The Spiral Path or Lokuttara Paṭicca-samuppāda
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Abstract

This article surveys the Spiral Path or *Lokuttara Paṭicca-samuppāda* in the Pāli *Nikāyas*, with some reference to Chinese parallels, exploring the similarities and differences between the presentations to further elucidate the doctrine which has been at the forefront of the teaching of Sangharakshita and the Triratna Buddhist Order.[2] English language sources are also surveyed and critiqued. Most writing to date has focussed on a single text, the *Upanisā Sutta*, which is shown to be unrepresentative of the class as a whole, and a new *locus classicus* is suggested in the *Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta*. The Spiral Path is seen to conform to the general outline of the Buddhist path as consisting of ethics, meditation and wisdom.

Introduction

The doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, or dependent arising, lies at the heart of all Buddhist thought and practice. The variety of applications of this doctrine can be divided into two major categories with titles drawn from the Theravāda commentarial text *Nettipakaraṇa*. The first category models beings trapped in cycles of craving and grasping, birth and death, and is called *lokiya*, 'worldly'. The most prominent way of representing this form of conditionality is the sequence of twelve *nidānas*.[3] The second category, called *lokuttara*, 'beyond the world',[4] models the process and dynamics of liberation from those same cycles. Applications of the second category are also referred to as the "Spiral Path" after the coinage of Sangharakshita, the pre-eminent modern exponent of this aspect of Buddhist doctrine.

By a quirk of history the Spiral Path has come to be represented in English language presentations by the *Upanisā Sutta* (SN 12.23). Only Payutto (1995) and Jones (2011) mention other texts,[5] and to date there is no account of the breadth of the Pāli literature on the Spiral Path. This article sets out to provide a comprehensive review of the Pāli *suttas* that contain the Spiral Path in some form, and a characterisation of the general features of the doctrine as well as the significant variations. It will also include some reference to Spiral Paths in the Chinese Tripiṭaka, and a survey of these texts is planned for a future article.[6]

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[3] In some Buddhist circles the *nidānas* are synonymous with *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

[4] Pāli *lokuttara* is frequently translated as 'transcendental', but this is a term with specific philosophic connotations that I do not believe apply in this context.

[5] Sangharakshita (1998) footnotes another text, but does not discuss it.

[6] A collection is found in the *Madhyāgama* (Taisho 1.26 §5, *sūtras* 42–55) which has parallels with many of the texts mentioned in this article, including AN 11.1–2; AN 8.81; and SN 12.23. A professional translation of the *Madhyāgama* is in progress under the auspices of the Numata Foundation, and the guidance of Bhikkhu Anālayo.

Arising from this survey is a challenge to the claim that the *Upanisā Sutta* is the *locus classicus* of the Spiral Path. The *Upanisā Sutta* is singular, and not in fact representative of the class. Indeed, when we look at the English language literature on the Spiral Path it becomes apparent that the choice of the *Upanisā Sutta* has led to some anomalies and difficulties. The most representative texts are the first three suttas of the chapter of elevens in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.

The *Upanisā Sutta* does, however, have the virtue of being the only Pāli text that brings the two applications of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (cyclic and progressive) together by linking the twelve *nidānas* with a version of the Spiral Path.[7] To date there has been some inconsistency and imprecision in the terminology used in discussing the sequences. It is usual to refer to the items in the lists, e.g. *avijjā, saṅkhārā* etc., as *nidānas* or as 'links'; however, it is both instructive and interesting to make a distinction between the *items* in the sequences and the relationships or *links* between them. I use 'Spiral Path' as the most general term for the principle embodied in the sequences, and on the model of '*nidānas*' I use the term '*upanisās*' for *lokuttara* list items generally in line with the use in the *Upanisā Sutta*.

The Spiral Path in Pāli

The sequences of items and links that make up the Spiral Path occur throughout the Pāli, though there is considerable variation in the composition of the sequences. I have considered any text that gives the items from *pāmojja* to *samādhi* as a progressive sequence to be a member of this category. Other progressive sequences exist, and I note them along the way.

Samaññāphala Sutta (DN 2; repeated at DN 9, 10, 11, 12, 13[8])

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[7] The Chinese *Madhyāgama* parallel, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* MĀ 55, also links the two sequences.

[8] I will refer to all of these simply as DN 2.

Dasuttara Sutta (DN 34)
Vatthūpama Sutta (MN 7; repeated at MN 40)
Kandaraka Sutta (MN 51)
Upanisā Sutta (SN 12.23)[9]
Pamādavihārī Sutta (SN 35.97)
Pāṭaliya Sutta (SN 42.13)
Nandiya Sutta (SN 55.40)
Vimuttāyatana Sutta (AN 5.26)
Mahānāma Sutta (AN 6.10)
Satisampajañña Sutta (AN 8.81)[10]
Kimatthiya Sutta (AN 10.1 = AN 11.1)[11]
Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta (AN 10.2 = AN 11.2)[12]
Paṭhama-upanisā Sutta (AN 10.3 = AN 11.3)
Dutiya-upanisā Suttas (AN 10.4 = AN 11.4)[13]
Tatiya-upanisā Suttas (AN 10.5 = 11.5)[11]
Dutiyamahānāma Sutta (AN 11.12)

There is a single mention of the Spiral Path in the Vinaya at: *Mahāvagga* 8.15.13 (Vin i.294). The Spiral Path does not appear to feature in *Abhidhamma* texts. Among the canonical commentarial texts we find the Spiral Path mentioned in the following:

Nettipakāraṇa (Netti 65)
Paṭisambhidāmagga (Paṭis i.85–6)[14]
Peṭakopadesa (Peṭ 182–7)

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[9] Parallel with the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* in the Chinese *Madhyāgama* (MĀ 54).

[10] This sequence beginning with *hirotappe* is found at AN 7.65, with *indriya-saṃvara* at AN 6.50, and beginning with *sīla* at AN 5.24 and 5.168. I will use AN 8.81 as a collective designation for all of these. Parallel with the *Hryapatrāpya Sūtra* Chinese *Madhyāgama* (MĀ 45).

[11] The difference between AN 10.1 and AN 11.1 is that the former combines *nibbidā* and *virāga* in one node, while the latter splits them into two separate nodes. Similarly for 10.2–5 cf. 11.2–5. Parallel with the *Kimartha Sūtra* in the Chinese *Madhyāgama* (MĀ 42).

[12] Parallel with the *Acintaka Sūtra* in the Chinese *Madhyāgama* (MĀ 43).

[13] *Dutiya-* & *Tatiya-upanisā Suttas* are repetitions of *Paṭhama-upanisā Sutta* AN 10.3/11.3, but spoken by Sāriputta and Ānanda respectively.

[14] *The Path of Discrimination* p.84.

Spiral Path lists occur several times in the *aṭṭhakāthā* and *ṭīka* texts (traditional commentaries and sub-commentaries), but no attempt to catalogue or describe these has been made.[15] We also find a mention in the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism i.32).[16] Some texts list the meditation *upanisās* but go no further than *samādhi*:

> *Sangīti Sutta* (DN 33)[17]
> *Bhikkhunupassaya Sutta* (SN 47.10)
> *Parisā Sutta* (AN 3.96)

A distinct list of items, but linked in the same way, and incorporating the rain simile found also in the *Upanisā Sutta*, is found in the *Avijjā Sutta* (AN 10.61) and the *Bhavataṇhā Sutta* (AN 10.62).[18] Another sequence is found in the *Indriyasaṃvara Sutta* (AN 6.50) that collapses the items from *pāmojja* to *samādhi* down to *samādhi*, but is otherwise similar. Sometimes unrelated sequences are presented in the same terms. Sangharakshita presents the seven *bojjhaṅgas* as found for example at SN 46.1 as a Spiral Path (Sangharakshita 1967a). We also see texts such as *Rathavinīta Sutta* (MN 24), which use the idea of a progressive sequence of stages.

