

Study Guide for MN 107
Discourse to Gaṇaka Moggallāna

The Buddha Shows the Path, You Have to Walk It
by Gil Fronsdal

This is a relatively straightforward sutta where both Nibbāna and the path to Nibbāna are emphatically said to exist (§14). In addition to its description of a path of practice, the Buddha clearly states that he “shows the way,” but not everyone follows the way to the end. Even when provided with clear directions, some people go the wrong way.

As in MN 70, this sutta describes the path as a gradual one, similar to how one is gradually trained in archery, accounting, and computation. The Buddha, as the teacher of this path, uses the analogy of training a thoroughbred horse for how he trains his monastic disciples. Just as a horse trainer first gets the horse accustomed to wearing the bit that controls the horse, so he tames people by first teaching the monastic rules of restraint. It is worth considering the implications of likening those who follow the Buddha’s path to thoroughbreds.

The path presented in MN 107 begins with the Buddha instructing practitioners in six steps of practice (§4-8):

1. The training precepts
2. Guarding the sense doors
3. Moderation in eating
4. Wakefulness in purifying the mind of obstructive states
5. Full awareness in daily activities
6. Resorting to a secluded spot to meditate

These six steps are prefaced with a statement that this is how the Buddha disciplines or instructs (*veneti*) a person. However, the Buddha does not specifically

state he instructs practitioners in the subsequent two steps involving meditation. Perhaps this is because meditation involves a different process than the first six. This seems to be implied in last week's reading where the mind is described as becoming concentrated based on supporting conditions, not through active effort (MN 7.8-11).

7. Meditating and abandoning the hindrances
8. Abiding in the four *jhānas*

We will explore what this different effort might be later in the course when we study the teachings on concentration practice.

The Buddha ends his description of the training with the four *jhānas*. He then explains that this training is useful both for those training for the highest goal, "the supreme security from bondage" and for those who have attained this goal, described here as the destruction of the taints. For arahants, continued training provides a "pleasant abiding here and now" and "mindfulness and full awareness" (§11). In this way, "training" before enlightenment and "practice" after enlightenment can be the same activity.