THIS IS ALSO IN THE MIND

In the Presence of Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera

A Disciple's Account, Kept Private for 25 Years

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In the Presence of Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera
A Disciple's Account, Kept Private for 25 Years

ORIGINAL NOTES
Recorded 1994–2001 by Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera

EDITORIAL WORK ON ORIGINAL NOTES
Edited by a collaborative team including:
Sanura Gunatilake, Sahan D, Bhikkhu Ānandajoti and Chittapala

ACCOMPANYING WRITTEN MATERIAL
All written material accompanying the original notes
by Sanura Gunatilake and Sahan D
APPENDIX "Unlocking the Timeless Insights Preserved in the *Suttas*"
by Dinith Hathurusinghe

REVIEW
The edited notes and all accompanying written material reviewed by
Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera, together with
the editorial team

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Portrait artwork by Sanura Gunatilake

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"*Tasmātihānanda attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā,*

dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā."

"Therefore, Ānanda, be islands unto yourselves,
be your own refuge, having no other refuge;

let the Dhamma be your island, let the Dhamma be your refuge,
having no other refuge."

—Mahāparinibbāna Sutta
(DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days)



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (circa mid–late 1990s).

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Foreword

It came to mind, suddenly I see this book and I feel the things people are going through. For me, it is very much about reality, about real life and what is happening to them. I hope this will play a part in removing their suffering. Otherwise, no point, you know?

Bhante's gone. I will be gone. All things pass away. Meanwhile, these teachings should help suffering go away.

My hope is that they will inspire people to read the *Suttas.* Or protect the *Suttas.* Maybe some good monastics, or some lay people become monastics. Even as lay people, they can practice deeply, living like monastics but in lay clothes. By remaining and practicing this way, their supporting *karma* grows stronger. If their *karma* ripens, it can ripen very fast. Meanwhile they may even attain Nibbāna also. Others, when the time is right, may become monastics. This is what happened to me—I remained at Polgasduwa, practicing. If I had just offered *dāna,* doing help and left like others, I would not have become a monastic later. Now I'm trying to create that same opportunity for many. The purpose is to keep it open—a platform where people can evolve, whether as lay practitioners or monastics. Then they will put effort and more people will find the right way. This whole thing will help, otherwise what's the point?

That's why Buddha became Buddha. It should help their liberation, and others' liberation too.

Before going to the higher Himalayas and the deep jungles of Sri Lanka, I'd entrust these notes to an immediate attendant—to hand over to a specific devotee in case I didn't return. They moved through different hands during this time. Finally, when I wanted to get them back to give them to you all, they were missing. My heart sank. I felt some attachment, some concern. I felt sorry that people

wouldn't get this opportunity, these ideas. Finally, we found them—inside another cover.

Ultimately, I was waiting for a time when I could give the proper respect to Bhante. The book is one part. The other is creation of a place for meditation retreats, ordinations and the wider spreading of the Dhamma.

This (book project) gives people a chance to follow the teachings and make them available to others. If it doesn't happen now, the opportunity is lost.

In some sense, I can see it has already happened, all of those involved in these projects. In that sense, I'm really free. Free in the sense that a weight has been lifted because there's nothing I can regret.

How do I know? It's that I don't get the slightest thought about the past in regards to my duty.

Venerable Ñāṇavimala contributed so much to my spiritual path. Through him I received the living Dhamma I could not have found on my own. For others who did not have that opportunity, this will be a service for the future.

When I hold this (the notes and reflections presented in this book), I feel the spirit of Venerable Ñāṇavimala.

I hope all of this helps people strive and be freed from suffering.

It's a short, fleeting moment. These things will also pass away.

Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka (Ñāṇāloka)
During a retreat
Penang, Malaysia
November 2025

[*Editor's Note: This foreword was adapted from Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera's spoken reflections and was refined with his direct guidance.*]

By the Roadside, 1990

Sometimes a single encounter can alter the course of an entire lifetime. For Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, later ordained as Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka, that moment came on a quiet street in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1990.

He was eighteen, visiting his grandmother in Bambalapitiya, near Siri Vajirarama Temple, when she invited him to offer alms to a foreign monk who had come to their house on *piṇḍapāta* (alms round). While she stepped into the kitchen, Shanaka remained standing beside the monk. A stillness emanated from him. A quiet light.

The young man could not step away.

This was Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera—wandering ascetic, a noble saint, and a rare embodiment of the Buddha's path in its purest form.

Shanaka could not have known then that this meeting would mark the beginning of a lifelong spiritual apprenticeship.

At the time, he was far from any traditional Buddhist influence. At fourteen, he had moved with his family to Lesotho, Southern Africa, where his mind became absorbed in the vastness of physics. Like many young people passionate about science, he was convinced that its laws alone held the key to revealing the ultimate nature of reality. Shortly after turning eighteen, while walking along the Caledon River, he experienced a deep, powerful recognition of impermanence—a moment so vivid it tilted his life toward solitude and contemplation. It left him with the bold, naïve conviction that he was his own teacher.

He still carried that conviction when he stood beside the monk in Bambalapitiya.

Days after their first meeting, fate intervened again. In Panadura Town, Shanaka saw a monk from behind, walking barefoot under the midday sun—robes weathered from the road, carrying a walking stick. His slight frame somehow held the presence of a giant. To Shanaka's eyes of wonder, there was something of a warrior about him. His steps, though slow, carried a surprising vitality. It was the same foreign monk, Venerable Ñāṇavimala. Stopping his motorbike, he offered to bring a bottle of 'SMAK' fruit drink. The monk looked at him with eyes that seemed to see far beyond the surface and said:

"This is not what we expect from you…that you also follow this path."

As he said this, a gentle smile crossed his face.

The words rang through Shanaka like a struck bell. He had never spoken of his spiritual leanings to the Venerable, yet here they seemed to be laid bare.

They sat together on the roadside. Shanaka had brought a SMAK, but the glass bottle refused to open in his hands. Seeing his struggle, Ven. Ñāṇavimala called him over and drew a Swiss Army knife from his shoulder bag. With a flick, the cap was open. He handed the bottle back to Shanaka so that the offering could still be Shanaka's to make. He then took his alms meal in silence, while Shanaka waited by the pavement.

Shortly after the meal, Shanaka opened up about his experience of perceiving impermanence, weaving it with his knowledge of physics and philosophy. Ven. Ñāṇavimala listened in silence. Then he said:

"This is also in the mind."

The sentence cut through every layer of self-assurance as if he'd

been reduced to the size of an ant. What he had taken to be profound realisations were seen for what they were.

At that moment, the ground shifted. A knowing emerged: he had found his teacher.

Two days later, he returned to Siri Vajirarama Temple and shared more of his experiences. Ven. Ñāṇavimala listened and said:

"Read the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and everything will be okay."

From then on, Shanaka began reading the *Suttas*, seeing them not just as texts for study but as subjects for contemplation, shaping his practice around them even while pursuing his studies. Yet, while working towards a degree in Business Studies in Cyprus, his practice weakened and even keeping his vows of moral conduct became difficult. But deep down, a yearning intensified. He was torn between two worlds. By the time he was twenty-three, the spiritual calling had grown too strong to ignore, and he returned to Sri Lanka.

Hearing that his teacher was at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage, he went to seek blessings before leaving for a self-retreat at Athdalagala forest monastery. Instead, Ven. Ñāṇavimala offered:

"There are empty kuṭis here."

It was a rare invitation to practise under his direct guidance. The abbot, however, seeing only a young man in jeans and a T-shirt, refused to allow a layperson to stay at the monastery. "This is not a holiday place," he was told. But Shanaka was unwilling to let the opportunity slip away. Inwardly, he resolved to live outside the island under a tree, to walk for alms in the village with a plastic bowl, and to visit the hermitage for his teacher's guidance.

As Shanaka walked back behind Ven. Ñāṇavimala, heavy with disappointment, Ven. Ñāṇavimala paused, turned back to him, and said:

"There may be some *karma* behind it."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala advised him to obtain a letter of approval from the Mahānāyaka Thera[1] at Maharagama Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayathanaya. The letter was granted by Venerable Madihe Paññāsīha Mahānāyaka Thera, who, five years later, would become his preceptor. With the letter in hand, Shanaka returned to Polgasduwa and was finally allowed to stay.

In 1994, during his first solo retreat there, he experienced a deeper intuitive connection. Not with contemporary forms of Buddhism, but with the Buddha who had walked the earth more than two and a half millennia before. Through the *Suttas*, he felt close to that timeless presence, and in Ven. Ñāṇavimala, he perceived not merely a person, but a living embodiment of the Dhamma itself. Every two days, he sat before Ven. Ñāṇavimala, receiving words as rare as they were illuminating, each pointing him back to the *Suttas*. Days were spent in the library reading the texts his teacher recommended, contemplating and meditating on them.

At night, under the dim glow of a kerosene lamp, he carefully recorded each instruction, knowing he was preserving something precious. Those notes, guarded for decades, trace the full arc of a training in the Buddha's path. Presented here, they are not simply records; they are the living current of a master's guidance encouraging a seeker towards the original *Suttas*, capable—if one listens closely—of altering the course of a life.

1 Mahānāyaka Theros are high-ranking Buddhist monks who oversee and regulate the Buddhist clergy in Theravāda Buddhist countries.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera on piṇḍapāta (alms-round)
near Siri Vajirarama Temple, Colombo. (circa 1990s).

Before It Was Too Late

A Hundred-Fold Promise

"To tell you honestly, some interesting things happened to me," Venerable Gnanaloka said, looking up from the pages. "I was getting very strong emotions on occasions, you know. I was seeing... like... seeing myself on very key occasions, where I am... meeting Bhante."

He paused, searching for words.

"Which I don't recall like that."

By now we knew what he meant. For over two decades, Ven. Gnanaloka has practiced not holding onto memories. His teacher, Ven. Ñāṇavimala—whom he addressed as "Venerable Sir," later "Bhante"—trained him in the art of living in the present. Memories, left unattended, don't arise, even memories of his own life.

But when he read the third draft of the Reflections in this book—stories of his teacher woven from multiple sources: his own notes from 25 years earlier, other accounts, his public talks, and our conversations with him—something broke through. Not just images, but *presence*. "Very key occasions," returning with such clarity that he was seeing them again.

We asked him what he meant. What was it about these stories?

"I don't recall him in a sentimental way," he said carefully. "But if I put a focus on that…" The precise word remained unuttered, but the implication was clear, "it touches a very core part of my heart."

In that moment, we understood: This book needed to exist.

Ven. Gnanaloka's chance encounter in 1990, when Ven. Ñāṇavimala was seventy-eight, began a sixteen-year discipleship. During seven of those years (1994–2001), he kept notebooks filled

with his words. This book is more than a preservation of those notes; it is an invitation to step into those years and encounter the Dhamma as it was lived.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala had come a long way to be standing on that roadside in 1990. Born Friedrich Möller in Germany in 1911, his path to Sri Lanka had been unlikely—through war, imprisonment and discovering a Buddhist text in an internment camp. After ordaining in 1955, he spent a decade at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage—the world's first Theravāda monastery established by a Westerner for Western monastics.

Then he became a *cārikā* bhikkhu, a wandering monk, walking barefoot across Sri Lanka for twenty-five years. It was said that there was no village in Sri Lanka his feet hadn't touched.

He practiced a rare echo of the Buddha's original instruction, a tradition nearly lost to time. *Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikaṁ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*—"Wander forth for the welfare of the multitude," the Buddha had told his first awakened disciples.[2] This became known as *cārikā*—the practice of wandering on foot without settling, forming no attachments to place or possession. He taught that the wise cling to nothing, like a droplet on a lotus leaf, touching but never sticking. The monk moves through the world the same way—being in the world while clinging to nothing, yet bringing welfare wherever he wanders.

The sight of such a monk—his presence, his simplicity—brought a rare blessing. For those fortunate enough to offer him alms or hear a few words of Dhamma, the encounter was rarer still.

Eventually, the body sustaining this journey grew frail, and walking reached its natural conclusion in 1991. He told the young disciple that the *cārikā* had been his service to the people.

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2 Vin 1.21 (*Mārakathā*); *Dutiyamārapāsa Sutta* (SN4.5; Māra's snare, second)

Those who encountered him often found their lives altered. Venerable Katukurunde Ñāṇananda, whose influential talks and writings on early Buddhism would be studied worldwide, described him as the "Mahākassapa of this age." In the Buddha's time, Ven. Mahākassapa was foremost in *dhutaṅga*—the thirteen austere practices of intensely 'shaking off' mental defilements—and the only disciple with whom the Buddha exchanged robes. Ven. Katukurunde Ñāṇananda told Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi: "If you want to get a sermon from Mahākassapa, go see Venerable Ñāṇavimala." Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, translator of major Buddhist texts, would note that "he would adjust his Dhamma talk to meet the other person in precisely the way that best fit the other person's needs," crediting him for shaping his early understanding of meditation. He also noted that while Ven. Ñāṇavimala exemplified the ascetic ideal, it was not the only model the Buddha praised.

Ajahn Brahmavaṁso, now one of the most recognized Buddhist teachers in the West, describes what he witnessed as "the best Dhamma talk that I have ever had the good *karma* (accumulated merit) to listen to!," recalling how Ven. Ñāṇavimala "wove quotes from the *Suttas* together with explanations from his own experience into such symphony of Dhamma."

Despite his influence on a generation of Buddhist teachers, Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself remained almost invisible. He gave no public discourses, wrote no books, built no institutions. When he passed away in 2005, most of the Buddhist world, even in Sri Lanka, where he'd walked for decades, barely knew his name.

None of that mattered to him anyway.

While many could only receive brief encounters, the specific depth and continuity of his private instructions were uniquely captured by Ven. Gnanaloka. An intensely private transmission he

now shares publicly, believing the Dhamma exists to end suffering, not to be guarded.

He describes Ven. Ñāṇavimala as embodying a rare combination of having the deep *Sutta* understanding of a Pāli scholar united with the relentless striving in meditative practice of a wandering forest ascetic. His knowledge came from studying under Venerable Nyanatiloka and Venerable Ñāṇamoli, two of the first Western monks to master Pāli and translate key Buddhist texts. This lineage of going directly to the *Suttas* as primary authority shaped everything about how he taught and practiced. He upheld the ancient practice so faithfully, even in a world of increasing comfort. It's easy to miss how rare such commitment is, even within monastic life. When Ven. Gnanaloka, as a young layman, first encountered him, he assumed all monks were like this. Only gradually did he discover he'd found someone exceptional. He had encountered or read about many great masters of the recent era, yet there was something in Ven. Ñāṇavimala that stood out.

During his years at Polgasduwa, Ven. Gnanaloka observed how visitors, whether seeking teachings or simply curious about him, found him formidable. His door was locked and windows closed most of the time. Visitors would come from afar, but many kept their distance, watching him sweep slowly, carefully, and mindfully around his kuṭi—as though observing something sacred they dared not interrupt. Ven. Gnanaloka noticed a pattern: in those who did approach, arriving with frantic eagerness and carrying offerings, something would shift. They would typically leave in what he described as a "bewildered calm."

It wasn't just what Ven. Ñāṇavimala said. It was that he was completely present. Each small action such as receiving an item, pouring water or adjusting robe, done with total attention.

Somehow, that simple presence became contagious. Yet it also demanded something.

There was an intensity to his focus, a sharpness that could unsettle those who weren't grounded, putting many into a state of urgency to attain Nibbāna without delay.

Staying rooted in practice, he didn't veer into idle conversation. While fluent in Pāli, the language of scriptures, his knowledge of the local Sinhala remained perhaps deliberately limited and carried a heavy German accent. This was so much so that even local people occasionally couldn't understand him. Yet once, addressing visiting monks from Wathuruwila, he spoke with unexpected clarity: *"Lankawe Sinhala handuruwanta saddawa thiyanawa, habai, shakthiya madiy"*—Sri Lankan monks have faith, but not enough energy.

When Ven. Gnanaloka asked him how he accessed Sinhala words he had never heard him speak, he explained: mindfulness opens access to knowledge stored across lifetimes.

His simple utterance to those monks was a call to match faith with effort, and a glimpse into what mindfulness could unlock.

It wasn't an isolated observation. In 1996, Shanaka recorded a warning from his teacher in his notebooks:

"It is sad to say that the essence of the practice is almost lost everywhere. People are getting more used to living a comfortable life."

1996—five years before his final teachings would be recorded. Before Google. Before anyone carried the internet in their pocket.

Ven. Gnanaloka remembers overhearing fellow monks speak with enthusiasm about the new technology of the internet. Ven. Ñāṇavimala just listened. He then replied: "This is also in the sensual world."

In an age when a generation has increasingly begun to report that life feels meaningless, the numbers flat for decades and then climbing steeply as smartphones and social media became near-universal,[3] his words feel less like an observation and more like a warning. It raises a question:

What if the comforts we choose aren't actually bringing us comfort?

When Ven. Ñāṇavimala turned away from the world, he turned towards something the world had forgotten: that real comfort—the kind that actually brings freedom—doesn't come from following distractions that pull us outward, but from going inward: staying with what's difficult. It requires effort guided by wisdom: the willingness to be uncomfortable and see clearly, and in that seeing, a release. As he would say, it is "a happiness free from the world."

Even in his time, with competing interpretations of how liberation was to be understood and attained, his approach to finding clarity was unwavering: go to the source.

The source was the Buddha's original discourses—the *Suttas*.

Ven. Bhikkhu Sujato—founder of SuttaCentral and a scholar of early Buddhist texts—in his course on Early Buddhism, shares an account of how Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī (the Buddha's maternal aunt, foster mother, and the first ordained nun) came to the Buddha seeking advice:

"*While Mahāpajāpatī (Gotamī) wants to go on retreat, do intensive meditation, Buddha is not exactly giving her specific meditation*

3 Monitoring the Future, University of Michigan, annual survey of American adolescents; see also J. M. Twenge, *iGen* (2017), and J. Haidt, *The Anxious Generation* (2024). The associations are correlational.

instructions.[4] *He is not saying do Ānāpānasati…do this meditation, or that meditation."*

He identified something telling about the way Buddhism is taught today.

"In modern Buddhism, when people talk about meditation, they often focus on details of meditation techniques. In the Suttas we don't find nearly so much detail about techniques, but a lot more about how you are living, what is the attitude in your mind, the focus and direction your mind is taking. These are the things that really matter."

When one observes the notes taken by Ven. Gnanaloka in his teacher's presence, it becomes clear that this is the exact spirit in which Ven. Ñāṇavimala had guided him.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala was direct and sparing with detail. He would often direct them to the *Suttas* or specific passages, but rarely elaborate at length. Other times he would share a story to inspire or to convey a certain Dhamma lesson. In meditation, he offered practical suggestions, yet refrained from outlining fixed techniques.

Being with him was like stepping through a doorway into the Buddha's way of practice.

During his first self-retreat with Ven. Ñāṇavimala, then twenty-three years old and still a layman, Ven. Gnanaloka experienced the power of this approach. Rather than lengthy explanations, his teacher would offer a brief, captivating explanation such as

4 *Saṁkhitta Sutta* (AN8.53; brief) is the specific *Sutta* mentioned by Bhikkhu Sujato. The Buddha instructs Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to recognize true Dhamma by its effects: whether teachings lead toward dispassion (not passion), being unfettered (not fettered), shedding (not accumulating), fewness of wishes (not many wishes), contentment (not discontent), seclusion (not fondness for company), arousing energy (not laziness), and being easy to look after (not hard to look after). This is just one of many such instances found throughout the *Suttas* that demonstrates Bhikkhu Sujato's point about the nature of how the Buddha instructed.

on consciousness, suffering or liberation, and then direct him to the *Suttas*. Ven. Gnanaloka would read them not as subjects for intellectual study, but as mirrors to observe his own experience, watching these teachings unfold in his own mind. As he reflects: "It's not like intellectually pondering on this"—it was a habit of direct observation, applying the teachings to lived experience.

On the last day of that retreat, the fourteenth day, a full moon, he perceived the Dhamma in a way he never had before.

"I will never forget that day," Ven. Gnanaloka says. "That was the time I really felt I had faith in Bhante. I also felt: these *Suttas*, 2,600 years old—these are the real teachings. From our level of defilements, our interpretations have come."

The importance of the *Suttas* revealed itself: "That was the first occasion where from the *Suttas* I had a perception of Dhamma." He added: "That was enough to inspire me to know that the Buddha is alive in these teachings. As well as to know that this could be the end of our journey [in *saṁsāra*]. There is nothing else to do." For Ven. Gnanaloka, there was no clearer path than this.

He came to see that true understanding of the *Suttas* transcends intellectual study. It requires direct experience. These insights arise naturally in moments of quiet contemplation, when the mind is relaxed and free from expectation, whether reading a few words of the Buddha or contemplating a single teaching.

Ven. Gnanaloka recalls those days fondly. With his teacher, he felt kindred—"like comrades in battle," he says. A spiritual battle.

In 2005, Ven. Gnanaloka was in India—the land where the Buddha walked and where remnants of his time still linger. The region had called to Ven. Gnanaloka since his youth. Even as a young layman, given money by his father for a one-month trip, he'd stretched it to three by sleeping at bus stands and washing at

the communal facilities of local ashrams, unwilling to leave the land so charged with spiritual history. This time in 2005, with Ven. Ñāṇavimala's blessing and trust in Venerable Upasama (a close attendant monk caring for Ven. Ñāṇavimala), he was staying in a cave in the hills of Badrinath—a sacred valley sealed off by towering Himalayan peaks. Each day, he would walk eight kilometers down the mountain for alms, then eight kilometers back up. He was having difficulties—a foreigner near the China border (Tibet region), with troubles brewing over obtaining the necessary permits to continue staying on.

With the Rains Retreat[5] approaching and needing to find a place to settle, an attendant devotee invited him to join a pilgrimage north. He left his bowl and shoulder bag behind and set out. Only along the way did he discover the route led north, deeper into the Himalayas, to Leh, Ladakh. He remembered he could contact a senior monk there—Bhikkhu Sanghasena, who welcomed him to stay for the Rains Retreat.

During his time in Leh, a feeling arose. Undeniable. He shared it with Bhikkhu Sanghasena: "I feel I may not meet Venerable Ñāṇavimala again."

A few days later, descending from the monastery with an attendant devotee to make a phone call from a booth in town, he received the news. His teacher had passed away. The funeral was already over.

There was no grief—his practice had released such attachments. Only profound gratitude. His teacher had given him everything that mattered: direct access to the Buddha's teachings, and the living example of how to practice them.

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5 The Rains Retreat: Known in Pāli as Vassa, this is a three-month annual retreat observed by Buddhist monastics during the monsoon season.

Several months later, he was invited to the stūpa consecration ceremony of Ven. Ñāṇavimala. On 10 October 2006, one year after his teacher's passing, the ceremony took place at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, adjacent to Polgasduwa. A crowd of more than fifty gathered. They expected him to speak, to share memories and to eulogize his teacher. Even his parents, present in the audience, encouraged him to say something.

But he refused.

By then he was shaped by years of solitary practice in the forest. "I was very serious," he recalls. "I didn't want to be in the public eye. It was very personal for me. Bhante, my guru. Even the notes were very personal for me. I was waiting for that time, when it could be passed on."

Instead of speaking, he quietly went to where the ashes were kept and worshipped. In that silence, "I made a vow," he says.

"Though I'm not going to say anything now, in a hundred-fold I will help them, give them the teachings."

Twenty years later, that vow bears fruit with the release of these teachings.

Becoming Students Once More

The notes exist because of an instinct Ven. Gnanaloka couldn't fully explain.

Something had been pulling him forward long before. When asked decades later why he—by nature someone reluctant to take notes even in school—felt compelled to record everything so meticulously, he paused. A long pause.

"Somehow, I knew it was precious," he said finally. "Even then, I didn't quite know why, only that it had to be preserved."

He had simply acted—reached for the notebook again and again without asking why. Some instinct beyond language, beyond decision. It felt as if it had a destiny beyond his own understanding.

When we first proposed creating this book, Ven. Gnanaloka's response was: "Let it be anonymous. Release the notes." He insisted the focus should be on his teacher.

For an ascetic monk who had spent nearly three decades cultivating self-effacement, the idea of a book with stories related to his life contradicted everything he'd trained for. "I am training to dismantle this idea of self," he would say—not to perpetuate it. But we had a problem: the notes alone—concise, sometimes cryptic, written in the shorthand of direct experience—would not reach beyond those already deep in practice.

To serve wider audiences, they needed context: the spirit in which they were spoken, the questions that prompted them, the life that gave them weight. They needed his voice and his memories.

Which meant he couldn't remain anonymous.

Eventually, he agreed—for the sake of sharing the teachings, preserving Ven. Ñāṇavimala's legacy and to fulfill the vow he made.

The work took nearly two years. Meeting an ascetic who carried no phone, moved between undisclosed locations and Sri Sambuddha Ramaneeya Ashramaya Forest Hermitage, and prioritized practice over appointments meant learning to wait. Messages relayed through attendants could take weeks. Evening meetings with devotees and young monks would often run late.

Ven. Gnanaloka would sometimes tell us as he left Sri Sambuddha Ramaneeya Ashramaya Forest Hermitage: "Don't think we have much time left." This cryptic line often puzzled us, until he explained. Now in his mid-fifties, he feels a great need to serve and to fulfil his duty. He would compare his life to the timeframe of a day: "When you look at it from the perspective of a day, I am approaching the evening." A reminder, too, not to take for granted the opportunity we have to find a true refuge in the Dhamma.

When we finally did meet, more than twenty times over those two years, he was generous with his time. Sessions would begin near midnight and continue until three or four in the morning. The world was silent. His recollections, perhaps even sharper at night, flowed freely. We captured teachings with audio recorders. Shanaka captured them with pen and paper. Different tools, but the same living current: we were there as students to receive a direct transmission, not merely to compile a historical record.

We would read him his own notes, written decades earlier. Stories spilled out—details that hadn't made it into the original entries, moments he had forgotten, teachings that needed the context of place and time to make sense. **These became the reflections that accompany the notes in this book—the stories behind the teachings, the moments that gave them life.**

The reflections move from the authority of the *Suttas* to tackling sensuality, from compassion in action to the deepest insights on consciousness and liberation. Woven through these teachings is the arc of a transformation—how a young man named Shanaka, drawn to meditation yet caught in worldly desires, gradually became Ven. Gnanaloka under his teacher's patient, uncompromising guidance. Each carries both the teaching and the testing of it, showing not just the path, but what it asks of those who walk it. Even *cārikā* through dangerous territory.

Months into the recording process, during one such late-night session, he said something that stopped us.

"Sometimes when I read," he began, "I was in tears actually."

He explained: "I don't go back to memories of those experiences. I am not trained to go back to those memories that much. It's a big strain for me. If I want to, maybe I have to specially make an effort."

But the reflections in the book had done what his own will wouldn't—they brought him back.

"It brought me to those feelings of *saddhā*—faith," he said. "I'll never forget. And it's very clear. Bhante's talking of the same points, especially now when I'm reading, the same way."

He paused, then added something we hadn't anticipated.

"I was also doubtful, did I tell the exact details?"

We understood then what it meant to be entrusted with something precious.

We weren't monks or scholars. We were practitioners—and sitting before Ven. Gnanaloka, we became students once more, receiving teachings to preserve and transmit.

The original notes are Ven. Gnanaloka's. The Reflections—the narratives surrounding those notes—are our attempt to transmit faithfully what we researched and heard in those midnight sessions.

The Writers & Editors

[*For more about the research process, sources, and the team behind this book, see A Note on Sources and Methodology.*]



Enshrining the relics of Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, a small memorial stūpa at Polgasduwa and Parappaduwa Island Hermitages bears silent witness.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala's Almsbowl, Island Hermitage

From Friedrich Möller to Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera

Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1911–2005) was a deeply revered yet elusive ascetic monk who remained almost entirely out of the public limelight. The unshakeable spirit and wisdom he embodied made him a quiet legend amongst dedicated practitioners, both lay and monastic.

Born in Germany as Friedrich Möller, one of four children, he displayed a spiritual inclination from an early age. He grew up in the small village of Rinteln, near Hannover, in a devout Christian household, during a time when the Dhamma was not widely known in the West.

In the years following World War I, though only seven years old, he witnessed what suffering looked like in war's wake. He watched the wounded and destitute coming to his village looking for food, saw a wealthy man his family knew reduced to begging on the roads. His school teacher, who had been shot in the eye while bringing water to a wounded enemy soldier, urged his parents to encourage him in studies and never to let the boy join the army.

Though his household was devout, he didn't see his family as deeply spiritual. The exception was his grandmother, who shared something of his temperament. She had, with remarkable accuracy, foretold when she would die.

He enjoyed sports like athletics and gymnastics, particularly the horizontal and vertical bars, but felt out of step with the world around him. Even as a boy, he would slip away to the forest alone, seeking solitude, neglecting his farm duties. His mother worried about what would become of such a child.

One time, when asked to slaughter a chicken during farm duties, he found the experience devastating. That moment left a lasting mark on him, and he vowed never to do such a thing again. Even then, he sensed this wasn't his path.

A chance meeting with an Indian medical student later introduced him to the Bhagavad Gītā, an Indian spiritual classic on duty and liberation. Its message of compassion and spiritual discipline resonated with the same tenderness he had shown toward animals. This awakened in him an aspiration to travel to India.

Leaving Germany was no easy matter, however. From 1935, Adolf Hitler's consolidation of power began demanding the enlistment of young men in military service. Then, in his mid-twenties, Möller got an opportunity to march at the 1936 Olympic Games, where he witnessed Hitler address a packed stadium of over a hundred thousand people. He saw the authority in his voice and how a generation of young men were being drawn to him. He despised the regime's militarism and ideology of violence. Though the full wartime draft was not yet active, he needed a way to secure passage out of Europe.

Möller had not qualified for university (the *Abitur*), having failed a critical requirement—Latin. Instead, he went to Hamburg to pursue vocational training in business and commercial studies. About three to four years before the war began, this training secured him a position as a stenographer at a Hamburg trading house leading to his narrow passage out of Europe during an increasingly tense time. Ven. Ñāṇavimala would later remark that his failure to enter university had, in fact, been his good fortune. Had he qualified, he would almost certainly have been conscripted into the military.

The post was initially located in Madras (renamed to Chennai in 1996), India. He performed his work with utmost capability, enabled by a concentrative power developed through his personal practice

of yoga. He quickly rose through the ranks to a top position. About a year before the outbreak of World War II he was transferred to Colombo, Ceylon (pre-independence name of Sri Lanka), as its branch director. This job offered him a pleasant and luxurious life, as well as a high standing in colonial society.

But when World War II erupted in 1939, this comfortable life ended abruptly. Though he had done no wrong, being a German national under the British colonial rule of Ceylon during that time meant that he was classified as an "enemy-alien." Along with other German nationals in Ceylon, he was interned at Diyatalawa.

As a man in his early thirties, now in confinement, he had to come to terms with life's bitter reality—that the comfortable life he had built was not as secure as he had imagined, and he was powerless to do anything about it.

When Singapore fell to advancing Japanese forces in February 1942, Ceylon lost its key protection. What Churchill called "that indispensable island"—Ceylon, Britain's strategic base in the Indian Ocean[6]—was now exposed and under direct threat. The authorities began transferring the enemy-alien internees to larger camps in India. Möller was among those sent to the largest of them, Dehra Dun Internment Camp, in the remote Himalayan foothills.

The camp was divided into seven to eight separate wings. They were each surrounded by double-barbed wire fences and housed different groups—Germans, Italians and even Catholic missionaries. Möller was assigned to Wing One, where the so-called

6 So described by Churchill after the fall of Malaya and Singapore. Ceylon became the critical base guarding the Allied sea lanes to the Middle East, India, Australia, and the Persian Gulf's oil; the island's security was now paramount—hence the internees' transfer inland to India.

"upper class"[7] were housed: company representatives, independent traders, doctors, teachers, scientists and even mountaineers. According to internee accounts, conditions were more humane than those in Germany or run by the Dutch, Japanese, or Russians—the British treated internees "properly." The camp functioned like a self-contained little town with a cinema, sports fields, library, hospital, canteen, gardens, and some internees even had pets. They were even given once or twice weekly walks into the surrounding foothills after signing parole bonds not to escape, under the watchful eyes of British escorts. Escapes during these walks[8] were unheard of, because beyond the barbed wire lay foreign land of rugged terrain, tight wartime controls, fear of being caught and shot or reprisals on the whole camp, and a weary hope that obedience might one day bring release.

The surrounding tea plantations and distant snow-capped Himalayan peaks offered an outward beauty, but hid a different reality. A melancholy hung over the camp with shattered spirits palpably felt amongst the internees as news of war's destruction swept through year after grinding year. Möller was among the many who became inwardly broken—cities bombed, lives lost, and his own disillusionment as the life he'd built crumbled. As fellow internee Walther Eidlitz, a Jewish Austrian writer, would later recall of the Dehra Dun camp: "There was no one in the camp who was not

7 Although the wings at Dehra Dun were officially divided by nationality, political category and perceived racial identity, the one that concentrated many socially and professionally privileged Germans came to be viewed inside the camp as socially elevated; in internee slang it was therefore nicknamed the 'upper-class' wing.

8 Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter—mountaineers from that same Wing One—joined five other Germans for a well-planned escape in 1944 by cutting through the barbed-wire fence, not during a walk but using those escorted outings for reconnaissance. It was the two alone, however, who managed to trek to Lhasa, where Harrer became tutor to the young Dalai Lama. See Harrer's memoir *Seven Years in Tibet* (later adapted into a Hollywood film by the same name).

at some time overcome by despair and close to committing suicide."[9]

Yet in this same wing, Möller encountered what would prove to be a hidden blessing. As it happened, Wing One also housed Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera—the esteemed German monk who had brought the light of the Dhamma to Europe and Asia—along with his German disciple, Ven. Vappo. Here the cool breeze of the Buddha's original words first touched his heart.

Through Ven. Nyanatiloka, Möller discovered his published book, *The Word of the Buddha*, compiled from the elder monk's handwritten notes and regarded as his most influential work.

First composed in German in the early 1900s, it was intended as a concise yet complete anthology of the Buddha's actual words, drawn directly from the Pāli Canon. Ven. Nyanatiloka compiled and arranged key *Sutta* passages in a way that allowed newcomers and scholars alike to see the framework of the Dhamma.[10] For Möller, encountering these words in their pure form, it clicked—"This is it." Barbed wire fences and armed guards could not confine the man on this path to true freedom. The wheel of Dhamma began to turn within him, never to stop.

Following the war, Möller was repatriated to Germany in 1946, leaving behind nearly seven years of internment as an "enemy-alien"—a dark period that however forged his spiritual conviction and direction.

Post-war Germany was a land of ruin and loss as many young men had perished. Although he had a strong aspiration to go back to Ceylon to ordain as a monk, he was deemed ineligible because he

9 Detailed in the book written by Bhikkhu Nyanatusita and Hellmuth Hecker, *The Life of Nyanatiloka Thera: The Biography of a Western Buddhist Pioneer* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2018).

10 *The Word of the Buddha* was later translated into multiple languages and recognised as a foundational text for both Eastern and Western students of Theravāda Buddhism.

had not been a monk in Ceylon before the war. Ven. Nyanatiloka and other Buddhist monks however were spared the same fate, and were able to return immediately with the help of increasingly politically powerful Sinhalese Buddhists and their several organisations.[11]

Faced with the harsh prospect of rebuilding his life in a devastated homeland, Möller took work as a farm hand in his village in the countryside near Hamburg. However, the only remuneration he received here was free food and lodging. Working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, the labor was so demanding that he didn't have any time to dedicate to practising the Dhamma. He later remarked that all he could do during this time was try to uphold his basic moral precepts. He also had a sensitivity to the insects he was unintentionally killing whilst ploughing the land and resented the harsh treatment of animals he was forced to inflict as part of his farm duties. One day he read a Dhammapada verse: "*Though one should live a hundred years, heedless and unvigilant, yet better is one single day's life of one vigilant and meditative.*" (Dhp 110). This gave him the impetus to leave for Hamburg—the "Gateway to the World." There he managed to find work as an English teacher and was able to stay with his former landlady, who treated him like the son she had lost in the war.

With many German men having perished in the war, the classrooms were filled largely with women, many of whom had husbands either missing in action or held as prisoners of war. Möller, however, maintained his physical distance, as the call of the Dhamma never left his heart.

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11 Sinhalese Buddhist lay and civic organizations gained considerable influence in the late colonial period, alongside the island's largely non-violent independence movement led by an educated middle class. Through their efforts they managed to request D. S. Senanayake (who would become Ceylon's first Prime Minister the following year) to put pressure on the British government to allow them to return to Ceylon. This was successfully granted in Sept. 1946. This movement culminated in the transfer of power to local representatives and the establishment of the Dominion of Ceylon on 4 February 1948—setting the stage for a renewal of Buddhist institutional life after over three centuries of colonial rule.

The nation was now facing a spiritual hunger to heal, as many churches also started re-establishing. Möller was able to participate in a different kind of support, by getting involved in *Sutta* discussion classes organised by a local Buddhist group.

Hamburg had an emerging Buddhist community, part of a post-war spiritual revival. It also provided the support Möller needed to fulfill his spiritual resolve. Through his involvement, he met Asoka Weeraratna, the visionary founder of the German Dharmaduta Society (GDS)—a Buddhist missionary organization established in 1952 to bring the Dhamma to the West. Möller had kept in contact with Ven. Nyanatiloka who was in Ceylon through the years since the war, and it was Ven. Nyanatiloka who had recommended him to Weeraratna. He was recruited to translate a speech for Weeraratna at a meeting in Hamburg in March 1953, leading directly to Weeraratna arranging his passage back to the newly independent Ceylon, to begin his monastic training. The arrangement was for Möller to train for three years in Ceylon before returning to Germany as one of GDS's first Buddhist missionaries.

It had been nearly thirteen years since he was first taken from Ceylon's shores. In June 1953, Möller arrived back in Colombo, ready to begin his monastic training as an anāgārika.[12]

As an anāgārika, he kept to himself and maintained a disciplined inward practice. A shopkeeper at a bookstore next to Siri Vajirarama Temple who witnessed him come to the store would later remark that his intensity even then was striking, his gaze never wandering.

After spending a year at the Dharmaduta Society in Colombo and some time at the Forest Hermitage in Kandy, on 19 September 1955, he was ordained as a novice monk (sāmaṇera) at the Island Hermitage on Polgasduwa. His full ordination (*upasampadā*) followed shortly

12 A lay renunciant who wears white robes observing eight to ten precepts.

thereafter, with Ven. Madihe Paññāsīha Mahānāyaka Thera—one of the most respected Sri Lankan scholar-monks and monastic leaders of the 20th century, as his preceptor. After three years in Ceylon, his training was complete and he was due to return to Germany as a missionary in time for the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations (the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's passing) in May 1956. Yet he felt he had barely scratched the surface of the Dhamma, and stated he was not ready to teach. He requested permission to stay on at the Island Hermitage, which was granted.

Situated within the Ratgama salt-water lagoon, near the coastal town of Dodanduwa, the Island Hermitage on Polgasduwa was a tiny sanctuary nestled within the lagoon's waters, lush with tropical trees and swept by the cooling breeze. Founded by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera in 1911, while pioneering a space for Western monks to receive authentic Theravāda training, the hermitage also welcomed Sri Lankan monastics. This became a center for dedicated Dhamma practitioners, including Ven. Nyanatiloka's disciple, Ven. Ñāṇaponika Mahāthera—whose later writings would help introduce Theravāda Buddhism to the West[13]—and notable Sri Lankan monks like Ven. Katukurunde Ñāṇananda. The monastic training and emphasis on the direct study of the *Suttas* shaped Ven. Ñāṇavimala's path, leading him to uphold the purest form of Buddhist monastic life.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala was the last living disciple of Ven. Nyanatiloka, placing him within a distinguished lineage of Western-born monks dedicated to reviving classical Theravāda Buddhism. Although Ven. Nyanatiloka was the key influence in guiding him onto the path, it was another resident monk, Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera, whom he regarded foremost as a mentor and source of theoretical guidance.

13 They were the only Western-born monks invited to participate in the Sixth Buddhist Council in Yangon, Burma (1954–1956), in recognition of their deep knowledge and contributions to Buddhism. Ven. Ñāṇaponika was also a fellow internee in Dehra Dun, but staying in a different Wing.

Ven. Ñāṇamoli was an English monk renowned for his deep study and translation of the Pāli Canon, having himself learned Pāli from Ven. Nyanatiloka.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala resolved that before teaching others the Dhamma, he must first directly experience its truth himself.

After 11 years of dedicated practice at the Island Hermitage, he took up the ancient practice of *cārikā*—walking from place to place as a wandering monk. This was a profound training in freedom, designed to systematically break all attachments to places, people, and possessions. He travelled the island on foot for over twenty-five years—from south to north, east to west—meeting people of all walks of life. He carried only what the Vinaya permitted: his alms bowl, the three robes, and the few basic allowables needed for survival, including a piece of soap wrapped in jackfruit leaves. His journey was one of silent blessing; each step was a teaching. To those who met him on the road—villagers, travelers, housewives—he offered the chance to give alms and thus earn merit. Occasionally, with just a few words, he would deliver profound Dhamma teachings that left lasting impressions on those who heard them.

He would usually stay no more than three days in one place except during the Rains Retreat. The austere practice he developed was reminiscent of Ven. Mahākassapa Thera, one of the foremost disciples of the Buddha. Ven. Ñāṇavimala embodied a similar asceticism, wisdom and unshakeable detachment from worldly concerns.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala by nature kept to himself. He didn't encourage disciples, didn't build monasteries, and didn't seek followers. He lived detached—from people, places, even from his own body.

The physically demanding practice of *cārikā* over the years took its toll. After 1987, a hip affliction prevented him from walking long

distances, and he finally ceased his wandering life in 1991. He then spent four years in Colombo at the Siri Vajirarama temple before returning to the Island Hermitage in 1995. He later moved to the more secluded adjacent island of Parappaduwa where, in the last years of his life, he was bedridden and stayed in almost complete seclusion, cared for by dedicated attendant monks.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala became an inspiration for many of the most eminent monks of his era, who recognized his extraordinary practice and dedication to the monastic path. A testament to the reverence he inspired is powerfully conveyed in the book, *Pure Inspiration: Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera; Recollections of His Life, Practice and Teachings* (2016), which offers first-hand accounts from monks who, at the time, were young monastics—many of whom went on to become highly respected senior monks or teachers. These include, among others, the recollections of the late Ven. Gampaha Pemasiri, the late Ven. Katukurunde Ñāṇananda, the late Ven. Ñāṇadīpa, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ven. Ajahn Brahmavaṁso and Ven. Guttasīla, who detailed their memorable encounters with him.

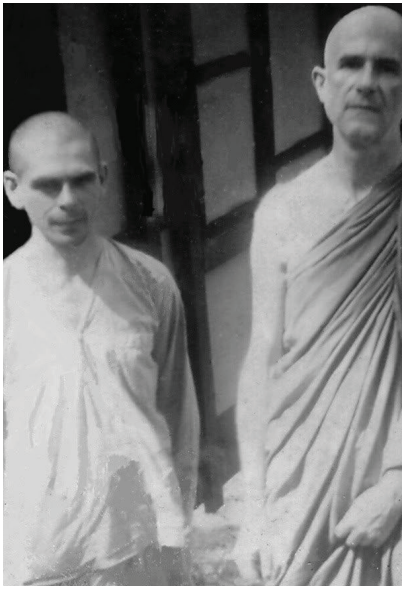
On 10 October 2005, at the age of 93, Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera passed away on Parappaduwa Island. At the time of his passing, he was the oldest and most senior Western Buddhist monk in the world. His passing marked not an end, but the consummation of a life lived with radical simplicity—a life that had long since transcended the need for worldly markers. Today, as many of the forests he once trod have been claimed by cultivated fields and concrete, his legacy lives brightest where his teachings are put into practice: in the mindful step of a *cārikā* bhikkhu, in the stillness between thoughts, and in the unwavering return to the Buddha's original words. For those who encounter his story, he remains what he always was—a mirror reflecting the Dhamma's fullest possibility.



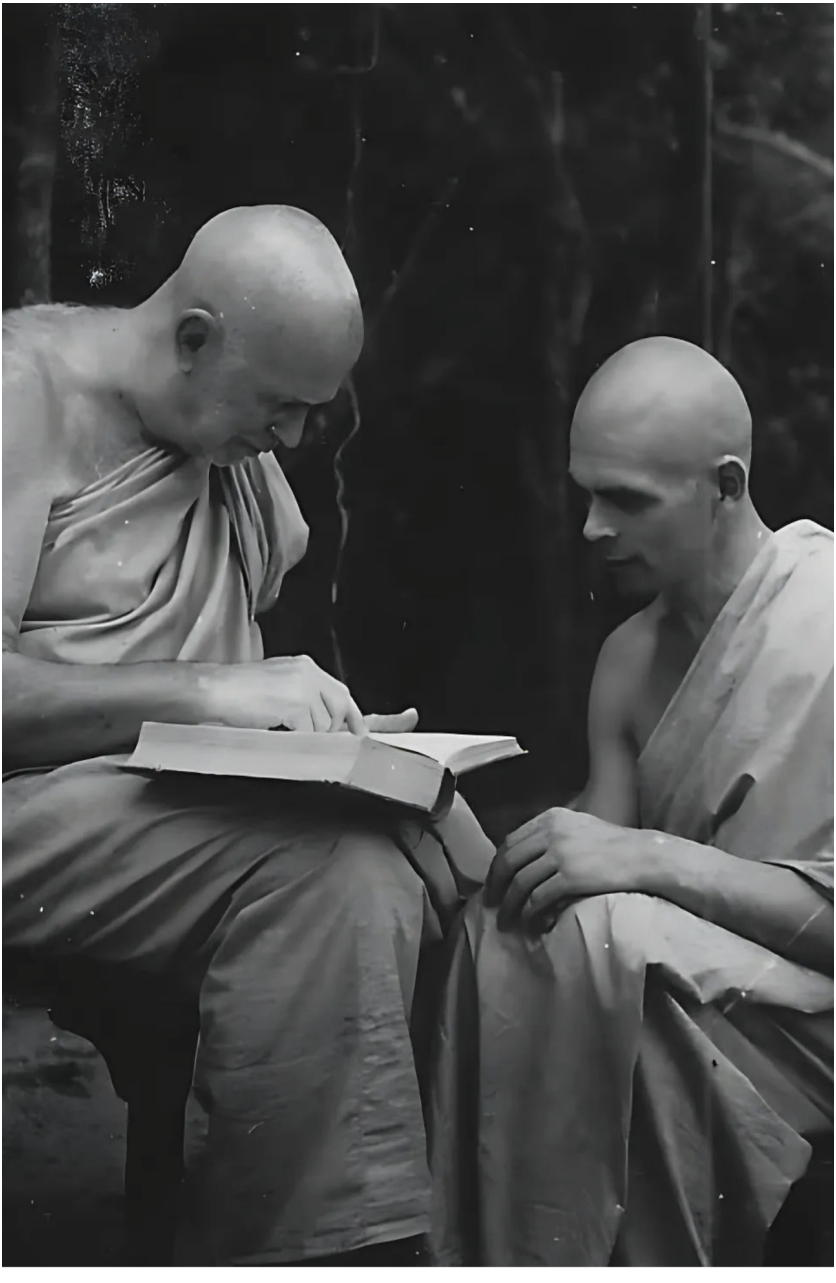
Buddhist Mission To Germany—Training Centre in Dalugama, Kelaniya (1953). Left to Right: Mr. Simpson Wijeratne; Ven. Galle Anuruddha; Ven. Ñāṇaponika; Ven. Nyanatiloka; Upāsaka Friedrich Möller (later known as Ven. Ñāṇavimala); Ven. Kudawella Vaṅgīsa; Mr. Asoka Weeraratna (Secretary, German Dharmaduta Society)



Friedrich Möller (far right), Taken during Asoka Weeraratna's visit to Germany to survey Buddhist activities and identify sites for a Buddhist Centre and Vihara (1953).



With Ven Ñāṇaponika, c. 1955



Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera—the first European Buddhist monk and founder of the Island Hermitage—with Sāmaṇera Ñāṇavimala, his newly ordained novice and final disciple, who would later become a legendary cārikā (wandering) monk (1955).

A Reader's Guide

Before diving into the Notes and Reflections, a few words about how this book is structured—and how to approach it for the deepest understanding.

What This Book Is

This is a window into how the Dhamma was communicated, person to person, from teacher to disciple. At its heart are the teachings of Venerable Ñāṇavimala captured in the handwritten notes of his student, Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera.

For general readers, this book offers a collection of reflections—stories of a disciple's training that show what dedicated practice looks like, inspiring accounts of the Dhamma embodied in daily life, and the gradual transformation of a student under his teacher's guidance. These narratives provide an accessible entry into the teachings, illuminating the challenges faced, the wisdom offered, and the lived reality of walking the path.

For practitioners, behind these stories lie the original handwritten notes—a seven-year training curriculum rooted directly in the Buddha's *Suttas*. Preserved exactly as recorded, unfiltered, with minimal edits only for clarity, they offer complete guidance from ethical foundations through advanced practice.

The Offering

For two and a half decades, these notes remained private—a way of remembering the Dhamma as it was lived. They now offer:

1. **A rare lineage preserved—**Ven. Ñāṇavimala combined the *Sutta* mastery of a Pāli scholar with the iron discipline of a forest ascetic. His approach—rooted directly in the Buddha's words—represents an almost-lost tradition.

2. **A complete training path**—from layman's ethical conduct to advanced monastic practice, these notes trace a gradual, systematic development rarely documented in such detail.

3. **In the spirit of *sandiṭṭhiko*** ("visible here and now") and *ehipassiko* ("come and see for yourself"), this book serves as encouragement to undertake your own meditation on the *Suttas,* which remain the ultimate authority.

4. **A glimpse of what is possible**—Ven. Ñāṇavimala's profound austerity exemplifies the Dhamma's highest capacity—not as a requirement for all, but as a measure of what becomes possible when renunciation is perfected.

The Structure

Each chapter contains two parts: Notes and Reflections.

Notes

Ven. Gnanaloka's original records from 1994–2001. The discourses themselves were brief, often lasting only fifteen to thirty minutes, but carried weight that lingered long after. After each meeting, during retreats stretching weeks or months, he would write down what he could recall in his own words. Some had to be recopied, as the originals, battered by sun, rain, and long journeys, began to disintegrate.

These notes capture the teachings in concise language—often brief and direct, even abrupt—as they were written in the language of a personal encounter.

These are the core instructions—treat them as direct curriculum.

Edits were made only to correct grammar and sentence structure for readability. In a few instances of ambiguity, minor word adjustments were made to convey the intended meaning, always

after direct consultation with Ven. Gnanaloka. All *Sutta* references, bracketed editor's notes [like this], and footnotes have been added for clarity.

Footnotes provide key context, clarifications, and additional details from Ven. Gnanaloka's spoken recollections.

Wherever the original notes contained words or phrases in ALL CAPS, underlining, or an asterisk (*), we have rendered them in **bold** in this edition to preserve the writer's emphasis—signalling points regarded as especially significant or relevant.

Reflections

The Reflections are crafted around a theme, not a chronological telling—though some chronological elements emerge naturally.

Each explores a core aspect of the spiritual path: going directly to the Buddha's words as living practice, finding the path as a layman, facing sensuality honestly, development of compassion and when *mettā* becomes a shield, understandings of consciousness, radical equanimity as the body ages and fails, and walking fearlessly with only Dhamma as protection.

Rather than presenting a linear account of training, they offer contemplative meditations on essential teachings, revealed through scenes of a disciple receiving his master's guidance, interwoven with the life stories of both.

Written by practitioners who trained under Ven. Gnanaloka and studied his teachings, these reflections were developed from Ven. Gnanaloka's public talks, retreat teachings and interviews as well as other practitioners' accounts. These Reflections provide context for the Notes.

Each stands as a contemplative piece and can be read on its own; however, reading them in sequence is recommended.

The Teaching Progression

Read in sequence, they reveal the gradual unfolding of a disciple's training under a noble master. The record is not continuous. Some notes were never written down. Natural gaps arose when Shanaka was away—studying at university in Cyprus, working in Colombo, on solitary retreats, or during long periods in India and the Himalayas. What remains, however, carries the full weight of the teaching and traces the outline of a training both personal and timeless.

How to Read

The book alternates between Notes (presented chronologically as they were recorded) and Reflections throughout.

We recommend reading in sequence—following the same journey Shanaka (Ven. Gnanaloka) took as his understanding deepened over seven years. The Reflections build upon each other, gradually providing context. The Notes can be revisited as reference material; their meaning deepens with repeated reading.

However, two distinct reader groups may benefit from different emphasis:

For Experienced Practitioners

Read the Notes as direct curriculum and use Reflections for context and inspiration. Treat this as a training manual. Test teachings in your own practice. Return often—let understanding deepen over time.

For Curious New Seekers

Start with the Reflections—read them as inspiring stories and a gentle introduction to the path. They offer glimpses into what

dedicated practice looks like. When ready for deeper practice, turn to the Notes for direct exploration of the teachings.

For Everyone

- Read slowly. Don't rush. Let teachings settle within.
- Read contemplatively. This is not an academic text to analyze but a source for quiet reflection.
- Return often. Meaning unfolds over time and through practice.
- Follow the *Sutta* references. The notes constantly point to the Buddha's words—these are the living sources from which all authentic Dhamma flows.

On Translation and Language

The Reflections were developed from sources in both English and Sinhala. Some quoted remarks have been translated from Sinhala, combined from multiple instances for clarity, or slightly adapted for readability. The original meaning and spirit have been carefully preserved.

This book aimed to address the challenge of being both authentic to the source and accessible to a broad audience. At times, this meant expressing certain Pāli terms and subtle scriptural meanings in simpler language. While some nuanced details may not be immediately apparent to readers unfamiliar with the original terminology, this approach was chosen to bridge the gap for newcomers while preserving the essence of the teaching.

On Pāli terms: You'll encounter many—the language of early Buddhist scriptures. Most are explained in context. A comprehensive Glossary at the end provides reference for all terms.

Using the Appendix

The Appendix is organized for different levels of practice and commitment:

For Lay Practitioners

Curated teachings on ethical conduct, generosity, and meditation suitable for household life.

For Monastics

Comprehensive curriculum addressing training for those who have gone forth.

Walking Contemplations

The precise sequence Ven. Ñāṇavimala would verbalize during *caṅkama* (walking meditation)—rare insight into a master's moment-to-moment practice.

The Source of Wisdom: Canonical References

All *Suttas* mentioned throughout the book for deeper reading and reflections.

This Book as Gateway

View this as a guide pointing to the ultimate source: the Buddha's own words. Keep these texts close while reading:

- The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Saṁyutta Nikāya)
- The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikāya)
- The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Aṅguttara Nikāya)
- The Word of the Buddha by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera

(Reference Key: DN = Dīgha Nikāya, MN = Majjhima Nikāya, SN = Saṁyutta Nikāya, AN = Aṅguttara Nikāya, Snp = Sutta Nipāta, Dhp = Dhammapada, Ud = Udāna, Iti = Itivuttaka, Thag = Theragāthā, Thig = Therīgāthā.)

REFLECTION 01

The Makings of a Disciple

Shanaka was born in 1971, during the height of the youth insurrection in Sri Lanka.[1] At the time, his parents were living in Anuradhapura, where his father worked as an agricultural engineer. However, his maternal grandfather, a doctor, insisted that Shanaka's mother travel to Colombo and stay with them until the baby was born. According to his mother, this decision turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Shanaka came into the world several weeks premature, not in a hospital, but in the backseat of his grandfather's car, near a Buddha statue, as they were rushing to the hospital. His grandmother, overjoyed, is said to have exclaimed:

"Mage budu putha ipaduna" ("My son, blessed as a Buddha, is born.")[2]

Though they may have hoped for a saintly child, what they got was a whirlwind of energy. From his earliest years, Shanaka was rebellious and intense. When his father's work later took the family to Kandy, he was enrolled at Trinity College, a prestigious private school known for its discipline and refinement. But Shanaka resisted conformity at every turn. He fought, broke rules, and challenged

1 In 1971, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist and anti-imperialist youth movement, launched an armed uprising with coordinated attacks on police stations across Sri Lanka. The revolt was crushed within weeks but left thousands dead and many imprisoned.

2 The phrase 'Budu putha' (blessed as a Buddha) is a fairly common Sinhalese term of endearment used to express that the child is precious or beloved in a moment of great joy.

authority. Bruce Lee became his hero. Canings at school were frequent, and at home, his mother struggled to contain his fierce spirit.

Yet one thing stood out, even amidst the chaos: Shanaka's instinctive reverence for monks. As a foreshadowing of his later path, at around nine years old, in an act of childhood play, he and a friend pretended to be monks, circumambulating a school tree they imagined to be a sacred Bodhi tree. They both thought it would be a good idea to run away from home to become monks, but knew their parents would be against it. The earnest play lasted a couple of days. Then it was back to fighting, back to trouble, the usual boyhood chaos.

His life changed course when his father accepted a foreign assignment in Lesotho, Southern Africa. There, Shanaka's unchanneled energy found a new outlet in sports, particularly athletics and cricket, where he proved to be a good fast bowler. In athletics he outdid many of his schoolmates to such an extent that they would ask him, "What do you eat?" At the same time, a curiosity about the nature of life began to emerge. He would often walk alone along the Caledon River, contemplating questions of time, space, and existence. Albert Einstein became his new inspiration, and he began to dream of studying astrophysics at Princeton University. The searching did not go unseen. When he eventually left the school, one teacher, a man he remembers as "like a soul connection," wrote in his leaving recommendation, "Shanaka is searching for a stimulus and a fulfillment beyond what we English call school."

Entering his teenage years, he was particularly drawn to the theory of relativity—how time slows as one approaches the speed of light. The theory suggested that time was not absolute, but relative. To his mind, this lent credibility to the idea of different planes of existence—something he'd read about in one of his mother's

Buddhist books[3]—where, in the higher planes, days stretch vastly longer and lifespans are measured in eons.

He had learned that mathematically, if something could travel faster than the speed of light, it would go backward in time. He began to relate this to the function of memory, how recalling the past is like going back in time. Meditation and intuition, he theorised, made you go faster and faster, time slowing progressively, like the eon-stretched time of higher planes. And there would be a speed where time would stop.

At eighteen, during one such walk, in a solitary, barren terrain near his house, a question arose:

What are the causes of any phenomenon?

And then, just as instantly, came an insight:

Anything that begins in time definitely ends. There is no beginning for this understanding, therefore there's no end.

The realisation struck him like a flash. All phenomena arise and pass away. This life was fleeting. But this very knowing transcends time. Whatever he was conscious of that had looked solid before now felt like jelly. Even the buildings of Princeton University felt like jelly. The dream began to fade.

In that moment, a picture appeared in his mind—a monk experiencing this very truth. A quiet resolve followed:

I must become like that and make this happen again and again. I must stay in silent places like this.

3 See Piyadassi Thera, The *Spectrum of Buddhism* (1988). The collection includes essays on Buddhist cosmology and the relative nature of time across various planes of existence (*Loka*), drawing parallels to modern physical theories.

When he returned home he informed his father that he wanted to ordain. That single sentence sent shockwaves through the family. From that day on, his once restless and fiery manner softened naturally. He walked more intently, ate mindfully and spoke less. His mother, who had a spiritual inclination, supported him wholeheartedly and became his first student.

His father, however, saw it differently. To him, it seemed as though his son was throwing away his future—his education, his cricketing talents, and his worldly potential. Their relationship grew strained. Shanaka knew he had caused pain, and with time, he came to understand just how difficult it must have been for his father to accept. But shortly after this turning point, he met Ven. Ñāṇavimala. The contemplations and experience during his walk by his house would form the ideas that he later shared with Ven. Ñāṇavimala on that day by the roadside.

Had he not met his teacher, Shanaka might have rushed blindly into renunciation, creating more conflict and widening the rift with his father. But Ven. Ñāṇavimala guided him with wisdom and restraint, offering a principle that left a lasting impression:

"Don't break your *sīla*[4] for anyone—not even for your parents. But short of that, do everything you can to make them happy."

During one solitary retreat, Shanaka gained deep insight into his *karmic* ties with his father. The years of his father pushing him—toward expected grades, a life mapped out in advance—and the frustration that came from resisting it. He saw it clearly now: not anyone's fault, but the result of cause and effect. Their relationship was a *karmic* exchange—why he had become his son and why his father had become his father. It was a *kamma* they had to reap

4 *Sīla* (moral conduct): For lay followers, *sīla* is primarily practiced by observing the Five Precepts: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants.

together. He no longer blamed his father, nor did he blame himself, and a peace overflowed from within when he saw this.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged harmony, not defiance. He reminded Shanaka that parents are not random strangers; they are beings bound to us through past *kamma,* who have cared for us since birth. Following this advice, Shanaka chose to honor his father's wishes. He enrolled in business management studies in Cyprus.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala once told him:

"You don't overcome *kamma* by changing the environment—you remain equanimous and let it pass."

These words shaped Shanaka's approach to challenges. Rather than reacting, he learned to stay centered, to uphold his precepts and let old *kamma* unfold without adding new layers of conflict.

It would take nearly a decade. He never argued or pleaded with his father. He simply followed his teacher's guidance: he meditated, studied the *Suttas,* and undertook silent retreats, both in Sri Lanka and later in India, while continuing to support his parents' happiness.

