

18

(Tad-ah') Uposatha Sutta

(This Day of) The Observance Discourse¹ | A 3.70

Theme: Types of precept days or sabbaths

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Origins of the *uposatha*

1.1 The ancient Indian year adopted by early Buddhism has three seasons—the cold (*hem'anta*), the hot (*gimhāna*) and the rains (*vassa*) (Nc 631)—each lasting about four months. Each of these seasons is further divided into 8 fortnights (*pakkha*) of 15 days each, except for the third and the seventh each of which has only 14 days. Within each fortnight, the full moon night and the new moon night (the fourteenth or the fifteenth) and the night of the half-moon (the eighth) are regarded as auspicious, especially the first two. For Buddhists, these are the *uposatha* or observance days.

The observance (*uposatha*) was originally the Vedic *upavasatha*, that is, the eve of the Soma sacrifice.² “Soma” is the name of the brahminical moon-god to whom libation is made at the Vedic sacrifice.³ The word *upavasatha* comes from *upavasati*, “he observes; he prepares,” derived from *upa-* (at, near) + √VAS, “to live, dwell”; as such, *upavasati* literally means “he dwells near,” that is, spends the time close to a spiritual teacher for religious instructions and observances. Apparently, in Vedic times, it was believed that on the full moon (*paurṇamāsā*) and new moon (*darśā*) days, the gods came down to dwell with (*upavasati*) the sacrificer. By the Buddha’s time, the term *upavasatha* (BHS *poṣadha*) had come to mean the four stages of the moon’s waxing and waning. The early Buddhists adopted this weekly system of holy days.

1.2 *Uposatha* is the Pali name for the observance (such as the act of keeping the 8 precepts by the laity), or the observance day, a day of spiritual vigil, sometimes also known as “fast day.” During the Buddha’s time the word meant the night *before* the four phases of the moon, namely, the 1st, 8th, 14th/15th and 23rd nights of the lunar month.⁴ The *pāṭihāriya, pakkha* (“the extraordinary half”) is an ancient extra holiday (not observed today).⁵ **S Dutt** says that it is likely that on these days the brahminical *sannyasins* (ascetics) would discourse on the Āraṇyakas and Upanishads, while the reform sects—ascetics (*samaṇa*) and wanderers (*paribbājaka*)—would recite their orally-transmitted canonical texts (replacing the *vrata* or observances of the householders) (1960:83; cf V 1:101).

The Buddha adopted this practice when those who came to listen to the Dharma were displeased at the monks sitting silently and remarked that they were “sitting like dumb pigs” (V 1:102). The Buddhist *uposatha* is held by a chapter of monks once a fortnight, that is, on the new-moon and the full-moon days, a practice that has become unique to the Buddhists.⁶ **The Mahāpadāna Sutta** (D 14) says that in the time of the Buddha Vipassī, the *uposatha* was conducted only once in six years, when only the *ovāda pāṭimokkha* was recited.⁷

¹ Lit “this observance day today.”

² See Macdonell & Keith 1912: Soma; Ling 1968:30 ff.

³ Cf Śata, patha Brahmaṇa 1.1.1.7.11. Cf also Iranian *haoma*, Hebrew *shabbath*, Malay *puasa* (fasting, fr Skt *upa-vasa*).

⁴ Respectively, *cātu-d, dasī, pañca-d, dasī, pakkhassa aṭṭhamī, pāṭihāriya, pakkha* (S 1:208; A 1:144; Sn 402; Vv 12, 17, 19, 20, 26, 35, 51; J 4:320, 6:110; DhA 4:21); *pañcamī, aṭṭhamī, cātu-d, dasī, paṇṇa, rasīnam uposatha, divasā* (Ujl 192,28), ie a weekly holy day.

⁵ AA 2:234; SnA 378, Ujl 2:55; Thī:K 67.31.

⁶ Pande 1974:275.

⁷ D 14.3/27-28/2:49 = Dh 184-186 except for the last 2 lines. Cf V 3:7 ff. See also Dutt 1960:70.

2 Observance precepts

2.1 The keeping of the *uposatha* is known by various terms: *uposatha,kamma* (“act of observance” for order members & for the laity),⁸ *uposatha,karana* (“deed of observance”),⁹ *uposatha,pālana* (“protecting the observance”),¹⁰ *uposatha,rakkhaṇa* (“guarding the observance”),¹¹ and *uposatha,vāsa* (“keeping the observance”).¹² The first is the oldest term.¹³

The early monks also used this holy day for the recitation of the monastic code or *pāṭimokkha*, while the laity observed the 8 precepts (*aṭṭh’āṅga,sīla, aṭṭha,sīla*) or observance precepts (*uposatha,sīla*), which traditional Theravadin Buddhists still do. These precepts are known in the Canon and Commentaries as “the 8-limbed observance” (*aṭṭha,uposath’āṅga* or *uposath’āṅga*),¹⁴ that is, the precepts against killing, stealing, incelibacy, lying, intoxicants, eating at untimely hours; dancing, singing, music, shows, garlands, scents and cosmetics; and high and luxurious beds.¹⁵

An observance day (*uposatha,divasa, uposatha,dina*), when the 8 precepts are kept is known as “the observance complete in 8 factors” (*aṭṭh’āṅga,samann’āgata uposatha*), or simply “the eightfold observance” (*aṭṭhangika uposatha*). The observance precepts comprise the 5 precepts and 3 others regarding sense-restraint. They are so called because they are special precepts observed on *uposatha* days. At other times, they are known simply as the 8 precepts.

2.2 The uposatha precepts or 8 precepts [§§9-16], kept by the laity, are the training-rules (*sikkhā,-pada*) nos 1-9 of the 10 precepts (of the novice), and as such rarely occur in the suttas as a set under the category of *sīla* or *sikkhā,pada*. Where they are mentioned—almost exclusively in the Aṅguttara, the Khuddaka Nikāya works or the Commentaries—they are known as *aṭṭh’āṅga,samann’āgata uposatha*¹⁶ or *aṭṭh’āṅgika uposatha*.¹⁷ This clearly shows that they are meant for the laity, and the importance of lay-practice, which is found in abundance in the Anguttara suttas.

The 8 precepts, like the 10 precepts, may be undertaken in one of two ways. If they are observed for a day or a specified period of time only, it is known as “time-limited moral conduct” (*kāla,pariyanta sīla*); or they may be undertaken as “lifelong moral conduct” (*āpāṇa,koṭika sīla*, literally, “end of breath” moral conduct) (Vism 1.30).

The observance day (especially for the laity) is sometimes called “fast day” because the preceptees (those keeping the precepts) abstain from taking “untimely meals” (*vikāla,bhojana*), that is, from noon to dawn the following day.¹⁸ It should be noted that “noon” and “12 o’clock” are not necessarily the same time. “Noon” technically is when the sun is directly over one’s head (over the meridian), while 12 o’clock is conventional (local) time depending on the time-zone.¹⁹

⁸ For monks, V 1:102, 105, 111, 5:142; Kkhv 8; VA 1166; for laity, J 3:52, 3:342; Vv 945; Vbh 422; Miln 293.

⁹ Kkhv 9, 11; J 4:332; AA 2:180.

¹⁰ Ujl 191.

¹¹ Ujl 191.

¹² J 4:332, DhA 1:27.

¹³ Cf Ujl:Se 96.

¹⁴ V 5:137; J 3:445; DhA 1:205; ThaA 3:128; SnA 2:377 ad Sn 401.

¹⁵ Eg S 1:208 f; A 1:144, 213, 4:248 f; Sn 400 f.

¹⁶ *Aṭṭh’āṅga,samann’āgata uposatha*: A 1:213×4, 214×3, 4:248×2, 251×3, 252×4, 253×3, 254×2, 256×5, 257×2, 258, 259×8, 260×2, 261×3, 5:83×3, 86×2.