Characteristics of Spiral Path Lists

The traditional division of the path into stages of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* (or morality, meditation, and wisdom) will provide a useful structure to our discussion.

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[15] It would be interesting to see what these two bodies of texts say about the Spiral Path, as it would indicate the trajectory of the teaching over time. But at the very least, it demonstrates that though the Spiral Path was not prominent, neither was it forgotten.

[16] Ñāṇamoli (1964) p.13.

[17] The sequence itself stops at *samādhi*, but each of the five ways the sequences begin are called *vimuttāyatana* – a basis for liberation.

[18] AN 10.62 is almost identical to AN 10.61, except that it adds *bhavataṇha* before *avijjā*. These texts have a parallel with the *Bhūtakoṭi Sūtra* in the Chinese *Madhyāgama* (MĀ 51), and to some extent with the two *Āhāra Sūtras* (MĀ 53 & 54).

Sīla or Morality

The Pāli word *sīla* could be defined as 'conduct', and is used rather broadly to refer to morality, ethics, and rules of monastic etiquette.[19] I'll use 'morality' as a general translation. In the stage of morality there are several types of items: some appear to be *starting points*, some forms of *practice*, and lastly some appear to be *fruits of practice*. So, for instance, DN 2 – which gives us the most extensive list of items, but no strong sense of the links between them – gives the starting point as 'the arising of a *tathāgata* in the world'. In the MN 7 the starting point is impurities of the mind (*cittassa upakkilesa*).

The bulk of the items in the stage of morality section reflect moral practice, especially ways of paying attention to experience:

> *saṃvara*; or, *-saṃvuta* = *indriyesu guttadvāra* 'sense restraint' or 'guarding the sense doors' (AN 8.81, SN 35.97, MN 7, MN 51, DN 2)
> *yoniso-manasikāra* 'wise attention' (DN 34)
> *appamattassa vihārato* 'dwelling vigilantly' (SN 55.40)
> *sati & sampajañña* ' mindfulness & attentiveness' (DN 2, MN 51)
> *hirotappa* 'shame & scruple' (AN 8.81)
> *sīla* 'morality, ethics'*; kusalāni sīlāni* 'virtuous behaviour' (AN 8.81, AN 10.1 etc, DN 2)

Saṃvara, indriyesu-saṃvara, yoniso-manasikāra, appamāda and *sati-sampajañña* all refer to how one pays attention to experience, and to the effects that experience has on the experiencer. *Saṃvara* or 'restraint' refers to restraining the sense faculties; not allowing the attention to run wild amongst sense pleasures. *Yoniso-manasikāra* 'wise attention' is also typically understood as being careful about where one's attention wanders.[20] Vigilance

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[19] Thanks to Dhīvan for clarifying this issue of terminology.

[20] The translation 'wise attention' reflects the received tradition regarding this quality of attention. However, the etymology suggests another interpretation: *manasi* 'in the mind' (a rare case of the first member of a compound being

(*appamatta* and the related form *appamāda* – literally 'non-intoxication') suggests care where attention rests, and sobriety with respect to sensory pleasure. Indeed, the Canon often explains *appamāda* in terms of guarding the senses (*indriyesu guttadvāra*). So, all of these terms are closely related. The presence of *sati & sampajañña* 'mindfulness & attentiveness' in this list suggests that we should see them as moral qualities also. These two terms refer to awareness more generally, and the more specific terms could be said to define how *sati & sampajañña* are put into practice. *Sīla* is also a generic term for behaviour, especially virtuous behaviour (*kusala sīla*). The compound *hirotappa* is made from *hiri* 'shame', or 'remorse' at bad conduct, and *ottappa* the fear of letting people down with one's poor conduct, often translated as 'moral dread' (I sometimes prefer 'scruple'[21]).

The population of sequences with these items varies considerably, as does the ordering.[22] Particularly, DN 2 seems to have a very different order from AN and SN texts. The comprehensive list and the different ordering suggest that this is a compilation with an attempt by the compiler to impose order on the various schemes.

These practices in turn lead to some early fruits such as a 'clear conscience' (*avippaṭisāra*; AN 10.1 etc.)[23], an undefiled mind (*avyāsittacitta*; SN 35.97), knowledge of the letter and spirit of teachings (*athaveda & dhammaveda*; MN 7, AN 6.10) and satisfaction (*santuṭṭho*; DN 2). Perfect confidence (*aveccappasāda*) arises as a result of hearing the *Dhamma* in DN

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declined – in this case the locative); *kāra* 'making'; *yoniso* 'according to origins' – so: 'making in the mind' (i.e. 'thinking about, imagining') the origin of experiences.

[21] Concise OED "a. regard to the morality or propriety of an action; b. a feeling of doubt or hesitation caused by this." (p. 1243).

[22] The pattern is quite similar in the Chinese *Madhyāgama* texts, though the order of the items seems more settled.

[23] Translating literally as 'non-remorse' runs the risk of suggesting 'remorselessness' or lack of conscience, but here the suggestion is that one refrains from doing actions which cause one to feel remorse.

2 and from abandoning defilements in the MN 7. Faith (*saddhā*) in SN 12.23 could also be considered a preliminary fruit.

Importantly, all of these are conditions for *pāmojja* 'happiness' or 'joy'. *Pāmojja* seems to occupy the threshold between morality and meditation. Ayya Khema emphasises that without *pāmojja* meditation is simply not possible (1991, p.92), though *pāmojja* is not included amongst the characteristics of absorption (*jhānaṅga*).

In AN 8.81 the sequence is first stated in the negative, i.e. without *satisaṃpajañña* 'recollection and clear comprehension' the precondition for *hirotappa* 'shame and moral dread' is destroyed (*hatūpanisa*), etc.; and then in the positive – when there is *satisaṃpajañña*, then there is a precondition (*upanisā*) for *hirotappa*. The syntax here mirrors the general conditionality formula – i.e. 'that being, this arises' (*imasmiṃ sati, idam hoti*) – as it does in SN 35.97.[24]

The *Visuddhimagga* (Vism) sequence appears to be a monastic adaptation of AN sequences. Morality is rephrased in the monastic language of discipline (*vinaya*) and restraint (*saṃvara*). Although Buddhaghosa traces the series through to *vimutti* and *vimutti-ñāṇadassana*, he places the series as a whole in the context of mundane (*lokiya*) virtue, which "brings about improvement in future becoming and is a prerequisite for the escape from becoming." Supramundane (*lokuttara*) virtue, by contrast, "brings about the escape from becoming and is the plane of Reviewing Knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇañāṇassa*)."[25] Contrast *Nettipakaraṇa,* which, as Bhikkhu Bodhi has noted, describes the Spiral Path as *lokuttara* or 'transcendental'.[26] The series is given

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[24] A similar syntax is found in another progressive sequence at AN 6.50.