As Shanaka continued practicing, he gradually began to understand: when the conditions truly ripen, life itself begins to push a person in that direction. Until then, there are still lessons to be learned, something still left to be understood and exhausted.

He recalled how painful it was to leave his precious stay with Ven. Ñāṇavimala. One time, after worshipping, he held his teacher's feet before departing. He felt a deep sorrow at having to leave behind the sense of calm and Dhamma atmosphere he had found there. Seeing this, Ven. Ñāṇavimala told him:

"You will be forced to come."

As his practice matured, those words began to unfold of their own accord. Those who had once opposed him now began to encourage ordination. Quite unexpectedly, the entire environment around him began to change. Relatives and even monks would ask, "When is your son going to ordain?" Shanaka only wished to deepen his practice. He was not yet willing to make the decision to ordain.

Eventually, his father began asking him when he planned to ordain.

His father's blessing gave Shanaka strength beyond anything he could have imagined. Years later, as Ven. Gnanaloka, during a grueling *cārikā* through the Knuckles mountain range, he became lost for several days. While trying to ascend a ravine adjacent to Duwili Ella by gripping a hanging root like a rope, he was battered and injured along the journey. Stings from fever nettle lashed across his body like being whipped, and leeches clung to him in thick clusters. Exhausted, wounded, and without food or water, he wandered through the wilderness alone until he finally encountered a group of cardamom pluckers who treated his injuries and ultimately saved his life. Some later speculated that he must have possessed supernatural powers to survive. But in truth, what sustained him was something much simpler.

A quiet mantra arose in the depths of the forest:

"My father blessed me… My father blessed me."

That blessing, that acceptance, became his source of strength.

Looking back nearly three decades later, Ven. Gnanaloka sees just how true his teacher's words were. Ven. Ñāṇavimala once told him:

"The only way to truly help your parents, your relatives, and all beings… is to purify yourself. This will inspire others."

He was right.

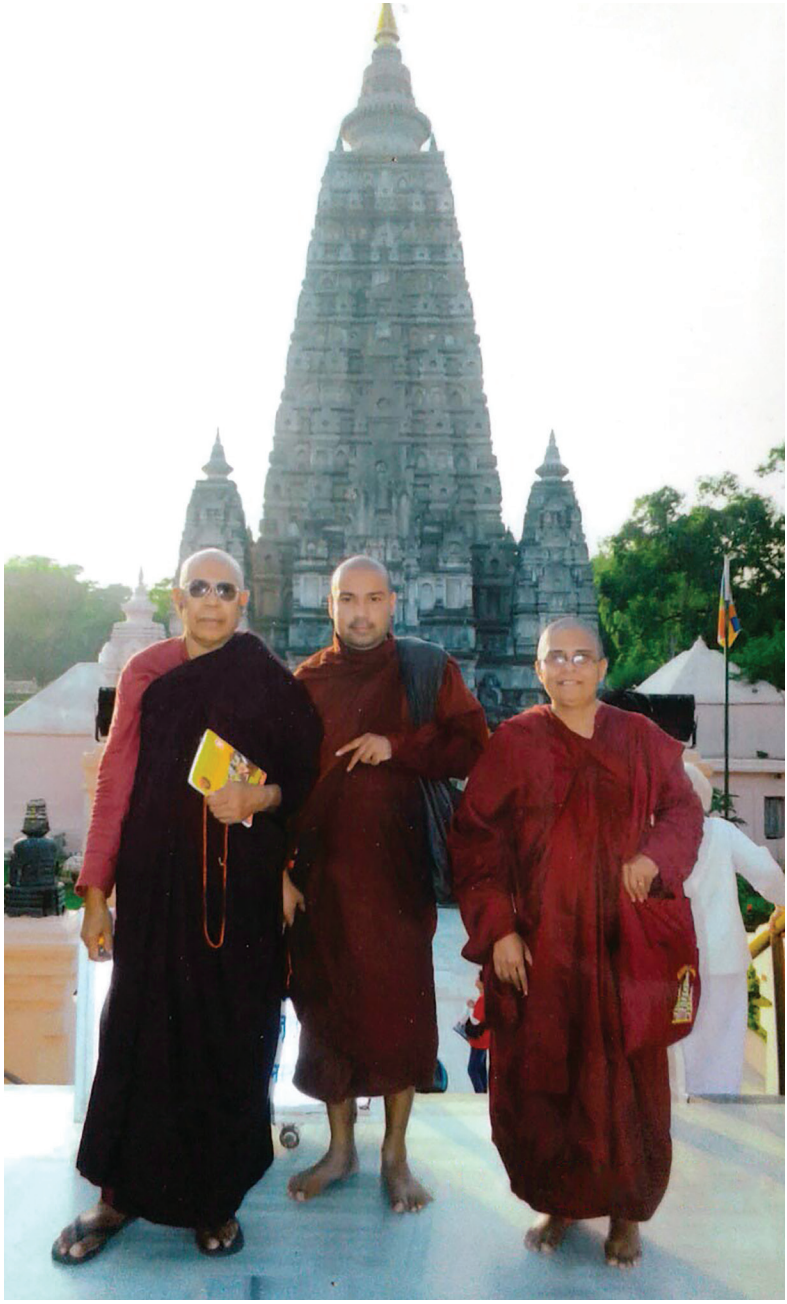
The seeds of Dhamma that Shanaka planted over the years bore extraordinary fruit. His father, who was once his greatest critic, became his greatest supporter, and in time, both parents were inspired to enter the holy life. His father ordained as a monk and passed away as a bhikkhu in 2024. His mother, his very first student, ordained as a nun in early 2025. It was the ultimate testimony of his teacher's instruction. Ven. Ñāṇavimala had provided the living bridge between the Buddha's words and the complexities of familial bonds.

The Blessed One had declared that even carrying one's parents on each shoulder for a hundred years would not repay the debt owed to them.[5] His teacher showed him the way to honour that truth. It was not through grand gestures, but through patient conduct, unbroken *sīla,* and the steady purification of the heart. In following this counsel, Shanaka found that his ordination was not a turning away from his parents, but the highest act of gratitude.

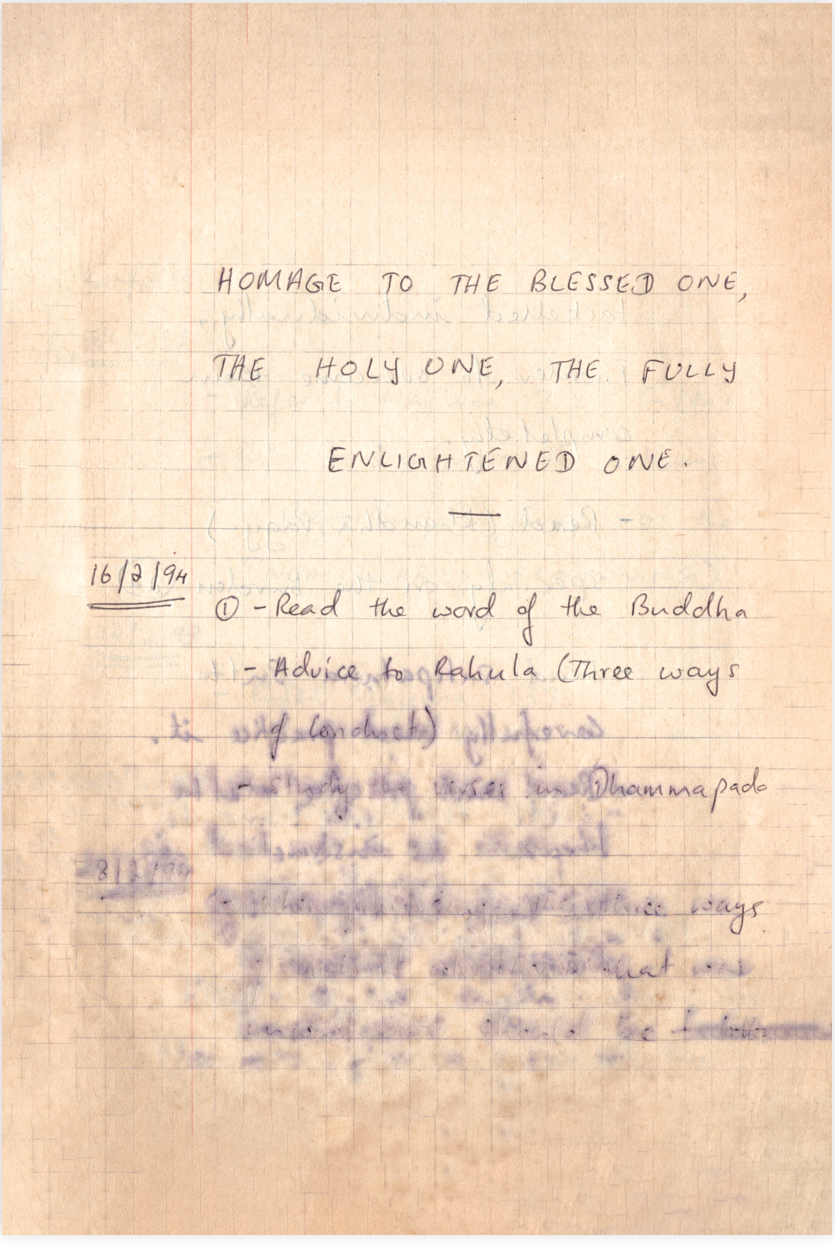
5 *Samacittavagga* (AN2.33; same-minded)



After a decade of close association with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, Shanaka finally entered the monastic life as Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera, with the full blessings of his parents (Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayathanaya, 19 December 1999).



Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera's parents took temporary ordination at Bodh Gaya, India, in 2015, prior to their formal ordination.


HOMAGE TO THE BLESSED ONE,
THE HOLY ONE, THE FULLY
ENLIGHTENED ONE.
16/2/94
① - Read the word of the Buddha
- Advice to Rahula (Three ways
of conduct)
- Dhammapada
8/3/94
ways

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1994).

CHAPTER 01

Avoid Every Bondage With the World

(February 1994 – April 1994)

Polgasduwa Island Hermitage

16 February 1994

- Read the *Word of the Buddha* [by Venerable Nyanatiloka Mahāthera].[6]
- Advice to Rāhula (three ways of conduct [*tīṇi sucaritāni*])—*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).[7]
- Study the verses in *Dhammapada* (Dhp; verses of the Dhamma).

18 February 1994

- When practicing the three ways of conduct,[8] whatever was unwholesome should be tackled individually in order to overcome them completely.

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6 The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Buddha in the Words of the Pāli Canon—Compiled, translated and explained by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera.

7 In the original notes, this discourse is referred to simply as *Rāhulovāda Sutta,* though its full title is *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).

8 This practice is the reflection on bodily, verbal, and mental actions—before, during, and after they occur. It is a foundational practice that should be done at all times.

- Read *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).[9] Especially on the burden—*Bhāra Sutta* (SN22.22; the burden).

- Read *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* carefully and practice it.[10]

- Read and practice *mettā bhāvanā* as instructed in the book written by Venerable Ñāṇamoli Thera [*The Practice of Loving-Kindness*].

20 February 1994

- Refer *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth), *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement), *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view).

- Refer *Saṁyutta Nikāya* regarding sayings on the incalculable beginning *Anamataggasaṁyutta* (SN15; connected discourses on without discoverable beginning).

22 February 1994

- Refer *Saḷāyatanavibhanga Sutta* (MN137; the exposition of the sixfold base).

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9 Primary focus should be given to the *Khandhasaṁyutta* section (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates). The Buddha analyzes the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness—as the aggregates subject to clinging, showing them to be impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

10 The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) is a foundational discourse of the Buddha, considered essential for the development of insight and the attainment of Nibbāna (Final Liberation). It lays out the four objects for the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna: mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. The two main canonical versions are the shorter *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness) and the longer *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN22; the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness)

23 February 1994

- Refer *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).[11]

9 March 1994

- When bhāvanā (*samatha*), Sleepiness = Not a good time for *Samatha*. To overcome it, refer to the discourse given to the great Moggallāna—*Pacalāyamāna Sutta* (AN7.61; dozing). Rubbing the ears, looking at the sky etc. or do some kind of alternative activity.[12]
- Too much *upekkhā* (equanimity) makes you slack in progress—*viriya* (energy/effort) is necessary.
- Like this you have to balance everything.
- To have a good foundation to continue this practice in every activity and all one's life, one must establish oneself in the three ways of conduct, mindfully reflecting in three stages.
- Read some *Suttas* from *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN; the middle-length discourses), *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN; the numerical discourses).
- When on retreats, be careful of attachment to food and sleep.

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11 Primary focus should be given to the *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* section (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases). The Buddha analyzes the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind and their objects—as the domain where contact conditions feeling and craving. He teaches guarding the sense faculties and seeing impermanence, suffering, and not-self in relation to the six sense bases.

12 *Samatha* (calm abiding) meditation stills and steadies the mind. But when drowsiness intrudes, the Buddha advised the monk Mahā-Moggallāna to: change the object of meditation, recite/reflect on Dhamma, rouse the body (rub the ears/limbs), wash the face and open the gaze, focus on perception of light, walk; if needed, lie down briefly. He later became a chief disciple, foremost in psychic powers.

13 March 1994

- *Meghiya Sutta* (AN9.3; Meghiya)
- *Upāli Sutta* (MN56; to Upāli)
- *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view)
- *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN118; mindfulness of breathing)
- *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN22; the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness)
- *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN119; mindfulness of the body)
- *Udāna* (Ud; inspired utterances)
- *Sutta Nipāta* (Snp; the collection of discourses)
- *Thera Gāthā* (Thag; verses of the elder monks)
- Wait for some time, you will have more understanding and become more mature (regarding marriage).

16 March 1994

- *Majjhima* 7, 8, 9, 10—*Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth), *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement), *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view), *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness).[13]
- This is the process in *Satipaṭṭhāna Dhammānupassanā* (perceiving impermanence, one breathes in and out, noting and reflecting the impermanence of the breath itself).

13 Ven. Ñāṇavimala gave directions in the briefest form: "*Majjhima* [number]" names the discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya* and, when several are given, the order to follow. The sequence "7, 8, 9, 10" is a compact progressive training: (MN7) begins by cleansing the mind's stains; (MN8) guides the effacement of defilements; (MN9) establishes right view as the framework; (MN10) sets out the direct path of mindfulness to be cultivated throughout.

- The breath that is sent in, is sent out. Like food when it is sent in, it is sent out. In this circumstance, it is unpleasant, but in the case of breath, it is not.

- Look at things perceived mentally as or consider them in the same manner as when considering with the five senses and build up equanimity.[14]

- Whenever there is disturbance, one must see the causes of those disturbances. You must remove the causes. The disturbance could be external and internal.

- First of all, a good foundation should be laid down with regard to the three ways of conduct.

- These things we have seen before. (Referring to what was sensed at the time).

- **Must try to find the way of Removal in the *Suttas* as advised by the Buddha if possible.**[15]

- When meditating pleasant peaceful feelings arise.

- When one tries to get the experience again, it might not come. Therefore, always see them and must see everything with equanimity.

- **Always it must be a pleasant abiding. Nothing should disturb. Seeing everything as impermanent.**

14 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies: "Mentally" refers to experiences arising in meditation (e.g. visions). Regard them like sense-objects: observe without assigning value or taking them up, and see their impermanence.

15 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies, this is referring to removing the mental defilements (*āsavas*), by the approaches described in the *Suttas*. This requires a certain degree of knowledge of the *Suttas*.

21 March 1994

- Read the *Dhammapada* verses. The ones that strike you, learn them by heart.
- Never be upset. Regard everything as impermanent, not yours.
- Try to avoid every bondage with the world and to be free from any actions that are *akusala* (unwholesome).
- *Jhāna* (meditative absorption) is an opening for [Dhamma] vision.[16]
- When there are disturbances, go one step below. Read the *Suttas*.
- Don't delay. Make use of the situation. A letter might come, or maybe sickness, or maybe an outside condition that might make you leave.
- Fasting is good [from] time to time to get rid of cravings for food. It is good to avoid certain foods that are attractive. Fast one day and eat one day. Fast two days and eat two days. Fast three days and eat three days. Fast four days and eat four days... five days and so on.
- This will be helpful, especially when one is going on *piṇḍapāta* (alms round). Sometimes you might not get any food.
- "Ah happy do we live, we who have no impediments. Feeders of joy shall we be even as the gods of the Radiant Realm" (Dhp 200).
- When drowsiness comes, use one of the techniques said to Mahā Moggallāna—*Pacalāyamāna Sutta* (AN7.61; dozing).

16 *Jhāna* provides the clarity and steadiness of mind through which the Dhamma is directly seen. This seeing is not conceptual knowledge but insight born of experience.

- Avoid everything that increases *lobha, dosa* and *moha* because it will bring suffering. Do the things that will reduce *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate) and *moha* (delusion); it will bring happiness.

- Always, the world is there to attract you.

- As a layperson, it is a must to observe *sīla* on *poya* days.[17] Time to time it is good to retire for a couple of days.

- Due to *kamma* one would get a teacher. Some teachers would tell you to read the *Suttas*, learn Pāli. That is if you decide to be a monk. But make sure you do not take any decision without the liking of your father.[18]

- The things that disturb—these things will be there throughout life. They are *kamma*. Surely, we have done *akusala kamma* (unwholesome actions) before. What you must do is direct the mind slowly in that given condition to turn towards the goal. You have to consider.

- If one doesn't have great understanding, one must think [of] how one has endlessly roamed in *saṁsāra* (the cycle of suffering and rebirth). See *Anamataggasaṁyutta* (SN15; connected discourses on without discoverable beginning). In order to refrain and arouse great energy to practice on the path, in whatever condition however unsuitable it may be. Never to deviate from the path, always sticking to it. Seeing the danger.

17 In Sri Lanka, a *Poya* day is the full-moon *Uposatha* observance. Lay Buddhists typically visit the temple or a forest monastery (often in white) and "take *sīla*" for the day—usually the Eight Precepts. This long-standing lay observance deepens study, meditation, and lay-monastic reciprocity.

18 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies this refers to gaining approval from his father, but being sensitive to how he is feeling as well, not just about getting formal approval.

- Always, suitable conditions would not remain. That will be the situation throughout life.

- *Dhammapada* (Dhp; verses of the Dhamma)—there is advice in it for all situations.

- Surely, we would not last. These Aranyas would vanish. The buildings, all these things are artificial. The *sāsana* is declining.[19]

24 March 1994

- When unwholesome thoughts arise, try to subdue them mentally. [For] example: by *asubha saññā* [perception of foul nature], or, if it doesn't work, try reading the *Dhammapada* and practice to remove the cause of this. Generally, it is due to ignorance, things that are impermanent, and [that] which are not yours.

- **Say you were a businessman, and that you did your business rightly and justly, [at the moment of death] for [next] birth to take place consciousness is required.**[20] When his body becomes old and when it comes to its end, it cannot continue. It needs another body to continue; therefore, it is born where necessary conditions would be available (a family that would give necessary encouragement and he will grow up to do business). Consciousness needs an object to arise.

- If one makes an effort and rises to a certain sphere, one would experience the object in that sphere. The effort you make is *kamma*.

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19 Aranya refers to forest hermitages. *Sāsana* denotes the Buddha's dispensation—the Dhamma and Vinaya as lived and handed on. The statement points not merely to the inevitable impermanence of physical structures, but more profoundly, to the weakening of practice, study, and virtue.

20 Refer to Reflection 08 for detailed elaboration.

- Your object of meditation is the presently arisen consciousness and the components constituting that framework, that is past *kamma.*[21]
- At the moment of *lokuttara sammā-diṭṭhi* [supramundane right view], when nibbāna [the unconditioned; the cessation of greed, hatred, and delusion] is an object, one firmly establishes in past formation.[22]
- **Read *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view).**

28 March 1994

- For the mental factors to arise, this body comes to be, with its unique nature and functions, such as the in-and-out breathing etc.
- Must not expect any vision of Dhamma but just create the conditions like *sīla* (virtue) and so on. Know that every perception even of Dhamma is impermanent, sticking to nothing that is connected to impermanent elements.
- If something or an activity is unpleasant, look at it as impermanent, not yours, and due to *kamma,* Do not be displeased.
- In and out breathing, and the perception arising due to the mind-element [are] processes taking place due to our past *kamma.* The body and body processes have come to be, the way it is, based on past craving and ignorance.

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21 Ven. Gnanaloka notes this line is a personal note—an over-explanation of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's teaching. "Presently arisen consciousness and components" should be read as the immediate field of experience—e.g., the breath together with contact, feeling, perception, and volitional formations—as observed as they arise and pass.

22 Ven. Gnanaloka notes this sentence is a personal note—an over-explanation of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's teaching. In the context of *lokuttara sammā-diṭṭhi*, when Nibbāna is the object, "past formation" should be understood as the bodily formation (*kāya-saṅkhāra*)—i.e., the last breath occurring as a result of past *kamma*. [For further context, see Reflection 08.]

- **And one cannot delight in the breath for it is impermanent and it is not yours.**

Vegetarianism:

- Everything that takes place in this world entails killing. Even the cultivation of rice. When the field is ploughed, what is prepared you eat, making sure there is no intention for something to be killed. The best way is to follow the path that will make the stopping of the arising of the body that needs to be fed is given more emphasis. Rather than being defiled by pride or a certain craving for the idea of a better world that all people will stop killing animals. But it is only a small amount that is killed by human beings compared to other factors that destroy life.

Regarding the *Suttas:*

- *Majjhima* 9, 10—*Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view), *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness).
- **First, perceiving impermanence and then where there is no craving, there is no new clinging, becoming, birth, old age and death. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination).**
- Angulimāla, though he has killed so many people, he has previously cultivated the faculties required for Arahantship—*Angulimāla Sutta* (MN86; on Angulimāla).
- Everything is conditioned.
- Musn't try to reason out things that are said to be unthinkable by the Buddha, for example how *kamma vipāka* (the fruition of actions) takes place, the *jhāna* etc.
- **Must stick to facts.**

1 April 1994

- Read *Majjhima* 13,14—"quite good"—*Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN13; the greater discourse on the mass of suffering), *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN14; the shorter discourse on the mass of suffering).

- Read *Majjhima* 117 too—*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty).

- If there are any disturbances from outside, you remove them in a way that you have nothing to regret. Read *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view) again and again.

- **Establish yourself in the three ways of conduct so that at the end of the day, when you reflect, you have nothing to regret.**

- **Keep in mind all the time, the four factors: noble friend, reading the *Suttas* etc.[23]—*Sotāpattiphala Sutta* (SN55.55; the fruit of stream-entry).**

- Make a firm determination to stick to the word of the Buddha always.

- Aversion arises because there is a lot of attachment.

- Memories that arise [are] connected to the sensual world. [*Personal Note:*] I have to go back and make a basis (exams and subsequent employment) in the world of the senses.[24]

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23 As mentioned in the *Sotāpattiphala Sutta*, to reach the first stage of awakening (stream-entry), the "four factors" to keep in mind are noble friendship (kalyāṇa-mitta), hearing the true Dhamma (*saddhamma-savana*), wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), and practice in accordance with the Dhamma (*dhammānudhamma-paṭipatti*).

24 A personal note by Shanaka—reminder of the tug between retreat and lay duty: once outside the forest monastery, he would have to resume study and, in time, work—engagements rooted in the sensory world.

7 April 1994

- *Vath Pirith Potha—Maharagama* [*The Mirror of the Dhamma* compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa].
- *Sutta Nipāta*, *Vijaya Sutta* (Snp1.11; victory).
- Stick to the facts. See things as they are. Bring the mind under control. When meditating on the breath, if the mind strays to any object, know that it should be brought back to the breath. The senses delight in and search for happiness generally. In general life, we avoid unpleasant things and get attached to pleasant things, this is done even in meditational experience. So, you must always stick to *Satipaṭṭhāna* [the foundation of mindfulness].
- Generally, we see the body as pleasant, which is an illusion. The actual perception is impurities.
- Sexual urges should not be suppressed, but by constantly perceiving the impurities of the body, must make the urge subside.
- Must take all sounds, even mental sounds as distractions and must stick to things as they are: the breath. Must stick to facts.
- Must concentrate on the in breath and out breath. The whole body means the whole body of breath. Calming the body means calming the process of breath.
- We are always either living in the future or in the past.
- Must stick to the present situation and investigate and see the situation as it is or the reality of it.
- When practicing mindfulness of breathing, at that time when certain feelings arise, observe them carefully, see things as they are, and investigate how they arise; the senses.

Thoroughly reflect [on] their impermanence, the nature of not belonging to you.

12 April 1994

- Taking part in Sinhalese New Year is only a convention. It is better to spend that time striving on the path and that merit could be transferred to relatives. For the wishes of the people who are pure and striving resolutely on the path are effective.

- Maintaining equanimity is very important, and developing and cultivating it, so that there is no more forming or constructing of rise and fall, [due to] intentions, efforts and craving.

- Commentaries are useful; the *Suttas* that strike you very much, go through them again and again. But all of them have the same principle.

- Must do what your parents say so that you would not have remorse later.

- Not mentally expecting any particular vision or something. It is continuously observing the real situation—*Satipaṭṭhāna.*

- When you are in retreat, you must continuously try to keep your mind not wandering by sticking to the object of meditation or [as] second-best thing, reading the *Suttas*. Of course, you have to keep this body clean and the dwelling, the surroundings [clean]. You may attend to these things with full attention, mindfully as to what you are doing. When finished doing the job, one may come and sit down to meditate and reflect carefully of the memory of the last work done, and there is no disturbance, then one must think of something or recite which will calm oneself quickly, that one has to know, after that one can rest the mind on the object

of meditation e.g. breath etc. (breath also one should not imagine but should grasp what actually is).

- In the beginning it is natural to conceptualize.

18 April 1994

- [*Quote from Ven. Ñāṇavimala*] I also had a migraine; it was there for some time. To overcome it, I started yoga, and became a vegetarian. Nothing worked, but when I entered the Saṅgha, when I looked at it from the point of view of Dhamma, it all vanished. There is past *kamma*. Have you read anything of Cayce? [Edgar Cayce].[25] In a dream, it was (consciousness). I got to know the cause of my migraine. I was a soldier in the army. I had inflicted pain. Then I knew the cause.[26]

- So don't worry about these things. Any illness or pain, don't try to overcome it by this action or that which is *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa* [clinging to mere rules and rituals]. Avoid that which increases it (whatever that is unpleasant). Practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is very effective. Maintain equanimity, let that *kamma* pass on. When that past *kamma* is finished, the pain will also be over.

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25 Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) was a well-known American psychic who gave trance readings that purported to reveal individuals' past lives. The book Many Mansions (1952) by Gina Cerminara documents Cayce's work on *kamma* and reincarnation as a cause for present-life conditions.

26 Ven. Ñāṇavimala related that, with a developed *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice, recollections of past lives began to occur. One such recollection revealed the origin of his lifelong migraines: in a former life during the time of the Roman Empire he had been a Germanic soldier fighting Romans in a Germanic village. A short Roman soldier approached, and he struck this Roman soldier on the head with a club, killing him. He noted his own unwholesome act. Following this insight on *kamma,* the migraines subsided. As an additional comment, Ven. Ñāṇavimala would stress the importance of grounding oneself in *Satipaṭṭhāna* (mindfulness), stating that the practice provides the necessary mental balance to confront often overwhelming past life recollections. 'It was (consciousness)' refers to Ven. Ñāṇavimala regarding these experiences as that of the working of consciousness.

- **Look at the body as if from outside—the perceptions, consciousness and feelings and see them as not yours and therefore maintain equanimity.**

- Keep the mind detached, don't let the mind be defiled by the pain. Make sure you do not act in the present in such a way that pain will arise in the future. Make sure all unwholesome activity is avoided.

- **Try to live as minimally as possible.**

- Think how the Pacceka Buddhas lived and died at Isigili—*Isigili Sutta* (MN116; Isigili: the gullet of the seers). You will show the highest gratitude by practice.

- **Get established in *Satipaṭṭhāna*.**

- Don't have any hopes or wishes. Try to cut down any bondage with the world of the senses. Be detached from the past, the future and the present.

- **When faced with the world, when one restrains and controls, and maintains a certain level of detachment or equanimity, that is *kamma* and it will bear its fruits in due course of time. Food should be taken as medicine.**

21 April 1994

- For the *sāsana* to last long and prosper, the best service you could [administer] is to yourself, properly make an endeavor to establish oneself in the proper Dhamma.

- **But if you try to change or get involved in changing the present situation, either the Bodhi pūjās [worshiping the Bodhi tree] or the conduct of the bhikkhus, even what is left will disappear. So be careful, do your own practice in accordance with the word of the Buddha, but don't encourage or assist the wrong practices, in any**

circumstance. It is like swallowing red hot iron balls (using money as a bhikkhu etc.)—[*Aggikkhandhopama Sutta* (AN7.72; fire)]

- When you go to different established places you should compromise according to their rules and regulations, but you must see that they are in accordance with the word of the Buddha.

- **You must observe this (*piṇḍapāta*) with Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi).***

- It is alright if you go on *piṇḍapāta* taking the 8 precepts with the white overall. It is good to go to a solitary place on a full moon day and observe [precepts]. It is good if circumstances permit, to observe 8 precepts on the other 4 *Poyas* [Uposatha days]. Failing that, choose the Sunday closest to the *Poya* or whenever there are holidays.

- **Everyday, you must do things carefully so that, when you reflect in the night, you have nothing to regret in regard to the three ways of conduct.**

- **When the mind is restless, you may read particular *Suttas* that struck you. You may read them over again and again. You may study and memorise the verses in *Dhammapada*, that particularly interest you.**

- ***Milindapañha* (Questions of King Milinda):[27] it is alright if you read them but accept the ones that are in accordance with the *Sutta* and *Vinaya piṭaka*.**

27 Composed around the beginning of the Common Era, and of unknown authorship, the *Milindapañha* is set up as a compilation of questions posed by the Indo-Greek King Milinda (identified as King Menander of Bactria) to a revered senior monk named Nāgasena. It is widely revered for its clear analogies and probing treatment of issues like self/no-self, *kamma,* and rebirth—an early meeting of Hellenistic and Buddhist thought.

- **So always stick to the *Suttas*.**

- The higher rules are there to arouse the *jhāna* (meditative absorption). The minor rules are not necessary. But when one is directed to purifying the three ways of conduct, then the rules are automatically observed.

- You may continue not to eat after 12 o'clock. If it affects the health or if you are involved in a lot of work you may eat something small (milk or 2 slices of bread). But on *Poya* days, milk is also not permitted, water or tea etc. [can be consumed instead].

27 April 1994

- Don't let the Dhamma seed that you have planted be destroyed. The seed that you have planted, the tree that you have grown—you must look after it, protect it, water it, and tend to it carefully so that it will grow, flourish, and come to full growth with flowers and fruit.

- Like a sailor when crossing a river, slowly, not losing the other shore, direct the boat slowly, gradually cutting the stream. Similarly, you should direct your life.

- Read *Sutta* No. 2 of *Majjhima Nikāya—Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN2; all the taints).

30 April 1994

- Always make sure to purify the mind.

- Purified mind brings purified action.

- The [Bodhisatta] left everything, settled to purify himself and [as the Buddha] served all beings in the highest.

- **Though we are separate we will be united in mind.**[28]
- **Avoid *akusala* [unwholesome deeds] even if you have to go through hardship.**
- Do things slowly, carefully and mindfully and always watch the three ways of conduct and just wait.
- Do *mettā bhāvanā* [loving-kindness meditation] and do a bit of *Ānāpānasati* [mindfulness of breathing].
- Be an example to others. It is a skill, the way one directs everything towards Dhamma.
- [Like] Nakulamātā and Nakulapitā [who were regarded by the Buddha as exemplary householder disciples].
- Direct the others in the highest—wish them the highest.
- *"Abhivādanasīlissa, niccaṁ vuḍḍhāpacāyino cattāro dhammā vaḍḍhanti, āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṁ balaṁ* (Dhp 109).

  sukhaṁ niddukkhā nirogyā nibbāna paccayā"
  All blessings.

  [*"For one who is respectful and always honors their elders, four things increase: life, beauty, happiness, and strength.*

  True happiness is that which is free from suffering, free from sickness, and has Nibbāna *(liberation) as its foundation."—A traditional blessing commonly recited by monks at the end of a discourse*]

28 Ven. Gnanaloka states that Ven. Ñāṇavimala would sometimes say this when Shanaka was leaving his kuṭi or was returning to Colombo. Ven. Ñāṇavimala used this statement to emphasize that spiritual unity is solely determined by mental purity, not physical proximity. For instance, the Buddha could see a sincere seeker practicing in the distance, whereas a person full of defilements (*kilesas*) is far away, even if they are touching the Buddha's robe.



Polgasduwa Island Hermitage (circa 1990s)



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera reading in the library at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage (circa 1990s).

REFLECTION 02

Returning to the Source

When Shanaka first met Ven. Ñāṇavimala, he was swept up in the charisma of his presence. There was nothing overt in his manner; if anything, it was understated and austere. Even in his eighties, body worn and frail, extraordinary alertness marked each step. Every movement seemed to arise from a deep inner silence.

One day at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage, Shanaka stood watching Ven. Ñāṇavimala walk toward the dining hall. A sense of awe filled him. The elder monk's stillness felt majestic. A wave of devotion arose in Shanaka.

In that very instant, as if the thought had been spoken aloud, Ven. Ñāṇavimala stopped.

He turned.

His compassionate calm, piercing gaze met Shanaka's eyes directly:

"Your teacher and my teacher is the Dhamma—Vinaya."

It was a direct response to his unspoken thoughts. How had he known? The words were familiar. Ven. Ñāṇavimala had said them before. But this time, spoken as if in direct answer to what he'd just been feeling, they settled deeply within him.

In time, Shanaka came to understand what Ven. Ñāṇavimala was pointing to. In the world, even the most sincere teachers can mislead, however unintentionally. Devotion can become entangled with personality, lineage, or charisma. But the Buddha, the true refuge, never lets one down. The Buddha offered a path grounded

in direct experience. He asked for no blind faith, only careful and honest inquiry.

This very inquiry led Shanaka to appreciate the difficulty many modern seekers face. He began to understand why the Buddha's words, though timeless, could feel so distant to modern seekers and why contemporary voices often seemed to reach them more easily.

The gap wasn't only about words that didn't quite fit in with the times. It was about resonance. And beneath that, something even subtler.

The unadorned power of the ancient words holds a subtle vibration that minds conditioned by constant noise struggle to detect. Truly penetrating the *Suttas* required stilling and re-attuning the mind. He found that first in the forests, where its primordial silence uncovered an intuition attuned to the Buddha's frequency.

He read a discourse given in the Great Wood near Vesālī, where a visiting crowd of Licchavis, the city's ruling clan, had arrived in a long procession of fine carriages. As their noise filled the forest, a group of elder monks then withdrew to a secluded grove. The Buddha, praising their retreat, declared that even sound was a thorn, an obstacle to attaining the first of the sublime unified states of mind known in the *Suttas* as *jhāna*.[1] *Jhānas* are states free from the five mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*): sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*). He reflects that this still quality of mind free from hindrances like a *jhāna* is conducive to the arising of intuitive insight.

1 *Kaṇṭaka Sutta* (AN10.72; thorns). The Buddha lists a thorn for each *jhāna*: sound (*sadda*) for the first *jhāna*, applied and sustained thought (*vitakka-vicāra*) for the second, rapture (*pīti*) for the third, and in-breath and out-breath (*assāsa-passāsa*) for the fourth.

He now sees that modern spiritual practitioners face disturbance beyond just sensory noise. Today seekers are contending with an even louder noise—cognitive noise—the internal disturbances that drive one away from deeper cognitive powers needed to reach these states of mind.

Attention, *manasikāra* in Pāli, is a mental resource that, if used wisely, can bring insight toward liberation. This fundamental resource has been cultivated by meditative sages for millennia. Yet today, he notices a pattern. Attention has now become a commodity, captured and engineered to be profited from, rather than cultivated.

Technology now advances and gets adopted at an ever-quickening pace. Brains do not evolve and update like technology does. What has become normal is a habituated chase for fleeting rewards—status updates, likes, addictive content and news snippets, whilst juggling six different things at once—leading to what modern culture has termed 'brain rot.'

That is the silent but destructive consequence: information overload, restless distraction and a rewiring toward shallow rewards. The very faculties of sustained attention and inner stillness a contemplative must cultivate are being worn away.

The problem stems from people reaching for technology not only for their necessary use, but also as an escape and a way to find a temporary release. This is a kind of 'intoxication,' he observes, where the craving within only grows. If craving grows, so does suffering. He quotes the Buddha: *taṇhā paccayā dukkhaṁ uppajjati, taṇhā nirodhā dukkhaṁ na uppajjati*[2]—with craving as a condition, suffering arises; with the cessation of craving, suffering does not arise.

2 See the *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta* (Snp3.12; contemplation of dyads), which sets out the twofold contemplation that all suffering arises conditioned by craving, and that with craving's complete cessation no suffering arises.

"Going on not recognising the problem, is itself the big problem," he says. "To practically begin any meditation, we have to recognise the thing that deteriorates the mind, and resolve not to do it."

Research shows that the mere presence of one's own mobile phone impairs cognitive capacity for attention, even without actually checking the phone.[3] This is because the brain has only so much capacity for attention, and it is being constantly consumed by simply resisting the urge to check it, even when the device is turned off. On top of this, the anxiety many feel when their phone is just kept away in another room reveals how deep the problem runs.[4] This is the modern-day thorn to settling into stillness.

The brain isn't broken. It's under chronic strain. These conditions reshape not just behavior, but the brain's very structure and chemistry.

From his own experience, he had come to know the area behind the forehead as significant for discriminative wisdom—the seat of what he calls the wisdom eye (*paññācakkhu*).[5] He says: "If you're really properly focusing, you will feel a kind of a tingling, or some activity, in the forehead. That eye is sleeping, but very subtle; the more you relax, you can open it. You have to relax as well as think." In this part of the head, science locates what is said to be the most evolved region of the brain—the prefrontal cortex, central to managing thought, emotion and behaviour. Its outermost part is what manages distractions. When this regulatory system functions well, the mind can resist reactivity.

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3 Ward, A. F., Duke, K., Gneezy, A., & Bos, M. W. (2017). Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2 (2), 140–154.

4 Cheever, N. A., Rosen, L. D., Carrier, L. M., & Chavez, A. (2014). Out of Sight is Not Out of Mind: The Impact of Restricting Wireless Mobile Device Use on Anxiety Levels Among Low, Moderate and High Users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 290–297.

5 For further reading, see: *Cakkhu Sutta* (Iti 61; the eye).

Deep within the brain sit the amygdala, twin almond-shaped structures that tag sensory objects with emotional value, creating the automatic pull towards what we crave and away from what we fear. When overstimulated and poorly regulated by the prefrontal cortex, reactive patterns dominate: fear when threatened, craving when enticed, aversion when confronted with the unpleasant. He saw in this a parallel to how the hindrances dominate an untrained mind.

But the brain can change. Meditation practices that cultivate the repeated return of attention to the present moment—mindfulness-based practice—have been shown to physically alter brain structure. Studies of eight-week mindfulness programs found that as stress diminished, grey matter density within the amygdala reduced while a key region of the frontal cortex involved in attention control increased.[6] In other words, the structure that drives emotional reactivity was physically changing while the capacity for sustained focus was growing. In those who had practised for years, the prefrontal region was measurably larger.[7]

He now reflects: "If the prefrontal cortex is developed in a balanced way, it has the ability where it develops a certain power. We have to develop that to a certain extent where we are not distracted. Focus is under our control. It is a repeated practice."

To guard that focus, he advises those on the spiritual path not to use devices like computers or phones for anything other than profession, studies or for spiritual activities. "Boredom," he says,

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6 The referenced frontal region is the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), detailed in Tang, Y. Y. et al. (2015), Frontiers in Psychology 6. Amygdala reduction—demonstrating brain change scientifically termed "neuroplasticity"—is detailed in Hölzel, B. K., Lazar, S. W. et al. (2010), Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience 5(1).

7 Lazar, S. W. et al. (2005), Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness (NeuroReport 16:17)

is a "fundamental requirement for one to settle down and start generating creative ideas." This facilitates the inclination of mind to reflect and seek out the truths of life. He reflects on what he sees: "From the time you wake up till the moment you close your eyes, till the time you drop dead, people are continuously being on the phone, reacting to every notification. This keeps you engaged with the *karmic* identity of 'you.' By not doing so, you're letting the hell you built around you to melt through mindfulness, contemplation and liberating wisdom."

Through this discipline, a different kind of happiness is found. Not the dulling kind that comes from intoxication, but one arising from virtue, generosity and meditation. "There is an ease that comes from the *nirāmisa*," he says—*nirāmisa sukha*, a happiness that does not depend on the senses. The Buddha spoke of such a happiness to the wanderer Māgandiya, who had accused him of being a "destroyer of growth" for teaching restraint of the senses. "There is, Māgandiya," he replied, "a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior, nor do I delight therein." The Buddha named it as the happiness of *jhāna*: the rapture and ease born of seclusion, of a mind gathered and withdrawn from the pull of the senses. "Always, the world is there to attract you," Ven. Ñāṇavimala would remind Shanaka.

To step away from that attraction is to enter the current the Buddha described: from rain falling on a mountaintop, the water fills the clefts and gullies, which fill the streams, which fill the rivers, until at last the great ocean is filled. Given the slope, the water simply flows. So it is that each state becomes the supporting condition for the next—from this happiness it flows into concentration, concentration into the seeing of things as they are, and this seeing

into disenchantment, disenchantment onward into dispassion and then liberation.[8]

Shanaka found this *nirāmisa sukha* with the support of nature. It was born from the intuition he had carried since those solitary walks by the Caledon River, when the resolve first arose: *I must stay in silent places like this.* These silent places were the types of environments his teacher had practised in, and many great masters before him.

The movement of branches, the calls of birds, the empty caves—these engage the senses without provoking reactivity. Ancient masters understood: this is why the *Suttas* describe them practicing beneath trees and in forest groves. In the modern world, it offers a space where that cognitive noise can quieten.

Now the science points the same way. Studies comparing walks in nature versus busy urban settings found that nature reduced amygdala activity,[9] lowered cognitive strain,[10] and decreased blood flow to regions involved in rumination[11]—those looping thoughts focused on the self. Busy urban settings kept these patterns hyperactive; nature calmed them.

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8 See *Upanisa Sutta* (SN12.23; proximate cause)

9 Sudimac, S., Sale, V., & Kühn, S. (2022). How nature nurtures: Amygdala activity decreases as the result of a one-hour walk in nature. Molecular Psychiatry, 27, 4446–4452.

10 Observed significant decrease in Frontal Midline Theta following nature walks, signifying a decrease in cognitive demand and attentional fatigue. See: McDonnell, A. S., & Strayer, D. L. (2024). The influence of a walk in nature on human resting brain activity: a randomized controlled trial. Scientific Reports, 14, 27253.

11 Reduced blood flow to subgenual prefrontal cortex (region involved in rumination) and reduced rumination scores as per participant's self reported measures after 90 min nature walks. See: Bratman, G. N., et al. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,* 112 (28), 8567–8572.

This rumination—the perpetual self-story, the endless loops of "me" that one wishes they'd stop thinking about, hinders present moment awareness and the clear seeing required for insight. Together with reduced reactivity, nature provides an environmental support for calming the hindrances, especially restlessness and worry.

Through first noticing how loud the cognitive noise has become, one can then allow discipline, quietude and seclusion to turn it down. He finds that only then do the *Suttas* begin to sound fresh.

Just like the waves crashing on the ocean's shore stir up the sand, so when those waves become still the sand settles. Then, through the clear undisturbed water, the sandy bottom is seen. So it is when the disturbances subside, what was always there can finally be seen. In that state, the mind could easily resonate with the ancient words, uncovering that intuitive spark.

Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṁ pajānāti—a bhikkhu who is concentrated sees things as they are.[12]

He would further reflect on the sacred support of places he practised in Sri Lanka, noting: "where enlightened beings practiced...we get that faith and the mind inclines towards that." Yet he came to see that within its nature lay only a training support, not the path itself. Ven. Ñāṇavimala had once cautioned him against romanticizing this. Observing Shanaka's idealization of the forest recluse, he remarked: "Even animals stay in the jungle." The true seclusion the Buddha taught was internal. It is a quieting of the mind and a guarding of the senses that could be accessed anywhere. Ven. Ñāṇavimala used to tell him that even while you are in a crowded place you should be practicing; that then helps you when you are in a silent place. Following on from his teacher's advice, he now

12 Refer to *Samādhi Sutta* (SN56.1; concentration) where the Buddha explains that a bhikkhu who is concentrated/composed understands the Four Noble Truths as they really are.

reflects: "It's not easy to be in solitude either. That is if you're not prepared before to some extent to handle solitude. Solitude also has an overwhelming effect on the mind. It can stir a lot of inner disturbances. But it can be a catalyst for spiritual wisdom if you have the proper foundation." That foundation was never a particular environment. It was the inner development, in spite of whatever the outer conditions may be. He would later experience this clarity amid a crowd of grieving family members after his cousin went missing. Even there, the stillness of a guarded mind allowed the Dhamma to be his refuge.

He further came to see how the untrained mind constructs its own reality. One forms an idea, and whatever evidence one finds has already been shaped by it. "You have an idea, and that creates the facts," he says. Truth, by contrast, is something that is revealed; it is not found by searching for evidence to confirm a view one already holds. Much of what passes for history and settled theory is formed in the opposite way—not by discovering the truth, but by beginning with an idea and then gathering supporting evidence around it. Once that idea takes hold, it quietly shapes what one notices, what one accepts, and even what one believes one sees. As he says, "*Micchā diṭṭhi* (wrong view) goes on," each wrong view reinforcing the next.

Modern civilisation is built on constructed ideas. The ancient cultures that turned toward the inner life grew rich in consciousness. The modern world turned outward and grew rich in material things, and called it progress. But he came to measure advancement differently. "We are not evolved, actually," he reflects. "Our evolution can be known by our ability to have more attention power. That leads to more *samādhi.* That leads to more intuition." By this measure, the one faculty that marks a civilisation's inner depth is the most threatened. "Inwardly we don't know an inch about our being, our existence. We are taking only the shell, we are not taking the life behind the shell." The law of impermanence shines a further light. "When you die, the things you take as gems, it's all a perception," he says.

This habit of borrowed ideas extends even into how the Dhamma is received. Ideas about Nibbāna are taken second-hand, from this teacher or that, held and repeated, while the meditative aspect—the direct seeing that alone gives them insight—remains absent. "When you have a lot of ideas, you never really go deep into the Dhamma. You're always on a superficial theoretical level," he says. People gather the words, holding them as views, rather than approaching the Dhamma as the Buddha instructed: *ehipassiko*—"come and see," to truly investigate and see.

This was the subtler root of the distance between the *Suttas* and the modern seeker. Beneath the noise lies a mind already crowded with borrowed ideas and inherited certainties, encountering spiritual ideas only to fit them into views it already holds. The attention needed to receive them has been worn thin. The *Suttas* ask to be met by another kind of seeing altogether.

That seeing does not manufacture a new idea. It investigates, it observes, and in that observing the truth discloses itself. He describes how it occurs: "washed completely from history, from the conditioning of the past, cognizing—like this you see the fresh truths."

It was with this openness that he approached the *Suttas*—the openness Ven. Ñāṇavimala had guided him toward. This is how attention turns, in receiving the *Suttas*, into *yoniso manasikāra*—wise attention—to see things as they are.

From his own experience, he came to understand that the wisdom eye is covered by layers of conditioning, even by tensions held in the body, particularly behind the forehead, where tension accumulates like deposits covering those nerves. Reading the *Suttas* gradually removes those coverings, awakening the wisdom eye like a path being cleared in a tangled forest, revealing truths of how the enlightened beings saw the world. This is the context behind his

words, "you have to relax as well as think"—simple words that hold more than they yet reveal.

Through his reading of the *Suttas*, he came to see the critical difference. While the words of modern commentators could be like a reflection of the moon, the *Suttas* were the moon itself. As he would later affirm, the *Suttas* "may look simple, but they point clearly to that insight."

That moment Ven. Ñāṇavimala said "your teacher and my teacher is the Dhamma—Vinaya," had not been just a passing remark. It was his way of pointing Shanaka away from himself and back toward the source. Don't cling to me, or to anyone. Go to the Dhamma. Trust the Buddha.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala had innovated a way to keep those words with him, his constant companion, even while walking thousands of miles on *cārikā*. The entire collection of the Buddha's discourses (Sutta Piṭaka) and the monastic code (Vinaya) he condensed into two small exercise books he could carry. Their pages were dense with German shorthand, compressed even further through his own system of abbreviations. This condensed what would normally require row upon row of heavy, hardbound volumes—an entire dedicated library shelf of scripture—into two portable booklets. He could locate any passage in moments.

A work of remarkable sophistication for a life kept radically simple.

What he'd also committed to memory was a feat in itself: the *Pātimokkha*[13]—all 227 monastic training rules—the entire

13 The Pātimokkha—the 227 core monastic training rules—forms part of the larger Vinaya, the complete monastic code that includes commentary, origin stories, and procedural guidelines. The Pātimokkha is memorizable; the full Vinaya comprises thousands of pages.

Dhammapada[14] with its 423 verses, as well as key *Suttas*. The rest lived in those two booklets, small enough to fit in his shoulder bag.

Toward the end of his life, this capacity for recall began to fade. The passages once instantly accessible and the verses held in memory for decades became harder to recall. Yet his awareness remained undimmed. His insight into the Dhamma and his presence had never depended on the ability to quote texts. What he had truly realized lived beyond memory.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala never claimed to have students. Yet many were drawn to him. They even came from schools of thought that did not always agree. Yet they all recognized what he had—a quality they lacked or a depth they aspired to.

Ven. Gnanaloka would time and time again notice two distinct types of devotees. The first were the dedicated practitioners of specific techniques, seeing in Ven. Ñāṇavimala an ascetic meditator who had reached the depths. Ven. Gnanaloka noticed in them a notable stillness and poise when in meditation, the kind of bodily calm that comes with regular practice. Yet, they expressed the same doubts: that they felt adrift, unsure of where they stood on the path or where to go next. They were, as Ven. Gnanaloka points out, like travelers hiking without a map. The second group were the intellectuals: those steeped in the scriptures, seeing in Ven. Ñāṇavimala someone who understood what the words truly meant. They possessed vast theoretical knowledge but lacked basic experience and were paralyzed by doubt in another way. They held a map with exquisite detail but had never stepped onto the trail.

Observing the two, Ven. Gnanaloka playfully suggests that if these two groups were to "marry," things would be "truly good."

14 Organized into 26 chapters, the Dhammapada offers practical guidance on virtue, truth, and the path to liberation from suffering, and is widely regarded as one of the most important and accessible Buddhist scriptures worldwide.

He was pointing to the essential union of *Suttas* and practice which Ven. Ñāṇavimala embodied.

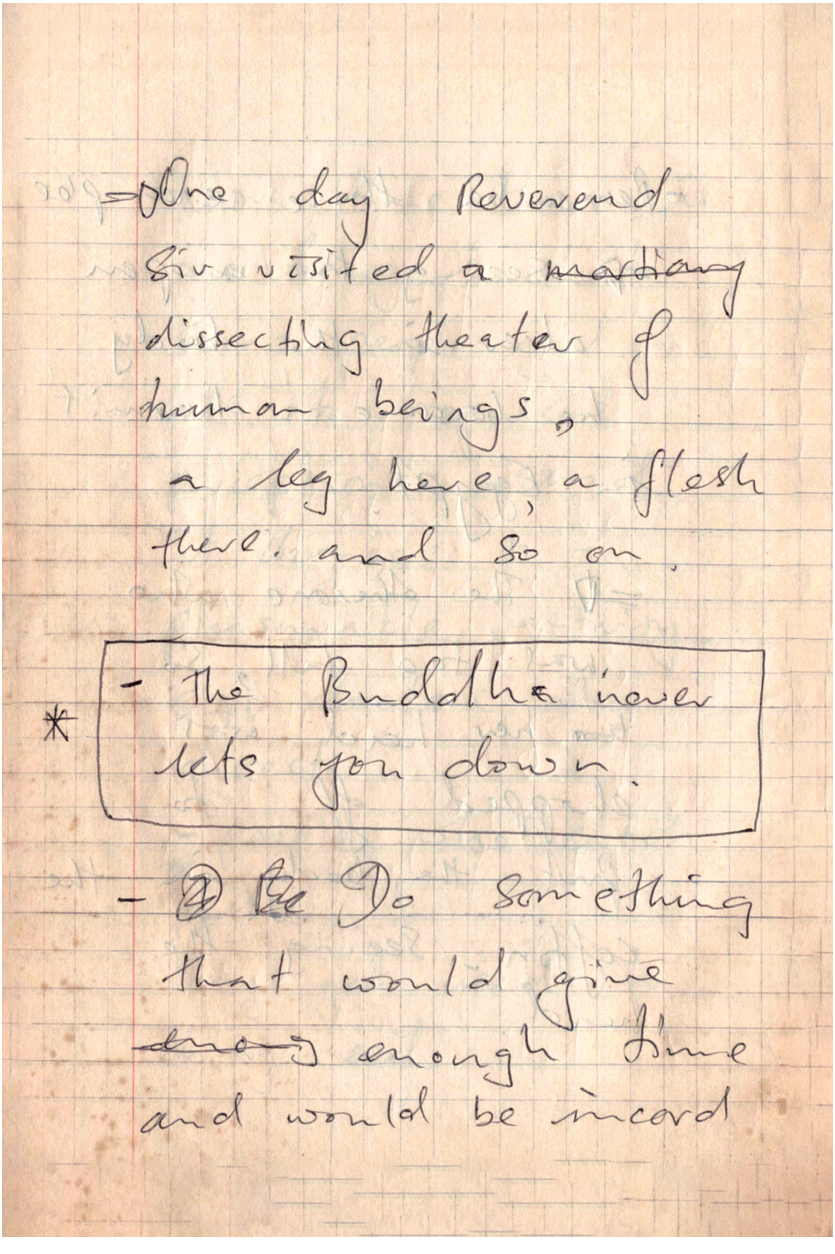
This unique capacity to bridge study and practice made him a source of inspiration for prominent lay teachers. During his time at Polgasduwa, Shanaka met individuals such as Godwin Samararatne, founder of the Nilambe Meditation Centre, and Brindley Ratwatte, the key figure in establishing Dhamma Kuta, the first Sri Lankan meditation centre in the Sayagyi U Ba Khin / Goenka tradition. Both had come seeking Ven. Ñāṇavimala for guidance. Years later, Brindley Ratwatte was ordained as Venerable Siddhartha. Ven. Ñāṇavimala asked Ven. Gnanaloka to support the newly ordained monk during his time at Polgasduwa.

Many monastics who met Ven. Ñāṇavimala as young monks would describe their encounters with a mix of admiration, but also intimidation. To some, he seemed fiercely unbending in his expectations, even narrow in his ways. However, there seemed to be a marked "softening in him" over the years as Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi would write. Ven. Gnanaloka acknowledges that he got to know him in that later period, which was characterised by more gentleness.

Whether they were monastics or laypeople, Ven. Ñāṇavimala never allowed himself to be elevated or revered as a "guru" or spiritual figurehead. Though his presence was undeniably compelling, he refused to let personal devotion obstruct the path. Again and again, he directed others not to himself, but to the Buddha.

"If anyone is sincere, they will guide you to the *Suttas*."

The lessons of the encounters were clear. Even the most gifted teachers may offer invaluable guidance and inspiration, but they can also falter, for charisma fades, institutions shift, and personalities fail. The only ultimate refuge, as Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself would say, is the timeless Dhamma, for "the Buddha never lets you down."



Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1994).

CHAPTER 02

The Buddha Never Lets You Down

(May 1994 – June 1994)

22 May 1994

- The phenomena that you encounter, look at them as things conditioned and subject to change.
- You may practice *mettā bhāvanā*.
- When you practice *Satipaṭṭhāna*, greed, hate and delusion slowly reduces.
- **Read the verses in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp; verses of the Dhamma), and memorise some.**
- Advice to Rāhula—*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā). Practice the three ways of conduct, so that there would be a sound basis, you may reflect on your actions every evening, to see if there was any transgression, and determine to avoid it in the future.
- *Girimānanda Sutta* (AN10.60; Girimānanda).
- *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).
- *Word of the Buddha* [by Venerable Nyanatiloka Mahāthera].
- Never let the mind be in a state of worry or fear. Always, it should be a pleasant abiding.
- When we are practicing, though we may be far away in body, we will be united in mind.

- Recommended Aranyas [forest monasteries]: Galduwa, Wathuruwila, Thapowanaya (Angoda) and Kalugala.[15]

- If you become a monk, you may not get the chance in the beginning; to practice the way you did when you were here (2.5 months). You might have to get involved in activities like learning Pāli and so forth. After five years you may spend more time on the practice.

- **May you be of service to your relatives and later to all beings.**

21 June 1994

- You mustn't plan anything, if you do you might face disappointment. But you must try to come close to Dhamma in that given environment.

- You must realise *saṁsāra dukkha* [the suffering inherent in the cycle of repeated existence].

- There is attachment and aversion due to ignorance.

- Everything in the world is covered by a thin surface. If it is penetrated there would not arise attachment.

- Sometimes there is a danger that some people get used to repulsive perceptions, and it changes to a pleasurable activity. e.g. Doctors who dissect, people who catch fish—they get used to doing evil.

15 Ven. Ñāṇavimala recommended several prominent Sri Lankan monasteries and their branches, including Galduwa Aranya Senasanaya, Ambalangoda; Wathuruwila Aranya Senasanaya in Galle; Gothama Thapowanaya in Angoda, Colombo; and Kalugala Aranya Senasanaya in Kalutara. Detailed information can be found in Buddhist Forest Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Sri Lanka: A Guide for Foreign Buddhist Monastics and Lay Practitioners by Bhikkhu Nyanatusita.

- Remember these examples: Seeing the open ulcer in the body, he became a hermit in Egypt.[16] The other one who was too tall, so then her head was chopped off to put the body in the coffin. Seeing the head.[17]

- One day reverend sir [Ven. Ñāṇavimala] visited a dissecting theatre of human beings, a leg here, some flesh there and so on.

- **The Buddha never lets you down.**

- Do something [an occupation] that would give enough time [to practice] and would be in accordance with Dhamma.

- Don't think of a particular teacher and so on.

- All the time there would be obstacles. You must work for it as a layman. Then things would change if you do things genuinely.

- There should be a good basis in meritorious actions, and the three ways of conduct are very important for a good foundation.

- When you make a determination, that is *kamma*; it will bear fruit in the future.

16 Ven. Gnanaloka suggested the likely source: This refers to the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, who told of a man who, upon seeing a naked woman, felt desire, but after noticing an open ulcer on her body, was so struck by the reality of decay that he abandoned worldly life to live as a hermit in Egypt.

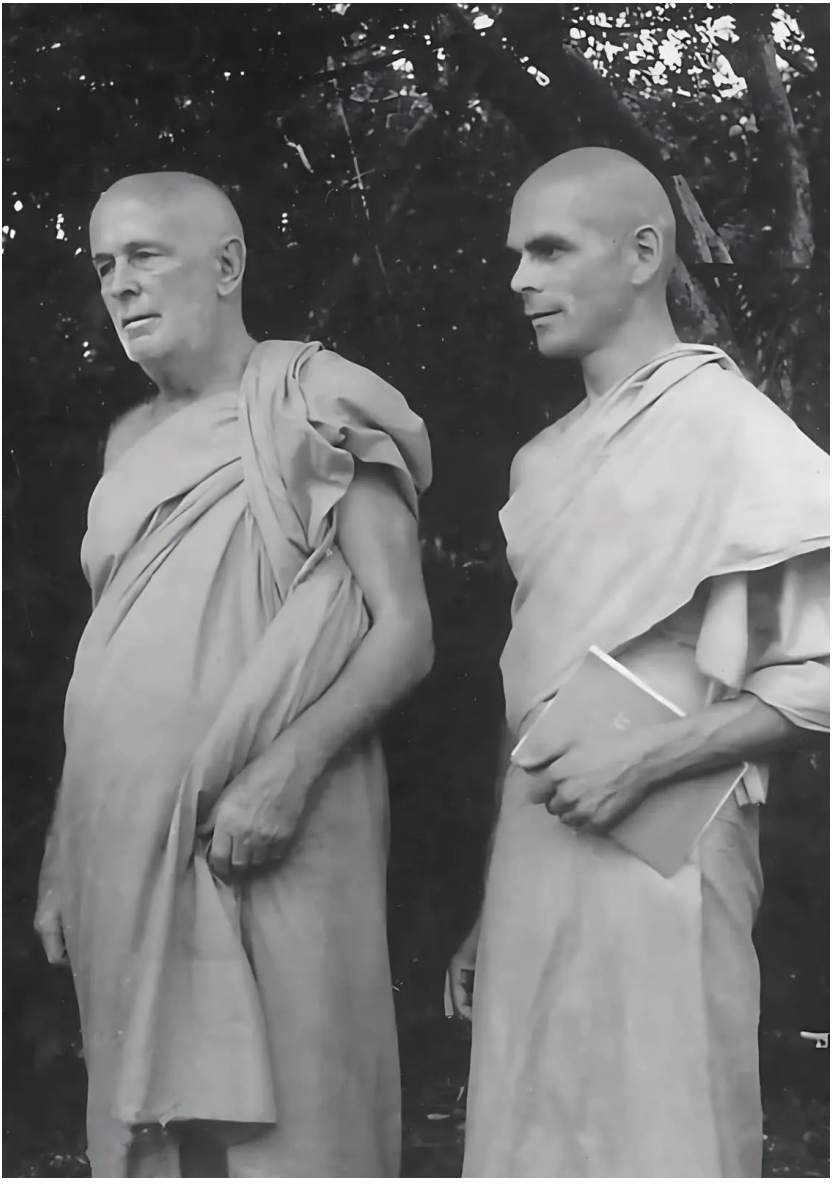
17 Ven. Gnanaloka was unsure of the source. The anecdote bears resemblance to two distinct historical accounts: that of Queen Anne Boleyn (executed 1536), whose head and body were reportedly placed in a makeshift chest; and that of Empress Isabella of Portugal (d. 1539), whose disfigured corpse is said to have prompted Duke Francis Borgia to renounce worldly life.

