

There is a well-known teaching in the Buddhist scriptures describing the stages of enlightenment—the stages of realizing Nibbāna. This comprises the four paths (*magga*) and four fruits (*phala*):

1. The path and fruit of stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga* and *sotāpatti-phala*).
2. The path and fruit of once-returning (*sakadāgāmi-magga* and *sakadāgāmi-phala*).
3. The path and fruit of non-returning (*anāgāmi-magga* and *anāgāmi-phala*).
4. The path and fruit of arahantship (*arahatta-magga* and *arahatta-phala*).

The first ‘path’ of stream-entry is also called ‘vision’ (*dassana*), because it refers to the first glimpse of Nibbāna. The following three ‘paths,’ of once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship, are collectively known as ‘cultivation’ (*bhāvanā*), since they involve a development in the truth (Dhamma)* initially realized at the moment of stream-entry.¹ {403}

*Sanskrit: *Dharma*. The word *dhamma* has many definitions; the most common are: Ultimate Truth, teaching, doctrine, nature, law, and ‘phenomenon.’

Those who have reached complete realization of Nibbāna, as well as those who obtain a first glimpse of the goal and are thus guaranteed to reach it, are classified as true disciples of the Buddha. They are known as the ‘community of disciples’ (*sāvaka-saṅgha*), as seen for example in the verse praising the attributes of the *Saṅgha**: ‘They are the Blessed One’s disciples who have practised well.’

There are many specific terms used to describe these true disciples. The most frequently used term is *ariya-puggala* (or *ariya*), translated as ‘cultivated,’ ‘noble,’ or ‘far from the foe’ (i.e., far from mental defilement). The term *ariya-puggala* was originally used in a general sense; only later was it used specifically in relation to the stages of enlightenment.² The original term used in the Pali Canon when distinguishing the stages of enlightenment is *dakkhiṇeyya* (or *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala*). In any case, the terms *ariya-puggala* and *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* were adopted from Brahmanism. The Buddha altered their meanings, as he did with many other words, for example: *Brahmā*, *brāhmaṇa* (brahman), *nahātaka* (‘washed clean’), and *vedagū* (‘sage’).

*The term *saṅgha* means ‘community’ or ‘assembly.’ When found on its own it refers either to awakened disciples (*sāvaka-saṅgha*) or to a group of four or more bhikkhus (*bhikkhu-saṅgha*). This term has begun to be assimilated into English and is most often spelled without the Pali diacritic: *sangha*. The verse praising the attributes of the *Saṅgha*: *supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*.

¹ MA. I. 73; DhsA. 356; Vism. 697; VismṬ: *Ñānadassana-visuddhi-niddesavaṇṇanā, Pariññādippabheda-kathāvaṇṇanā*.

² The first example of using *ariya-puggala* as a term specific to stages of enlightenment occurs in the *Puggala-Paññatti* of the *Abhidhamma* (Pug. 11-12, 14). See related material at: Vin. V. 117; Nd. I. 232; Ps. I. 167.

The Buddha gave the term *ariya* a new definition, different from that prescribed by the brahmins. The word *ariya* (Sanskrit: *ārya*; English: Aryan) originally referred to a race of people who migrated from the north-west regions and invaded the Indian subcontinent several thousand years ago. As a result of this invasion, the native inhabitants retreated either south or into the forests and mountains. The Aryans considered themselves cultivated; they disdained the native people, marking them as savages and enslaving them. Later, when the Aryans had consolidated their rule and established the caste system, the native peoples were accorded the lowest tier as sudras (labourers). The term *ariya* ('noble') designated the three upper castes of kshatriyas (warriors, kings, administrators), brahmins (scholars, priests, teachers), and vaishyas (merchants). Sudras and all others were labelled *anariya* ('ignoble,' 'base').³ A person's caste was determined at birth; there was no way to choose or alter one's position.