¹⁷ *Aṭṭh’āṅgika uposatha*: Vv 214/27; common in Comys, eg DA 1:179; MA 2:43; AA 2:328; SnA 1:378; VvA 113; PvA 256.

¹⁸ V 1:83, 4:274; D 1:5; M 1:39; A 1:212, 2:209; Sn 400d.

¹⁹ Those who are monastics or have spent time as monastics in the southern tradition (Theravāda), whether in south and south-east Asia, or in the West and elsewhere, generally know that this precept is one of the most commonly broken, albeit unknown to the laity or compassionately tolerated by them: see eg J Samuels, *Attracting the Heart: Social relations and the aesthetics of emotion in Sri Lankan monastic culture*, Honolulu, 2010:xxi f, 12 f.

3 The various kinds of observances

3.1 THREE KINDS OF OBSERVANCES

3.1.0 The Sutta starts off with the Buddha's mentioning these 3 kinds of observances, that is,

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|--|------------------------|----------|
| (1) The cowherd's observance, | <i>gopālakūposatha</i> | [§2] |
| (2) the nirgranthas' observance [the Jain observance], ²⁰ | <i>nigaṇṭhūposatha</i> | [§3] |
| (3) the noble observance [the saints' observance]. ²¹ | <i>ariyūposatha</i> | [§§4-16] |

3.1.1 The cowherd's observance. In the first case, the cowherd, having completed his day's task, reflects on his routine earlier that day, and what he should do the following day. This is merely the observance of one earning a living [§2]. Today, we might call this a "business observance" or a "professional observance." Such an observance (*uposatha*) or routine is related to our work, and to that extent is positive action, but it is without any spiritual significance, and no personal or mental cultivation is involved.

3.1.2 The nirgranthas' observance. The second case is that of the observance of the nirgranthas (here referring to the Jain ascetics and their lay followers). The Buddha is critical of this observance because it is purely ritualistic, limited in scope, and based on wrong view. The Jain ascetics exhort their followers to be compassionate to all beings, but only in a limited way, that is, "for a hundred fathoms" around [§3.1]. Furthermore, they tell their followers to reflect on non-self, that they own nothing, but at the end of the day, they resume using those very things they have disowned—thus taking the not-given [§3.2], and also in not keeping to their observance declaration, they practise false speech! [§3.3]

3.1.3 The noble observance or "the noble ones' observance" is the *uposatha* of the saints (*ariyūposatha*), that is, an observance or spiritual retreat where the practitioner emulate the example of the noble saints, that is, the streamwinners, once-returns, the non-returns and the arhats. However, here, at the close of the Sutta, the arhats are invoked as our inspiration for keeping the observance [§§9-16], which is the Sutta's main theme, that is, the 8-factored observance (*aṭṭh'aṅg'uposatha*). [3.2]

3.1.4 The training sequence

3.1.4.1 MEDITATION ENHANCES MORAL VIRTUE. In the Chinese version (MĀ 202), the 8 precepts are given *before* the 5 recollections,²² while here our Sutta puts the recollections first. The MĀ 202 apparently follows the sequence of the 3 trainings (in moral virtue, in meditation and in wisdom).²³ Does this mean that the Pali version is erroneous?

It is unlikely this is an error if we understand the true nature of spiritual training. Theoretically, we need to restrain our body and speech first before we can effectively meditate. Hence, in the traditional 3 trainings, we have the training in moral virtue first, followed by concentration training. However, it is clear that keeping to the precepts (both for the monastics as well as the laity) is not easy if we lack mental training. Without lovingkindness, for example, it is difficult to keep all the precepts properly: it is out of lovingkindness that we respect life and treat others kindly, charitably, respectfully, truthfully and unconditionally.²⁴

3.1.4.2 THE SUTTA'S AGE. Another important fact we must note is the natural progression of the (Tad-ah') Uposatha Sutta. First, the Sutta points out the worldly and wrong kinds of observances [§§1.2-3.3]. Then, the rest of the Sutta deals with the noble observance [§§4-24]. Five of the six inspirational recollections [3.2.0.4] are then listed, which is very significant, as they are practices for the faith-inclined (such as the protagonist, the lady Visākhā) [cf §8.2].

Each of these recollections is illustrated with a **parable** of the body or of what beautifies it: those of washing the head [§4.2], washing the body [§5.2], cleaning a piece of cloth [§6.2], cleaning a mirror

²⁰ Although "nirgrantha" (*nigaṇṭha*) usu refers to the "Jain ascetics," here it is clear that it is simply a generic adj, referring to "Jains" in general, ie, the ascetics and their lay followers.

²¹ "Noble observance," *ariy'uposatha*, alt tr "the observance of the noble ones (ie the saints)."

²² MĀ 202 @ T1.770a26-771a24.

²³ See SD *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

²⁴ On the 5 values, see SD 1.5 (2.7+8) & Table (2).

[§7.2], and purifying gold [§8.4]. Clearly, all the parables allude to a spiritual purification, that is, keeping our body and mind ready for spiritual awakening.²⁵

The five recollections serve as preparations for the Sutta's main theme: the full-fledged noble observance, that is, the 8-factored uposatha [§§9-16]. In such an arrangement, it is only natural that the 8 precepts should be placed at the end of the Sutta since they are the goal of the training laid out in the Sutta. This reflects the spiritual training in real life. Although theoretically we have the sequence of the 3 trainings as *moral virtue, concentration and wisdom*, the practical reality is that they all interact and support one another in a *pari passu* or progressive manner. This is also, in fact, how the noble eightfold path itself works, too—like a highway with 8 lanes.²⁶ [3.2.6]

3.2 THE 8 KINDS OF NOBLE OBSERVANCES

3.2.0 Two unhelpful observances

3.2.0.1 The Sutta mentions a total of 8 kinds of observances, namely:

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| (1) The cowherd's observance, | <i>gopālakūposatha</i> | [3.1.1; §2] |
| (2) the nirgranthas' observance [the Jain observance], | <i>nigaṇṭhūposatha</i> | [3.1.2; §3] |

3.2.0.2 **The noble observance** [the saints' observance) (*ariyūposatha*) [3.1.3; §§4-16] comprising of the following:

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| (3) the perfect observance | <i>brahmūposatha</i> | [§4.4] |
| (4) the dharma observance | <i>dhammūposatha</i> | [§5.4] |
| (5) the sangha observance | <i>saṅghūposatha</i> | [§6.4] |
| (6) the moral virtue observance | <i>sīlūposatha</i> | [§7.4] |
| (7) the gods' observance | <i>devatūposatha</i> | [§8.6] |
| (8) the 8-limbed observance | <i>aṭṭh'aṅg'uposatha</i> | [§§9-16] |

3.2.0.3 Each of the first five of these six kinds of observances is, in turn, based respectively on the following recollections, namely:

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|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| (3) the recollection of the Buddha | <i>buddhānussati</i> | [§4] |
| (4) the recollection of the Dharma | <i>dhammānussati</i> | [§5] |
| (5) the recollection of the Sangha | <i>saṅghānussati</i> | [§6] |
| (6) the recollection of moral virtue | <i>sīlānussati</i> | [§7] |
| (7) the recollection of the devas | <i>devatā'nussati</i> | [§8] |
| (8) the noble observance | <i>ariy'uposatha</i> | [§16.2] |

When we do any of these recollections, our mind is brightened [is calm and clear], joy arises, and we give up our soiled or impure mind [§4.1 etc]. In other words, we abandon (at least temporarily) the 5 mental hindrances, so that we are able to attain dhyana. On the other hand, if our meditation is still not strong, we would still be able to have some mindfulness and spiritual strength to keep up the practice and live a Dharma-moved life.