[25] Ñāṇamoli p.13. [my italics] Nyanatiloka (2004) explains *paccavekkhaṇañāṇassa* as "retrospective knowledge ... any inner experience just passed" (p.136) – I wonder if here it refers to *vimuttiñāṇa*, the knowledge of having experienced *vimutti*?

[26] Netti. 65. The phrase 'Transcendental Dependent Arising' (*lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda*) used by Bodhi doesn't actually occur; what it says is: "This is the end of disappointment: dependent arising. It is of two types: 'of

no great prominence in Vism, and appears only once in this context.

The sequence at DN 33 begins with a variety of ways of hearing about the Dhamma and coming to understand the letter and the spirit: *attha-paṭisaṃvedin* and *dhamma-paṭisaṃvedin* respectively. Each of the five ways this can happen leads to *pāmojja*, and through the sequence to *samādhi*. Each is referred to as *vimuttāyatana* 'a basis for liberation', and collectively they are the five bases for liberation (*pañca vimuttāyatanāni*).[27]

The characteristic feature of this part of the sequence is the familiar expressions of moral restraint that are expected of the Buddhist practitioner. Buddhists often characterise the problem of human existence in terms of intoxication (*pamāda*), obsession (*pariyādāya*), or infatuation (*madanīya*) with sense pleasures, and the solution as practicing *appamāda* or 'sobering up' (e.g. SN 35.97). Indeed, we could see these practices as modelling the experience of disenchantment, and turning away – the factors which come after knowledge and vision, and precede liberation.

A minority of texts include two factors in the morality section of the sequence: either faith (*saddhā*) or confirmed confidence (*aveccapasāda*). I will deal with these in detail below when discussing the *Upanisā Sutta*.

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the world', and 'beyond the world'. 'Of the world' is from 'with ignorance as condition there is volition' up to 'old age and death'. 'Beyond the world' is 'a clear conscience is born in the virtuous', up to 'he knows there is no further rebirth'." (*Esevanto dukkhassā''ti paṭiccasamuppādo. So duvidho lokiyo ca lokuttaro ca. Tattha lokiyo avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, yāva jarāmaraṇā. Lokuttaro sīlavato avippaṭisāro jāyati, yāva nāparaṃ itthattāyāti pajānāti.*). The Spiral Path here doesn't seem to correspond exactly to any of the other sequences I have identified: it begins like AN 11.2, but ends like MN 51. I am very doubtful about using 'transcendental' as a translation of *lokuttara*, as it comes with considerable baggage. The path is not 'transcendental' by any of the definitions supplied by the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 9th ed.

[27] This sequence appears at DN iii.241–243.

Meditation

Most of the lists converge at *pāmojja*, and all share the sequence joy (*pāmojja*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquillity (*passadhi*), bliss (*sukha*), and integration (*samādhi*). Two exceptions are AN 8.81, which goes from *sīla* straight to *samādhi*, and AN 6.50, which goes to *samma-samādhi* (perfect integration); and here I think we must read *samādhi* in its more general sense as 'meditation'. Despite the unanimity of the texts regarding these terms, the translation of them varies considerably – we do not, apparently, have good English equivalents. I've settled on joy, rapture, serenity, bliss, and integration respectively. The first four are relatively uncontroversial. However, *samādhi* in this more specific sense is usually translated as 'concentration' or 'absorption', which do not seem to quite capture either the experience or the etymology. The word is an action noun from the passive form of the verb *samādahati* 'to put together, to compose [the mind]'. 'Concentration' is similar, and *samādhi* does include the factor of one-pointedness. However, *samādhi* is much more than simple focus: it suggests that all of the disparate and competing aspects of our psyche are composed or integrated into a unified whole. Our attention is focused, but our will is entirely behind it so that no distraction is even possible. An analogy would be the contrast between focusing light to a point with a lens, and the intense, coherently-focused beam of a laser (cf. MW s.v. *samādhi*, and *ādhi*[1]).[28]

In MN 7 and elsewhere the sequence of associated verbs is *labhati, jāyati, passambhati, vedeti, samādhiyati*, so: joy is obtained, rapture is born, the body is pacified, bliss is experienced, and the mind is integrated. Meditation then involves a series of states characterised by increasingly subtle positive experiences that culminate in some form of knowledge or

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[28] The former creates an intense spot of light by drawing together the light passing through the lens; while the latter creates intensity by making the waveforms of photons line up.

knowing (*ñāṇa*). This knowledge instigates the wisdom part of the Spiral Path.

There is another traditional list which has some crossover with the meditation *upanisās*, i.e. the *satta bojjhaṅgas* or 'seven factors of awakening':[29] mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of mental states (*dhammavicaya*), energy (*viriya*), rapture (*pīti*), serenity (*passadhi*), integration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Pursuing and attaining these states (*dhammas*) leads to awakening (*bodhi*). Both are further obviously related to the *jhānaṅgas* or *jhāna* factors: *vitakka* 'initial thought', *vicāra* 'sustained thought', *pīti*, *passadhi*, *sukha*, and *samādhi*. I suggest that in fact the *jhānas* are not different from the meditation items: that the first *jhāna* is characterised by rapture, the second by serenity, the third by bliss, and the fourth by integration. Other traditional descriptions add to these characteristic qualities, but we can take the items from joy to integration as being synonymous with the *jhānas*.

There are some partial sequences (e.g. DN 33, SN 47.10, AN 3.96) that end on *samādhi*; however, although the sequence is not completed we can infer that a person having attained *samādhi* will complete it. Cf. SN 35.99: "Integrated, a bhikkhu understands things as they are."[30] Completion having reached samādhi is also implied by the term used for the shorter sequence in DN 33, i.e. the five bases of liberation (*pañca vimuttāyatanāni*).

Wisdom

The culmination of the meditation stage in most cases is knowledge & vision of experience-as-it-is (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*). This is often described in terms of knowledge *of* Reality,[31] though I think Nyanatiloka gets closer when he defines

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[29] For example, at SN 46.1ff; PTS S v.63ff (The *Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta*).

[30] S iv.80 *Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānātīti*.

[31] Sangharakshita usually capitalises the word 'reality' in the works that deal with the Spiral Path. For example, "[*prajñā*] may be described as a direct non-conceptual apprehension of transcendental Reality" (1993: 25); or

it 'knowledge & vision *according* to reality'.[32] Following Sue Hamilton (2000), I interpret the Buddhist doctrine to be referring to *experience,* not to *Reality*, and I understand this node in terms of understanding the nature of experience, i.e. the knowledge of why and how we experience *dukkha*. This avoids a lot of haggling over ontologies.

The characteristic formulation is that *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana* causes disenchantment (*nibbidā*) with sense experience and to lose interest in it; one thereby ceases to be caught up in the passions aroused by it, and becomes dispassionate (*virāga*). Most of the sequences reach the point of *vimutti*, but some elaborate this as liberation of the mind (*cittaṃ vimutti*).[33] Other sequences spell out that the mind is liberated from the *āsavas*, which results in another kind of knowledge: the knowledge that one is liberated (*vimuttiñāna*), or that the *āsavas* have been destroyed (*āsavakhayaṃ ñāṇaṃ*), which amounts to the same thing. DN 2 diverts from *samādhi* through the four *rūpa jhānas* and arrives at 'knowledge of having seen through' *vipassanañāṇa,* which is a synonym for *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*. MN 51 follows DN 2 up to the fourth *jhāna* and then proceeds to the three wisdoms (*tevijjā*), to liberation of the mind, and to knowledge of liberation.