When the Buddha began teaching, he declared that nobility does not depend on birth, but rather on righteousness (Dhamma), which stems from spiritual practice and training. Whoever acts in line with noble principles (*ariya-dhamma*) is 'noble' (*ariya*) irrespective of birth or caste. Whoever does not is *anariya*. Truth is not restricted to the dictates of brahmins and the Vedas,* but is objective and universal. A person who has realized these universal truths is noble, despite having never studied the Vedas. Because knowledge of these truths makes one noble, they are called the 'noble truths.'⁴ Technically, those who understand the noble truths are stream-enterers and above. Therefore, the scriptures generally use the term *ariya* as synonymous with *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* ('those worthy of offerings'), a term which will be discussed shortly.

*Body of ancient Brahmanistic sacred texts.

The Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*) are sometimes referred to as the *ariya-dhamma*.⁵ The term *ariya-dhamma*, however, does not have a fixed definition and is used in other contexts.⁶ It can refer to the ten 'wholesome ways of action' (*kusala-kamma-patha*)⁷ and to the five precepts.⁸ Such definitions are not contradictory, since those householders who truly keep the five precepts their entire lives, without blind adherence (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) and without blemish, are stream-enterers and above. The standard commentarial definition of *ariya* in reference to

³ See *ārya* in 'A Sanskrit-English Dictionary' by Sir Monier Monier-Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 152. See also 'The Laws of Manu' (Manava Dharma Shastra).

⁴ S. V. 433 (referred to at Vism. 495; in the Pali Canon the word *ariyoti* has vanished. See also ItA. I. 85; PsA. I. 62). Compare with S. V. 435.

⁵ Alternatively: *ārya-dhamma*. Sn. 62; SnA. I. 350.

⁶ See, e.g.: DA. II. 643; A. V. 241; Nd2A. 77.

⁷ A. V. 274.

⁸ A. II. 69; AA. III. 213, 300; AA. III. 303.

‘noble’ people encompasses the Buddha, Pacceka-Buddhas* and disciples of the Buddha,⁹ although in some places the definition refers to the Buddha alone.¹⁰ When qualifying a spiritual practice or factor, *ariya* is equivalent to ‘transcendent’ (*lokuttara*),¹¹ although this is not always strictly the case.¹²

Although the definition of *ariya* is rather broad, one can summarize that when the term is used in reference to people it is identical to *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala*, meaning those who have gone beyond the state of ordinary persons and become members of the *sāvaka-saṅgha* (today, more often called the *ariya-saṅgha*).¹³ In the commentaries and sub-commentaries this definition is almost fixed, with very few exceptions. In the scriptures, the term *ariya* tends to be used in a general sense, not specifying the level of awakening. *Dakkhiṇeyya* is the more specific technical term and is used less often than *ariya*.

*‘Silent Buddhas’; those who have reached the supreme awakening by themselves, but do not proclaim this truth to the world.

The Buddha extended the meaning of the term *ariya*, referring to members of a new community: Buddhist disciples who are ennobled by practising the Middle Way. These disciples live ethically, non-violently and harmoniously. They are dedicated to promoting wellbeing for all. {405} Their actions are not ruled by the enticements and threats of religious officials, who often cater to people’s selfish needs. Moral principles may be perverted due to the decisions of such religious authorities. An example of this is the sacrifice of animals performed by brahmins.

Dakkhiṇeyya translates as ‘one worthy of offerings.’¹⁴ The original Brahmanic meaning of this word referred to the payment received for performing ceremonies, particularly sacrifices (*yañña*; Sanskrit: *yajña*). The Vedas describe the forms of payment, including: gold, silver, household goods, furniture, vehicles, grain, livestock, young women, and land. The more prestigious the ceremony the greater

⁹ VinA. I. 165; DA. III. 1009; Nd1A. II. 379; NdA. [2/200]; Vism. 425. The Vibhaṅga of the Abhidhamma defines *ariya* as comprising Buddhas and disciples of Buddhas (Vbh. 259). (Translator: although *ariya* usually refers to ‘enlightened’ disciples, there are some exceptions. See below.)

¹⁰ E.g.: MA. I. 60; SA. III. 208; Nd1A. II. 272; DhsA. 349.

¹¹ E.g.: M. III. 72; AA. III. 416; Nd1A. II. 336.