3.2.0.4 Items (3) to (7)—the recollections of the 3 jewels, on moral virtue, and on the gods—are all reflections conducive to preparing the mind of the faith-inclined for deeper meditation.²⁷ Hence, they are sometimes called “inspirational meditations,” and also because they instill joy in us to free us from a difficult meditation. They usually form a set of 6 inspirational meditations, that is, including the recollection on charity (*cāgānussati*) as the fifth.²⁸

In **the (Tad-ah') Uposatha Sutta**, however, the recollection on charity is omitted. This is probably not a transmission error as the Chinese parallel (MĀ 202), too, makes the same omission.²⁹ This shows that

²⁵ Compare this to how electronic components should be produced and prepared in a sterile environment for the electronic device to work properly.

²⁶ See **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117), SD 6.10. On the 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā*), see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6 esp (3.2.2).

²⁷ See **Bhāvanā**, SD 135.1 (Fig 8.1) meditations 23-28.

²⁸ See eg (**Agata,phala**) **Mahanāma S** (A 6.10), SD 15.3.

²⁹ MĀ 202 @ T1.770a.16-773a1.

the omission is an ancient one, that is before the early pre-Mahāyāna school split, and the Sarvāsti,vāda version reached China.³⁰

It is possible that this list of 5 inspirational meditations is an ancient one, pre-dating the list of 6 recollections, where the recollection on charity was added. This is understandable if we consider that during the first period of the Buddha's ministry (the first 10-20 years),³¹ when the monks were more itinerant. However, when the monks were more settled in monasteries (during the second period and later), the laity regularly patronized them so that it was spiritually helpful for them to reflect on their own charity.

If this surmise is correct, then the (Tad-ah') Uposatha Sutta is clearly a very ancient text belonging to the early years of the Buddha's ministry. **The lady Visākhā** is the foremost of the female lay donors (*dāyikā*) (A 1:26), which means that she must have been the earliest significant female supporter of the order. This further suggests the Sutta's age.

3.2.0.5 Apparently, observances nos (3)-(7), with their respective recollections, can serve either *ideally* as a progressive preparation for the 8-factored observance, that is, the noble observance, or *optionally*, each can serve as a practice in itself. In other words, if we are unable to observe the full 8-factored observance, we could choose to at least observe one of the preliminary observances, that is, the perfect observance, the dharma observance, the sangha observance, the moral virtur observance, or the gods' observance.

3.2.1 The perfect observance [§4] centres around **the recollection oh the Buddha** (*buddhānussati*) [§4.2] as "one perfected" (*brahma*): here, the epithet "perfect" refers to the Buddha. The overlap between Buddha and Brahmā here is clearly an intentional one, especially as a skillful means for us, if we are God-believers, to wean ourselves off our God-fixation in a gentle way. In this case, first, we reflect on the perfection and peace of God or on Godliness. Then, on attaining that mental focus, we direct our mind to the breath meditation.

The same recollection works for us if we are faith-inclined. In due course, when we are spiritually stronger, when we are more liberated from our theistic fixations and views, we would be ready to directly use the Buddha as our reflection, so that, with mental focus, joy arises in us in due course. From there, we properly proceed on to practise breath meditation and cultivate insight.

The parable here [§4.2-3] is of head-cleansing, since the Buddha is at the *head* of our spiritual life: he is our spiritual ideal.³² However, we need to exert purposeful effort (*upakkama*) to attain this goal. This purposeful effort itself works to cleanse us of all our mental impurities in preparation of further mental cultivation leading to spiritual liberation.

3.2.2 The dharma observance [§5] centres around the recollection of the Dharma as the path to awakening. However, a practitioner well versed in theoretical Dharma may find reflecting on certain suttas, or even aspects of the teaching, to be inspiring. In either case, the Dharma is reflected on so that the mind is cleared of negative emotions and distracting thoughts.

Another good strategy that helps us prepare for meditation is to listen to a Dharma reading, either pre-recorded or read live. This is where it is best to read from a sutta on meditation or teachings conducive to calming the mind, and such readings should have all the abridged passages (*peyyālā*) read out *in full* to facilitate an effective reflection.

At the end of the reading, we should go on to our meditation. It may also happen that we are inspired by great joy even as we do the reflection or hear a reading. We should then stop the reflection or reading, and fully focus on our meditation. If we are listening to someone else reading the reflection, then we simply disregard the reading and direct our attention fully to the meditation object.

3.2.3 The sangha observance [§6] refers to our recollecting the lives and virtues of the great noble saints. This means that we should have some familiarity with such accounts of the saint or saints. This is not a review of the saint's life, but a reflection of his difficulties or worldliness before being touched by

³⁰ Furthermore, in Chinese version, the 8 precepts are given before the 5 recollections (MĀ 202 @ T1.770a26-771a24), while in the Pali Sutta puts the recollections first. See [3.1.34].

³¹ On the 2 period of the Buddha's ministry, see **Notion of diṅghi**, SD 40a.1 (1.3).

³² See **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7.

the Dharma, and his upliftment after that. The easiest way to do this would be to read or listen to readings on the sutta episodes on how the great saints break away from their negative past or awaken.³³

It is unwise to use any living teacher or even a famous teacher, dead or alive, outside of the suttas.³⁴ It is better to be certain of the awakening of the great saints than to speculate on the spiritual state of later teacher or individuals. However, such post-sutta persons can be the subject of the second stage of loving-kindness meditation, if we are inclined to, that is, directing our lovingkindness to a beloved teacher or someone we are deeply inspired by.³⁵

3.2.4 The moral virtue observance [§7]. This observance centres around positively recollecting our efforts in living a morally wholesome life. This meditation may be difficult for God-believers, especially if we feel we have “sinned” or are “guilty” of some transgression. In that case, it is better for such a person to try a more suitable observance [3.2.1; 3.2.5].

For most of us, even those without any religion, this observance is not as difficult as it sounds, if we mindfully set aside our guilt feelings and painful memories. As we are not arhats or even path saints, it would be impossible for us to reflect on ours as a totally “moral life.” However, there are often moments in our lives when we are fully keeping to the precepts and living a moral life, such as when we mindfully attended a Buddha puja, a meditation retreat, a sutta study, a Dharma talk, or when we offered dana (offerings) to monastics or participated in some welfare or charity work.

We should recall the joy and peace of such moments, and reflect how we have then kept to all the 5 precepts or the 8 precepts. Or we could recollect the moral virtue of someone inspiring, especially one of the great saints, such as Mahā Kassapa. Once our minds are clear of thoughts and we feel peaceful or joyful, we should at once direct ourselves fully to the meditation.

3.2.5 The gods’ observance [§8] is helpful to those of us who are deeply devoted to god-belief, or come from a background of God-belief, and are not ready to let go, or still unable to let go, of such an idea. Yet, we have a deep attraction to the Buddha’s teachings or meditation. We have already spoken on how God-believers can keep the observance [3.2.1], so here we will only address “god-belief,” that is, a belief in many gods and other spiritual beings, such as “spirits,” and so on.

It is important that, as such believers, we only recollect the wholesome aspects of such gods or beings. Interestingly, the (Tad-ah’) Uposatha Sutta gives the most detailed comments on this particular observance. It is useful to recollect *the faith, the moral virtue, the learning, the charity and the wisdom* of such gods and beings [§8.2]. Carefully read the whole section [§8], including its parable, for a better idea of the god’s observance.

Once our minds are clear of thoughts, we should at once direct ourselves fully to the meditation, especially the breath meditation or lovingkindness cultivation. Once we are able to do this, we should try a different observance, or even all of them in due course, so that we have a good idea of which observance suits us best.

3.2.6 The 8-limbed observance [§§9-16]. This is the “ideal” observance, complete in all its aspects or factors (*āṅga*), here meaning the 8 precepts, which are elaborated in the Sutta [§§9-16], which should be carefully read and reflected on. Notice here that we are not merely keeping to the precepts: this is our emulating the goodness of the arhats, the highest ideal in the Dharma. The “8-limbed observance” (*aṭṭh’āṅg’uposatha*) is our opportunity to live like the arhats.

