



Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

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February 2025 Newsletter

The Middle Way (majjhimā-paṭipadā)

The Middle Way teaching of the Buddha is a practice that avoids the extremes of asceticism (attakilamathānuyoga) and indulgence (kāmasukhallikānuyoga). In the context of the Middle Way, “asceticism” is the practice of physical mortification or devotion to physical torment; and “indulgence” is the behavior that feverishly pursues sensual pleasures or unrestrained preoccupation with sensual happiness.

The Buddha realized that pursuing sensual pleasures (kāma) will lead to attachment (rāga), suffering (dukkha), and distraction from the training that removes defilements (kilesa) from the mind. The removal of defilements from the mind is a necessary condition for enlightenment (nibbāna). The practice of extreme asceticism in an attempt to purify the mind and remove unwholesome kamma does not work nor does it lead to enlightenment. Extreme asceticism harms both the body and mind.

The Middle Way is a practice that avoids the extremes of asceticism which tortures the body and indulgence without restraint in sensual pleasures. The Buddha taught moderation: take care of physical well-being without attachment to sensual pleasures; and do so in a manner that removes the defilements.

The defilements obstruct and obscure the luminous mind (āloka kasiṇa). The Three Unwholesome Roots (akusala mūla) are the fundamental defilements:

1. delusion (moha) = ignorance (avijjā),
2. greed (lobha), and
3. hatred (dosa).

The various defilements are listed in the January 2025 Newsletter - Removal of Distracting Thoughts.

Buddhadhamma by Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto

Introduction

Later, when he [the Buddha] proclaimed to others the truth, the Dhamma, that he had discovered, he referred to it as the middle truth (majjhena-dhamma) or the middle teaching (majjhena-dhammadesanā), and he referred to the system of practice that he laid down for others as the middle way (majjhimā-paṭipadā; the ‘middle path of practice’).

The Buddha taught the Middle Way in his first sermon after enlightenment, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma. The teaching is a guide for his disciples to achieve liberation from suffering without falling into extremes.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

56.11 (1) Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma

“Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures [kāma-sukha], which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification [atta-kilamatha], which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

“And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to vision ... which leads to Nibbāna? It is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

The Middle Way is the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya atṭhaṅgika magga) leading to enlightenment and the escape from the round of rebirths (saṃsāra); consisting of the following eight interconnected path factors:

1. Right View (sammā diṭṭhi),
2. Right Intention (sammā saṅkappa),
3. Right Speech (sammā vācā),
4. Right Action (sammā kammanta),
5. Right Livelihood (sammā ājiva),
6. Right Effort (sammā vāyāma),
7. Right Mindfulness (sammā sati), and
8. Right Concentration (sammā samādhi).

The path of practice is the training in ethical behavior (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā).

The main topic of the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta is the Four Noble Truths (ariya catusacca). The Middle Way is the Fourth Noble Truth.

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkha) acknowledges the existence of suffering, discussed in the February 2023 Newsletter.
2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (samudaya) identifies the cause of suffering as craving (taṇhā), discussed in the March 2023 Newsletter.
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (nirodha) is nibbāna, discussed in the April 2023 Newsletter.
4. The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (magga) is the Noble Eightfold Path which embodies the Middle Way, discussed in the May 2023 Newsletter.

The Middle Way cultivates equanimity (upekkhā) or mental balance. The mind observes experiences with peace, neither clinging to pleasant experiences nor resisting unpleasant ones. The practice is to observe all experiences with a sense of detachment (virāga) and patience (khanti), accepting phenomena as they appear without proliferating, clinging or being swayed by them. Acceptance is an attribute of khanti, a pāli word usually translated as patience and endurance.

Equanimity is an immeasurable or divine abode. The Four Immeasurables or Divine Abodes (brahmavihāra) are:

1. loving-kindness (mettā),
2. compassion (karunā),
3. sympathetic joy (muditā), and
4. equanimity (upekkhā).

The Four Divine Abodes are discussed in the September 2023 Newsletter - Tranquility Meditation (samatha) and The Five Hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇā).

The recognition of the impermanence (anicca) of all things and practicing acceptance, the mind will maintain calm (santi) and equanimity even in the face of life's challenges. The Middle Way cultivates an attitude of equanimity where the mind does not react with attachment (rāga), greed (lobha) or aversion (dosā).

The Middle Teaching (majjhena-dhammadesanā) is Dependent Origination (patīcasamuppāda).

Buddhadhamma by Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto
Chapter 4

Dependent Origination is an 'impartial teaching of truth' or a 'middle teaching'.

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi
12.15 (5) Kaccānagotta

...
“This world, Kaccāna, for the most part depends upon a duality—upon the notion of existence and the notion of nonexistence.²⁹ But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of

nonexistence in regard to the world. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world.³⁰

“This world, Kaccāna, is for the most part shackled by engagement, clinging, and adherence. But this one [with right view] does not become engaged and cling through that engagement and clinging, mental standpoint, adherence, underlying tendency; he does not take a stand about ‘my self.’ He has no perplexity or doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing. His knowledge about this is independent of others. It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is right view.³³ “All exists’: Kaccāna, this is one extreme. ‘All does not exist’: this is the second extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, **the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma by the middle**: ‘With ignorance as condition, volitional formations [come to be]; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

Notes:

29 The notion of existence (atthitā) is eternalism (sassata); the notion of nonexistence (natthitā) is annihilationism (uccheda). Spk-pt: The notion of existence is eternalism because it maintains that the entire world (of personal existence) exists forever. The notion of nonexistence is annihilationism because it maintains that the entire world does not exist (forever) but is cut off.