¹² The term *ariya* can sometimes designate the mundane (*lokiya*), e.g.: SA. I. 35; SA. III. 303.

¹³ Some exceptions include passages at: J. II. 42; 280; J. III. 81; J. IV. 293. The commentaries explain these exceptions by classifying *ariya* into four categories: 1) *ācāra-ariya*—noble by behaviour; those grounded in virtue; 2) *dassana-ariya*—noble in appearance; those possessing features that instil confidence; 3) *liṅga-ariya*—noble by ‘gender,’ i.e., those living the life of a spiritual renunciant (*samaṇa*); 4) *paṭivedha-ariya*—noble through realization, i.e. the Buddha, Pacceka-Buddhas and enlightened disciples of the Buddha. See, e.g.: J. II. 42, 280; J. III. 354; J. IV. 291.

¹⁴ Offerings = *dakkhiṇā* (Sanskrit: *dakṣhiṇā*). *Dakkhiṇā* + *neyya* (‘taddhita’ suffix; ‘secondary derivative’) = *dakkhiṇeyya*.

the reward. For example, in the *Ashvamedha* ('royal horse sacrifice') the king shared the spoils of war with the priests. The recipients of these gifts were invariably the brahmans, because they were the only ones entitled to perform the rituals.

When the Buddha began teaching he spoke in favour of abolishing animal sacrifice, and he transformed the meanings of the words *yañña* and *dakkhiṇā*. He developed the meaning of *yañña* into cruelty-free almsgiving, while *dakkhiṇā* in the Buddhist teachings refers to suitable gifts and faithful donations, not a fee or recompense.¹⁵ If it is a reward then it is a reward for virtue, but it is more aptly called an offering in honour of virtue. In addition, these gifts are not excessively lavish, but simple and basic requisites essential for life.*

Persons worthy of these offerings have trained themselves and are full of virtue. They embody a virtuous and joyful life. Their very existence in the world is a blessing to others. When they go out into the wider society and impart these virtuous principles, living as an example and instructing others, they offer a priceless service to the world. And these individuals do not demand or wish for recompense. They rely on the offerings of the four requisites merely to sustain life. Offerings made to such people bear great fruit because the offerings permit goodness to manifest and increase in the world. These people are called 'worthy of offerings' (*dakkhiṇeyya*) because offerings made to them yield valuable results. They are also referred to as the 'incomparable field of merit,'¹⁶ because they are a source of virtue to blossom and spread in the world.¹⁷ {406}

People give suitable remuneration to ordinary teachers; is it not appropriate for people to give simple gifts to those who teach virtue and the ways of truth? In today's society people whose business causes destruction—harming the economy, the environment, or even human goodness—receive all sorts of lavish rewards.¹⁸ Is it not right that those who protect the world and protect virtue by being moderate in consumption should receive support? Those who consume only what is necessary have minimal impact on the world's resources; they take little and give much in return.

*Four basic requisites: food, clothing, lodging and medicine.

¹⁵ The commentaries mention those things given with the belief in action (*kamma*) and the fruits of action (*kamma-vipāka*), not given with the expectation of medical assistance or other favours; see: [KhA. 200]. Some places mention things offered by those who believe in the 'world beyond' (*paraloka*); e.g.: Vism. 220; ItA. I. 88; VinṬ.: Pārājika-kaṇḍaṃ, Sikkhāpaccakkhāna-vibhaṅga-vaṇṇanā.

¹⁶ *Anuttaram puññakkhettaṃ lokassa.*

¹⁷ See, e.g.: DA. III. 996; AA. IV. 29; VinṬ.: Pārājikakaṇḍaṃ, Sikkhāpaccakkhāna-vibhaṅgavaṇṇanā.

¹⁸ What we call 'production' or 'industry' invariably involves some degree of destruction. Sometimes the costs or harmful effects outweigh the value of the manufactured product. It is time that people review the true meaning of 'industry,' 'labour,' and 'production,' by using a broader perspective of economics.