Notice that the 8-limbed uposatha is the Sutta’s climax, with the other five kinds of observances as preparatory practices for the “real thing.” This observance is a serious practice and should not be taken lightly, if we wish to enjoy its full benefit. In other words, if we are not able to observe it—such as we are too busy, or unable to find a suitable environment—then it is sufficient that we keep to one of the 5 observances.

We should make sure that we include some perception of impermanence (*anicca’saññā*) in our observance or retreat. If we make a regular practice of this, and constantly reflect on impermanence in all

³³ Such a passage could, eg, be Aṅgulimāla’s conversion: **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86,4-6), SD 5.11.

³⁴ See esp (**Ahita**) **Thera S** (A 5.88), SD 40a.16.

³⁵ On the cultivation of lovingkindness, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8) & **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (3 + 7).

our actions and observations around us, then we have strengthened ourselves with the Dharma. The Dharma will protect us (Tha 303). We will live happily (Dh 168 f) and in this life itself, we will attain stream-winning, if not certainly at the moment of passing away.³⁶

4 The observance today

The “8-precept” observance day is today almost exclusively a Theravada lay practice. These precept days are known as *poya* (Sri Lanka), *u.bok.nei* (Myanmar), and *wan.phra-*(Thailand). On new-moon and full-moon days lay Mahayana Buddhists generally keep to a vegetarian diet and/or offer puja.

One begins the observance day by the “taking” (mindfully reciting) of the observance precepts, usually in a congregation before a virtuous monastic. This is then followed by listening to a Dharma talk or doing some meditation.³⁷ But strictly speaking, the observance is a day of solitary retreat or temporary “renunciation” spent in a monastery, temple, centre, retreat or even one’s own personal space. For such a retreat, we should have tied up all loose ends with the world (at least temporarily) and have prepared all that we need for the observance. We also dress in simple and comfortable clothing.

The observance may also be kept as a communal event with common meals, Dharma study or discussion, and meditation. There can also be an “invitation” (*pavāraṇā*) to others to point out one’s faults which one then resolves. This is best done in a Dharma circle, that is, small groups (numbering 15-20 each) to keep in touch spiritually. In such cases, one should of course behave and speak mindfully. It is such practices that truly makes one an *upāsaka* (male follower) or an *upāsikā* (female follower), since one “keeps” (*upavasati*) the precepts and stays close to the Dharma.

The nature of the eightfold observance day is discussed in detail here in **the Tad-ah’uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70),³⁸ which incorporates **the Vitthata Uposatha Sutta** (A 8.42),³⁹ The section [§8.1] on the recollection of the devas is also found in **the (Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10).⁴⁰ Both the Tad-ah’ Uposatha Sutta and the Vitthata Uposatha Sutta end with verses on the 8 factors, two of which are found in the **Dhammika Sutta** of the Sutta Nipāta.⁴¹ **The Pañc’uposatha Jātaka** (J 4:325 ff) was related to 500 lay followers to encourage them to keep the observance.

— — —

(This Day of) The Observance Discourse

A 3.70

[A 1:205]

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in the mansion of Migāra’s mother⁴² in the Eastern Monastery near Sāvattihī. Now at that time—it being the observance day—Visākhā Migara,mātā [Migāra’s mother], went up to the Blessed One, and having saluted him, sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to Visākhā Migāra,mātā:

“Now, Visākhā, why are you here so early at dawn?”

“Today, bhante, I am keeping the observance.”

³⁶ See (Anicca) **Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), SD 16.7, or any of the 10 suttas on S 25.

³⁷ Cf Ujl 189.

³⁸ A 3.70/1:205-215.

³⁹ A 8.42/4:251-255. There is also a shorter version of this, **Saṅkhitta Uposatha S** (A 8.41/4:248-251).

⁴⁰ (Agata,phala) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.7/3:287 f), SD 15.3.

⁴¹ (Taṇhā) **Māluṅkyā,putta S** (A 4:254 f = Sn 400 f), SD 84.10.

⁴² “The mansion of Migāra’s mother,” *migāra,mātu pasāde*. For details, see **Satta Jaṭila S** (S 3.11,1/3:11n), SD 14.11.

Three kinds of observance

1.2 “Visākhā, there are these **three kinds of observance**. What are the three?

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| (1) The cowherd’s observance, | <i>gopālakūposatha</i> |
| (2) the nirgranthas’ observance [the Jain observance], ⁴³ | <i>nigaṇṭhūposatha</i> |
| (3) the noble observance [the saints’ observance]. ⁴⁴ | <i>ariyūposatha</i> |

2 (1) And what, Visākhā, is the cowherd’s observance?

Suppose, Visākhā, a cowherd, having returned the cows to the owner in the evening, reflects thus:

‘Today the cows grazed at such and such a place, and drank at such and such a place. Tomorrow they will graze at such and such a place, and drink at such and such a place.’

2.2 In the same way, Visākhā. A certain observant [observance keeper]⁴⁵ here reflects thus:

‘Today I ate such and such hard food, took [206] such and such soft food. Tomorrow I shall eat such and such hard food, I shall take such and such soft food. And he lets the day pass with his mind occupied by covetousness through greed.

This, Visākhā, is the cowherd’s observance. This cowherd’s observance is not of great fruit, not of great benefit, not very luminous, not very pervasive.

3 (2) And what, Visākhā, is the nirgrantha’s observance?

There is, Visākhā, a class of nirgrantha [naked Jain] ascetics who exhort their disciple thus:

‘Come, my good man,

lay aside the stick [be non-violent] to all living beings that exist in the *east* for a hundred fathoms;

lay aside the stick to all living beings that exist in the *west* for a hundred fathoms;

lay aside the stick to all living beings that exist in the *north* for a hundred fathoms;

lay aside the stick to all living beings that exist in the *south* for a hundred fathoms!’

Thus, Visākhā, they show⁴⁶ compassion and kindness towards certain living beings. They do not show compassion and kindness to certain living beings.⁴⁷

3.2 Then again, Visākhā, on the day of observance, they exhort their disciple thus:

‘Now, my good man, take off all your clothes⁴⁸ and say thus:⁴⁹

- | | |
|--|---|
| (a) “I’m not in anything,” | <i>nāhaṃ kvācīni</i> |
| (b) “There is nothing of me in anything whatever,” | <i>na kassaci kiñcana tasmim</i> |
| (c) “There is nothing whatever that is mine,” and | <i>na ca mama kvācīni</i> |
| (d) “There is nothing in anything.” | <i>kismiñci kiñcana n’atthi</i> ⁵⁰ |

But still the parents know their son, thus, “This is our son,”

and he knows them, thus, “These are my mother and father.”

But still the wife and children know⁵¹ their bread-winner, “This is our bread-winner,”⁵²

⁴³ Although “nirgrantha” (*nigaṇṭha*) usu refers to the “Jain ascetics,” here it is clear that it is simply a generic adj, referring to “Jains” in general, ie, the ascetics and their lay followers.

⁴⁴ “Noble observance,” *ariy’uposatha*, alt tr “the observance of the noble ones (ie the saints).”

⁴⁵ “Observant,” *uposathika*, ie one keeping the *uposatha*..

⁴⁶ “Show,” *samādapenti*, lit “they undertake” = *samādiyanti*. Alt tr: “take up; take upon (themselves); rouse.”

⁴⁷ These words describe the contemporary state of affairs. Clearly, such criticisms (and various internal developments), have influenced the Jains, so that in due course, esp in our own times, they evolved into their modern form, esp in taking a meatless diet and an attitude of non-violence. The Buddha’s criticism is that of an overt ritualism of the Jains in his own time.