- You are facing this situation (studies) because you have given support previously, and now you are getting it. Something you liked and valued previously.[18]
- When your father supports you in this way, he will get similar support in the future. If he supports you spiritually, he will get the same in the future.
- Don't take any steps without your father's approval.
- All the people in Sri Lanka were in India before.[19]
- What is inside will manifest to outside.[20]

18 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies: he has liked studies in a previous life, and supported someone to study in that life, perhaps even forcing it onto somebody. This consequence of *kamma* is coming back to him in this life with his father pressuring him to focus on his studies. He also adds that if his father supports him in the spiritual way, he will get similar support in the future.

19 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that Ven. Ñāṇavimala speaks about the similarities of Sri Lankan and Indian people, as they share the same roots.

20 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that this has multiple layers of meaning—what you are experiencing is related to your internal world such as defilements and so on. A further meaning is that if you have a strong intention within you, it may create those conditions outside. A third meaning is that seeing the faults of others outside is a reflection of what is inside you.



Sāmaṇera Ñāṇavimala with Ven. Nyanatiloka, Island Hermitage, 1955



Ven. Ñāṇavīra, Ven. Ñāṇamoli, and
Ven. Ñāṇavimala at the Island Hermitage, Polgasduwa (1955).

REFLECTION 03

Seeing Through the Snare of Sensuality

The Buddha taught the spiritual seeker to look beyond appearances, to see the true nature of experience as it is. Beings, he said, are trapped in an illusion they don't recognize and don't know how to break free from. What the world takes as beautiful has an inherent foul nature; what it calls lasting is impermanent; what it delights in as pleasure is bound up with suffering—*dukkha*. As Ven. Ñāṇavimala would say: "Everything in the world is covered by a thin surface."

Those words were not just philosophy. The Buddha revealed that even a world of wealth and comfort was not a solid reality, but a fleeting collection of conditions. The words Möller read in the internment camp felt like a breath of fresh air, a light piercing the fog of illusion. They spoke to the hollow core of everything he had once held as certain. He began seeing the danger the Buddha warned of: mistaking the unstable for stable invites suffering again and again.

To be free of that danger requires dismantling the web of false conditioning woven by craving and ignorance. To penetrate this illusory appearance was to see through that thin surface he spoke of. As he went on to say: "If it is penetrated, there would not arise attachment." This was the path to the end of *dukkha*. He undertook this with endurance and clarity. An unrelenting commitment to simplicity, renunciation and truth. A striving that would come to define his life as a monk.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala wandered barefoot across Sri Lanka, carrying nothing but his bowl, robes, shoulder bag and other necessary

requisites.[1] He accepted only absolute necessities for survival—and even then, only the bare minimum. He once told Shanaka, "You rest only in hospitals," a reflection of his own uncompromising resolve. It wasn't an exaggeration.

Years later, when Ven. Gnanaloka himself began undertaking *cārikā*, he met doctors who had treated Ven. Ñāṇavimala during bouts of severe illness. They remembered him staying only until he could stand again; then, without announcement, he would vanish—on foot, alone, with no destination beyond the next forest or village. For him, rest was not a right but a concession to necessity, and even then, only briefly granted.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala would often say that "life, even the life of a bhikkhu is full of *dukkha*: sickness, old age, and the continuous effort just to find sustenance." The body, he reflected, is merely a fragile sack of thirty-two foul parts. "If one vomited what was consumed, one would recoil in disgust. Even before it enters the stomach, it is offensive. Let it sit a day or two, and it rots. Yet the world clings to this form—this perishable thing—mistaking it for pleasure."

The flower that delights the eye is already wilting; the skin that seems radiant today will soon wrinkle and fade. Even delight itself grows weary with time. What the world praises as beauty is only impermanence briefly disguised.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala understood sensuality not as something to chase, but as delusion wearing the mask of sweetness. Reflecting on the snare of romantic attachment, perhaps the most potent expression of sensual desire, he said:

"Whatever momentary happiness is there, it is a temporary intoxication. But far more suffering is connected with it."

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1 The eight requisites of a monk are the three robes, almsbowl, razor, needle/thread, belt & water strainer.

To grasp at this momentary sweetness is to accept its shadow: the change, the loss, the effort of holding to what slips away and the ceaseless longing.

Desire, aversion, and delusion—these are the fires that keep us bound to discontent, always seeking, never still. He came to see that freedom lay not in belief, but in understanding the chain of arising and ceasing—how every flame of clinging depends on its fuel, and when the fuel is gone, the fire ends.

This clarity had not come overnight. Long before he donned the robe, even as a young layman in Germany, he had glimpses of it.

Once, there was a beautiful young woman from his hometown who was devoted to him. One day, he saw her speaking warmly with another man and in that instant, jealousy struck him like a sword. The pain was sharp, but the insight that followed was sharper still. The trap was clear—how attachment binds the heart, how longing turns quickly to anguish.

He ended the relationship quietly, moved by a painful recognition that such attachment would only lead to suffering. It was a glimpse of the turning away that would one day deepen into renunciation.

For Shanaka, this inner steadiness didn't come easily. He would later describe his school years as a "terrible time", a period of raging hormones and intense temptation.

Growing up in Lesotho among expatriate families, he was surrounded by Western ideals. Some classmates were sexually unreserved, others experimented with drugs. While drugs held little interest for him, the allure of Friday night discos—the dancing, the laughter, the intoxicating company of girls—was a constant pull.

Though he longed to join them, he was too shy to ask his father for money. That hesitation, mingled with a sense of shame, kept him away from habits that might have veered him off course.

Even at that young age, traces of a deeper potential flickered beneath his outward rough character. At sixteen, he had a quiet intuition that life was about to change, that by eighteen, something decisive would turn. And it did. But the first signs came not in temples or scriptures, but in the ordinary tests of youth.

There was a British girl he had a crush on. The interest was mutual; she even sent a friend to pass a message of affection. Yet when his own friend urged him to respond, his reply was unusually philosophical for a teenager: "I don't want to play with the world until I know about it."

That restraint came from an unspoken sense that the world operated according to a certain order, and he didn't want to mess with it until he understood its rules. This moral instinct, a wish to act rightly without knowing why, was a kind of *sīla*, he believes, that earned him respect even from those girls.

That same instinct followed him into early adulthood.

Having just turned eighteen, before his first real spiritual experiences or any encounter with Ven. Ñāṇavimala, he found himself facing a test of another kind. While playing club cricket, he associated with older teammates who often went to the pub after matches for beers. One day, they started chanting:

"Shanaka is going to drink today!"… "Shanaka is going to drink!"

He had seen what alcohol did to his elders, how it made them unrecognisably obnoxious. He had no want for it. But the pressure was overwhelming. The disco was called 'Why Not'. Inside, at the bar, the drink was placed in front of him, and for a moment, his mind wavered. Perhaps just a sip, a thought whispered. It's only once… why not?

He was just about to reach for the glass.

And then, through the noise, came a clear voice. One of the players' wives turned toward him and said:

"Shanaka, stick to your principles."

Her words cut through the confusion. In that instant, his thoughts cleared, and conviction returned. His hand stilled beside the glass.

He said, "No." It was final. The act of refusing stayed with him. It showed him how easily one could slip, and how firmly one could stand.

Even then, Shanaka's sense of *sīla* was more a matter of conscience than insight—a kind of moral pride, a wish to show he had the willpower to resist what others yielded to, mixed with a sense of shyness.

However, something within him was preparing for change, though he could never have imagined it unfolding how it did.

What began shortly after, as a spontaneous spiritual insight, soon turned into a sincere discipline under the steady influence of Ven. Ñāṇavimala.

As the years passed, that guidance grew firmer. As Shanaka neared twenty-five, Ven. Ñāṇavimala perhaps sensed that he stood at a threshold—the age when the world begins to pull one outward, offering paths that promise comfort, but bind the heart more tightly. He would remind him to be firm in his direction, knowing that the world would soon expect other commitments.

Around this time, Shanaka took a job at an auditing firm, a decision that was met with his teacher's quiet disapproval. He remarked to Shanaka, almost in passing:

"I tell you to go this way," he gestured one direction, "but then you go that way," turning his hand the other way.

It was said in such passing, the words seeming to drift away as he quickly turned to another topic. Yet, for Shanaka, they did not drift at all. The words landed with an immense weight. For Shanaka this passing remark carried the force of a reprimand. At least, that's the way he perceived it. It was the only time Ven. Gnanaloka recalls his teacher expressing visible disapproval toward him.

During this time, some assumed Shanaka had let go of the idea of ordaining. They speculated that he would settle down and start a family. But Ven. Ñāṇavimala's influence lingered in him like a constant echo. His teacher had once advised that if he could practice to maintain the discipline even here—amidst the noise, the demands, and the sights of the office—only then would his consciousness truly be replaced.

Shanaka took this to heart, resolving to use the environment to his advantage. Following his teacher's guidance, he practiced sense restraint. He averted his gaze from the powerful allure of feminine beauty, not out of disrespect, but as an act of inner discipline, and kept his interactions with women brief and professional. It was an immense effort to steady a mind conditioned by countless lives of desire. So immersed was he in practice that he meditated during lunch breaks, even in the office restroom.

He could maintain outward composure, but it often concealed a fiercer reality inside. The fire of lust still raged. This became painfully clear at twenty-six, during a pilgrimage to the sacred Ruwanwelisaya *stūpa* in Sri Lanka. Midway through the journey, his mind was suddenly overwhelmed by a storm of lustful thoughts, as if a force from outside himself had descended upon him. The assault was so intense that he was forced to turn back. He never reached the holy site that day.

What he didn't yet know: the intensity itself was a sign. When breakthrough nears, the storm can often become fiercest.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's uncompromising counsel remained in him:

"You must see a tremendous need to turn away from the *kāma-loka*—the world of sensual pleasure."

Yet the mind does not submit to willpower alone. It must be met wisely, its habits seen for what they are, not fought against.

For this, Ven. Ñāṇavimala's advice was: "When unwholesome thoughts arise, counter them with *asubha saññā*":

This practice is about seeing the truth of the body beyond the superficial appearance that the world values so highly. It means investigating its inherent foul nature by seeing it as the Buddha taught—a fragile assembly of internal organs, tissues, and fluids, thinly veiled by a layer of skin;[2] an assembly subject to decay and unworthy of attachment. Does the sight or smell of any of these internal parts evoke attraction? Yet, we have built a conceit, calling this assembly 'mine.' This reflection reveals how the mind falsely takes the body as its own—an attachment born of deception, which perpetuates seeking delight in food and the human form. Seeing this, the grip of identification with the body weakens. When the body is no longer identified with, pleasure-seeking through its sense faculties loses its power. The fever of lust gradually cools. A wise, liberating dispassion arises, finding its worth in wisdom, not in fleeting appearances.

2 The 32 parts of the body: Head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestine, small intestine, contents of the stomach, feces, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, and urine.

Then Ven. Ñāṇavimala added:

"If that fails, read the Dhammapada.[3] Trace the root. See where the attachment lies. Know that it stems from ignorance—from clinging to what is not truly yours."

He urged the careful watching of the mind—to learn to recognize the root before it overpowers. Ven. Ñāṇavimala would say:

"Whenever you delight in pleasant feeling, know that delusion is close by."

He would tell Shanaka again and again, throughout the day, to bring one's mindfulness to reflect on one's conduct. He directed him to the *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)—the Buddha's counsel to his own son. This practice is to hold a mirror to body, speech, and mind—look before you act, watch while acting, and review afterward. If unwholesome actions have occurred, honestly recognize them and resolve to let them go.

Ven. Gnanaloka knew of a rishi in India who carried the essence of this principle: each day, he would write down every unwholesome thought that had arisen in him on the wall of his cave. Over time, the writings grew fewer. Then eventually, they became zero.

The mind's activities, when recognised honestly without judgement, begin purifying themselves.

"Purified mind brings purified action," Ven. Ñāṇavimala used to say.

He spoke of three protective factors against sensual lust. The first was physical exertion.

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3 The Dhammapada is a revered collection of the Buddha's verses on ethical and mental cultivation, drawn from the Pāli Canon.

Staying in comfort without exertion, he said, allows urges to increase more easily. Where possible, he would encourage practice with some physical endurance—walking such as for alms, physical movement that leads to sweating. This physical exertion was never for fitness or the vain idea of sculpting a body, but a deliberate support to quell restless energy. "Not everyone can sit in one place all day and meditate," he would say. "That is not for all."

He would point out that the practice Shanaka did at Parappaduwa was the right way—the morning rowing across the lagoon, the long, taxing miles walked for alms.

The other two protective factors were reading the *Suttas* and solitude.

For his first solitary retreat, Shanaka chose the secluded Kalugala Forest Monastery, a sanctuary nestled in the hills of Sri Lanka's Kalutara District near the dense Sinharāja rainforest. It was the ideal setting to put his teacher's guidance into practice. Before departing, Ven. Ñāṇavimala gave him one essential instruction for his protection:

"Be well-grounded in the Four Protective Meditations before heading to the jungle."

They were:

- *Buddhānussati* [Recollection of the Buddha's qualities]—to uplift and steady the mind,
- *Mettā* [Loving-kindness]—to guard against ill will,
- *Asubhasaññā* [Perception of foulness]—to weaken sensual craving,
- *Maraṇānussati* [Recollection of death]—to cultivate urgency and clarity.

These were not rituals to be recited. They were armor. A toolkit for the mind in solitude. And he was right. Immediately upon entering the forest, lustful thoughts arose.

Shanaka came to see sense restraint not as submission, but as a freedom—a peace of mind untouched by the pull of the senses.

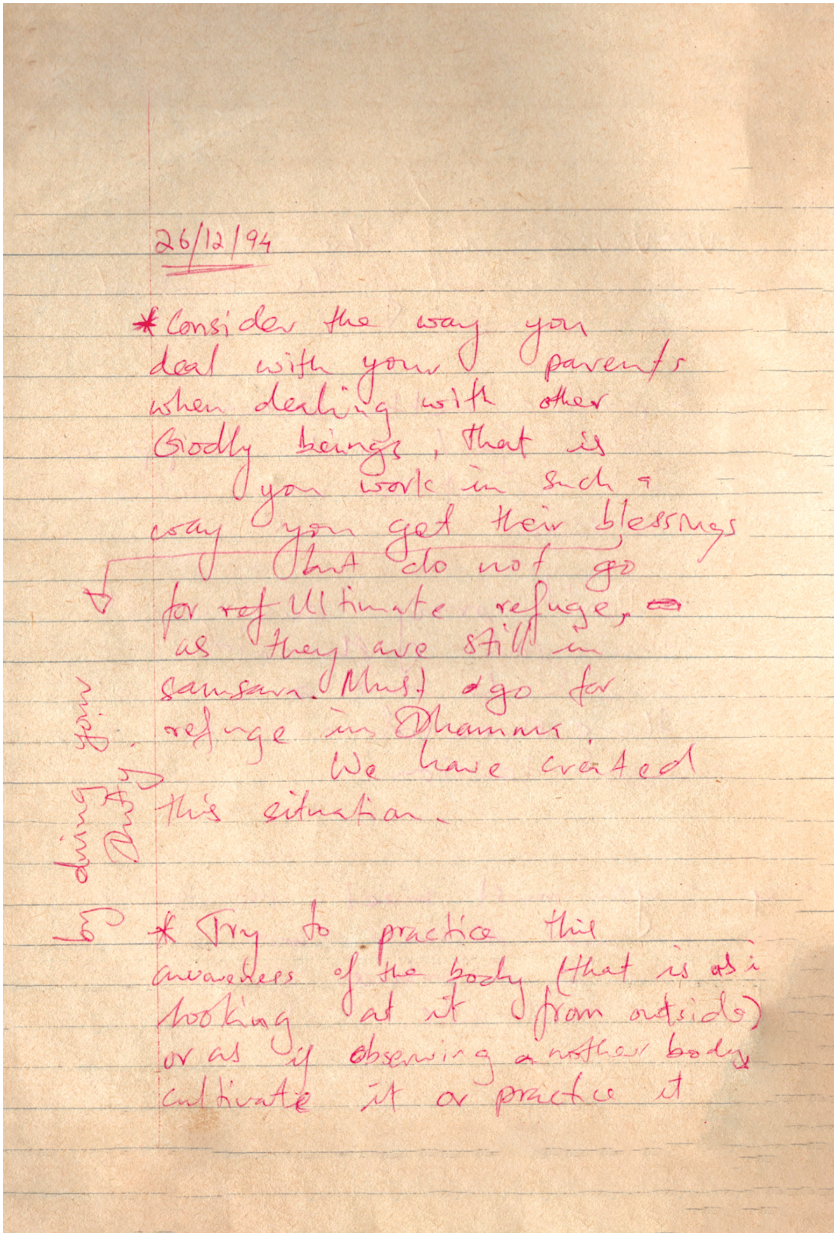
Yet even as this understanding deepened, Shanaka found himself torn between lay life and the monastic path. He looked to his teacher for an answer. Once, his teacher shared a simile that encapsulated the training as a gradual approach:

"Like a sailor when crossing a river—slowly, not losing the other shore—direct the boat slowly, gradually cutting the stream. Similarly, you should direct your life."

With practice and his teacher's guidance, Shanaka gained confidence in navigating that boat, adjusting according to the conditions and choosing the right tools at the right moment. Sometimes appearing to drift with the current, but never losing sight of the far shore, always skilfully angling back.

"Obstacles come when gems are close," he later reflects, looking back on the unsuccessful attempt at going to Ruwanwelisaya. A couple of years after that incident took place, practice did indeed bring a clarity that cemented his conviction. The grip of the grosser defilements began to loosen. The confidence especially deepened when he donned the robes in 1999. The monastic discipline provided foundational support for what had been developing within.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala would remind him: "One must not worry about what changes from the outside... but be happy that one is constantly following the way that learns to delight in the Dhamma, which is ultimately developed beyond feelings." He taught this art not just with words, but with his life. In that silent, steadfast example, the answer shone brighter than any spoken word. And in that light, his student found the courage to follow.

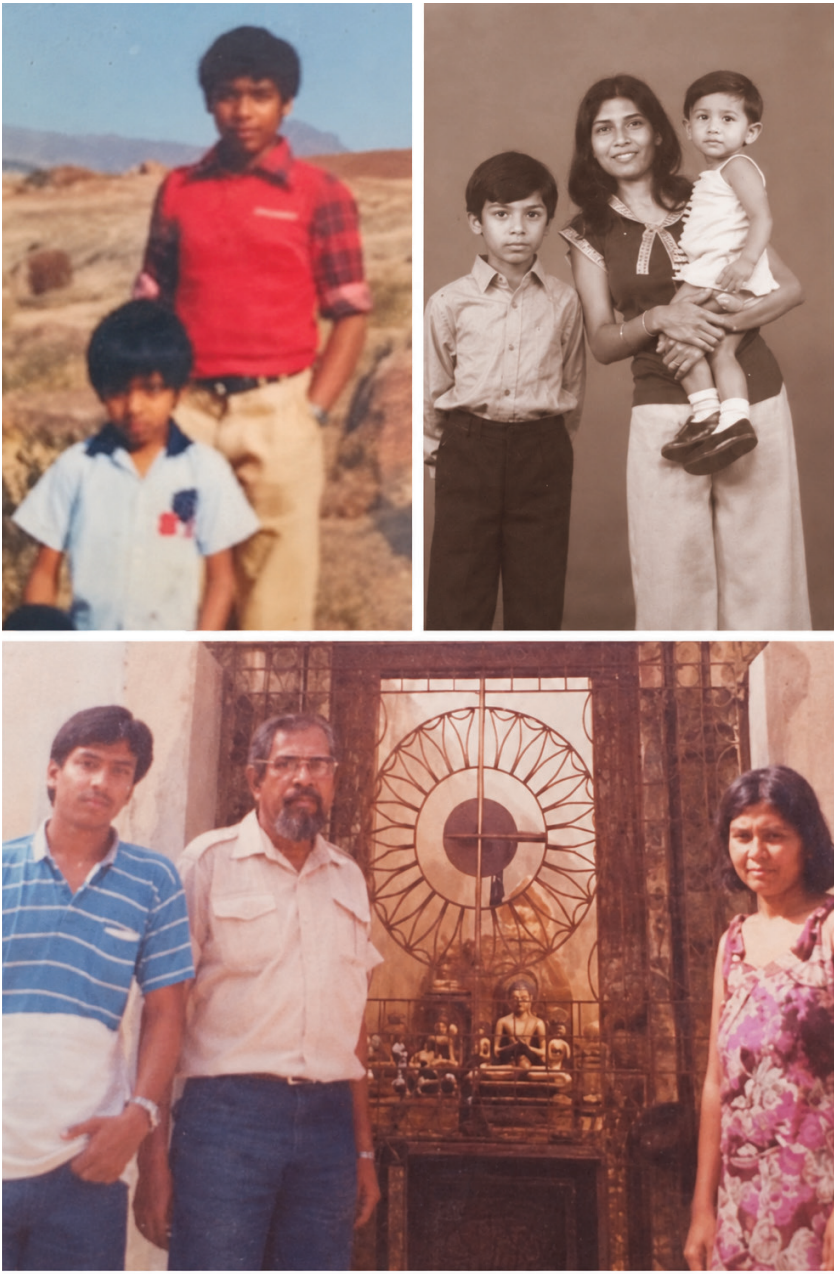

26/12/94

* Consider the way you deal with your parents when dealing with other Godly beings, that is you work in such a way you get their blessings that do not go for of Ultimate refuge, as they are still in samsara. Must go for refuge in Dhamma. We have created this situation.

during your Puja

* Try to practice this awareness of the body (that is as if looking at it from outside) or as if observing another body cultivate it or practice it

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1994).



Top left: Shanaka Dharmakeerthi with his younger brother during childhood.
Top right: Shanaka Dharmakeerthi with his mother, who is holding his younger brother.
Bottom: Shanaka Dharmakeerthi with his father and mother.

CHAPTER 03

The Way You Deal With Your Parents

(Oct 1994 – Dec 1994)

26 October 1994

- It is good to start the practice early in life (earlier the better).
- You must see in your own self [the body] the impurities and how it is rushing towards old age.
- When one sees this with full concentration, there is no craving (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). You must also see the other bodies with the same destiny and impure nature.
- When you are old, it is difficult.
- Watch over the three ways of conduct[4] and practice *mettā bhāvanā*, and wait.
- If you have to do a job [get one] that will give you enough time and is in accordance with Dhamma.[5]

4 Refers to the practice highlighted in the *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).

5 Ven. Ñāṇavimala advised Shanaka to seek employment in fields like the Red Cross, civil service, or as a carer/attendant. The emphasis was on choosing a livelihood (*ājīva*) that aligned with the Dhamma (Right Livelihood) and left ample time for practice, rather than just pursuing large monetary gain. Such work generates wholesome *kamma*.

28 October 1994

- *Suttas* to Mahānāma. Though they were laymen they attained the path. Practice the way it is taught there. *Buddhānussati, Dhammānussati* and *Saṅghānussati* then *mettā, anicca saññā.*[6]

- As a layman or a bhikkhu, in any case, *Majjhima* 61—*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).

- *Majjhima* 107, 125 gradually to *jhāna* and the *anicca* of that—*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna), *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed).

- *Majjhima* 64—*Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (MN64; the greater discourse to Mālunkyāputta).

- Word of the Buddha [by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera] (not what is mentioned in the commentaries). But follow advice strictly from the early Buddhist texts.[7]

- *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta* (there is a lot of valuable advice in it)—*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days)

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6 Mahānāma was a prominent Sakyan layman and a relative of the Buddha, known for asking practical questions about how a layperson can cultivate faith and virtue. The practices often discussed in these discourses include the recollections (*anussati*) of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*), the Dhamma (*Dhammānussati*), and the Saṅgha (*Saṅghānussati*), as well as the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and the perception of impermanence (*anicca saññā*). These teachings can be found in several discourses addressed to him: AN6.10; AN8.25; AN11.11; AN11.12; SN55.21; SN55.22; SN55.37.

7 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies: The book *'The Word of the Buddha'* presents the essence of the Dhamma primarily through direct excerpts from the early Buddhist texts. However, Ven. Nyanatiloka also included brief explanatory passages and summaries drawn from the Abhidhamma and the commentarial understanding. Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged Shanaka to focus just on the presentations of the early texts themselves.

- Word of the Buddha [by Venerable Nyanatiloka Mahāthera] has a very good right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi)* in essence. You can practice *ānāpānasati* but with Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi)*.

- Soon as you enter the Saṅgha, there is certain training one has to do (new bhikkhus). Venerable Mettavihārī knows the *Suttas* and their grouping very well.

- **Now you are 24, you may have to start an apprenticeship which your father would also like. Then before you take up another job or anything, take a one year holiday. Then you may visit certain aranyas and stay for a couple of months and see the practice.**

- I recommend [several] aranyas: Galduwa, Wathuruwila, and also Kanduboda. They [all] have branch [monasteries]. They have branches.

- But you must make sure you are given all opportunities to devote fully to the practice; otherwise, impossible to attain to the path.

- If you decide to be a monk after that one year, make sure it is under those conditions. Otherwise, it is better to be a layman.

- The Saṅgha may disappear any moment.

- **If you are a laymen try to join an organization like Red Cross or civil service where you can perform action doing merit at the same time supporting the body.**

- If you take up a job in the management field you may earn a lot of money and now you are 24 but 25, 26, 27, these ages you will be approached by parents and relatives to have a partner. Here you have to make a decision. [*Personal Note:*] I must be frank about this [subject of marriage].

- Jotipāla and Ghaṭīkāra—*Ghaṭīkāra Sutta* (MN81; Ghaṭīkāra the potter). Ghaṭīkāra was a layman—an anāgāmī, who reached the Suddhāvāsa [Brahma world]. Jotipāla joined the Saṅgha, attained nothing at that birth and became an arahant as Sammāsambuddha [Gotama] before Ghaṭīkāra.

- [Quote from *Ven. Ñāṇavimala*] So I don't know, these are only suggestions. You might know a better way.[8]

- At this stage, it is most important to do your studies properly.

- I really don't know your exact intentions, all this Dhamma knowledge etc. (The Reverend Sir seems to ask "for what").[9]

- **All my blessings to your endeavors.**

29 October 1994

- How much work you have in the layman's life, still you should allocate certain time for the practice and in any case during *poya* [holiday] you should take *sīla.* If possible before and after *poya* you may retire [for] 2 or 3 days at a stretch.

- You need merit, don't fear merit.

- The Buddha was once asked why he was so powerful? etc. He replied how he did *mettā bhāvanā* and how he rose in the Brahma world and how he became the *Cakkavatti king* many times as a result of his *puñña kamma*.

- **Learn to experience everything from a distance, as everything is *anicca, dukkha* and *anatta*.**

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8 This is Ven. Ñāṇavimala's remark regarding the previous entry notes about marriage & work, saying that those were only suggestions, but giving Shanaka the freedom to choose what he thinks he should do.

9 Shanaka was gathering a lot of information at that time about *Suttas* and different ways of understanding—so his questioning was about why he was gathering all this Dhamma knowledge.

30 November 1994

- Were you free from disturbance from inside and outside. From inside it is not possible to be free from stray thoughts. Unless you attain *jhāna* (meditative absorption) where you have one thought.

- To attain *jhāna*, you should be highly *sīlavanta* (virtuous). The *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā); in this *Sutta* not only verbal and physical, but mental. So, you must purify the mind. It is based on the state of mind that one's physical and verbal actions follow.

- **Therefore, the mind should be watched as in *Sutta* No. 19 in *Majjhima Nikāya—Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN19; two kinds of thought), and controlled as mentioned in *Sutta* 20—*Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta* (MN20; the removal of distracting thoughts).**

- You may read *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases). And note down striking passages in Pāli. Repeat it and go through them slowly.[10]

- When you are a layman, you must make sure to follow what was advised to Mahānāma.[11]

- *Samādhi* (Stillness): *mettā bhāvanā* (cultivation of loving-kindness), *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness), *Cāga*

10 Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged monks who aimed for the ultimate goal of *magga-phala* (the paths and fruits of liberation) to read the *Khandhasaṁyutta (*SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and the *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).

11 These teachings are found in several discourses given to Mahānāma, the Sakyan prince and cousin of the Buddha, including: AN6.10; AN8.25; AN11.11; AN11.12; SN55.21; SN55.22; SN55.37.

(generosity and letting go): giving up (even the hindrances), *Bahussuta* (knowledgeable/learned): reading the *Suttas* daily, a bit.

- *Mettā bhāvanā* should be practiced as advised by Ñāṇamoli Thera [The Practice of Loving-Kindness].[12]
- You must get *saṁvega* (spiritual urgency) by reading what is mentioned in the *Maharagama Pirith Book* [*The Mirror of the Dhamma* compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa].
- *Caturarakkha bhāvanā* [Four Protective Meditations].
- If you want to be a bhikkhu, you must really look into your heart.

25 December 1994

- Explanation of walking [meditation] of Rev. Ñāṇavimala, from the kuṭi to *dāna sālā* (*sati sampajañña),*[13] it is looking at the body from outside as if looking at another person, especially the movement of the legs and seeing the impermanence in the movement of the legs constituted by flesh, bones, and in this way establishing dispassion and at other times sitting down to meditate and attain *jhāna*.[14]

12 This refers to the booklet 'The Practice of Loving-Kindness (*Mettā*)', compiled and translated by Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera, a British Theravāda monk and Pāli translator who was also Ven. Ñāṇavimala's Pāli teacher. Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that Ñāṇamoli Thera describes in the book "where you change *mettā* to *Khandha* contemplation," which was how Ven. Ñāṇavimala practiced.

13 *Sati-sampajañña* refers to mindfulness and clear comprehension—the continuous awareness *(sati)* of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, together with the discernment/clear knowing *(sampajañña)—Sati Sutta* (SN47.35; mindful).

14 On numerous occasions, Shanaka accompanied his teacher from his hut to the monastery dining hall, where Ven. Ñāṇavimala would verbalize his *caṅkama* (walking meditation) contemplations. These exact phrases, memorized by Shanaka, are presented in the appendix.

- Working is a good idea, because of your concentration you may achieve good results in meditation [and at work]; and there may arise temptation when higher things are offered [at work] and at that time you must be careful.

- Do not stick to one meditation object, but to eradicate different kinds of defilement you should choose [different meditation objects] and practice.

- Verses in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp; verses of the Dhamma) and *Word of the Buddha* by Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera are good.

- Practice *mettā bhāvanā*, don't just wish happiness, but do it in the way taught by Ven. Ñāṇamoli [The Practice of Loving-Kindness].

- Don't pray or wish that you should come to this or that, there should not be any tension.

- You must meet the teacher and discuss when there is a disturbance of thought or such like.

26 December 1994

- **Consider the way you deal with your parents when dealing with other Godly beings. You must work and do your duty in such a way to get their blessing. But do not go [to them] for ultimate refuge, as they are still in saṁsāra (the cycle of suffering and rebirth). [You] must go for refuge in Dhamma.**

- We have created this situation.

- **Try to practice this awareness of the body (that is, as if looking at it from outside) or as if observing another body, cultivate it or practice it as much as possible because at that time you are living in the present.**

- **Read, grasp and practice a couple of *Suttas*. Concentrate on them.**

- Don't try to memorise a lot of *Suttas*, like in the case of a scholar. Practice is important.

- **It is very important, this practice (to reflect on all activities during the day and to think over these activities one by one before your sleep, then to make [a] determination [*adhiṭṭhāna*] to avoid any activities you did the previous day that are regrettable).**

  It is good to end the day with *mettā bhāvanā*, after doing *Buddhānussati* [recollecting the Buddha's virtues] and when doing *mettā bhāvanā* in the end reflect on the impermanence of that also.

- **[Your] Father too will definitely come to understand. He will definitely give his deep blessings.**

- **When certain impressions come, when reading or reciting the *gāthās* [verses] or *Suttas*, don't sort of feel, I should immediately go, get there and things like that.[15] No frustration, wishes and so on. You must remember that situations change.** So, you should work for it in the desired direction continuously and constantly. Like when you desire to reach a certain place (e.g., Kandy city), simply by wishing you would not get there. But if you start moving in the right direction and working towards it, stage by stage, you would finally come there. It is the same way.

15 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that when a meditator gains a moment of clarity while reading or reciting the teachings, they should not get lost in wishing for it again. Instead, they should focus on diligently practicing the very things that led to that insight.

27 December 1994

- There should be a good foundation of *sīla* (virtue) and then *jhāna* (meditative absorption) and *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness).

- First 10 *Suttas* in *Majjhima Nikāya* leading to final liberation.[16]

- Purified mind is followed by purified action. It is important to first concentrate on the state of mind then after that other actions will be all wholesome (first *Dhammapada* verses).[17]

- Read a couple of *Dhammapada* verses daily.

- While attending [to] normal activities, it is not possible to attain the *jhānas* (meditative absorption). But when you practice *sati* or awareness, then when the time for sitting meditation, it is more supportive to attain the *jhānas*.

- When you practice this awareness of the body (that is looking at it as if another body) and the things that constitute the impurities, then there is a turning away of the mind from the body (dispassion). Then due to this a certain feeling of peace may arise. Now one must understand the impermanence of feeling and should not accommodate any craving for it. When one does that, [then] clinging (*upādāna*), existence (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), old age, sickness—all this is not there (*paṭicca samuppāda*).

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16 While all of the *Suttas* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN) are valuable, the first ten (from *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN1; the root of all things) to *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness)) are especially recommended for meditators as they lay a foundational understanding of the core principles of the Dhamma that lead directly to the path of liberation.

17 *"Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-made. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox."* (Dhp1)

- But to do all this, one must build a sound foundation of *sīla* (virtue).
- Don't think about what to do in the future or how to act because all situations change. When the time comes, consider and decide.

28 December 1994

- Must make sure there is a good basis for *sīla* (virtue), for the Dhamma building to be constructed.
- One cannot always be in meditation or *jhāna* (meditative absorption). But when one is attending to other work like moving about, one should establish oneself in mindfulness as much as possible and it becomes the most wholesome condition to attain the *jhānas* when one sits down to it.
- One should establish three ways of conduct and should reflect every evening before sleeping [in regards to] any activity that is regrettable—that which should be avoided the next day and so on. It should continue day after day. This practice should be put into effect without delay.
- Then one practices *Satipaṭṭhāna* to overcome the hindrances, and then attains the *jhānas*. Afterwards one turns away from that as well, that is when one enters the path.
- Know you have a theoretical grasp, but experience is important. You must experience it.
- Whenever there is a decision to be made and you do not know what to do, then you should practice *mettā bhāvanā* before you sleep and then think about the ultimate goal you want to achieve, and the decision you have to make, and then you can fall asleep. In the morning you would get the answer.

- Normally, reasoning out is not correct. This way it is more reliable.

- **In a nice appealing fashion, someone may appear (maybe the wife in past lives), you must know that this is Māra.**[18]

- But when you practice *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness) it is quite safe. Don't worry about anything. Every moment should be [a] pleasant abiding.

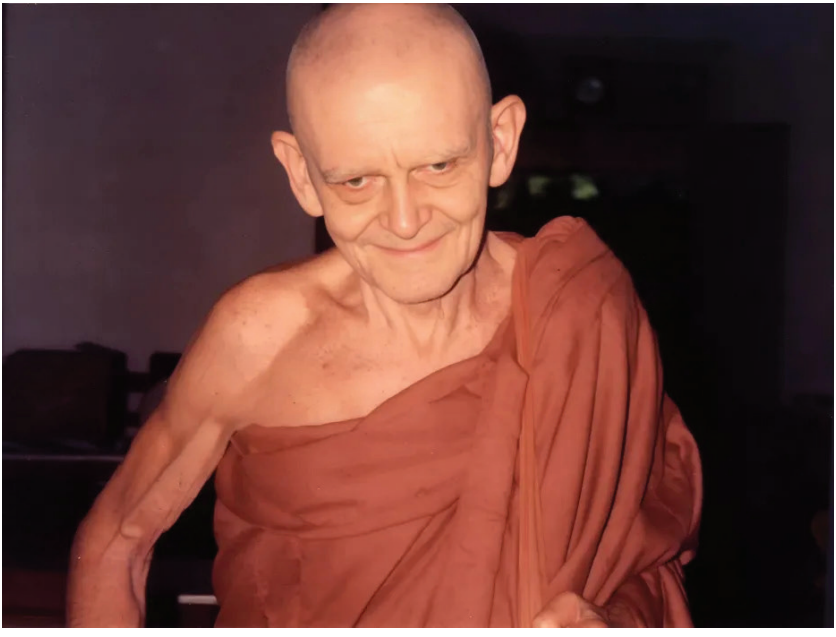
- You must be one with the Mahāsaṅgha, not considering an individual, then though we are separate in body, we will be one in mind.

At a Previous Discussion

- **You must go and stay in a jungle, if you are forced from inside, not otherwise. You must see a tremendous need to turn away from the *kāma-loka* [world of sensual pleasure].**

- **A lot of arahants were near the Himalayan region. This area is extremely difficult. This was the reason that many became yogis, to escape from the *kāma-loka*, because there is nothing pleasant in this outside world of five senses. So, they turn away inwardly.**

18 Māra is also known as the "Great Deceiver" or the "Evil One," that embodies temptation and illusion, seeking to distract the spiritual practitioner from the path to liberation.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala, Vajirarama, 1990s



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera offering a Dhamma discourse to lay devotees at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, among them the mother of Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera.

REFLECTION 04

The Protection of Mettā

For Ven. Ñāṇavimala, compassion was not a simple sentiment, but wisdom itself. It was a seeing that cut through illusion and a courage that met death with a pure heart. A quality forged, it seemed, across many lifetimes. As a young man in Germany, working on the farm, he battled with an internal struggle—that by ploughing the land he was killing tiny creatures and he would need to hurt the farm animals as part of his duty. Later on he would understand this sensitivity, one rooted in a deep *karmic* learning.

He sometimes spoke of past-life recollections that began to occur after his practice of mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*) deepened. These were not meditative experiences in the usual sense, but spontaneous memories appearing like dreams, though he remained conscious of them.[1]

One such recollection concerned a past life as a soldier. In the heat of battle, he found he could not bring himself to kill. In that moment of hesitation, an enemy horseman's lance killed him. He remembered the harrowing scene with startling clarity.

He later got to know in this life that a monument commemorating that war event stood in that very place in Germany. From his recollection he came to understand that it was because of his family at the time that he was put into that situation, and the event was a source of his deep rejection of harming in his most recent life.

This *karmic* sensitivity led him to embrace strict vegetarianism as part of his spiritual practice. Möller had been shaped by his

1 Refer to the Notes, Chapter 1, 18 April 1994, for more description regarding his past life recollections.

understandings of Hinduism and yoga, and by Gandhi's example of *ahimsa*—non-harming as a way of being. It was a conviction he took on absolutely.

At Dehra Dun internment camp, this commitment nearly killed him. The rations were basic, and in wartime India, where famine gripped many regions, dietary accommodations were not made. According to accounts, the diet consisted almost solely of meat, and when vegetables were included, they were typically cooked together with the meat in dishes like goulash. Unable to eat most of what was provided, week by week, his weight dropped. His Buddhist friends finally encouraged him: as long as there was no intention for the killing to be made, the animals were already dead; eating to survive was not the same as causing their death.[2] Near death, he accepted the food.

He recovered, and from that experience came to appreciate the wisdom of the Buddha's Middle Path.

As a monk, his perspective deepened further. "Everything that takes place in this world entails killing," he would say. He taught that all existence in *saṁsāra*, even the act of survival, inadvertently involves harm—the growing of rice kills insects, and everyday acts such as walking kill unseen beings. Each plate of food, regardless of its contents, depends on the suffering of beings. The highest compassion, he explained, was not about perfecting one's diet, but about ending rebirth itself—extinguishing the very 'self' that keeps arising and thus a body that must be sustained at the expense of other life.

What mattered was intention. Indulging in tastes was a greater harm than the act of eating meat itself. If one had an attachment to the taste of meat, he would advise, one should acknowledge that and

2 For the scriptural basis of this advice, see the *Jīvaka Sutta* (MN55; to Jīvaka).

make a purposeful effort to give it up for that reason.[3]

This same care for intention shaped his alms round each morning, mindful not of what was offered, but placing the needs of the giver foremost. When a wealthy lay devotee once wanted to continue offering specially prepared delicacies after the initial offering, he responded, "Please give an opportunity for poor people also to offer alms." He was especially attentive that the poor had the chance to give, seeing it through a lens of *kamma.* That their present hardship was but the unfolding of past causes, and that through the merit of generosity now, they could help shape brighter conditions to come.

His compassion remained consistent, even when health concerns tested it.

Later on, whilst at Polgasduwa Hermitage, Shanaka and other devotees, concerned for his ill health, once made a special arrangement for particular nutritious food packets to be offered to him. He refused, saying, "This is not ascetic," and insisted on taking what was normally being given to everyone.

This deep, inner goodwill wasn't merely philosophy; it became a tangible force. It manifested as a protective energy, a fearless heart-felt wish for the well-being of others, that could be felt by all beings, human and animal alike. This was the quality that Ven. Gnanaloka would later come to rely on in the remote jungles, where he experienced its power.

In 2007, Ven. Gnanaloka spent six months in complete silence at Bambaragasthalawa—a remote cave within Kumana National Park (Yala East). What struck him most about the place was not just its seclusion but its absolute stillness. Even the animals seemed to respect the silence. The ancient cave, once used by meditating

3 The Buddha instructs that a monk should reflect on food "not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support spiritual practice."

monks during the height of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, had likely not been inhabited by humans for centuries. Now, it belonged to the bears and leopards who ruled the jungle.

The nearest village was 15 to 20 kilometres away. A few concerned devotees had arranged for a *kapakaru* (lay attendant) to offer the daily meal. But Ven. Gnanaloka made it a point never to see or speak with him. If there was an urgent message, it would be left in writing near the alms bowl. Otherwise, noble silence prevailed.

One night, while lying on his side in the cave, he heard a low, rhythmic sound. At first, it felt like a dream. Then it grew clearer—deep, heavy breathing. Without rising, he reached toward the lamp and adjusted the wick. As the light spread across the cave, a wild bear came into view, just a few feet in front of him.

Instinctively, he began chanting:

"Virūpakkhehi me mettaṁ, mettaṁ Erāpathehi me..."

(from the *Khandha Paritta—Ahirāja Sutta* (AN4.67; snakes))[4]

The bear turned and fled, disappearing into the forest like a dissolving shadow.

Years earlier, Ven. Ñāṇavimala had shared similar encounters. While meditating in a cave at Kudumbigala, a bear once entered and stood on its hind legs, claws raised. Ven. Ñāṇavimala recited the *Khandha Paritta*. As he continued, the bear lowered its paws and walked away. On another occasion, while walking through a national park, he came face to face with a bear. He lowered his gaze, radiated *mettā*, and when he looked up again, the bear was gone. When someone asked, "Bhante, what if the bear had attacked you?" he replied:

4 The *Khandha Paritta* is a protective chant taught by the Buddha to safeguard practitioners from dangerous creatures, such as snakes, by radiating thoughts of universal loving-kindness (*mettā*).

"Well, then I would have died with a pure heart."

As a young man, Shanaka was advised by Ven. Ñāṇavimala:

"Recite the *Khandha Paritta* daily and act with *mettā* to all beings."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's instructions may have saved his life more than once.

Years later, at Bambaragasthalawa, in a monastery, Ven. Gnanaloka would have another close encounter. Deep in meditation, lying down in corpse posture, he felt something heavy on his chest. He ignored it. Only later did he discover a snake coiled on his chest, perhaps seeking warmth. As he moved, the snake raised its head and met his gaze. Ven. Ñāṇavimala's instruction had settled into instinct: "Don't get frightened or excited when faced with animals because they perceive the state of mind." Fear was replaced by a quiet recognition, almost like meeting an old friend. The snake turned, looked back a few times, and slid silently back into the forest. It was a tangible testament to the protective power of the *mettā*-training Ven. Ñāṇavimala had so consistently emphasized.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala related an instance when, in deep meditation, he realised a snake had been coiled on his lap. As he noticed it, he had gently lowered it to the ground. The snake moved on without harming him. He also spoke of how a snake would slither around him during meditation. When he chanted the *Itipiso Gāthā* (chant on the recollections of the Buddha's virtues) the snake calmly waited without moving. When he stopped, it continued slithering. He started chanting again, and it stopped once more. As Ven. Ñāṇavimala related this story, he commented, "He [the snake] also needs some entertainment."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala used to say:

"Develop this heart of *mettā* in the highest way to all beings. This

will be the greatest service to all beings from you."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged Shanaka to read Ven. Ñāṇamoli's book *The Practice of Loving-Kindness (Mettā)*. Though Ven. Ñāṇavimala didn't himself instruct how to do the *mettā* practice, glimpses of his practice came through when he gave blessings for people. He would radiate a wish for the well-being of beings, ultimately directing them to spread the wish for all to be free from greed, hate, and delusion. He would say "your wishing for greed, hatred and delusion to go away." This in essence was a wish for their ultimate release from suffering—Nibbāna.

He often spoke of *mettā-ceto-vimutti*—reaching a state of pervasive, limitless goodwill that becomes liberated from the hindrances. It is the liberation of the heart through loving-kindness—not as a technique, but as a way of being, a state of mind free from greed and hate.

This is a state of *samādhi*—deep stillness of mind—that can reach *jhāna*.[5] Ven. Ñāṇavimala taught that from out of this *jhāna*, one can direct contemplation toward investigation, as described in the *Suttas*, allowing insight to arise and lead to liberation.[6]

What stood out to Shanaka was how *mettā* could become a path to liberation through insight itself, not merely tranquility, as described in Ven. Ñāṇamoli's book.

To speak of compassion is one thing. To embody it when death stands close is another. But this was the way Ven. Ñāṇavimala walked, not once, but again and again, with unwavering courage, turning principle into lived truth and encouraging others to do the same.

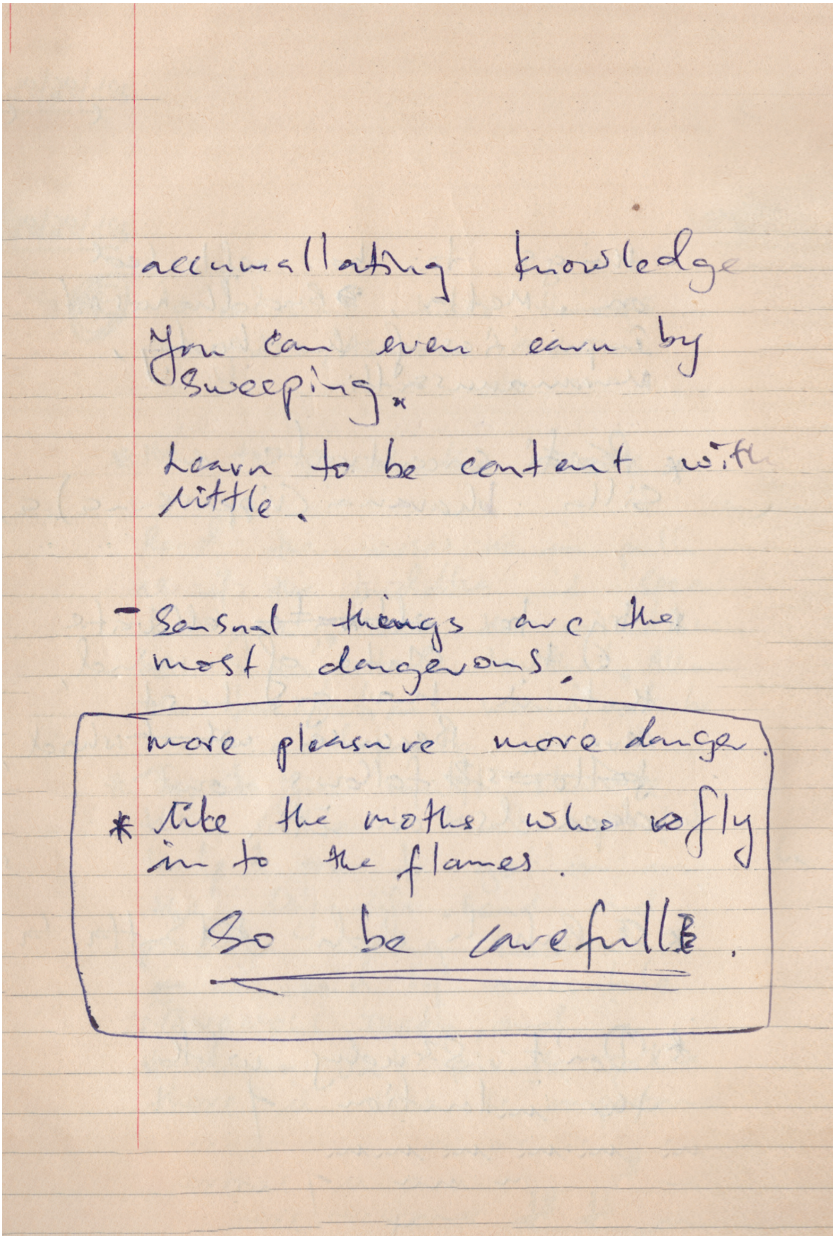
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5 *Jhāna*: absorbed states of deep concentration where the hindrances are temporarily suspended and the mind becomes unified.

6 Ven. Gnanaloka mentions *Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (MN64; the greater discourse to Mālunkyāputta).



Ven. Ñāṇavimala at Parappaduwa, 1990s



Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1995).

CHAPTER 04

More Pleasure More Danger

(Jan 1995 – Mar 1995)

28 January 1995

- **To overcome these [sensual] thoughts, *asubha saññā* [perception of foulness]**

How to spend the week:

- Read the verses in Pāli as if the Buddha is speaking to you, then the mind will be directed to that. Always the translations would not be adequate.[7]

- You must choose the *Suttas* that would help you to get on in the lay life. Read and practice loving kindness as [outlined] by Ñāṇamoli Thera [*The Practice of Loving-Kindness*], and in *Vandana Vathpirith Potha* [*The Mirror of the Dhamma* compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa] there are 4 important things to be reflect on: *mettā* (loving-kindness), *buddhānussati* (recollection of the Buddha), *asubha* (foul nature of body), *maraṇānussati* (mindfulness of death).

- **Concentrate on *sīla* and *bhāvanā* (*vipassanā*).**

- **Try to elevate the state of mind—that is the greatest service. Because what follows depends on it.**

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7 To Ven. Ñāṇavimala there was no second best to knowing Pāli; that was the best way to understand the Buddha. Regardless of how good they are, translators' views invariably get projected into their translations, distorting meaning to some degree. He encouraged Shanaka to learn Pāli. However, he directed Shanaka to the *Suttas* through English translations and Shanaka/Ven. Gnanaloka would rely on them as his primary source of meaning.

- ***Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).**
- **Don't study with the intention of accumulating knowledge.**[8]
- You can earn a living even by sweeping.
- Learn to be content with little.
- Sensual things are the most dangerous.
- **More Pleasure More Danger.**
- **Like moths who fly into the flames. So be careful.**
- Know that the Saṅgha is in decline.
- Because when living near towns, going to *pirivenas* [monastic colleges that educate monks], there are more sense impressions arising that arouse inner worldly inclinations, so they disrobe.
- So, one should retire to the forest, follow the instructions of the teacher.
- *Satipaṭṭhāna* should be practiced with Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi)*.
- *Jhāna* (meditative absorption) and then *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness).
- For *jhāna* to arise, there needs to be a foundation of *sīla* (virtue).

8 Refers to acquiring knowledge of spiritual literature just for knowledge's sake.

Regarding sensual desire:

- **When elephants are in rut, or other animals, or lovers—they are fully absorbed and intoxicated by that; no sense is seen.**
- **People work just to earn money, to support their body. All the activities are centered on that. No time for the practice.**
- **When on retreat food and sleep or negligence are the hindrances one must watch, not too much effort either, but one should balance.**
- **First you should raise the mind or consciousness to higher deva worlds. Then after that you direct the mind to the Dhamma.**[9]
- ***Saṅkhāra* (Volitional Formations) brings about birth.**

31 January 1995

- *Yoniso-manasikāra* (wise attention)—is these three ways of conduct.
- *Satipaṭṭhāna* should be practiced with the right understanding.
- The five faculties (*indriya*), *saddhā, viriya*, *sati*, *samādhi (*four *jhānas)* and *paññā.*[10]
- No hate, no greed should arise.

9 Ven. Gnanaloka elaborates: With *sīla* and *saddhā* (faith) and *cāga* (generosity), you stay with good activities—you're elevated to a deva state of existence. Then in such a state of mind you practise the Dhamma.

10 The five spiritual faculties (*pañcindriyāni*) are inner strengths that sustain progress on the path: *saddhā* (faith or confidence), *viriya* (energy or effort), *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration, including the four *jhānas*), and *paññā* (wisdom or insight into the true nature of phenomena)—*Paṭhamavibhaṅga Sutta* (SN48.9; analysis, first).

- If hate arises, you should control it with *mettā* (loving-kindness).
- When greed arises, practice *asubha* (contemplation of the foul nature of the human body), when delusion arises, read the *Suttas*.
- Refer to the *Suttas Majjhima* 117, 25, 50—*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Nivāpa Sutta* (MN25; the bait); *Māratajjanīya Sutta* (MN50; the rebuke to Māra).
- It is good to be with the teacher in the jungle.
- It is very difficult to practice otherwise with unnecessary impressions.
- Also read *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).
- **This life is full of suffering: old age, sickness, and the trouble of always searching for food. Even bhikkhus are not free from that; all others are working day and night only for this. [Also], the weakness of the body due to sickness. The food you put in is only for the purpose of supporting the body, [which is] constituted of the 32 parts of impurity. If you vomit it back, it is so repulsive. When it goes [past] the throat it is all foul, especially if you keep it for some days. When you reduce the craving or attraction to these things—though there [was] initial pleasure, [but] more suffering [is] connected to it. [By] cultivat[ing] the happiness in the absence of deluded pleasure, you turn away from the cause of this suffering *(paṭicca-samuppāda)*. No illusion, no craving, no clinging, [no] birth, old age, [or] death. The causes are *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate), and *moha* (delusion).**

- When you are doing *caṅkamana* (walking meditation) first you must arouse a sense of urgency.
- Thinking of this endless round of rebirth. Each step towards death. Then you should exclude all other thoughts and must stick to the present.
- With thoughts of *mettā*, supporting each other, harmony in mind to achieve this one goal, deliverance from all suffering, Nibbāna.
- When practicing *mettā-bhāvanā*, (loving kindness meditation), not just wishing long life and happiness, but wishing the highest happiness to end this suffering [for all beings].
- You must stay with the teacher in the jungle for the practice to establish firmly, so that you can face any situation in time to come.
- When you give into food and other things, craving increases and clinging, birth, old age and death.
- *Mettā-bhāvanā* and the impermanence of feelings, perceptions and consciousness.
- *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates).
- Read the *Dhammapada* verses, recite them, and learn by heart in Pāli certain verses that strike you.
- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)
- Mustn't have inner conflict. Your father would like you to have a sound education. You can support each other.
- You must stick to a few *Suttas* and put them into practice.

3 February 1995

Morning

- *Majjhima Sutta* 125—*Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed), *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates).
- You must purify yourself. In other words, you become selfish—[that is,] retire to solitude to purify oneself in order to overcome the 'I' conceit and thereafter serve in a selfless way.
- A teacher generally has an idea of all the *Suttas*. So, he prescribes to the pupil, according to where the pupil is and where he has to get [to] and it is a step-by-step process.
- If the pupil is a layman and wants to meditate then he should start with *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā), the three ways of conduct.
- If he is just a layman, *Sigālaka Sutta* (DN31; to Sigālaka), etc.
- You must always start with the three protections[11] and with arousing of spiritual urgency, when beginning on *caṅkamana* (walking meditation) or any kind of *bhāvanā (meditation)* or spiritual endeavor.
- You must always try to curb and annihilate *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate) *and moha* (delusion) by a suitable *kammaṭṭhāna* (object of meditation).
- One cannot rely on anything that is from outside that is happiness—only the inner peace.

11 The Three Protections refer to the recollection of refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha.

- *Caṅkamana* (walking meditation) is sticking to the present without giving into thoughts from outside, this should be done with understanding and reflection of the situation of the body, how all activity is centered around supporting the impure body that is connected with all kinds of suffering—old age, sickness, and all kinds of illusive happiness.
- **Certain things are practiced for the benefit of future generations e.g. certain Vinaya rules, Venerable Mahākassapa was staying in solitude.**
- The three ways of conduct [*tīṇi sucaritāni*] done unremittingly and immaculately.
- **May you get all the protection in *saṁsāra*.**

Afternoon

- *Majjhima Sutta 53—Sekha Sutta* (MN53; the disciple in higher training).
- It is for the monks, when you become a monk, it is useful, especially regarding the [spiritual] faculties [*Indriyas*].
- *Satipaṭṭhāna* leads to *jhānas.*
- Do this *caṅkamana* practice when you feel sleepy and control this hindrance.
- **All my blessings are there for your practice.**
- Always look at *Khandhasaṁyutta* and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta*. Look at it as it is.
- **Always stick to the present, don't expect anything from the future nor regret or go back to the past. What you do in the present makes the future.**

- When you go on *cańkamana* (walking meditation), think of this body: made up of defiled actions in the past, so impure and repulsive.[12]

- Read the *Dhammapada* verses. Memorise some.

4 February 1995

- When you are in retreat solitude try to control the 5 *indriyas* [five spiritual faculties] and practice *cańkamana* (*sati-sampajañña*).

- ***Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates).**

- ***Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases)**

- **You may speak about the Dhamma when asked.**

- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā). In the evening *mettā bhāvanā* and *anicca.*[13] When *cańkamana, "sabbe sańkhārā aniccā"* [all conditioned things are impermanent], verses in *Dhammapada* (Dhp277—279).

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12 Ven. Gnanaloka explains that the body's impure nature arises from past defiled thoughts—due to greed, hate and delusion. It is a result of *kamma*, that this body has taken the form it has. "Why is it repulsive?" he asks. "Because it's created by repulsive thoughts. He (Ven. Ñāṇavimala) means that you have to picture the reality of how gross it is." The reflection is meant for clear seeing: one cannot observe what one is attached to. By reflecting upon the body's gross nature, a necessary distance for insight is created—"because you cannot observe something that you are attached to." When thoughts are more refined, the resulting *kamma* is also more refined, giving rise to subtler bodies of existence. Yet, all remain bound by the same law of arising and passing away.

13 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies: the teachings in the *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (about bodily, verbal and mental actions)—this should be done during the whole day. In the evening do loving kindness meditation. Reflect upon impermanence as understood through the *Suttas*—applying it to the five aggregates of clinging. Reflect on impermanence when doing walking meditation as well.

- *Sacittapariyodapanaṁ, etaṁ buddhāna sāsanaṁ* [To purify one's own mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas] (Dhp183).
- You may give support to each other, the family, not only this material support, but also this spiritual support.
- See everything as impermanent, and suffering; and not yours.
- *Atta Vagga* (last verse) in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 166) and Bubble & Mirage (Dhp 170).

16 February 1995

- *Bahussuta* [knowledgeable/learned] is important.[14]
- After practicing *bhāvanā* like in Rishikesh [India]. More ability to concentrate. Therefore, successful in worldly activity. But what you build up in the sensual world also comes down very fast.[15] *"sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā"* [all conditioned things are impermanent].
- As a layman you observe verbal and physical actions. As a monk higher *sīla* is first restrained by the *Pātimokkha* [monastic discipline] and *indriya saṁvara sīla* [sense restraint] and then thoughts, *ariya sīla* (noble virtue).

14 *Bahussuta* (Pāli) literally means "much-heard"—i.e., well-read or extensively acquainted with the *Suttas*. When Ven. Ñāṇavimala says "*Bahussuta* is important," he is emphasizing that close and repeated reading of the Buddha's discourses strengthens right view, supplies the practitioner with suitable objects for reflection, and supports practice.

15 Ven. Gnanaloka clarified that this was a reference to a trend, known at the time, of business leaders using yogic meditative concentration, developed in places like Rishikesh, for the purpose of worldly manifestation. Ven. Ñāṇavimala, who had direct experience with this concentration power from his time as a corporate director in his lay life, was adding the crucial teaching that all such achievements are ultimately impermanent and can "come down very fast."

