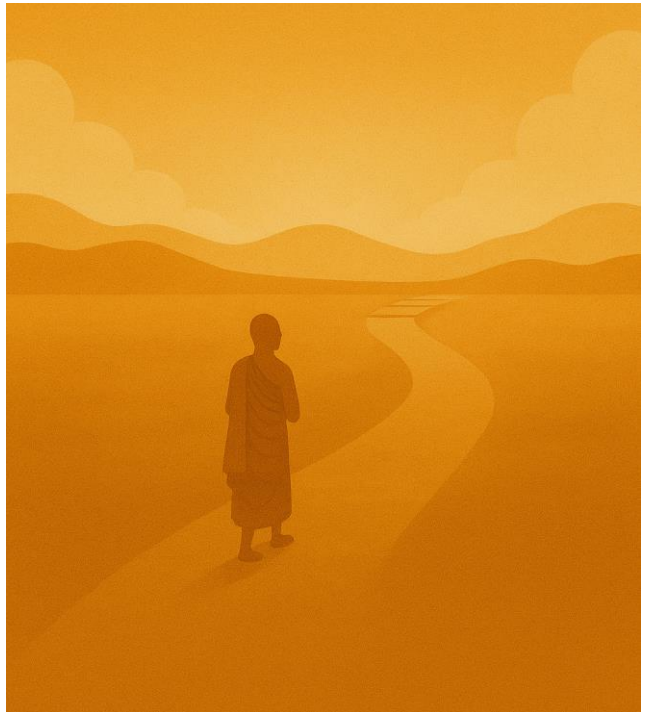
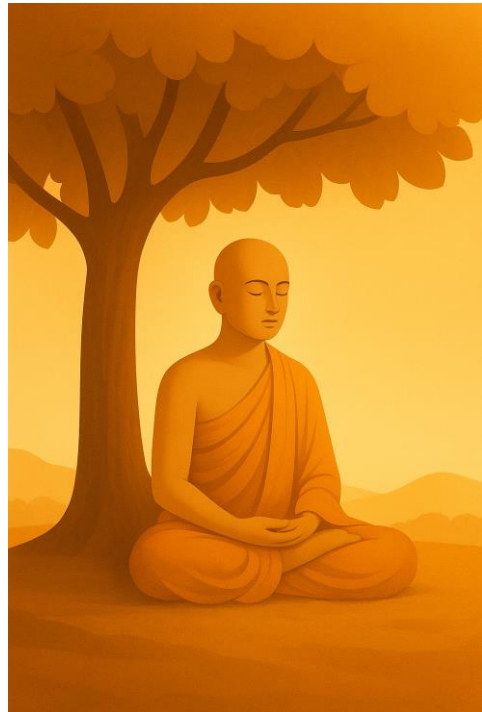
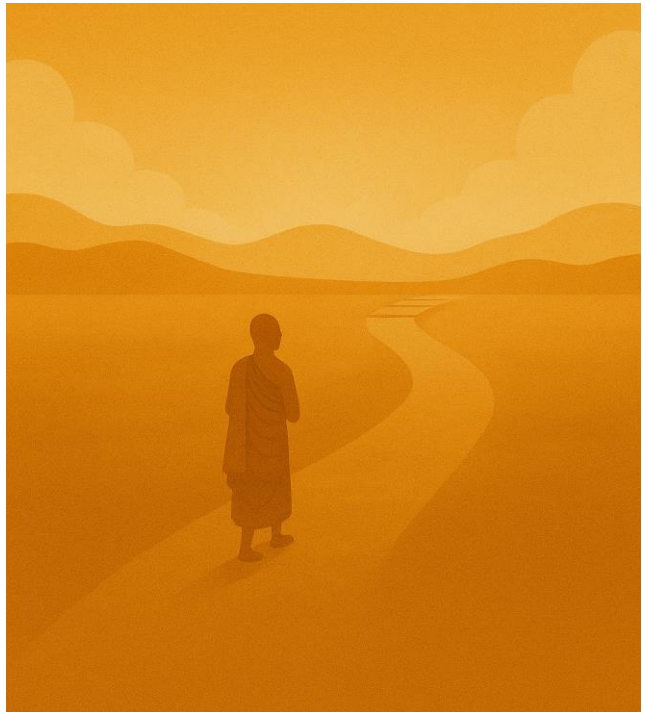
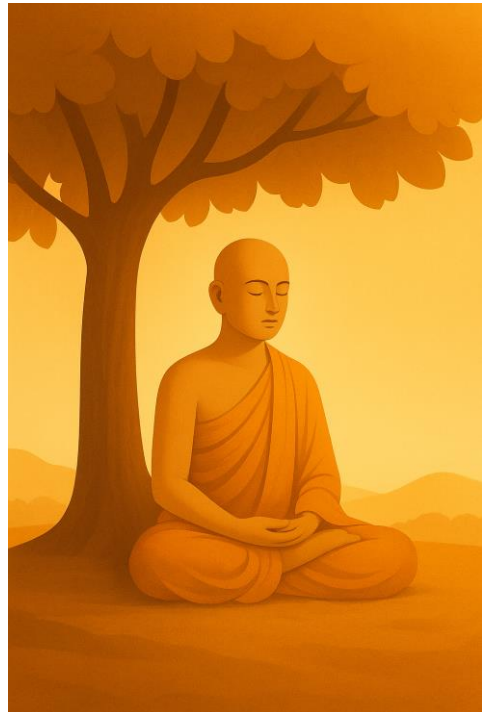
The Gradual Training
in
Early Buddhism

A Gradual journey

to

Freedom

Gradual training

Anupubba-sikkhā: **gradual training**

Anupubba-kiriyā: **gradual practice**

Anupubba-paṭipadā: **gradual path**

Gradual training

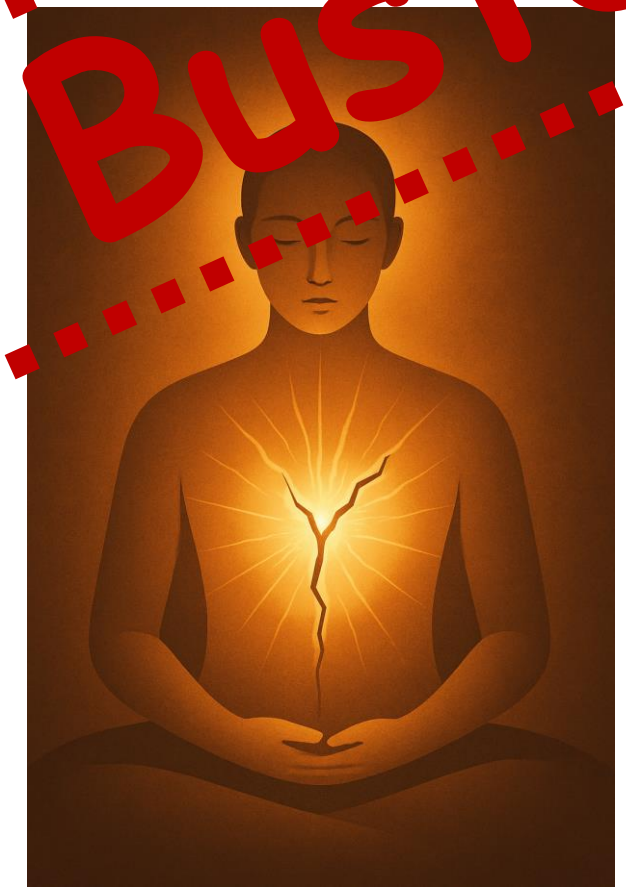
"Just as the ocean slopes and inclines gradually, and doesn't drop off all at once, so too on this spiritual path, the **training is gradual**, the **practice is gradual**, and the **penetration to perfect insight** doesn't happen all at once."

