind of expanded version.

Kim Allen

I think *Majjhima Nikāya* 13, I think has quite a bit. And then there's also one, I don't remember the exact number somewhere in the sixties that has quite a lot also. Both of them are referenced in my book, actually. In *Full Simplicity*, there's a section on the dangers of sense pleasure in both of those 13 and whatever the one I couldn't remember is talked about there. Thanks.

Good question. Yeah, one question I had was, thank you first for all of this information. You mentioned sort of the preliminary conditions sort of being first, and then when it comes to the topics, did it seem like it was a preliminary condition for a person to understand one topic before the Buddha would continue on to the other topic? Was it sort of step-by-step in that way, too? It doesn't say that.

It just says talk on giving, talk on virtue, et cetera. So maybe he was, this is again speculation, maybe he was watching the person to see that they were understanding and then he would move on. You know, the way if you were explaining to somebody how to do a long process, you might not necessarily ask, did you get that? Okay, let's go on to step two. But you would explain step one, and if they nod and look like they get it, you go on to the next one.

That would be my guess. It doesn't literally say that he had confirmation of each, understanding each thing. Well, maybe I thought I would say a little bit now about focusing on one of these stories. Because last time we had the story of Mālunkyaputta, who was one of the people receiving the Dhamma in grief. And so I thought we'd look at Upāli in this case, just to add kind of a human face onto this.

You know, what is some of the context that comes up here? We'll do it fairly briefly. There were at least two Upāli's in the suttas, by the way, and this one was a Brahmin layperson who was wealthy and well-known in the community, and he was a prominent follower of a person named the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, whose name was also Mahāvīra, and that's the leader of the Jains, or the Niganthas. So his name was Nāṭaputta, or Mahāvīra, and he was a Jain and he was in fact the leader of them and so this brahman Upāli was a follower of him and there was um another follower of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta who had a debate with the kind of a brief conversation with him about whether bodily verbal or mental

action is the most powerful especially in the case of unwholesome action like which of these is the worst And so the Jain person says it is, based on what his leader says, it's bodily action that's the worst.

And we might agree with that on the surface, that it's probably worse to actually kill somebody than to imagine doing it. But interestingly, in this particular debate, the Buddha asserts that mental action is actually the most consequential. And so the follower of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta goes back to him and reports all of this. And he reports it to an assembly where Upāli is also there with a bunch of other lay followers. And Upāli says, they all say, oh, that's ridiculous.

And so Upāli says, I'm going to go debate the Buddha on this. And the first guy who went and came back and reported this said, I don't think you should go because, you know, the Buddha is really good in debate and he tends to have some kind of magical power to convert people. I don't think you should go. And Upāli says, I want to go. And so anyway, in the end, Upāli decides to go.

And so he goes and he makes the same assertion. The chain leader says that bodily action is the most defiled, not mental action. And then the Buddha gives Upāli a series of similes through which he makes the case that mental action actually is more powerful, either because it has to be there to precede bodily action and hence is the real force behind it, Or he also gives the example of how supernormal mental powers can do much more than limited bodily action can. There was a belief in that society and the ability to affect, you know, if you had a strong enough concentration and tapping into supernormal mental powers, you could do things that the body couldn't do. So he gives that simile also.

And so at the end of several such similes, Upāli keeps saying, I don't believe it, or anyway, I'm going to still assert it to the body. So the Buddha gives him another one and another one. And at the end of several of these, Upāli backs off and says that actually he was convinced after the very first simile that the Buddha was right, but he kept up because he wanted to hear more. So remember, this is a Buddhist story. So then he takes refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

And the Buddha says to him, oh, be careful. You should investigate more carefully before you change your alliance. You know, you've just declared that you're taking refuge in me, and you're a follower of the Jains. He says you should be careful because you're a prominent person, and it will have public ramifications if you change this allegiance, because Upāli is very well known. And Upāli is delighted, actually.

And he says, wow, other teachers would have been eager for the fame. And you instead ask me to be careful about changing my allegiance. I feel even more, you know, even more devoted to you. And he takes refuge a second time. And the Buddha says, well, okay, but just so you know, you should probably still give alms to the Jains if they come to your house.