30 Spk: The origin of the world: the production of the world of formations. There is no notion of nonexistence in regard to the world: there does not occur in him the annihilationist view that might arise in regard to phenomena produced and made manifest in the world of formations, holding “They do not exist.”

Spk: The cessation of the world: the dissolution (bhaṅga) of formations. There is no notion of existence in regard to the world: There does not occur in him the eternalist view which might arise in regard to phenomena produced and made manifest in the world of formations, holding “They exist.”

33 Spk explains dukkha here as “the mere five aggregates subject to clinging”. Thus what the noble disciple sees, when he reflects upon his personal existence, is not a self or a substantially existent person but a mere assemblage of conditioned phenomena arising and passing away through the conditioning process governed by dependent origination.

... “knowledge independent of others,” is glossed by Spk as “personal direct knowledge without dependence on another.” This is said because the noble disciple, from the point of stream-entry on, has seen the essential truth of the Dhamma and thus is not dependent on anyone else, not even the Buddha, for his or her insight into the Dhamma. Until arahantship is attained, however, such a disciple might still approach the Buddha (or another enlightened teacher) for practical guidance in meditation.

The Kaccānagotta Sutta state that “the Tathagatha teaches the Dhamma by the middle [way or teaching]”; i.e., the teaching of Dependent Origination (paticcasamuppāda) as a view between the extremes of eternalism (sassatavāda) and annihilationism (ucchedavāda) as well as the extremes of existence (bhava) and non-existence (abhāva).

The teaching of Dependent Origination is composed of a sequence of twelve factors. Each factor arises in dependence on the preceding factor and ceases when that preceding factor is no longer active. Dependent Origination is discussed in the July 2023 Newsletter. The twelve factors of the forward sequence of Dependent Origination (anulōma paṭicca samuppāda) are as follows:

1. ignorance (avijjā) give rise to (paccayā)¹
2. volitional formations (saṅkhārā), volitional formations give rise to (paccayā)
3. consciousness (viññāṇa), consciousness give rise to (paccayā)
4. mentality-materiality (nāmarūpa), mentality-materiality give rise to (paccayā)
5. six sense bases (saḷāyatana), six sense bases give rise to (paccayā)
6. contact (phassa), contact give rise to (paccayā)
7. feeling (vedanā), feeling give rise to (paccayā)
8. craving (taṇhā), craving give rise to (paccayā)
9. clinging (upādāna), clinging give rise to (paccayā)
10. becoming-existence (bhava), becoming-existence give rise to (paccayā)
11. birth (jāti), birth give rise to (paccayā)
12. suffering (dukkha)
 - a. aging (jarā) and death (maraṇa),
 - b. sorrow (soka),
 - c. lamentation (parideva),
 - d. pain (dukkha),
 - e. grief, displeasure (domanassa), and

f. despair (upāyāsa).

Note 1: The pāli word paccayā means ‘condition’, a significant influence that determine something, and may be expressed as “give rise to”.

The two extreme metaphysical views are avoided through the teaching of Dependent Origination.

- Eternalism is the view that there is an indestructible and eternal self. The problem with this view is that it leads to grasping at the five aggregates (pañca khandhā), which are impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha) and not a self (anattā). The five clinging aggregates (pañcupādānakkhandhā) constitute the empirical being and are listed as follows:
 1. material form, body, matter (rūpa khandha);
 2. feeling, sensation (vedanā khandha);
 3. perception, memory (saññā khandha);
 4. mental formations, volitional formations, karmic activity, emotions, attention, thought, imaginative thinking (saṅkhāra khandha); and
 5. sense consciousness, sensory awareness (viññāṇa khandha).
- Annihilationism is the view that a person is annihilated at death and there is nothing which survives. The problem with this view is that it leads to nihilism, particularly ethical nihilism.

Dependent Origination avoids the two extremes by teaching that existence is a dynamic current of conditioned phenomena devoid of an unchanging self, yet the stream of causes continue from birth to birth within the round of becoming (saṃsāra), as long as the causes within the stream are active.

The Noble Eightfold Path and Dependent Origination are the teachings that describe the Middle Way.

Announcements

- Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center has a presence on Meet-Up social media and we ask that you please sign-up for every event that you are planning to attend at www.MeetUp.com. Some people are intimidated by a small number of attendees and a larger number will be encouraging.
- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at www.google.com/maps.

Activities of the Meditation Center

- Group sitting meditation practice for **one hour** is held Monday through Friday at 6:30AM and **everyday** at 5:30PM. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- Group sitting meditation practice for **two hours** is held every Saturday and Sunday at 6:30AM.
- The days of the full moon, new moon and the two half moons are called in Pāli: The Uposatha, and is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the five precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30PM meditation. You may elect to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc).
- Meditation Workshop is held on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00AM and 1:00PM. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- A recording of a Dhamma Talk from an experienced Thai Forest Teacher will be played on the third Sunday of each month. Sitting meditation starts at 4:30PM and the Dhamma Talk will be played afterwards. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.

- Every Saturday at 4:15PM the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.
- There is a Library at the Meditation Center. You may browse for books to borrow at 5:00PM and check out the books for three weeks.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave. just before 9:00AM and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.
- For more additional information please send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com. We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

Request for Support

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its' mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com.
- Volunteering your skills, energy and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.