AN 8.19 Pahārādasutta

Myth:

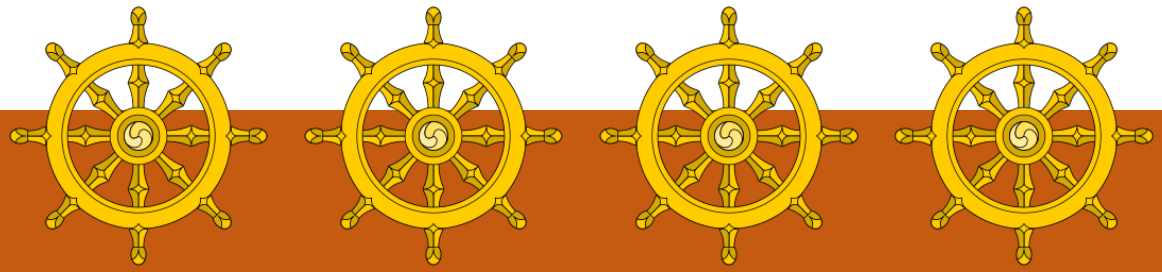
Enlightenment is instantaneous

Myth Busted



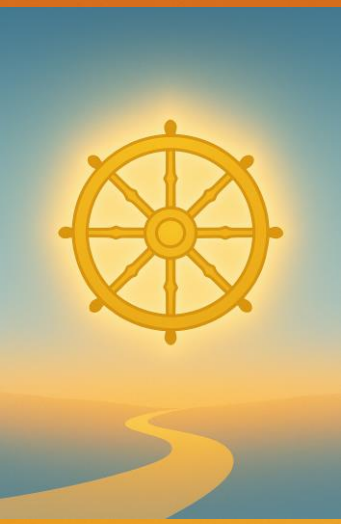
The importance of the gradual training

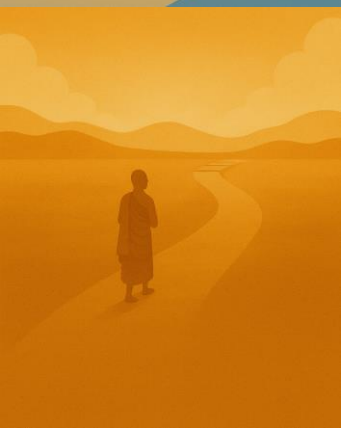
- *Dīgha Nikāya* : 12 times (all the same)
- *Majjhima Nikāya* : 11 times (with variations)
- *Saṁyutta Nikāya* : once (short)
- *Aṅguttara Nikāya* : twice (one variation)



Gradual training

- A Buddha arises and reveals the spiritual practice
- Hearing that teaching
- Gaining faith in the Buddha
- Going forth from the lay life to homelessness
- Right action
- Right speech
- Contentment
- Sense restraint
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion
- Giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- Three higher knowledges



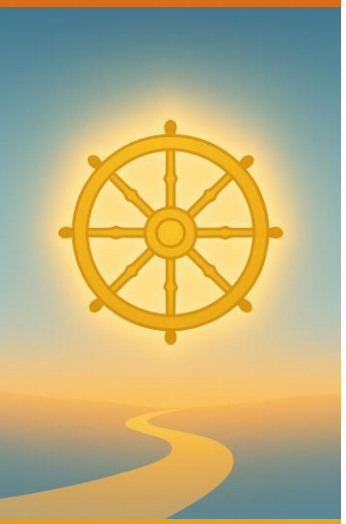


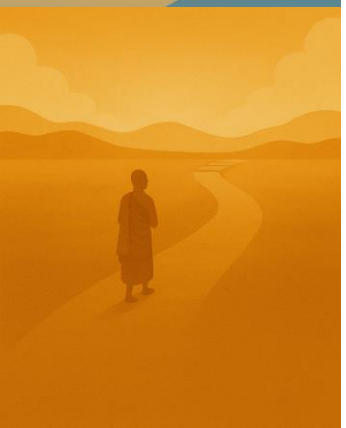
Pali/Theravāda

- A Buddha arises and teaches
- Hearing the teaching
- Gaining faith
- Going forth
- Right action
- Right speech
- Right livelihood
- Contentment
- Sense restraint
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion
- Giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- Three higher knowledges

Chinese/Sarvāstivāda

- A Buddha arises and teaches
- Hearing the teaching
- Gaining faith
- Going forth
- Right action
- Right speech
- Right livelihood
- Contentment
- Sense restraint
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion
- Giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- Awakening



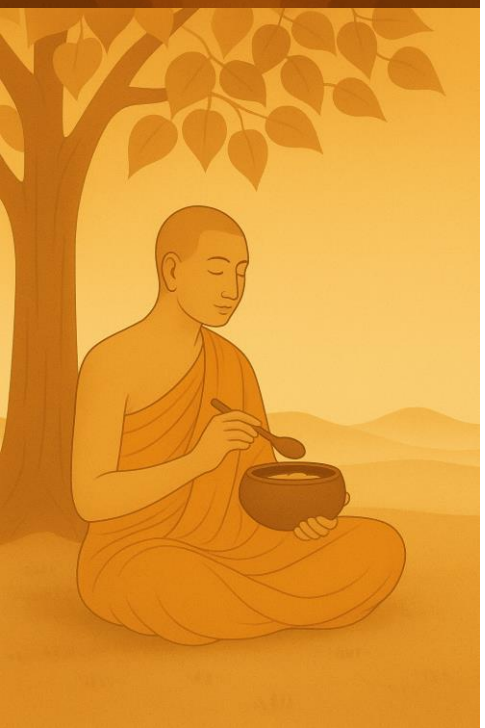


Pali/Theravāda

- A Buddha arises and teaches
- Hearing the teaching
- Gaining faith
- Going forth
- Right action
- Right speech
- Right livelihood
- Contentment
- Sense restraint
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion
- Giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- **Three higher knowledges**