You've been supporting them before. You should not cut off that support, even if you change your allegiance. And this even further delights Upāli, who says other spiritual teachers would say to only

support them. And here you say, I'm supposed to still support the Jains, even though I've become your follower. So he feels even more devoted, and he takes refuge a third time.

And so that's a very strong expression in Buddhist understanding. Whenever you say something three times, that means you really mean it. And so then, with all of that, that's the setup. And then the Buddha gives the graduated discourse, and Pāli awakens as the first stage of awakening. So I said earlier that this is followed then by some kind of an expression of gratitude, like offering a meal, and that does happen.

But rather hilariously, I don't know why, in this particular sutta, the first thing Upāli says after waking up is, I'm very busy. I have to leave. I have a lot of things to attend to. And the Buddha says, okay, go at your convenience. And so Pāli rushes off to do his important things as an important person, but then later he invites the Buddha to come for a meal and gives kind of a long elegy about his conversion.

So it's kind of a nice story. And there's this sense of all the steps of the graduated discourse and the framing around it being there. We're going to look in a little while by the way at all the nine suttas that are I'll have another little chart like I did for the 44 and we'll go through and see who some of the other people were so maybe at this point we are ready for looking at this list of the nine suttas where this discourse is given. And I've listed also who they were given to. I'm sorry, it looks like it might be a little hard to read.

You'll get this handout in case that's a little small. And then they do have the common feature that the person takes refuge sometimes before and sometimes after. So I listed that also. But in this column with a lot of words in it, it also mentions how they acquired that initial confidence before they were given the teaching, that the Buddha then decided that it was a good time to give them the graduated discourse. And I thought I'd point out a few things that I noticed through looking at this list and reading through the texts, which you'll be able to do once you get the handout.

So a number of them were prominent people in their society, let's say. So Kutadanta, Upāli, Sīha, Brahmayu, all of those were famous and wealthy people that would have been well-known and in most of those cases and then in this one where it says Ambattha Sutta it was Ambattha's teacher, Pokkarasāti who got the teaching and he was also I think a pretty well known Brahmin so in all of those cases essentially there was kind of a debate or a discussion and the Buddha said something and talked with people and interacted with them such that confidence was gained in him. So we might call it kind of almost a cognitive kind of confidence or trust that the person gained.

In a couple of cases, they were seeing 32 marks, which I mentioned earlier was something that was convincing to Brahmins that the Buddha was enlightened. But generally, there's a sense that through what the Buddha says, people realize that his teaching has value and makes sense in a certain way. And then we get down to the two that are with Uga. I think they're supposed to be different people. I don't know why they both have the same name.

Maybe they refer to the same person. Where it's more of an emotional thing. So essentially, he's the

one who, when he saw the Buddha, he says that he instantly acquired confidence in the Buddha just by seeing him. And the second one says that he was carousing when he saw the Buddha and instantly gained confidence and his drunkenness subsided in that moment. So this was convincing to them in terms of acquiring confidence.

And then this one that's the great discourse on traces left behind the Mahā-Abhidhāna Sutta. That's the unusual one that's about a prior Buddha, the Buddha Vipassī, not the Buddha Gautama. and in that case this teaching was actually the first one that he gave after his awakening so that was how he started acquiring followers very different for example than the turning of the wheel sutta which was the Buddha Gautama's first discourse so I thought that was kind of interesting. That this was this graduated discourse was the first one given by a prior Buddha so it's an important one and then we also have this case about the leper that I mentioned earlier whose name was Supa-Buddha and there's a story, this is from the Udāna which is a somewhat different kind of text and there's a story about his past and future lives that explain why he was receptive to Dharma so you'll be able to look at that later

So we have the sense that the initial confidence was sometimes cognitive, sometimes emotional. And then there are these expressions of going for refuge, either done before or after, which is kind of both about the Buddha's teaching making sense to someone and it feeling emotionally right. I said I would read the standard phrase, I realized, to get from the book here. So, okay.

Magnificent, venerable sir, magnificent, venerable sir, the blessed one has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though you were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. Venerable sir, I go to the Blessed One for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha. Let the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life.