- You should always reflect on the impurities of the body, and the impermanence of food. Especially [reflect] if you vomit [it] out, or [if you have] some food still in your stomach undigested, and so on. And also, when you are taking food, [reflect on] the trouble involved in meeting lay people and just to support this body, with people working day and night for a body which is rushing to old age, sickness and death. But when you know that, one is able to remove the cause of suffering or the arising of this body—which is craving, by clear seeing or understanding, so that ultimately the craving will diminish and extinguish. The arising of new suffering will extinguish.

- One should retire with the teacher into the forest for *jhāna* to take place. Such an environment with less sense impressions to work with is necessary.

- During the day you should work in a *sīlavanta* [virtuous] way because this affects the sleep and meditation at the end of the day.

- Writing letters and so on by monks—it is not that you should forget your relatives.[16]

- Even the Brahmā world is suffering. One may re-arise even in the hell realms.

- *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty).

- Sleep—you should try to sleep generally 5 to 6 hours. It is good to reduce it. You should allocate a specific time of the day for this. And at other times you must not allow sleepiness.

16 Ven. Gnanaloka recalls an occasion when a visitor from Ven. Ñāṇavimala's own hometown in Germany arrived at Polgasduwa. Although they were strangers, they shared the same roots—yet his teacher showed no special emotion or reaction. Ven. Gnanaloka notes this unwavering restraint as an example of relinquished bonds—reducing ties with all people and places, even those of profound personal significance.

- You must share the Dhamma with your relatives, not by going behind them and talking, but by your own actions.
- This solid knowledge should arise. That is insight into Dhamma.
- Today more money is needed and people's needs are more.
- When you are in retreat, you should have Dhamma thoughts.
- You mustn't eat very little food or sleep too little; you may fall sick. But you should try to do it with little effort. You have to maintain this body and keep it in good shape.
- *Jhāna*; then *vipassanā*.[17]
- When you have wishes, and when they are fulfilled, the craving increases more, wish after wish will follow.
- Do not wait with certain ideas for a long time, even arahants discuss from time to time.[18]

17 Ven. Gnanaloka recalls this was the summary in essence of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's talk at the time: *Jhāna* helps *Vipassanā*. Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that it doesn't mean that it is necessary to get *jhāna* and then insight. There are *Suttas* where they get insight without mention of *jhāna.* He continues to explain, in those cases, even if *jhāna* wasn't mentioned, the mind was still in a "*jhāna*-like" state—meaning the five hindrances were absent—otherwise the truth could not penetrate. An example is the *Susimaparibbājaka Sutta* (SN12.70; Susīma), which describes attainment of liberation through wisdom (*paññā-vimutta*) without possessing formless meditative attainments. The Buddha's explanation to Susīma confirms that *Dhamma-ṭṭhiti-ñāṇa* (knowledge of the stability of the Dhamma) is the definitive requirement for Nibbāna. Generally, however, it is good to have sitting meditation and then reading.

18 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies, by giving the example that someone may even think they have become enlightened—don't assume because it may also be wrong. He recommended that it is better to have discussions, which may give different perspectives on what you are experiencing.

2 March 1995

- **Supply the causes for the things that you wish to arise.**
- **Make sure the foundation is firmly established.**
- **Read *Majjhima* 125, 117, 107, 118—*Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed), *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty), *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna), *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN118; mindfulness of breathing).**
- ***Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases), *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates), *Bojjhaṅgasaṁyutta* (SN46; connected discourses on the factors of enlightenment)[19] all in *Saṁyutta Nikāya*.**
- **Read *Word of the Buddha* [by Venerable Nyanatiloka Mahāthera] for *sammā diṭṭhi*.**
- **When you are here now, just don't think to abide [in] *jhāna*, but try to overcome the five hindrances, then the mind will settle easily.**
- **[Then] you should concentrate to attain *jhāna*.**
- **You must do things slowly and thoroughly.**
- **In time to come when practicing *mettā bhāvanā*, pleasant feelings may arise. Look at it with equanimity, they are just feelings. All feelings are impermanent, suffering, not mine, and conditionally arisen.**

19 *Bojjhaṅgasaṁyutta* (SN46; connected discourses on the factors of enlightenment): A section of the Connected Discourses where the Buddha teaches the Seven Factors of Awakening—mindfulness, investigation (clear seeing), energy, joy, calm, concentration, and equanimity.

- **Equanimity is most important—not emotional feeling.**[20]
- **Don't worry, it will come.**
- **Regarding *bojjhaṅga* [factors of enlightenment]—this is towards true enlightenment. Not the way of the [ātman-believing] yogi, [which is] *micchā diṭṭhi* [wrong view] way.**[21]
- ***Bojjhaṅga* takes place when you are doing *bhāvanā*.**
- **Don't try to have theoretical explanations, but instead experience.**
- **Don't stick to an attainment, go on.**
- **You must change the *kammaṭṭhāna* (object of meditation) in order to tackle each defilement.**
- **When going on *caṅkamana*, control the thoughts, so that it sticks to one place. At that time *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate) and *moha* (delusion) are reduced [the] sense of 'I' is going away, [leading] towards Nibbāna.**
- **Sometimes one is enthusiastic, sometimes one's strength is going down. This will be the situation throughout life. So don't worry—as long as the conditions are good, you may work as hard as possible, but not overdoing. Always the middle way.**

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20 Ven. Gnanaloka explains how Ven. Ñāṇavimala taught that equanimity is the highest conscious experience. He would say based on that you have the formless states.

21 Here, "the way of the yogi" refers broadly to any contemplative practice—whether inside or outside historical Buddhist circles—that utilizes exalted states of consciousness or absorptions to unite with, or abide in a permanent 'self' or soul. While these practices can lead to profoundly peaceful, exalted states of consciousness, they are considered *micchā diṭṭhi* (wrong view) from the standpoint of ultimate awakening because they fail to see that all phenomena are *anatta* (void of a permanent identity). The *bojjhaṅgas* (factors of enlightenment) are unique because they do not build up a meditator's identity; instead, they dismantle the subtle tendency to cling to any state as "myself."

6 March 1995

- Don't rely on anybody or any person or anything that is external. They can separate [from you] at any moment and are all unreliable. But depend on your own mind that is developed and the All Enlightened One as your guide.
- Observing the physical and verbal actions you do as a layman is known as *sīla;* [as] a monk, you go further to observe thoughts, and to bring them into control (mental actions), that is Ariya *sīla*.
- The physical and verbal actions also derive from the mental state (first verse in *Dhammapada*—Dhp 1).
- First look after your own welfare; it is not selfish. Bringing yourself to selflessness, then you can serve others in the highest way without selfish motives.
- First Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi)* [theoretical foundation],[22] then the five hindrances[23] should be checked and overcome; then *Satipaṭṭhāna*.
- *Suttas* 117, 125, 106 [of *Majjhima Nikāya*]—*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed); *Āneñjasappāya Sutta* (MN106; the way to the imperturbable).
- Reading all the *Suttas*, memorising them, there is no point. Practice and experience. This is important.

22 The original writes '(theoretical grasping),' however, the meaning is to get a theoretical foundation.

23 The five hindrances are mental obstacles that cloud understanding and obstruct concentration: *kāmacchanda* (sensual desire), *vyāpāda* (ill will), *thīna–middha* (sloth and torpor), *uddhacca–kukkucca* (restlessness and worry), and *vicikicchā* (doubt).

- When we see the 32 parts of the body, and [by] not letting any worldly thought arise, one will know that one is directing towards overcoming suffering or Nibbāna.

8 March 1995

- All my blessings are there for all your endeavors.
- Never let the mind be disturbed by a certain situation or circumstance.

9 March 1995

- You must be firmly established in the Dhamma as a bhikkhu when you go out, where you will face all sorts of situations. Must think of the *Sutta* [relating to] the Simile of the Saw—*Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN21; the simile of the saw) and reflect that our *kamma* is behind us.
- First *sīla* (virtue) and then *jhāna* (meditative absorption) and then entering the path—*sotāpanna* (Stream-Enterer), *sakadāgāmī* (Once-Returner), *anāgāmī* (Non-Returner), arahant (Fully Enlightened One).
- Until arahantship (full enlightenment) there is this "I" conceit in a very subtle way.
- All lay people are like children, they need a father figure. But when the children grow up, they do not need one anymore. So don't think of a particular person outside. Rely always on the All Enlightened One and the Dhamma that you have already mastered as your guide. Whenever effort is made and certain bliss is connected to that, take that as a strength to go on and develop.
- Do not teach the Dhamma for any worldly gain and so on.
- **Go on with compassion for beings with less understanding.**

- First give support to people who are close to you. But don't try to convert or go behind [them], but [do so] with your own example—and if they are interested, you may help them accordingly. You may send to your friend in Cyprus the *Kesamutti Sutta* (AN3.65; Kesaputtiya). If [they] are more interested, a list of BPS [Buddhist Publication Society] books may be provided, and maybe point to particular books. Not [to] suggest this is Buddhism.

- Don't have any ties. Try to reduce ties as much as possible.

- You must understand this situation. We have not always acted in a *kusala* (wholesome) way in the past. Never [be] displeased.[24]

- When unwholesome thoughts arise, don't react with aversion or hate or fear, if reacting that way, it means one is directing the mind in that direction, therefore it increases.

- Don't stick to an attainment or turn back from [putting] effort.

- *Suttas* to *Anamataggasaṁyutta* (SN15; connected discourses on without discoverable beginning). *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta* (MN20; the removal of distracting thoughts) [to] deal with thoughts.

- Doctors are very busy, [with] more diseases, so more activity to cope up with, and they are generally highly considered by the society, for everybody is keen about good health.

24 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies, the idea is not to dwell or brood over troublesome life situations; know that they are the consequences of past *kamma* and those consequences will also pass. Rather one should take care not to create new unwholesome *kamma*.

But in the Dhamma it is all mentioned: the root cause for sickness—that is immorality.[25]

- It is difficult to maintain *jhāna*, so you should do the second best by reading the *Suttas* etc.
- Live in the present, every pleasant present moment will bring happiness in the future, so never let the mind be displeased.
- Look at everything as a *bubble and mirage* (Dhp 170). There is no meaning in all this phenomenon.
- There is no 'I', there is no 'me'.
- Daily, make sure all activities are done in such a way [that] there hasn't been any harm done to anybody. Go to bed early. Before sleeping practice *mettā bhāvanā*. Do the activity with full concentration, slowly. And on *poya* days, you may retire in a suitable place and wait. All depends on your practice.
- All external support may come to an end finally. It is our *kamma* behind us, we have not always acted in a wholesome way.
- All [your] relatives and family have a lot of *saddhā* due to past lives.
- **You may give support to your family, relatives, and all others, not by trying to convert them, but by your example. It is the best way.**

25 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies: as people's virtue (*sīla*) declines, sickness increases in the world. This relates to the principle that immoral conduct (*akusala kamma*) serves as a root cause for disease. The canonical connection between the decline of morality and the increase in sickness and shortening of lifespan is detailed in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (DN26; the lion's roar on the turning of the wheel).

- You practice in solitude and go [out] to the world, in order to fully establish in the practice of *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā) in the lay life, so that a sound basis and a foundation is established.

- **Based on the way we look from inside; the world is formed from the outside.**

- Anyway, we cannot change things outside.

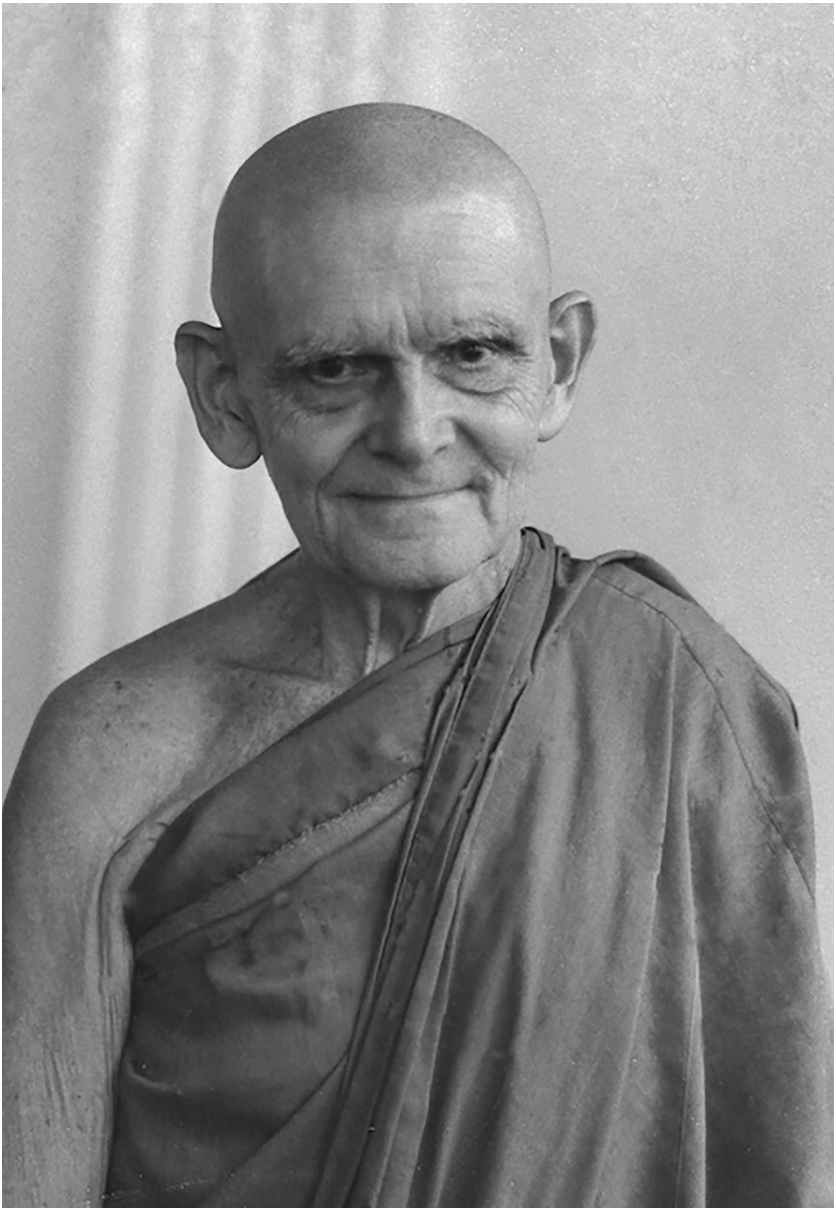
- When going on *caṅkamana* (walking meditation), see the suffering we have to go through to maintain this meaningless process: coming in contact with disturbing sense impressions and the food we [consume]. [And see the] danger in it—for it [strengthens] the cause for this process that is rushing toward old age, sickness, [and] death—this craving. Yet, one should be happy that we know the root cause of this suffering: it is this craving.

- Building houses and so forth for the body etc.

- When disturbing thoughts come, *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice will be good.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala, Vajirarama, 1990s



Ven. Ñāṇavimala, Colombo 1991

REFLECTION 05

Soft like Butter, Hard like Diamond

Ven. Ñāṇavimala embodied an infinite gentleness of spirit held by an unbreakable will. To some, he appeared as a saintly monk, radiating serene benevolence; to others, he was a fierce ascetic whose unyielding determination allowed no compromise on the path to liberation. As Ven. Gnanaloka would later reflect, his teacher was "intense in the Dhamma," yet that intensity was always expressed through a soft, warm smile. It was a harmony of extremes captured perfectly by the way he would describe him: "soft like butter, hard like diamond."

He did not shape his teachings to please, but to awaken. Sometimes his words were tender, at other times sharp. Sometimes his silence carried more weight than speech. Yet always they were directed precisely to the person before him. Whoever came to him was urged to walk with urgency, as though time were slipping away. For many, this intensity was too much to bear. Drawn by the aura of a saint, they often found themselves unsettled by the fierceness of his path. With Ven. Ñāṇavimala, there was no idle talk, no wasted time. It was practice, practice, and more practice.

A senior monk who had completed over ten Rains Retreats once came to pay respects. Despite his seniority, Ven. Ñāṇavimala treated him almost as a novice, advising that he should remain under the guidance of a teacher until maturity was reached. By then he knew not to question his teacher's judgement, but he still felt a little awkward.

Yet as they left the kuṭi, the monk turned to Ven. Gnanaloka and remarked, "He knows everything about me."

A precise instruction, spoken exactly as it was needed.

At other times, the lesson came without words. On one occasion, a doctor was brought by lay supporters who thought he might be of help. Ven. Ñāṇavimala was on his bed, in Shanaka's line of sight, with a Buddha image on the wall to the side. As if thinking Ven. Ñāṇavimala was just a frail old man with little awareness, the doctor addressed his words to Ven. Mettavihārī, one of the attendants, rather than Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself.

At one point he made a direct remark to Ven. Ñāṇavimala: "Everyone thinks you're an arahant, but I don't consider like that."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's response was not in words. He remained in silence, his neutral gaze resting with a softness, a trace of a smile upon his face.

Nothing in him shifted. No trace of irritation, no hint of pride.

For Shanaka, however, it was very different. Hearing his teacher spoken of so carelessly stirred a surge of anger.

"I wanted to throw him out of the kuṭi," he later admitted.

To be near Ven. Ñāṇavimala was often to feel as though one had stepped into a kind of force field—a space of stillness where the mind naturally became settled. But in that instant of anger, it was as if he had been thrown out of the force field. Before his eyes, Ven. Ñāṇavimala seemed to drift away, growing distant. The Buddha image on the wall beside him also appeared to recede, as though pulled back into the distance. Then clarity came like a vision, exposing what had arisen in his mind: a thought of anger, ill will; a mind inflamed. Where his own mind was inflamed, Ven. Ñāṇavimala sat unmoved by either praise or disrespect.

Even in matters of requisites, Ven. Ñāṇavimala's attitude remained the same—gentle yet unbending. During his student years in Cyprus, Shanaka had worked for the first time in his life,

laboring for seven days. After returning to Sri Lanka, he went to a shop with his earnings and selected the best robe, alms bowl, and other requisites he could find, preparing a complete *Aṭapirikara*—the traditional offering of a monk's eight basic requisites. He brought it to his teacher with deep devotion, expecting him to accept it.

Smiling at the memory, Ven. Gnanaloka later recalled, "I can still picture myself standing before him in his room. When I offered the *Aṭapirikara,* he didn't accept it!" To Shanaka's determined insistence, his teacher's response was: "Offer it to the Saṅgha."

It was an answer Shanaka would hear many times. Though he was among Ven. Ñāṇavimala's closest attendants, there was never special treatment. This was a level of asceticism that, even after decades of his own practice, Ven. Gnanaloka felt he could never match. "Even for a glass of water, he didn't ask," he reflects. His teacher seemed to exist in a state of perfect mindfulness. An unwavering attention infused his every action. "If he was not talking, he would be absorbed in even lifting a finger," he recalls. The smallest gesture. The simplest word. Nothing, it seemed, was ever done heedlessly.

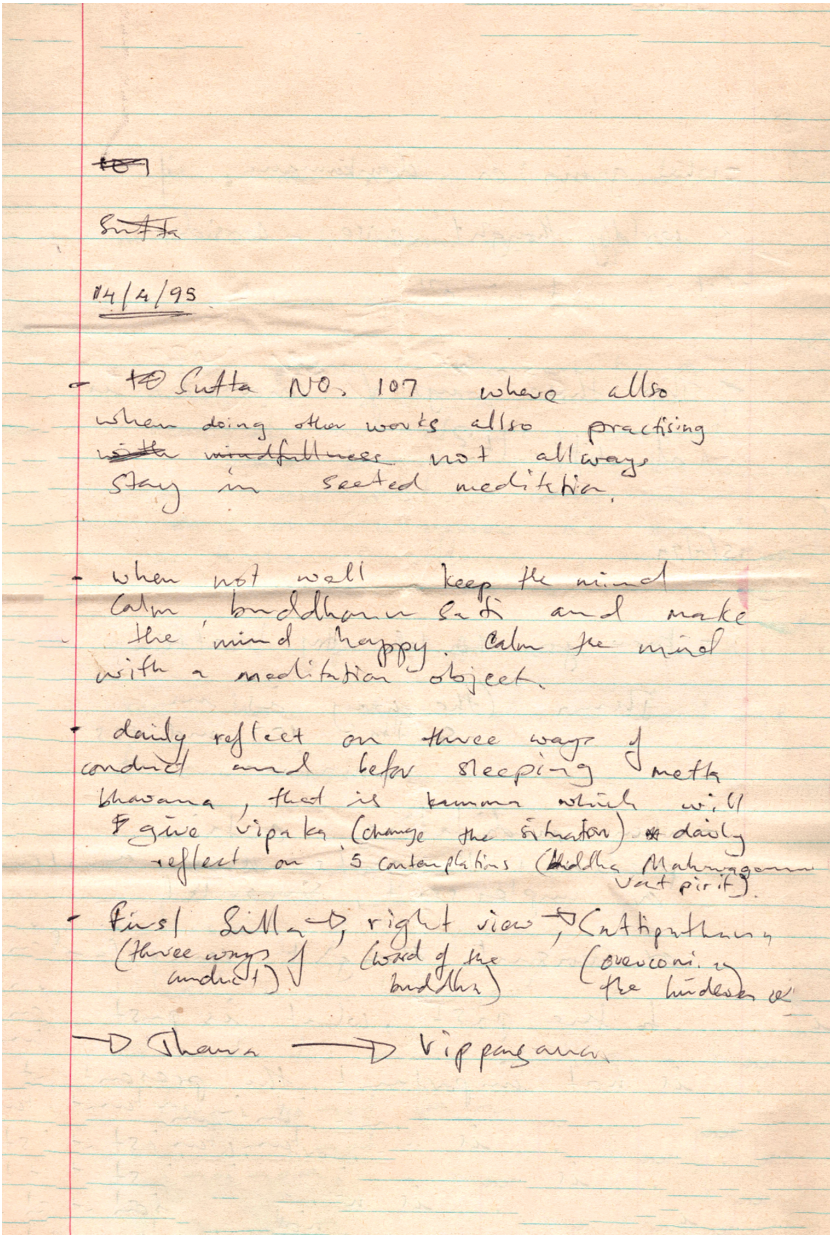
Yet this firmness was never coldness. On rare occasions, Ven. Ñāṇavimala would accept offerings, but always out of compassion, and seemingly from a deep karmic sensitivity. Once, a young mentally disturbed boy had come to meet him and offered him a simple packet of Nestomalt [powdered malted food drink]. Another time, some of Shanaka's friends from India placed their offering before him: a dozen bananas, unceremoniously wrapped in newspaper. To the quiet amusement of the onlooking Shanaka, Ven. Ñāṇavimala accepted both without hesitation, seeming to know that for these individuals, such an opportunity might never arise again, that this act of merit carried a weight they could not otherwise gain. For them, his acceptance was an act of kindness. For others, his gentle refusals became lessons in detachment.

His responses were never predictable. He would usually dismiss requests for photographs. Shanaka's grandmother learned this first-hand when Ven. Ñāṇavimala was on *piṇḍapāta* stopping by her house. When she asked to take a picture, his response was: "Why do you want to see this foul body? See the *Dhamma."*

Yet on one occasion, when a foreign visitor who was due to leave Polgasduwa that day requested some photographs, to Shanaka's surprise, he agreed. Then Ven. Ñāṇavimala turned toward Shanaka with a hint of amusement and said, "It's not a movie." The act of allowing, so different from his usual refusals, was a key insight for Shanaka. It was a glimpse into a compassion that was not bound by rigid consistency, but one that responded with wisdom to what was needed in the moment. Whether a sharp lesson in detachment or a simple act of kindness. As Ven. Gnanaloka later reflected: "Even for the smallest things, I would ask him what to do, because I knew the answer would always be different."

As he reflected on these seemingly contradictory responses, Ven. Gnanaloka came to see that they were not inconsistencies, but the actions of a mind that had gone beyond the reaches of the ordinary mind. The source of this freedom was his way of seeing the world, a perspective Ven. Gnanaloka was given a glimpse of on another occasion. Once, Ven. Ñāṇavimala remarked that "life is just a dream," and with those words, he laughed. For Ven. Gnanaloka, so accustomed to his quiet composure, the very quality of this rare laughter stood out. It was the kind of laughter of one who had seen beneath the thin surface.

For over sixteen years, Ven. Gnanaloka saw this interplay again and again. Ven. Ñāṇavimala never clung, never favoured, never softened the path to make it easier. Yet behind his firmness there was always compassion. To many, this intensity was too much, and they drifted away. But for those who stayed, the lessons were unforgettable.



14/4/95

- Sutta NO. 107 where allso when doing other works allso practising ~~with~~ mindfullness not allways stay in seated meditation.

- when not well keep the mind calm, buddhanu sati and make the mind happy, calm the mind with a meditation object.

- daily reflect on three ways of conduct and befor sleeping metta bhawana, that is kamma which will give vipaka (change the situation) * daily reflect on 5 contemplations (Buddha Mahanuganu vat pirit).

- First Sila → right view → (attha pathanu (three ways of conduct) (word of the buddha) (overcoming the hindrances of

→ Shamatha → Vippasana.

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1995).



Ven. Ñāṇavimala, Vajirarama

CHAPTER 05

Always Be with Thoughts of Mettā

(April 1995 – July 1995)

14 April 1995

- *Sutta* No. 107—*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna)—where, when doing other work one must also practice. Not just to always stay in seated meditation.
- When not well, keep the mind calm, practise *Buddhānussati* and make the mind happy. Calm the mind with a meditation object.
- Daily reflect on the three ways of conduct and, before sleeping, practice *mettā bhāvanā*. That is *kamma* which will give *vipāka* (change the situation).
- **Daily reflect on the 5 contemplations** (Maharagama Vath Pirith).[1]
- First *Sīla* (three ways of conduct), Right View (Word of the Buddha), *Satipaṭṭhāna* (Overcoming the hindrances), *Jhāna*, *vipassanā.*

1 The five contemplations, as found in the *Abhiṇhapaccavekkhitabbaṭhāna Sutta* (AN5.57; themes), are five facts the Buddha taught for daily reflection: that one is subject to aging, illness, and death and has not gone beyond them; that one will be separated from all that is dear; and that one is the owner and heir of one's own actions (*kamma*). This is also commonly found in Sinhala chanting texts, such as the Maharagama Pirith Book (the English equivalent being 'The Mirror of the Dhamma' compiled by Venerable Nārada Mahāthera and Venerable Kassapa Thera).

- When going on *caṅkamana* (walking meditation), if a worldly thought arises, consider it as "it is not mine."
- This; three ways of conduct [*tīṇi sucaritāni*], is it difficult?[2]

15 April 1995

- Know the way you should try to attain *Jhāna*—(the way is described in *Suttas*; *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna) and *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed) of *Majjhima Nikāya*).
- When meditating, certain pleasant, unpleasant or sensual thoughts connected to the past may arise. What is past is not important. The present is important.
- You can notice how moment to moment objects are always changing.
- The present moment or situation due to the past way of conduct is something we cannot brush aside, but we may act in such a manner that no greed, hate or delusion may arise and that is *kamma*.
- In the past for many births, we have depended on feelings for our happiness.
- Death is nothing but breaking up of this present body which never belonged to us and the mind getting a new base to get on.
- The art of living in the present; it takes time to get established in that; not by days or weeks, but years.

2 Ven. Ñāṇavimala stresses this reflection of bodily, verbal and mental actions, reflecting before, during and after, as a foundational practice that should be done always. Ven. Gnanaloka comments "I've noticed that those who have developed *samādhi*, they have that developed in their mind (also)." Ven. Ñāṇavimala's advice about doing things "slowly, mindfully, carefully" goes with this.

17 April 1995

- Control of talking and thinking, *Suttas—Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN119; mindfulness of the body), *Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness) and *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN121; the shorter discourse on voidness) of [*Majjhima Nikāya*].
- Talk only on Dhamma, otherwise be quiet.
- Thinking and reasoning should stop a bit.
- No point knowing, preaching and so forth many *Suttas.* If one is not meditating, then one is not *Dhammavihāri*—[*Paṭhamadhammavihārī Sutta* (AN5.73; one who dwells in the Dhamma, first)].
- It is good to know many *Suttas* thoroughly and meanwhile meditate.
- There is no point looking for external support. The whole practice is dwindling away but make sure what is inside—the state of mind is kept undisturbed and pure.
- When you are old you have to depend on others, more bondages. Therefore, more suffering.
- In the library, you may find the *Suttas* in Pāli and an English translation. You may read both.

20 April 1995

- Whenever there are inclinations (in the sensual world) don't try to fight them. It is impossible. But divert the mind to thoughts of Dhamma or recite certain verses.
- Watch the mind and keep it purified.
- Anyone who delights in feelings, delights in suffering.

- In the beginning read certain *Suttas*, but as you practice and go on you may read more accordingly. Don't just go [straight] to reading more *Suttas,* practice is important.
- Generally, a teacher should be one who has entered the path.

13 May 1995

- Start with Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi)* [by] read[ing] the Word of the Buddha [by Venerable Nyanatiloka Mahāthera] etc.
- Tradition is so dangerous. That's why you should stick to the *Suttas.*[3]
- When going on [*cārikā*—wandering on foot] as a Bhikkhu, you have to go on *piṇḍapāta* (alms-round). All the difficulty. When no illusion.

14 May 1995

- Read *Suttas*; *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement), *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view), *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty).
- When you see Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination) you see *Dhamma.*
- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).
- Read *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).

3 Ven. Ñāṇavimala's emphasis here is on rejecting practices that deviate from the teachings found in the *Suttas,* such as rituals. He, however, cautioned against being openly critical, as noted on 21 April 1994 about the danger in doing that—"even what is left will disappear." The best approach is not to encourage such practices.

- *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases) is an expansion of *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) through the six sense doors. The *Suttas* and so on are similar.

- **You may talk on the Dhamma to whoever shows interest, but you must do this with your example. You may do with means that are suitable to them tactfully.**

- **Whether someone has entered the path and how far he has progressed one cannot say. Only an Arahant (Fully Enlightened Being) knows for certain when he comes to that (that is his arahantship). This sort of questioning is meaningless.**

- **You must look after your welfare first. This is done by *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness).**

- **Our teacher is the All Enlightened One**

- Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.85—*Sītibhāva Sutta* (AN6.85; coolness)

- You must deal with the different *nīvaraṇā* [hindrances] with suitable objects of meditation.

- Reading of new *Suttas* should be done with practice.

- Working toward a certain worldly position etc. they are all to do with feelings. But all that ultimately comes to an end by old age and death.

- Always health is taken over by sickness, youth by old age and life by death.

- Sickness may come suddenly; we do not know what *kamma* we have done. The sickness of the body cannot be overcome but the sickness of the mind can be. It is very important to purify the mind from *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate), *moha* (delusion).

The best conditions for recovery from physical sickness is *mettā bhāvanā*, high *puñña kamma* and *upekkhā* etc.

- Even if difficult situations come, you mustn't let the mind get disturbed. [The] mind should abide... should abide blissfully every time.

15 May 1995

- All your efforts are not in vain. They will follow you like your shadow.

17 May 1995

- You must learn to accommodate with the place or environment to create harmony but not at the expense of *akusala kamma* (unwholesome actions). That you should know.

- There is happiness in married life and in renounced life. There is a difference. What is this married life? It is an illusion, an intoxication. It is due to not knowing things as they are. Take the example of Venerable Mahākassapa. How both stayed together and departed in separate ways. That is possible.[4]

- Even if someone is kind and restrained, but it is an obstacle to stop this *saṁsāra* (the cycle of suffering and rebirth).

- Do your studies also properly. You may retire from time to time as you do now.[5]

4 Venerable Mahākassapa and Venerable Bhaddā Kapilānī, both Arahants, were once husband and wife who lived in a celibate marriage and later renounced household life by mutual consent.

5 At that time Shanaka was pursuing his higher studies, and Ven. Ñāṇavimala's comment "do your studies properly" is regarding that, seeing that Shanaka was perhaps neglecting this aspect.

- Simile of the sailor, very important, crossing the river [Ven. Ñāṇavimala's own simile, detailed in the 27 April 1994 entry].
- You may feel this is right and that is right.
- You mustn't enforce on others. But show with your example.
- Always [be] with thoughts of *mettā* etc.

18 May 1995

- Arahants look at all things with *upekkhā* (equanimity).
- Some arahants with *abhiññā* (supernormal powers) and the Buddha had the ability to see the attainments of others.
- Until you come to arahantship (full enlightenment) one doesn't know. So it is good to have or continue to develop *saddhā*.
- You would not always have [quiet] suitable surroundings. I had it only twice in life.[6]
- You must make use of all situations to come to your goal. Obstacles should be made use of. You have to get involved in certain activities, that is unavoidable. Therefore, when you are engaged in such activity, direct your full concentration to that.
- Regarding the *Suttas*, certain things omitted by the Buddha means the person the Buddha talks to has already cultivated what is omitted. Sometimes things are omitted because certain preliminary things have to be cultivated [first].
- Your studies; they will also come to an end. It might come to an end suddenly.

6 Ven. Ñāṇavimala would also add that being in solitude is itself a result of *kamma.* In other words, do not attach to solitude or continuously long for it. Such periods arise and cease depending on conditions.

- Though we have lived in a good way this life, we don't know what we have done in the past births. So certain painful *kamma vipāka* (ripening of past actions), we should learn to bear it up with equanimity.

- *Mettā bhāvanā* and *Buddhānussati*.

- You must do *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvanā*. Never neglect *bhāvanā*. [Do it] daily.

- Due to past *kamma* certain urges may come. That you must take care [by not acting on those urges].

- Not letting the mind go to the future and the past, sticking to the presently arisen Dhammas with perfect knowledge.

19 May 1995

- *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases)—Very important.

- *Attadatthaṁ paratthena* (look after your welfare etc.)—Dhp 166.

- **His last words: Dhamma and the Vinaya is our teacher.**[7]

- Always this path is against the stream. So, you should cut across like the sailor. You must sometimes accommodate, but direct it slowly to the goal.[8]

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7 Referring to the Buddha's last words before his passing—*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).

8 "You must sometimes accommodate"—means one must learn to be flexible, sometimes it may seem like one is even going with the current, but slowly gradually directing it according to the conditions, without trying to cut across directly. In a practical real world sense, this may appear as they have to take a decision such as taking a job or duty in marriage, in order to fulfill a certain worldly responsibility. However even in the face of those decisions, one must gradually steer it tactfully towards the goal.

- Don't get upset by any situation. Our *kamma vipāka* has to take place.
- Don't have a fixed idea about the future or how you get about. So just get on peacefully moment to moment.
- All your efforts are not in vain.
- The highest way you can respect the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha is through the practice.

28 May 1995

- You may concentrate on the foundation—not thinking of *jhāna* etc. nor to be a scholar, but as the practice goes on you may refer further to *Suttas* and could categorize them under *'sīla'* (virtue), *'samādhi'* (concentration) and *'paññā'* (wisdom).
- *Iṣṭa Devatā* [guardian celestial being] is there so you have nothing to worry.
- Studies: You may do your duty with maximum effort on your part, so that you would have no inner remorse or conflict concerning your duty, but the result should be expected with equanimity.
- You may learn Pāli [language] when you see the necessity for it.
- Certain verses you may recite and memorise in Pāli, [those] which appeal to you.
- Mirror of the Dhamma,[9] daily reflection on death etc.

9 Recommended by Ven. Ñāṇavimala was 'The Mirror of the Dhamma: A Manual of Buddhist Chanting and Devotional Texts', compiled by Nārada Thera and Bhikkhu Kassapa. This English-language manual served a similar function to the traditional Sinhala Vath Pirith Potha, published by the Siri Vajiragnana Dharmayathanaya Temple at Maharagama.

- May you put brick by brick etc.
- Mustn't be negligent and also mustn't be too eager, but the middle way.
- Hope your effort and understanding will continue.
- Not letting the mind go to the future and the past, sticking to the presently arisen Dhammas with perfect insight as to its true nature of impermanence, suffering and therefore not mine. And at that time no *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* (no craving, clinging —*paṭiccasamuppāda*), then the mind is directed to Nibbāna.
- ***"Nibbānaṁ paramaṁ sukhaṁ"*** **["Nibbāna is the ultimate happiness/bliss"].**

26 June 1995

- *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna), *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed), *Sekha Sutta* (MN53; the disciple in higher training), *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (MN26; the noble search).
- *Saṁyutta Nikāya, Khandhasaṁyutta* and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta*—some you may memorise.
- *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN22; the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness).
- We are always going to either the past or the future. But if we stick to the present, you would then experience *anicca*. That which is *anicca* is *dukkha*. That which is *anicca* and *dukkha* is not mine.
- A bhikkhu has no attendant. When you go on *cārikā* you are quite alone. If you are not well, the hospital is there free of charge.
- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).

- Don't think of this personal services, but think of [the] highest form of merit.[10]
- *Buddhānussati* (Recollection of the Buddha).
- *Maraṇasati* (Mindfulness of Death).
- *Asubha bhāvanā* (Contemplation of Impurity/Foulness) (already in *Satipaṭṭhāna*, when you are practicing there is no ignorance, no craving, no *lobha, dosa,* and *moha—greed, hatred, delusion.*).
- *Saṁyutta Nikāya* (Read *Khandha* and *Saḷāyatana Vagga*).

29 June 1995

- *Saṁyutta* 22 and 35 onwards—*Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).
- No *avijjā* no *saṅkhāra*, no *saṅkhāra* no *bhava,* no *jāti* no old age, no sickness, no death. What doesn't arise doesn't pass away.[11]
- **Read *Satipaṭṭhāna*. Practice it. The *nimittas* [mental signs/ objects] are there for *samādhi* in *Satipaṭṭhāna*.**
- **Must attain *jhāna*. It is the suitable condition for entering the paths.**

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10 Ven. Ñāṇavimala's advice was directly related to Shanaka's service to him during his final years. He taught that while physical assistance creates merit, the highest form of merit is gained through the disciple's own sustained purification of mind in meditation.

11 This statement reflects the reverse sequence of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), showing the cessation aspect (*paṭiloma-paṭiccasamuppāda*). When *avijjā* (ignorance) ceases, *saṅkhārā* (volitional formations) cease; with the cessation of formations, there is no *bhava* (becoming), and consequently no *jāti* (birth), *jarā* (aging), *vyādhi* (sickness), or *maraṇa* (death). The phrase "What doesn't arise doesn't pass away" expresses the realization of nibbāna—the unconditioned state, free from arising and ceasing.

- You may read *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days). Where it is mentioned, how you respect the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha in the highest way, is only through the practice. The other thing is, though you hear that a certain teacher is famous or popular, compare it with the Dhamma and the Vinaya. So the Dhamma and the Vinaya is our teacher.

- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā) is very important. After the *vandanā* [worship].

- Nobody can make another practice or attain. They can only show like the Buddha. They are only *Dhamma kāya*.[12]

- Read certain passages, verses and ones that appeal to you, memorise them or recall them.

8 July 1995

- Solitude is most necessary for the understanding to arise. As when there are distractions through the sense doors, the required concentration used to investigate the Dhamma is disturbed.

11 July 1995

- Formations will never be complete and perfect. So you must learn not to be dissatisfied, but to get on with inner peace and *upekkhā* [equanimity]. And that *upekkhā* too you should reflect its true nature. It is consciousness. It arises and passes too. Seeing it in this way you continue up until arahantship. This inner peace (*upekkhā*) you should see as it is, without delusion.

12 In the Theravāda tradition, *Dhamma kāya* means "embodiment of Dhamma." Like the Buddha, even realized teachers cannot make another person practice or attain—they can only point out the way through the Dhamma they have realized.

- **[Whether] I am there or not make sure you retire for the *poya*.**[13]

- **And before you sleep, make sure you reflect and do *mettā bhāvanā,* or in other words go to sleep with a raised or elevated mind.**

- **When you have attained the path, try your best to establish others who are first connected to you by birth, and more beings as possible.**

- **Make sure while you're doing your studies that you retire from time to time.**

12 July 1995

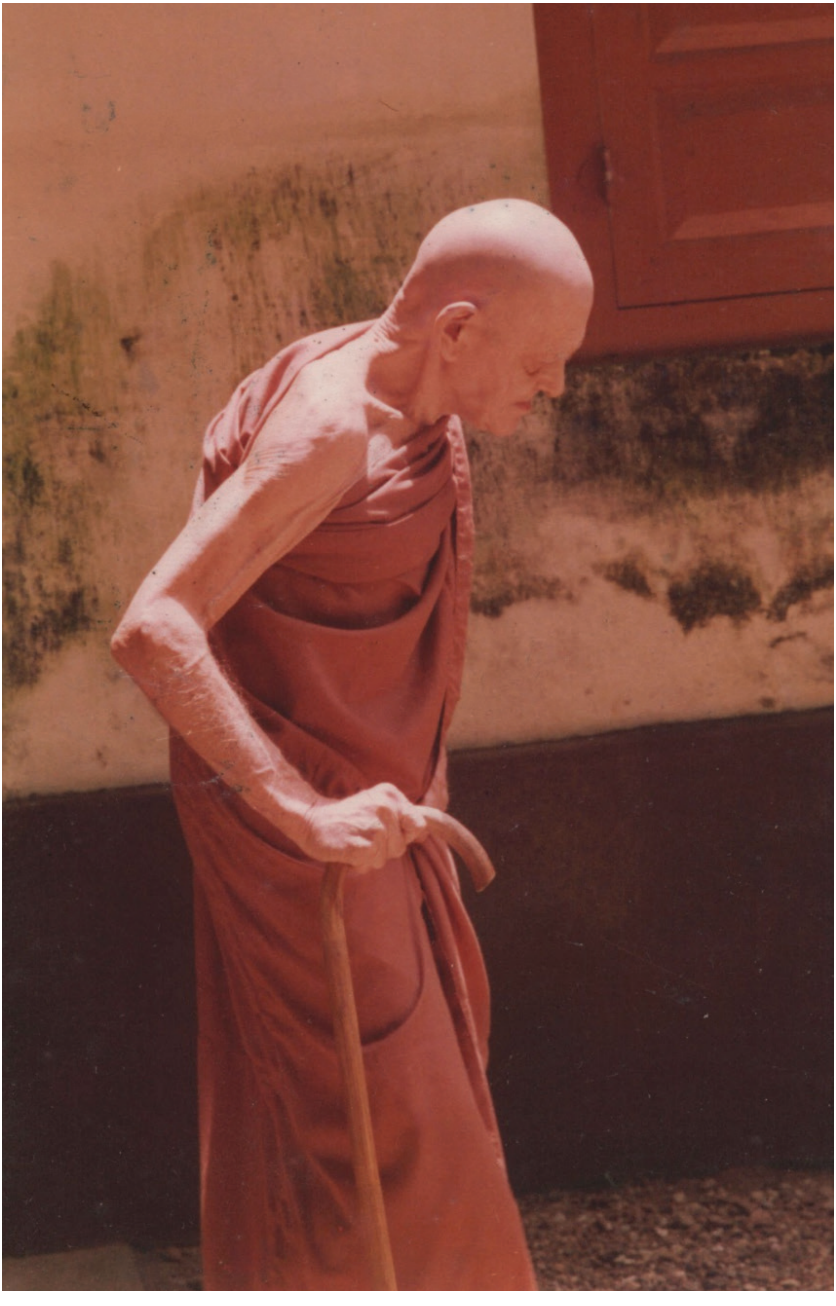
- Face facts with confidence (in general in all situations).

- *Saḷāyatana*, *Khandha*, *Ānāpānasati*, *Bojjhaṅga*—[*Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases), *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates), *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN118; mindfulness of breathing), *Bojjhaṅga Saṁyutta* (SN46; connected discourses on the factors of enlightenment)].

- When you are with other people, don't be separated, but with compassion direct them by your example.

- Always associate and be close to people and places that have an understanding for this Dhamma.

13 Poya (full moon day) is a public holiday in Sri Lanka, and this instruction emphasizes dedicating the full day to intensified practice.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera walking mindfully from the monks' dining hall to his kuṭi at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage (circa mid–late 1990s).

REFLECTION 06

Living as an Island Unto Oneself

Living in close association with Ven. Ñāṇavimala often brought to mind the Buddha's final instructions to the Saṅgha, as recorded in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days). Speaking to Venerable Ānanda shortly before his passing, the Buddha said:

"Tasmātihānanda attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā, dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā."

"Therefore, Ānanda, be islands unto yourselves, be your own refuge, having no other; let the Dhamma be your island, let the Dhamma be your refuge, having no other refuge."

This single instruction seemed to encapsulate the way Ven. Ñāṇavimala lived. Beholden to no institution, title, reputation or following, his refuge lay not in monasteries or teacherhood, but solely in the Dhamma.

One day, Shanaka saw him slowly making his way back to his kuṭi. At that time, Ven. Ñāṇavimala was already well into his eighties. Decades of walking barefoot across Sri Lanka had worn his body thin. A hip injury sustained in his youth had worsened with age. He leaned heavily on his cane, each movement deliberate.

Out of concern, Shanaka approached and asked, "Bhante, can I help you?"

Ven. Ñāṇavimala turned, his eyes calm and bright, and replied,

"This body is not mine, why should I give it to somebody else?"

That response left Shanaka speechless. In just a few words, Ven. Ñāṇavimala revealed the source of his unshakeable composure:

when the body is no longer taken as 'self,' its inevitable decay is no longer a personal tragedy.

Time and time again, Shanaka would get a window into just how deeply Ven. Ñāṇavimala had found this to be true.

He once advised Shanaka: "Don't rely on anybody or any person or anything that is external. They can separate at any moment and are all unreliable. But depend on your own mind that is developed and the All Enlightened One as your guide."

It was the kind of teaching that could only come from someone who had tested it against hunger, against danger, against the collapse of every external support—and it had held.

Years earlier, during his *cārikā*, Ven. Ñāṇavimala had been confronted by robbers seeking valuables. They demanded he strip to just his under-robe while they rummaged through his belongings. He stepped away and hid. When he returned, he found his possessions scattered across the ground, but nothing had been taken.

Even these dirt-poor thieves found nothing worth stealing. His books were completely written in, margins filled with notes. His robes were weathered. Every item bore the marks of years of use and utter simplicity. There was nothing of value to take, not even to those who had nothing.

On another occasion, at a train station, after rising from his night's rest, he saw that his bag had been rummaged through, but there had been nothing of value to take. The booklets inside his bag were scattered outside. It included one on *maraṇānussati* (death recollection)[1] which looked like it had been opened. He commented to Shanaka how those poor people who had tried to rob him may have gone through this and even had pity on him.

1 Death recollection: a cultivation of mindfulness that death is certain but its time uncertain.

During the Sinhalese New Year—a time of festivities, family gatherings, and the sharing of rich foods and delicacies—all the lay attendants would return home to be with their families. Shanaka found himself conflicted about whether he should join his grandmother and family for the celebrations, or remain at Polgasduwa and continue his practice.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala noticed his inner conflict. He allowed Shanaka to come to his own decision, but just playfully nudged him: "There are good sweet things here also. You can have that here."

Later, Ven. Ñāṇavimala would explain to him: "It is not that you should forget your relatives. It is always good to reduce bonds and ties with all people, even in a lay life." He was unentangled from personal bonds just as he was from material possessions. He taught that the transference of merit through living purely held more of a positive power of influence on family and relatives than just being there physically. For the remainder of his life, Ven. Ñāṇavimala never left the island of Sri Lanka, nor did he express any desire to. He didn't keep in contact with anyone from his home country.

On another occasion, Shanaka expressed to Ven. Ñāṇavimala that he wanted to leave the island hermitage to donate blood. Shanaka had a strong commitment to social good and was moved by that calling. Ven. Ñāṇavimala supported his wish. Shanaka went to Colombo in the morning and came back to Polgasduwa later in the afternoon. Ven. Ñāṇavimala then explained to him how those meritorious deeds are good, but greater is the merit from cultivation of inner development. To trade that inner work for them, he said, is like sacrificing millions to earn a few dollars. Looking back, he reflects, being with Ven. Ñāṇavimala was like being drawn into an experience that was beyond all things related to the connections of the sensual world.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala never claimed disciples and never sought to build a following. As Ven. Gnanaloka recalls with amusement, his teacher would often say, "I'm not your teacher"—and then proceed to instruct him.

Although he never took on the title of *Ācariya* (teacher), from the moment Shanaka met him to the time of his passing, Ven. Ñāṇavimala offered steady guidance. Sometimes he pointed Shanaka to the *Suttas*; sometimes, he gave direct advice, often understood fully only years or even decades later. But more than anything, it was his presence—his silence, his unwavering commitment to the path—that engraved the young aspirant's heart.

For nearly three years after they first met, Shanaka hesitated. He had a desire to enter monastic life, but he remained on the fence about it with all kinds of doubts playing on his mind. First, could he live as a celibate for the rest of his life?

Ven. Ñāṇavimala gently encouraged him, never forcefully. He would sometimes remark, "How great it would be if you were to ordain." On another occasion he even went as far as to suggest: "For one year you can ordain, then you can disrobe again."

One day, hearing his encouragement again, Shanaka responded with frustration: "The temples are deteriorating, the forest monasteries are deteriorating, the monks are deteriorating…"

Without missing a beat, Ven. Ñāṇavimala replied: "Your consciousness is deteriorating."

Only silence followed.

Shanaka knew he was right. Yet confidence did not come immediately.

Later, at the age of twenty-eight, Shanaka was staying at a cave kuṭi in Athdalagala forest monastery. He was meditating—reading

the *Suttas* and reflecting quietly in solitude. From the rocky outcrop above, Rasvehera—an ancient forest monastery where it was said that hundreds of enlightened beings had once dwelt in caves—was visible.

By this time, the desire to ordain he once had when he was eighteen had largely faded. He saw a beacon of light in his teacher and the subtle pressure from him growing during these years. But he also saw the laxity within the monastic institutions and feared its influence. To him, the risk was too great; he worried that in becoming a monk, he might merely become another symptom of the deterioration he observed. He considered the idea that it was safer to remain an upāsaka (lay person who practices).

One afternoon during the retreat, however, he was reading the *Vipassī Sutta*.[2] After reading, he practised walking meditation. As he did this, a recollection of a small stanza from the *Sutta* struck him: *Jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṁ*—with birth as a condition ageing and death come to be. At once this knowing came to him. He saw his body just disintegrate. This insight was not one of fireworks or overwhelming bliss, but a kind of shock, like finding that the rope that one had been holding in both hands had been a snake all along. What followed was an immense peace of letting go. He realised he had been in such an internal space of silence and mindfulness during this time, that only when later coming out of it did his attention go to the sounds outside of the surroundings in the monastery, and the subsequent sense impressions that followed.

The following day, he stood upon the rocky outcrop looking out in the direction of Rasvehera. Whether it was the knowledge that the *Dhātunvahanse*—the sacred relics of the ancient saints—were enshrined there, or something beyond explanation, distinct rays began to emanate from its direction. Then, as if carried by the sky itself, an internal voice echoed:

2 *Vipassī Sutta* (SN12.4; Vipassī)

"*Klesa Nasana* Bhikkhu. *Klesa Nasana* Bhikkhu." (Bhikkhu who destroys defilements, Bhikkhu who destroys defilements.)

It gave him an inspired feeling that the energy of the great saints was not a relic of history, but a presence still accessible in the here and now, and that the golden period of the Buddha's dispensation is still alive. The question finally rose to the surface: *Why am I still staying like this?* The call to the only work that mattered had arrived—the relentless ceasing of the fires within. The fence he had sat upon for three years was gone. It was time.

Acting swiftly on the forest abbot's advice, he boarded a bus to Colombo the following morning. Beneath his resolve, a part of him feared that Ven. Ñāṇavimala might pass away before he could take his vows.

He returned home and informed his father that he wanted to ordain. This time his father embraced him and said:

"Son, don't look back."

He then felt a "funny feeling," not the liberation one might expect. Instead, it felt like a slow death. The weight of such a big renunciation dawned on him. Craving had built a world outside, and now it was being asked to die. This death felt like a lifeless void. Yet somewhere within, he understood, this dying was necessary.

He was going to the ordination ceremony as a layman, in jeans and a T-shirt, with a long beard. Before that he was to meet Ven. Ñāṇavimala, who, bedridden at the time, would be unable to attend.

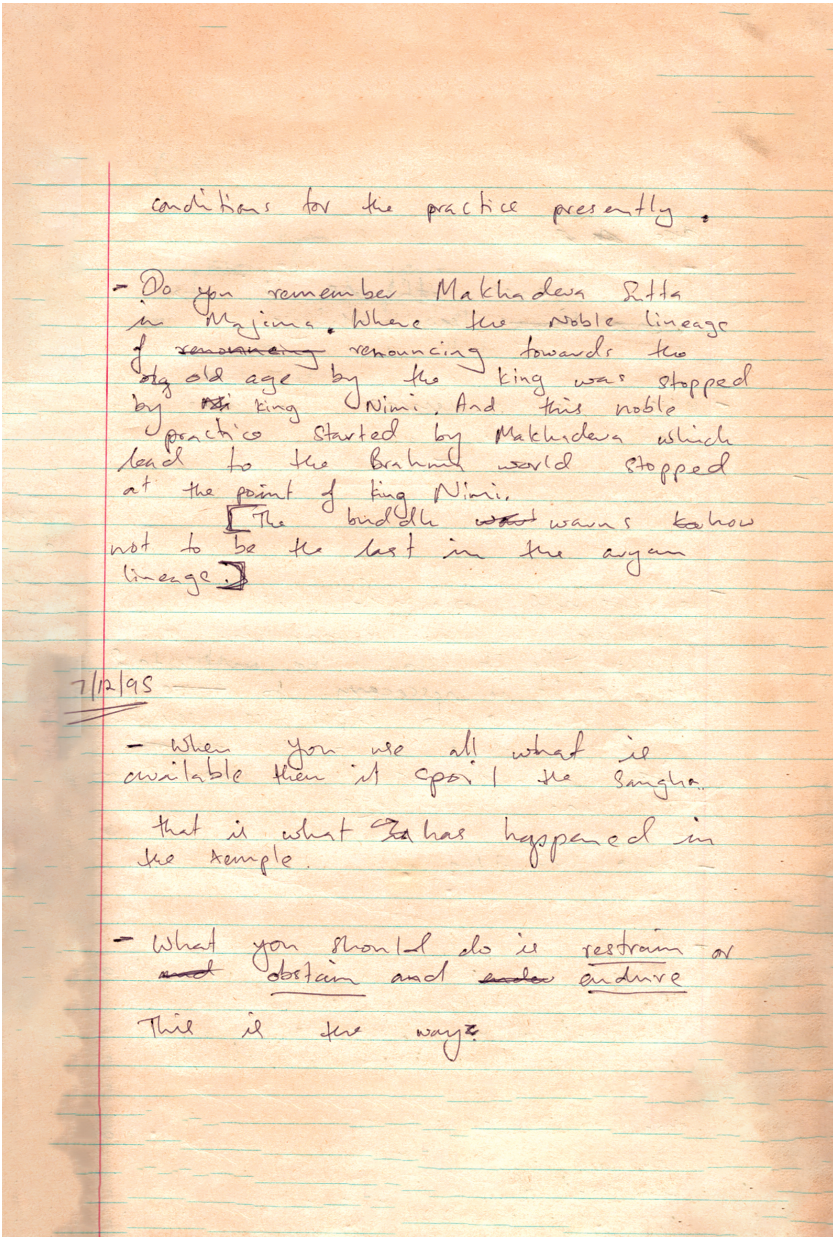
As he stood before his teacher and announced his decision, Ven. Ñāṇavimala gazed at him for some moments, as if pondering. Then, his words were not about the Dhamma, but something much more unexpected—a remark about appearances: "Don't know how you would look without your beard." It was as if the unbending ascetic

had receded, leaving only the recognition of a spiritual father for his son.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala had tactfully nudged him on the path, and this tactfulness was observed in many aspects of his life. Ven. Gnanaloka recalls one of these aspects was the way he moved between two worlds. There was the ascetic with a depth of practice beyond this world. And there was the monk who played his part within the community, mingling with other monastics when the situation called for it and engaging in simple conversation. Ven. Gnanaloka recollects seeing how his teacher went to lengths to keep the full depth of his practice inconspicuous. It was his way of blending in without drawing attention to the intensity beneath.

A quarter century has passed, yet the gravity of his teacher's example has never shifted. Though devotees come seeking Ven. Gnanaloka's guidance, looking back, he comments: "I am but a tiny speck of dust compared to my teacher."

In quiet moments beside his teacher, he had tried to express his gratitude through service or offerings. But he came to understand: true repayment comes only by walking the path Ven. Ñāṇavimala had lived.



conditions for the practice presently.

- Do you remember Makhadeva Sutta in Majima. Where the noble lineage of ~~renouncing~~ renouncing towards the old age by the king was stopped by ~~the~~ king Nimi. And this noble practice started by Makhideva which lead to the Brahma world stopped at the point of king Nimi.

[The buddha ~~was~~ wanna know not to be the last in the aryan lineage.]

7/12/95

- When you use all what is available then it spoil the Sangha.

that is what has happened in the temple.

- What you should do is restrain or ~~and~~ obtain and ~~endure~~ endure

This is the way.

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1995/1996).

CHAPTER 06

Restrain, Abstain and Endure

(Dec 1995 – Feb 1996)

3 December 1995

- All these blessings and merit that you have accrued—may you achieve your goal.

- **You may practice as mentioned in *Sutta* 107, 117, 125 of *Majjhima* [*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed)] and *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā), if you are keen to enter the path, then *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases). This effort you make in this direction will be the highest form of merit. And will be the only way to repay parents, relatives and ultimately to all beings. It will be a blessing.**

- As a layman, *Suttas* mentioned to Mahānāma.[3]

- Know when you [return], you would have to accommodate a bit. You may not find people with an understanding for this. In that case, you would not try to convince them or convert them, but with [a] heart of *mettā*, you should also keep away from them and should not follow their inclinations.

3 These teachings are found in several discourses given to Mahānāma, the Sakyan prince and cousin of the Buddha, including: AN6.10; AN8.25; AN11.11; AN11.12; SN55.21; SN55.22; SN55.37.

- You will truly be able to help your relatives and everyone else only if you purify yourself. Because from a purified mind, purified actions follow.

- *Bhava Sutta* (SN45.164; existence)

- *"Iti kho, bhikkhave, dhammā dhamme abhisandenti, dhammā dhamme paripūrenti apārā pāraṁ gamanāyā'ti."*

  ["And so, mendicants, good qualities flow on and fill up from one to the other, for going from the near shore to the far shore."]

  Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta (AN11.2; volition)

4 December 1995

- [*Quote from Ven. Ñāṇavimala*] "Regarding Saddhātissa, it may be true that we would have been together. But one must stick to the present. As the present makes the future. One must control the mind. They are just thoughts (past and future). This name seems to be very familiar, we would have been together in past lives. **But you must stick to the All Enlightened One's words and advice. As in *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days), where the Buddha said, *'After my passing away, that your teacher will be the Dhamma and the Vinaya'."*** [4]

4 An acquaintance once told Shanaka that, in a past life, he and Ven. Ñāṇavimala had studied under an elder named Ven. Saddhātissa, during an ancient period when Buddhism was flourishing in Sri Lanka. When asked about it, Ven. Ñāṇavimala gently set aside such past-life claims, bringing him back to the present and directing his attention to the Dhamma instead.

- [*Quote from Ven. Ñāṇavimala*] "I also got something after 20 years in the Saṅgha. There is *kamma* behind [this]." [*Personal Note:*] (Maybe an attainment etc.)[5]

- *Ariya sīla* (noble virtue) is observed when one is practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness).

- You can't fall into negligence because you have a lot to work on. That is to overcome the hindrances (five of them) and to attain *jhāna*. And that state of peace and so as to see its true nature of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*, because it is also a state of consciousness.

- *Mātugāma Sutta* (SN37.1; agreeable and disagreeable, first).[6]

- *Sutta* 39 and 40 in *Majjhima* leading to *jhāna—Mahā-Assapura Sutta* (MN39; the greater discourse at Assapura); *Cūḷa-Assapura Sutta* (MN40; the shorter discourse at Assapura).

- A Gradual Training in 107 and 125 in *Majjhima—Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed).

- You must not try to preach and so you must center on yourself. Based on your pure state of mind, purified action will flow. To benefit both you and all beings.

5 '(Maybe an attainment etc.)' was Shanaka's own real-time interpretation. Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself did not make such a claim and consistently discouraged any focus on attainments, advising instead to simply continue the practice.

6 The *Mātugāma Sutta* (SN37.1; agreeable and disagreeable, first) details qualities that appeal to men, serving as a monastic aid for contemplating the danger of sensual attachment (*kāma ādīnava*). The canonical counterpart, listing qualities that appeal to women, is the *Purisa Sutta* (SN37.2; agreeable and disagreeable, second).

- You cannot be negligent as it is so uncertain. The *sāsana* (dispensation/teaching) nearly disappeared twice in Sri Lanka. It can disappear again. So we do not know what will happen tomorrow. So make haste right now.

- To get *saṁvega* (think of the endless past, what we had to go through), e.g. the tears more than the four oceans etc. and what is ahead of us in Dīgha 26—*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (DN26; the lion's roar on the turning of the wheel).

- Dīgha 27—*Aggañña Sutta* (DN27; on knowledge of beginnings).

5 December 1995

- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā): You do things and follow actions that benefit both parties or that which reduces *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate) and *moha* (delusion).

- The way you reflected in the past [how] the present things are formed; for example, you have acted with 'I' conceit etc. Therefore, now [there occurs] the present manifestation of the body and so on. As time goes on you will understand it deeply. Nothing from outside could help you to see things in reality. But the mind [itself] should be slowly established and trained to reflect [on things] as not mine and so on.