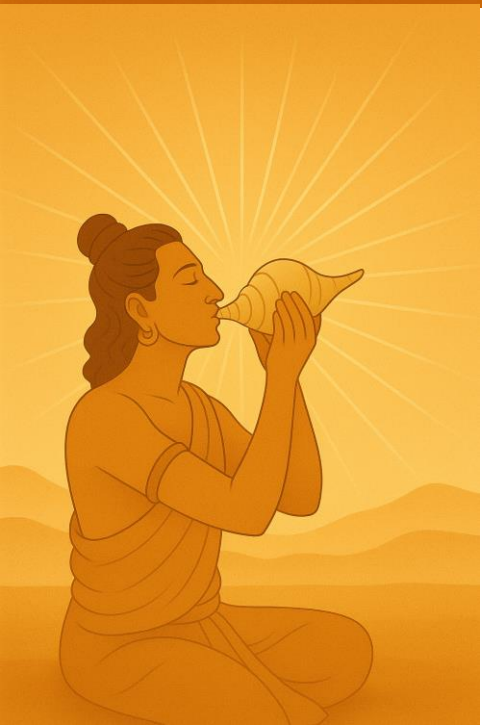
Chinese/Sarvāstivāda

- A Buddha arises and teaches
- Hearing the teaching
- Gaining faith
- Going forth
- Right action
- Right speech
- Right livelihood
- Contentment
- Sense restraint
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion
- Giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- **Awakening**



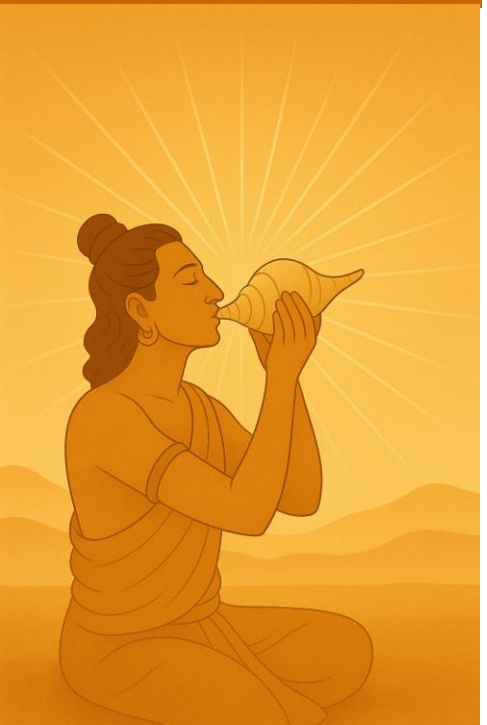
Alternative versions

- A Buddha arises and teaches + hearing the teaching
- Gaining faith + going forth
- **Shame and fear of consequences (MN 39)**
- **Keeping the Pātimokkha (DN 2)**
- Right action + right speech + right livelihood
- Detailed exposition on virtue
- **Good mental conduct (SN 42.8)**
- Contentment + sense restraint
- **Moderation in eating (MN39, 53, 107, 125)**
- **Wakefulness (MN39, 53, 107, 125)**
- Situational awareness
- Seclusion + giving up hindrances
- Four *jhānas*
- **Immaterial attainments (AN 10.99)**
- **Supernormal powers (DN2-13)**
- Three higher knowledges



SN 42.8 A Horn Blower

- A Buddha arises and teaches
- Hearing the teaching
- Right action
- Right speech
- Good mental conduct
- Four divine abidings (*brahmāvihāra*)