So that's the classic phrase, similar to what we say at the beginning of a retreat, but a little bit more flowery with the part about making the Dhamma clear, turning upright what had been turned over, etc. So all of that is kind of like saying, I mean, it's clearly an emotional expression, but it praises the way the Buddha explained things, such that they made sense, such that they were clear. So I like to say this is about the whole of the **citta**, the heart-mind. The heart and the mind are delighted by what the Buddha says in some way.

So you're hearing a lot about this refuge, faith, confidence, trust. I think I've said that many, many times this evening. And that is the primary condition for this discourse being effective. Apparently, this is the quality that the Buddha considered very important in lay people to be receptive to the Dharma. Monastics is not as emphasized because they ordained.

That's their expression of faith and confidence, is to live that lifestyle. So there's that. I think next time

maybe we'll say a little bit more also about this quality of faith and confidence, because there's kind of more to say about that. I don't know what time tonight. So there's this initial one.

And then in the middle of the discourse, I just want to remind us that there was the part where the Buddha does check. We had the question earlier, does he check after every step? I don't think so, but not explicitly. But in the middle of the discourse, it says, when the Buddha knew that this person's mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident, then he goes on with the rest. So there's kind of this explicit understanding that these particular qualities need to arise as we're listening to the Dharma in order for the mind to be ready to go through some kind of a transformation.

So we also see, just as a little aside for those of you who really like to look up suttas, in *Majjhima Nikāya* 4, the Buddha talks in his own case before his awakening about bringing to mind certain wholesome qualities that he had in order to be able to go and practice well. So even in his own case, he checked his own mind for wholesome qualities and he paid attention to them and he sort of honored them in himself. I think this has to be emphasized for Westerners because we don't like to reflect on our own good qualities. We've been told that that's not a nice thing to do, etc., etc. or it's too arrogant, but it's a key part of these teachings is that we understand ourselves to have these good qualities.

And in this case, ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident. We're supposed to be happy. If you sit there on the cushion, you know, grumbling and, you know, wondering when the bell is going to ring and being depressed and all these things. That does happen. Anything can come up.

But when the mind is elated is when it's getting close to having some kind of an insight. So I think this is worth reflecting on. Maybe this is, I want to offer some kind of reflections that we might consider for ourselves. How do you nourish your sense of confidence and your sense of sincerity in the practice? Do you explicitly think about that and nourish it in some way?

Do you appreciate your own good qualities when they're present? And do you know how to deliberately bring them up as a support for practice? I had a teacher tell me once, Kim, it's important that you know how to cheer yourself up. And I've taken that advice from time to time. You know, there are times when the mind just needs to be cheered up, and there's nothing fake, you know, fakey positive about that.

The mind's just wandering around in territory that's not very cheery, and it would do well to cheer itself up. And then this particular set about ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident. Have you ever had times when your mind felt like that? Maybe on retreat, for example. We're not always in an everyday state like that.

And if so, were they easy to recognize? these are all kind of reflective questions but now i do have an actual question to ask and i'm curious if anyone wanted to answer there isn't just one answer what practices do you think might lead to that set of qualities metta? Metta? Possibly, yeah yeah I think the Brahma Vihara practices could get the mind in a good state I'd say that Anapanasati practice can do

this also, mindfulness of breathing. And the Satipatthana Sutta says quite clearly that if a person were to practice that for a certain, you know, one day, seven days, etc., the mind will be able to realize the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths are, you may remember, the very last of the four, the fourth Satipatthana.

We contemplate the Four Noble Truths. So I think Satipatthana practice could also put the mind in such a state. these are very classical practices and then maybe another question to consider is do you think we can willfully create these or do they come about as a result of some other kind of effort could you just sit down and say okay I'm going to now create ready, receptive, free from hindrances elated and confident

Questioner

I was just I just was going to say ritual and lighting candles incense, chanting all of those things can be very helpful.

Kim Allen

Yeah it's interesting that people are pointing toward heart practices and devotional practices as bringing these up it's possible not make the mind totally free from hindrances. We can still be carrying some various kinds of desire when doing those. The Ramabihara should be pretty good. But there's certainly a sense that the mind is in a very open and receptive, as it says, state. But this comes about, in my experience, quite naturally from the classical practices that the Buddha offers, even in breathing and other kinds of things.

