

THE MIND WITHOUT FOOTHOLD
THE END OF BECOMING

Guy Eugène DUBOIS

Dhamma
books

• *Spiritual wisdom is a gift to be shared with insight and compassion and not exploited for vulgar personal gain. When wisdom is commercialized—‘marketed’—it loses its purity and degenerates into a commodity, giving profound insights a valuation, which undermines their transformative power.* •

(Guy E. Dubois)

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• *Investigate phenomena so deeply that every need for a permanent essence falls away.* •

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INTRODUCTION

The human mind is seldom truly still. Even when the body is at rest, the mind continues to move: thinking, desiring, remembering, planning, comparing, hoping, rejecting, fearing, grasping, and clinging.

Upon closer observation, this continuous movement appears almost unbroken, as if the mind were constantly trying to reaffirm, protect, or complete itself from one moment to the next.

Within early Buddhism, this movement is not regarded as a personal failing or a moral deficiency, but as a process of conditioning.

The mind becomes continually entangled in craving, aversion, attachment, identification, and ignorance, giving rise to an unceasing stream of *becoming* (*bhava*; *id.*).

Not only in the sense of rebirth from one life to another, but also psychologically: whenever the mind fixes itself upon experience, a new form of ‘I,’ ‘me,’ or ‘mine’ is born.

From this perspective, the meaning of meditation undergoes a fundamental shift.

Meditation is no longer merely a technique for becoming calmer, nor a method for attaining extraordinary states of consciousness. It becomes a direct investigation into the nature of experience itself.

A quiet and attentive observation of how craving and aversion arise, how attachment takes shape, how identification appears, and how suffering continually conditions itself anew.

For this reason, this book does not proceed from metaphysical speculation, but from direct experience.

The central question is not, “*What is ultimate reality?*” but rather: “*How does inner unrest arise?*” “*How does attachment arise?*” “*How does psychological becoming arise?*” And “*Can this process also come to rest?*”

Within the early Dhamma, liberation does not lie in acquiring a new identity, attaining a higher spiritual status, or gaining a metaphysical insight through which an eternal essence is discovered.

Rather, the emphasis is on the gradual fading away of that which continually fuels suffering: craving (*taṇhā; tṛṣṇā*), aversion (*vyāpāda; id.*), attachment (*upādāna; id.*), identification (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra; id.*), and ignorance (*avijjā; avidyā*).

This contemplative path unfolds gradually.

At first, the practitioner learns to recognize the coarse movements of the mind: craving, aversion, sloth, restlessness, and doubt.

Within Buddhism, these movements are known as the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni; pañca nivāraṇāḥ*). These obstacles obscure the clarity of the mind and sustain the process of psychological becoming (*bhava; id.*).¹

As these hindrances gradually subside, space emerges for deeper concentration and inner stability.

Within the early Dhamma, the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) are described as states of stillness, concentration, and refinement of the mind.

Yet even these states of stillness are not an ultimate goal. The *jhānas* are neither metaphysical realities nor spiritual accomplishments that can be possessed.

Rather, they provide a refined and lucid foundation from which insight becomes possible.

From this stillness, *vipassanā* can unfold: direct insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

The practitioner begins not merely to understand, but to see directly that all conditioned phenomena arise dependently through causes and conditions, are in constant flux, and contain no enduring core. Through this insight, the grip of attachment and identification gradually weakens.

What was once experienced as a fixed identity is revealed, upon closer examination, to be a dynamic process of conditioning.

Thoughts arise and pass away. Emotions arise and pass away. Even moments of consciousness arise dependent upon conditions.

Ultimately, no independent and enduring essence is found that possesses or controls the whole.

Within early Buddhism, liberation therefore does not necessarily refer to the discovery of an absolute metaphysical reality behind phenomena, but rather to the extinguishing of the grasping through which the mind continually reconditions itself.

From this perspective, the concept of *the Unborn* (*ajāta*; *id.*) also acquires a special significance.

The Unborn does not refer to a hidden eternal substance or a cosmic Self, but to that which becomes apparent when craving, aversion, attachment, identity, and ignorance come to rest. Nothing new is acquired. Rather, something fades away.

Personally, I do not doubt that there is the Unborn (*ajāta*; *id.*), the Unbecome (*abhūta*; *id.*), the Unmade (*akata*; *id.*), the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*), and *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*). Otherwise, there could be no escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

At the same time, I feel no need to turn the Unborn into a new metaphysical theory. For the search for an ultimate explanation, an ultimate certainty, or an absolute ground of security is itself still part of the very movement that the Dhamma seeks to investigate.