"Conditioned things are like stars, for instance, because having no real existence they cannot be got at or grasped; because they are insignificant in comparison with Absolute Reality" (1991: 83). However, in later works such as Sangharakshita (1998), the capitalisation has been dropped. See also note 44 on Sangharakshita's capitalisation of philosophical terms.

[32] Nyanatiloka 2004, p.247. My italics.

[33] And this puts us in mind of the distinction between *ceto-vimutti* and *paññā-vimutti*. I follow Richard Gombrich in taking this distinction to be a development of Buddhist doctrine that took place during the development of the Canon; see, for example, Gombrich (2009) p.80–84. There is a good case for taking *ceto-vimutti* to be a synonym for *nibbāṇa* where it comes at the end of a sequence such as the one we are studying. The Theravāda tradition demoted *ceto-vimutti* because of the association with the *brahmavihāra* meditations, which they determined could not lead to liberation.

The sequences in SN 35.97 and SN 55.40 diverge from *samādhi* to *dhammānaṃ pātubhāva* 'the manifestation of phenomena'. I suggest that this is functionally equivalent to *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*. MN 7 goes from *samādhi* to *brahmavihara*, and then to knowledge of escape beyond the perceptual situation (*pajānati ... saññāgataṃ uttariṃ nissaraṇaṃ*) – which, again, I suggest is equivalent to *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*.

In the characteristic sequence, liberation is an experience of being free from the desire that causes suffering, and this gives rise to the knowledge that one is free. The experience itself is not easily communicable, but no experience is. (Imagine trying to communicate the experience of eating a peach to someone who had never seen one.) We can, however, communicate about *having had* the experience: how we felt at the time; how we feel about it now. If it was transformative, we can usually speak about the significance an experience has had for us. And this is what makes the *knowledge* (*ñāṇa*) important. We do not communicate the experience so much as the knowledge of having had the experience, the insights we gained as a result, and the meaning the experience has for our lives.[34]

This brief outline gives us the main features of the *lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda* sequences. The next task is to survey the English language literature on the Spiral Path.

The Spiral Path in English

Caroline Rhys Davids, having discovered the idea in 1902, highlights the *Upanisā Sutta* in the 'editorial notes' to the Woodward's 1922 translation of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

> Yet more refreshing is it to find that oasis on p.26, where a causal sequence of joy and happiness is, for this once only, harnessed to the scheme [of *paṭicca-samuppāda*]! How might it not have altered

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[34] Richard Gombrich (2009) makes a similar point. See especially Chapter 10: 'Cognition; Language; Nirvana'.

the whole face of Buddhism to the West if that sequence had been made the illustration of the causal law![35]

Dr Beni Barua took up the theme in his lecture *Buddhism as Personal Religion*, published in the *Mahabodhi Society Journal* in 1944.[36] It appears to be Barua who first used the terminology 'cyclic' and 'progressive' of the two forms of conditionality; a terminology popularised by Sangharakshita in his writing. Barua presents a progressive sequence of steps, but attempts to locate this precise sequence in the Canon have not found it, and it seems Barua may have used poetic licence with canonical lists. The only identifiable text Barua cites is the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44), and Sāgaramati (2010) has shown that it is doubtful whether this *sutta* actually represents an example of *lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda* at all. However, Sangharakshita used Barua's presentation as the basis of his own early thinking on this subject. In his 1954 lecture series, subsequently published as *A Survey of Buddhism* in 1957, Sangharakshita includes an extensive quote from Barua. Mrs Rhys Davids also seems to have made an impression on Sangharakshita, who refers to her 'slightly intemperate' comments when introducing the sequence in *A Survey*.[37] Sangharakshita also highlights the singular nature of the *Upanisā Sutta* (SN 12.23) in combining the two categories of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (p.136).[38] It was Sangharakshita who coined the term 'Spiral Path'[39] for this sequence, to contrast it with the cyclic *nidānas*.[40]

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[35] Rhys Davids in Woodward (1922), Part II, 'The nidāna book' p.viii.

[36] Cited in Sangharakshita (1993).

[37] Sangharakshita (1993), p.136. References are to the 7th ed., though I have checked the 3rd ed. (1966) and there are no differences in the sections in question.

[38] The *Upanisā Sutta* is unique in the sense that it is the only Pāli text that presents both *lokiya* and *lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda* together. The two sequences are also linked in the Chinese *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (MĀ 55), which is a parallel of the Pāli *Upanisā Sutta*.

[39] Sangharakshita (1993) p.138.

[40] Sangharakshita has always taught the traditional 'three lifetimes' interpretation of the twelve *nidānas*, and often makes use of the *bhavacakka*

Sangharakshita has mentioned the Spiral Path in numerous lectures and written works. His books *A Guide to the Buddhist Path* (1990a) and *What is the Dharma?* (1998) use edited extracts from his 1966 lecture *The Stages of the Spiritual Path*. This material was reiterated in the 1967 lecture *The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (1967b). In 1967 Sangharakshita published a treatment in *The Three Jewels* (19991) illustrating the points using Sanskrit terminology and material drawn from Mahāyāna sources, such as the idea of *śūnyatā*.[41] Also in 1967 Sangharakshita gave a lecture in which he used the seven *bojjhaṅgas* as his illustration of the Spiral Path.[42] Sangharakshita has made the Spiral Path a central platform of this teaching. It forms an essential aspect of the training course devised for members of the Triratna Buddhist Community and Order.

Bhikkhu Bodhi (1980) wrote in response to Sangharakshita (1967c), in order, as he says, to give a Theravāda account of the teaching.[43] Ayya Khema used the *Upanisā Sutta* as the basis of teaching on a meditation retreat published as *When the Iron Eagle Flies* (1991). Phra Payutto makes mention of the Spiral Path in his discussion of Dependent Arising (1995). Bhikkhu Anālayo (2003) also notes the sequence in his discussion of the importance of joy (*pāmojja*), and provides a list of references. Neither Payutto nor Anālayo place much emphasis on the Spiral Path. Finally in 2011 Dhīvan published his book *This Being, That Becomes,* which devoted a chapter to the Spiral Path. Dhīvan

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or 'wheel of life' with the twelve nodes around the outside forming a circle in his teaching.

[41] Despite the source texts being in Pāli, Sangharakshita consistently opts for Sanskrit terminology. We can see this as part of Sangharakshita's conscious efforts to disindentify from the Theravāda at the time, and to make it clear that his sympathies were non-sectarian. The use of Sanskrit rather than Pāli, despite the lack of any Sanskrit source for the *Upanisā Sutta*, was an aspect of this. Citations are to the 1991 printing.

[42] Sangharakshita (1967a). Subsequently published as Sangharakshita (1975). This is consistent with the way they are presented in, for example, SN 46.1.

[43] The implication here is that he was not aware of any Theravādin account at that point.

offers an exposition of the *Upanisā Sutta* in line with the teachings of Sangharakshita, but also discusses the stages up to joy (*pamojja*) as found in AN 10.1–5, and DN 34, showing that the different sequences converge on joy.