⁴⁸ “Take off...say thus,” *tvam...sabba, celāni nikkhipitvā evaṃ vadehi*, lit “Having taken off all your clothes, say this...”

⁴⁹ These four statements are, in Buddhism, called the 4 kinds of emptiness (*catu,koṭīka suññatā*) (M 2:263 f; A 1:206, 2:177; cf A 3:170). For details, see “Is there a soul?” =SD 2.16.15.

⁵⁰ This well known stock phrase is found in connection with the teaching of non-self (*anattā*) at M 2:263 f; A 1:206, 2:177; cf A 3:170.

⁵¹ “The wife and children,” *putta, dāro* (lit “son and wife”) is a singular collective noun attracting singular verb constructions; but the English idiom has to be rendered in the plural.

and he knows them, thus, “These are my wife and children.”

But still his slaves, labourers and workers know him, thus, “This is our master,”

and he knows them, thus, “These are my slaves, labourers and workers.”

3.3 Thus, at a time when they should be exhorted to undertake the truth,⁵³ they are exhorted to undertake false speech! This is speaking falsehood on their part, I say!

Then, when the night has passed, he resumes the use of his belongings that actually⁵⁴ have not been given to him!⁵⁵ This is taking the not-given on their part, I say!

This, Visākhā, is the nirgrantha’s observance. This nirgrantha’s observance is not of great fruit, not of great benefit, not very luminous, not very pervasive.

THE NOBLE OBSERVANCES⁵⁶

4 And what, Visākhā, is **the noble observance (*ariyūposatha*)?**⁵⁷ [207]

(3) Recollection of the Buddha: the perfect observance

It is, Visākhā, by the cleansing of a soiled [impure] mind by purposeful effort.⁵⁸

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus:

‘The Blessed One is such:

an arhat [worthy],
fully self-awakened,
accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
well-farer,
knower of worlds,
peerless guide of persons to be tamed,
teacher of gods and humans,
awakened,
blessed.’⁵⁹

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened [is calm and clear], joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

Parable of the head-cleansing

4.2 A soiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by purposeful effort,⁶⁰ Visākhā, in the same way that a soiled head is cleansed.

⁵² “Bread-winner,” *bhattā*, usu tr as “husband”, but the context here dictates it to be “supporter, bread-winner” as at J 5:260.

⁵³ “The truth,” *sacce*, PTS ed wr *sabbe*, “all.”

⁵⁴ “Actually,” *eva*.

⁵⁵ “He resumes...to him,” *so...te bhoge adinnam y’eva paribhuñjati*, lit “he indeed partakes of his not-given wealth.”

⁵⁶ **Observances (3)-(6)** [§§ 4-7]—ie, the perfect observance, the dharma observance, the sangha observance and the moral virtue observance—constitute the qualities of a streamwinner (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*, D 33.1.11(14)/-3:227), here to be cultivated by the laity on a simpler level. Cf *sotāpatti-y-aṅga*, the “limbs for streamwinning”: see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(1). For a shorter statement on the limbs of a streamwinner, see **Ogadha S** (S 55.2/5:343 f). For details, see Intro (3).

⁵⁷ This is the start of the explanation of “the noble observance,” which ends at §16.2.

⁵⁸ “By effort,” *upakkamena*, which Comy glosses as *paccatta, purisa, kārena*, “by individual effort” (AA 2:322). See n on “Proper personal effort” below.

⁵⁹ On this reflection, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7.

⁶⁰ *Upakkiliṭṭhassa visākhē cittassa upakkamena pariyodapanā hoti*.

And how, Visākhā, is a soiled head cleansed by purposeful effort?⁶¹

By means of **cleansing paste**⁶² and clay and water and proper personal effort.⁶³

This, Visākhā, is how a soiled head is cleansed by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort.

4.3 How, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus:

‘Such is he, the Blessed One,
*an arhat [worthy],
 fully self-awakened,
 accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
 well-farer,
 knower of worlds,
 peerless guide of persons to be tamed,
 teacher of gods and humans,
 awakened,
 blessed.*’

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened [is calm and clear], joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

4.4 THE PERFECT OBSERVANCE. This noble disciple, Visākhā, is said to keep **the perfect observance** [the brahma observance] (*brahmūposatha*): he dwells with Brahmā.

When he is focussed on the (spiritually) perfect one [the Buddha],⁶⁴ his mind is brightened,⁶⁵ joy arises, and the mind’s impurities are abandoned.⁶⁶

This, Visākhā, is the way of cleansing his soiled mind by purposeful effort.

(4) Recollection of the Dharma: the dharma observance

5 There is, Visākhā, the cleansing of a soiled mind by purposeful effort.

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Dharma, thus:

‘Well-taught is the Blessed One’s true teaching,
 visible here and now,
 immediate [having nothing to do with time],
 inviting one to come and see,
 accessible [to bring oneself up to it],
 to be personally known by the wise.’⁶⁷

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

Parable of the body-cleansing

⁶¹ *Kathaṅ ca visākhe upakkiliṭṭhassa sīsassa upakkamena pariyodapanā hoti.*

⁶² “Cleansing paste,” *kakka*, “a sediment, a paste (produced by grinding oily substances); face-powder.” J 6:232 mentioned 3 kinds of paste: mustard (*sāsapa*) paste, fragrant earth (*mattika*) paste and sesamum (*tila*) paste. DA 1:88 adds turmeric (*haliddī*), used before face-powder is applied.

⁶³ “Proper personal effort,” *purisassa ca tajjāṃ vāyāmaṃ paṭicca*. See n on “By effort” above.

⁶⁴ In this passage, *brahma* or *brahmā* is used as meaning “perfect, divine, divinely perfect,” and an epithet of the Buddha. This serves as a bridge or skillful means for those who are still God-believers, so that in time, they would let go of the God-idea. Cf recollection of the devas (*devatā ’nussati*) [§8] below.

⁶⁵ *Pasīdati* (*pa* (a strengthening prefix) + √SAD, “to sit”): (1) (of the face, body) to become bright, brighten up (PvA 132); (2) (of the mind, heart) to brighten up (fig), to be purified, reconciled or pleased, to be calm and clear, to be pacified; (3) (psychological) to feel satisfied with, have faith in (D 2:202; S 1:98, 2:199; A 3:248; Sn 356, 434, 563). Here sense (2) applies. Past part *pasanna*: PED sv.

⁶⁶ *Brahmaṅ c’assa ārabha cittaṃ pasīdati pāmojjaṃ uppajjati, ye cittaṃ upakkilesā te pahīyanti.*

⁶⁷ On this reflection, see *Dhammānussati*, SD 15.9.

5.2 This soiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by purposeful effort, Visākhā, in the same way that a soiled body is cleansed.

And how, Visākhā, is a soiled body cleansed by purposeful effort?

By means of **shell**⁶⁸ **and chunam [lime soap]**⁶⁹ **and proper personal effort**.

This, Visākhā, is how a soiled body is cleansed by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is his soiled mind [208] cleansed by purposeful effort.

5.3 How, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Dharma, thus:

*‘Well-taught is the Blessed One’s Teaching,
visible here and now,
immediate [having nothing to do with time],
inviting one to come and see,
accessible [to bring oneself up to it],
to be personally known by the wise.’*

When he reflects thus, his mind is still brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

5.4 THE DHARMA OBSERVANCE. This noble disciple, Visākhā, is said to keep **the dharma observance** (*dhammūposatha*): he dwells with the Dharma.

It is in reference to the Dharma that his mind is brightened, that joy arises, by which his soiled mind is given up by purposeful effort.

This, Visākhā, is the way of cleansing his soiled mind by purposeful effort.

(5) Recollection of the Sangha: the sangha observance

6 There is, Visākhā, the cleansing of a soiled mind by purposeful effort.

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Sangha, thus:

‘The Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to	the good way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to	the straight way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to	the right way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to	the proper way.