See for yourself. These are just my suggestions. Okay, so I gave you a little bit of a leading question before. Do you think we can willfully create these or do they come about as results of other things? I think they're not so easy to create willfully.

So that's maybe worth reflection also, because often we have a feeling like, it's up to me, I got to do this, I'm sitting down in order to create certain things. And there's a certain value to having a sense of agency and confidence in sitting down and knowing what you're doing and tuning in to renunciation of unhelpful mind states and so forth. But in the end, to really transform the mind, it's not really up to us. There's something else that comes in in some way. I have a few more things to say, but I'll pause again for any questions or comments.

And we're just going to wind up after this. So, yeah, Carrie.

Questioner

So, but we could like just take one of them, like confidence. Like, yeah, we're not going to be able to sit down and like go through the list and go, now I'll have this, now I'll have that.

But we can be practicing to, you know, build more access to all of those things at different points in our practice. Just like, okay, I'm going to sit down. I'm going to think about all the ways practice has benefited me or, you know, just to sort of build some confidence.

We can have practices that are helping us sort of build up some of these things so they're more likely to show up when we're doing these.

Kim Allen

I think that's the happy medium of it's not exactly something that we can create, but we can put the conditions in place for it. Yeah, nicely said. And if we direct ourselves that way, we can expect that result. It's not random how these things come about. So maybe this gives us a sense of more like what we should be pointing toward or putting conditions in place for these kinds of qualities that will poise the mind to let go in some way.

okay so stepping back we can see now that this form of teaching is quite different actually from the one that we looked at last week so although this is a literal brief teaching on the dhamma you know it's as i said it's a single discourse it's not at all actually a condensed form of practice instructions as the other ones were, right? It's a very different idea. It's intended more as something that takes a person out of their usual way of seeing things. So they're buoyed up by confidence when they arrive. And then the person kind of follows the Buddha along a mental trajectory of getting a, toward getting a whole different understanding what they're doing in their life.

And this shift at stream entry is when a person acquires what is called **right view** or **right understanding**. I don't know if those words are very sufficient, though, because it's not something logical. It's not just a better view that could be explained. You used to think of it this way, and now it's this way. It's not quite like that.

It's actually, yeah, it's not something that could be explained, but it is a shift such that we don't see suffering in the same ways we did before. We have a much clearer understanding of how it can cease and what needs to be done for that, whereas we tend to be wandering around a little bit and not sure exactly what that is until we see the cessation of it. We wander around only with an idea of what it's going to be like, but it ends. So the teaching on the Four Noble Truths, when it penetrates, gives a person that glimpse. And then you have a different reference point.

And you have that reference point of actually having seen it end. And then the mind goes on in a different way, a different understanding about that. It's not the same as full awakening. To get that,

you have to do those specialized practices with subjects like the aggregates or the sense bases. so it's a yet a kind of a deeper penetration of how all of this is working but we can get an initial glimpse that gives us a good reference point from which we can then go and do these other practices at least that's kind of in the ideal sequence of how this unfolds there's always exceptions so yeah so there's the gradual versus sudden that i touched into last time i think one the best resolutions of that i've heard is that it's gradual until it's sudden.

And so there's preparation and the arising of certain wholesome qualities in someone's mind, and then there's the leading of the mind from something familiar into new territory that they haven't considered, like the Four Noble Truths, and then there can be some kind of a shift. So next time, I think, first of all, we should talk a little bit more about this quality of faith or confidence, because it might not be exactly what we think. And then also we'll talk about an example of a path that starts with faith and ends with transformation that was given to both monastics and lay people. So it's kind of another form of a standard stock teaching, but it's common to both, and it takes us through that same process.

So let me also then put into the chat a link that will take you to the Donna form for this class this class is offered freely I know we have one more session but in case you were interested in knowing how to donate to the Sati Center or to the teacher I've put a link in the chat and follow at your leisure. And I hope you'll come back for the ongoing discussion of this transformation that we go through. Gradual, sudden, lay people, monastics. We know too much, theoretically, it can hinder us, but I think it's also helpful to look at all the different ways it's expressed, many different ways it's expressed, and we're not even covering all of them in this short class.

So I hope to see you next week and have a wonderful week.

Take care. Goodbye. Good night.