At present there are no English translations of most of the Spiral Path texts in Chinese, but I plan to publish a study of the sequences in a forthcoming article, which will include translations of the key terms and some commentary on the form and content of the sūtras compared to the Pāli.

The Upanisā Sutta as Locus Classicus

The *Upanisā Sutta* shares the characteristic meditation items from *pīti* to *samādhi* with all the other lists, but begins and ends idiosyncratically. In particular, the *Upanisā Sutta* begins the sequence with faith arising from suffering as a precondition.[44] Suffering is the culmination of the *nidānas,* and replaces *jarā-maraṇa* in the usual *nidāna* sequence. This requires some exegesis, and some assumptions must be made about how *saddhā* arises out of *dukkha*.

Sangharakshita does not address this problem in *A Survey* (1993). However, in *The Three Jewels* (1991) he says that *saddhā* "develops when, as a result of our experience of the painful, unsatisfactory and frustrating nature of *saṃsāric* experience, we begin to place the heart ... not so much on the conditioned as on the Unconditioned" (p.112).[45] This statement in turn requires

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[44] The Chinese *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (MĀ 55) shares this feature, but faith is a factor in other sequences. In MĀ 51, 52 & 53 faith is nourished by 'hearing a good teaching' (聞善法 wén shànfǎ; which translates a Sanskrit term such as *saddharmaśravana*, though the original is obscure in this case). At MĀ 54 the condition for faith is 'forbearance from reflecting on the dharma' (觀法忍 Guānfǎrěn; Skt. *dharmanidhyānakṣānti*).

[45] Pāli: *saddhā* and Sanskrit: *śraddhā* are both literally 'to place (*dhā*) the heart (*śrad*)', from the Indo-European root **kred* 'heart'; with *dhā* from the verbal root √*dhā* 'to place, to put'. In Sanskrit *śrad* is a form which is only found in this context of faith; while other applications use the form *hṛd*, i.e. *hṛdaya*

some unpacking, as what Sangharakshita means by "*the Unconditioned*" (with uppercase U) is not immediately clear.[46] However, let us say that by "the Unconditioned" he means something like 'the possibility of liberation', which is in keeping with the terminology of the texts we are discussing. He seems to be saying that as a result of our experience of *dukkha* we develop faith in the possibility of liberation. However, it is not clear that *saddhā* does develop directly from the experience of *dukkha,* or Buddhism would spontaneously break out everywhere. In his 1966 and 1967 lectures, however, Sangharakshita filled in the gaps a little: awareness of *dukkha* gives rise to "restlessness", which sets us "searching for something higher", and once we contact something higher *then* faith arises. Sangharakshita, in effect, introduces three intermediate steps: restlessness, searching, and contact with something higher.[47] Sangharakshita (1990a) defines faith in this context as:[48]

> The emotional response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe. Faith is an intuitive response to what is of ultimate value.[49]

It is difficult to see how to square this statement with *saddhā* arising directly from *dukkha*, because *dukkha* would seem to be

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'heart'. The same distinction is found in Pāli. In Avestan 'faith' is *zrazdā*; while 'heart' is *zərəd*. The word *śraddhā* is cognate with the Latin *credo*.

[46] In the past Sangharakshita has used this terminology, with the definite article, in parallel with terms drawn from German Idealist philosophy such as "The Absolute", "Absolute Consciousness" and "The Transcendental" but he "now eschews [these terms]." Subhuti (2010 p.1–2). "The problem is that inevitably one hears or reads terms like 'The Absolute', 'The Unconditioned', 'The Transcendental', 'The Non-dual', 'Buddha Nature', especially when capitalised, as referring to some reified metaphysical entity, real, but existing somehow apart from what can be experienced." Subhuti (2010, p.6).

[47] The transcript for this lecture was published in Sangharakshita (1990a) p.95; and again in Sangharakshita (1998) p.109.

[48] Note that elsewhere Sangharakshita defines faith quite differently. A full discussion of his use of the word would be beyond the scope of this article.

[49] Sangharakshita (1990a), p.95. This is based on the lecture 1996, 1967.

the very opposite of 'something higher'. This is presumably why extra steps are needed in order to get from one to the other. Unfortunately, this exposition appears to make the spiral loop back on itself, because surely 'contact with something higher' is very like *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*. Subhuti's (2010) recent presentation of Sangharakshita's current thinking on doctrine argues that *saddhā* requires some experience of the path itself. He says: "We need to be confident that it is possible to go beyond our present level of consciousness...", and confidence is supported by reason, intuition and experience; but, paradoxically, he says that it is only when we have faith that we will practice in a way which will bring about that shift in consciousness. "Without that confidence we will not apply ourselves to assembling the necessary conditions [for new levels of consciousness to emerge]".[50]

In fact, there are two different concepts here, and they are reasonably clearly distinguished in the Pāli texts, if not in contemporary exegesis. In other Spiral Path texts, faith is one's immediate response to hearing *dhamma* teaching, e.g. DN 2 (*dhammaṃ suṇāti*), and AN 10.61 & AN 10.62 (*saddhammassavana*); and it is faith *in the Buddha* (*tathāgate saddhā*). Faith here is simply the willingness to follow a teacher. This simple level of faith seems almost to be denied by contemporary Buddhist teachers in the rush to insist that Buddhism requires no blind faith.

On the other hand, what arises with practice is *aveccapasāda* 'confirmed confidence' (or perhaps 'perfect clarity'). In MN 7 confirmed confidence arises in dependence on abandoning the impurities of the mind (*cittassa upakkilesā*), while in AN 6.10 it is conditional upon the mind being directed towards the six recollections (*anussati*), which are:

1. The Buddha
2. Dhamma
3. Saṅgha

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[50] Subhuti (2010), p.14.

4. One's own virtue

5. One's own generosity

6. The faith (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), religious knowledge (*suta*), generosity (*cāga*) and wisdom (*paññā*) of the *devas,* which enabled them to be born in the *devaloka*

Compare the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta* (MN 60), where the Buddha asks the Brahmin lay folk he has just met whether they have settled on a teacher in whom they have reason to have faith, or perhaps 'have obtained reasoned confidence' (*ākāravatī saddhā paṭiladdhā*). A number of texts in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* refer to faith in the Buddha. For instance, in SN 55.37 (S v.395):

> To what extent, Sir, is a layman endowed with faith (*saddhā-sampanna*)? Here, Mahānāma, the layman is faithful (*saddha*), he trusts (*saddahati*) in the understanding (*bodhi*) of the *tathāgata* [as expressed in the *Buddhavandana* or *itipi so* verse]. To this extent, Mahānāma, the layman is endowed with faith.

This passage is interesting because it contains the noun (*saddhā*), the verb (*saddahati*), and an adjective from the verb (*saddha*). Faith here is faith in the *bodhi* of the Tathāgata. SN 48.44 contrasts faith in the Buddha with knowledge gained from personal experience. Sāriputta says he need not rely on faith in the Bhagavan (*Na khvāhaṃ ettha, bhante, bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi*) to have confidence that the faith faculty has the deathless as its final goal (*saddhindriyaṃ... amatapariyosānaṃ*): he knows it for himself.