- You must make plans for the near future (e.g. going to the station in the morning) and quickly come back to the present and must practice *sati sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension). This should be the way throughout.

- **Past inclination would manifest, but one must delight in overcoming those inclinations and coming to mastery of them, in the present life. It is a great difficulty to overcome attractions to people [with whom] one was connected to in past lives.**[7]

- Whatever momentary happiness there is, it is a temporary intoxication. But far more suffering is connected with it. Therefore, overcome it by developing the opposite faculties [5 *indriyas*—5 spiritual faculties] and [take] delight [in them]. For example, Ven. Nanda when he was an Arahant, a *devī* [female celestial being] from the *deva loka* [celestial realm] who had once been his consort appeared. However, he replied that, as an Arahant, he had no such connections.[8]

- *Majjhima Sutta* 131—*Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN131; a single excellent night); practice like that. Stick to the present.

- When you go to certain temples or meditation centers (Remember *Mātugāma*)—*Mātugāma Saṁyutta* (SN37; connected discourses on women).

- **Try to avoid such contact [with the opposite sex] as far as possible.**

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7 Ven. Gnanaloka recalls Ven. Ñāṇavimala relating that, during his school days, he was especially drawn to a particularly attractive girl. He explained that this sense of closeness and attraction to certain people—and even particular places—is due to being closely connected in a past life. Ven. Ñāṇavimala cautioned Shanaka not to give in to such feelings or seek them out in an attempt to make them permanent, because they are merely past *kamma*. Being blindly driven by them only ensures one is sucked into continuing that bondage in *saṁsāra*.

8 The story, in the *Nanda Sutta* (Ud3.2; Nanda), is about using one desire to overcome another. The Buddha promised Ven. Nanda 500 celestial women to motivate him to stay a monk, as he was struggling with lust for his fiancée. This promise was an *upāya* (skillful means): it gave Ven. Nanda the drive to practice until he achieved Arahantship. He realized all desire, whether for his fiancée or the female celestial beings, was a form of bondage—and he chose liberation instead.

- **Don't look at them.**
- **If you have to look at them, don't talk.**
- **If you have to talk, then think of the *asubha*.**[9]

- When you have attained the first *jhāna*, you should go to the second and so on until one reaches Nibbāna. Never should one stick to even good states. However, as a Bodhisatta, the Buddha was never satisfied with good states.
- Certain verses or *Suttas* that had an impact, isolate them and repeat it over and over again.
- Further qualities to be developed when one is established in five [spiritual] faculties (*indriya*): *saddhā* (faith/confidence), *viriya* (energy/effort), *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), *paññā* (wisdom)—[*Paṭhamavibhaṅga Sutta* (SN48.9; analysis (1))].
- There are six qualities to be grown—*Mahānāma Sutta* (AN6.10; Mahānāma)
    - Recollect the Tathāgata—Happiness should develop in connection to repeated recollection.
    - Recollect the Dhamma
    - Recollect the Saṅgha
    - You should recollect your own virtues
    - You should recollect your own generosity (*cāga*)
    - You should recollect the *devas*

9 This graduated advice parallels the Buddha's counsel to Ven. Ānanda in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days) recorded near the time of the Buddha's final passing. When Ven. Ānanda asked how monks should conduct themselves regarding women, the Buddha gave the advice: avoid contact entirely if possible; if unavoidable, do not look; if looking becomes necessary, do not speak; if speech becomes necessary, maintain mindfulness. Both teachings reflect a fundamental principle of monastic discipline—the protection of the sense faculties through progressively stricter restraint. The practice is not rooted in aversion toward women, but in the understanding that sensory contact is the gateway through which lust arises and takes root. For deepening of training, *asubha* (perception of the body's foul nature) serves as the contemplative support that stabilizes this restraint from within.

6 December 1995

- Daily practice of a bhikkhu is to overcome the five hindrances and to develop the five *indriya*.[10]
- And we come back to *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā) *(tīṇi sucaritāni*—three ways of good conduct) *ariyakanta sīla,*[11] this is accomplished when you practice *Satipaṭṭhāna*—*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN22; the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness).
- You should act in the way of *Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness). That is verbal and mental actions.
- *Majjhima* 131—*Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN131; a single excellent night) is very important, because it is not worth following the past (past lives etc.) and having future hopes and definite plans etc.
- Visions and dreams and so on, one makes a note of it but does not follow them. Some may be right, some maybe not. But should always and totally rely on the words of the Buddha.
- And regarding attainment; how can anyone know unless declared by the Buddha or an Arahant with *abhiññā*? It was forbidden for bhikkhus to declare their attainment, how much so laymen. And what's the point of speculating? What one should ensure is that one is acting in the present

10 The daily practice of a bhikkhu is centred on overcoming the five hindrances *(pañca nīvaraṇāni):* sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt—by cultivating the five spiritual faculties *(pañcindriyāni):* faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

11 *Ariyakanta sīla*—"virtue dear to the Noble Ones"; the purity of moral conduct that is cherished and praised by the Noble Disciples (Ariya), forming the foundation for the higher training in concentration and wisdom.

in accordance with a way that brings one closer to a state of peace and certainty regarding the Dhamma.

- [*Quote from Ven. Ñāṇavimala*] "For example, there was [a yogi] who thought [they were] an Anāgāmi, and I said that [they] will go mad if [they think] like that. And after one year or so, it happened that [they] went mad."[12]

- In *Majjhima* 105—*Sunakkhatta Sutta* (MN105; to Sunakkhatta), how many came and declared in front of the Buddha their final attainment. Among them some were true and some were not.

- It is peaceful when one practices the Dhamma [in the present moment].

- Now when you [return] to the layman's life, it is as if you are going on *piṇḍapāta*: you are going to give [Dhamma] and this is the highest giving. First you may establish them in *dāna*, *sīla, bhāvanā—Sigālaka Sutta* (DN31; to Sigālaka). Furthermore you can [guide them] to establish them in Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha. For those who are further interested in attaining the path: [the] *Suttas* taught to *Mahānāma* and *Anāthapiṇḍika* and *Rāhulovāda Sutta* [*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)], *mettā bhāvanā* (as mentioned by Ven. Ñāṇamoli).

- If you are unable to practise the three ways of conduct perfectly, do not have remorse; what is past is past. However, must make a determination to avoid it in the future.

- You must encourage others in *paviveka* (solitude)—for laypeople, at least on the *poya* days. As for yourself, try to

12 The original note mentioned this individual by name; it has been changed to 'a yogi' to protect their privacy.

retire [into solitude] as [much] as possible, 2 or 3 days before and after the *poya*.

- The way you act and direct the mind in that environment is very creative and constructive. One must constantly concentrate on one's practice and only by one's example that one encourages others.

- Attaining the *jhānas,* step by step training, the *Suttas* 107 and 125 of *Majjhima—Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed) and then to attain to the path, *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases).

- In any case, daily one must make it a point even if it is in the night for this *bhāvanā* (meditation).[13]

- **One must not overload with intellectual grasping of the *Suttas*. One picks out one or two and brings the mind to that actual nature of function mentioned in the *Suttas*.[14] This is very important!**

- To get *saṁvega* (spiritual urgency)*:* Dīgha 26—*Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (DN26; the lion's roar on the turning of the

13 *Ven. Gnanaloka* clarifies that *bhāvanā* means the exercises of purifying the mind such as reflecting on the *Suttas* or *Ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing), *mettā* (loving kindness) and so on.

14 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that the "actual nature of function" refers to the practice of applying the *Suttas* directly to one's own experience, rather than treating them as abstract philosophy. This process cultivates a "dhamma picture" in the mind's eye—an intuitive understanding that arises from the "eye of wisdom." This wisdom is developed by using the *Suttas* as "signposts" for analysis. However, to prevent this analysis from becoming purely intellectual, it must be anchored in the present moment. This grounding is achieved by repeatedly returning to *Kāyagatāsati* (mindfulness of the body). When this balanced practice leads to a state of *samādhi* (concentration), it is a sign that one is cultivating the correct "dhamma picture." This is a form of "right tuning," where the mind becomes steady and free from the hindrances.

wheel); *Anamataggasaṁyutta* (SN15; connected discourses on without discoverable beginning).

- And never be satisfied with good states.
- You must establish others in only what you yourself are established in and what you clearly see and have experienced.
- When some people (laypeople) recite the *gāthās* etc. in their shrine room, certain *devatās* (blood relatives) come and impart certain information. They have a wider field of knowledge. e.g. when Reverend Sir went on *cārikā* in Minneriya how he was offered a lunch pack.[15]
- All the merit that you have accrued and the past background in the Dhamma etc. will come to fruit, even though you have to deviate a bit from suitable conditions for the practice presently.
- Do you remember *Makhādeva Sutta* (MN83; king Makhādeva) in *Majjhima*, the noble practice [of renunciation] started by Makhādeva which led to the Brahma world, [being] stopped [after] king Nimi. The Buddha warns how not to be the last in the *Ariyan* lineage [noble lineage].[16]

15 Minneriya is a large national park in Sri Lanka, a vast wilderness with very few inhabitants. Receiving an unsolicited lunch pack while on *cārikā* in such a remote area is highly improbable. He related the story: Ven. Ñāṇavimala arrived unannounced where food would be unlikely. Yet an elderly woman offered him a carefully prepared lunch, explaining that a *devatā (*possibly a departed blood relative reborn as a celestial being) had appeared to her the previous night during her chanting, instructing her to prepare a meal for a bhikkhu who would arrive the next morning.

16 This refers to the personal responsibility to continue the lineage of practice for the sake of future generations. As Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies, the warning is not to be the person who breaks the chain of practice passed down from a teacher, thus ensuring the path remains open for others. He gives the example, "my teacher went on a certain path, if I don't go on that path and stop, then others also will stop and it will stop." (See the *Makhādeva Sutta* (MN83; king Makhādeva) for the origin of this theme).

7 December 1995

- When you use all that is available then it spoils the Saṅgha That is what has happened in the temple.[17]
- **What you should do is restrain or abstain and endure.**
- This is the Way.
- The bhikkhu's attitude is to leave things.
- When he endures, he does not feed on craving.
- To like solitude, it is necessary to have *kamma* in the past. Or it should be cultivated. Because it is necessary to strive in solitude to experience certain things that cannot be reasoned out, like *jhānas* and *vipassanā* knowledge.
- *Sutta* 9 in *Majjhima—Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view)
- Like Raṭṭhapāla and others, like the one who was married, [where] the wife kept the child in front of him—because

17 Ven. Gnanaloka elaborates on this through the *Kaliṅgara Sutta* (SN20.8; blocks of wood) regarding the Licchavis—a clan of fierce warriors whose strength was established in rugged austerity. The Buddha observed that as long as they lived "using logs for pillows, strenuous, ardent, and diligent in their training," they remained invincible. However, he warned that once they succumbed to comforts, trading their hard discipline for soft beds and down pillows, they would create an opening for their enemies to strike. This directly applies to the monk's life: a Saṅgha that "uses all that is available" loses its defensive edge. When a monk trades the "hard rock" of striving for the comforts of the world, he becomes an easy target for Māra and the kilesas (defilements).

he was an arahant, there [was] no effect.[18] It is *acintiya* [inconceivable] at thought level, to [conceive of] how arahants think. (They are looking at the whole process from outside). As they are considering [it] as 'not mine' and 'not I.' That's why most of the arahants are silent.

- You must consider yours' and others' welfare. You have already done it with your relatives. It's the beginning.

- But never forget your welfare which is most important. And it is the first priority! "*Attadatthaṁ paratthena*" [Let one not neglect one's own welfare for the sake of another's] (*Attadatthatthera Vatthu*, Dhp 166).

8 December 1995

- **If you follow another religion, that means you never got a true understanding in the Dhamma.**

Important:

- **Some may decide to be anāgārika and so on.[19] But one must consider this may create *asmi-māna* [egocentric conceit],**

18 The note refers to two distinct accounts of Arahants remaining unmoved by family ties. The first is Raṭṭhapāla—*Raṭṭhapāla Sutta* (MN82; on Raṭṭhapāla), who, after ordaining against his parents' wishes, returned to his former home as an Arahant. His father attempted to lure him back to lay life by displaying piles of gold and having his former wives adorn themselves in jewelry to tempt him. Raṭṭhapāla remained entirely indifferent, referring to his former wives as "sisters" and showing that the "bond" of the past had been completely severed. The second account is that of Ven. Saṅgāmaji—*Saṅgāmaji Sutta* (Ud 1.8; with Saṅgāmaji). While he was sitting in meditation, his former wife placed their young child directly in front of him, demanding that he provide for them. Ven. Saṅgāmaji remained silent and dispassionate, neither looking at the child nor responding to the woman's pleas. Seeing his total lack of attachment, the wife eventually took the child and left. Upon witnessing this, the Buddha praised his equanimity, stating: "He does not rejoice at her coming, nor grieve at her departure. A brāhmaṇa is he, set free from the bond [of craving]."

19 An anāgārika (Pāli: "homeless one") is a dedicated lay practitioner who has renounced worldly life, observes the ten precepts, is celibate, and dedicates their life to the Dhamma and serving the monastic community (Saṅgha).

that I am better than others or different to others etc. It is important out of respect and gratitude to the Buddha that one accommodates, and has the Buddha as one's constant aim. For three years I was an *upāsaka* and I was quite alright like that, but I reflected how I got all that opportunity, it is because of the Saṅgha. It is always good not to separate oneself from the outside framework. Always respecting the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha.

- **By entering the Saṅgha, one encourages the Saṅgha and brings unity.**

- **The less you need to support yourself as a bhikkhu or as a layman, the better it is.**

- Always, [you] must not worry [about] what changes from outside. But [you] must know even [with] things that seem to be pleasant, [that they] are connected with feelings. Anyone who delights in feelings, delights in suffering. So, one must be happy that one is constantly following the way that learns to delight in the Dhamma, that is ultimately developed beyond feelings.

- Always developing equanimity, see even that the highest state of mind is connected with consciousness. For consciousness needs an object and depends on the body, so it is *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (not-self).

- To do all these it takes some time. So, you have to see it as a layman or bhikkhu that one first reduces *saṅkhāras* that is coming up till *jhāna*. So, it is a gradual process of reducing *saṅkhāras* and overcoming them.

- Whenever you notice that you are delighting in some kind of pleasant feeling, [know that] there is delusion at that time. From time to time the attraction to the opposite sex will

come. You should know that for many lives we have given into this strongest fetter. It is not easy to overcome overnight, only by *asubha* that one sees the delusion behind it. And one overcomes it immediately. And again *Rāhulovāda Sutta* [*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)], for my welfare and for others, [one] should firmly stick to [the practice of] learning to reflect before, while and after all actions.

- When meeting people from other religions, you should instruct them (mentioned by Venerable Piyadassi) and encourage them to follow their religion.[20] All religions talk about *dāna* (giving), *sīla* (virtue) and *bhāvanā* (meditation/ mental development). But in this Dhamma there is this *Satipaṭṭhāna* (foundation of mindfulness).

- All religions and their founders are ones who reached a certain high state. But it lasts only for some time and collapses again. Whether it is Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism.

- The western countries are materially driven, each one wanting to advance more than the other. Then war begins. And then when everything collapses, they go to the churches etc. But when things become alright, again they get back to building. This is because their spiritual experience is based on *micchā diṭṭhi* (wrong view).

- When you [wonder], how [does] the arahant think, it is not possible to understand. But if we just consider; he experiences things from a distance.

20 "[Buddha] tried to impart to those who sought it, and never forced it upon others. He never compelled or persuaded people to follow him, for compulsion and coercion were foreign to his method of teaching."—Piyadassi Mahā Thera, *The Buddha's Ancient Path.*

- There is happiness in worldly life and suffering of the renounced life. But the suffering of the renounced life is better than the happiness of the worldly life. When I went on *cārikā*, I was completely independent; don't think it was easy. There was suffering and it is like that until death. No formation is complete or satisfactory. And all that we experience [is], that which we have done or created. So making sure the mind is always directed to a state (where one will be free from all this suffering forever) without creating disharmony or conflict with the surrounding that one is in.

- You must not try to be a scholar, and going on preaching etc. like in the temples, one activity after the other—more *saṅkhāras* (volitional formations). Satisfying the *dāyakas* [lay devotees] etc. and losing sight of the essential practice, which in return makes the Saṅgha deteriorate.

- The *Suttas: Majjhima* 131, 19, 20, 107, 117, 125—*Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN131; a single excellent night); *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN19; two kinds of thought); *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta* (MN20; the removal of distracting thoughts); *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed).

- When you get back [home], *Mahānāma Suttas*.[21]

- This way of activity (mentioned in *Mahānāma Suttas*) gives a chance to glimpse the ultimate at that level, as a layman.

21 These teachings are found in several discourses given to Mahānāma, the Sakyan prince and cousin of the Buddha, including: AN6.10; AN8.25; AN11.11; AN11.12; SN55.21; SN55.22; SN55.37.

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- **When you direct your mind to a certain sphere, then as if by force, you get support and response in that direction. For example: when someone is trying to climb a mountain, he begins to meet people who are on the same path and they help each other to come to the goal.**

- One must learn in all one's activities to stick to the present. *Majjhima* 131—*Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN131; a single excellent night).

- One must not try to think whether one has attained the path or one will attain the path. But must stick to the practice as advised by the Buddha, not sticking to a person, etc.

- Practice according to the *Suttas* 107, 117, 125 *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed) leading to the *jhāna*. And if one wants to enter the path: *Khandha* and *Saḷāyatana Saṁyuttas*. This is almost the noble eightfold path.

- Seeing always the causes of this suffering and removing it. It is removing the *nīvaraṇas* (hindrances).

- There is always the danger that one may become a scholar. In the beginning, the first arahants heard only one *Sutta*. You may make note of certain *Suttas* that had an impact. And may repeat them. Only as the practice progresses that you may refer to more *Suttas*.

- You must try your best to help others by your example. When you turn away. And when they see that, it is an encouragement for them to do the same.

- When you don't think of a person or an individual, but as a whole, for example as the Mahā Saṅgha, that is spiritual. One must regularly develop the delight connected to Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.

- *Purāṇa kamma* (Old action/Past *kamma*) is the present body and what is experienced with it. And making sure in the present one reflects wisely the presently arisen phenomenon, so that future arising would not take place.

- **May you be successful in all your endeavors (last words).**

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- From *sati* (mindfulness), it is possible to attain *jhāna* (meditative absorption).

- As you go on, one day you should determine to learn the Dhamma in the exact words of the Buddha, that is in Pāli. There is no other language to [better] describe the ideas expressed by the Buddha, except Pāli. The other thing is when the translator translates with his defiled mind the meaning undoubtedly changes.

- You may read the *Thera Gāthās* (Thag; verses of the elder monks) to get inspiration. Like this you can add some knowledge that fits to the main practice.

- What is most important now is to establish these practices so that they become a habit. In all conditions.

- As soon as you concentrate and see every experience from the point of view of the Buddha's teaching, all difficulties and suffering vanish.

- Then one looks at it from a distance, as not mine etc. [The practice] goes up to the end (arahantship), until one is

continuously experiencing from that point of view. You see they are just processes and phenomena. When you stick to this awareness certainty should come and doubt should vanish.

- May you be a help for many beings. It starts at home. All who have a body will go through, some time or the other, the suffering connected to it. May they all come to the utter release from this suffering. May you go ahead of all of them, that will be a great help.

- **Most of life is created by sex. Most of the time we meet people who were connected to us from the past. One is totally blinded [by] illusion when one is sexually attracted. And [once] involved, [mental] bondages are made. Only after all that is done, one sees the suffering connected [with it] and involved in it. So one must take care !**

- In the Dhamma when help is possible to be given, you may do so but not at personal expense. Otherwise one may get on, making all these things fall off,[22] because what we see, hear, etc. there is *kamma* behind it, but they are just feelings, perceptions: "not mine," "not I."

- You may discuss with your parents, relatives, telling them clearly and definitely your intentions.

- Later on, when you are definitely certain you may act like Raṭṭhapāla—*Raṭṭhapāla Sutta* (MN82; on Raṭṭhapāla). But you should act in such a way that will create harmony, and

22 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies the statement "otherwise one may get on, making all these things fall off." This refers to one who does not have such an obligation to help people: one can just continue the practice and allow that sense of needing to find people to help to "fall off." One should not concern oneself with that, because these come out of karmic reasons. They (the sense of imagined duty) themselves are just feelings, perceptions, not to be regarded as 'mine' or 'I'.

not disharmony.[23] And especially your relatives have been useful and helpful from a young age. And they are connected to you from past lives. So, you have to help each other.

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- Make sure you develop the mind now, not to worry about what is ahead and what has happened. But learning to observe the present with skill. Try to get established in this until you are here. Then you will be able to face anything with an undisturbed mind. And when you try to avoid foreseen activities and bondages, restraining your inner inclination, remember this is *kamma*. And when you are fully directing the mind, things would change from outside.

- **Very Important: You must learn to get along alone. Because what is ultimately to be cultivated, goes beyond outside access and intervention, and in any case the outside situations change too. I too had support for five years and was left alone. Then I have to go through the *Suttas* by myself. There is *kamma* behind all these things. You may meet certain people who would give support at different levels. You must be like a clever sailor or a mountaineer, not going straight through but criss-cross[ing] never losing the aim.**

- For your uncle: *Sigālaka Sutta* (DN31; to Sigālaka), *Mettā Bhāvanā*, *Buddhism in a Nutshell* by Nārada Thera.

- You may discuss it with your parents and relatives. Prestige is not important. In any case all this material gain ultimately brings disaster. And you may tell your future aim. And you

23 This refers to the story of Raṭṭhapāla, the wealthy young man who renounced against his parents' wishes to become a monk, but would later use that opportunity to teach them the Dhamma. The context here is acting with firm conviction when the time is right, but always maintaining harmony.

may openly tell the difficulties faced when attending the classes etc.

- Even to enter the Saṅgha, there is *kamma* behind it. So one must try to support the bhikkhus to get on undisturbed.

- It is impossible that you spend the whole time in *pīti* [rapture] and happiness.

- **Regarding women, act in the way Venerable Ānanda was advised to do—*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).**[24]

- **When you go to the classes and when you practice restraint etc. you are practicing the Dhamma.**

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- We may meet again or not or these conditions may come or will not come. But what is important is that you direct to the Dhamma in whatever condition one is in. That this state of mind is undisturbed. One lives in the present, that itself is a happiness. And making the conditions more suitable to do that undisturbed and continuously in a harmonized way. Because when the objects change very fast, it is difficult to practice this.

- The Hindus and so on, when their teacher dies, the pupils [seek] out where he is [re-]born and bring him back to teach. The yogis, no doubt, work very hard. They consider that which they [strive] for as permanent, but it is [still] within consciousness and therefore a formation. All formations are *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (non-

24 The term 'women' is used here as it reflects the specific monastic context of the Buddha's original advice to his chief attendant and cousin, Ven. Ānanda. While the example is framed for male renunciants, the essential teaching is a universal one for any practitioner: to cultivate sense restraint when faced with sensual attraction.

self). They have *asmi-māna* (ego-conceit), but the bhikkhus do not.

- Many arahants at the time of the Buddha were previously in the Brahmaloka[25] or one who has cultivated *jhāna*. When they met the Buddha they easily attained *jhāna* and arahantship. In any case they experienced what they have done (the *kamma*) to come back to the human world (*manussaloka*).

- You may not be able to sit in *bhāvanā*[26] all the time. But you may go a step below, and contribute towards the concentration by reading the *Suttas*, reciting striking stanzas and memorizing etc.

- The Buddha as Bodhisatta (king Makhādeva—*Makhādeva Sutta* (MN83; king Makhādeva)) arose many times in the Brahmaloka, but came back, still a *puthujjana* (common worldling). Until he understood the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). Then he became the *Dhamma Rāja* (king of Dhamma).

25 Brahmaloka—the heavenly realms of form and formless existence inhabited by beings who have attained high meditative states *(jhānas)*. Though long-lived and peaceful, these realms are still within *saṁsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) and thus impermanent.

26 Ven. Gnanaloka explains that, according to Ven. Ñāṇavimala, *bhāvanā* (meditation) is not simply about being able to sit for hours. He cautioned that progress stagnates when sitting lacks the right foundation, as some can sit for long periods and still not advance in the Dhamma. The essential preparation lies in reading and contemplation, which builds the necessary foundation of wisdom and actively contributes to the quality of *samādhi*.

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[Editor's Note: The following *Sutta* list is from a final set of notes that Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself classified, considering it "very important." The list was given to Ven. Mettavihārī with the instruction to share it with Shanaka. The list continues on to the next day.][27]

Kāma ādīnava

[These discourses detail the danger (*ādīnava*) and eventual suffering inherent in sensuality (*kāma*).]

- *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN139; the exposition of non-conflict)
- *Pāsādika Sutta* (DN29; the delightful discourse)
- *Satipaṭṭhānasaṁyutta* (SN47; connected discourses on the establishments of mindfulness)
- *Subha Sutta* (MN99; to Subha)
- *Māgandiya Sutta* (MN75; to Māgandiya)
- *Dhammapada 215* (Dhp215; from lust arises grief, from lust arises fear)
- *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN22; the simile of the snake)
- *Potaliya Sutta* (MN54; to Potaliya)
- *Bāhirātītādianatta Sutta* (SN35.203; the past, etc., as nonself (external)
- *Viveka Sutta* (SN9.1; seclusion)

27 Errors in the *Sutta Nipāta* citations (misclassified *Suttas* or incorrect verse numbering) found in the original notes have been corrected.

- *Upaṭṭhāna Sutta* (SN9.2; rousing)
- *Therī Gāthā 488* (Thig488; sensual pleasures are like a butcher's knife)
- *Anussatiṭṭhāna Sutta* (AN6.25; recollection)
- *Bhaya Sutta* (AN8.56; peril)
- *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* (Snp1.3, v.50; on seeing peril in sensual pleasures)
- *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* (Snp1.3, v.51; on the fear and danger in sensual pleasures)
- *Uraga Sutta* (Snp1.1, v.2; on cutting off passion entirely)
- *Uraga Sutta* (Snp1.1, v.5; on finding no essence in existence)
- *Uraga Sutta* (Snp1.1, v.7; on scattering doubt and inner freedom)
- *Dhammika Sutta* (Snp2.14, v.388; on a monk's conduct after alms—inward reflection)
- *Āneñjasappāya Sutta* (MN106; the way to the imperturbable)
- *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* (Snp1.3, v.61; on freedom from attachment and wandering alone)
- *Padhāna Sutta* (Snp3.2, v.436; on Māra's challenges during the Bodhisatta's striving for enlightenment)

Nekkhamma ānisaṁsa

[These discourses detail the advantage (*ānisaṁsa*) and profound spiritual peace achieved through renunciation (*nekkhamma*), contrasting it with the inherent stress of sensual life.]

- *Laṭukikopama Sutta* (MN66; the simile of the quail)
- *Saḷāyatanavibhanga Sutta* (MN137; the exposition of the sixfold base)
- *Araṇavibhanga Sutta* (MN139; the exposition of non-conflict)
- *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN13; the greater discourse on the mass of suffering)
- *Pāsādika Sutta* (DN29; the delightful discourse)
- *Phāsuvihāra Sutta* (AN5.94; dwelling at ease)
- *Samādhibhāvanā Sutta* (AN4.41; concentration)
- *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement)
- *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN14; the shorter discourse on the mass of suffering)
- *Māgandiya Sutta* (MN75; to Māgandiya)
- *Sammāsamādhi Sutta* (AN5.113; concentration);
- *Padhāna Sutta* (Snp3.2, v.425; on the Bodhisatta's exertion near the Nerañjarā River in pursuit of Nibbāna)
- *Jatukaṇṇimāṇavapucchā* (Snp5.11, v.1099; on letting go of past, future, and present to dwell in calm)
- *Naḷakapāna Sutta* (MN68; at Naḷakapāna)
- *Paṭhamatajjhāna Sutta* (AN6.73; first *jhāna,* first)
- *Ādhipateyya Sutta* (AN3.40; authorities)
- *Dutiyatajjhāna Sutta* (AN6.74; first *jhāna,* second)
- *Arahatta Sutta* (AN6.66; arahant)

Kāma assādo

[These discourses detail the gratification or appeal (*assādo*) that initially draws the mind to sensual objects.]

- *Saḷāyatanavibhanga Sutta* (MN137; the exposition of the sixfold base)
- *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN13; the greater discourse on the mass of suffering)
- *Laṭukikopama Sutta* (MN66; the simile of the quail)
- *Paṁsudhovaka Sutta* (AN3.101; the soil remover)

Kālaṁ āgameyya (waiting for one's time/death)

[These discourses focus on the contemplation of mortality and sickness—the practice of facing the body's inevitable decay with mindfulness and equanimity.]

- *Paṭhamagelañña Sutta* (SN36.7; the sick ward, first)
- *Dutiyagelañña Sutta* (SN36.8; the sick ward, second)
- *Paṭhamagilāna Sutta* (SN35.74; sick 1)

Kāya phassa

[These discourses detail the nature of physical feeling (*kāya phassa).*]

- *Dutiyagilāna Sutta* (SN35.75; sick 2)
- *Salla Sutta* (SN36.6; the dart)

Anusaya

[This summary reflects the Buddha's analysis common in *Suttas* such as the *Salla Sutta* (SN36.6; the dart). Painful feeling

(*dukkha vedanā*) gives rise to aversion (*paṭighānusaya*), pleasant feeling (*sukha vedanā*) to lust (*rāgānusaya*), and neutral feeling (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*) to ignorance (*avijjānusaya*).]

- *dukkha ~ paṭighānusayo*
- *sukha ~ rāgānusayo*
- *adukkhamasukha ~ avijjānusayo*

Mātugāma

[These discourses provide specific instruction on sense-restraint (*indriya saṁvara sīla*) for the celibate practitioner. They address the need to safeguard the mind from sensual desire *(kāmacchanda)—a* practice that requires recognizing the danger in attachment to the physical form of the opposite sex. This is a technical antidote for monastic commitment, not a general commentary on gender. Ven. Ñāṇavimala gave this to Shanaka to emphasise how strong this fetter is.]

- *Mātāputta Sutta* (AN5.55; mother and son)
- *Paṭhamabandhana Sutta* (AN8.17; bondage 1)
- *Dutiyabandhana Sutta* (AN8.18; bondage 2)
- *Paṭhamakaṇhasappa Sutta* (AN5.229; snake 1)
- *Dutiyakaṇhasappa Sutta* (AN5.230; snake 2)
- *Dutiyaaggi Sutta* (AN7.47; sacrifice)
- *Paṭhamasaññā Sutta* (AN7.48; perceptions 1)
- *Thera Gāthā* 455 (Thag455; five kinds of sensual pleasure)
- *Thera Gāthā* 456 (Thag456; the horrors of the charnel ground)

- *Thera Gāthā* 457 (Thag457; avoid like a snake's head with a foot)
- *Biḷāra Sutta* (SN20.10; the cat)
- *Cātumā Sutta* (MN67; at Cātumā)
- *Dhammapada* 284 (Dhp284; if the slightest craving remains, the mind stays bound, like a calf suckling its mother)
- *Bhāradvāja Sutta* (SN35.127; Bhāradvāja)

Samudaya

[These discourses detail the Origin *(Samudaya)* of suffering—the Second Noble Truth. They focus on identifying craving, clinging, and wrong view as the fuel that perpetuates the cycle of existence. The texts use canonical similes to illustrate how internal craving is the cause of external suffering.]

- *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN22; the simile of the snake);
- *Nibbedhika Sutta* (AN6.63; penetrative);
- *Āditta Sutta* (SN1.41; ablaze)

Attagamo

[These discourses focus on how the sense of "I" or self-reference is mentally constructed and maintained.]

- *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (MN18; the honeyball)
- *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN19; two kinds of thought)
- *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta* (MN38; the greater discourse on the destruction of craving)
- *Bāhirātītādianatta Sutta* (SN35.203; the past, etc., as nonself (external))

- *Upādāna Sutta* (SN12.52; clinging);
- *Puṇṇovāda Sutta* (MN145; advice to Puṇṇa)

Nissaraṇa

[These discourses detail the Escape (*Nissaraṇa*) from suffering.]

- *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN13; the greater discourse on the mass of suffering)
- *Upādāna Sutta* (SN12.52; clinging)
- *Puṇṇovāda Sutta* (MN145; advice to Puṇṇa)
- *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN28; the greater discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint)
- *Nadīsota Sutta* (Iti109; a river); even with pain, abandon sensual desire.
- *Yogakkhemi Sutta* (SN35.104; secure from bondage)
- *Thera Gāthā 669* (Thag669; the suffering of seclusion is better than the happiness of sensual pleasures).

Nava Bhikkhu

[These discourses provide essential guidance and qualities for the new monk (*nava* bhikkhu). They detail the necessary conduct and progressive training in the Dhamma and Vinaya.]

- *Andhakavinda Sutta* (AN5.114; Andhakavinda)
- *Pahārāda Sutta* (AN8.19; Pahārāda)

Samaṇa Vagga

[These discourses detail the ideal qualities and necessary conduct of the true ascetic (*samaṇa*). They define the

requirements for genuine spiritual life, emphasizing discipline (*vinaya*) and wisdom (*paññā*).]

- *Samaṇa Sutta* (AN3.81; ascetics)
- *Gadrabha Sutta* (AN3.82; the donkey)
- *Khetta Sutta* (AN3.83; the field)
- *Vajjiputta Sutta* (AN3.84; the young Vajji)
- *Sekkha Sutta* (AN3.85; a trainee)
- *Paṭhamasikkhā Sutta* (AN3.86; the process of training 1)
- *Dutiyasikkhā Sutta* (AN3.87; the process of training 2)
- *Tatiyasikkhā Sutta* (AN3.88; the process of training 3)
- *Paṭhamasikkhattaya Sutta* (AN3.89; the trainings 1)
- *Dutiyasikkhattaya Sutta* (AN3.90; the trainings 2)
- *Paññā Sutta* (AN8.2; wisdom)



Ven. Madihe Paññāsīha Mahānāyaka Thera visiting Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, with Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera and Ven. Pannipitiye Upasama attending to the Mahāthera (circa 2000s).

REFLECTION 07

Final Lessons on Detachment

Even as illness and age pressed upon him, Ven. Ñāṇavimala remained unmoved, like a mountain, standing firm against wind and storm. Whether in the solitude of forests or the sterility of hospital corridors, his practice did not concern itself with altering the outer world but with a steady, inward response to it through reflection and equanimity.

From early on in his monk's life at Polgasduwa Island Hermitage, this became evident. At the time, as the hermitage's disciplined character began to change, attracting a different kind of monastic and lay visitor, many of the senior monks felt it was no longer conducive to their practice and departed one by one. Ven. Ñāṇavimala remained.

"For *karmic* reasons," he once said, "we receive a particular place and teacher. To remain there also offers support for the rest." He held that leaving should not be done hastily, but in consultation with the Saṅgha. He stayed for a decade.

When he finally began his wandering life (*cārikā*), it was not from dissatisfaction, but as a natural unfolding of the path.

After those long years of wandering, his health began to decline. The toll of *cārikā* and advancing age showed themselves most markedly after he returned first to Siri Vajirarama Temple and then to Polgasduwa Hermitage. There, severe prolonged diarrhea rapidly diminished his weight and vitality.

Characteristically, he made nothing of his condition, maintaining his daily practice of receiving alms at the *dāna sālā* [1] and, when

1 *Dāna sālā* is the hall where monks gather to eat the single meal of the day, which has been provided by lay supporters.

special requests were made, giving Dhamma advice or blessings. To outside eyes, this decline of physical condition was a time of hardship; but Shanaka sensed something altogether different—a palpable dispassion, and a detachment from the body that preserved his radiance even as his strength faded.

Ven. Gnanaloka described one such occasion, when he was still a layman at Polgasduwa, when Ven. Ñāṇavimala first lost consciousness:

"On that particular day I was washing items in the *dāna sālā* when alarmed attendants and monks rushed to tell me of Bhante's condition. I found him unresponsive, his head drooping and both hands composedly clasped in his lap.

Yet remarkably his face retained its moonlike radiance—that glow never dimmed, creating an unforgettable image. All present were hesitant to intervene, as he had never before allowed anyone to assist him in such an intimate manner."

Shanaka then gently laid Ven. Ñāṇavimala's body down flat.

"I reached for Ven. Ñāṇavimala's belt, quickly pulled out the keys, and ran to his kuṭi. I found the medicinal honey he kept and ran back with it. Placing it on his tongue, I remember being struck by the radiance that still seemed to emanate from his unconscious body. I could not tell whether it was the honey, the passage of time, or something else, but suddenly he regained consciousness and spoke the following in Pāli:

'*Vayadhammā saṅkhārā… uppādavayadhammino; uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho*. (All conditioned things are impermanent … they are of the nature to arise and pass away; having arisen, they cease. Their stilling is bliss.)'[2]

2 This utterance stems from *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days)—the Buddha's final words—combined with Sakka's verse from the *Parinibbāna Sutta* (SN6.15; final Nibbāna)

'*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti yadā paññāya passati, atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā*. (When one perceives with wisdom that all conditioned things are impermanent, then one turns away from suffering. This is the path of purification.)'[3]

Then he said, 'This foul body, just lift this up.'

At that moment, I realized that his consciousness had faded while reflecting on these verses, and it was those same reflections that brought him back. This was my first time physically assisting him. It was a moment of mixed emotions—on one hand bearing witness to the helpless nature of the human body of someone so remarkable, but on the other a most joyous experience at the rare privilege of being by his side during this time. It was both the saddest and happiest day of my life."

Doctors would periodically come and check up on Ven. Ñāṇavimala at the hermitage, and would often leave with a sense of admiration. Once, a new doctor came to perform a medical check-up. Unfamiliar with Ven. Ñāṇavimala's character and perhaps overzealous to treat his declining health, the visiting doctor was met with a single remark:

"There is no medicine for old age."

While his mind met old age with such clarity, his body's decline soon became undeniable. Worn from years of austere wandering, his body now demanded a level of care he had long resisted. Yet even here his practice revealed itself, not as resistance to aging and sickness, but as a direct meeting of them.

In line with his austerity, he chose to be admitted to a government hospital and whilst there he remained the same: inwardly composed, outwardly simple. His preference for public over private care was

3 *Dhammapada* (Dhp 277)

not incidental; it reflected his lifelong consistency. For one who had rejected comforts, a hospital ward was no different from a kuṭi or a forest glade; it was merely another setting for practice.

Shanaka, who now became one of his close attendants, visited regularly, and Ven. Ñāṇavimala would sense his presence before even seeing him. Recognising the sound of his footsteps in the corridor, he would softly call out, "Shanaka, Shanaka," to Venerable Mettavihārī, who was the other close attendant there.

Sometimes Shanaka slept on the floor beside the hospital bed, keeping a watchful eye over his teacher.

Ven. Gnanaloka recalls those hospital days vividly:

"I possessed great faith but little experience in caring for anyone. Yet I remained present, offering a kind of protection that I could."

Even during these times, Ven. Ñāṇavimala's independence was apparent. He had once warned Shanaka: "Don't be in the hands of the devotees."

Ven. Ñāṇavimala was concerned about what he saw happening: how temples and monasteries were often beholden to devotees, doing things primarily to please them. Especially if they held a high standing in society, he saw monastics would go out of their way to maintain close relationships, at the expense of their practice.

He thus cautioned Shanaka against becoming *Āmisa-garu*—weighed down by material gains. It is when a practitioner begins to honor the worldly offerings—comfortable lodgings, rich offerings and the praise of followers—above the internal work.

This speaks to the balance of monastic life. The Buddha intentionally established the monastic order so that monks were not self-sufficient. By forbidding them from growing food, picking fruit from trees, or handling money, he made them reliant not just

on the lay community, but on faith itself. This physical dependence for material needs—food, robes, shelter, and medicine—served to continually remind monks of their non-ownership. Survival depends entirely on the kindness of others.

Yet, alongside this dependence, Ven. Ñāṇavimala showed by example an inward autonomy. While the body relied on the world for its very life, the mind had to remain rooted in the Dhamma rather than the favor or opinions of others. This was *Dhamma-garu*—placing the weight of respect only upon the truth.

He warned that the Buddha described how the *sāsana* (Buddha's dispensation) decays from within when the mind loses its edge, when worldly benefits become the priority,[4] and the path to liberation is traded for a comfortable cage. Through watching him live, Shanaka took to heart the weight of this warning.

After being hospitalized, Ven. Ñāṇavimala accepted assistance, but never gave favor to any attendant. More often, seeing there was another attendant available, he would instruct Shanaka to return to his practice and give the other attendant an opportunity to earn good merits. The lesson was subtle but unmistakable: service too must not become a form of clinging.

Ven. Gnanaloka later reflected: "There was no difference between the first day I met him and the last day I met him." Outwardly he could be close and kind, but inwardly he maintained a steady dispassion, balanced with a universal compassion that never leaned into intimacy.

The steady discipline carried into his daily routine. Even within hospital walls, he seemed to erase the distinction between day and night. Ven. Gnanaloka recalls how at 2 a.m., he would engage in

4 Refer to *Dhammadāyāda Sutta* (MN3; heirs in Dhamma), *Sīha Sutta* (AN5.99; the lion), *Tatiyaanāgatabhaya Sutta* (AN5.79; future perils, third), *Catutthaanāgatabhaya Sutta* (AN5.80; future perils, fourth)

walking meditation in the hospital corridors, quietly pacing every two hours. Even when lying down, there seemed to be a watchful awareness that carried with him.

One day Shanaka was doing walking meditation on the balcony of the hospital ward, as Ven. Ñāṇavimala watched. When Shanaka returned, Ven. Ñāṇavimala asked him:

"Did you meet your friend… your thoughts?"

Then, after a pause, he added with a soft smile,

"Don't overdo it. Take some rest."

It was how he spoke of wandering thoughts, those passing visitors of the mind. He had once advised Shanaka not to forcibly chase them away, but to meet them gently as if they were a guest, and let them pass on their own. Then the underlying tendency to aversion finds no ground to grow.

What stayed with Shanaka were moments like these—the peculiar, but illuminating way of teaching hidden in simple exchanges.

As his teacher's health declined, those small exchanges took on a deeper tone. Ven. Ñāṇavimala later needed to stay at Siri Vajirarama Temple as it was easier to access medicines and appropriate care. During this period, one incident left a lasting imprint on Ven. Gnanaloka.

He recalls entering Ven. Ñāṇavimala's room and offering to help adjust his body in bed. He replied with an uncharacteristically abrupt "No!"

Then, after a pause, he asked, "Did anything touch you?"

Shanaka was confused until he realized that stool had involuntarily passed from Ven. Ñāṇavimala's frail body. The moment this was understood, Ven. Ñāṇavimala's response was piercing:

"Whether it's inside or outside, it doesn't make a difference."

The body, the Buddha taught, is just elements (*dhātu*)—solidity (*pathavī*), fluidity (*āpo*), heat (*tejo*), and motion (*vāyo*). Inside, outside. All the same. Nothing to claim as 'mine.' Just nature unfolding.

Ven. Gnanaloka recalls "he was looking at his body with that reality, really meaning it. You could feel it." At first, Ven. Ñāṇavimala declined Shanaka's offer of help, stating he would wait for the other attendants. But when Shanaka remained quietly beside him, he consented.

What stood out through the years was not hardship, but the steadiness of a life wholly given to the Dhamma. In old age, pain often makes people irritable, understandably so. Yet even facing severe hardship, he never complained to his attendants.

Only once did Shanaka see that his body was overwhelmed. For a couple of hours, soft sounds escaped—the low groaning "er" of physical pain, the body expressing what the mind seemed to not do. Alarmed, Shanaka rushed to his side, fearing he may be close to dying.

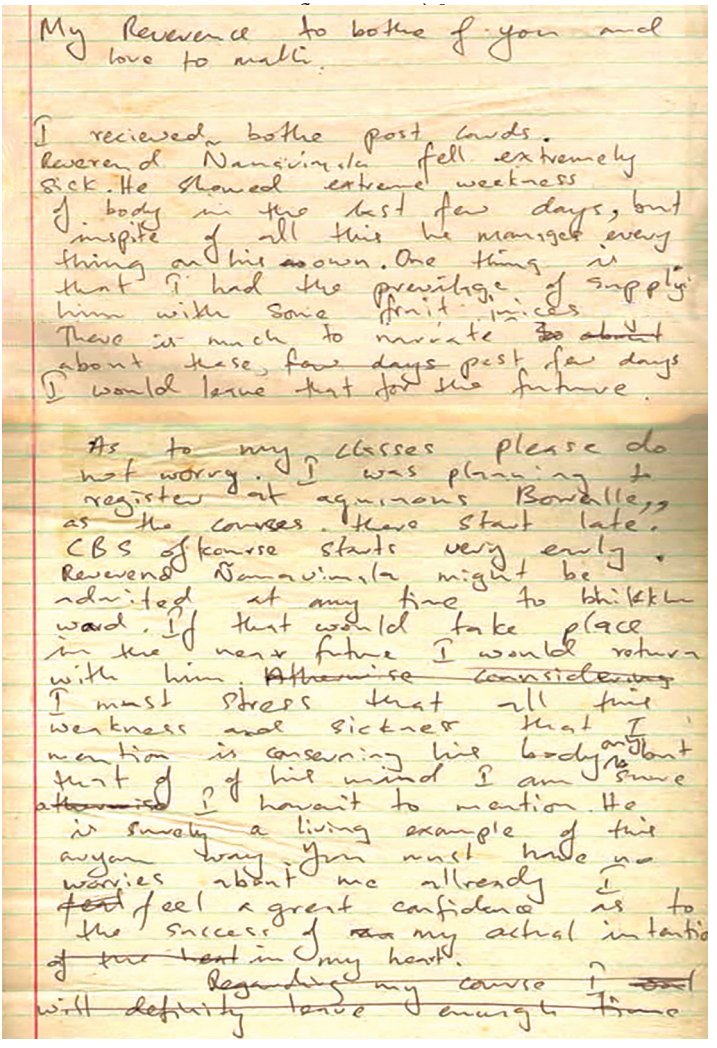
Ven. Ñāṇavimala's response was: "Don't worry. Why are you worried? Everything has to go. We will all have to pass away."

Since the first day he got a chance to physically assist Ven. Ñāṇavimala at Polgasduwa, a thought remained with Ven. Gnanaloka: a single day of his teacher's existence on earth offered more worth than the entirety of our lifetimes, for his presence was a rare light that shone upon both the Buddha's Dispensation (*sāsana*) and the world. How fortunate to encounter one who walked the spiritual path with uncompromising focus and complete dedication. While many pursue this spiritual journey with admirable knowledge and sincerity, Ven. Ñāṇavimala stood apart—a life that was not an

interpretation of the Dhamma, but its living expression.

Shanaka's draft letter to his family

(date unknown; likely written during the period described in



My Reverence to bothe of you and love to malli.

I recieved bothe post cards. Reverend Nanaviməla fell extremely sick. He showed extreme weakness of body in the last few days, but inspite of all this he managed every thing on his own. One thing is that I had the previlage of supply him with some fruit juices. There is much to narrate ~~to about~~ about these ~~four days~~ past few days I would leave that for the future.

As to my classes please do not worry. I was planning to register at aquinons Bandalle,, as the courses have start late. CBS of course starts very early. Reverend Ñanaviməla might be admited at any time to bhikkhu ward. If that would take place in the near future I would return with him. ~~Otherwise considering~~ I must stress that all this weakness and sickness that I mention is conserning his body and not that of his mind I am sure ~~otherwise~~ I have'nt to mention. He is surely a living example of this aryan ~~teaching~~ you must have no worries about me allready I ~~feel~~ feel a great confidence is to the success of my actual intention ~~of true heart~~ in my heart.

Regarding my course I ~~shall~~ will definitly leave enough time

5 Ven. Gnanaloka recalls that this letter was written to reassure his worried parents, who were urging him to continue his studies. During this period, he received many practical gems from Ven. Ñāṇavimala simply by being in his presence—many of which are documented in Reflection 06.

"My reverence to both of you and love to Malli [younger brother].

I received both postcards. Reverend Ñāṇavimala fell extremely sick. He showed extreme weakness of body in the last few days, but in spite of all this he manages everything on his own. One thing is that I had the privilege of supplying him with fruit juices. There is much to narrate about these past few days. I would leave that for the future.

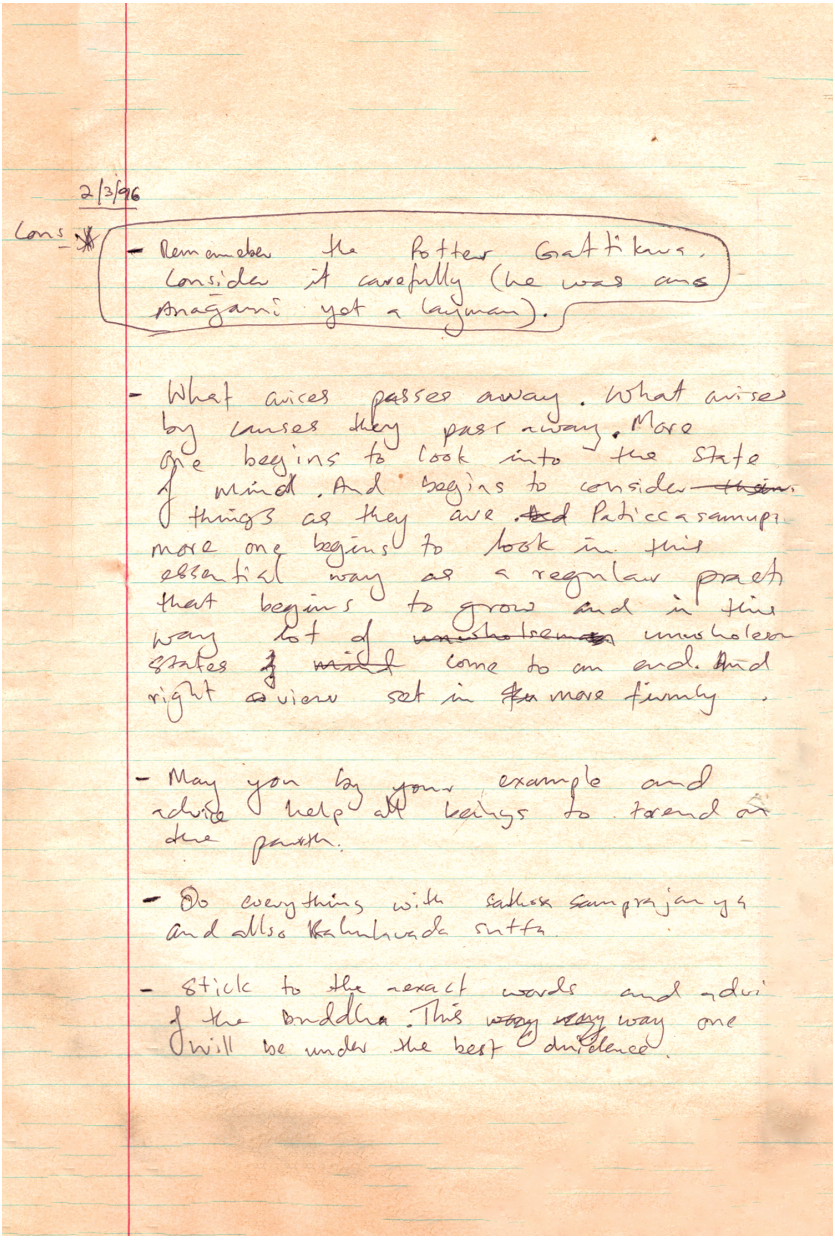
As to my classes, please do not worry. I was planning to register at Aquinas Borella, as the courses there start late. CBS of course starts very early. Reverend Ñāṇavimala might be admitted at any time to the Bhikkhu Ward. If that would take place in the near future. I would return with him. I must stress that all this weakness and sickness, that I mentioned is concerning his body only but that of his mind I'm sure I haven't to mention. He is surely a living example of this Aryan way. You must not have any worries about me. Already I feel a great confidence as to the success of my actual intentions in my heart."



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera seated at the monks' dining hall, Polgasduwa Island Hermitage—the exact place where he first lost consciousness before being assisted by Shanaka (circa mid–late 1990s).



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera offering a Dhamma discourse to lay devotees at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, among them the mother of Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera.



2/3/96

Cons

- Remember the Potter Gatikara. Consider it carefully (he was an Anagami yet a layman).

- What arises passes away. What arises by causes they pass away. More one begins to look into the State of Mind. And begins to consider ~~them~~ things as they are. ~~And~~ Paticcasamuppa more one begins to look in this essential way as a regular practice that begins to grow and in this way lot of ~~unwholesome~~ unwholesome states of ~~mind~~ come to an end. And right views set in ~~the~~ more firmly.

- May you by your example and advice help all beings to travel on the path.

- Do everything with Sakkara Sampajanya and also Kalahavada sutta.

- Stick to the exact words and advice of the Buddha. This ~~way~~ ~~way~~ way one will be under the best guidance.

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1996).

CHAPTER 07

Stick to the Exact Words of the Buddha

(Feb 1996 – April 1996)

20 February 1996

Practice step by step from 1 to 7 below:

1. *Mahānāma Sutta* (AN8.25; Mahānāma).
2. *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna).
3. *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed).
4. *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty).
5. *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).
6. *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases)—(SN22 onwards; SN50 to SN55 in *Saṁyutta*).[6]
7. ***kālaṁ āgameyya* (waiting for one's time/death).**[7]

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6 The following collections from *Bala Saṁyutta* (SN50; connected discourses on the powers) to *Sotāpatti Saṁyutta* (SN55; connected discourses on stream-entry) describe successive stages of mental development and provide a gradual training that culminates in the attainment of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*).

7 These *Suttas* are all found in the *Vedanā Saṁyutta* (SN36; connected discourses on feeling) of the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*. They deal with the nature of feelings (*vedanā*) and how to relate to them, particularly in the context of pain, illness, and suffering.

- *Salla Sutta* (SN36.6; the dart).
- *Paṭhamagelañña Sutta* (SN36.7; the sick ward 1).
- *Dutiyagelañña Sutta* (SN36.8; the sick ward 2).

❁ *Devadūta Sutta* (MN130; the divine messengers) is also good.

❁ Dīgha 2—*Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN2; the fruits of the homeless life).

❁ You can focus on these few *Suttas* for the practice and later on you may add.

❁ *Sutta* No. 7, 8, 9, 10—*Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth), *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement), *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view), *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness)—they follow one after the other, it is also important.

❁ Try to reduce talking.

❁ **May your actions speak!**

21 February 1996

❁ Try to calm down, like when you are practicing *Ānāpānasati* [Mindfulness of Breathing]. At other times, you are concerned with keeping the calmness to get back to the practice.

❁ *Mettā Bhāvanā* [Loving-kindness meditation]—this will reduce sickness etc.

22 February 1996

❁ ***Khantī*** **[Patience]**

"Khantī paramaṁ tapo titikkhā, Nibbānaṁ paramaṁ vadanti Buddhā;

Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī, Na samaṇo hoti paraṁ viheṭhayanto."

"Forbearing patience is the highest austerity. Nibbāna is supreme, say the Buddhas.

He, verily, is not a recluse who harms another. Nor is he an ascetic who oppresses others." (Dhp 184)

- Develop this heart of *mettā* in the highest way to all beings. This will be the greatest service to all beings from you.

29 February 1996

- *Majjhima Nikāya*: *Cūḷagosinga Sutta* (MN31; the shorter discourse in Gosinga); *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN28; the greater discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint); *Puṇṇovāda Sutta* (MN145; advice to Puṇṇa)—These three are connected.

- In *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness), soon after *Ānāpānasati* comes the repulsiveness of the body. To look at it as it actually is, when walking, standing etc., in all positions. So that one tears away from the *kāmaloka* (the sensual realm) altogether. When you consider that, turning away happens naturally.

- Slowly begin to practice *Majjhima* 117—*Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty) that leads to *jhāna* and then *Saṁyutta* SN22; SN50–SN55 to attain *sotāpanna*, if you continue to practice like this, at latest, at the moment of death, one will attain the path.[8]

- Ultimately, all this practice should lead to *kālaṁ āgameyya*.[9]

- *Rāhulovāda Sutta* (and reflect before sleeping to attain *jhāna* through *mettā bhāvanā*).[10]

8 This instruction summarises a progressive path of practice based on canonical sources. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty) outlines the complete structure of the Noble Eightfold Path leading towards concentration *(jhāna).* The *Khandha Saṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) provides insight into the five aggregates as subjects of clinging, supporting insight into non-self. The following collections—from SN50 through SN55—describe successive stages of mental development: the cultivation of the five spiritual powers (*Balasaṁyutta,* SN50), the bases of spiritual power *(Iddhipādasaṁyutta,* SN51), mindfulness meditation and its fruits *(Anuruddhasaṁyutta,* SN52), the absorptions *(Jhānasaṁyutta,* SN53), mindfulness of breathing *(Ānāpānasaṁyutta,* SN54), and finally, the qualities leading to stream-entry *(Sotāpattisaṁyutta,* SN55). Together, these provide a gradual training that culminates in the attainment of stream-entry *(sotāpatti).*

9 The phrase *kālaṁ āgameyya* literally means "to await one's time (of death)." In the context of practice, it signifies a state of inner preparedness and equanimity toward death—a serene acceptance that arises when craving and clinging have been weakened. It does not imply passivity or resignation, but rather the culmination of wisdom *(paññā)* and detachment, where the practitioner lives mindfully, ready to face death without fear or regret.

10 Ven. Gnanaloka elaborates: *Rāhulovāda Sutta* aka *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)—the three ways of conduct—this continuous self-reflection should be done the whole day, using it at night to help reflect on what you have done—from body, words and thoughts. Then determine the next day also not to do it, focusing on how to avoid that. When you are reflecting like this, one can get into a *samādhi*, and then proceed to attain *jhāna* (or meditative concentration) through *mettā*. Doing this before sleep, pushing to the point until one knows when the body needs sleep, then allows the body to naturally fall asleep. This kind of sleep reduces your subconscious inclinations and *kamma*.

- Regarding *Mātugāma,* in *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).[11]

- The notes you take from Venerable Mettavihārī won't be applicable at present but will be useful and available to use at a later period when required.

- It is good to make note of them and repeat them so that one doesn't forget them.

- **You won't be able to take the ten precepts when you are a layman, but you can take eight precepts *(aṭṭhaṅgika uposatha sīla)* and the *ājīvaṭṭhamaka sīla* (eight precepts focused on right speech and right livelihood).**[12]

2 March 1996

- **Remember the potter Ghaṭīkāra—*Ghaṭīkāra Sutta* (MN81; Ghaṭīkāra the potter). Consider it carefully (he was an Anāgāmi, yet a layman).**

- What arises passes away. What arises by causes they pass away. The more one begins to look into the state of mind and begin to consider things as they are—*Paṭiccasamuppāda*—the more one begins to look in this essential way as a regular practice, that begins to grow. In this way, [a] lot of unwholesome states come to an end. And Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi)* sets in more firmly.

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11 This refers to the Buddha's counsel to Ven. Ānanda in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days) regarding *mātugāma* (women): do not see; if seen, do not speak; if speech is required, maintain full mindfulness. It is a renunciant's discipline of sense restraint—a practical safeguard against sensual desire and a protection for concentration—not a blanket moral judgment.

12 The five precepts are the basic moral code for daily conduct. The eight precepts (*aṭṭhaṅgika uposatha sīla*) represent a higher spiritual discipline, requiring celibacy, abstinence from food after noon, and the avoidance of adornment, entertainment, and luxurious beds.

- May you by your example and advice, help all beings to tread on the path.
- Do everything with *sati-sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension) and also *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).
- Stick to the exact words and advice of the Buddha.[13]
- This way one will be under the best guidance.
- Whatever you do as a layman—a career etc.—it should be ultimately directed to the welfare of all beings.

3 March 1996

- Daily you may reflect on *kālaṁ āgameyya* (waiting for one's time/death) even as a layman.
- You may continue to take *ājīvaṭṭhamaka sīla* until life lasts. A lot of people do, and it will be a great support.

27 March 1996

- *Sutta* 19, 20 *Majjhima—Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN19; two kinds of thought); *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta* (MN20; the removal of distracting thoughts) for Dhamma thoughts and Dhamma speech in *Majjhima* 122—*Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness).
- Don't build up any bondages with anybody or anything except with the word of the Buddha [*Suttas*].

13 Ven. Ñāṇavimala adhered strictly to the *Sutta Piṭaka* as the complete guide for human liberation. He once commented on the detailed analytical doctrine, stating, 'Abhidhamma is for the devas,' implying its intricate framework was primarily suited for celestial beings, while the practical path for human effort lay in the *Suttas*.

- In your kuṭi you might have a place for *caṅkamana* [walking meditation]. You can go up and down fully focused and reflecting 1. The *Ādīnava* [disadvantages or dangers] 2. *Ānisaṁsa* [merit; good results] 3. Finally, Nibbāna [liberation].
- Marvels of the ocean—*Pahārāda Sutta* (AN8.19; Pahārāda) and Udāna—*Uposatha Sutta* (Ud 5.5; observance day).
- Daily recall the *Saṁvega Vatthu* (grounds for spiritual urgency)—[The Mirror of the Dhamma compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa].
- You may learn a bit of Pāli.
- For a moment, when one attains *mettā cetovimutti* [liberation of mind through loving-kindness], it will strengthen the faculties.[14]

Go through:

1. *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā), *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty).
2. *Saḷāyatana, Khandha* 22 to 55—*Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases); *Khandha Saṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) to *Sotāpattisaṁyutta* (SN55; connected discourses on stream-entry).

