(Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Analysis (of the Path)

[A definition of the path factors]

(Saṁyutta Nikāya 45.8/5:8-10)

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Introduction

The (Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta quite straightforwardly defines the factors of the noble eightfold path. This well known set of definitions is also found in **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (D 22)[1] and **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141).[2]

In the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, these definitions are incorporated into the formal treatment of the path according to the sutta method in the Suttanta Bhājaniya at **Vbh 235-135**. Following the Abhidhamma method of the Abhidhamma Bhājaniya, the path factors are regarded as exclusively supramundane.

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[1] D 22.21/2:311-313 = SD 13.2(21).

[2] M 141.23-31/3:251 f = SD 11.11. Historically, the materials of the former (D 2:311-313) are derived from Sacca Vibhaṅga S. See SD 13.1ac.

The Discourse on the Analysis (of the Path)

(S 45.8/5:8-10)

1 At Sāvatthī.

2 "Bhikshus, I will teach you the noble eightfold path and I will analyze it for you. Listen to it and pay close attention, I will speak.

"Yes, venerable sir," the monks replied in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

3 "And what, bhikshus, is **the noble eightfold** path?

They are namely:

right view,
right intention,
right speech,
right action,
right livelihood,
right effort,
right mindfulness,
right samadhi [concentration].

4 (1) And what, bhikshus, is **right view**?

That which, bhikshus, is

the knowledge that is suffering;
the knowledge that is the arising of suffering;
the knowledge **[9]** that is the ending of suffering;
the knowledge that is the path leading to the ending of suffering.

This, bhikshus, is called right view.

5 (2) And what, bhikshus, is **right intention**?

That which, bhikshus, is

the intention of renunciation,
the intention of non-ill will,
the intention of non-violence.

This, bhikshus, is called right intention.

6 (3) And what, bhikshus, is **right speech**?

That which, bhikshus, is

the refraining from false speech;
the refraining from divisive speech;
the refraining from harsh speech;
the refraining from useless talk.

This, bhikshus, is called right speech.

7 (4) And what, bhikshus, is **right action**?

That which, bhikshus, is

the refraining from destroying life;
the refraining from taking the not-given;
the refraining from sexual misconduct;[3]

[3] The **Saṁyutta** texts here all give *abrahma,cariyā veramaṇī* (the refraining from incelibacy), the practice of the monks, novices and voluntary celibates. However, elsewhere the reading is *kāmesu micchācāra veramaṇī* (the refraining from sexual misconduct) (D 2:312; M 3:74, 3:251; Vbh 235). Comy is silent, which suggests that this

This, bhikshus, is called right action.

8 (5) And what, bhikshus, is **right livelihood**?
Here, bhikshus, a noble disciple, having abandoned wrong livelihood, earns a living through right livelihood.
This, bhikshus, is called right livelihood.

9 (6) And what, bhikshus, is **right effort**?
Here, bhikshus, a monk
brings forth the desire for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, rouses energy, applies his mind, and strives;
he brings forth the desire for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, rouses energy, applies his mind, and strives;
he brings forth the desire for the arising of unarisen wholesome states; he makes an effort, rouses energy, applies his mind, and strives;
he brings forth the desire for the maintenance of arisen wholesome states, for their non-decay, increase, growth and fulfillment by cultivation; he makes an effort, rouses energy, applies his mind, and strives.
This, bhikshus, is called right effort.

10 (7) And what, bhikshus, is **right mindfulness**?
Here, bhikshus, a monk[4]
dwells [5]exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, contemplating the body in the body,[6] removing[7] covetousness and displeasure[8] in the world;[9]
a monk dwells exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, contemplating feelings in the feelings, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world;
a monk dwells exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, contemplating the mind in the mind, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world;
a monk dwells exertive, clearly knowing, mindful, contemplating dharmas in the dharmas, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.
This, bhikshus, is called right mindfulness. **[11]**

And what, bhikshus, is **right samadhi [concentration]**?[10]
Here, bhikshus,
(1) a monk, detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, enters and remains in the first dhyana,[11]

(*abrahma,cariyā*) is a scribal error, "probably introduced after the age of the commentary; otherwise [SA] surely would have explained the variant…" (S:B 1893 n17).

[4] Here "a monk" (*bhikkhu*) may refer to either an ordained monastic or anyone who is meditating (here, doing satipatthana) (DA 3:756; VbhA 216 f; cf SnA 251). See above §3.0(ii).

[5] *Ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā,domanassaṁ.* Here we find 4 of the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'-indriya*) in action: see SD 13.1(4.2).

[6] "Contemplating the body in the body" (*kāye kāyânupassī*). See 13.1(3.4).

[7] *Vineyya* can mean "should remove" (as pot, as *vineyya,* Sn 590) or as "having removed" (as ger, like *vinaitvā,* Pm 1:244), and both senses apply in Satipaṭṭhāna S. U Silananda similarly ends the sentence with "removing covetousness and grief in the world" (1990:177); also 1990:22-25. See 13.1(4.2c).

[8] "Covetousness and displeasure," *abhijjhā,domanassaṃ,* alt trs: "desire and discontent," "desiring and disliking," or "longing and loathing." Walshe (1995:335 & n632) renders it as "hankering and fretting [for the world]." See 13.1(4.2).

[9] "World" (*loka*). See 13.1(4.2d).

[10] Buddhist practitioners like Brahmavamso teach that the *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna,* orig meaning simply "meditation") is unique to Buddhism, ie discovered by the Buddha (2003:5-7). See also Bronkhorst 1986 & Gethin 2001: 180 f.

accompanied by initial application and sustained application,[12]
accompanied by zest and happiness, born of detachment [ie born of samadhi].

(2) With the stilling of initial application and sustained application,
by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,
he enters and remains in the second dhyana,
free from initial application and sustained application,
accompanied by zest and happiness born of samadhi.[13]

(3) With the fading away of zest, he remains equanimous,
mindful and clearly knowing,
and experiences happiness with the body,
he enters and remains in the third dhyana,
of which the noble ones declare,
'Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.'

(4) With the abandoning of pleasure and pain—
and with the earlier disappearance of joy and grief—
he enters and abides in the fourth dhyana,
that is neither pleasant nor painful,
with a mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.[14]
This, bhikshus, is called right samadhi.

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[11] For a more details description of dhyanas with similes, see **Sāmaññaphala S** (D 1:73-76 = 2.75-82) = SD 8.10.

[12] "Initial application and sustained application," *vitakka,vicāra.* For a discussion on these terms, see Gethin 1992:137-157.

[13] The 2nd dhyana is known as "the noble silence" (*ariya,tuṇhī,bhāva*), explains **Kolita S** (S 2:273), because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and pondering) (*vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. In **Kāmabhū S 2** (S 4:293) *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī,-saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 1:161 = 26.4), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to "either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence." Comy on the passage says that those who cannot attain *jhāna* are advised to maintain "noble silence" by attending to their basic meditation subject. See also "Dhyana" = SD 8.4.

[14] Vbh 245, Vism 165 = 4.183.