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- Four *jhānas*
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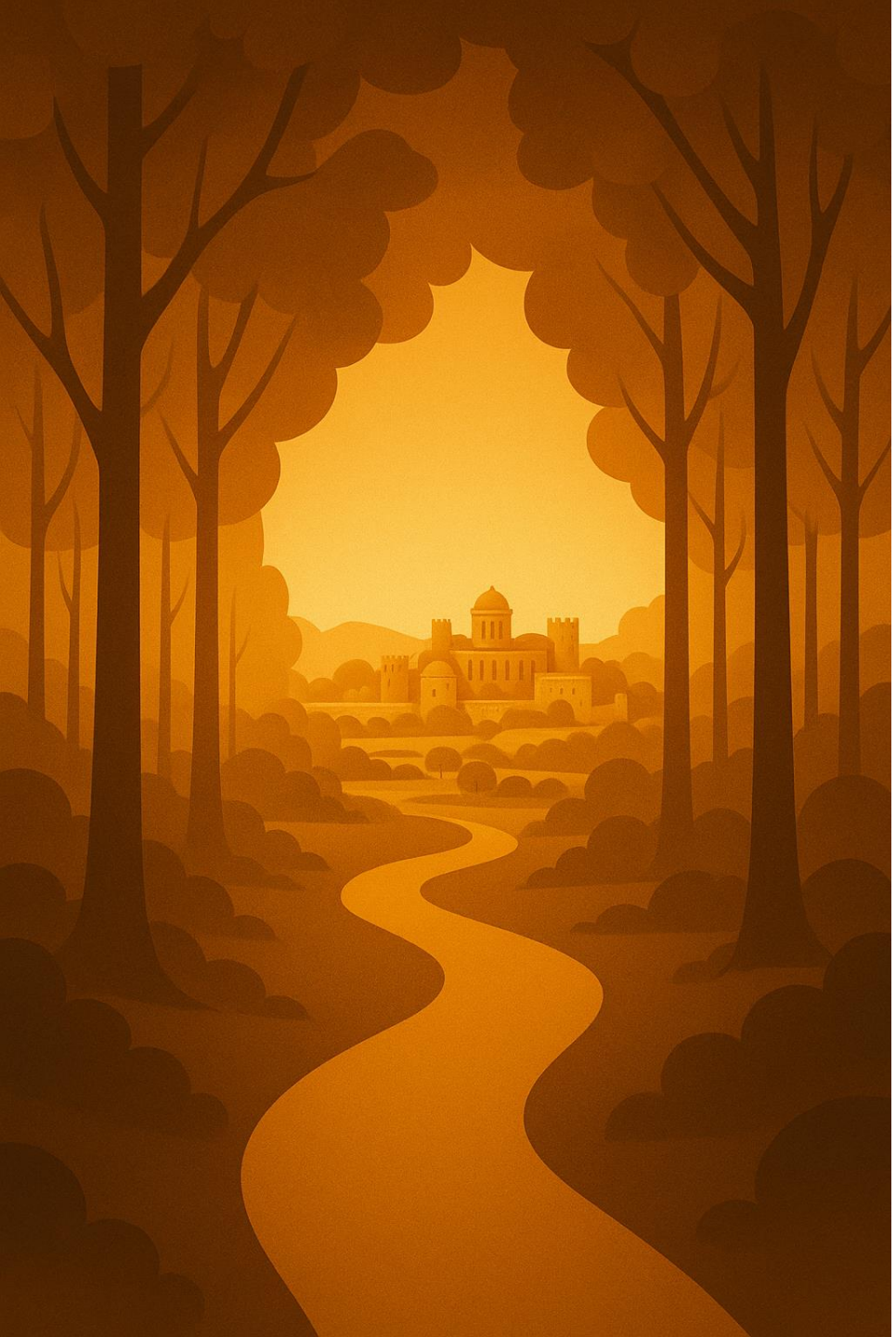
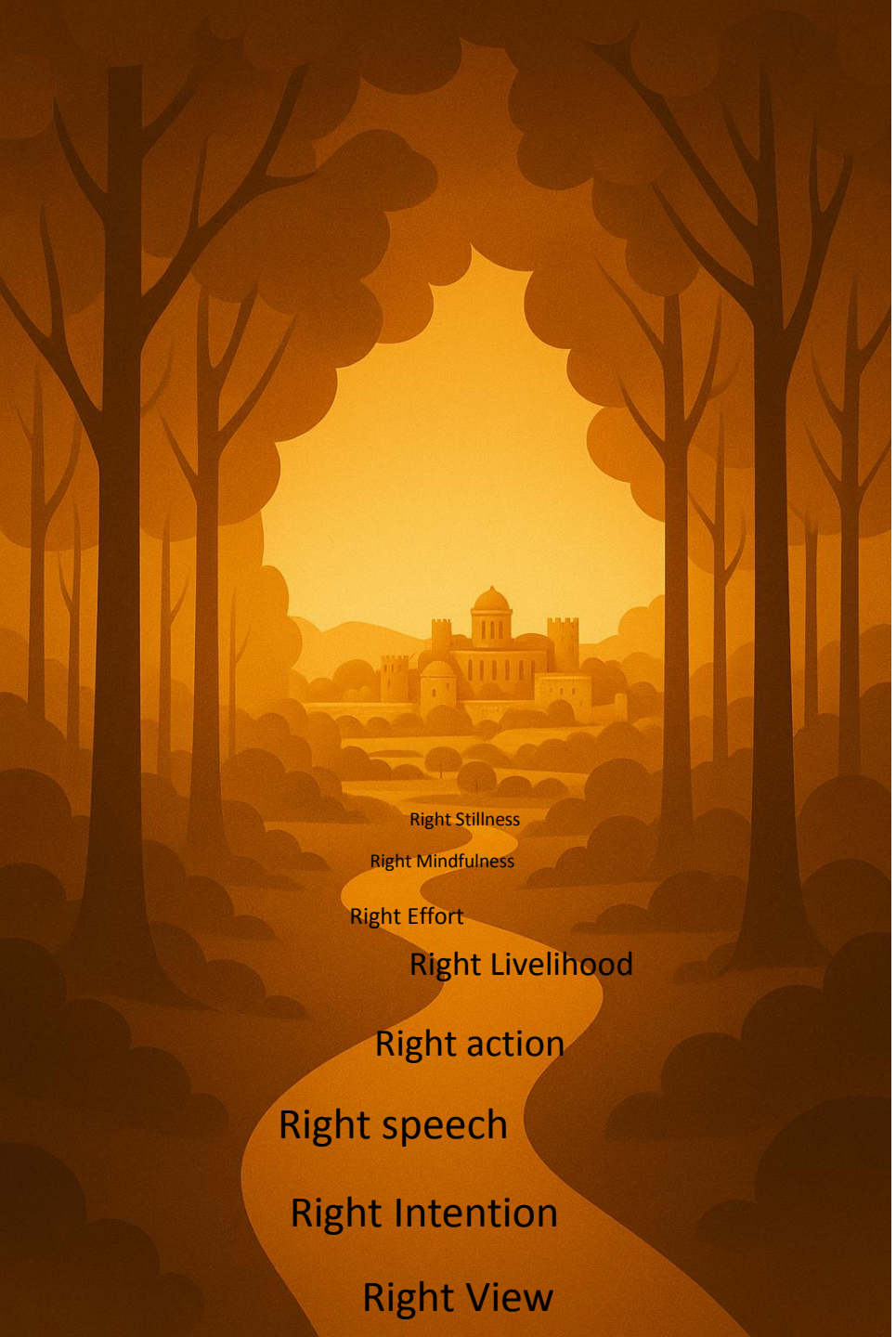


The Noble Eight-Fold Path

“Suppose, bhikkhus, a man wandering through a forest discovers an ancient path once trodden by people long ago. Following it, he finds the remains of a great city—once vibrant with parks, groves, and ponds. He reports his discovery to the king, who restores the city, and in time it thrives again—prosperous, filled with people, and renewed in its former glory.” - SN 12.65 Nagarasutta



The Noble Eight-Fold Path

"So too, bhikkhus, I saw the ancient path, the ancient road once travelled by the Perfectly Enlightened Ones of the past. That ancient path is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path: **right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right stillness**. Following that path, I directly knew aging and death, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation. Having realized these truths, I have declared them to monks, nuns, and lay followers. Thus, this holy life has become successful and prosperous, well-established and widespread among both devas and humans." - SN 12.65 Nagarasutta

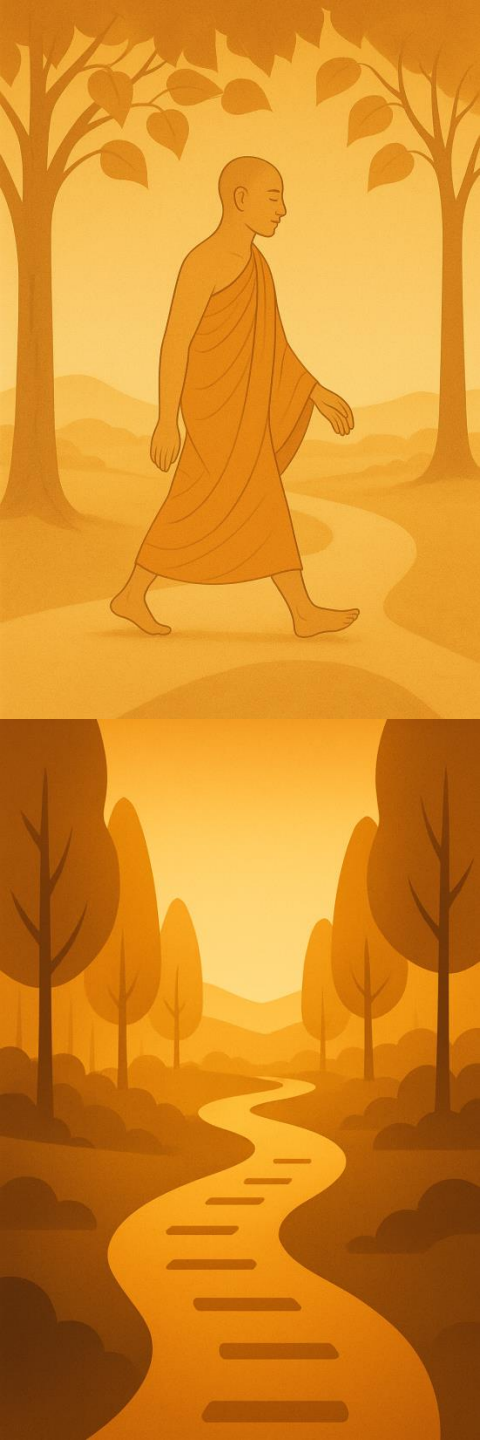
Gradual Training

Associating the wise
Hearing the teaching
Gaining faith in the Buddha
Going Forth
Right Action
Right Speech
Contentment
Sense restraint
Situational awareness
Seclusion
Giving up Hindrances
Four *jhānas*

Noble Eight-Fold Path

Right View
Right Intention
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Action
Right Mindfulness
Right Stillness

Why are they Different?