14 *Mettā cetovimutti*—the liberation of mind through loving-kindness—is said to temporarily purify and uplift consciousness, strengthening the five spiritual faculties *(indriya)*: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. While not a final liberation, this wholesome release (*cetovimutti*) powerfully supports the development of these faculties toward full emancipation—*Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN52; the man from Aṭṭhakanāgara).

3. MN5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth); *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement); *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness).

4. *Saṁvega Vatthu* (grounds for spiritual urgency)—[The Mirror of the Dhamma compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa].

5. *Kālaṁ āgameyya* [waiting for one's time/death].

28 March 1996

- Greek mythology originates from Hinduism. They had contact with the East. e.g. China and India, etc. So most of the myths are [influenced] from Hindu[ism].

- Even Christ had beginnings from the East. Though he could not fully grasp the Dhamma as he had a Jewish background [rooted in Abrahamic beliefs in a Creator-God]. He was highly saintly, though he allowed drinking wine and killing animals.[15]

- When old inclinations appear, one must deal with them tactfully. It is impossible to fight them.

- The one who captured Troy, he had to cross a stretch of ocean. People warned him telling him that on the one side

15 Ven. Ñāṇavimala noted that the Three Wise Men (Magi), said to come from the East, were spiritual sages (rishis) who recognized Christ as a "spiritual king." This exchange, facilitated by the ancient Silk Route, suggested that established Eastern ethical principles—non-violence and compassion—helped shape early Christian ethics. The main point is that these core ethics had Eastern resonances, even if later religious practices diverged from the strict morality *(sīla)* of the Buddhist path. Doctrinally, however, Abrahamic metaphysics—a Creator-God and an eternal soul—is fundamentally incompatible with the Dhamma's principles of non-self *(anatta)* and dependent origination *(paṭiccasamuppāda)*.

there were abysses and only death could come if you turn to that side. And on the other side there are nymphs alluring, but they are flesh eating. So he told his fellow sailors to cover their ears with wax and to tie him to the mast and if he tries to loosen himself, then to tighten further. This was to be done until that stretch was passed. In the case of the bhikkhu, it is the practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna*.[16]

- **The other is how the cowherd beat the cows when they ate the harvest. When they decided to eat again, they recalled the painful experience. So, they never went there—[*Vīṇopama Sutta* (SN35.246; the simile of the lute)]. Similarly, you should think of *kāma ādīnava* (the drawbacks of sensuality) and *nekkhamma ānisaṁsa* (the advantages of renunciation).**

- *Satipaṭṭhāna*—the *asubha* (of the *kāmaloka*) and then *Ānāpānasati.*

- MN107, 117—How to attain *jhāna*—*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty) + *Saṁyutta* 22 to 55—*Khandha Saṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) to *Sotāpattisaṁyutta* (SN55; connected discourses on stream-entry).

- Marvels of the ocean—*Pahārāda Sutta* (AN8.19; Pahārāda). How to be a true representative of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha.

16 This is a reference to the journey of the Greek hero Odysseus in Homer's The Odyssey (Book XII). Ven. Ñāṇavimala uses it to convey a powerful Dhamma teaching: Shanaka's note fuses two separate threats to create a single simile for sensual craving (*kāma-sukha*): the Sirens (who used their alluring songs to tempt sailors) and the monstrous, flesh-eating Scylla (who caused literal death). Odysseus's instruction to be tied to the mast and use ear wax represents the fierce determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*) and disciplined sense-restraint (*indriya saṁvara sīla*) required to survive the temptation of the pleasures and avoid their resulting dangers (*ādīnava*).

- You should [skillfully] accommodate yourself to the place and situation to create harmony.
- Saṅgha is also a formation. It lasted 2500 years, the Buddha foresaw the decline of the *sāsana*. That is why Vinaya was brought as an outside formation to support the longevity of the *sāsana*. In the beginning the bhikkhus were allowed to live as they wish, as most of them used to attain arahantship as soon as they entered [the order].
    1. *Itivuttaka* (along the stream what one meets, the dangers)—[*Nadīsota Sutta* (Iti109; a river)]
    2. *Dhammapada* (Dhp; verses of the Dhamma)
- In the night, try to sleep with a fresh, peaceful mind so that one will avoid unwholesome impressions throughout the night. And it will be highly *puñña* (meritorious) supporting one's future.

30 March 1996

- As I see it I think you should attend the classes and pass the examination at this point.
- I hope you will attain, in the evening, *mettā cetovimutti* [liberation of mind through loving-kindness]. It will help you. It is a merit for future happiness.
- If people arise in a lower world, [they] will miss Metteyya Buddha also.[17]
- Marvels of the ocean—*Uposatha Sutta* (Ud5.5; observance day) e.g. [even] at the cost of life, do not transgress a training

17 This likely refers to the tendency of some Buddhists to delay or postpone effort in meditation, believing they will attain liberation under the future Buddha, Metteyya (Maitreya). Ven. Ñāṇavimala's point highlights the danger of such complacency—those reborn in lower realms will miss that opportunity entirely.

rule laid down by the Buddha—*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at *Ambalaṭṭhikā*) and to attain path *Saṁyutta* 22 to 55.

3 April 1996

- *Majjhima* 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth); *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement); *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness).

- *Mahānāma Suttas* (as a layman this is the base, and the practice should be the *Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases)). As a bhikkhu MN107, 117, 125—*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed) and then *Khandha* and *Saḷāyatana*, then you are *gotrabhū* [who has entered the lineage of the Noble Ones]—then one is fit to take the *dāna* [offering given by people].

4 April 1996

- *Majjhima* 28—*Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN28; the greater discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint).

- *Majjhima* 122—*Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness).

- Don't do [any] work that is indirectly not connected to the main practice, in a way that you would say, 'after that work is finished, then I will start reflecting on the *Dhamma*.' Know

[that the practice] should happen then also. Because if we die at that time we will arise according to that nature of things. So the practice should be always directed to *sampajañña* [clear comprehension], and then to *sampajañña* [clear comprehension], and attaining the path.

- You may not live [with] any kind of expectation etc., that is an illusion, when you are practicing the true Dhamma there is no disappointment.

- *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā), *Saṁyutta* 22—*Khandha* and *Saḷāyatana* and *kālaṁ āgameyya,* you may stick to a couple of *Suttas* and practice them. It is more than enough.

- The determination to help all beings which you have decided upon, you may go with that—State of Mind.

9 April 1996

- *Suttas* MN5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth); *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement); *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness). Go through them slowly and pick the ones that are conspicuous at the moment. Deal with them individually. When they are overcome you would notice the others, then you can set about them as before.

- Now the noble eightfold path has to be slowly cultivated. Then there is *sammā samādhi, sammā ñāṇa* and finally *sammā vimutti*, then you will know how to get about (*Majjhima* 64)—*Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (MN64; the greater

discourse to Mālunkyāputta).[18]

- Know only a little experience will come initially in *mettā bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation), but as you go on, the experience will be strengthened and it will be a more complete experience.

- You may give your foreign friends and other newcomers, in the beginning, *Kesamutti Sutta* (AN3.65; Kesaputtiya), and maybe *Dhammapada*, seeing their response; and you may find suitable ways and means to deal with them. For ones who are a little advanced, the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).

- As time goes on you will get the ability to help others with a more pure state of mind, and then you will know what is appropriate for them and how to use your thoughts.

- You don't have to write a big letter, you can just write "best wishes" only. [regarding writing to parents and friends]

- Ultimately, one must prepare oneself for *kālaṁ āgameyya* [waiting for one's time/death]. For that, you slowly reduce the feelings, making them finer. Because after all, it is nothing but feelings, perception, consciousness, *pañcupādānakkhandha* (five aggregates subject to clinging).

12 April 1996

- You would find nothing from outside that is more helpful than what you have already inside, in the form of understanding etc. (This is in relation to following the Dhamma's way of life).

18 This progression refers to the tenfold path of a "noble one," which extends beyond the standard Noble Eightfold Path. While the eighth factor is *sammā samādhi* (Right Concentration), it is followed by *sammā ñāṇa* (Right Knowledge) and *sammā vimutti* (Right Liberation), which together represent the final insight and complete freedom of an enlightened being.

- It is sad to say that the essence of the practice is almost lost everywhere. People are getting more used to living a comfortable life.

- *Majjhima* 135—*Cūḷakammavibhanga Sutta* (MN135; the shorter exposition of action); To Gotamī [*Dakkhiṇāvibhanga Sutta* (MN142; the exposition of offerings)].

14 April 1996

- *Suttas* MN5, 6, 7 etc.—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth) etc. in *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *kilesas* are mentioned in detail.

- [In] any situation, keep the inside calm, never be disturbed, this is the very practice of the Dhamma.

- The body is not the Arahant, it is unthinkable.[19]

- We must go in stages. First raise the mind to higher states or stages from the grosser level with all its gross defilements—that is the realm of devas. In that state there is not this kind of [physical] body. But one must know that all formations [even heavenly ones] are *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*. So while in this human state one can do the highest reflection and already transcend the whole situation of forming by attaining the path, etc.

19 Ven. Gnanaloka explains what Ven. Ñāṇavimala means: People will try to determine whether someone has attained arahantship by observing the body—appearance or physical and verbal actions. But arahantship has not occurred in the body; it has occurred with regard to consciousness. To perceive this, one must at minimum be able to perceive another's consciousness, which is not possible for one without such capability. Additionally, one must know what insights have arisen. For one who has not destroyed defilements fully, it is thus "unthinkable." People interpret according to the level of their own defilements.

- Never let the mind ponder and go back to past events etc. Try to bring it to the present, and that is *kamma.*[20]

- Always from *āmisa* to *nirāmisa sukha.*[21] Never the other way.

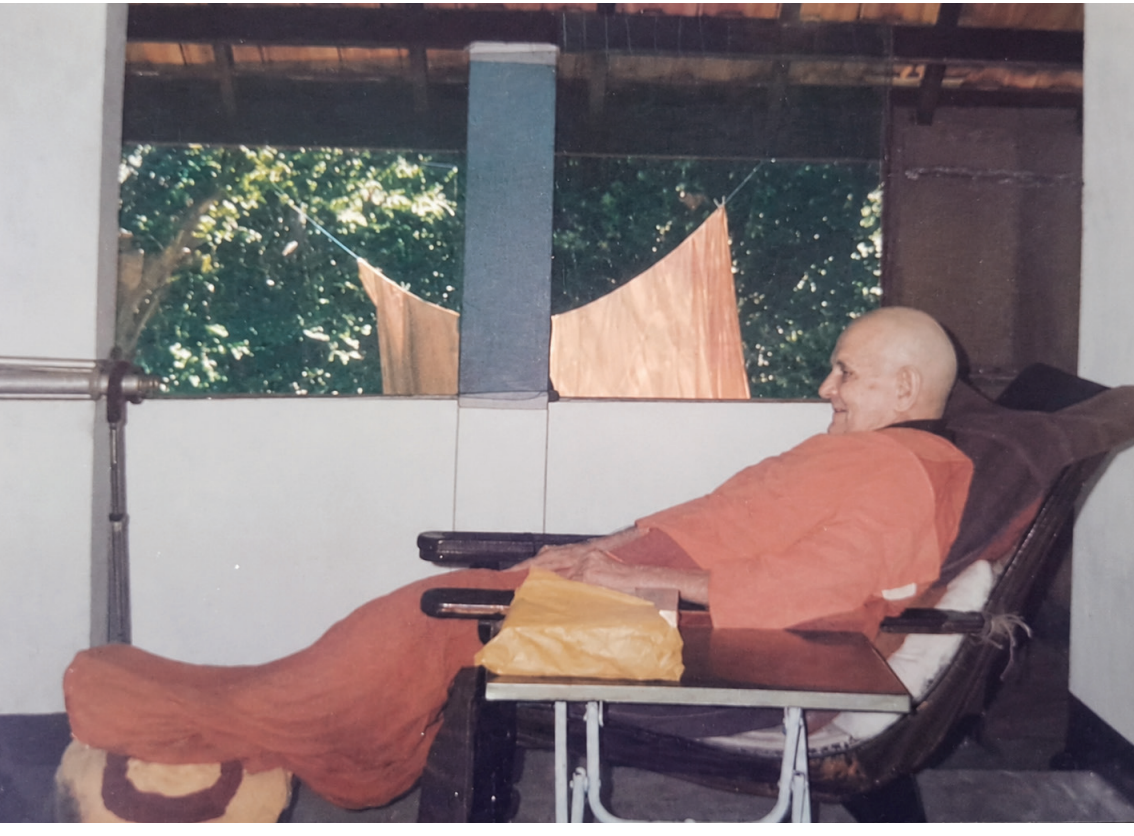
- Must never neglect to increase and grow the *Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, sati* [mindful recollection of the Triple Gem] or *saddhā* [faith and confidence in them].

- What to speak etc. in *Sutta* 122 in *Majjhima—Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness).

- Always overcoming the *nīvaraṇas* [five mental hindrances] and developing the *indriyas* [five spiritual faculties]. *Saṁyutta* 22 to 55 etc. This is done in stages first fulfilling the noble eightfold path.

20 Ven. Ñāṇavimala explained that the deliberate effort to bring the mind to the present moment, and even the purposeful avoidance of mental distractions, constitutes new wholesome *kamma* (*kusala kamma*). This intentional redirection of energy in the present moment is a powerful action that will bear positive results, strengthening the path.

21 *Āmisa sukha* is "worldly happiness," the fleeting pleasure that comes from satisfying the five senses. *Nirāmisa sukha* is "spiritual happiness," the more profound and stable joy that arises from renunciation, meditation, and wisdom.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala, Parappaduwa

REFLECTION 08

Breath, Consciousness and the Final Moment

There were rare moments when Ven. Ñāṇavimala sensed that the conditions were right, when Shanaka's mind was settled and receptive, that he would offer teachings on the deepest truths. It was during one of these quiet intervals, in the cool shade beside the library at Siri Vajirarama Temple, that he posed a question to Shanaka:

In the final moments, at physical death, is the arahant[1] able to keep the attention on the breath or does it go elsewhere?

This was no idle question. Behind it lay the profound mechanics of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and the nature of rebirth.

In the Buddha's teaching, this question is particularly significant because it touches on the ultimate goal of the path: the complete end of suffering (*dukkha*). This isn't just everyday unhappiness, but the deep, underlying stress that exists in every life, whether seemingly fortunate or not—the stress of being subject to loss, the pain of unfulfilled desire, sickness, aging and death.

Ending rebirth is the only final solution, because even a life in a peaceful heavenly realm is temporary. As Ven. Ñāṇavimala had once remarked:

1 Arahant is a fully enlightened being.

"Even the Brahma world[2] is suffering. One may re-arise even in the hell realms."

Therefore, to break this chain for good, one must see it clearly. This means understanding what binds the process of consciousness, turning it into the crucial link that connects one life to the next.

To appreciate the weight of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's question, one must first understand consciousness within the context of the Dhamma. There is the body composed of flesh and bone, but there is a difference between a body with consciousness and one without. Without consciousness, it is merely a physical object. With consciousness, there is a knowing, tied to one of the six sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind.

Take the ear faculty: there is the ear and there are sound waves. Yet consciousness does not necessarily arise. Only when there is the ear and sound is brought into attention do the conditions align for ear-consciousness to arise. When it arises, this consciousness is a 'knowing-ness' associated with that particular sense faculty. It is not an independent entity or 'soul' existing on its own. The meeting of the three: ear, sound, and ear-consciousness is 'contact' (*phassa*). From contact, feeling (*vedanā*) arises: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Alongside feeling, perception (*saññā*) may arise, recognizing and designating what is present—for example, "this is a sound" or "this is a table." More fundamentally, perception judges the feeling itself: for example, "this is pleasant," "this is unpleasant."

From here, based on being judged as "pleasant," a reaction occurs with desire and greed; as "unpleasant," a reaction occurs with aversion and hatred; as "neutral," a reaction occurs with delusion.

2 The Brahma world is a celestial realm of immense peace and bliss where beings experience extraordinarily long lifespans, free from physical pain and gross forms of suffering.

Saṅkhāra[3] is the Buddha's term for these intentional reactions, and they are born from ignorance (*avijjā*). Ignorance, here, is the blindness to these conditioned processes: not knowing their impermanent and suffering nature, their cause, their cessation, or the path to their end. A mind veiled by this ignorance rushes toward these burning processes, continually getting hurt, drawn to them, as Ven. Ñāṇavimala warned, "like the moths who fly into the flames." This reactive process constitutes willed and intentional actions, which manifest through mind, speech, and body as *mano-kamma, vacī-kamma* and *kāya-kamma*.[4] Moment by moment, across the six sense faculties, this continuously drives the ongoing accumulation of new *kamma* and the *karmic* consequences they produce.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala taught that at the last moment of death, an object appears according to one's accumulated *kamma*, becoming a condition for consciousness to re-arise. He would illustrate this by giving the example of a virtuous businessman whose mind in this life had been conditioned by business, whose thoughts habitually turned to trade and transactions. Those habitual desires become the *kamma* that fuels the final-moment object—the condition for consciousness to re-arise. Then that person may be reborn in a life

3 The Pāli word *saṅkhāra*—translated by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi as "volitional formations," a rendering he himself acknowledges as imperfect—carries subtle shades of meaning depending on context. Its essence lies in its conditioned nature: phenomena that arise dependent on causes and conditions. Within Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), *saṅkhāra* refers to the intentional or willed activities ("intentional reactions" as rendered by Ven. Gnanaloka) rooted in ignorance, that condition the arising of consciousness and propel the round of existence. When appearing among the five aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*), it retains these essential characteristics but takes on a subtle contextual difference. However, for the purpose of this reflection, it is unessential to know this distinction in depth. Ven. Ñāṇavimala himself steered away from elaborate definitions. Ven. Gnanaloka encourages seekers to gain a gradual understanding through broader readings of *Suttas* and reflection, rather than through intellectual analysis of a term.

4 *Kamma* (or more widely known as "*karma*"—a Sanskrit form of the word) in this context of Dependent Origination, is virtually synonymous with *saṅkhāra*, as described by Bhikkhu Bodhi, both derived from the verb *karoti*—'to act, do, or make.'

with favorable conditions for doing business, such as being born to parents who are supportive of business. Particular conditions follow from how one occupies the present moment, he would say.

Years later, reflecting on these teachings, Ven. Gnanaloka further related his understanding to the one who is one stage below final liberation—the anāgāmi.[5] In contrast to the arahant, the anāgāmi has cut off the lower fetters like ill will (*vyāpāda*) and lust for the five senses (*kāmarāga*), but may still harbor subtle desire for the sixth sense (mind door), in addition to having conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).[6] Lacking gross desire for material existence, the anāgāmi retains subtle attachment as well as *kamma* towards the higher formless existences. He understood that this becomes the object that conditions the consciousness to move on, which is why the anāgāmi is reborn in a higher, formless Brahma plane. The subtle attachment has not been completely uprooted, unlike the arahant. Thus, at the moment of physical death, attention is not able to remain exclusively on the breath but gravitates to the object of subtle attachment, which is that of the equanimous *samādhi*. Ven. Ñāṇavimala used to remark that this equanimity is the highest that the consciousness could reach.

Even modern neuroscience, with all its instruments, still struggles to define consciousness. It looks to the brain to trace how neural processes might give rise to consciousness. But the ancient teachings had already revealed that consciousness does not arise randomly, nor from matter alone, but due to specific causes.

Pre-dating Buddhism, the spiritual traditions existing in ancient India already recognized that consciousness arises through specific

5 Anāgāmi: The third of the four stages of enlightenment; a "Non-returner," meaning one who will not be reborn into the sensual realms (which includes the human and animal worlds) before attaining final liberation.

6 For further context, see the Pāli framework of the Ten Fetters (*dasa saṁyojanāni*).

karmic causes. This understanding of *kamma* was related to the world of the five senses. Escape was sought through *samādhi*—a deep meditative experience of stillness of mind. They found it was possible to overcome greed and anger with blissfulness and purity, and thus be reborn into the Brahma plane of existence. Yet even a state such as "pure consciousness" is also a feeling, no matter how subtle. As Ven. Ñāṇavimala taught: "They consider that which they strive for as permanent, but it is still within consciousness and therefore a formation."

Ven. Gnanaloka explains: the Buddha found that where there is feeling, there remains a conditioned state of consciousness. The underlying defilements had still not been destroyed. Hence, beings remained trapped in the cycle of rebirth. The Buddha's unique contribution was that through wisdom, the causes of consciousness, and thus all conditioned existence, could be transcended.

So what of the arahant—the one who has fully uprooted greed, hate and delusion, without traces of craving and *kamma*?

Ven. Ñāṇavimala explained that the arahant, in that final moment, can maintain attention solely on the breath without attachment. The breath is simply known as it is, nothing more. Because there is no *kamma*, there is no object—a thought—to distract attention. Because there is no craving one doesn't get distracted. Even the breath itself is not attached to. With conditions absent for consciousness to arise, no rebirth occurs. Ven. Gnanaloka recalls how powerfully his teacher's words resonated: "As Bhante described it, I remember imagining it happening to me and a great peace came over my mind just from the reflection." After giving this explanation, "It's deep," Ven. Ñāṇavimala would warn Shanaka.

Looking back, he reflects: "This is the final liberation of any living being. You're ending an entire journey, a beginningless journey—

saṁsāra. When I used to speak to Bhante I felt like he is swimming across from a vast ocean, the way he explains."

Ven. Gnanaloka would draw the reflection out further. Imagine a situation where someone has been told that they have only a short time to live. They may also have heard advice from somewhere that in the dying moments they should keep their attention on the breath. If one makes an effort by force to keep their full attention on their breath in the dying moment, could they? He says "you will find you can't do that." The arahant, the one without attachment, doesn't have that struggle. When there are no desires, the breath is seen naturally, without effort.[7] Such reflection on this conditionality, arising from *yoniso manasikāra*, can break the mental defilements, and hence the craving. He adds that "that thinking must happen—how the consciousness is working."

This isn't about gaining conceptual knowledge of an arahant's final thought process, nor about training oneself to control the breath at that moment. One must also not take this explanation too literally either, thinking of an idealised way one has to die. This is out of one's control; one may die even in a violent way, in which a disturbing experience precedes the final moment.[8] It is the *karmic* habits, however, which condition the final moment object, not specifically the way in which one dies.

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7 Refer to *Sakkapañha Sutta* (SN35.118; Sakka's question) where the Buddha explains that where there is clinging (*upādāna*), one will not attain Nibbāna. See also: *Āneñjasappāya Sutta* (MN106; the way to the imperturbable).

8 When asked how the arahant would focus on the breath if drowning, Ven. Gnanaloka responds: "The defilements are broken in stages—the arahant is the purest extent of no clinging at all—that's a state of mind. Whether [the arahant] focuses on the breath or not, it's not necessary to know. Maybe another function of the body. But [the arahant] is in that moment. You must not try to imagine how they are doing it, it becomes very intellectual and speculative. The point of the explanation is not about that, but to demonstrate the conditioned nature of consciousness."

The teaching itself, as Ven. Ñāṇavimala gave it, had come to Shanaka years before his first self-retreat in 1994. But the depths of this explanation would be understood later during this self-retreat where he first came across the *Khandhasaṁyutta* and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta.* "I was surprised that so many *Suttas* are there by the Buddha and I became quite absorbed with it," he recalls. He discovered in their pages the confirmation, and the unfolding meaning of his teacher's words.

These texts contain the Buddha's core analysis of experience: the *Khandhasaṁyutta* deconstructs our sense of 'self' into five aggregates *(pañcupādānakkhandhā),* while the *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* is an extension of the *Khandhasaṁyutta* to explain the experience of the world through our six senses. As Ven. Gnanaloka reflects on these very aggregates, "craving acts like a glue. It binds consciousness to form,[9] feeling, perception and volitional formations. But when that glue is removed by wisdom, the process cannot exist."

These meanings are found within the *Suttas,* which were introduced to him from their very first meetings.

During that beginning roadside encounter, when Shanaka described the experience of noticing arising and passing away, Ven. Ñāṇavimala directed him toward the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.[10] The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which lays out the four foundations of mindfulness—of body, feeling, mind, and *Dhammas*[11]—holds a

9 The Pāli word for form is *rūpa*. See glossary for further description.

10 In addition to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness), on this occasion Ven. Ñāṇavimala also directed him to the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN28; the greater discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint), which contains a reflection on the four elements that comprise existence.

11 *Dhammas*: In this context, refers to mental objects or phenomena, including the hindrances, aggregates, sense-bases, factors of awakening, and Four Noble Truths. The fourth foundation involves observing these categories of experience with mindfulness.

central place in Buddhist practice today. As passed down to him by his teacher, Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that the proper application of *Satipaṭṭhāna* happens when one is free from the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*): sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*). He explains that this is not a matter of forceful suppression, but of cultivating the opposite qualities of the mind—the five spiritual faculties (*indriyas*)*:* faith (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*)*,* stillness (*samādhi*)*,* and wisdom (*paññā*).

Ven. Ñāṇavimala once hinted to Shanaka that when Shanaka was finding reasons for needing to leave the Island Hermitage, it was because these five *indriyas* were not properly cultivated in a balanced way, and if they were he would just stay on. Ven. Ñāṇavimala further remarked that monks who base their practice solely on the Vinaya (the monks' code of conduct), without the five *indriyas* being properly cultivated in a balanced way, often disrobe for this underlying reason.

Wisdom is a critical component in the *indriyas*. *Yoniso manasikāra* is fundamental to this, belonging to *Dhammā-nupassanā*—the contemplation of *Dhammas*. While the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* provides the framework, it is primarily through discourses such as those in the *Khandhasaṁyutta* and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta* that this contemplation is developed in various ways. Yet, as Ven. Gnanaloka observes, these detailed teachings have been largely overlooked in modern practice.

On seeing the arising and passing of the five aggregates and recognizing their impermanent nature, Ven. Gnanaloka elaborates: "This insight goes beyond simply noticing that something appears and later disappears, or that a feeling arises and subsides. This is just an immediate noticing of impermanence. On a contemplative level, however, one sees that the very causes and conditions that create

these phenomena are themselves impermanent. In this deeper intuitive insight, one can naturally realize impermanence (*anicca*)."

Since *Dhammānupassanā* is present in all the foundations of mindfulness, Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged systematic reading of various *Suttas*, allowing deeper understandings to emerge naturally. This broader approach reveals the full richness of the teaching, rather than focusing narrowly on one aspect such as the body.

Ven. Gnanaloka remembers an incident from his layman days when the *Suttas* revealed their practical power in a most personal way.

One day Ven. Ñāṇavimala looked at Shanaka and remarked, "My thoughts went to your cousin." Since he didn't usually comment on worldly affairs, the remark struck Shanaka as unusual. His cousin, an Air Force pilot, was only a year apart in age from Shanaka and they had grown up together more like brothers than cousins. As children they shared toys, and as young men his cousin had confided in Shanaka. The bond was deep, stronger even than the one he shared with his own brother. After Ven. Ñāṇavimala's remark, the following day a telegram arrived from home calling him to come back urgently to Colombo, without explanation. When he arrived, he found the house full of grieving relatives. His cousin had gone missing in action and was presumed dead.

Rather than react immediately, he made his way through the crowd to his room at the back, his mother following after him, anticipating his sorrow. Sitting down, he turned his mind inward to the reflections presented in *Saḷāyatana* discourses: '*The ear is impermanent, sounds are impermanent, ear-consciousness is impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering; what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change is thus non-self.*' Hearing the distressing news, he saw it was beyond his control—merely an arisen soundwave reaching his ear. He began to witness his ear faculty as if from a distance as a separate thing, and sound as

a separate external occurrence, both momentary and conditioned. The sense of "*this belongs to me, this I am, this is myself*" then quieted. In clearly seeing this as an impersonal process, sadness did not take hold. The mind did not shut the experience out but saw its true dependent and impersonal nature. His mother, moved by his unshaken calm, worshipped him.[12] Later, the full, tragic story came to light: his cousin's plane had been shot down over the northern war zones[13] by LTTE[14] rebels.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala would say, "arahants see everything from a distance." What Shanaka was only beginning to glimpse was a form of this detached awareness—observing experiences through this framework of causes and conditions—an approach that reveals how the *Suttas*, when read with the right spirit, are not just concepts but can give a direct experience of these truths.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's advice was that "one must not overload with intellectual grasping of the *Suttas*." Neither rushing the reading as too simple nor over intellectualizing them as academia or abstract philosophy. Both extremes block what the *Suttas* are meant to reveal. Each *Sutta* provides a means for reflection (*kammaṭṭhāna*), by keeping the mind steady on the reflection, without going too far into wanderings of the past or future. Ven. Gnanaloka offers simple guidance: "Read as if the Buddha were speaking directly to you. Cultivate a childlike openness. For this to happen, one can cultivate

12 Worship—bowing with joined palms—is traditionally offered by children to parents in Sri Lankan culture.

13 The aircraft, an Antonov An-32B troop transport carrier, was shot down while approaching Jaffna, killing all sixty-three people on board, including Co-pilot Flying Officer Nihal Ranjith Fernando (Jnr.), who at the time was the youngest pilot in Sri Lanka to obtain a pilot's license. It was believed to have been struck by a surface-to-air missile fired by the LTTE. The tragedy occurred on 22 November 1995, several months after the outbreak of Eelam War III, the third phase of the Sri Lankan Civil War.

14 The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a militant separatist group opposing the Sri Lankan government in the long-standing civil war (1983–2009).

samādhi[15]—bringing the mind to the present moment—which creates a desirelessness from the world of five senses, opening the space for intuition to happen. Then read the *Suttas*. Don't aim for some imagined '*magga-phala*' experience. Let the insights unfold by themselves." To strike a balance between cultivating stillness while maintaining the contemplation of the *Dhammas* presented in the *Suttas* is the central idea. Ven. Ñāṇavimala taught the *Suttas* serve as "signposts": practical guides pointing the way for contemplation.

Ven. Gnanaloka observed that when meditators got a powerful insight from contemplating the *Suttas*—like seeing that "this is not mine, not I"—they would sometimes cling to it. "See it as also just a Dhamma perception, which is also impermanent," he would say, "Keep reading, don't stop there, because that's the very reason it happened in the first place. Otherwise, one may get stuck in that or just trying to get that equanimous *samādhi* feeling again." He clarifies: "That equanimous *samādhi* can arise from contemplating the Dhamma itself, which is good, but that's also where it can get dangerous. One can then incline more to that peaceful feeling rather than contemplating. For that pure contemplation to happen, one shouldn't be turning to just that peaceful feeling. Else, it can block you from having deeper insight." He adds that "it happened to me too."

Repetition runs through the *Suttas*. Passages recur word for word or through abbreviation, intended to deepen insight with each return. The *Nandakovāda Sutta* (MN146; advice from Nandaka) highlights why this matters.[16] The Buddha asked Venerable

15 Ven. Gnanaloka adds that "faith, mindfulness and sense restraint" lead to *samādhi.*

16 Ven. Gnanaloka explains: This *Sutta* describes the internal sense organs and the external sense impressions, based on that you get the experiences of consciousness and feeling. These are impermanent, changing and fragile. So how can you think that the experience you get from that is solid and permanent? The *Sutta* gives the simile of a skinned cow, which is skinned and placed back. The desire represents the tendons and connective tissue that join the skin to the flesh. So how can you put it back the same way if desire has been cut?

Nandaka to teach five hundred bhikkhunīs and after he delivered the teaching, the Buddha requested he repeat it. Only after hearing it the second time did all five hundred bhikkhunīs attain liberation. The *Suttas* reveal their power not as single, passing encounters, but as living instructions best engaged with repeatedly. One shouldn't try to squeeze understanding from them either. If something isn't clear on first reading, simply move on to the next. Ven. Gnanaloka credits his teacher's tactful approach in guiding him this way to the *Suttas* again and again.

Such reflections, done with a receptive and investigative mind, could lead to subtle forms of support. He remembered one occasion when, whilst Ven. Ñāṇavimala was speaking about impermanence, Shanaka found himself absorbed in that, silently catching that insight himself. At that moment, Ven. Ñāṇavimala would say, "just wait like that," watching and waiting as if a form of mind-to-mind communication or internal exercise was taking place.

That subtle influence, he came to understand, was not confined by distance or space.

At another time, while staying in the Himalayas, reading and reflecting in his kuṭi, Ven. Gnanaloka felt an influence—a blessing perhaps—from Ven. Ñāṇavimala, reaching him across the great distance supporting that insightful contemplation. Reflecting on these experiences, Ven. Gnanaloka felt they were not a coincidence, but a kind of connection on a 'Dhamma-plane'. He reminds fellow practitioners "don't think you're alone," affirming Ven. Ñāṇavimala's advice to him—if the qualities are aligned, support comes, even from those beings afar but on the same Dhamma-plane. Ven. Ñāṇavimala passed away not long after this experience, while Ven. Gnanaloka was still practicing in the Himalayas.

Ven. Upasama, another close attendant disciple of Ven. Ñāṇavimala, witnessed Ven. Ñāṇavimala during these last days take his final breath. His account records:

> "Half an hour before he passed away, Ven. Upasama was at his bedside continuously. Ven. Ñāṇavimala got himself prepared for the last minute by feeling his arms and fingers then cleared his ears, pushed up his chin and pulled up his robe to cover his chest, then kept both the arms resting on the chest as if he was ready. Ven. Upasama happened to look at Ven. Ñāṇavimala's face and saw him expel his last breath peacefully. How fortunate would it be to face the last moment in this fully controlled manner! May he have attained the highest bliss, Nibbāna!"[17]

Ultimately, it all points to one truth. The final breath, the last moment of attention, the condition that determines whether consciousness re-arises or ceases—it all depends on how one has perceived the Dhamma and how the defilements have been destroyed. Whether craving still binds, or whether wisdom has finally cut the thread.

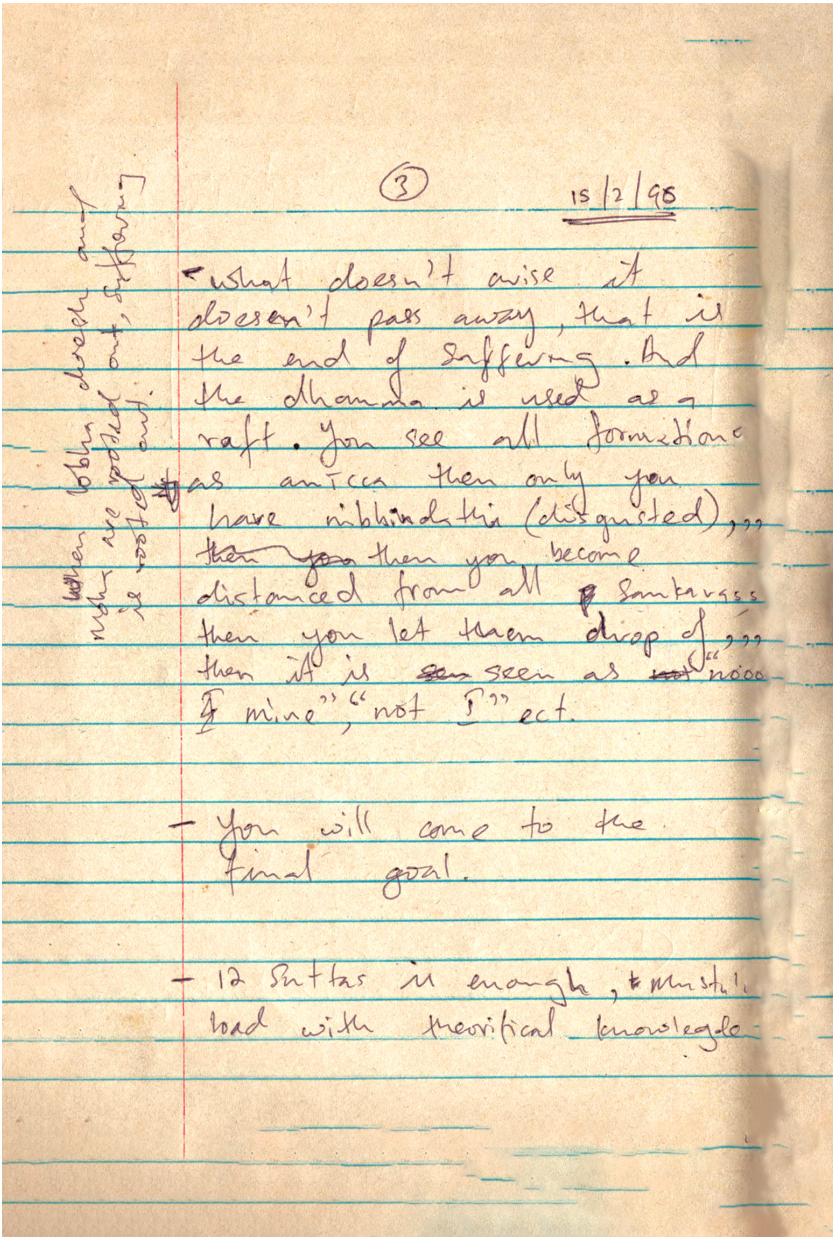
17 For a detailed account refer to *Pure Inspiration: Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera; Recollections of His Life, Practice and Teachings (2016).*



Monks and devotees paying their final respects and offering homage to the revered Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera at his funeral (12 October 2005).



Bone relics of Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, later enshrined in memorial stūpas at Polgasduwa, Parappaduwa, and Pannapitiya; some were also offered to close lay disciples.



(3) 15/2/98

- What doesn't arise it doesn't pass away, that is the end of suffering. And the dhamma is used as a raft. You see all formations as anicca then only you have nibbindathi (disgusted),,, then you become distanced from all Sankharas then you let them drop off,,, then it is seen as "not mine", "not I" ect.

- You will come to the final goal.

- 12 Suttas is enough, don't load with theoritical knowledge

When you observe dhamma arise and pass away, you get disgusted with it.

Handwritten notes by Shanaka Dharmakeerthi, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (1996–1998).

CHAPTER 08

What Doesn't Arise, Doesn't Pass Away

(May 1996 – Feb 1998)

14 May 1996

- ***Majjhima* 5 to 10 and in detail MN107, 117, 125 and then to *Saṁyutta* SN22 to SN50, SN55.**

- *Majjhima* 5 to 10—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth); *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement); *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness).

- MN107, 117, 125—*Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed).

- *Saṁyutta* SN22 to SN50, SN55—*Khandha Saṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates) to *Balasaṁyutta* (SN50; connected discourses on the powers), *Sotāpatti Saṁyutta* (SN55; connected discourses on stream-entry).

- **We can't do without thinking. They are still formations. But one must consider and see whether they are formations that lead towards *asaṅkhata* (the unconditioned) and make sure that one is coming closer to one's goal by using the chosen formation.**

- **What one wants to realize—that should be made daily [practice] so that it becomes a habit.**
- **You must never fight with the defilements. You must say "Oh! You are there. Well, I will feed you more" and you should cultivate the five *indriyas*. Never develop or react surprisingly or adversely, [otherwise] the *patigha anusaya* (latent tendency to aversion) is nourished and the defilements get a strong hold.[18] It is the same with wars and so on, repression doesn't work.**
- **The Dhamma way is very much different to the Christian way of repentance and remorse etc.**
- **One may wish and have long life, but more the body gets older, more the decay.**
- **Think of the simile of the oil taken in the midst of a crowd and the man behind with the sword.[19] Must remember all these *Suttas*. For now stick just to the essential.**

18 Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies this is a teaching on skillful disengagement. The instruction to not "fight" a defilement is because direct resistance, born of aversion, can paradoxically give it more energy. The metaphor to "feed" it, or treat it like a guest, means to calmly acknowledge its presence without alarm or self-blame. Don't take it too seriously, else it will grow in power. Having acknowledged it without conflict, the practitioner does not indulge it, but skillfully diverts it away and cultivates wholesome qualities, such as the five spiritual faculties (*indriyas*).

19 This refers to the *Janapadakalyāṇī Sutta* (SN47.20; the most beautiful girl of the land), where the Buddha uses a powerful simile for mindfulness. A man is commanded to carry a bowl filled to the brim with oil through a crowd watching a beautiful dancing woman. A guard follows with a raised sword, ready to execute him if he spills a single drop. The Buddha explains that the bowl of oil represents mindfulness of the body (*kāyagatāsati*), which must be guarded with the same life-or-death urgency and unwavering attention amidst the world's most powerful distractions.

19 May 1996

- That is why you must make sure that you are constantly occupied with [a] wholesome object for thought. So that no chance is given for unwholesome things to enter the mind.

- *Mātugāma* is the biggest fetter that you must take care of.[20] All this accumulation of *kamma*, that is in the *kāmaloka* (sensual realm), finds an opportunity to be realized beginning from the mother's womb.

- **All this falling in love, etc. is an intoxication. One doesn't listen to anybody, one gets blinded and then the honeymoon—and after that only the dark side of the moon begins to appear.**

- ***Sati sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension)—Nothing is neglected.**

- How to make the mind immediately calm in accordance with the Dhamma is the way taught to Bāhiya—*Bāhiya Sutta* (Ud1.10; with Bāhiya) and look at it as just feeling, perception, etc.[21]

- What you think or are occupied with, that increases and strengthens.

22 May 1996

- The *Khandha Parittaṁ*—[*Ahirāja Sutta* (AN4.67; snakes)], use it as a mantra.

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20 The advice on *Mātugāma* (women) was given to Shanaka to emphasize the reflection on the danger of sensuality (*kāma ādīnava*) on his spiritual path. This challenge manifests through the physical form of the opposite sex.

21 The "immediately calming" method points to the Bāhiya instruction: "in the seen, just the seen; in the heard, just the heard; in the sensed, just the sensed; in the cognized, just the cognized," given in *Bāhiya Sutta* (Ud1.10; with Bāhiya); a close parallel occurs at *Mālukyaputta Sutta* (SN35.95; Māluṅkyaputta).

- Reverend Sir once used this paritta (protective chant) when he was in the jungle against a bear.

13 August 1996

***Nava Bhikkhu* [new monk or novice]:**

- *Ādibrahmacāriya* [the beginning of the holy life; the foundational training that establishes the conditions for deeper practice and liberation].

- MN107, 117, 125, *Rāhulovāda Sutta—Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN107; to Gaṇaka Moggallāna); *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (MN117; the great forty); *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (MN125; the grade of the tamed); *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)

- MN5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—*Anangaṇa Sutta* (MN5; without blemishes); *Ākankheyya Sutta* (MN6; if a bhikkhu should wish); *Vatthūpama Sutta* (MN7; the simile of the cloth); *Sallekha Sutta* (MN8; effacement); *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* (MN9; right view); *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN10; the foundations of mindfulness)

- *Saṁyutta* SN22 to SN55 to attain the path.[22] *Saṁvega Vatthu* (grounds for spiritual urgency)—[The Mirror of the Dhamma compiled by Ven. Nārada and Ven. Kassapa].

- *Mahāsuññata Sutta* (MN122; the greater discourse on voidness)—What to think and what to talk.

- Whole days' work is overcoming the *nīvaraṇa* [five mental hindrances] and cultivating the *indriyas* [five spiritual faculties].

22 The complete progressive framework from understanding the aggregates—*Khandhasaṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates)—to entering the stream—*Sotāpattisaṁyutta* (SN55; connected discourses on stream-entry)—the full range of insight and path teachings in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*.

16 August 1996

- *Vijaya Sutta* (Snp1.11; victory)

31 August 1996

- *Saṁvega Vatthu* and what is in *Saṁyutta Nikāya*.
- *Suttas* in *Majjhima Nikāya* MN39, 40, 64—*Mahā-Assapura Sutta* (MN39; the greater discourse at Assapura); *Cūḷa-Assapura Sutta* (MN40; the shorter discourse at Assapura); *Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (MN64; the greater discourse to Mālunkyāputta).
- *Saṁyutta* SN22 to SN55.
- [When] Makhādeva entered the room he determined that at that time he completely retire. Similarly, you must make a regular routine and where you make a definite determination at that time. Otherwise, if you have not attained the path, the *anusaya* will come forward.[23]

2 September 1996

- In the night he [Ven. Ñāṇavimala] inquired whether my brother is also interested in the Dhamma.

16 September 1996

- Make sure you have a daily goal in mind. You may remind yourself of these essential *Suttas* that is leading to the goal.

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23 This refers to the *Makhādeva Sutta* (MN83; king Makhādeva), which tells the story of a king who, upon seeing his first grey hair, immediately made a firm determination to renounce the world and take up the holy life. Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies that the teaching here is about the necessity of similarly making a resolute determination in one's own practice. Without such a firm determination, one's latent tendencies (*anusaya*) will continue to arise and take hold. Only a practitioner who has already attained a stage of enlightenment is considered safe from these latent tendencies.

- **Starting from *Mahānāma Suttas,* then *Majjhima* 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 39, 40, 107, 117 + 64 + *Saṁyutta* SN22 to SN50, SN55, MN125—For the final result; *sammā ñāṇa*.**[24]

- This reminding of the contents of the *Suttas*, you may do once a day.

- Then during the day you should spend more time maintaining and cultivating the next step thoroughly.

- When there is *Sarasaṅkappa* (Memories & Thoughts), you may straight away go to the practice of *Mahānāma Sutta*—[*Paṭhamamahānāma Sutta* (AN11.11; *Mahānāma* 1)].

15 February 1998

Very Important:

- **Establish others in the *Mahānāma Suttas,* (It is a great service you can do to them).**

- Practice according to 37, 40 of *Majjhima*—*Cūḷataṇhāsankhaya Sutta* (MN37; the shorter discourse on the destruction of craving); *Cūḷa-Assapura Sutta* (MN40; the shorter discourse at Assapura).

- ***Sati sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension) then *jhāna* then *Satipaṭṭhāna.***

- To practice *Satipaṭṭhāna*, you should have *sammā diṭṭhi* and observe *ariya sīla* (that is not only verbal and physical action but also watching the mind).—*Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN61; advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā).

24 This list of *Suttas* constitutes a highly specific curriculum designed by Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera to cultivate *sammā ñāṇa* (Right Knowledge) and lead directly to the final result (Nibbāna). It organizes texts crucial for developing full insight into the Four Noble Truths.

- Watching the mind means overcoming the *nīvaraṇas* (hindrances) and cultivating the *pañca indriya* (five spiritual faculties). This is the daily practice of a Bhikkhu. When one attains the path, one knows how to get about to overcome them. One is not overpowered by them. At arahantship only they are completely overcome, never to arise.

- Even at *Anāgāmi*, there is *kāma rāga* not at a gross level but to the feelings connected to the *jhānas*. Only at the fourth *jhāna* there is equanimity, but it is a feeling. Then you should consider that all feelings are *anicca*. They are *saṅkhāras.*

- The Saṅgha is also a *saṅkhāra*. What you do in the Buddha's teaching is to root out the cause of suffering. You don't try to remove it from outside.

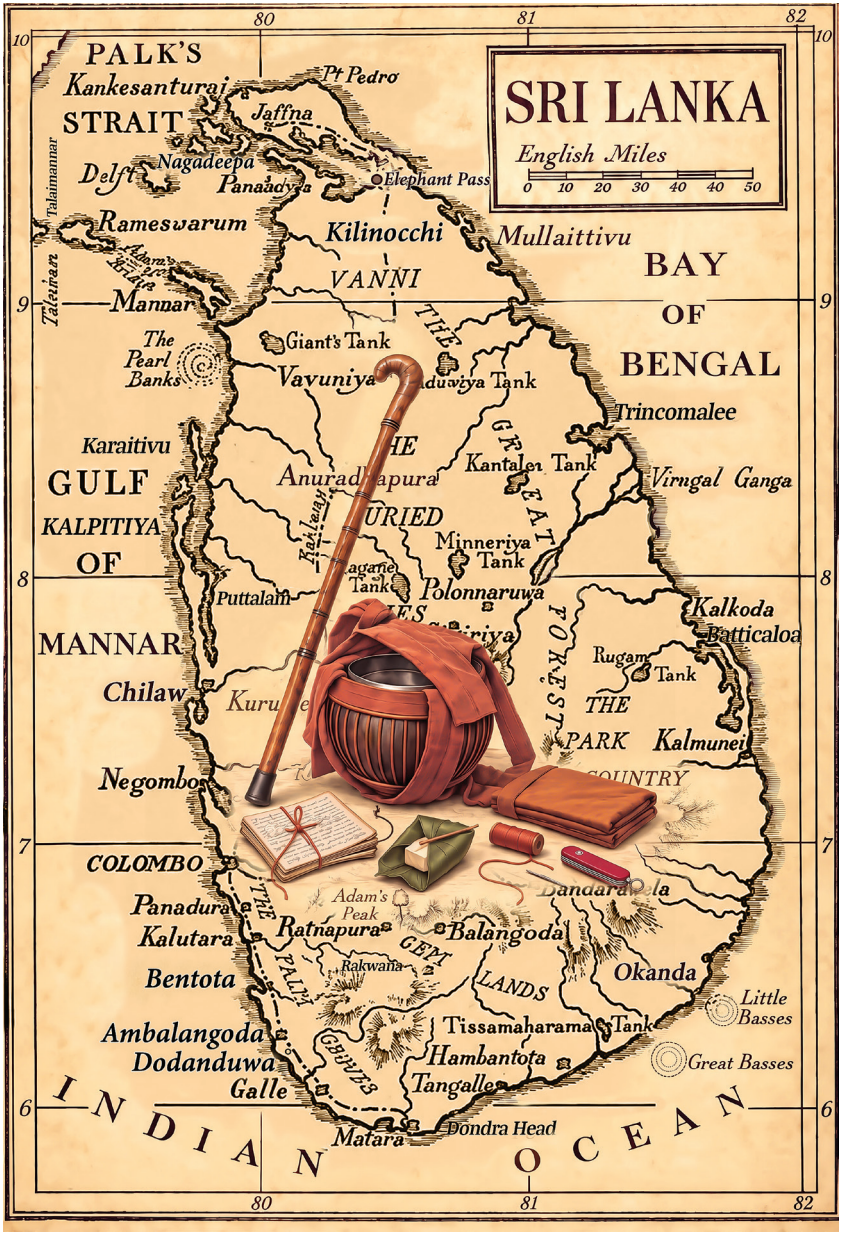
- What does not arise, does not pass away, that is the end of suffering. The Dhamma is used as a raft. You see all formations as *anicca*, then only you have *nibbidā* (disenchantment with worldly life) then you become distanced from all *saṅkhāras (formations),* then it is seen as "not mine," "not I," etc.

- When *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hate) *and moha* (delusion) are rooted out, suffering is rooted out.

- You will come to the final goal.

- 12 *Suttas* is enough, you mustn't be loaded with theoretical knowledge.[25]

25 "Twelve *Suttas* is enough" means depth over breadth. Take a small, well-chosen set, learn them thoroughly—read, memorize key lines, reflect, practice—so study (*pariyatti*) becomes practice (*paṭipatti*) and realization (*paṭivedha*). The point is to avoid theoretical overload, not to forbid wider study.


SRI LANKA
English Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50
80
81
82
10
9
8
7
6
PALK'S
STRAIT
Kankesanturai
Pt Pedro
Jaffna
Delft
Nagadeepa
Panaadiya
Elephant Pass
Talaimannar
Rameswarum
Kilinocchi
Mullaittivu
Adam's Bridge
Talaivan
VANNI
Mannar
BAY
OF
BENGAL
The Pearl Banks
Giant's Tank
Vavuniya
Trincomalee
Karaitivu
GULF
KALPITIYA
OF
MANNAR
Anuradhapura
Kantalai Tank
Virngal Ganga
Railway
Minneriya Tank
Puttalam
Polonnaruwa
Kalkoda
Batticaloa
Rugam Tank
Chilaw
Kurunegala
THE
PARK
Kalmunei
Negombo
COLOMBO
Panadura
Kalutara
Ratnapura
Adam's Peak
Balangoda
Bentota
Rakwana
Okanda
Little Basses
Great Basses
Ambalangoda
Dodanduwa
Galle
Tissamaharama Tank
Hambantota
Tangalle
Matara
Dondra Head
INDIAN OCEAN

REFLECTION 09

In the Footsteps of a Master

When Ven. Ñāṇavimala lay bedridden in his final years at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, his attendants would meet him each morning for a blessing before their alms round. As Ven. Gnanaloka recalls, "He would put us in a *mettā* state… In his bed, you would know that he's having a kind of vision. You could see that he is seeing something. That's very, very clear."

These visions shifted from day to day, and his blessings became a vast field of loving-kindness (*mettā*). He would encourage his attendants to join him in spreading *mettā*, beginning with the local villagers and gradually extending it to all beings, offering brief descriptions to aid their visualization. At some point, he began regularly mentioning spreading it to the "youth who have gone astray in the North." His usual specific mentions included "the fisherman who would serve," referring to the daily offering they would get from them in their alms round.

For three consecutive days, however, a curious new phrase entered the blessing. After the usual verses, he said, "Even those who are misguided in the North… they will also serve."

The repetition of this final phrase was strange. To Ven. Gnanaloka it seemed misplaced, almost puzzling. Perhaps a moment of confusion brought on by age.

The North was then the heartland of the civil war, where Buddhist monks were often singled out by the LTTE for their saffron robes. They were often seen as political instigators, symbols of the Sinhala-Buddhist state. Records tell of monks being dragged from

buses and shot,[1] temples bombed,[2] and rural communities living in fear of sudden massacres.[3] Shanaka's own cousin, an Air Force pilot, had been killed in the conflict there. Such a remark was not just unlikely; it was an impossibility.

But two years later, Ven. Gnanaloka found himself deep in rebel-held territory, standing barefoot as a senior LTTE leader, a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main separatist group in Sri Lanka's civil war, removed his cap and placed a handful of *vadai* (a savoury fried snack) into his alms bowl.

It had all begun at Parappaduwa, where Ven. Gnanaloka was serving his teacher. Inspired by the stories of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's solitary wanderings, he felt moved to take up the ancient practice of *cārikā* himself. It was a path of radical uncertainty, a practice of meeting each moment without a plan. During those days, when Ven. Ñāṇavimala was asked where he was going, his reply was simple: "I haven't decided yet. I'll decide when I get to the corner."

It was this spirit of profound, present-moment freedom that so inspired the young disciple.

When Ven. Gnanaloka asked his teacher for permission, Ven. Ñāṇavimala gave him a resolute blessing: "Don't worry. Your guardian *devas*[4] are behind you." That single line, spoken with such certainty, was more than a promise; it was a reflection of the Dhamma's protective power.

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1 The Aranthalawa Massacre (1987): LTTE cadres killed 33 Buddhist monks, most of them novices, in the Ampara District.

2 The Temple of the Tooth attack (1998): The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka's most sacred Buddhist site housing the Buddha's tooth relic, was attacked by three LTTE suicide bombers driving an explosive-laden truck.

3 The Anuradhapura Massacre (1985): LTTE attack at the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi Tree, killing about 146 pilgrims at one of Sri Lanka's most revered Buddhist shrines.

4 *Devā/devatās* are celestial beings.

His teacher had often spoken of a principle woven through the ascetic life: that the pure virtue of a wandering monk naturally attracts the support of unseen deities, or *devatās*. "Those who are practising," Ven. Ñāṇavimala would say, "*devatās* will follow," drawn to virtue to gain merit. He spoke from decades of experience. There were times when a particular food would come to mind, and then appear before him in ways that seemed beyond coincidence. Once, arriving unannounced in a remote village near Minneriya National Park where food was scarce and no one could have known he was coming, an elderly woman offered him a carefully prepared meal. She told him that a *devatā* had appeared in her evening prayers, instructing her that a monk would arrive the next morning.[5]

Yet Ven. Ñāṇavimala would always add caution: wishes fulfilled in such ways could stir further desire. A practising monk must guard his mind with the utmost care.

Ven. Gnanaloka departed with no itinerary. Just a direction—north, a rudimentary map, and the inner compass of *sati* (mindfulness). After seeking the blessing of his preceptor,[6] Ven. Madihe Paññāsīha Mahānāyaka Thera, who told him "Do it without falling ill, this is the time to try such things," he began walking. He began the journey on 9 April 2003. The path north was no simple undertaking. While Nāgadīpa and the Jaffna peninsula were under government control at the time, he first had to pass through vast areas of the Vanni region, which were still administered by the LTTE.

He would walk 15 kilometers in the early morning and another 15 in the late afternoon. With *Sati* and *Samādhi* as his companions, the body did not complain.

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5 See Chapter 6, 6 December 1995, for this account in the notes.

6 Preceptor (Pāli: *upajjhāya*): The senior monk who gives a new monk his higher ordination (*upasampadā*) and serves as his primary mentor and spiritual guide. The relationship is traditionally akin to that of a spiritual father and son.

When he reached Anuradhapura, he rested for a week, asking a few lorry drivers about the conditions ahead. He knew that entering rebel-controlled territory would mean stepping into uncertainty, perhaps even death. But as he later shared, "I didn't have an army to protect me—only the teachings of the Buddha, *mettā*, and the understanding that this body is not mine."

He carried with him the contemplation from the *Khandha-saṁyutta*—the teaching on the five aggregates (*khandhas*) of clinging. Form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness—that is all that takes place. And he saw those he would meet in the same way: not soldiers or rebels, but aggregates arising and passing away, like his own. Just nature meeting nature.

He would recollect: "The *khandhas* are universal, this craving is universal, whoever decreases this craving through wisdom—with that, dispassion will come, and they can be liberated. I feel it is a potential everybody has. In this way I had a lot of *mettā*."

Before crossing the last government military checkpoint, he sought out a monk to purify his *sīla* and prepare for the possibility of death.[7] A forest monk from the Wathuruwila tradition, fluent in Tamil, helped him and even went to the extent of preparing a note for alms rounds and taught him the sacred Tamil phrases: "*Subam, śānti, samādhānam"* (auspiciousness, peace, harmony).

The soldiers at the final government outpost tried to stop him.[8]

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7 According to the Vinaya (monastic code), a monk purifies his *sīla* (moral conduct) by formally confessing any minor transgressions to another monk; more serious offenses require a formal meeting of the monastic community (Saṅgha) for resolution. This act of clearing one's conscience is especially important when facing potential death because a mind unburdened by guilt is more likely to be peaceful.

8 The peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, which began with a Ceasefire Agreement on 22 February 2002, and officially ended on 2 January 2008, was marked by frequent violent outbreaks, making the region dangerous throughout this period.

It was a plea, not an order. "Is there active conflict?" he asked. "No," they replied. And with that, the Monastic Rules permitted his passage.[9]

On the other side he was not met with bullets. Instead, a senior leader stepped forward. He spoke English, arranged a travel pass, offered food, and even shielded Ven. Gnanaloka from publicity. Others came—militants, villagers, children—drawn by the sight of a lone monk walking barefoot in silence. "*Paavam, paavam* [poor thing]," some children would call to their parents from outside as they saw him coming, feeling pity at the sight of him. To others they posed simple questions. *"Saappida?"*—have you eaten?

He moved through areas without human habitation, across forests and dry plains, where the only shelter was the Dhamma. When militants approached him with suspicion, a kind stranger would often appear at just the right moment, offering reassurance or safe passage.

The journey was a series of such unexpected moments. Some of quiet grace, others of sudden danger.

Once, a motorcycle came hurtling toward him, its rider intent on intimidation. It veered away only at the final instant. Later, with a smile, Ven. Gnanaloka said, "I was ready to die. It seemed he wasn't."

Through his walk he noticed what had become normalized. Empty sleeves where arms should have been. Missing eyes. Food, a scarcity. Years of unmarked minefields, checkpoints, displacement, and loss. In some, deep-seated anger had taken root. People who had never known another world. He saw, for them, that this had become their only reality.

9 This refers to a rule in the Vinaya, the monastic code of conduct, which prohibits monks from traveling to or through a place where there is active fighting.

As he moved deeper into rebel territory, LTTE's Chief of Police Balasingham Nadesan arrived, inspected him, and then asked a question that seemed to come from somewhere deeper than protocol: "Will we ever get peace?"

Ven. Gnanaloka replied, "Peace is inside, not outside."

"I never saw them as terrorists," he would later say. "I felt as if I were meeting my own children."

This feeling was never clearer than in an encounter at Kilinochchi—a place then known as the most heavily secured region in the North, the heart of LTTE control. Some had warned him, "Not to pass through that and go somehow another way. If you do, do not linger there."

He entered anyway.

Word seemed to have spread of a lone monk, arriving barefoot.

Young soldiers who looked barely sixteen were positioned every twenty meters along the roadside on the way to the main checkpoint. As he approached, they would duck behind trees, then peer out with wide eyes at the strange sight of this monk. Was he mad? How could he not be frightened? The villagers watched too, they seemed to feel it. He didn't show any fear.

At the checkpoint, a young cadre tasked with a body search approached, his eyes filled with a conflict between his duty and his devotion. He looked at Ven. Gnanaloka and said, "Seniors are watching me, Swami, so I need to make physical contact with you." He then closed his eyes to perform the search. As he did, Ven. Gnanaloka recalls, "I have never seen so much devotion in anyone, Sinhalese or otherwise."[10] The young cadre performed the search,

10 The Sri Lankan Civil War was rooted in political and ethnic tensions between the island's majority Sinhalese (who are predominantly Buddhist) and the minority Tamil community. Ven. Gnanaloka is of Sinhalese ethnicity.

struggling against an inner reluctance to lay hands on him.