Subhuti's (2010) suggestion appears to create a tautology: knowledge & vision arises with faith as a precondition, but faith itself in his exegesis depends on something very like knowledge and vision. Sangharakshita might argue that the two are of a different order and that knowledge & vision refers to a decisive insight that takes us past the point of no return (to use his 'gravitational' metaphor), whereas contact with "something higher" merely confirms that there is something other than *dukkha* to aspire to. I can see an argument for making the distinction between reaching the point of no return and lesser

insights, but if "something higher" is not *yathābhūta* then what is it? Compare the *lokuttara* and *lokiya* aspects of the eightfold path. Sangharakshita says of these:

> The point of distinction is the difference between a virtue consciously and deliberately practised, with more or less success, as a discipline, and a virtue that is the natural expression, the spontaneous overflow, of an inner realization.[51]

This kind of distinction may well seem to apply to faith and knowledge & vision as well. My main response to these kinds of arguments would be that the complexity of the exposition required to iron out the apparent contradictions goes against the description of the Dharma as 'immediately apparent' (*sandiṭṭhiko*). That *saddhā* arises from *dukkha* is not apparent, let alone *immediately* apparent.[52]

Bhikkhu Bodhi, writing in direct response to Sangharakshita's exposition of the Spiral Path in *The Three Jewels*, has also explored the way that *saddhā* depends on *dukkha*.[53] Bodhi sees *dukkha* as stimulating a need to make a break from our "instinctual urges", leading to "a search for something different", and an "arousing of religious consciousness". To this point he appears to be thinking along the same lines as Sangharakshita, but he further characterises the arousing of religious consciousness in terms of an "act of understanding" and an "adoption of a new perspective".[54] Bodhi says: "The urge for liberation can only set in when pain and sorrow have been confronted with reflective awareness and

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[51] Sangharakshita (1993), p.159.

[52] I am arguing on the basis of doctrine. However, I am aware that some Buddhist practitioners say that the connection between *saddhā* and *dukkha* is meaningful to them at an experiential level. I would argue that they have this experience because as Buddhists they have an approach to *dukkha* that allows *saddhā* to emerge, i.e. that they have internalised the kinds of intermediate steps referred to by both Sangharakshita and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

[53] Bodhi (1980), pp.11–13.

[54] Bodhi (1980), p.11.

recognised as symptoms of a deeper ailment...".[55] I make this a total of four extra steps between *dukkha* and *saddhā*. Bodhi's description of *saddhā*, like Sangharakshita's, seems to incorporate the sense of *aveccapasāda* in that his understanding of *saddhā* seems to go beyond simply faith in the teacher, and involve the application of 'reflexive awareness'. Note that Bodhi's "act of understanding" also seems to anticipate knowledge & vision, and to some extent equate it with faith.

The Canon itself presages the extra steps that Sangharakshita and Bodhi introduce to get from disappointment to faith. In the *Nibbedhika Sutta* (A iii.416):

> And what is the result of disappointment? Here, bhikkhus, someone overwhelmed by disappointment is mentally and emotionally exhausted—grieving, fatigued, lamenting, beating their breast and weeping, they either exhibit bewilderment or search outside asking 'Who knows a verse or two[56] for the ending disappointment?' I say, bhikkhus, that disappointment ripens either as bewilderment or searching. This is the result of disappointment.[57]

However, note that neither author cites this passage.

The *Upanisā Sutta* as a model of the spiritual life is also problematic because it does not mention ethics (*sīla*) at all. This means that the threefold model of morality, meditation and wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*) can't be applied to the *Upanisā Sutta*, at least not directly. Sangharakshita's own presentation of the Dharma, for instance, often relies on the

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[55] Bodhi (1980), p.11.

[56] *ekapadaṃ dvipadaṃ*: *pada* could mean 'way' (Thanissaro) or 'word' (Bodhi). Hare has 'spell' in his translation for the PTS. In choosing 'verse' I had the *Dhammapada* in mind, i.e. popular, pithy verses containing wisdom that seem to have been in circulation through much of India during the early period of Buddhism. No two collections are quite the same, and many of these verses were shared with other traditions.

[57] My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this important passage.

description of the threefold path.[58] Faith is important, but in practical terms we cannot leave ethics out.

A further minor problem that occurs at the end of the *Upanisā Sutta* sequence is that it uses a mixed metaphor. The last two items are 'liberation' (*vimutti*) and 'knowledge of the destruction of the influxes' (*āsavakhayaṃ ñāṇaṃ*). The final node in most other Spiral Path texts is the knowledge of liberation (*vimutti-ñāṇa*). DN2 also finishes with *āsavakhayaṃ ñāṇaṃ,* but this arises out of *vipassanñāṇa*. Elsewhere (e.g. MN 51), liberation is specifically liberation *of* the mind *from* the taints, but even here the knowledge gained is "it is liberated".[59] What isn't clear in the *Upanisā Sutta*, except through a broad knowledge of the Canon, is that liberation is synonymous with the destruction of the influxes. What we would expect from liberation is knowledge of liberation.

The *Upanisā Sutta* has two virtues. Firstly, it is the only sutta where the progressive *upanisā* sequence occurs in the same context as the cyclic *nidāna* sequence, which gives us a clue that the two trends in conditionality were already seen as two aspects of one process by the time the Canon was collated.[60] However, we do need to note how the two were linked. The progressive sequence is tacked onto the end of the cyclic:

> ... taṇha > upādāna > bhava > jati > *dukkha* > saddhā > pāmojja > pīti...

This substitution of *dukkha* for the more usual *jarā-maraṇa* 'old age and death' is to some extent consistent with other texts which describe the *nidāna* chain as the origin of this whole mass of

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[58] See for instance Sangharakshita (1993) p.159ff; and (1998) p.163 ff. Part 2 of Sangharakshita (1990a) is organised around the threefold path.

[59] M i.348. *vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti.* ('In liberation is the knowledge 'it is liberated'.)

[60] As noted above, however, AN 8.81 uses the *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti* syntax commonly associated with the *nidāna* sequence.

suffering (*kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo*),[61] because the whole mass of suffering, by definition, includes death.

When composing a meditation practice combining reflection on the two trends, Sangharakshita did not follow the pattern of the *Upanisā Sutta*. His practice begins with the Spiral Path *upanisās* from *dukkha* up to *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*. The content of the *yathābhūta* insight is the *nidāna* chain, so at this point we go forward through the twelve links from *avijjā* to *maraṇa* in terms of arising, then backwards from *maraṇa* to *avijjā* in terms of ceasing. We then continue through the remaining links in the Spiral Path from *nibbidā* to *khaye-ñāṇaṃ*.[62]

Elsewhere, Sangharakshita says that the link at which we break the cycle of *saṃsāra* is between *vedanā* and *taṇhā*: "[The Spiral Path] begins at the crucial point of our experience of *vedanā*, the feelings that befall us in the course of our lives".[63] Similarly, "If we refuse to react [to *vedanā* with *taṇha*] and respond instead with a healthy mental attitude we are carried out of the *saṃsāra* into the process of reaction in a progressive order between two counterparts or compliments, at the 'end' of which lies Nirvāṇa".[64] *Dukkha* and *vedanā* become synonymous in this presentation, e.g. "...suffering in this sequence of positive Nidanas corresponds to vedana, or feeling, among the twelve reactive, or cyclical, Nidanas".[65] Again there is an apparent conflict with how the *Upanisā Sutta* connects the two sequences end to end.