These 4 pairs of persons, the 8 individuals:
this Blessed One’s community of disciples is
worthy of offerings,
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
a supreme field of merit for the world.⁷⁰

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

Parable of cloth-cleaning

6.2 This soiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by purposeful effort, Visākhā, in the same way that a soiled piece of cloth is cleansed.

And how, Visākhā, is a soiled cloth cleansed by purposeful effort?⁷¹ [209]

By means of **cleaning salt**⁷² **and lye**⁷³ **and cow-dung and proper personal effort**.

⁶⁸ “Shell,” *sotti*; PED conjectures this meaning.

⁶⁹ “Chunam,” *cuṇṇa* (Skt *cūrṇa*, Tamil *cuṇṇam*), ie lime used esp with betel leaf to make pan. The proper way of washing and using chunam are given at V 1:47.

⁷⁰ On this reflection, see **Aṭṭha Puggala S 1** (A 8.59), SD 15.10a(1).

⁷¹ This analogy recurs in **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/3:131), SD 14.13.

⁷² “Cleaning salt,” *ūsa*; I follow Bodhi (S:B 945). PED conjectures as “salt earth.” Comy says “heat (or steam)” (*usuma*) is involved.

This, Visākhā, is how a soiled piece of cloth is cleansed by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort.

6.3 How, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus:

*‘The Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to the good way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to the straight way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to the right way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples keeps to the proper way.
These are the 4 pairs of persons, the 8 individuals:
this Blessed One’s community of disciples is:
worthy of offerings,
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
a supreme field of merit for the world.’*

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

6.4 THE SANGHA OBSERVANCE. This noble disciple, Visākhā, is said to keep **the sangha observance** (*saṅghūposatha*): he dwells with the Sangha.

It is in reference to the Sangha that his mind is brightened, that joy arises, by which his soiled mind is given up by purposeful effort.

This, Visākhā, is the way of cleansing his soiled mind by purposeful effort.

(6) Recollection of moral virtue: The moral virtue observance

7 There is, Visākhā, the cleansing of a soiled mind by purposeful effort.

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects his own moral virtue, unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, *conducive to concentration*.⁷⁴

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

Parable of the mirror

7.2 This soiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by purposeful effort, Visākhā, in the same way that a soiled mirror is cleansed.

And how, Visākhā, is a soiled mirror cleansed by purposeful effort?⁷⁵

By means of **oil**, by means of ashes,⁷⁶ by means of a bristle brush, and by means of proper personal effort.

This, Visākhā, is how a soiled mirror is cleansed by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort.

7.3 How, Visākhā, is his soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort? **[210]**

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects his moral virtue.

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

7.4 THE MORAL VIRTUE OBSERVANCE. This noble disciple, Visākhā, is said to keep **the observance of moral virtue** (*sīlūposatha*): he dwells with moral virtue.

It is in reference to moral virtue that his mind is brightened, that joy arises, by which his soiled mind is given up by purposeful effort.

⁷³ “Lye,” *khāra*, ie an alkali or caustic substance (like soda or potash).

⁷⁴ “Unbroken, . . . giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññū-pasaṅghehi aparāmaṅghehi samādhi, samvattanaikehi*. See UA 268. On this practice, see *Sīlānussati*, SD 15.11.

⁷⁵ This analogy recurs in **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/3:131), SD 14.13.

⁷⁶ “Ash,” *chārika*.

This, Visākhā, is the way of cleansing his soiled mind by purposeful effort.⁷⁷

(7) Recollection of the devas: the gods' observance⁷⁸

8 There is, Visākhā, the cleansing of a soiled mind by purposeful effort.

How, Visākhā, is a soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the devas—

there are the devas of the heaven of the four great kings (*cātum, mahā, rājikā*);

there are the devas of the heaven of Tāvatisa [the heaven of the 33 devas];

there are the devas of the heaven of Yāma;

there are the devas of the heaven of Tusita [the contented];

there are the devas of the heaven of Nimmāna, ratī [who delight in creating];

there are the devas of the heaven of Para, nimmīta, vasavattī [who lord over the creations of others];⁷⁹

there are the devas of the heaven of Brahma's hosts;⁸⁰

(and) there are the devas beyond these.⁸¹

The fivefold noble growth: Cultivating the recollection of the devas⁸²

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 8.2 (1) The <u>faith</u> | that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of <i>faith</i> is found in me, too. |
| (2) The <u>moral virtue</u> | that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of <i>moral virtue</i> is found in me, too. |
| (3) The <u>learning</u> ⁸³ | that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of <i>learning</i> is found in me, too. |
| (4) The <u>charity</u> | that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of <i>charity</i> is found in me, too. |
| (5) The <u>wisdom</u> | that those devas are endowed with because of which, |

⁷⁷ In (**Agata, phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10), here follows the recollection of charity (*cāgānussati*), but not found here. This is curious because Visākhā is well known for her charity, which could well serve as a good subject of recollection. On this practice, see *Devatā'nussati*, SD 15.13.

⁷⁸ This recollection is also found in (**Agata, phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.7/3:287 f), SD 15.3. This is a skillful mrsnd for those who still hold some kind of God-belief, so that in due course they would let go of it: cf “the perfect observance” [§4.4] above. The first 6 deva planes are the six sense-sphere (*kāma, loka*) heavens. The devas of Brahma's Hosts (*brahma, kāyikā*) dwell in the various spheres of the 1st dhyana in the form world (see A:ÑB 293 n52). The “devas beyond these” are those of the form world and the formless world. See chart in Appendix. For comy, see Vism 7.115-118.

⁷⁹ Māra the evil one is said to reside in this heaven, lording over a part of it (MA 1:33 f). The ruler of this realm here is called Vasa, vattī (D 1:219; A 4:243). Māra is also called Vasa, vattī (but distinct from his namesake) because he is “lord with great power over the 6 Sense Realms” (*māro mahānubhāvo cha, kāmāvar'issaro vasavattī*, MA 2:201). Māra is also called Pajā, patī, “the lord of creation,” because he lords over this “generation” (*pajā*) of living beings (M 1.9/1:2; MA ad loc).

⁸⁰ “Brahma's hosts,” *brahma, kāyikā*. See n on this section's header.

⁸¹ “Beyond this,” *tat'uttarim*, lit “higher than these.” See n on this section's header.

⁸² “Fivefold growth,” ie the fivefold noble growth (*ariya, vuddhi*, A 3:80). Here, they are given as instructions in how we should cultivate the “recollection of the devas.” Cf the 5 virtues conducive to growth (*vuddhi, dhamma*, A 5.246/2:245): see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(1) etc; (**Agata, phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.7/3:287), SD 15.3; **Sambadh'okāsa S** (A 6.26.8/3:316), SD 15.7a.

⁸³ “Learning,” *suta*, lit “listening,” ie “one who has heard much Dharma,” cognate with today's “well-read, learned,” but in spiritual matters.

when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there,
that kind of *wisdom* is found in me, too.’

8.3 When he recollects his own faith, moral, virtue, learning, charity and wisdom, *as well as those of the devas*,⁸⁴ his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

Parable of gold-purifying

This soiled mind, Visākhā, is purified by purposeful effort, Visākhā, in the same way that gold⁸⁵ is purified.

8.4 And how, Visākhā, is gold purified by purposeful effort?⁸⁶

By means of a furnace,⁸⁷ by means of salt, by means of red chalk,⁸⁸ by means of a blow-pipe,⁸⁹ by means of a pair of tongs, and by means of proper personal effort.

This, Visākhā, is how soiled gold is purified by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is his soiled [impure] mind purified by purposeful effort. [211]

8.5 How, Visākhā, is his soiled mind purified by purposeful effort?

Here, Visākhā, the noble disciple recollects the devas.