After passing through the checkpoint, he was asked if he had a place to stay. He didn't. A policewoman escorted him through the town. When they arrived at a church, a priest greeted him warmly with joined palms, almost with relief, and offered a place to stay for the night.

That evening, LTTE officials questioned him for nearly two hours. A young translator sat between them, carefully choosing his words. Ven. Gnanaloka could sense the translator's protectiveness. His words were shaped so the monk wouldn't appear suspicious or dangerous. Each translation deliberate, as if shielding him. It helped ease any doubts the officials might have had. He stayed one night and moved on.

At another checkpoint along his route, when a militant asked "Are you not afraid of us? We are LTTE," his answer was: "As long as I have this *Shakthiya* [inner spiritual strength], I'm not afraid."

As Ven. Gnanaloka left the LTTE-controlled area, LTTE cadres followed on motorbikes, eager to speak with him one last time. "We have no conflict with your thoughts," they told him.

He made his way north through government-held areas to Nāgavihara, and from there to the sacred islet of Nāgadīpa. The journey there had taken a month. While staying in a makeshift shelter built by sailors near the Dambakolapatuna Navy Camp, his mind turned to his cousin—the Air Force pilot whose plane had gone down somewhere in these northern waters more than seven years earlier, in 1995. When the camp commander arrived with the daily meal, Ven. Gnanaloka asked if he happened to know anything about the crash.

The commander's reply was uncanny. Just a month earlier, local fishermen had pulled a large piece of wreckage from their net. It was

the engine of the lost aircraft. The spot where they found it, deep in the ocean, was just three kilometers ahead of where he sat.

The path had, without any intention, brought him to the place tied to the one Ven. Ñāṇavimala had once sent blessings to, before word of his cousin's passing had reached him. He stayed an extra day. With the support of the fishermen, he went out on a boat to the exact location and performed a blessing over the water.

His journey now felt complete, and for the first time, his body began asking for rest. He planned to return to Polgasduwa by bus. He was offered a stay at a pilgrims' resthouse in Nāgavihara. They had learned of his walk from Jaffna and managed to make space for him despite the lack of rooms available.

The resthouse was mixed accommodation for public guests. He was conscious of the Vinaya rules that stated if women were staying under the same roof, the lodging needed a separate entrance, otherwise it wasn't appropriate for a monk to stay overnight.[11] The current arrangement he was given was not exactly in line with these rules.

He lay down and began to meditate. As he heard a sound, the thought came that he had walked such a long distance only to compromise on Vinaya rules in the last leg because of convenience. A question occurred to him—would he leave this room, or simply forget about the rules in carelessness? He decided he couldn't sacrifice his discipline. He went across the road to the shrine room of the main Nāgavihara temple. Trying not to draw attention, he approached a lay attendant there and asked if he could arrange a simple mat for him to rest on overnight, as he was observing the

11 According to the Aṭṭhakathā (commentary), if a room has a separate entrance, you are allowed to stay in that room. Here, "separate entrance" means that you must be able to enter and leave directly through that door, not into a shared lobby, corridor, or another room.

Vinaya rule. He asked him to keep it to himself. He would use the resthouse during the day instead.

When he returned to that shrine room that evening, to his surprise, he saw that all the monks had gotten involved in preparing his space with even a mattress placed.

Later that night, as he lay down there, he suddenly felt the feeling of Buddha's presence, of him being alive. This was not through the *Sutta* understanding this time, but through the Vinaya. He had the recognition that whenever one makes the effort to adhere to the instructions of the Buddha, you get connected to him in that.

Before his final departure, he went out looking for a quiet place for the day's meditation. There was a cultural event happening in the area that day so it was too noisy. He headed to find a suitable place in Jaffna. He eventually stumbled upon an old Hindu temple called Kailash Natha Swami. The place was unpopular, so it was an ideal quiet place to meditate. The meditation there took on an especially peaceful and elevated quality.

After returning to the resthouse in Nāgavihara, the following morning he began to meditate, this time at the resthouse itself. The meditation felt light. Like cushioned clouds, thoughts drifted. His body began to unwind. Clouds deepened, turning to grey smoke. It rose in twirls as flames from beneath leaped out of a copper-lined pit. A priest in white sat chanting as he stoked the flames with ghee and raw rice. A fire ritual. Believed to be a primal offering, a purging away.

The priest in white then looked at him and pressed his thumb against Ven. Gnanaloka's forehead. He tried to resist it, but the pressure was an immovable force. As the priest pressed, a blissful floating sensation came over him, as if he was leaving his body, accompanied by an immense surge of energy.

He opened his eyes. A dream.

He couldn't recall the last time he had fallen asleep during meditation. Let alone during a morning meditation.

When he woke he was in a state of heightened refreshment and energy unlike anything from ordinary rest. The thought came to him whether it was that chief priest at the Kailash Natha Swami temple.

He decided to visit it again. When the chief priest came and greeted him, he realised it was not the same priest wearing white. Whilst speaking to him, his eyes began scanning around the room. On the wall behind him, he noticed a picture of three priests in white. He recognised that one of them was the one he saw in the dream. Ven. Gnanaloka asked him who he was. The priest conveyed the answer in broken English: "He is the one who made this temple with his own money. He is very pure. I believe he is a deity now."

The bus was no longer a consideration. The tiredness had now completely vanished, replaced by an energy that demanded he return the way he came, on foot.

In total, the journey there and back covered over 1,200 kilometers on foot, much of it through the rebel-held territory.

But looking back at the whole journey, one scene remains etched in memory. It was when he was passing Kilinochchi on the way to Nāgadīpa. He remembers families had gathered on either side of the road, some with tear-filled eyes. He could feel the weight of their emotion. Their voices rose together: "Why are you suffering for us Sadhu? Why are you suffering for us?"

There were no words he could give. Only his presence, only *mettā*.

This was not one such moment, but many—the same kind of scene, time and again, the whole way through the rebel-held territory.

Decades earlier, Ven. Ñāṇavimala had taken up the practice of *cārikā* for more than twenty-five years, traveling to all kinds of villages. Regardless of what faith background they came from, he always received food. When asked why he had walked for so many years, Ven. Gnanaloka would remember how Ven. Ñāṇavimala would talk about it: "You are faced with the real truth of the *kāma loka*, then you can see the suffering of it, and you get that real feeling of wanting to come out of it."

Kāma loka: the world as filtered through our five senses. Not just pleasure, but all of it—the clinging, the loss, the endless wanting.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala had traversed the island south to north, east to west three times over. Walking into every province, every terrain, every kind of human struggle.

Every kind of uncertainty.

According to one account, during the Tamil insurgency of the early 1970s, Ven. Ñāṇavimala had been on *cārikā* when he was surrounded by armed rebels who suspected him of being a spy. They dragged him into the jungle, threatening to kill him. Ven. Ñāṇavimala asked for a few moments to prepare his mind. Sitting on a rock, he closed his eyes and entered deep meditation. When he was ready, he raised one arm, his signal to be shot.

But no shot came. When he opened his eyes, the forest was empty. His would-be executioners had vanished. He rose and continued walking.

"*Dhammo have rakkhati dhammacāriṁ*"—the Dhamma protects those who live by the Dhamma.

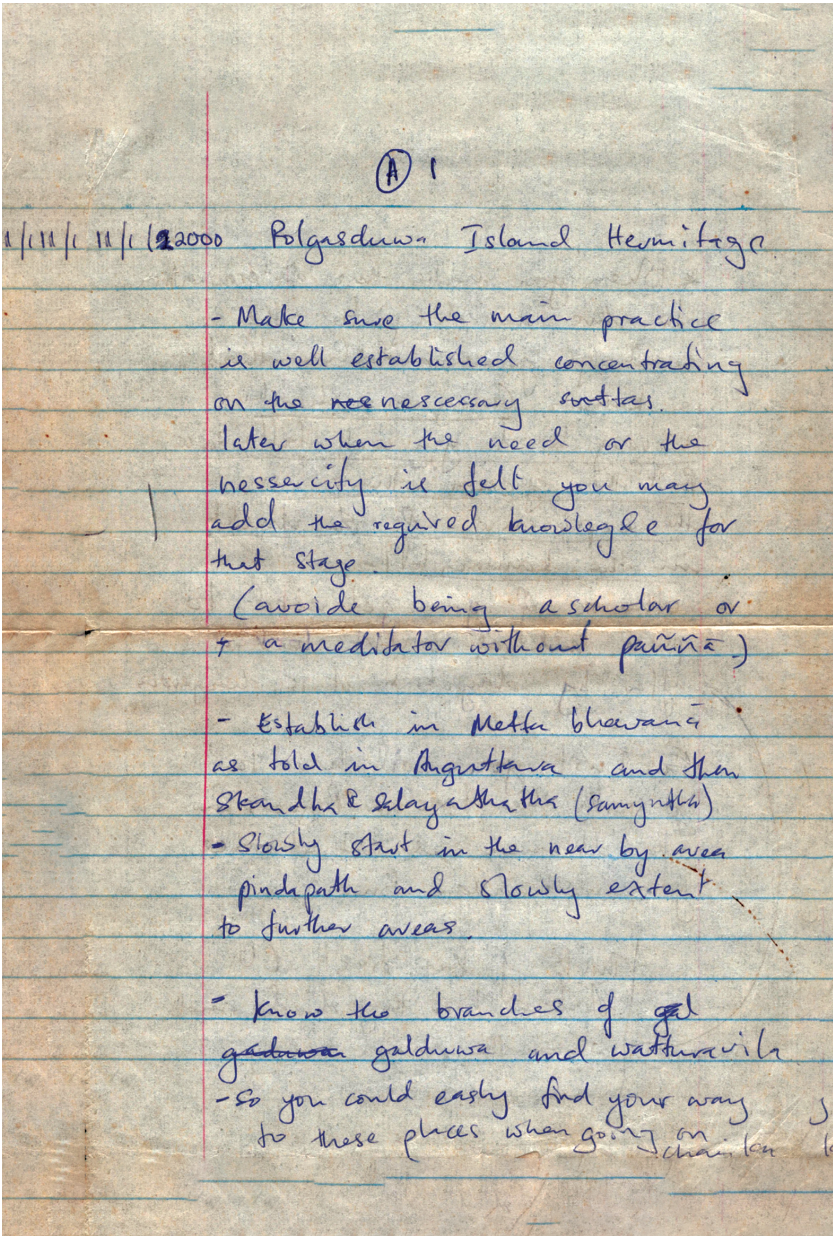
As Ven. Gnanaloka reflects now, it is not his own courage or clarity that carried him through, but the example of a teacher who had walked that path for decades. Not for what he would gain, but for what he could give. A blessing offered wherever he walked.

For Ven. Gnanaloka, the journey fulfilled a deep aspiration. Yet he came to see that physical extremes do not reveal the Dhamma. For that, one needs meditative seclusion with the Buddha's words.

His teacher had been clear: *cārikā* was not for everyone. It depended on one's *kamma*. You don't walk to find the Dhamma. You walk because you already have some sense of it.

But even then, one must remain unbound, even from the practice of *cārikā* itself. The essence was freedom, not the form.

This journey, then, was never his alone. It was part of an ancient path renewed. A living echo of one who said little, lived simply. Yet transformed lives, one silent act at a time.



(A) 1

1/11/11/2000 Polgasduwa Island Hermitage

- Make sure the main practice is well established concentrating on the ~~ne~~ necessary sutras. later when the need or the nessecity is felt you may add the required knowledge for that stage.
(avoide being a scholar or a meditator without paññā.)

- Establish in Metta bhavana as told in Anguttara and then Skandha & Salayathana (Samyutta)
- Slowly start in the near by area pindapath and slowly extent to further areas.

- know the boundaries of ~~gal~~ galduwa and watthuvila
- So you could easly find your way to these places when going on

Handwritten notes by Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (2000).



Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka with his teacher, Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage (circa 2000s).

CHAPTER 09

Give a Finger to Māra, He Takes a Hand

(Jan 2000 – May 2000)

[*Shanaka Dharmakeerthi was ordained as Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka on 19 December 1999; these notes were written after his ordination.*]

11 January 2000

- Make sure the main practice is well established, concentrating on the necessary task. Later when the need or the necessity is felt you may add the required knowledge for that stage. (Avoid being a scholar or a meditator without *paññā*).

- Establish in *mettā bhāvanā* as told in *Aṅguttara—Mettā Sutta* (AN8.1; loving-kindness) and then *Khandhasaṁyutta* and *Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta—Khandha Saṁyutta* (SN22; connected discourses on the aggregates); *Saḷāyatana Saṁyutta* (SN35; connected discourses on the six sense bases)

- Slowly start in the nearby area *piṇḍapāta* (alms round/ gathering of alms food) and slowly extend to further areas.

- Know the branches of Galduwa and Wathuruwila [forest monasteries], so you could easily find your way to those places when going on *cārikā*.

- **When you make the determination to live according to the teachings of the Buddha, that is *kamma*. Going on *cārikā* is very hard, you will fall sick. But then only there is**

experience of *dukkha* (suffering) in *kāmaloka* (the sensual realm).

- Otherwise if you get used to the place and all its comforts, being looked after by the *dāyakas*. It is dangerous. Think of the first 60 arahants, how they died and where they passed away.[12]

- First you will have to go with the teacher. Progress in the Dhamma is not at once, you must allow time.

- When in the jungle, don't get frightened or excited when faced with animals because they perceive the state of mind. Recite the *Khandha Paritta*—[*Ahirāja Sutta* (AN4.67; snakes)] daily and act with *mettā* to these beings.

- **If the monk you are under (the teacher's senior pupil) does not have an understanding of the actual practice, then you might have to part from him. This must not be done at once. When such things come, you must call for a Saṅgha meeting. Because it is not by chance you get this and that one as your *upajjhāya* (preceptor) or *ācariya* (teacher). There is a certain *kamma* behind it.**

23 January 2000

- When you are striving and living according to the Dhamma, merit is made and *devas* in the higher world will give protection as they like a person who can give merit. They will follow, don't forget that.

12 "The first 60 arahants" refers to the Buddha's initial enlightened disciples, whom he immediately sent out to teach. The Buddha was leaving the comfort and care provided by his attending supporters (*dāyakas*)—the food, medicine, robes and dwellings they offered—to prioritize his mission. The statement challenges the monk to reject the ease of dependence on the laity in favor of the duty to teach the Dhamma.

- Though things have changed outside, if you are determined to live according to the Dhamma, that will not be in vain.

- Though things have changed in Ceylon from outside, still in the hearts of the people the true idea of the monks is not lost.[13]

4 May 2000

- When you give a finger to Māra, he takes a hand. So be careful of this *kāmasukha (sensual pleasure)*. If some bhikkhus continue in this way, over the course of time, as people look for a leader, [those bhikkhus would be the ones] they would follow.[14]

- *"Ekāsanaṁ ekaseyyaṁ, eko caraṁ atandito;*
  eko damayaṁ attānaṁ, vanante ramito siyā"

  "Sitting alone, sleeping alone, tirelessly wandering alone; one who tames themselves alone would delight within a forest."

  (Dhp 305)

13 Ven. Ñāṇavimala often emphasized that while social conditions may shift, the fundamental faith of the Sri Lankan lay community toward sincere monks remains strong, rooted in centuries of devotion to the Saṅgha.

14 Ven. Ñāṇavimala's primary warning is against the danger of sensual pleasure (*kāmasukha*) corrupting the spiritual path. However, Venerable Gnanaloka adds that when spiritual practitioners maintain this disciplined, virtuous spiritual life, they naturally become figures who inspire and lead others to follow the Dhamma.



Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera on piṇḍapāta (alms-round):
(Location and date unknown)

REFLECTION 10

A Seed Foreseen, a Path Unfolding

In the quiet seclusion of Polgasduwa Island Hermitage, Ven. Ñāṇavimala spent over a decade immersed in disciplined training under the guidance of eminent monastic scholars—Ven. Nyanatiloka, Ven. Ñāṇaponika, and Ven. Ñāṇamoli. These were monks who didn't just study the Pāli Canon, they carried it in their blood. And among the original teachings of the Buddha, Ven. Ñāṇavimala's roots of renunciation took hold.

But the Island Hermitage was only a beginning. After eleven years, Ven. Ñāṇavimala stepped beyond the boundaries of monastery walls and began a life of ascetic wandering, lived entirely by the Dhamma's rhythm. Those who encountered him felt a life lived so simply that its very presence made the Dhamma visible.

Among the many who watched and listened was the young Shanaka, who had been drawn to meditation from a young age. Reserved by nature, he lived as a recluse even before his ordination. He rarely engaged in small talk, even among fellow monastics, and had no aspiration for recognition or teaching others.

Yet his teacher saw otherwise.

As a novice, Ven. Gnanaloka was once told, unexpectedly, "Your devotees are waiting for you." At the time, it sounded more poetic than prophetic. Still, over the years, Ven. Ñāṇavimala would prepare him, not with formal instruction, but with passing remarks that hinted at something more to come.

"When you happen to discourse to others," he once said, "you must discourse to them from their framework or language. Your idea or Dhamma ideas—it will create an impression."

Then, in 2001, what had once been subtle suggestions crystallized into a clear mission from his teacher: "You must find a way to bring many to this path. Create separate *cārikā piṇḍapātika bhikkhus.*"

It was a rare and weighty instruction—especially for one who had spent his life resisting social contact, avoiding even casual interactions with other monks. But the words were delivered without pressure, as if Ven. Ñāṇavimala knew the moment would come by itself.

That moment came years later, not in a monastery, but high in the Himalayas.

In 2015, while attempting a high-altitude ascent near Mount Kailash,[1] Ven. Gnanaloka faced sudden, life-threatening altitude sickness. With no access to oxygen or proper medical help, he began gasping for breath. Each breath brought less air. The body began to fail. Natural instinct was to panic, but his training had prepared him for this. He turned inward, not to fight death, but to meet it. In that surrender, a stillness came.

And in that space between life and death, a troubling thought arose:

I couldn't share enough with the people.

Can't help it, next life I'll have to.

This tension was magnified by his private aspiration: he had vowed to share the Dhamma he had received only after no trace of greed, hate or delusion was left in his heart.

He realized then that sharing need not wait for perfection. One doesn't need to master the entire ocean to offer a cup of water. That

1 Mount Kailash, located in Tibet, is considered one of the most sacred mountains in the world, revered by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and adherents of the Bön religion.

realization drew him out of his long seclusion. The vow made in silence at his teacher's stūpa had found its hour.

It wasn't a desire to teach, but a sense of duty that emerged. Slowly, almost reluctantly, he began to guide others—offering retreats, sharing insights, and encouraging those ready to walk the path. In time, he even began to support others in renunciation, nurturing a new generation of monastics inspired by the same wandering spirit.

Though his own instincts had always leaned toward quietude, it was clear the turning point had been foreseen. Not by him, but by the one who had trained him.

Looking back now, the threads are unmistakable. From cryptic remarks to direct instructions, Ven. Ñāṇavimala had not only planted the seed but somehow glimpsed its flowering.

"Actually my focus is on the Buddha," Ven. Gnanaloka clarifies.

He was not trying to fulfill anyone's expectations or carry out a plan. He was simply practicing day by day, moment to moment, living the Dhamma.

"Bhante made it alive for me," he reflects. "I would never have known from the *Suttas* what the Buddha is, if it wasn't for his guidance." Not a memory, but a living practice through which his teacher's presence remains. "He's not dead for me, if I do these things," he adds.

He sees the transformation in his own life as no accident. It had taken shape long before anyone else noticed.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala did not speak of destiny. His way was to place the right word in the heart of one who was ready and then wait, patiently, as life brought it to fruition.



"I made a vow."—Ven. Gnanaloka.

That moment, at the stūpa consecration, Parappaduwa Island Hermitage, 10 October 2006, one year after his teacher's passing. Captured by a bystander.

CHAPTER 10

Find a Way to Bring Many to This Path

(July 2001)

14 July 2001

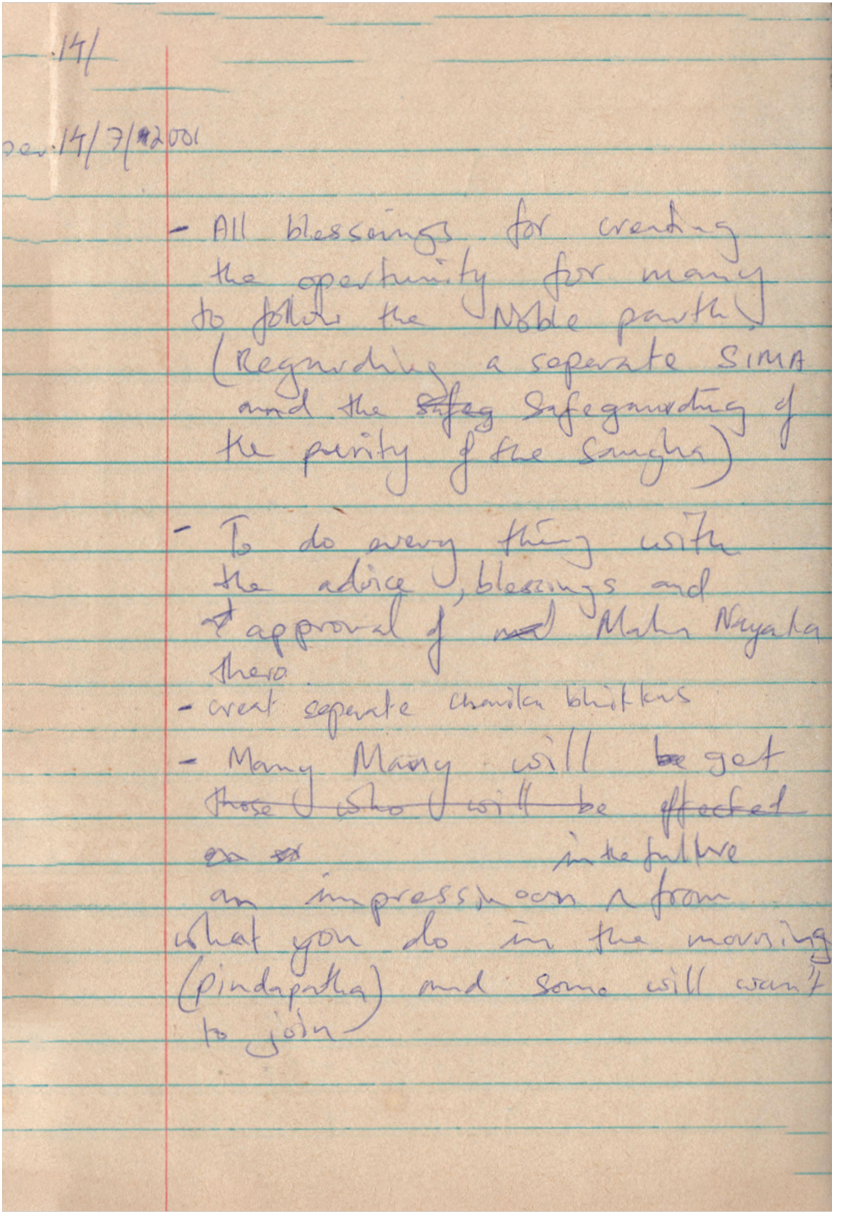
- [*Personal Note:*] All blessings for creating the opportunity for many to follow the Noble path. (Regarding a separate *sīmā* and the safeguarding of purity of the Saṅgha).[2]
- To do everything with the advice, blessings and approval of [Ven. Madihe Paññāsīha] Mahānāyaka Thera.
- Create separate *cārikā* bhikkhus.[3]
- Many will get an impression in the future from what you do in the morning (*piṇḍapāta*) and some will want to join.
- *Kasibhāradvāja Sutta* (SN7.11; Kasi Bhāradvāja) applies especially to you: when you happen to discourse to others, you must discourse to them from [within] their [own] framework or language, your idea or Dhamma ideas it will create an impression.

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2 Ven. Gnanaloka Thera expressed this statement of gratitude to his teacher, Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, on the day the new *sīmā* was opened at Parappaduwa Island Hermitage. A *sīmā* is the legally defined boundary within which the Bhikkhu Saṅgha (Monastic Community) conducts formal communal acts—such as higher ordination *(upasampadā),* the closing of the rains-retreat, disciplinary procedures, and the annual robe-offering ceremony *(kaṭhina)* to safeguard procedural purity.

3 Ven. Ñāṇavimala encouraged the establishment of such monks to preserve the ancient forest tradition of renunciation and simplicity. Interestingly, this advice was given to a young monk—Ven. Gnanaloka—who had been in robes for only two years at the time.

- You must find a way to bring many to this path.
- Create separate *cārikā piṇḍapāta* bhikkhus.
- (Bhikkhus in mind) recruit young ones from the age 20 who are especially coming from good families, who can make a determination on the essential goal.



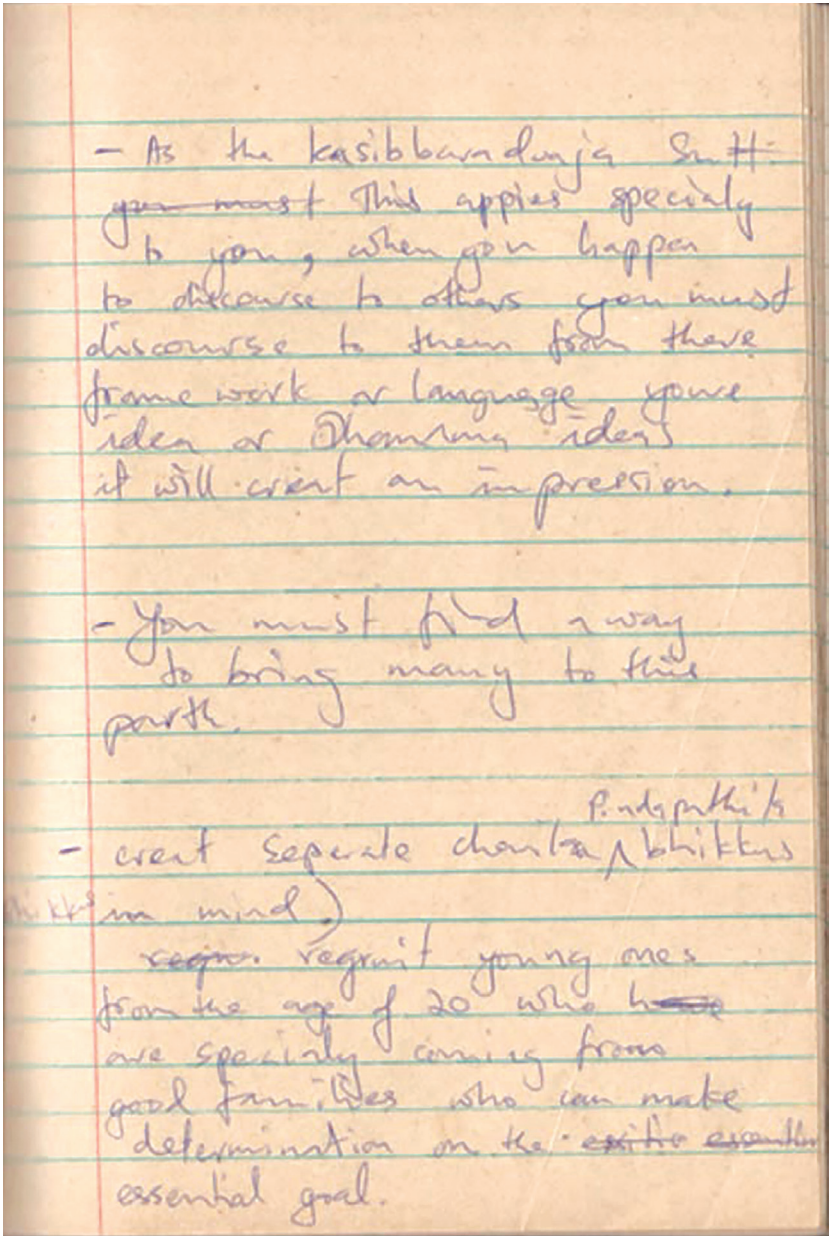
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Dec. 14/7/2001

- All blessings for creating the opertunity for many to follow the Noble path (Regarding a seperate SIMA and the ~~Sfag~~ Safeguarding of the purity of the Sangha)

- To do every thing with the advice, blessings and approval of ~~and~~ Maha Nayaka thero
- creat seperate chanda bhikkus
- Many Many will ~~be~~ get ~~those who will be effected~~ ~~on~~ ~~as~~ in the future an impression from what you do in the morning (pindapatha) and some will want to join

Handwritten notes by Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (2001).

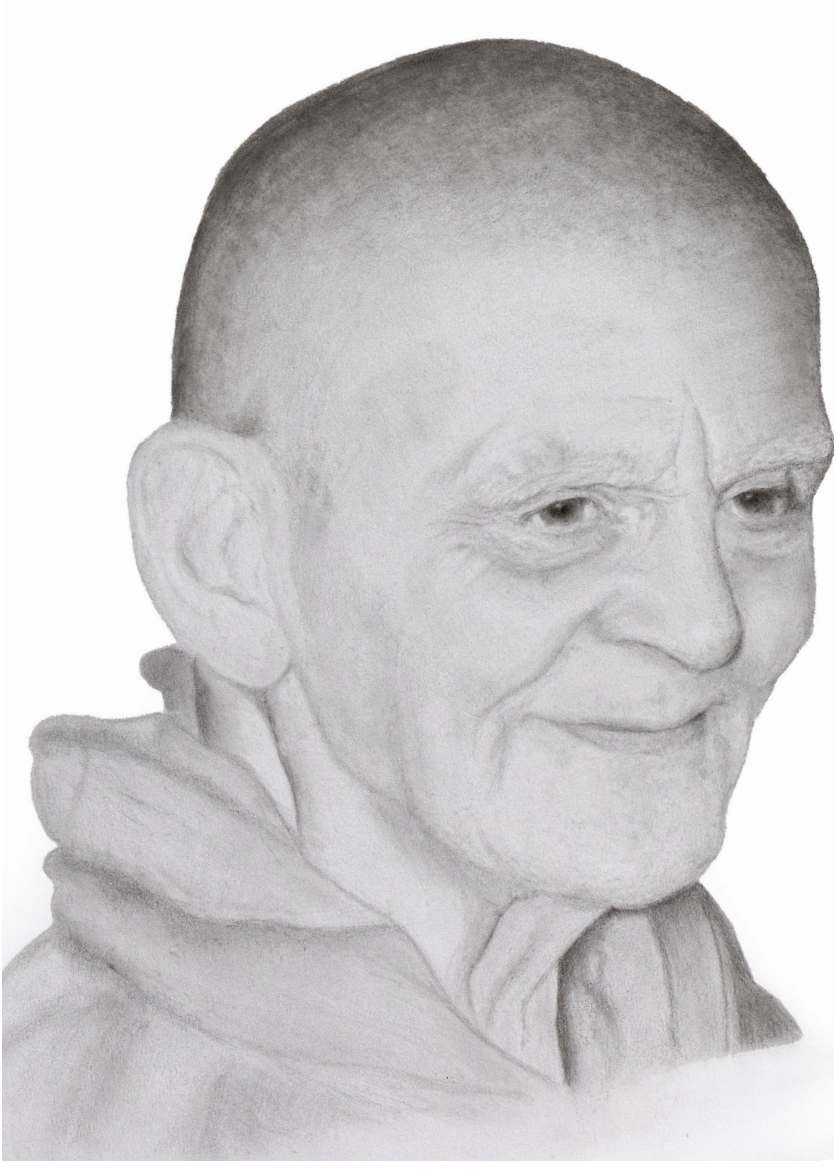


- As the kasibharadvaja Sutta ~~you must~~ This applies specially to you, when you happen to discourse to others you must discourse to them from these frame work or language your idea or Dhamma ideas it will orient an impression.

- You must find a way to bring many to this path.

- orient Separate chanda/Abhikkhus (Pabbajitha in mind)
~~regno~~. regrint young ones from the age of 20 who ~~h~~ are specially coming from good families who can make determination on the ~~exitto~~ ~~essential~~ essential goal.

Handwritten notes by Ven. Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera, capturing teachings and reflections from his time with Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera (2001).



In Reverence to Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera

23 November 1911 – 10 October 2005

Epilogue: The Sage

At the time of the Buddha, many who listened to the Dhamma were moved to renounce worldly life and follow the ancient path of the sages.

In Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, the spirit of the ancient path came alive again—a life of quiet renunciation, lived beneath the open sky. His footprints joined those of countless seekers, from the forests of India to the hermitages of Sri Lanka and beyond. Wherever such lives are lived, the way of the sage endures—serene, selfless and unbroken through time.

The verses below, spoken by the Buddha, encapsulate the essence of that path—the life of the *muni*, the silent sage. They remind us that the Dhamma is not a doctrine to be held, but a way to be lived—here and now, in this very life.

May these words awaken in the reader the same resolve that inspired countless seekers—to live by the Dhamma, to see clearly, and to walk the way of the sage.

"Peril stems from intimacy, dust comes from an abode.
Freedom from abode and intimacy: that is the sage's vision.

Having cut down what's grown, they wouldn't replant,
nor would they nurture what's growing.
That's who they call a sage wandering alone,
the great seer has seen the state of peace.

Having appraised the fields and measured the seeds,
they wouldn't nurture them with moisture.
Truly that sage who sees the ending of rebirth
has left speculation behind and is beyond reckoning.

Understanding all the planes of rebirth,
not wanting a single one of them;
truly that sage freed of greed
need not swim, for they have reached the far shore.

The champion, all-knower, so very intelligent,
unsullied in the midst of all things,
has given up all, freed in the ending of craving:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

Strong in wisdom, with precepts and observances intact,
serene, loving absorption, mindful,
released from chains, kind, undefiled:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

The diligent sage wandering alone,
is unshaken by blame and praise—
like a lion not startled by sounds,
like wind not caught in a net,
like water not sticking to a lotus.
Leader of others, not by others led:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

Steady as a post in a bathing-place
when others speak endlessly against them,
freed of greed, with senses stilled:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

Steadfast, straight as a shuttle,
horrified by wicked deeds,
discerning the just and the unjust:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

Restrained, they do no evil,
young or middle-aged, the sage is self-controlled.
Irreproachable, he does not insult anyone:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

When one who lives on charity receives alms,
from the top, the middle, or the leftovers,
they think it unworthy to praise or put down:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

The sage lives refraining from sex,
even when young is not tied down,
refraining from indulgence and negligence, freed:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

Understanding the world,
the seer of the ultimate goal,
the unaffected one,
having crossed the flood and the ocean,
has cut the ties, unattached and undefiled:
that's who the attentive know as a sage.

The two are not the same,
far apart in lifestyle and conduct—
the householder providing for a wife,
and the selfless one true to their vows.
The unrestrained householder kills other creatures,
while the restrained sage
always protects living creatures.

As the crested blue-necked peacock
flying through the sky
never approaches the speed of the swan,
so the householder cannot compete with the mendicant,
the sage meditating secluded in the woods."

Muni Sutta (Snp 1.12; the muni)

Appendix

Unlocking the Timeless Insights Preserved in the *Suttas*

Although the Buddha attained Parinibbāna over 2,500 years ago, something of him is still alive wherever a *Sutta* is read with sincerity. The *Suttas* are the closest thing we have to the Buddha's own voice. Everything else—commentary, modern interpretation, secondhand explanation—is someone else's reflection of the teaching. The *Suttas* are the teaching itself, carried forward with extraordinary care by generations of the Saṅgha, who memorized, recited, and faithfully preserved these discourses so that what reaches us today remains remarkably faithful to what was originally spoken.

That is what makes these words unlike any ordinary book. They are not merely teachings about the path; they are the very words that have guided countless practitioners to stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and ultimately arahantship—complete liberation. Every discourse is an opportunity to encounter the Dhamma exactly as it was first taught: not a summary of it, not an interpretation of it, but the living voice itself, still speaking across the centuries to anyone willing to listen with an open heart.

In that sense, reading a *Sutta* is a small kind of time travel. Sit with one slowly enough, and it can feel as though you are being carried back more than 2,500 years, to a quiet forest grove, a monastery, or a village park, sitting among monks, nuns, and lay followers gathered around the Blessed One as these very words are spoken for the first time. As you read, the centuries seem to fall away, and for a moment the distance between you and the Buddha feels surprisingly small, as though the Buddha himself is speaking directly to you. The possibility of transformation that existed then is still present now.

These discourses were never meant simply to be read, analysed, or stored away as knowledge. They are meant to be contemplated, lived, and realized. They deserve to be approached the way one would approach something genuinely precious, with reverence, patience, and humility. In the Buddha's day, people travelled great distances on foot, endured hardship, gave up comforts, and even went forth from the household life into homelessness for the opportunity to hear the Dhamma. In the modern age, those same precious discourses are often no more than a Google search away, carried in our pockets wherever we go. To treat them merely as information would be to forget the immense value they once held for those who sacrificed so much to hear them, preserve them, and pass them on to us. Such accessibility is a blessing that should never be taken for granted.

The *Suttas* are also like a treasure map. Hidden within each discourse are directions pointing toward the greatest treasure there is: the complete ending of suffering. For a mind fully ripe, a single discourse can act as a complete key, unlocking total liberation in an instant. But for most of us, the map unfolds piece by piece. Each *Sutta* reveals another landmark, another layer of training, and another profound insight waiting to be discovered.

At the same time, every heart is locked a little differently. Think of each *Sutta* as a key, and your own mind as a lock you do not yet fully understand. Apart from the Buddha, no one can tell you beforehand which key will fit. The only way to find out is to read sincerely, one *Sutta* after another, without forcing the search. Then, often unexpectedly, a particular discourse will resonate so deeply that it quietly transforms the way you see yourself, the world, and the Dhamma. When you find that key, the real work begins: returning to that teaching again and again, contemplating it deeply, and allowing it to shape the way you live.

As Venerable Ñāṇavimala said:

"If anyone is sincere, they will guide you to the Suttas."

Teachers, traditions, and interpretations may vary with time, but the *Suttas* remain the one stable and trustworthy reference point. Within them lie both the map and the key. Read them slowly. Read them with faith, with curiosity, and with sincerity. For when you open a *Sutta* with the right heart, you are not merely reading an ancient text; you are encountering the world through the lens of the Buddha himself. As the Blessed One said, *"Yo dhammaṁ passati so maṁ passati; yo maṁ passati so dhammaṁ passati"*—"One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma." For within the *Suttas,* it is the Dhamma that shines forth, and through the Dhamma, the Buddha is truly seen.

For immeasurable ages you have wandered through this beginningless saṁsāra, roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Lifetime after lifetime, you have pursued fleeting happiness while remaining bound to birth, aging, and death. Yet now, in this rare human life, you have encountered the words of a Fully Awakened Buddha, carefully preserved in the *Suttas* for more than 2,500 years. Do not underestimate how precious this is. Do not take this opportunity lightly. After countless lifetimes, you may be far closer to liberation than you have ever been before.

Venerable Ñāṇavimala's Walking Contemplations *(Caṅkama Bhāvanā)*

On numerous occasions, Venerable Gnanaloka (then Shanaka) accompanied his teacher from his hut to the monastery dining hall and back. During these walks, Venerable Ñāṇavimala would often verbalize the sequence of his *caṅkama* (walking meditation) contemplations. The following phrases, memorized by Venerable Gnanaloka, offer a rare glimpse into the structured, moment-to-moment reflection of a master.

The practice unfolds in a progressive arc, moving from contemplating the drawbacks of sensuality (*Kāma ādīnava*) and the benefits of renunciation (*Nekkhamma ānisaṁsa*), culminating in the direct contemplation of the path to liberation (*Nissaraṇa*) through Dependent Origination.

1. Brightening the Mind

The practice begins by cultivating faith and confidence in the Buddha, reflecting on his boundless qualities, reciting a Pāli Gāthā or recalling the great practitioners of the past who walked this very path to liberation.

2. Grounding in the Present Moment

After brightening the mind with faith, one returns to the present by reflecting on the impermanent nature of all phenomena.

"Yadatītaṁ pahīnaṁ taṁ, appattañca anāgataṁ.
Paccuppannañca yo dhammaṁ, tattha tattha vipassati"

"The past is left behind, The future is not yet reached.
But those phenomena that are present, He clearly sees wherever they arise"

[This verse is extracted from *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN131; a single excellent night)]

3. Contemplating the Body and Cultivating Awareness

Next, one detaches from the body by mindfully recognizing its nature and cultivates awareness in every posture.

"Kāyo anantādīnavo āvāso,
Sabba roga rukkha mūlo"

"This body is a dwelling full of endless faults,
the root of all disease and suffering."

[Not a direct quote; likely inspired by *Girimānanda Sutta* (AN10.60; Girimānanda) and *Apadāna* (PTS 2.467)]

"Gate ṭhite bhāsite tuṇhībhāve sampajānakārī bhikkhu."

"A bhikkhu acts in full awareness when walking, standing, talking, and keeping silent."

"Gacchanto gacchāmi"

"When walking, one knows: 'I am walking.'"

[Paraphrased from *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN22; the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness)]

4. Reflecting on Impermanence

While walking, the contemplation deepens by examining the conditioned and transient nature of the body and all formations.

"Āhārasambhūto kāyo
Āhāraṁ aniccaṁ dukkhaṁ anattaṁ
Kāyaṁ aniccaṁ dukkhaṁ anattaṁ
Sabbasaṅkhāraṁ aniccaṁ dukkhaṁ anattaṁ"

"This body is sustained by food.
Food is impermanent, subject to suffering, and not-self.
The body is impermanent, subject to suffering, and not-self.
All conditioned things are impermanent, suffering, and not-self."

[Not a direct quote; likely inspired by *Puttamaṁsa Sutta* (SN12.63; son's flesh)]

5. Aspiring to Be Like the Sages

Reflects on calming the body, speech and mind, practicing restraint, understanding impermanence, and following the path of the wise ones.

"Santakāyo santavāco
Santavā susamāhito
Vantalokāmiso bhikkhu
Tādisā samaṇā mama
Santindriyā santamānasā
Santaṁ tesaṁ gataṁ ṭhitaṁ
Okkhittacakkhū mitabhāṇī
Tādisā samaṇā mama"

"Peaceful in body, peaceful in speech
Living serenely, inwardly composed
The bhikkhu who has cast away worldly bait
Such are the ascetics dear to me

Peaceful in faculties, peaceful in mind
Peaceful is their going, peaceful their standing
With lowered gaze and measured speech
Such are the ascetics dear to me"

[Not a direct quote; likely inspired by Sayings of the Buddha, Dhammapada Verse 378 and the commentary to Dhammapada verse 304 (Cūḷa Subhaddā's Story)]

"Kāyaṁ purāṇaṁ kammaṁ,
Abhisaṅkhataṁ abhisañcetayitaṁ,
Aniccaṁ nirodha dhammaṁ."

"This body is old karma.
Formed and shaped by prior intentions.
It is impermanent and subject to cessation."

[Not a direct quote; likely inspired by *Natumha Sutta* (SN12.37; not yours)]

6. Contemplating Mundane Dependent Origination

The reflection then turns to the causal chain that perpetuates suffering (*saṁsāra*).

"Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā,
Saṅkhāra paccayā viññāṇaṁ,
Viññāṇa paccayā jāti,
Jāti paccayā jarāmaraṇaṁ sokaparideva dukkha domanassupāyāsā sambhavanti."

"With ignorance as condition, mental formations arise,
With mental formations as condition, consciousness arises,
With consciousness as condition, birth arises,
With birth as condition, arise aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair."

[Condensed form of dependent origination; extracted from *Paṭiccasamuppāda Sutta* (SN12.1; dependent origination)]

7. Contemplating the Impermanence of All Formations

Imagine what it's like to taste the peace of cessation—the stilling of formations—echoed in the Buddha's final words.

"Vayadhammā saṅkhārā,
Uppādavayadhammino,
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti,
Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho."

"Conditioned things are subject to decay,
Having the nature to arise and pass away,
They come into being and then cease.
Their stilling is bliss"

[Combination of the Buddha's final words and the verse uttered by Sakka, Lord of the Gods, following his passing; from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN16; the great passing, the Buddha's last days).]

"Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā'ti,
Yadā paññāya passati,
Atha nibbindati dukkhe,
Esa maggo visuddhiyā."

"All conditioned things are impermanent,
When one sees this with wisdom,
One becomes disenchanted with suffering.
This is the path to purification."

[Sayings of the Buddha, extracted from *Dhammapada*—Verse 277]

8. Contemplating Transcendental Dependent Origination

As these contemplations are deeply realized in the present moment, the chain of suffering begins to cease, revealing the liberating sequence that culminates in Nibbāna.

"Avijjā nirodhā saṅkhāra nirodho,
Saṅkhāra nirodhā viññāṇa nirodho,
Viññāṇa nirodhā jāti nirodho,
Jāti nirodhā jarāmaraṇaṁ sokaparideva dukkha domanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti.

Etaṁ santaṁ etaṁ paṇītaṁ, yadidaṁ sabba saṅkhāra samatho, Sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo, Taṇhakkhayo, virāgo, nirodho, nibbānan ti."

"With the cessation of ignorance, mental formations cease,
With the cessation of mental formations, consciousness ceases,
With the cessation of consciousness, birth ceases,
With the cessation of birth, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair all cease.

This is the peaceful, this is the sublime: the calming of all formations, The relinquishment of all attachments, The destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, and Nibbāna."

[Condensed form of dependent origination; extracted from *Paṭiccasamuppāda Sutta* (SN12.1; dependent origination) and closing verse describing the peace of Nibbāna is extracted from *Girimānanda Sutta* (AN10.60; Girimānanda)]

"Saṅkhāraparamā dukhā;
Nibbānaṁ paramaṁ sukhaṁ."

"Conditioned things are the greatest suffering;
Nibbāna is the highest happiness."

[Sayings of the Buddha, extracted from *Dhammapada*—Verse 203]

A Note for the Practitioner

While this sequence reflects the specific contemplations verbalized by Venerable Ñāṇavimala, practitioners are encouraged to adapt these principles—selecting verses from the *Suttas* that resonate with their own experience—to support mindfulness and insight during walking meditation.

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's Suggested Readings for *Upāsakas* (lay people)

Venerable Ñāṇavimala often recognized lay people who displayed a sincere commitment to practice. To support their efforts, he would sometimes give them handouts—privately typed or photocopied sheets of his teachings—as a personal form of encouragement.

List of *Suttas* for *Upāsakas:*

Who is an Upāsaka?

- AN5.175: *Caṇḍāla Sutta* (Caṇḍāla); Various qualities of *upāsakas*
- AN8.25: *Mahānāma Sutta* (Mahānāma), AN8.26: *Jīvaka Sutta* (Jīvaka), SN55.37: *Mahānāma Sutta* (Mahānāma); *Saddhā, sīla, diṭṭhi-ujuka*
- DN31: *Sigālaka Sutta* (to Sigālaka); Duties to family
- AN4.60: *Gihisāmīci Sutta* (the layperson's proper practice); Duties of *upāsaka* to Saṅgha
- AN8.21: *Paṭhamaugga Sutta* (Ugga, first); Eight Dhammas for laypeople (*Gahapativagga*)
- AN8.41: *Saṅkhittūposatha Sutta* (in brief)

Saṁvega

- AN7.74: *Araka Sutta* (Araka); How life grew shorter
- DN26: *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* (the lion's roar on the turning of the wheel); What will happen in the future
- MN130: *Devadūta Sutta* (the divine messengers)

Dāna

- Iti22: *Metta Sutta* (the benefits of love)
- AN9.10: *Āhuneyya Sutta* (worthy of gifts); Whom to give dāna to
- AN9.20: *Velāma Sutta* (Velāma); How to give dāna
- AN10.177: *Jāṇussoṇi Sutta* (Jāṇussoṇī); Merit to petas
- AN7.52: *Dānamahapphala Sutta* (giving); Dāna as *mahapphalaṁ*
- AN5.35: *Dānānisaṁsa Sutta* (the benefits of giving); Dāna *ānisaṁsa*

Sīla

- AN8.41: *Saṅkhittūposatha Sutta* (in brief), AN8.42: *Vitthatūposatha Sutta* (in detail); Eight *sīla* for lay people
- AN10.46: *Sakka Sutta* (Sakyans); *Uposatha*, not only once in a while
- AN3.70: *Uposatha Sutta* (uposatha); What is *uposatha*?
- SN47.47: *Duccarita Sutta* (misconduct); *Sīla as kāya vacī mano sucaritaṁ*
- SN55.2: *Brahmacariyogadha Sutta* (grounded); *Ariyakanta sīla*

Bhāvanā

- AN5.176: *Pīti Sutta* (rapture)—even a lay follower should train in *paviveka*
- SN47.3: *Bhikkhu Sutta* (a bhikkhu); *Diṭṭhi ca ujuka*, *sīlañ-ca suvisuddhaṁ*, four *Satipaṭṭhāna, Samādhinimitta*
- MN44: *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (the shorter series of questions and answers)
- MN143: *Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta* (advice to Anāthapiṇḍika)

- AN11.12: *Dutiyamahānāma Sutta* (Mahānāma, second)
- SN54.12: *Kaṅkheyya Sutta* (in perplexity)

How to judge the *Dhamma*

- AN8.53: *Saṁkhitta Sutta* (brief); Eight qualities of the *Dhamma*

Kālaṁ āgameyya

- SN22.1: *Nakulapitu Sutta* (Nakulapitā), AN3.51: *Paṭhamadvebrāhmaṇa Sutta* (two brahmins, first), AN3.52: *Dutiyadvebrāhmaṇa Sutta* (two brahmins, second)—Keep the mind healthy in old age
- MN83: *Makhādeva Sutta* (king Makhādeva); Don't be the last person in the line

Benefits of *Dhamma* Practice:

- AN4.116: *Appamāda Sutta* (heedfulness), AN4.117: *Ārakkha Sutta* (guarding); No fear of death
- AN5.122: *Satisūpaṭṭhita Sutta* (establishment of mindfulness); Some benefits

First duties to oneself

- Dhp166: (the self); Not to neglect oneself for the sake of others
- Dhp 166: (the self); First establish yourself, then teach

Duties to relatives

- SN55.17: *Dutiyamittāmacca Sutta* (friends and colleagues, second); Duty to establish relatives in faith in the Buddha
- AN3.75: *Nivesaka Sutta* (should be encouraged); *Dhamma, Saṅgha, sīla*

Ven. Ñāṇavimala's Suggested Readings for Saṅgha (monastics)

Given by Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera mainly to young monks—newly ordained or beginning to live independently. He stressed that genuine training starts with a clear grasp of the Buddha's gradual path (*anupubba-paṭipadā*): from virtue (*sīla*) to concentration (*samādhi*) and finally to wisdom (*paññā*).

- MN117: *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* (the great forty); Complete the Noble Eightfold Path in a specific order to obtain samādhi. After that *sammāñāṇa* and *sammāvimutti.*
- The gradual training for a bhikkhu;
- MN107: *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (to Gaṇaka Moggallāna)
- MN39: *Mahā-Assapura Sutta* (the greater discourse at Assapura)
- MN53: *Sekha Sutta* (the disciple in higher training)
- MN59: *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* (the many kinds of feeling)
- MN27: *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta* (the shorter discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint)
- MN125: *Dantabhūmi Sutta* (the grade of the tamed); The gradual training for *jhāna*.
- AN10.61: *Avijjā Sutta* (ignorance); If you have difficulties at the present level of practice then take one step back and practice at that level.
- MN61: *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā); *Sīla:* for laypeople—eight precepts; for monastics—Pātimokkha; for ariyas—*ariyakanta sīla.* This *Sutta*

is describing a different kind of *sīla,* which is purity in *kāya, vācā* and *mano (tīṇi sucaritāni).* Based on this *sīla*, *pīti* will arise.

- MN19: *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (two kinds of thought); Dividing the thoughts.[1]
- MN7: *Vatthūpama Sutta* (the simile of the cloth); Reflecting on the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha leads to step by step progress as follows: *saddhā*, *pāmujja, pīti, passaddhakāya,*[2] *sukha, samādhi*. This process is how one comes to *samādhi* with joy and Dhamma-understanding as a basis.
- MN40: *Cūḷa-Assapura Sutta* (the shorter discourse at Assapura); More or less the same as MN7: *Vatthūpama Sutta* (the simile of the cloth) but based on being purified from twelve unwholesome mental qualities (covetousness, ill will, anger, hostility, disdain, contempt, jealousy, stinginess, deviousness, deceit, evil desires, and wrong view).
- MN64: *Mahāmālunkya Sutta* (the greater discourse to Mālunkyāputta); How to practice for *sammāñāṇa* and *sammāvimutti* with *jhāna* as the basis.

1 A handwritten note, possibly by Ven. Mettavihārī or Ven. Ñāṇavimala.

2 A handwritten note, possibly by Ven. Mettavihārī or Ven. Ñāṇavimala.

The Source of Wisdom: Canonical References

This section lists all Suttas (Discourses of the Buddha) and verses referred to in this work, along with brief summaries adapted from SuttaCentral.net. They represent the wellspring from which these notes and reflections arise—words that earlier seekers journeyed far to find, and which today lie open to all who wish to see for themselves.

Dīgha Nikāya

Sīlakkhandhavagga

- DN2: **Sāmaññaphala Sutta** (the fruits of the homeless life)

  The newly crowned King Ajātasattu is disturbed by the violent means by which he achieved the crown. He visits the Buddha to find peace of mind, and asks him about the benefits of spiritual practice. This is one of the greatest literary and spiritual texts of early Buddhism.

Mahāvagga

- DN16: **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (the great passing, the Buddha's last days)

  The longest of all discourses, this extended narrative tells of the events surrounding the Buddha's death. Full of vivid and moving details, it is an ideal entry point into knowing the Buddha as a person, and understanding how the Buddhist community coped with his passing.

- DN22: **Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness)

  The Buddha details the seventh factor of the noble eightfold path, mindfulness meditation. This discourse is essentially identical to MN10, with the addition of an extended section on the four noble truths derived from MN141.

Pāthikavagga

- DN26: **Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta** (the lion's roar on the turning of the wheel)

  In illustration of his dictum that one should rely on oneself, the Buddha gives a detailed account of the fall of a kingly lineage of the past, and the subsequent degeneration of society. This process, however, is not over, as the Buddha predicts that eventually society will fall into utter chaos. But far in the future, another Buddha, Metteyya, will arise in a time of peace and plenty.

- DN27: **Aggañña Sutta** (on knowledge of beginnings)

  In contrast with the brahmin's self-serving mythologies of the past, the Buddha presents an account of evolution that shows how human choices are an integral part of the ecological balance, and how excessive greed destroys the order of nature.

- DN29: **Pāsādika Sutta** (the delightful discourse)

  Following the death of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, the leader of the Jains, the Buddha emphasizes the stability and maturity of his own community. He encourages the community to come together after his death and recite the teachings in harmony.

- DN31: **Sigālaka Sutta** (to Sigālaka)

  The Buddha encounters a young man who honors his dead father by performing rituals. The Buddha recasts the meaningless rites in terms of virtuous conduct. This is the most detailed discourse on ethics for lay people.

Majjhima Nikāya

Mūlapaṇṇāsapāḷi (the root fifty discourses)

Mūlapariyāyavagga

- MN1: **Mūlapariyāya Sutta** (the root of all things)

  The Buddha examines how the notion of a permanent self emerges from the process of perception. A wide range of phenomena are considered, embracing both naturalistic and cosmological dimensions. An unawakened person interprets experience in terms of a self, while those more advanced have the same experiences without attachment.

- MN2: **Sabbāsava Sutta** (all the taints)

  The diverse problems of the spiritual journey demand a diverse range of responses. Rather than applying the same solution to every problem, the Buddha outlines seven methods of dealing with defilements, each of which works in certain cases.

- MN3: **Dhammadāyāda Sutta** (heirs in Dhamma)

  Some of the Buddha's students inherit from him only material profits and fame. But his true inheritance is the spiritual path, the way of contentment. Venerable Sāriputta explains how by following the Buddha's example we can experience the fruits of the path.

- MN4: **Bhayabherava Sutta** (fear and dread)

  The Buddha explains the difficulties of living in the wilderness, and how they are overcome by purity of conduct and meditation. He recounts some of the fears and obstacles he faced during his own practice.

- MN5: **Anangaṇa Sutta** (without blemishes)

  The Buddha's chief disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, use a simile of a tarnished bowl to illustrate the blemishes of the mind and conduct. They emphasize how the crucial thing is not so much whether there are blemishes, but whether we are aware of them.

- MN6: **Ākankheyya Sutta** (if a bhikkhu should wish)

  According to the Buddha, careful observance of ethical precepts is the foundation of all higher achievements in the spiritual life.

- MN7: **Vatthūpama Sutta** (the simile of the cloth)

  The many different kinds of impurities that defile the mind are compared to a dirty cloth. When the mind is clean we find joy, which leads to states of higher consciousness. Finally, the Buddha rejects the Brahmanical notion that purity comes from bathing in sacred rivers.

- MN8: **Sallekha Sutta** (effacement)

  The Buddha differentiates between peaceful meditation and spiritual practices that encompass the whole of life. He lists forty-four aspects, which he explains as "effacement", the wearing away of conceit.

- MN9: **Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta** (right view)

  Venerable Sāriputta gives a detailed explanation of right view, the first factor of the noble eightfold path. At the prompting of the other mendicants, he approaches the topic from a wide range of perspectives.

- MN10: **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (the foundations of mindfulness)

  Here the Buddha details the seventh factor of the noble eightfold path, mindfulness meditation. This collects many of the meditation teachings found throughout the canon, especially the foundational practices focusing on the body, and is regarded as one of the most important meditation discourses.

Sīhanādavagga

- MN13: **Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta** (the greater discourse on the mass of suffering)

  Challenged to show the difference between his teaching and that of other ascetics, the Buddha points out that they speak of letting go, but do not really understand why. He then explains in great detail the suffering that arises from attachment to sensual stimulation.

- MN14: **Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta** (the shorter discourse on the mass of suffering)

  A lay person is puzzled at how, despite their long practice, they still have greedy or hateful thoughts. The Buddha explains the importance of absorption meditation for letting go such attachments. But he also criticizes self-mortification, and recounts a previous dialog with Jain ascetics.

- MN18: **Madhupiṇḍika Sutta** (the honeyball)

  Challenged by a brahmin, the Buddha gives an enigmatic response on how conflict arises due to proliferation based on perceptions. Venerable Kaccāna draws out the detailed implications of this in one of the most insightful passages in the entire canon.

- MN19: **Dvedhāvitakka Sutta** (two kinds of thought)

  Recounting his own experiences in developing meditation, the Buddha explains how to understand harmful and harmless thoughts, and how to go beyond thought altogether.

- MN20: **Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta** (the removal of distracting thoughts)

  In a practical meditation teaching, the Buddha describes five different approaches to stopping thoughts.

Opammavagga

- MN21: **Kakacūpama Sutta** (the simile of the saw)

  A discourse full of vibrant and memorable similes, on the importance of patience and love even when faced with abuse and criticism. The Buddha finishes with the simile of the saw, one of the most memorable similes found in the discourses.

- MN22: **Alagaddūpama Sutta** (the simile of the snake)

  A monk denies that misconduct is a serious concern. Both the monastic community and the Buddha subsequently reprimand him sternly. The Buddha compares someone who clings only to the literal meaning of the teachings to a person who grasps a snake by its tail—a perilous mistake. He also introduces the famous simile of the raft.

- MN25: **Nivāpa Sutta** (the bait)

  The Buddha compares getting trapped by Māra with a deer getting caught in a snare, illustrating the ever more complex strategies employed by hunter and hunted.

- MN26: **Ariyapariyesanā Sutta** (the noble search)

  This is one of the most important biographical discourses, telling the Buddha's experiences from leaving home to realizing awakening. Throughout, he was driven by the imperative to fully escape from rebirth and suffering.

- MN27: **Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta** (the shorter discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint)

  The Buddha cautions against swift conclusions about a teacher's spiritual accomplishments, comparing it to the care a tracker would use when tracking elephants. He presents the full training of a monastic.

- MN28: **Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta** (the greater discourse on the simile of the elephant's footprint)

  Sāriputta gives an elaborate demonstration of how, just as any footprint can fit inside an elephant's, all the Buddha's teaching can fit inside the four noble truths. This offers an overall template for organizing the Buddha's teachings.

Mahāyamakavagga

- MN31: **Cūḷagosinga Sutta** (the shorter discourse in Gosinga)

  The Buddha comes across three mendicants practicing diligently and harmoniously, and asks them how they do it. Reluctant to disclose their higher attainments, they explain how they deal with the practical affairs of living together. But when pressed by the Buddha, they reveal their meditation attainments.

- MN37: **Cūḷataṇhāsankhaya Sutta** (the shorter discourse on the destruction of craving)

  Moggallāna visits the heaven of Sakka, the lord of gods, to see whether he really understands what the Buddha is teaching.

- MN38: **Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta** (the greater discourse on the destruction of craving)

  To counter the wrong view that a self-identical consciousness transmigrates from one life to the next, the Buddha teaches dependent origination, showing that consciousness invariably arises dependent on conditions.

- MN39: **Mahā-Assapura Sutta** (the greater discourse at Assapura)

  The Buddha encourages the mendicants to live up to their name, by actually practicing in a way that meets or exceeds the expectations people have for renunciants.

- MN40: **Cūḷa-Assapura Sutta** (the shorter discourse at Assapura)

  The labels of being a spiritual practitioner don't just come from external trappings, but from sincere inner change.