The second virtue of the *Upanisā Sutta* is the simile that occurs at the end of the sutta to illustrate the principle. Many people respond more easily to images than to concepts, and this

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[61] For example, *Kaccānagotta Sutta*, S ii.16.
[62] This practice is briefly described in Dhīvan (2011), p.75–94; and more fully in Kamalashila (2012), p.217–223.
[63] Sangharakshita (1998) p.106.
[64] Sangharakshita (1991), p.111.
[65] Sangharakshita (1991), p.111.

image nicely conveys the point of the progressive sequence. I will discuss this together with related similes below.

Linking the Items: the Nature of *Upanisā.*

There are several different ways to describe the links between the items in the Spiral Path. The *Upanisā Sutta*, AN 10.3–4, and the variations on AN 8.81 all refer to the link between the elements of the sequence as an *upanisā* − a word which can mean 'supporting condition', 'precondition', or perhaps 'secret connection'.[66] The commentary glosses *upanisā* with *kāraṇa* 'cause' and *paccaya* 'condition'.[67] Bhikkhu Bodhi translates 'proximate cause', but it remains debatable whether 'cause' is appropriate. Elsewhere, Bodhi is resistant to seeing the twelve *nidānas* as causal:

> The sequence of factors should not be regarded as a linear causal process in which each preceding factor gives rise to its successor through a simple exercise of efficient causality. The relationship among the factors is always one of complex conditionality rather than linear causation.[68]

In *The Three Jewels* Sangharakshita, following C.A.F. Rhys Davids' translation, describes the link as a "causal association".[69] Likewise, Ayya Khema very much sees dependent arising in

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[66] 'Secret connection' is a suggestion by Dhīvan and draws on the identity of Pāli *upanisā* with Sanskrit *upaniṣad*. He notes that Aśvaghoṣa "uses upaniṣad in a close parallel to this sutta in *Saundarananda* 13:22–26." and that the translator of the Clay Sanskrit Library edition, Linda Covill, has translated 'secret' at this point. [Personal communication]. Dhīvan (2009) discusses this issue in greater depth. The translation as 'secret connection' is still rather speculative however and, with respect to my friend, I prefer to note it as a possible connotation rather than adopt it as a main translation.

[67] SA 2.52 *Saupanisanti sakāraṇaṃ sappaccayaṃ*. There are a number of these 'condition' words which are often synonymous, e.g. *upanisā, kāraṇa, nidāna, nissaya, paccaya,* and *hetu.*

[68] Bodhi (2000). p. 523 (introduction to the *nidāna-saṃyutta*).

[69] For example, Sangharakshita (1991), p.111. "In causal association with *dukkha* arises ... saddhā."

terms of "cause and effect".[70] There is an argument for the use of the language of causality, but it would be better to speak instead of conditionality. To say that *avijjā* causes *saṅkhārā* seems to give *avijjā* itself agency. We can, however, say that an action tainted by *avijjā* gives rise to *dukkha*. The word *upanisā* doesn't seem to imply a cause, only a condition, and especially a precondition.

In AN 10.1 and Vism the link is described in terms of *attha*, variously translated depending on the context as 'benefit, reward, advantage; meaning, purpose.' This serves a useful methodological purpose, as it deals with the motivation to practice – it sets out the Spiral Path as a series of positive benefits which accrue to the spiritual practitioner. In AN 10.1 *attha* is paired with its synonym *ānisaṃsa* 'reward, profit, merit, advantage'. Each subsequent item in the list is the 'benefit and reward' of the preceding item.

In AN 10.2 the progress comes because it is 'natural' (*dhammatā*), which means that being virtuous one need not make an effort of will (*cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ*) to bring about a clear conscience; it just happens. That a clear conscience is the natural outcome of being virtuous doesn't require any speculation on our part; it is within the range of everyone's experience. Neither does it require any extra steps. AN 10.4 and 10.5 also phrase this negatively in that without virtue the basis for a clear conscience is destroyed (*hatūpaniso*); cf. AN 8.81, which similarly begins with the way the absence of the previous node destroys the condition for the arising of the next.

The AN texts in particular emphasise the fundamental role of morality in Buddhism, though with a particular focus on our relationship to sensory experience. By behaving virtuously, we set up the conditions for the Spiral Path to naturally and spontaneously arise. Not only is being virtuous its own reward, but also a continued effort to be ethical fuels the whole of the process of liberation. The texts associated with the *bojjhaṅgas,*

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[70] Khema (1991) especially p.51ff.

such as the *Himavant Sutta* (SN 46.1), also emphasise virtue as the basis upon which the path leading to liberation rests.

The last linking term is *pāripūri* 'fulfils', or its verbal form *paripūreti* 'to fulfil'. The latter is the causative form of *paripūrati* 'to fill up or perfect'. Since this term is closely associated with the simile of streams, discussed below, the translation of 'filling up' seems preferable to 'perfects', though this is clearly a connotation. The image of the pool filling up and overflowing into the lake, and in turn filling the lake up, adds to our understanding of the process. It is not that virtue causes a clear conscience, but if we practise virtue to perfection then we will have a perfectly clear conscience. With a perfectly clear conscience we would be perfectly happy, in the sense that nothing about our own behaviour would be troubling us; and, according to the logic of early Buddhist morality, because we treat everyone with kindness no one is unkind to us.[71] This may well strike the modern reader as more than a little naïve. However, several stories in the Pāli Canon suggest that perfect kindness may have unlooked-for benefits. The story of Aṅgulimāla is a good illustration of this. Perfect kindness overcomes even the mass murderer.

Similes for the Process of Liberation

The fact that the Spiral Path unfolds naturally (*dhammatā*) is a very attractive feature of the AN 10/11 *Suttas*. The same point is made by the use of similes.[72] Firstly, we have the image of flowing water in the *Upanisā Sutta*:[73]

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[71] Compare this to the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65) and its parallels at AN 3.66 (PTS AN i.190), AN 4.193 (PTS AN ii.190) and SN 42.13 (PTS SN iv.340).

[72] Also discussed in Dhīvan (2011).

[73] The simile is also found at A i.243. ii.140, v.114; S v.396. At S v.396 (*Mahānāma Sutta*, SN 55.38) there is a coda saying that for an *ariyasāvaka* the four factors of stream entry (confidence in the Three Jewels, and virtue) flow on, having gone over [to the other shore], and result in the destruction of the āsavas. (*evameva kho, bhikkhave, ariyasāvakassa yo ca buddhe*

> Just as, when the gods pour down rain over the mountains, water flows down the mountainside filling up the branches of the crevices and gullies; having filled the crevices and gullies, small lakes, and the great lakes are filled; the great lakes being filled the small rivers fill up; the small rivers fill up the large rivers, and the large rivers fill up the great ocean.

Here, our virtue is like rain pouring down on the mountainside. The effects of each ethical act might be small, like a single rain drop, but morality is a cumulative process. The effects of our actions accumulate and gain momentum as we become more ethically aware and astute.[74] This process is sometimes described in terms of accumulating 'merit' (*puñña*). Another version of this simile is found in the *Himavant Sutta* (SN 46.1, PTS S v.63):

> Monks, the *nāgas* depend on the king of snowy mountains to increase their substance, and account for their power. Increased and empowered they descend into small pools, then into large pools; then they descend into small rivers, and then into large rivers; and finally they descend into the great gathered waters of the ocean. Thus their body becomes great and full. Just like that, monks, the monk depending on virtue, supported by virtue, seriously takes up the practice of, and produces, the seven factors of awakening and attains the greatness and fullness of them.