When he reflects thus, his mind is brightened, joy arises—he gives up his soiled mind.

8.6 THE GODS’ OBSERVANCE. This noble disciple, Visākhā, is said to keep **the observance of the gods** (*devatūposatha*): he dwells with the gods.

It is in reference to the gods that his mind is brightened, that joy arises, by which his soiled mind is given up by purposeful effort.

This, Visākhā, is the way of cleansing his soiled mind by purposeful effort.

THE LAITY’S NOBLE OBSERVANCE⁹⁰

(8) The 8-limbed observance⁹¹

9 Then the noble disciple, Visākhā, reflects⁹² thus:

(1) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,

giving up harming any living being, abstaining from harming any living being,

having laid aside rod and sword, conscientious, kind,

dwelt compassionate towards all living beings.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,

⁸⁴ From hereon, replacing the remaining section of the para, (**Agata,phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10) has “At that time his mind is not obsessed by lust, hate or delusion—his mind is straight, with the devas as its object. This is called a noble disciple who dwells (spiritually) consistent amidst an inconsistent generation, who dwells unafflicted amidst an afflicted generation, who has entered upon the stream of the Dharma and develops the recollection of the devas” (A 6.10/ 3:288). On “the stream of the Dharma,” see “**Listening beyond the ear**,” SD 3.2 (3).

⁸⁵ “Gold,” *jāta,rūpa*, which the Vinaya’s own Old Commentary defines *jāta,rūpa* as “gold” (that is “the colour of the teacher”, V 3:238). Here it refers to the worked metal.

⁸⁶ This analogy recurs in **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/3:131), SD 14.13.

⁸⁷ “Furnace,” *ukkā*, also “crucible.”

⁸⁸ “Red chalk,” *geruka*.

⁸⁹ “Blow-pipe,” *nālika*.

⁹⁰ This whole concluding section (incl closing verses) is also found word-for-word at (**Paṭhama**) **Visākhā S** (A 8.43/4:255-258).

⁹¹ **Tad-ah’uposatha S** (A 3.70.9-18/1:211 f), SD 4.18; **Saṅkhittūposatha S** (A 8.41.3-10/4:249-251), **Vitthatūposatha S** (A 8.42/4:251), (**Paṭhama**) **Visākhā S** (A 8.43.3/4:255 f), **Bojjha S** (A 8.45.3/4:260), **Nav’añg’uposatha S** (A 9.18.2-9/4:388-390), **Thera S** (A 10.98.5/5:204 f), **Cunda S** (A 10.176.8-10/5:266-268), **Niraya Sagga S 1** (A 10.200.4/5:284), **Niraya Sagga S 2** (A 10.201.4/5:286), **Saṃsappanīya S** (A 10.205.5/5:290), SD 39.7, **Saṅcetanika S 1** (A 10.206.8-11/5:295 f) + SD 3.9; see also A 4.53/2:58, A 54.60/2:60, 5.250/3:276, 8.46.5/4:266, 48.-4/4:268.

⁹² “Reflects,” *paṭisañcikkhati*.

*giving up harming any living being, abstaining from harming any living being,
having laid aside rod and sword, conscientious, kind,
dwell compassionate towards all living beings.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

- 10** (2) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
giving up taking the not-given, abstain from taking the not-given,
accepting only what is given, expecting only what is given,
dwell not by theft but with a mind of purity.⁹³

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
*giving up taking the not-given, abstain from taking the not-given;
accepting only what is given, expecting only what is given,
dwell not by theft but with a mind of purity.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

- 11** (3) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life,
dwelling alone,⁹⁴ abstaining from coupling, the way of the world.⁹⁵

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
*giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life,
dwelling alone, abstaining from coupling, the way of the world.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’ [212]

- 12** (4) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
giving up false speech, abstain from false speech;
speaking the truth, keeping to their word, trustworthy,⁹⁶
not breaking their word to the world.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
*giving up false speech, abstain from false speech;
speaking the truth, keeping to my word, trustworthy,
not breaking my word to the world.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

- 13** (5) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
giving up strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness,
abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
*giving up strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness,
abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

- 14** (6) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
eating only one meal a day, abstain from eating at night and from untimely meals.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
*eating only one meal a day,
abstain from eating at night and from untimely meals.*

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

- 15** (7) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
abstain from dancing, singing, music,⁹⁷ **watching unseemly shows,**
and from wearing and adorning themselves with garlands, scents and cosmetics.⁹⁸

⁹³ “A mind of purity,” *sūci, bhūtena attanā*. Here *attā* refers to “mind.”

⁹⁴ “Dwelling alone,” *anācarī*, vll *ārā, cārī, anācārī*.

⁹⁵ “The way of the world,” *gāma, dhamma*, lit “the way of village.”

⁹⁶ “Trustworthy,” *sacca, sandha*.

⁹⁷ “Music,” *vādita*.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
abstain from dancing, singing, music, watching unseemly shows,
and from wearing and adorning myself with garlands, scents and cosmetics.
 I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

16 (8) ‘As long as they live, the arhats,
giving up high and luxurious beds,
abstain from high and luxurious beds,
 using a low bed, that is, a small bed or a straw mat.

Today I, too, for this night and this day,
giving up high and luxurious beds,
abstain from high and luxurious beds,
using a low bed, that is, a small bed or a straw mat.

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.’

16.2 Such, Visākhā, is **the noble observance**. Thus kept, the noble observance is of great fruit, of great benefit, very luminous, very pervasive.

Benefit of the noble observance

17 How is it of great fruit, of great benefit, very luminous, very pervasive?

Suppose, Visākhā, one were to wield lordship and sovereignty [213] over these sixteen countries⁹⁹ abounding with their seven great treasures,¹⁰⁰ that is to say—Aṅga, Magadha, Kāsī, Kosala, Vajjī, Mallā, Ceḍī, Vaṁsā, Kuru, Pañcala, Maccha, Surasena, Assaka, Avantī, Gandhārā and Kambojā¹⁰¹—yet, this is not worth even a sixteenth¹⁰² part of a single observance complete in its 8 limbs.

What is the reason for this? Because poor is human sovereignty when compared to heavenly bliss.

Divine bliss of the sense-world heavens

18 For the devas of the heaven of **the four great kings**, a single night and day (there) is that of *50 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

Five hundred such celestial years¹⁰³ are the lifespan of the devas of the heaven of the four great kings.

18.2 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up, to be reborn in the company of the devas of the four great kings.

It is in reference to this that I said human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

19 For the devas of the **Tāvatiṁsa heaven**, a single night and day (there) is that of *100 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

A thousand such celestial years are the lifespan of the devas of the heaven of the Tāvatiṁsa heaven.

⁹⁸ “Cosmetics,” *vilepana*.

⁹⁹ Some of these 16 great states (*soḷasa mahā.janapadā*), such as Kāsī (Kāśī), Kosala (Kośala), Kuru-Pañcala, Maccha (Matsya), Gandhārā and Kambojā, had existed long before and were mentioned on Vedic literature. The rest, such as Aṅga, Magadha, Vajjī (Vṛjī), Malla, Ceḍī, Vatsā, Surasena (Śūrasena), Assaka (Aśmaka) and Avantī, were new states that arose from declining old ones or more areas coming into prominence. The autocratic monarchies (Skt *rājya*, P *rajja*) were Kosala, Magadha, Vaṁsā (Vatsā) and Avantī. Kosala had annexed Kāsī; Magadha had annexed Aṅga; Vaṁsā had annexed Ceḍī; and Avantī had annexed Assaka. (Sanskrit names follow within parentheses.)

¹⁰⁰ The seven treasures—the wheel treasure, the elephant treasure, the horse treasure, the jewel treasure, the woman treasure, the houselord treasure, the advisor treasure—are described in detail in **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129.34-41/3:172-176), SD 2.22.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix.