Gradual Training	Noble Eight Fold Path	
Associating the wise	Right View	Paññā
Hearing the teaching		
Gaining faith in the Buddha		
Going Forth	Right Intention	
Right Action	Right Action	Sīla
Right Speech	Right Speech	
Contentment	Right livelihood	
Sense restraint	Right Effort	
Situational awareness		
Seclusion	Right Mindfulness	Samādhi
Giving up Hindrances		
Four *jhānas*	Right Stillness	

Is it strictly sequential?

The seven factors of enlightenment have a **nutriment**; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the seven factors of enlightenment? It should be said: the four establishments of mindfulness.

The four establishments of mindfulness, too, have a **nutriment** … the three kinds of good conduct.

The three kinds of good conduct, too have a **nutriment** … restraint of the sense faculties …

- AN 10.61 Avijjāsutta

Gradual Training	AN 10.61 *Avijjāsutta*
Associating the wise	Associating the wise
Hearing the teaching	Hearing the teaching
Gaining faith in the Buddha	Gaining faith in the Buddha
Going Forth	Wise attention
Right Action	Situational awareness *
Right Speech	
Contentment	
Sense restraint	Sense restraint
Situational awareness*	Right Conduct by body, speech & mind
Seclusion	Right Mindfulness
Giving up Hindrances	Seven Awakening Factors
Four *jhānas*	

Is it strictly sequential?

AN 8.81 *Satisampajannasutta*	Gradual Training
	Associating the wise
	Hearing the teaching
	Gaining faith in the Buddha
	Going Forth
Situational awareness *	Right Action
Moral shame & dread	Right Speech
	Contentment
Sense restraint	Sense restraint
Right Conduct by body, speech & mind	Situational awareness*
	Seclusion
	Giving up Hindrances
Four *jhānas*	Four *jhānas*

When there is no situational awareness, the sense of moral shame and moral dread **lack their proximate cause.**
Without moral shame and dread, restraint of the sense faculties **lacks its proximate cause.**
Without restraint, virtuous conduct by body, speech & mind **lacks its proximate cause.**
Without virtuous behavior, right concentration **lacks its proximate cause** …

- AN 8.81 Satisampajaññasutta

Is it strictly sequential?

"What, bhikkhus, is noble right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) with its supports and its requisites, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness? **Unification of mind equipped with these seven factors** is called noble right concentration with its supports and its requisites.

"Therein, bhikkhus, right view comes first. And how does right view come first? One understands wrong view as wrong view and right view as right view: this is one's right view.

"One makes an effort to abandon wrong view and to enter upon right view: this is one's right effort.

Mindfully one abandons wrong view, mindfully one enters upon and abides in right view: this is one's right mindfulness.

Thus these three states run and circle around right view, that is, right view, right effort, and right mindfulness.

– MN 117 Mahācattārīsakasutta

Is it strictly sequential?

"Therein, bhikkhus, right view comes first. And how does right view come first?
In one of **right view**, right intention comes into being;
in one of **right intention**, right speech comes into being;
in one of **right speech**, right action comes into being;
in one of **right action**, right livelihood comes into being;
in one of **right livelihood**, right effort comes into being;
in one of **right effor**t, right mindfulness comes into being;
in one of **right mindfulness**, **right concentration** (*sammāsamādhi*) comes into being
…

- MN 117 Mahācattārīsakasutta

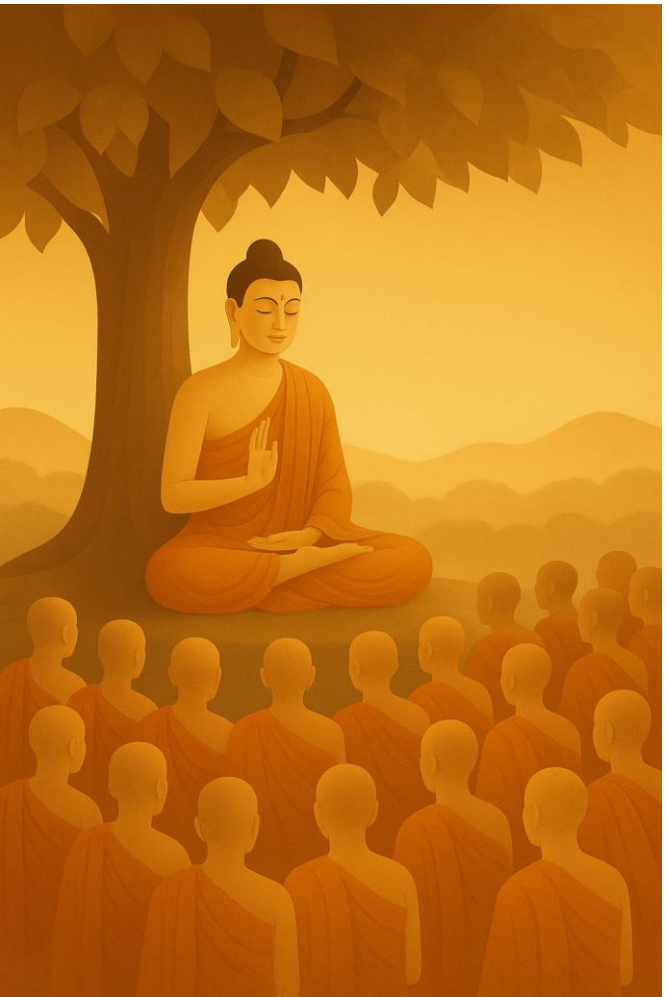
Myth:

The Path Factors can be practiced in any order

Myth Busted

Practice in every wakeful moment

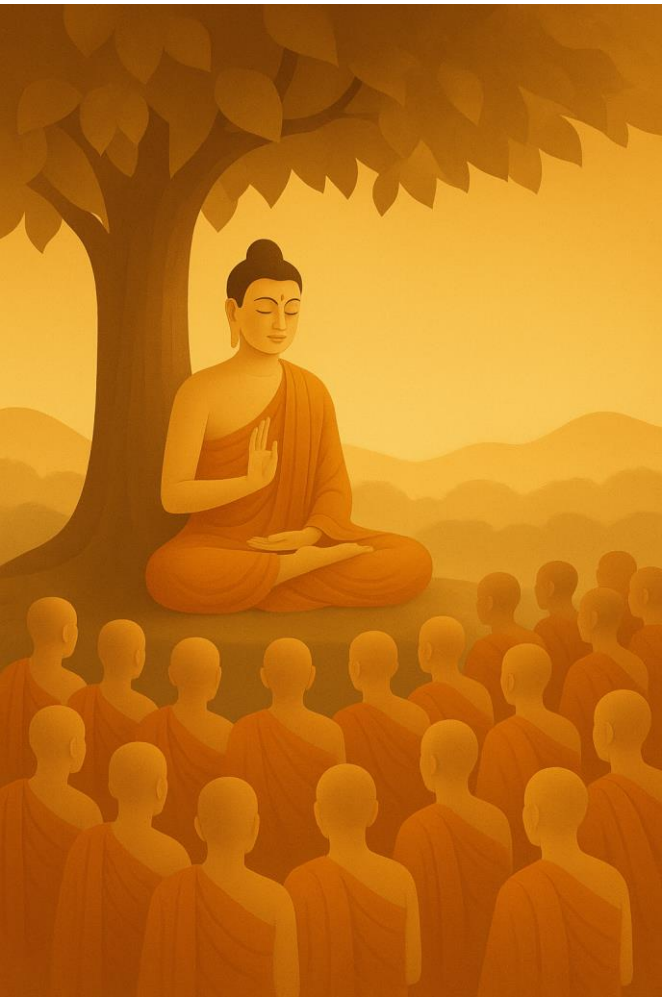
How is it A Gradual Training



"Bhikkhus, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. On the contrary, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress."

– MN 70 Kīṭāgirisutta

How is it A Gradual Training

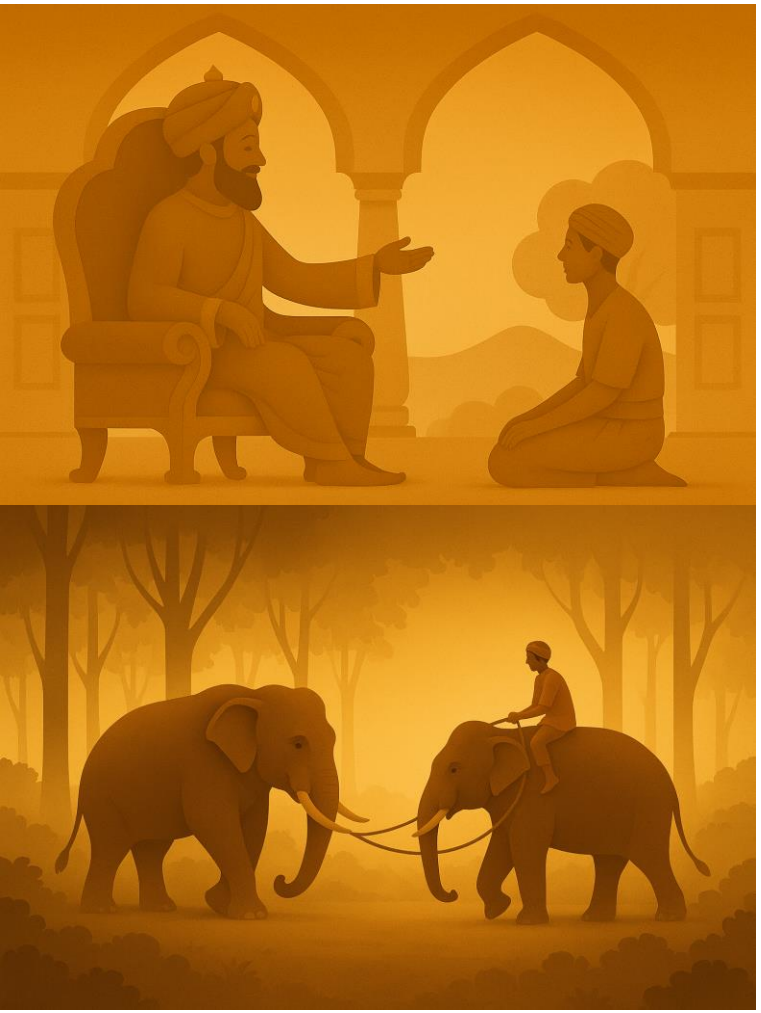


"And how is final knowledge achieved by **gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress?**
Here one who has **faith** in a teacher **visits him**;
when he visits him, **he pays respect** to him;
when he pays respect to him, **he gives ear**;
one who gives ear **hears the Dhamma**;
having heard the Dhamma, **he memorises it**;
he **examines the meaning** of the teachings he has memorised;
when he examines their meaning, **he gains a reflective acceptance** of those teachings;
when he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, **zeal springs** up
when zeal has sprung up, he **applies his will**;
having applied his will, he **scrutinises**;
having scrutinised, he **strives**;
resolutely striving, **he personally realises** the supreme truth and **sees it by penetrating it with wisdom**." - MN 70 Kīṭāgirisutta

How to train an elephant

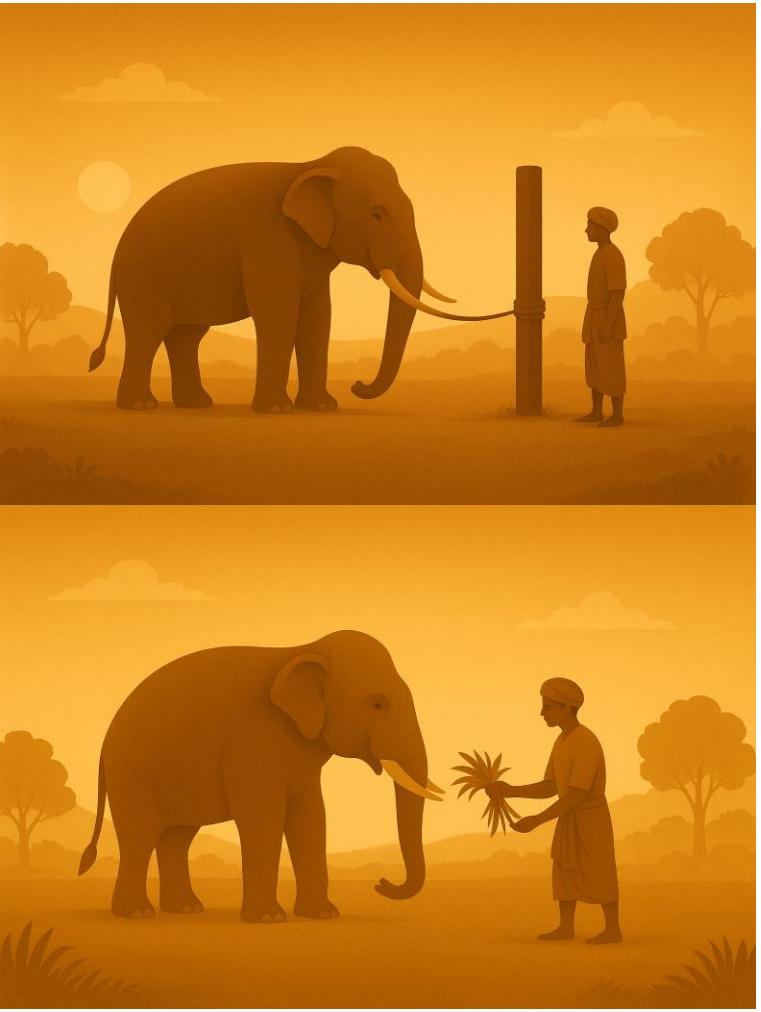
In the *Dhantabhūmi Sutta* (MN 125), the taming of the mind is likened to the training of a wild elephant for the king, illustrating a gradual discipline that leads the mind step by step toward liberation.