Here, the mythic *nāgas* are the ones making the progress. In Pāli *nāga* frequently means elephant, but can also mean any large or particularly impressive animal. And it is in this sense that it is usually applied to the Buddha. However, the *nāgas* were also local animistic deities, often associated with water, but sometimes also with trees. In many ways they personify water and the life-giving properties of it, as well as the fertility it engenders in the

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aveccappasādo, yo ca dhamme aveccappasādo, yo ca saṅghe aveccappasādo, yāni ca ariyakantāni sīlāni – ime dhammā sandamānā pāraṃ gantvā āsavānaṃ khayāya saṃvattantīti S v.396). The simile is repeated at A v.47 with the eightfold path as a sequence. The same simile is also found in the Chinese *Madhyāgama*, *sūtras* 52 and 53.

[74] Compare also the mitigation of kamma through good actions in the *Lonaphala Sutta* (AN 3.99) and the *Devadaha Sutta* (MN 101).

soil. *Nāgas* often take the form of serpents: the symbolic connection with serpentine rivers is obvious. Since snakes often live in burrows under the earth, the *nāga* also has chthonic resonances – they are creatures of the underworld.[75]

In this simile the *nāgas* seem to represent the water itself: the *nāgas* enter (*otarati* –literally 'go down to, descend') each body of water in turn, and come to the collected waters of the ocean (*mahāsamuddasāgara*), where they achieve greatness (*mahantatta*) and fullness (*vepullatta*). The *nāgas* depend on the king of snowy mountains (*himavantaṃ pabbatarāja*) presumably because spring thaws fill the lakes and rivers.

The second simile likens the *upanisās* to a tree:

> [With sense control in place, this] is like a tree endowed with branches and leaves: the young shoots will mature, the bark mature, the inferior wood will mature, and the heartwood will also mature.[76]

In the tree simile *sīla* is the branches and leaves of the tree that keep it healthy, and make it possible for buds to grow and mature (*paripūri gacchati*). The action noun *paripūri* 'fulfilment' derives from the same verb that describes the dynamic of the rain simile. In the Chinese *Hryapatrāpya Sūtra* (*Madhyāgama* 46) the simile begins with the tree having healthy bark. An even better simile would have been to liken *sīla* to the roots of the tree. Indeed, in the Chinese *Śīla Sūtra* (*Madhyāgama* 48) the text does substitute root for bark.

The similes – particularly the flowing water simile – are valuable for presentations of the Dharma. The main sense of both of these similes is that if we set up the conditions for spiritual growth, then spiritual growth is not only possible but will *naturally* occur, and both of the similes draw on the natural world to convey this.

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[75] Cf. Sutherland (1991) p.38–43.
[76] AN 6.50; PTS AN iii.359.

Conclusion

This survey shows that the Spiral Path is not a novel or separate teaching, but is broadly consistent with the Buddhist path. The Spiral Path is spread throughout the Nikāyas, and is found in some commentarial texts. In particular, the typical members of this class of teaching seem to follow the traditional path of morality, meditation and wisdom. However it is not given prominence in the Theravāda tradition, which seems to prefer the model of undoing the conditions in the *nidānas* as showing the dynamics of liberation.

One of the important features of the Spiral Path model is that it gives us intellectual insights into the dynamics of progression on the Buddhist path. Each step on the path is a precondition for the next; while the next step is the benefit and reward of the previous. We find that the connection of one stage to another is natural, with each step arising out of the fulfilment of the previous step. Progress occurs without direct acts of will for something to arise. As such, the Spiral Path represents a middle way between an absolutely transcendent goal, forever beyond the reach of mere mortals, and the imminent but mundane goals of humanism. Liberation (from the disappointment and distress caused by greed, hatred, and delusion) is beyond simply being a good person, and yet it is obtainable through a natural process. This is a powerfully optimistic vision.

Despite its apparent virtues, a broader perspective shows that the *Upanisā Sutta* is not representative of the Spiral Path in Pāli texts. Indeed, it is a rather quirky one-off. The first five suttas of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* chapter of elevens (or tens) convey the spirit of the teaching more aptly. If we had to choose a single *locus classicus*, I would suggest it should be the *Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta* (AN 11.2).

I hope this article will go some way towards broadening the scope of the discussion about the Spiral Path.

Appendix: The Discourse on Forming an Intention.
(*Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta* A v.312)[77]

The virtuous one, monks, endowed with virtue[78] need not form an intention 'may my conscience be clear.' It is natural (*dhammatā*) for the virtuous one endowed with virtue to have a clear conscience. Having a clear conscience, there is no need for an act of will[79] 'may I feel joy.' Joy naturally arises in those who have a clear conscience. The joyful need not decide 'may I be filled with rapture.' Joyfulness naturally produces rapture. There is no need for the enraptured to resolve 'may my body calm down.' It is natural in the enraptured for the body to calm down. With a body at rest, there is no need to form the intention 'may I experience bliss.' With the body at rest they naturally experience bliss. The blissful don't need to will 'may my mind become integrated.' The mind of the blissful is naturally integrated. When the mind is integrated, there is no need to think 'may I have knowledge & vision of experience as it is.' With the mind composed, one naturally sees and knows experience as it is. Knowing and seeing experience as it is, there is no need to form an intention 'May I become disenchanted [of experience].' It is natural, when seeing experience as it is, that one becomes disenchanted. Disenchanted, there is no need to form an intention 'may I become dispassionate [towards experience].' It is natural when disenchanted that one becomes dispassionate. When one is dispassionate, there is no need to wish 'may I experience for myself the knowledge & vision of liberation.' For when one is dispassionate, one naturally experiences knowledge & vision of liberation.

Thus, the benefit and the blessing of being dispassionate towards experience is the knowledge & vision of liberation. The

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[77] The sutta is repeated at A 10.2 (A v.2) with *nibbindati* & *virajjati* combined into one.

[78] Pāli: *sīlavant sīlasampanna.*

[79] Pāli: *na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ*, i.e. 'there is no requirement for a *cetanā* (intention, will, volition).' I have rung the changes of this term to make for a more varied reading.

benefit and the blessing of being disenchanted with experience is dispassion. The benefit and the blessing of knowing and seeing experience as it is, is disenchantment with experience. The benefit and the blessing of an integrated mind is knowing and seeing experience as it is. The benefit and the blessing of blissfulness is an integrated mind. The benefit and the blessing of a calm body is blissfulness. The benefit and the blessing of rapture is the calming down of the body. The benefit and the blessing of joy is rapture. The blessing and the benefit of a clear conscience is joy. And the blessing and the benefit of behaving virtuously is a clear conscience.

Thus each one fills up the next; each one is fulfilled by the next, and goes from the near bank to the far bank.

Abbreviations

AN   Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN   Dīgha Nikāya
MĀ   Madhyāgama, from the Chinese Tripiṭaka
MN   Majjhima Nikāya
MW   Monier-Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary
Netti   Nettipakaraṇa
Paṭis   Paṭisambhidāmagga
Peṭ   Peṭakopadesa
PTS   Pali Text Society, especially PTS editions of Pali texts
SA   Saṃyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Saṃyutta Nikāya
         Commentary)
SN   Saṃyutta Nikāya
Vin   Vinaya
Vism   Visuddhimagga

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