¹⁰² “A sixteenth part,” *solasiṁ*, here a figure meaning “an iota; a tiniest fraction,” meaning there is almost no comparison at all.

¹⁰³ “Celestial years.” See Appendix or A:ÑB 17 f.

19.2 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up,

to be reborn in the company of the devas of the Tāvātimsa heaven.

It is in reference to this that I said human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

20 For the devas of the **Yāma heaven**, a single night and day (there) is that of *200 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

Two thousand such celestial years are the lifespan of the devas of the heaven of Yāma.

20.1 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up,

to be reborn in the company of the devas of the Yāma heaven.

It is in reference [214] to this that I said human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

21 For the devas of the **Tusita heaven**, a single night and day (there) is that of *400 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

Four thousand such celestial years are the lifespan of the devas of the heaven of Tusita.

21.1 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up,

to be reborn in the company of the devas of the Tusita heaven.

It is in reference to this that I say human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

22 For the devas of the **Nimmāṇa, ratī heaven** [who delight in creating], a single night and day (there) is that of *800 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

Eight thousand such celestial years are the lifespan of the devas of the Nimmāṇa, ratī heaven.

22.2 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up,

to be reborn in the company of the devas of the Nimmāṇa, ratī heaven.

It is in reference to this that I say human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

23 For the devas of the **Para, nimmita, vasavattī heaven** [who lord over the creation of others], a single night and day (there) is that of *1,600 human years*: 30 such days make a month, 12 such months make a year.

Sixteen thousand such celestial years are the lifespan of the devas of the heaven of Para, nimmita, vasavattī heaven.

23.2 It is possible, Visākhā, for a certain woman or man here, having kept the observance complete in its 8 limbs, after death, when the body has broken up,

to be reborn in the company of the devas of the Para, nimmita, vasavattī heaven.

It is in reference to this that I say human sovereignty is poor compared to heavenly bliss.

24

*Pāṇam na hāne na cādinnaṃ ādiye
musā na bhāso na ca majjapo siyā [215]
abrahma, cariyā virameyya methunā
rattim na bhujjeyya vikāla, bhojanaṃ
mālaṃ na dhāraye na ca gandhaṃ ācare
mañce chamāyaṃ vasayetha saṅghate
etaṃ hi aṭṭhaṅgikam āhūposathaṃ
buddhena dukkh'anta, guṇaṃ pakāsitaṃ*

*Cando ca suriyo ca ubho sudassanā
obhāsayaṃ anupariyanti yāvatā
tamo, nudā te pana anta, likkha, gā
nabhe pabhāsanti disā virocana
etasmiṃ yaṃ vijjati antare dhanam
muttaṃ maṇim veḷuriyaṃ ca bhaddakam*

One should not harm a living being; nor take the not-given; one should not utter false speech; nor take intoxicating drinks; one should abstain from incelibacy; one should not eat during the night nor at the wrong time; one should not wear garlands nor use scents; one should dwell on a small bed or a couch on the ground. This is “the great observance of 8 limbs” declared by the Buddha for the end of suffering.

The sun and the moon, both beautiful to look at, shedding their radiance where they course their orbits, scattering the gloom as they go in the open skies; the heavens light up, radiant in all the quarters. Within this space there is wealth to be found— pearls, gems, beryls and lucky stones,

*siṅgi, suvaṇṇaṃ athavā pi kañcanaṃ
yam jāta, rūpaṃ hāṭakaṃ 'ti vuccati
aṭṭh' aṅg' upetassa uposathassa
kalam pi te nānubhavanti soḷasim
canda-p, pabhā tāra, gaṇā ca sabbe*

gold nuggets and glittering gold,
beautiful metal called Hāṭaka gold.¹⁰⁴
Yet, of the keeping of the 8-limbed observance
even all the moonlight and galaxy of stars
are but a fraction, not worth a sixteenth part.

*Tasmā hi nārī ca naro ca sīlavā
aṭṭh' aṅg' upetaṃ upavassūposathaṃ
puññāni katvaṃ sukh' udrayāni
aninditā saggam upenti ṭhānan' ti*

As such, a woman or a man of moral virtue,
who keeps the 8-limbed observance,
makes merits that bring them happiness
without blame—they find a place in heaven.

— evaṃ —

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¹⁰⁴ SED says *hāṭaka* is the name of a river in the “lower world.” Perhaps we could tr it simply as “magical: see BHSD under *hāṭaka prabhāsa*.

Appendix**The 16 Great Countries**

Some of these sixteen great states (*soḷasa mahājanapadā*), such as **Kāśī, Kośala, Kuru-Pañcāla, Matsya, Gandhārā and Kambojā**, had existed long before and were mentioned on the Vedic literature. The rest, such as Aṅga, Magadha, Vṛjī, Malla, Ceḍī, Vatsā, Śūrasena, Aśmaka and Avantī, were new states that arose from declining old ones or more areas coming into prominence.¹⁰⁵

Country/State	Capital & towns	Modern districts
1. Aṅga	Campā (Bhagalpur) Bhadrikā (P: Bhaddiyā) Aśvapura (P: Assapura)	Bengal
2. Magadha	Rājagṛha or Girivraja (Rajgir)	Southern Bihar
3. Kāśī/Kāśī	Vārāṇasī (Banaras)	Banaras/Vārāṇasī
4. Kośala/Kosala	Śrāvasti (Saheth Maheth) Sāketa (Ayodhyā)	Oudh
5. Vṛjī/Vajjī	Vaiśālī (Besarh) of the Licchavis Mithilā (Janakpur) of the Videhas	Northern Bihar
6. Malla (<i>Malloi</i>)	Pāvā (Padaraona)	Gorakhpur
7. Caitya/Ceḍī	Kuśinagara (Kasia; P: Kusinārā) Śuktimati Sahajati Tripurī	Bundelkhand
8. Vatsā/Vamsā	Kauśāmbī (Kosam; P: Kosambī)	Allahābād
9. Kuru	Indraprastha (Delhi) Hastinapura	District of Thānesar, Delhi & Meerut
10. Pañcāla	N. Ahicchatra (Rāmnagar) S. Kāmpilya (Kampil)	Rohilkhand Central Doāb
11. Matsya/Maccha	Virāṭa (Bairāt)	Jaipur
12. Śūrasena	Mathurā	Mathurā (Muttra)
13. Aśmaka or Aśvaka/ Assaka (<i>Assakenus</i>)	Potali or Potana (Bodhan)	Nizam
14. Avantī*	Ujjayinī (Ujjain), (P: Ujjenī) Māhiṣmati	Mālwā & Nimār
15. Gandhārā or Yonā*	Takṣaśilā (P: Takka,silā)	District of Peshāwār & Rawalpiṇḍī
16. Kambojā* ¹⁰⁶		SW Kaśmīr & Kāfirstān

(A 1:213 = 4:252 f. = Nc 247) [See E Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 1988:8]

The names in *italics*, e.g. *Malloi*, are those found in ancient Greek writings.

A name with an asterisk (*), eg “Avantī*” denotes that it was outside the Middle Country.

The Middle Country of the Buddhists was about the size of peninsular Malaysia or of England and Wales.

¹⁰⁵ See SD 4.18 App & SD 9 (16) App & map (16c). See also **Mahā Assa,pura S** (M 39) @ SD 10.13 (1).

¹⁰⁶ **Kambojā**, one of the “great countries” (*mahājanapada*), not in the Middle Country, but in the “north country” region (*uttarā, patha*), an ancient Indo-Iranian kingdom, orig (during the Vedic period) in the Pamirs and Badakshan in Central Asia, and after 2nd cent CE prob extending over SW Kashmir and Kafirstan (the Hindu Kush, straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan). The name is prob related to Cambyses of Anshan (6th cent BCE). The Kambojas were prob the descendents of Indo-Iranians known as Sassanians and Parthians.