The making of offerings differs from ordinary giving; one does not give out of personal affection, obligation, or an expectation to get something in return. One gives with faith in the power of goodness, appreciating that the recipient is a member of the Buddhist monastic community (*saṅgha*), or that he or she upholds virtue. In any case, the recipient must possess the necessary qualities to be entitled to these offerings. For example, an unenlightened monk or novice who eats the almsfood of lay-supporters is ‘indebted,’ despite having moral conduct and making effort in Dhamma practice. He should hasten to free himself from this debt by achieving the state of a *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala*. Venerable Mahā Kassapa, for example, claimed that he was in debt to the laypeople for seven days, between being ordained and realizing arahantship.¹⁹ After his ordination he made effort in Dhamma practice as an unawakened person for seven days, before reaching the fruit of arahantship and becoming one worthy of the offerings by the faithful laypeople.

The commentaries categorize monks and novices who receive offerings in four ways:

1. Those who behave immorally. They do not have the inner qualities fitting for a mendicant and merely wear the outward signs of a monk. They are undeserving of offerings; their use of offerings is called *theyya-paribhoga*: ‘to consume as a thief.’
2. Those who have moral conduct but do not reflect with wisdom when using the four requisites. For example, when eating almsfood they neglect to consider: ‘I eat not for pleasure or beautification. I use almsfood only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, to keep it healthy, to sustain the holy life.’ Such use of offerings is called *ina-paribhoga*: ‘to consume as a debtor.’²⁰ {407}
3. *Sekha*, or the first seven of the eight *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* (see below). Their use of offerings is called *dāyajja-paribhoga*: ‘to consume as heirs.’ They have the right to use these offerings as heirs to the Buddha, who was supreme among the *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala*.
4. Arahants, who are freed from the enslavement of craving. Their virtue makes them truly worthy of offerings. Their use of offerings is called *sāmi-paribhoga*: ‘to consume as masters.’²¹

¹⁹ S. II. 221.

²⁰ This is a more liberal definition than that found in the Pali Canon, which claims that all unawakened persons use offerings as debtors.

²¹ VinṬ.: Nissaggiyaṅgaṃ, Kosiya-vaggo, Rūpiyasikkhāpada-vaṅṅana; MA. III. 343; SA. II. 199; AA. I. 72; Vism. 43; VismṬ.: Sīlaniddesa-vaṅṅana, Catupārisuddhi-sampādanavidhi-vaṅṅana.

Here we can see that the term *dakkhiṇeyya* is used in both social and economic contexts. The principle of offerings (and to some extent the principle of generosity) fits into the wider principle of the Buddhist social structure, of having an independent group of individuals (the monastic sangha) within a wider society. These individuals gain their independence by not seeking benefits from society and not being directly involved in other social institutions. They have their own way of life based on spiritual freedom. They support society by transmitting the Dhamma, without seeking recompense for their work. They live on offerings by members of the wider society, who give out of devotion to the Dhamma in order to preserve the teachings and purify themselves of unwholesome qualities like greed. Offering this support has minimal financial impact on the supporters' lives.

The recipients (the monastic sangha) are like bees who collect pollen from various flowers to make honey and build their hives, without damaging even the fragrance or complexion of the flowers.²² Indeed, they fertilize the flowers. Because they depend on others to live, they have an obligation to act for the welfare and happiness of all. Although their life depends on others it does not depend on anyone in particular; they rely on the public and in a sense belong to the public, but are subject to no single individual. In a well-organized society no one should be destitute and forced to beg.²³ In such a society religious mendicants live on the offerings of others but the receiving of alms has no resemblance to begging. This system of an independent community that is devoted to spiritual values and provides a necessary balance to the wider society is unique among social systems in the world.

There are generally two ways to categorize *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* or *ariya-puggala*: into the eight levels of eradicating defilements (the eight levels of path and fruit mentioned above), and into the seven qualities or practices that enable the attainment of those eight levels. [The first of these classifications is presented below; the second classification is presented in a following section.]* {408}

*Note: in the Thai version of *Buddhadhamma*, these two classifications are presented together.

²² See: Dh. verse 49.

²³ See the Cakkavatti-Sutta: D. III. 61.