MN 125: *Dantabhūmisutta*



An anointed aristocratic king
addresses
an elephant tracker
mounts the royal bull elephant
enters the elephant wood
sees a wild bull elephant
tethers it by the neck to the royal elephant
the royal elephant leads the wild elephant out into the open
it's only then that it comes out into the open, for a wild bull
elephant clings to the elephant wood

MN 125: *Dantabhūmisutta*



He digs a large post into the earth

tethers the elephant to it by the neck

to subdue its wild behaviours, its wild memories and thoughts, and its wild stress, weariness, and fever

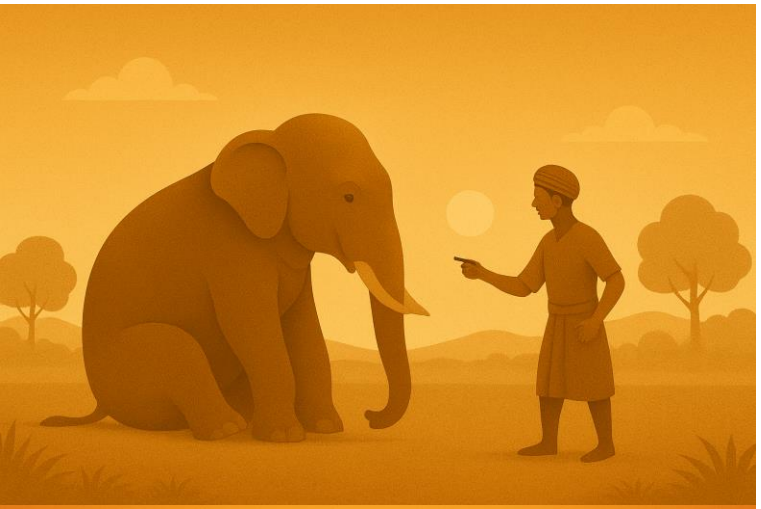
to make it happy to be within a village, and instil behaviours congenial to humans

speaks in a way that's mellow, pleasing to the ear, lovely, going to the heart, polite, likable and agreeable

the wild elephant wants to listen; it lends an ear and applies its mind to understand

the elephant trainer rewards it with grass, fodder, water.

MN 125: *Dantabhūmisutta*



When the wild elephant accepts the grass, fodder, and water, the trainer knows, ‘Now the wild elephant will survive!’

Then he sets it a further task: ‘Pick it up, sir! Put it down, sir!’

The trainer sets it a further task: ‘Forward, sir! Back, sir!’

The trainer sets it a further task: ‘Stand, sir! Sit, sir!’

When the wild elephant … follows, the trainer sets the task called imperturbability

the wild bull elephant endures being struck by spears, swords, arrows, and axes; it endures the thunder of the drums, kettledrums, horns, and cymbals

it is worthy of a king, fit to serve a king, and considered a factor of kingship.

Stages of the Gradual Training (MN 27)

- A Buddha arises and reveals the spiritual practice
- Hearing that teaching
- Gaining faith in the Buddha
- Going forth from the lay life to homelessness
- Right action
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- Contentment
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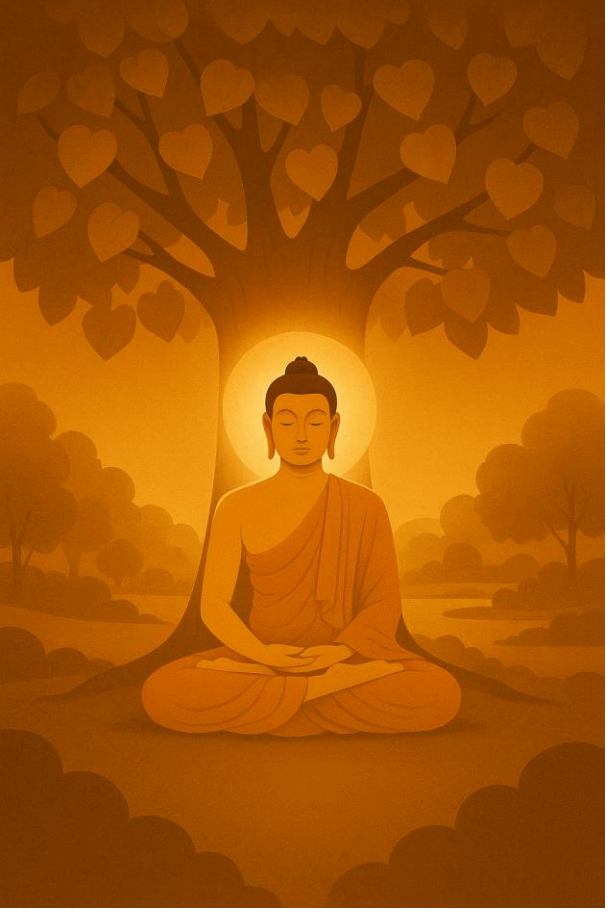
- Giving up hindrances
- Four jhānas
- Three higher knowledges



Stages of the Gradual Training (MN 27)

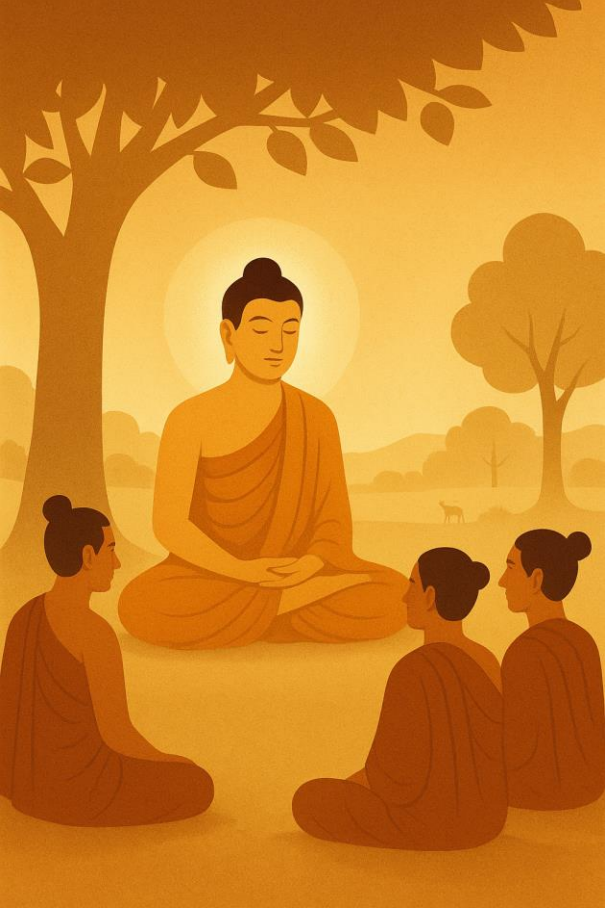
A Buddha arises in the world

He is perfected, fully awakened, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed

He realizes with his own insight

this world—with its gods, Māras and Brahmās, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, gods and humans—

and he makes it known to others



Stages of the Gradual Training (MN 27)

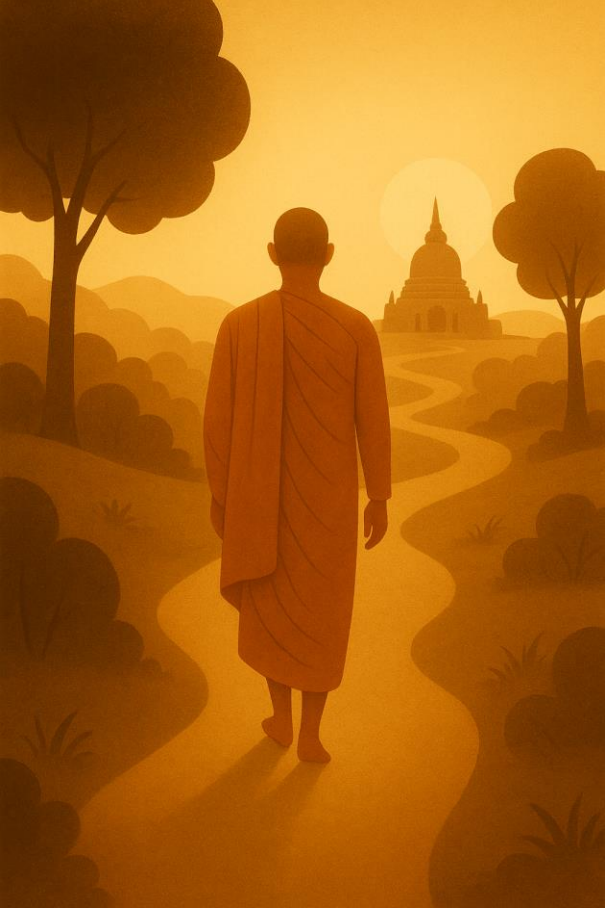
He teaches Dhamma that's good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end,

meaningful and well-phrased.

And he reveals a spiritual practice that's entirely complete and pure.

A householder hears that teaching, or a householder's child, or someone reborn in some good family

They gain faith in the Buddha



Stages of the Gradual Training (MN 27)

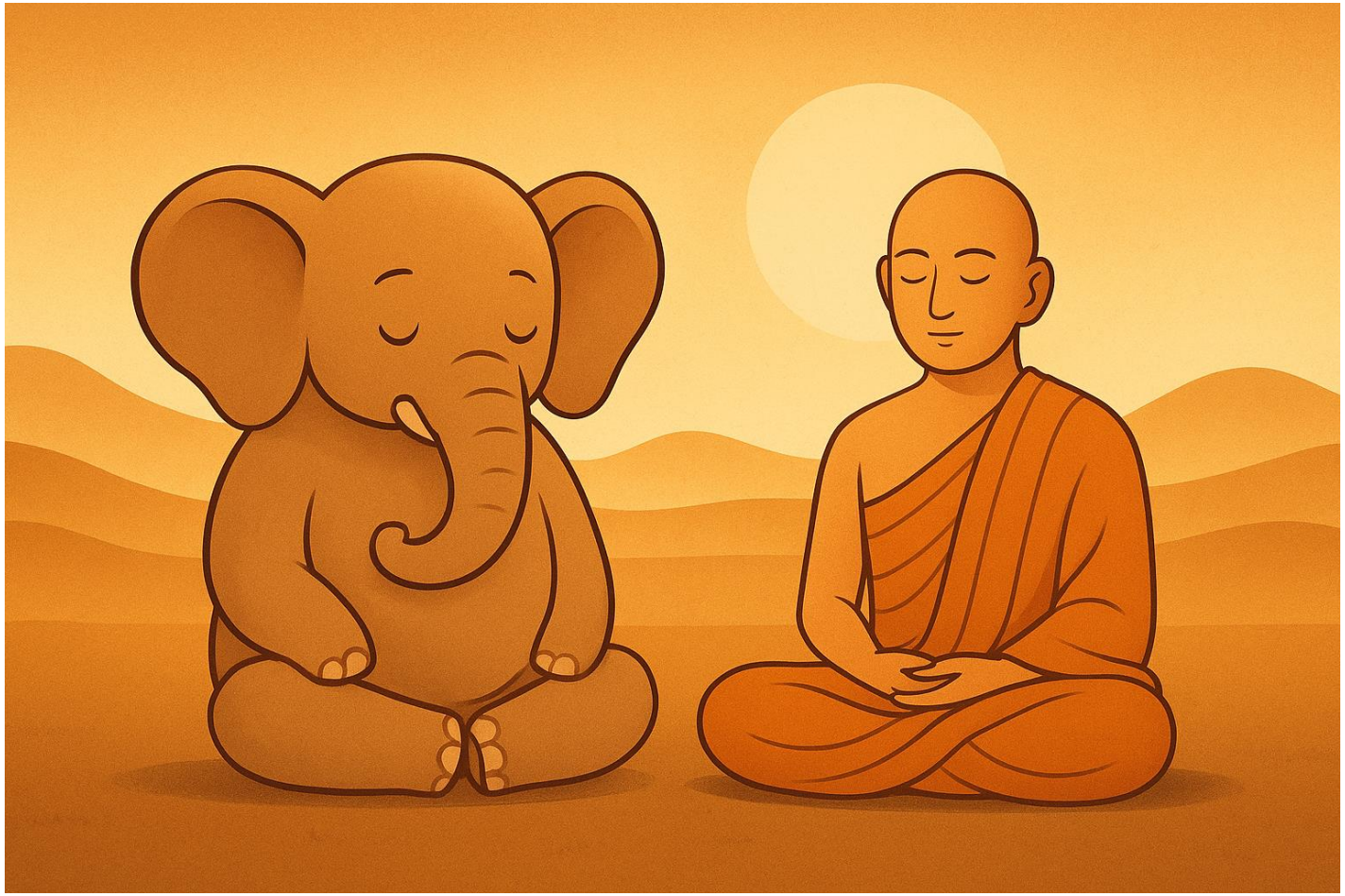
They reflect, ‘Living in a house is cramped and dirty, but the life of one gone forth is wide open.

It’s not easy for someone living at home to lead the spiritual life utterly full and pure, like a polished shell.

Why don’t I shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness?’

After some time, they give up a large or small fortune, and a large or small family circle.

They shave off hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness.



Good luck training your elephant-mind.

See you next week for more!