Cūḷayamakavagga

- MN44: **Cūḷavedalla Sutta** (the shorter series of questions and answers)

  The layman Visākha asks the nun Dhammadinnā about various difficult matters, including some of the highest meditation attainments. The Buddha fully endorses her answers.

- MN50: **Māratajjanīya Sutta** (the rebuke to Māra)

  Māra, the trickster and god of death, tried to annoy Moggallāna. He not only failed but was subject to a stern sermon warning of the dangers of attacking the Buddha's disciples.

Majjhimapaṇṇāsapāḷi (the middle fifty discourses)

Gahapativagga

- MN52: **Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta** (the man from Aṭṭhakanāgara)

  Asked by a householder to teach a path to freedom, Venerable Ānanda explains no less than eleven meditative states that may serve as doors to the deathless.

- MN53: **Sekha Sutta** (the disciple in higher training)

  The Buddha is invited by his family, the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu, to inaugurate a new community hall. He invites Venerable Ānanda to explain in detail the stages of spiritual practice for a lay trainee.

- MN54: **Potaliya Sutta** (to Potaliya)

  When Potaliya got upset at being referred to as "householder", the Buddha quizzed him as to the true nature of attachment and renunciation.

- MN55: **Jīvaka Sutta** (to Jīvaka)

  The Buddha's personal doctor, Jīvaka, hears criticisms of the Buddha's policy regarding eating meat, and asks him about it.

- MN56: **Upāli Sutta** (to Upāli)

  The Buddha disagrees with a Jain ascetic on the question of whether physical or mental deeds are more important. When he hears of this, the Jain disciple Upāli decides to visit the Buddha and refute him, and proceeds despite all warnings.

- MN59: **Bahuvedanīya Sutta** (the many kinds of feeling)

  The Buddha resolves a disagreement on the number of kinds of feelings that he taught, pointing out that different ways of teaching are appropriate in different contexts, and should not be a cause of disputes. He goes on to show the importance of pleasure in developing higher meditation.

Bhikkhuvagga

- MN61: **Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta** (advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā)

  Using the "object lesson" of a cup of water, the Buddha explains to his son, Rāhula, the importance of telling the truth and reflecting on one's motives.

- MN64: **Mahāmālunkya Sutta** (the greater discourse to Mālunkyāputta)

  A little baby has no wrong views or intentions, but the underlying tendency for these things is still there. Without practicing, they will inevitably recur.

- MN66: **Laṭukikopama Sutta** (the simile of the quail)

  Again raising the rule regarding eating, but this time as a reflection of gratitude for the Buddha in eliminating things that cause complexity and stress. The Buddha emphasizes how attachment even to little things can be dangerous.

- MN67: **Cātumā Sutta** (at Cātumā)

  After dismissing some unruly monks, the Buddha is persuaded to relent, and teaches them four dangers for those gone forth.

- MN68: **Naḷakapāna Sutta** (at Naḷakapāna)

  Those who practice do so not because they are failures, but because they aspire to higher freedom. When he speaks of the attainments of disciples, the Buddha does so in order to inspire.

Paribbājakavagga

- MN75: **Māgandiya Sutta** (to Māgandiya)

  Accused by a hedonist of being too negative, the Buddha recounts the luxury of his upbringing, and his realization of how little value there was in such things. Through renunciation he found a far greater pleasure.

Rājavagga

- MN81: **Ghaṭīkāra Sutta** (Ghaṭīkāra the potter)

  The Buddha relates an unusual account of a past life in the time of the previous Buddha, Kassapa. At that time he was not interested in Dhamma, and had to be forced to go see the Buddha. This discourse is important in understanding the development of the Bodhisattva doctrine.

- MN82: **Raṭṭhapāla Sutta** (on Raṭṭhapāla)

  A wealthy young man, Raṭṭhapāla, has a strong aspiration to go forth, but has to prevail against the reluctance of his parents. Even after he became a monk, his parents tried to persuade him to disrobe. The discourse ends with a moving series of teachings on the fragility of the world.

- MN83: **Makhādeva Sutta** (king Makhādeva)

  A rare extended mythic narrative, telling of an ancient kingly lineage and their eventual downfall.

- MN86: **Angulimāla Sutta** (on Angulimāla)

  Ignoring warnings, the Buddha ventures into the domain of the notorious killer Angulimāla and succeeds in converting him to the path of non-violence. After becoming a monk Angulimāla still suffered for his past deeds, but only to a small extent. He uses his new commitment to non-violence to help a woman in labor.

Brāhmaṇavagga

- MN99: **Subha Sutta** (to Subha)

  Working hard is not valuable in and of itself; what matters is the outcome. And just as in lay life, spiritual practice may or may not lead to fruitful results.

Uparipaṇṇāsapāḷi (the final fifty discourses)

Devadahavagga

- MN105: **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (to Sunakkhatta)

  Not all of those who claim to be awakened are genuine. The Buddha teaches how true spiritual progress depends on an irreversible letting go of the forces that lead to suffering.

- MN106: **Āneñjasappāya Sutta** (the way to the imperturbable)

  Beginning with profound meditation absorption, the Buddha goes on to deeper and deeper levels, showing how insight on this basis leads to the detaching of consciousness from any form of rebirth.

- MN107: **Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta** (to Gaṇaka Moggallāna)

  The Buddha compares the training of an accountant with the step by step spiritual path of his followers. But even with such a well explained path, the Buddha can only show the way, and it is up to us to walk it.

Anupadavagga

- MN116: **Isigili Sutta** (Isigili: the gullet of the seers)

  Reflecting on the changes that even geographical features undergo, the Buddha then recounts the names of sages of the past who have lived in Mount Isigili near Rājagaha.

- MN117: **Mahācattārīsaka Sutta** (the great forty)

  A discourse on the prerequisites of right samādhi that emphasizes the interrelationship and mutual support of all the factors of the eightfold path.

- MN118: **Ānāpānasati Sutta** (mindfulness of breathing)

  Surrounded by many well-practiced mendicants, the Buddha teaches mindfulness of breathing in detail, showing how it relates to the four kinds of mindfulness meditation.

- MN119: **Kāyagatāsati Sutta** (mindfulness of the body)

  This focuses on the first aspect of mindfulness meditation, the observation of the body. This set of practices, simple as they seem, have far-reaching benefits.

Suññatavagga

- MN121: **Cūḷasuññata Sutta** (the shorter discourse on voidness)

  The Buddha describes his own practice of meditation on emptiness.

- MN122: **Mahāsuññata Sutta** (the greater discourse on voidness)

  A group of mendicants have taken to socializing too much, so the Buddha teaches on the importance of seclusion in order to enter fully into emptiness.

- MN125: **Dantabhūmi Sutta** (the grade of the tamed)

  A young monk is unable to persuade a prince of the blessings of peace of mind. The Buddha offers similes based on training an elephant that would have been successful, as this was a field the prince was familiar with.

- MN130: **Devadūta Sutta** (the divine messengers)

  This discourse contains the most detailed descriptions of the horrors of hell.

Vibhangavagga

- MN131: **Bhaddekaratta Sutta** (a single excellent night)

  This discourse opens with a short but powerful set of verses extolling the benefits of insight into the here and now, followed by an explanation.

- MN135: **Cūḷakammavibhanga Sutta** (the shorter exposition of action)

  The Buddha explains to a brahmin how your deeds in past lives affect you in this life.

- MN137: **Saḷāyatanavibhanga Sutta** (the exposition of the sixfold base)

  A detailed analysis of the six senses and the relation to emotional and cognitive processes.

- MN139: **Araṇavibhanga Sutta** (the exposition of non-conflict)

  Achieving peace is no simple matter. The Buddha explains how to avoid conflict through contentment, right speech, understanding pleasure, and not insisting on local conventions.

- MN142: **Dakkhiṇāvibhanga Sutta** (the exposition of offerings)

  When his step-mother Mahāpajāpatī wishes to offer him a robe for his personal use, the Buddha encourages her to offer it to the entire Saṅgha instead. He goes on to explain that the best kind of offering to the Saṅgha is one given to the dual community of monks and nuns, headed by the Buddha.

Saḷāyatanavagga

- MN143: **Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta** (advice to Anāthapiṇḍika)

  As the great lay disciple Anāthapiṇḍika lies dying, Venerable Sāriputta visits him and gives a powerful teaching on non-attachment.

- MN145: **Puṇṇovāda Sutta** (advice to Puṇṇa)

  On the eve of his departure to a distant country, full of wild and unpredictable people, Venerable Puṇṇa is asked by the Buddha how he would respond if attacked there.

- MN146: **Nandakovāda Sutta** (advice from Nandaka)

  When asked to teach the nuns, Venerable Nandaka proceeds by inviting them to engage with his discourse and ask if there is anything that needs further explanation.

Saṁyutta Nikāya

Sagāthāvagga (the book with verses)

SN1: **Devatāsaṁyutta** (connected discourses with devatās)

Ādittavagga

- SN1.41: **Āditta Sutta** (ablaze)

  A deity tells the Buddha in verse that, as one saves useful goods from a burning house, one should rescue one's wealth from a world ablaze with aging and death by giving, for what is given is saved.

SN4: **Mārasaṁyutta** (connected discourses with Māra)

Paṭhamavagga

- SN4.5: **Dutiyamārapāsa Sutta** (Māra's snare, second)

  When the Buddha explains to the mendicants how he has realized freedom, and so have his mendicant followers, Māra claims he is still trapped.

SN6: **Brahmasaṁyutta** (connected discourses with Brahmās)

Dutiyavagga

- SN6.15: **Parinibbāna Sutta** (final Nibbāna)

  After the Buddha became finally extinguished, Brahmā Sahampati led a series of distinguished beings who uttered verses in commemoration.

SN7: **Brāhmaṇasaṁyutta** (connected discourses with brahmins)

Upāsakavagga

- SN7.11: **Kasibhāradvāja Sutta** (Kasi Bhāradvāja)

  A brahmin farmer criticizes the Buddha for failing to produce food, merely living off the work of others. But the Buddha shows that his true work is spiritual.

SN9: **Vanasaṁyutta** (connected discourses in the woods)

Vanavagga

- SN9.1: **Viveka Sutta** (seclusion)

  A monk in the forest lets his mind drift to thoughts of the lay life, but is warned by a local deity.

- SN9.2: **Upaṭṭhāna Sutta** (rousing)

  When a mendicant falls asleep during the day, a deity tries to rouse him; he replies in verse that, being free of desire and ignorance, he has no need to be roused.

Nidānavagga (the book of causation)

SN12: **Nidānasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on causation)

Buddhavagga

- SN12.1: **Paṭiccasamuppāda Sutta** (dependent origination)

  The famous twelve links of dependent origination are spelled out, showing the origin and cessation of suffering dependent on ignorance.

- SN12.4: **Vipassī Sutta** (Vipassī)

  In the far past, the Buddha Vipassī reflected on how the world had fallen into suffering, and became awakened by understanding dependent origination.

Dasabalavagga

- SN12.23: **Upanisa Sutta** (proximate cause)

  The ending of defilements comes only when the truth is seen. But seeing the truth comes about due to a vital condition. In this way, twelve factors leading to freedom are united with the twelve factors leading to suffering.

Kaḷārakhattiyavagga

- SN12.37: **Natumha Sutta** (not yours)

  The body is not yours, but is old kamma, generated by choices in past lives.

Dukkhavagga

- SN12.52: **Upādāna Sutta** (clinging)

  Craving increases when you linger on pleasing things that stimulate grasping, illustrated with the simile of a bonfire.

Mahāvagga

- SN12.63: **Puttamaṁsa Sutta** (son's flesh)

  The Buddha defines the four kinds of "food" or "nutriment", which include edible food, contact, intention, and consciousness. He illustrates them with a series of powerful and horrifying similes.

- SN12.70: **Susimaparibbājaka Sutta** (Susīma)

  The wanderer Susīma fraudulently enters the Saṅgha so that the wanderers can learn the secret to the Buddha's fame and success. Hearing that some mendicants claimed to be perfected, Susīma approaches and asks them if they have developed psychic powers or the formless states, to which they say no. Perplexed, he asks the Buddha, who explains that awakening follows insight into the principles of impermanence and causality. Eventually Susīma confesses his misdeed.

SN15: **Anamataggasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on without discoverable beginning)

SN20: **Opammasaṁyutta** (connected discourses with similes)

Opammavagga

- SN20.8: **Kaliṅgara Sutta** (blocks of wood)

  The Licchavis, sleeping on blocks of wood and living diligently, give King Ajātasattu no opening; so too mendicants who live diligently give Māra no opportunity—but when they become soft and comfortable, Māra will find his chance.

- SN20.10: **Biḷāra Sutta** (the cat)

  As a cat may suffer from eating too hastily, so a mendicant may suffer by not restraining the senses.

Khandhavagga (the book of the aggregates)

SN22: **Khandhasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the aggregates)

Nakulapituvagga

- SN22.1: **Nakulapitu Sutta** (Nakulapitā)

  The householder Nakulapitā asks the Buddha for help in coping with old age. The Buddha says to reflect: "Even though I am afflicted in body, my mind will be unafflicted." Later Sāriputta explains this in terms of the five aggregates.

Bhāravagga

- SN22.22: **Bhāra Sutta** (the burden)

  The aggregates are the burden, a person carries that burden, craving takes up the burden, and letting go puts down the burden.

Saḷāyatanavagga (the book of the six sense bases)

SN35: **Saḷāyatanasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the six sense bases)

Gilānavagga

- SN35.74: **Paṭhamagilāna Sutta** (sick, first)

  Hearing that a newly-ordained mendicant was sick, the Buddha visited him to offer support and Dhamma encouragement.

- SN35.75: **Dutiyagilāna Sutta** (sick, second)

  Hearing that a newly-ordained mendicant was sick, the Buddha visited him to offer support and Dhamma encouragement.

Saḷavagga

- SN35.95: **Mālukyaputta Sutta** (Māluṅkyaputta)

  Venerable Māluṅkyaputta asks for a teaching to take on retreat. The Buddha wonders how to teach an old monk like him, then questions him on his desire for sense experience that has been or might be, and encourages him to simply let sense experience be. Māluṅkyaputta says he understands, and expands the Buddha's teaching in a series of verses.

Yogakkhemivagga

- SN35.104: **Yogakkhemi Sutta** (secure from bondage)

  Someone who has given up attraction to the senses has arrived at the sanctuary.

Lokakāmaguṇavagga

- SN35.118: **Sakkapañha Sutta** (Sakka's question)

  Sakka asks the Buddha why some become awakened in this very life, while others do not.

Gahapativagga

- SN35.127: **Bhāradvāja Sutta** (Bhāradvāja)

  King Udena of Kosambi asks Venerable Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja how even young monks can maintain the celibate life. Piṇḍola says it's because they see women as their sisters, mothers, or daughters. If this doesn't work, they meditate on the ugliness of the body. Finally they exercise sense restraint.

Saṭṭhipeyyālavagga

- SN35.203: **Bāhirātītādianatta Sutta** (the past, etc., as nonself (external))

  External sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects—whether past, future or present—are not-self.

Āsīvisavagga

- SN35.246: **Vīṇopama Sutta** (the simile of the lute)

  One should restrain the senses like a farmer watching over a field. The Buddha gives the parable of a man bewitched when he first hears a lute. He takes apart the instrument in search of the sound, but is disillusioned when no sound is found.

SN36: **Vedanāsaṁyutta** (connected discourses on feeling)

Sagāthāvagga

- SN36.6: **Salla Sutta** (the dart)

  Both ordinary and awakened people experience the three feelings. The difference is that when an ordinary person is stricken with feeling, they react, creating more suffering, whereas an awakened person responds with equanimity.

- SN36.7: **Paṭhamagelañña Sutta** (the sick ward, first)

  A mendicant should await their death mindful and aware. They should bear the feelings of approaching death with wisdom and equanimity.

- SN36.8: **Dutiyagelañña Sutta** (the sick ward, second)

  A mendicant should await their death mindful and aware. They should bear the feelings of approaching death with wisdom and equanimity.

SN37: **Mātugāmasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on women)

Paṭhamapeyyālavagga

- SN37.1: **Mātugāma Sutta** (agreeable and disagreeable, first)

  Five things that make a woman either agreeable or disagreeable to men.

- SN37.2: **Purisa Sutta** (agreeable and disagreeable, second)

  Five things that make a man either agreeable or disagreeable to women.

Mahāvagga (the great book)

SN45: **Maggasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the path)

Esanāvagga

- SN45.164: **Bhava Sutta** (existence)

  There are three kinds of existence—sensual, form and formless. The noble eightfold path is to be developed for their direct knowledge, full understanding, ending and abandoning.

SN46: **Bojjhaṅgasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the factors of enlightenment)

SN47: **Satipaṭṭhānasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the establishments of mindfulness)

Ambapālivagga

- SN47.3: **Bhikkhu Sutta** (a bhikkhu)

  When a mendicant asks for a teaching to take on retreat, the Buddha issues an unexpected rebuke. Evidently the mendicant had been badly behaved; but now, he insists, he is sincere. The Buddha relents, and teaches the four kinds of mindfulness meditation, well grounded on ethics.

Nālandavagga

- SN47.20: **Janapadakalyāṇī Sutta** (the most beautiful girl of the land)

  A parable that sets up an impossible challenge: to walk between a popular performer and the crowd jostling to see her, carrying a bowl of oil filled to the brim, while a man with a drawn sword waits to chop off your head if you spill a drop. That's mindfulness!

Ananussutavagga

- SN47.35: **Sati Sutta** (mindful)

  Mindfulness is the four kinds of mindfulness meditation. Situational awareness is watching the arising and passing of feelings, thoughts, and perceptions.

Amatavagga

- SN47.47: **Duccarita Sutta** (misconduct)

  When a mendicant asks for a teaching to take on retreat, the Buddha teaches the four kinds of mindfulness meditation, well grounded on good bodily, verbal, and mental conduct.

SN48: **Indriyasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the faculties)

Suddhikavagga

- SN48.9: **Paṭhamavibhaṅga Sutta** (analysis, first)

  The Buddha gives a short explanation of each of the five faculties.

SN50: **Balasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the powers)

SN51: **Iddhipādasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the bases for spiritual power)

SN52: **Anuruddhasaṁyutta** (connected discourses with Anuruddha)

SN53: **Jhānasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the jhānas)

SN54: **Ānāpānasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on breathing)

Dutiyavagga

- SN54.12: **Kaṅkheyya Sutta** (in perplexity)

  Venerable Lomasavaṅgīsa explains to Mahānāma that the difference between a trainee and the Realized One is that the trainees practice to give up the hindrances, whereas the Realized One has already ended all defilements.

SN55: **Sotāpattisaṁyutta** (connected discourses on stream-entry)

Veḷudvāravagga

- SN55.2: **Brahmacariyogadha Sutta** (grounded)

  Someone who has the four factors of stream-entry—experiential faith in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha, and ethical conduct—is a stream-enterer, destined for awakening.

Rājakārāmavagga

- SN55.17: **Dutiyamittāmacca Sutta** (friends and colleagues, second)

  You should encourage your friends in the four factors of stream-entry.

Saraṇānivagga

- SN55.21: **Paṭhamamahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma, first)

  Mahānāma the Sakyan expresses his fear that if he dies unmindful he may go to a bad rebirth. The Buddha tells him not to fear, as he will definitely go to a good place, since he has long practiced the Dhamma.

- SN55.22: **Dutiyamahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma, second)

  Mahānāma the Sakyan expresses his fear that if he dies unmindful he may go to a bad rebirth. The Buddha tells him not to fear, as he will definitely go to a good place, since he has the four factors of stream-entry.

Puññābhisandavagga

- SN55.37: **Mahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma)

  The Buddha explains to Mahānāma what is a lay follower, what is a virtuous lay follower, and a lay follower accomplished in faith, generosity, and wisdom.

Sappañña vagga

- SN55.55: **Sotāpattiphala Sutta** (the fruit of stream-entry)

  Association with good people, hearing the teaching, proper attention, and right practice lead to the fruit of stream-entry.

SN56: **Saccasaṁyutta** (connected discourses on the truths)

Samādhivagga

- SN56.1: **Samādhi Sutta** (concentration)

  Mendicants should develop immersion so as to understand the four noble truths: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

AN2: **Dukanipāta** (the book of the twos)

Samacittavagga

- AN2.33: **Samacittavagga** (same-minded)

  Two people can never be fully repaid: one's mother and father. Not even by carrying them on one's shoulders for a hundred years. One repays them only by establishing them in faith, ethical conduct, generosity and wisdom.

AN3: **Tikanipāta** (the book of the threes)

Devadūtavagga

- AN3.40: **Ādhipateyya Sutta** (authorities)

  Practicing with yourself in charge, or with others, or the teaching.

Brāhmaṇavagga

- AN3.51: **Paṭhamadvebrāhmaṇa Sutta** (two brahmins, first)

  You can begin to practice even late in life: advice to elderly brahmins.

- AN3.52: **Dutiyadvebrāhmaṇa Sutta** (two brahmins, second)

  You can begin to practice even late in life: advice to elderly brahmins.

Mahāvagga

- AN3.65: **Kesamutti Sutta** (Kesaputtiya)

  How to navigate among different spiritual opinions.

- AN3.70: **Uposatha Sutta** (uposatha)

  The uposatha observance day of the cowherds, the Jains, and the Buddha.

Ānandavagga

- AN3.75: **Nivesaka Sutta** (should be encouraged)

  How to encourage and support those close to you.

Samaṇavagga

- AN3.81: **Samaṇa Sutta** (ascetics)

  The duties of an ascetic.

- AN3.82: **Gadrabha Sutta** (the donkey)

  A donkey tries to moo like a cow. It doesn't end well.

- AN3.83: **Khetta Sutta** (the field)

  The duties of a farmer are like those of a mendicant.

- AN3.84: **Vajjiputta Sutta** (the young Vajji)

  What to do if you can't keep all the rules.

- AN3.85: **Sekkha Sutta** (a trainee)

  What exactly is a "trainee"?

- AN3.86: **Paṭhamasikkhā Sutta** (the process of training, first)

  Even spiritually advanced people can break minor rules.

- AN3.87: **Dutiyasikkhā Sutta** (the process of training, second)

  Even spiritually advanced people can break minor rules.

- AN3.88: **Tatiyasikkhā Sutta** (the process of training, third)

  Even spiritually advanced people can break minor rules.

- AN3.89: **Paṭhamasikkhattaya Sutta** (the trainings, first)

  The three trainings explained, to seeing the truths.

- AN3.90: **Dutiyasikkhattaya Sutta** (the trainings, second)

  The three trainings explained, to achieve perfection.

Loṇakapallavagga

- AN3.101: **Paṁsudhovaka Sutta** (the soil remover)

  Meditation is like purifying gold. A meditator should progressively eliminate more refined corruptions.

AN4: **Catukkanipāta** (the book of the fours)

Rohitassavagga

- AN4.41: **Samādhibhāvanā Sutta** (concentration)

  Developing convergence for pleasure, understanding, mindfulness, and ending defilements.

Puññābhisandavagga

- AN4.60: **Gihisāmīci Sutta** (the layperson's proper practice)

  A lay disciple serves the mendicant Saṅgha with robes, alms-food, lodgings, and medicines.

Pattakammavagga

- AN4.67: **Ahirāja Sutta** (snakes)

  Spreading loving-kindness to snakes and other creatures.

Kesivagga

- AN4.116: **Appamāda Sutta** (heedfulness)

  Be diligent in giving up bad conduct and wrong view and developing good conduct and right view; one who does so does not fear death.

- AN4.117: **Ārakkha Sutta** (guarding)

  Guard the mind so it is not aroused by greed, hate, delusion or intoxication; one freed of these does not tremble or fear.

AN5: **Pañcakanipāta** (the book of the fives)

Sumanavagga

- AN5.35: **Dānānisaṁsa Sutta** (the benefits of giving)

  Five benefits of generosity for lay people.

Nīvaraṇavagga

- AN5.55: **Mātāputta Sutta** (mother and son)

  A mother and son, though ordained as monk and nun, have sexual relations. The Buddha launches a powerful attack on the dangers of sex.

- AN5.57: **Abhiṇhapaccavekkhitabbaṭhāna Sutta** (themes)

  Five themes that everyone, lay or ordained, should often reflect on: aging, illness, death, separation from all that is dear, and being the owner of one's deeds.

Yodhājīvavagga

- AN5.73: **Paṭhamadhammavihārī Sutta** (one who dwells in the Dhamma, first)

  The difference between someone who merely studies the letter of the Dhamma, and someone who truly lives by it.

- AN5.79: **Tatiyaanāgatabhaya Sutta** (future perils, third)

  When the teachers and leaders of the Saṅgha are not well practiced, their weakness will be passed down the generations.

- AN5.80: **Catutthaanāgatabhaya Sutta** (future perils, fourth)

  The Saṅgha may forsake the simple life and indulge in luxuries.

Kakudhavagga

- AN5.94: **Phāsuvihāra Sutta** (dwelling at ease)

  Living comfortably by practicing meditation.

- AN5.99: **Sīha Sutta** (the lion)

  A lion is always respectful when it kills. So too when the Buddha teaches he always respects his audience.

Andhakavindavagga

- AN5.113: **Sammāsamādhi Sutta** (concentration)

  To enter samādhi, a mendicant must be able to endure sense impacts.

- AN5.114: **Andhakavinda Sutta** (Andhakavinda)

  Five qualities to instill in recently ordained mendicants.

Gilānavagga

- AN5.122: **Satisūpaṭṭhita Sutta** (establishment of mindfulness)

  Five meditations that lead to perfection or non-return.

Upāsakavagga

- AN5.175: **Caṇḍāla Sutta** (Caṇḍāla)

  A lay follower who is faithless, unethical, superstitious, believes in omens rather than deeds, and seeks recipients of offerings outside the Saṅgha is an outcaste among lay followers; one with the opposite qualities is a gem among them.

- AN5.176: **Pīti Sutta** (rapture)

  The Buddha encourages Anāthapiṇḍika not to rest content with generosity, but to also develop the rapture of seclusion through meditation.

Dīghacārikavagga

- AN5.229: **Paṭhamakaṇhasappa Sutta** (snake, first)

  Five ways a woman is like a black snake. [Intended to counter deeply rooted male kāma-rāga (sensual desire) by focusing on the danger (ādīnava) and arouse a sense of dispassion, not on the inherent nature of gender].

- AN5.230: **Dutiyakaṇhasappa Sutta** (snake, second)

  Five ways a woman is like a black snake. [Intended to counter deeply rooted male kāma-rāga (sensual desire) by focusing on the danger (ādīnava) and arouse a sense of dispassion, not on the inherent nature of gender].

AN6: **Chakkanipāta** (the book of the sixes)

Āhuneyyavagga

- AN6.10: **Mahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma)

  The Buddha teaches his relative Mahānāma that a noble disciple often practices the six recollections, which lead to joy and peace.

Anuttariyavagga

- AN6.25: **Anussatiṭṭhāna Sutta** (recollection)

  The six recollections are a way to escape from greed.

Mahāvagga

- AN6.63: **Nibbedhika Sutta** (penetrative)

  A detailed analysis of several central themes, including sense perception, feeling, defilements, kamma, etc.

Devatāvagga

- AN6.66: **Arahatta Sutta** (arahant)

  Six things lead to perfection.

- AN6.73: **Paṭhamatajjhāna Sutta** (first jhāna, first)

  Six qualities that enable a mendicant to gain the first absorption.

- AN6.74: **Dutiyatajjhāna Sutta** (first jhāna, second)

  Six qualities—sensual, malicious and cruel thoughts, and sensual, malicious and cruel perceptions—that must be given up to enter the first absorption.

Sītivagga

- AN6.85: **Sītibhāva Sutta** (coolness)

  Possessing six qualities a mendicant attains coolness.

AN7: **Sattakanipāta** (the book of the sevens)

Mahāyaññavagga

- AN7.47: **Dutiyaaggi Sutta** (sacrifice)

  The brahmin Uggatasarīra has arranged a great sacrifice. On Ānanda's advice, he asks the Buddha how to make a sacrifice beneficial.

- AN7.48: **Paṭhamasaññā Sutta** (perceptions, first)

  Meditating on seven perceptions leads to the deathless, in brief.

- AN7.52: **Dānamahapphala Sutta** (giving)

  The lay followers of Campā seek a teaching from the Buddha. Together with Sāriputta, they ask the Buddha about what makes a gift fruitful.

Abyākatavagga

- AN7.61: **Pacalāyamāna Sutta** (dozing)

  Before his awakening, Moggallāna is struggling with sleepiness in meditation. The Buddha visits him and gives seven ways to dispel drowsiness, and other important teachings.

Mahāvagga

- AN7.72: **Aggikkhandhopama Sutta** (fire)

  It would be better for a monk to embrace a blazing fire than to lie with a maiden.

- AN7.74: **Araka Sutta** (Araka)

  Araka was a famous teacher long ago, when the life span was much greater than today. Nevertheless, he still taught impermanence; how much more is it relevant today!

AN8: **Aṭṭhakanipāta** (the book of the eights)

Mettāvagga

- AN8.1: **Mettā Sutta** (loving-kindness)

  The eight benefits of practicing the meditation on love.

- AN8.2: **Paññā Sutta** (wisdom)

  Eight conditions that lead to the arising of wisdom, its growth and perfection.

Mahāvagga

- AN8.17: **Paṭhamabandhana Sutta** (bondage, first)

  A woman imprisons a man in eight ways.

- AN8.18: **Dutiyabandhana Sutta** (bondage, second)

  A man imprisons a woman in eight ways.

- AN8.19: **Pahārāda Sutta** (Pahārāda)

  Demons delight in the ocean for eight reasons, and likewise the mendicants delight in the Dhamma for eight reasons.

Gahapativagga

- AN8.21: **Paṭhamaugga Sutta** (Ugga, first)

  The Buddha celebrates the eight amazing qualities of the householder Ugga of Vesālī. Ugga himself speaks of these qualities.

- AN8.25: **Mahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma)

  Questioned by his relative Mahānāma, the Buddha explains what makes someone a Buddhist lay follower, a virtuous lay follower, and a lay follower practicing for the welfare of all.

- AN8.26: **Jīvaka Sutta** (Jīvaka)

  Questioned by Jīvaka Komārabhacca, the Buddha explains what makes someone a Buddhist lay follower, a virtuous lay follower, and a lay follower practicing for the welfare of all.

Uposathavagga

- AN8.41: **Saṅkhittūposatha Sutta** (in brief)

  When the uposatha is observed by following the eight precepts, one lives for that day like the perfected ones. Such a uposatha is glorious.

- AN8.42: **Vitthatūposatha Sutta** (in detail)

  When the uposatha is observed by following the eight precepts, one lives for that day like the perfected ones. The benefits are explained at length.

Gotamīvagga

- AN8.53: **Saṁkhitta Sutta** (brief)

  Mahāpajāpatī wishes to go on retreat, so the Buddha teaches her eight principles that summarize the Dhamma in brief.

- AN8.56: **Bhaya Sutta** (peril)

  The Buddha explains how addiction to sensual pleasures is perilous.

AN9: **Navakanipāta** (the book of the nines)

Sambodhivagga

- AN9.3: **Meghiya Sutta** (Meghiya)

  Venerable Meghiya, while attending on the Buddha, wants to go off and meditate in a forest alone. The Buddha discourages him, but he goes anyway. When his meditation doesn't go well, he returns chastened to the Buddha, who teaches him about the benefits of good companions and other fundamentals of a balanced spiritual practice.

- AN9.10: **Āhuneyya Sutta** (worthy of gifts)

  Nine persons are worthy of gifts: the eight noble persons and a member of the spiritual family.

Sīhanādavagga

- AN9.20: **Velāma Sutta** (Velāma)

  The wealthy and devoted lay supporter Anāthapiṇḍika rather curiously says that only poor alms are given in his home. The Buddha praises gracious and bounteous generosity. But meditation surpasses even the greatest offering.

AN10: **Dasakanipāta** (the book of the tens)

Akkosavagga

- AN10.46: **Sakka Sutta** (Sakyans)

  The Sakyans say that they don't always observe the eight precepts on the uposatha. The Buddha strongly admonishes them to be more consistent.

Sacittavagga

- AN10.60: **Girimānanda Sutta** (Girimānanda)

  The monk Girimānanda is sick. The Buddha encourages Ānanda to visit him and speak of ten perceptions.

Yamakavagga

- AN10.61: **Avijjā Sutta** (ignorance)

  Even though ignorance has no discernible first point, it still has a cause.

Ākaṅkhavagga

- AN10.72: **Kaṇṭaka Sutta** (thorns)

  When the Buddha receives noisy visitors, several monks withdraw to a nearby forest to meditate. The Buddha praises them, saying that noise is a thorn to absorption.

Jāṇussoṇivagga

- AN10.177: **Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (Jāṇussoṇī)

  Jāṇussoṇī describes brahmanical memorial rites for the dead, and asks if giving gifts actually benefits dead relatives. The Buddha replies that it might do in some circumstances.

AN11: **Ekādasakanipāta** (the book of the elevens)

Nissayavagga

- AN11.2: **Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta** (volition)

  A virtuous person need not make a wish; it is natural for the path to flow on.

Anussativagga

- AN11.11: **Paṭhamamahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma, first)

  Mahānāma the Sakyan sees that the monks are preparing robes after the rains season. Knowing that the Buddha will soon depart, he asks how they are to live with their busy lives.

- AN11.12: **Dutiyamahānāma Sutta** (Mahānāma, second)

  Mahānāma the Sakyan, recently recovered from illness, learns that the Buddha will soon set out wandering and asks how lay people with busy

lives should live. The Buddha teaches five qualities and six recollections, to be practiced while walking, standing, sitting, lying down, working and at home.

Khuddaka Nikāya

Dhammapada

- Dhp1: **Yamakavagga** (pairs)

  Mind is the forerunner of all things. When one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, suffering follows, like the wheel that follows the ox's foot.

- Dhp109: **Sahassavagga** (the thousands)

  For one who habitually honors and respects the elders, four blessings grow: lifespan, beauty, happiness and strength.

- Dhp110: **Sahassavagga** (the thousands)

  Better a single day lived ethical and absorbed in meditation than a hundred years lived unethical and without concentration.

- Dhp166: **Attavagga** (the self)

  Never neglect your own good for the sake of another's, however great. Knowing well your own good, be intent upon your true goal.

- Dhp170: **Lokavagga** (the world)

  Look upon the world as a bubble or a mirage, and the King of Death will not see you.

- Dhp183: **Buddhavagga** (the Buddhas)

  Not to do any evil, to embrace the good, to purify one's mind: this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

- Dhp184: **Buddhavagga** (the Buddhas)

  Patient endurance is the highest austerity; Nibbāna is the highest, say the Buddhas. No true renunciate harms another.

- Dhp200: **Sukhavagga** (happiness)

  Happily indeed we live, we who have nothing. We shall feed on rapture, like the gods of radiance.

- Dhp203: **Sukhavagga** (happiness)

  Hunger is the worst illness, conditions are the worst suffering. Knowing this as it truly is, Nibbāna is the ultimate happiness.

- Dhp215: **Piyavagga** (the beloved)

  From sensual desire springs sorrow, from sensual desire springs fear. For one free of sensual desire there is no sorrow, let alone fear.

- Dhp277: **Maggavagga** (the path)

  When one sees with wisdom that all conditioned things are impermanent, one grows disenchanted with suffering: this is the path to purity.

- Dhp278: **Maggavagga** (the path)

  When one sees with wisdom that all conditioned things are suffering, one grows disenchanted with suffering: this is the path to purity.

- Dhp279: **Maggavagga** (the path)

  When one sees with wisdom that all things are not-self, one grows disenchanted with suffering: this is the path to purity.

- Dhp284: **Maggavagga** (the path)

  As long as even the slightest craving of a man for women is not cut off, his mind remains bound, like a suckling calf to its mother.

- Dhp305: **Pakiṇṇakavagga** (miscellaneous)

  Sitting alone, sleeping alone, wandering alone and untiring, one who tames oneself alone will delight in the forest.

- Dhp378: **Bhikkhuvagga** (the bhikkhu)

  Calm in body, calm in speech, peaceful and well composed, the bhikkhu who has spat out the bait of the world is called 'one at peace'.

Udāna

Bodhivagga

- Ud1.8: **Saṅgāmaji Sutta** (with Saṅgāmaji)

  A monk's former wife tries to use their child to lure him back into the lay life.

- Ud1.10: **Bāhiya Sutta** (with Bāhiya)

  The ascetic Bāhiya becomes an arahant after receiving a brief teaching about adding nothing to sensory experience.

Soṇavagga

- Ud5.5: **Uposatha Sutta** (observance day)

  Ven. Mahā Moggallāna expels a sham monk from the Saṅgha's observance-day meeting; the Buddha then compares the eight wonders of the ocean with eight wonders of the Dhamma and Vinaya.

Itivuttaka

Ekakanipāta

- Iti22: **Metta Sutta** (the benefits of love)

  "Acts of merit" is a synonym for what is blissful, desirable, pleasing, endearing, charming. The Buddha recalls the results he himself has experienced from doing meritorious deeds.

Tikanipāta

- Iti61: **Cakkhu Sutta** (the eye)

  Three eyes: the eye of flesh, the divine eye, and the eye of discernment.

Catukkanipāta

- Iti109: **Nadīsota Sutta** (a river)

  An extended metaphor for the dangers of "going with the flow."

Sutta Nipāta

Uragavagga

- Snp1.1: **Uraga Sutta** (the serpent)

  One who advances far along the path sloughs off the near shore and far, like a snake who sloughs off its skin.

- Snp1.3: **Khaggavisāṇa Sutta** (the rhinoceros horn)

  If you can't find a good teacher, it's better to wander alone.

- Snp1.11: **Vijaya Sutta** (victory)

  Victory over the defilements through contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body.

- Snp1.12: **Muni Sutta** (the muni)

  The characteristics of the ideal sage, who finds happiness and security in living the solitary life.

Cūḷavagga

- Snp2.14: **Dhammika Sutta** (Dhammika)

  The proper code of conduct for monastics and for lay followers of the Dhamma.

Mahāvagga

- Snp3.2: **Padhāna Sutta** (striving)

  Māra attempts to dissuade the Bodhisatta from his path.

- Snp3.12: **Dvayatānupassanā Sutta** (contemplation of dyads)

  Not all dualities are misleading. This sutta teaches ways to contemplate the duality of the origination and cessation of stress and suffering so as to reach awakening.

Pārāyanavagga

- Snp5.11: **Jatukaṇṇimāṇavapucchā** (the questions of Jatukaṇṇī)

  Jatukaṇṇī asks the Buddha for the state of peace; the Buddha tells him to let go of what is past, future and present, and to grasp at nothing.

Theragāthā

Chakkanipāta

- Thag455: **Sabbakāmittheragāthā** (Sabbakāmi)

  Sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touches: the five kinds of sensual stimulation are seen in a woman's body.

- Thag456: **Sabbakāmittheragāthā** (Sabbakāmi)

  Ordinary people whose minds are full of lust, who pursue women, swell the horrors of the charnel ground, piling up future lives.

- Thag457: **Sabbakāmittheragāthā** (Sabbakāmi)

  One who mindfully avoids them, as one avoids a snake's head with one's foot, gets over clinging to the world.

Cuddasakanipāta

- Thag669: **Godattattheragāthā** (Godatta)

  There is the happiness of sensual pleasures and the suffering of seclusion; the suffering of seclusion is better than the happiness of sensual pleasures.

Therīgāthā

Mahānipāta

- Thig488: **Sumedhātherīgāthā** (Sumedhā)

  Sumedhā, refusing marriage to a king, describes sensual pleasures as like a butcher's knife and chopping board, a cobra's head, a burning fire-brand and a skeleton.

Glossary

The terms listed below are from the Pāli language—the language of the early Buddhist scriptures—and provide the English meaning and context for essential concepts found in this work.

Ācariya: A teacher or master.

Adhiṭṭhāna: Determination or Resolution. It refers to the unwavering commitment to a course of practice, a virtue, or a specific spiritual goal.

Ādibrahmacāriya: The beginning of the holy life; the foundational training that establishes the conditions for deeper practice and liberation.

Akusala: Unwholesome, unskillful, or demeritorious actions or thoughts.

Anāgāmi: A "Non-returner"; the third of the four stages of enlightenment, a being who will not be reborn in the human realm but in a pure abode.

Anāryan: "Ignoble" or "worldling" (puthujjana). A person who has not yet attained any of the four stages of enlightenment, characterized by the persistent view of a permanent "self."

Anatta: "Not-self"; the core Buddhist doctrine that there is no permanent, unchanging soul or self in any phenomenon.

Anicca: Impermanence; the doctrine that all conditioned things are in a constant state of flux and subject to change.

Arahant: A "worthy one"; a fully enlightened being who has attained Nibbāna and ended the cycle of rebirth. An arahant, having uprooted all delusion, no longer creates new kamma; their actions are instead termed kiriya (inoperative) and do not produce future results, thus ending the cycle of rebirth.

Aranya: A forest hermitage or monastery.

Aryan (Sanskrit: Ārya; Pāli: Ariya): Noble; a "Noble One." This term carries three distinct meanings depending on context. In the Buddha's teaching, it refers to a lineage of virtue—one who has reached a transformative realization of the Dhamma and entered the path to liberation. Historically, it also refers to the ancient Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group of the Indian subcontinent. In modern history, the term was bastardized by the Nazi regime, who misappropriated the Indian term to promote a "superior race" ideology. In the scriptural context, however, true nobility is strictly spiritual; it is earned through the internal work of shedding defilements—greed, hatred, and delusion—rather than by birth or ancestry.

Asubha (saññā): Contemplation on the 32 components the body is made up of: head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, intestines, intestinal tract, stomach, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovium [oil lubricating the joints], urine and brain. There is nothing attractive in nature found in these, hence one sees how unworthy the body is of being identified with. It is used as an antidote to lust.

Aṭapirikara: (Sinhala) The traditional offering of the eight basic requisites for a Buddhist monk, including robes, an alms bowl, a razor, etc.

Avijjā: Fundamental ignorance or delusion. This is not a lack of worldly information, but a deep-seated misperception of reality. Specifically, it is the ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, which causes one to see what is impermanent as permanent, what is suffering as pleasure, and what is not-self as a self. It is considered the root cause that drives the entire cycle of rebirth (saṁsāra)

Bhikkhu/Bhikkhunī: A fully ordained Buddhist monk (bhikkhu) or nun (bhikkhunī).

Brahmā-loka / Brahma World: A very high and long-lived celestial being (Brahma) or realm (loka) attained through deep meditation. Despite its peace, it is still part of the impermanent cycle of rebirth (saṁsāra).

Buddhānussati: Recollection or mindfulness of the qualities of the Buddha; one of the protective meditations.

Cārikā: A journey on foot, especially the traditional ascetic practice of a wandering monk who does not stay in one place for long.

Dāna: The act of giving, generosity, or charity; an offering, especially of food, to monastics. Dāna hall is the place where people offer.

Deva/Devatā: A deity or celestial being, often compared to an angel. However, they are still mortal, unenlightened, and bound to the cycle of rebirth (saṁsāra). While the terms are often used interchangeably, deva is the general term for a god, whereas devatā can refer more specifically to a localized spirit or guardian divinity.

Dhamma/Dhammas: A term with two main meanings depending on context. Dhamma (capitalized) is the Buddha's Teaching as a whole, or the ultimate Truth. In meditation, mindfulness of dhammas (lowercase) refers to contemplating mental objects or phenomena, often grouped into categories like the Five Hindrances or the Four Noble Truths.

Dhammapada: "Verses of the Dhamma"; a beloved collection of the Buddha's sayings in verse form.

Dhātu: An element or natural property. Refers to the four great elements ('solidity' or earth, 'fluidity' or water, 'heat' or fire, and 'motion' or air) that are the fundamental components of all physical matter. By seeing that one's own body is composed of the

same elements as the world outside, this contemplation helps deconstruct the idea of a solid 'self.'

Dosa: Aversion, hatred, or ill will; one of the three root defilements. Sometimes means fault(s).

Dukkha: Suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness; the first of the Four Noble Truths.

Indriya: Faculties or controlling principles. In the context of meditation, this most often refers to the five spiritual faculties: faith (saddhā), energy (viriya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā). The practice involves developing and balancing these five qualities to lead the mind toward liberation.

Jhāna: A state of deep meditative absorption characterized by profound stillness and concentration.

Kālaṁ āgameyya: "Awaiting one's time." A phrase used to describe the final stage of a practitioner's path, referring to the practice of mindfully and equanimously awaiting death. It is a contemplation of the body's inevitable decay, done with an unagitated mind.

Kamma (Karma): (Pāli/Sanskrit) The universal law of cause and effect where intentional actions of body (kāya), speech (vacī), and mind (mano) determine one's future experiences. These actions are primarily categorized by their nature and results:

- *Wholesome (kusala) kamma* refers to actions rooted in skillful qualities like generosity and kindness. While skillful, they are performed by one who has not yet eradicated the fundamental ignorance (avijjā), and thus lead to favorable rebirth.
- *Unwholesome (akusala) kamma* refers to actions rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*), which lead to painful results.
- *Imperturbable (āneñja) kamma* is a specific type of wholesome *kamma* related to deep meditative states, leading to rebirth in a formless realm.

Khandha Paritta: A protective chant from the *Suttas***,** recited to generate loving-kindness towards snakes and other creatures.

Kuṭi: A small hut or simple dwelling for a monk or nun.

Lobha: Greed, desire, or attachment; one of the three root defilements.

Magga-phala: "Path and Fruition." A term for the specific, supramundane moments of consciousness that mark the attainment of the four stages of enlightenment. The Path (magga) is a single moment of insight that cuts through specific defilements, while the Fruition (phala) is the immediate result—the direct experience of the peace of Nibbāna.

Mahāthera: "Great Elder"; a title of respect for a senior monk, typically with over twenty years of ordination.

Māra: The "Evil One" or "Great Deceiver"; a deity who personifies temptation, illusion, and the forces that bind beings to the cycle of rebirth (saṁsāra). While depicted as a being who tempted the Buddha, Māra can also be understood as a metaphor for the internal defilements—such as greed, hatred, and fear—that a practitioner must overcome in their own mind.

Maraṇānussati: Recollection or mindfulness of death, used to cultivate urgency and reduce attachment.

Mettā (meditation): The meditative practice of cultivating boundless goodwill towards all beings.

Moha: Delusion or ignorance; one of the three root defilements.

Nibbāna (Nirvana): (Pāli/Sanskrit) The ultimate goal of Buddhism; the complete cessation of suffering and the extinguishing of the "fires" of greed, hatred, and delusion.

Nīvaraṇa: The Five Hindrances; a group of five unwholesome mental states that obstruct the mind during meditation and block the development of wisdom. They are: sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt.

Pacceka Buddha: Commonly referred to as a "silent" or "private" Buddha. An individual who attains full enlightenment on their own, without a teacher, during an age when the Buddha's teachings are not available in the world. Paccekabuddhas are, in reality, neither silent nor private. Additionally, they do teach in a conventional way, but not the ultimate analysis. They also do not establish a Sāsana.

Pāli Canon: The collection of primary scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism, written in the Pāli language and consisting of three "baskets": the Sutta Piṭaka (discourses), the Vinaya Piṭaka (monastic discipline), and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (philosophy).

Pañcupādānakkhandhā: The "five aggregates subject to clinging." This is the Buddha's analysis of a person's experience into five components: form (the body), feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. According to the teaching, suffering arises from our clinging to or identifying with these constantly changing processes as a permanent "self."

Paṭiccasamuppāda: Dependent Origination; the doctrine that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena, explaining the process that perpetuates suffering.

Piṇḍapāta: The monastic practice of collecting alms food by walking with a bowl. (More strictly, this is called piṇḍacāra; piṇḍapāta is what is dropped into the bowl.)

Pirith/Paritta: (Sinhala/Pāli) A collective term for a set of protective chants or discourses from the Pāli Canon.

Poya/Uposatha: (Sinhala/Pāli) A day of religious observance in Sri Lanka, typically falling on the full moon, when devout lay Buddhists often observe eight precepts.

Puthujjana: A "worldling" or ordinary person who has not yet attained any of the four stages of enlightenment and thus remains bound to the cycle of rebirth (saṁsāra). The opposite of a Noble One (ariya).

Rishi/Isi: (Sanskrit/Pāli) A title meaning a sage, seer, or revered teacher. It is used in Hindu, Jain, and other Indian spiritual traditions.

Rūpa: Form, matter, or physical phenomena. It is the first of the Five Aggregates of Clinging (pañcupādānakkhandhā). According to the *Suttas*, all rūpa is composed of the four great elements (mahābhūta): the properties of earth (solidity), water (cohesion), fire (heat), and air (motion). It also includes derived form (upādāya-rūpa), which consists of the five physical sense faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body) and their corresponding sense objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible things).

Samādhi: Meditative concentration. A key part of the Noble Eightfold Path, it is the practice of unifying the mind to serve as the foundation for wisdom (paññā).

Samatha: "Calm-abiding" or tranquility. A category of meditative practices designed to quiet the mind and develop deep concentration (samādhi). Along with insight (*Vipassanā*), it is one of the two pillars of Buddhist meditation; a calm mind developed through *samatha* provides a powerful foundation for seeing reality clearly.

Saṁsāra: The endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, characterized by suffering and driven by ignorance and craving.

Saṁvega Vatthu: A sense of spiritual urgency or holy dread that arises from contemplating the dangers of saṁsāra (e.g., old age, sickness, and death). This feeling is a powerful catalyst for dedicated practice.

Saṅgha: The community of Buddhist monastics (bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs); can also refer to the community of all awakened or noble disciples. The distinction is between Ariyasaṅgha (community of awakened ones) and sammutisaṅgha (ordained disciples aiming at becoming ariya).

Saṅkhāra: A Buddhist term with two main meanings depending on context; its essential characteristic is that it relates to conditioned phenomena.

1. As the fourth of the Five Aggregates, the saṅkhāra-khandha is defined as the six classes of volition: volition regarding forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and ideas.

2. As the second link in Dependent Origination (*avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*), it refers to *kamma*-forming volitional actions—the wholesome and unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind, born from ignorance, that propel the cycle of rebirth.

Sāsana: The dispensation, teachings, and legacy of a Buddha.

Sati: Mindfulness; awareness of the present moment.

Sīla: Morality, virtue, or ethical conduct, often undertaken by observing precepts.

1. **Ājīvaṭṭhamaka Sīla:** The "eight precepts with right livelihood." This includes the standard five precepts (no killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, or intoxicants) plus three additional rules focused on wholesome speech and ethical livelihood.

2. **Aṭṭhaṅgika Sīla:** The "eightfold morality" typically observed on special retreat or Uposatha days. It includes the basic precepts (with full celibacy) plus ascetic rules such as not eating after noon and avoiding entertainment or luxuries.

3. **Ariyakanta Sīla:** Virtue that is "dear to the Noble Ones." This refers to flawless, unbroken morality that has become natural to the practitioner. It is no longer just following rules, but a state of integrity that directly supports deep meditation.

Sīmā: Boundary or consecrated area. In monastic law (Vinaya), the sīmā is the specific, legally established ground where the Saṅgha (community of monks) conducts formal legal ceremonies like ordinations (Upasampadā) and the recitation of the Pātimokkha (monastic rules).

Sutra/Sutta: (Sanskrit/Pāli) A discourse or sermon of the Buddha.

Swami: (Sanskrit) An honorific title from the Indian subcontinent, meaning "master" or "one who is master of oneself." While it is most commonly used for Hindu spiritual teachers, in Sri Lanka, it is also used colloquially as a term of deep respect for Buddhist monks in some regions.

Thero/Thera: Honorific title used for a Buddhist monk who has been fully ordained (upasampadā) for ten or more Vassa (rainy season retreats). It denotes seniority and respect.

Upekkhā: Equanimity; a state of balanced, unshakable peace of mind that is not swayed by pleasure or pain.

Vinaya: The code of monastic discipline for the Saṅgha.

Vipassanā: Insight; meditation that cultivates a direct seeing into the true nature of reality, especially into the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

Yoniso manasikāra: A right means of attending that is in accordance with the truth. That is attention to the way things really are: impermanent as impermanent etc. Engaging in yoniso manasikāra leads to the awakening of the eye of wisdom.

A Note on Sources and Methodology

This book was carefully reviewed by a team of over ten people, including the joint editors of *Pure Inspiration: Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera—Recollections of His Life, Practice and Teachings* and who both knew Ven. Ñāṇavimala personally—together with other monastic practitioners and lay practitioners, some of whom also knew Ven. Ñāṇavimala personally.

The process involved extensive research: reviewing hundreds of hours of Ven. Gnanaloka's public talks in Sinhala and English, studying the *Suttas* referenced in the notes, cross-checking dates and details, and consulting existing records such as *Pure Inspiration* and *Life of Nyanatiloka Thera—The Biography of a Western Buddhist Pioneer.*

As for the writing team, between us we brought nearly fifty years of meditation practice—including backgrounds in social research and conducting interviews, psychology and medical science—deeply influenced by time in Saddhammadhara Sutta retreats with Ven. Gnanaloka, as well as experience in various traditions such as the Thai Forest, Mahāsi, and Goenka.

The original notes are Ven. Gnanaloka's, written between 1994 and 2001 during his training under Ven. Ñāṇavimala. The Reflections were created by our writing team through:

- Over twenty extended interviews with Ven. Gnanaloka over two years (2022–2024).
- Sessions typically lasting 3–4 hours, often beginning near midnight.

- Review of hundreds of hours of his public Dhamma talks in both Sinhala and English.
- Cross-referencing with existing biographical resources such as Pure Inspiration.
- Multiple rounds of review by Ven. Gnanaloka himself.

A challenge for the writers was piecing together the patchwork of stories available about such a monk shrouded in mystery and verifying its credibility. While Ven. Gnanaloka could personally verify the vast majority of these accounts, a few instances, perhaps three in total, rely on other credible sources. We intentionally excluded a few lay accounts that veered into the downright mystical; though Ven. Gnanaloka was aware of some of these stories, they remained unverifiable and were thus omitted to maintain the integrity of the record.

Acquiring time for an interview could be incredibly difficult, sometimes waiting months just to have a chance to talk with Ven. Gnanaloka. The writers had to get creative, taking every opportunity, and sometimes inventing them, to gather information. At times, our persistence may have bordered on the intrusive, yet Ven. Gnanaloka always welcomed our dedication to the task. On one occasion during a car trip while Ven. Gnanaloka was giving retreats, one writer attempted handing him printed sheets to review from the back seat. Ven. Gnanaloka was recovering from minor health issues at the time. As the sheets were passed forward, he commented in an amused way, "When I am dying, will you also be handing me sheets to review?"

Ven. Gnanaloka insists this story be included in the book. It was likely his way of highlighting the great lengths to which we devotees went to complete this work. We are grateful for his patience, and ask forgiveness if we at times overstepped.

Much of the writing work was done at Sri Sambuddha Ramaneeya Ashramaya Forest Hermitage during retreats—an environment of practice that shaped our reflections.

Our role was to preserve and transmit—to provide context, narrative, and accessibility while remaining faithful to Ven. Gnanaloka's accounts and his teacher's approach.

In developing these narrative sections, we chose to include specific accounts of Ven. Gnanaloka's training and experiences to illustrate the practical application of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's instructions. We have included these at the editors' insistence, as we believe these moments provide essential illustration of how the Dhamma functions as a protective and transformative force—and as a final testimony to the transformative power of Ven. Ñāṇavimala's presence and guidance. Any errors or shortcomings in this transmission are ours alone.

This book represents a living Dhamma transmission in the oral tradition. The teachings passed from Ven. Ñāṇavimala to Ven. Gnanaloka through direct encounter and practice (1990–2005). Ven. Gnanaloka preserved them in handwritten notes (1994–2001). We received them through interview and study (2023–2026), and now transmit them in written form to readers.

In this sense, the book continues the lineage of direct transmission—from teacher to student to student—that has preserved the Buddha's teachings for 2,600 years.

Acknowledgements

This book has been a journey of faith and perseverance, made possible only through the collective goodwill of many individuals. It was an entirely volunteer-based effort that spanned almost three years, from November 2023 to August 2026.

Our deepest gratitude goes, first and foremost, to the memory of Venerable Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, whose profound life of renunciation is the very heart of this work. His ascetic, unwavering example continues to be a source of immense inspiration.

Though we have called it three years, this book has in truth been thirty-two years in the making. It began not in 2023, but in February 1994, when a young man named Shanaka first began to jot down the words of his teacher—brief notes, taken in the moment, without any thought of a book. That he wrote them at all, and kept them safe across three decades of a wandering, ascetic life, is the reason these pages exist. What was preserved for one student's practice has become an inheritance for many.

We are profoundly indebted to Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera. He not only gave his permission for this project but generously shared the private, handwritten notes of his teacher, entrusting them to us. Given his ascetic nature and deep commitment to solitude, meeting with him was a rare and precious opportunity. Over the course of this project, a small team of writers was granted several extensive interviews—some lasting many hours—both in Sri Lanka and during his travels abroad. During these invaluable sessions, he patiently answered our questions, clarified ambiguities in the decades-old notes, and reviewed the reflections to ensure they faithfully preserved the spirit and meaning of his encounters with his master. We hope this book does justice to his trust.

This work would not exist without the tireless efforts of a dedicated team of volunteer editors and reviewers, both lay and monastic, whose insightful feedback helped to shape and refine this manuscript.

Special thanks to our review team: Venerable Bhikkhu Ānandajoti, Venerable Joe Athullo, Venerable Gnanadakshi, Chittapala, Sean Mendis, Dinith Hathurusinghe, Himalee Dimantha, Jayantha Samarasinghe, Premalal Gunatilleke, Lal De Silva and others who prefer to remain unnamed.

We also extend our gratitude to the devoted supporters who cared for Venerable Ñāṇavimala during his final years, and to all those who have preserved his memory and teachings over the decades.

May any merit generated from this work be dedicated to the liberation of all beings.

Sri Sambuddha Mission Trust

The Sri Sambuddha Mission Charitable Trust was established to support meditation practitioners and propagate the Buddha's original teachings. The Trust is dedicated to preserving and sharing the Dhamma with sincerity and generosity.

Venerable Bambalapitiye Gnanaloka Thera serves as the spiritual advisor to the Trust and its associated monastery, the Sri Sambuddha Ramaneeya Ashramaya Forest Hermitage—a serene meditation center nestled in the picturesque surroundings of Dunumala, Sri Lanka.

The monastery regularly hosts *Saddhammadhara Meditation Retreats* for both monastics and lay visitors. Following a framework inspired by Ven. Ñāṇavimala Mahāthera, these retreats emphasize a quiet, self-guided exploration of the Buddha's teachings through direct engagement with the *Suttas*. As Ven. Ñāṇavimala envisioned, the ultimate intention is to inspire suitable individuals toward the renunciant path.

To learn more about the mission, support the Trust, or inquire about retreats, please contact:

Phone: +94 76 422 4858 or +94 77 738 7842
Email: srisambuddhamissiontrust@gmail.com
Website: www.srisambuddhamission.org

The Pāḷi Alphabet

(An extract from An Elementary Pāḷi Course *by Ven. Nārada Thera)*

The Pāḷi Alphabet consists of forty-one letters, eight vowels and thirty-three consonants.

8 Vowels (*sara*): *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, o.*

33 Consonants (*vyañjana*)

Gutturals:	*k, kh, g, gh, ṅ.*	(*ka*-group)
Palatals:	*c, ch, j, jh, ñ.*	(*ca*-group)
Cerebrals:	*ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ.*	(*ṭa*-group)
Dentals:	*t, th, d, dh, n.*	(*ta*-group)
Labials:	*p, ph, b, bh, m.*	(*pa*-group)

Palatal:	*y.*	Cerebral:	*r.*
Dental:	*l.*	Dental and Labial:	*v.*
Dental (sibilant):	*s.*	Aspirate:	*h.*
Cerebral:	*ḷ.*	Niggahīta:	*ṁ.*

The vowels "*e*" and "*o*" are always long, except when followed by a double consonant; e.g., *ettha, oṭṭha.*

The fifth consonant of each group is called a "nasal".

There is no difference between the pronunciation of "*ṅ*" and "*ṁ*". The former never stands at the end, but is always followed by a consonant of its group.

The dentals "*t*" and "*d*" are pronounced with the tip of the tongue placed against the front upper teeth.

The aspirates "*kh*", "*gh*", "*ṭh*", "*ḍh*", "*th*", "*dh*", "*ph*", "*bh*", are pronounced with an "*h*" sound immediately following; e.g., in blockhead, pighead, cat-head, log-head, etc., where the "*h*" in each is combined with the preceding consonant in pronunciation.

Pronunciation of Letters

Pāḷi is a phonetic language. As such each letter has its own characteristic sound.

Letter	is pronounced like … in		Letter	is pronounced like … in	
a	u	but	*ñ*	gn	signor
ā	a	art	*ṭ*	t	not
i	i	pin	*ḍ*	d	hid
ī	i	machine	*ṇ*	n	hint
u	u	put	*p*	p	lip
ū	u	rule	*b*	b	rib
e	e	ten	*m*	m	him
ē	a	fate	*y*	y	yard
o	o	hot	*r*	r	rat
ō	o	note	*l*	l	sell
k	k	key	*v*	v	vile
g	g	get	*s*	s	sit
ṅ	ng	ring	*h*	h	hut
c	ch	rich	*ḷ*	l	felt
j	j	jug	*ṁ*	ng	sing