For me, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned, and *nibbāna* are not "nothingness." Yet neither need they be understood as a metaphysical substance, a cosmic Consciousness, or a hidden essence behind phenomena. It is sufficient for me that they point to the possibility of

escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

I seek in them no new certainty, no ultimate refuge, and no absolute object upon which thought can once again establish itself. What interests me is not how the Unborn is to be understood precisely, but how dukkha comes into being and how dukkha can come to cessation.

Therefore, I do not regard the Unborn as an object of knowledge that must be comprehended, but as that which becomes apparent when the conditioning through which the mind continually creates, appropriates, and clings to objects comes completely to rest.

For me, the significance of the Dhamma therefore lies not in defining the Unborn, but in bringing dukkha to an end. The Unborn does not need to be defined in order to be liberating.

The contemplative inquiry presented in this book unfolds gradually in two movements.

First, it investigates how the mind continually becomes entangled in craving, aversion, metaphysical grasping, identification, and psychological *becoming*.

Then the focus shifts to the contemplative practice itself: the direct recognition of hindrances, the quieting of the mind, the direct seeing of experience, and the gradual fading away of that which continually seeks to become once again.

This entire contemplative path may be simply summarized as the gradual quieting of everything to which the mind continually tries to cling.

And where that grasping comes completely to an end, becoming itself comes to rest. There, the Unborn unfolds. The Unconditioned. *Nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*): the extinguishing of all that still seeks to be born.

Guy
Beerzel, July 2026

PART I — THE CONTEMPLATIVE ANALYSIS

The chapters that follow explore how the mind continually conditions itself through craving, attachment, identification, and psychological *becoming*.

In doing so, the focus shifts away from metaphysical speculation about an ultimate reality and toward the direct contemplative investigation of experience itself.

For only when it becomes clear how bondage arises can the possibility of liberation gradually begin to reveal itself.



CHAPTER I — THE UNBORN

In my previous book, *The Unborn*,² I examined in depth what this term may signify within the context of the early Dhamma.

That investigation returns here, not as a repetition, but as a necessary foundation for what will be further unfolded in this book.

For as long as the Unborn is understood as a metaphysical principle hidden beyond the world, as an enduring essence present within all phenomena, or as an absolute ground of consciousness into which individual existence ultimately dissolves, the meaning of liberation within early Buddhism inevitably remains obscured.

Within the early Dhamma, however, the Unborn is not presented as a first cause, an eternal substance, or a transcendent reality concealed behind impermanent phenomena.

Nor does it refer to a hidden self, a fixed core, or an unchanging identity that must be discovered or realized. It is not described as a universal or absolute consciousness in which all duality ultimately dissolves.

When such notions are projected onto the Unborn, it easily gives rise to the impression that liberation consists in returning to a metaphysical origin or merging with an ultimate reality. Yet it is precisely these speculative views that the Buddha consistently sets aside in the early texts.

The Unborn, within the early Dhamma, does not refer to something that can be possessed through thought, identification, or metaphysical affirmation.

It is indicated only as that which is not subject to arising and passing away, precisely because it is there that the conditioning which gives rise to *dukkha* comes completely to an end.

Only when the Unborn is freed from metaphysical projections does it become possible to see that *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) does not refer to a hidden absolute reality, but to the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identity, ³ and ignorance.

The central issue is not the discovery of an eternal essence, but the falling away of every form of grasping at what is regarded as ‘self’ or ‘reality.’

Within the early Dhamma, the *Unborn* (*ajāta; id.*)—together with such terms as the *Unbecome* (*abhūta; id.*), the *Unmade* (*akata; id.*), and the *Unconditioned* (*asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta*)—does not point to an eternal Self or a transcendent substance behind phenomena, but to the cessation of arising, becoming, and conditioning.

It is precisely because of this that, according to the *Udāna*, liberation from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned becomes possible.

This passage has given rise to diverse interpretations for centuries. That fire has not yet been extinguished.

Some recognize in it a language that seems to resonate with *Advaita Vedānta* or non-dual mysticism.

Words such as *the Unborn* and *the Unconditioned* can easily create the impression of an absolute reality existing behind or beyond the impermanent world.

From an early Buddhist perspective, however, such an interpretation calls for great caution.

Nowhere does the Buddha describe the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta*) as an eternal metaphysical essence, a cosmic Consciousness, or an absolute ground in which phenomena find their ultimate foundation.

The emphasis is not on affirming a transcendent reality, but on the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identity, and ignorance, through which liberation from *dukkha* becomes possible.

Within this context, the Unborn therefore does not refer to a hidden reality behind experience, but to the possibility of liberation from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

In my book *The Unborn*, I examined this text in considerable detail. I quote it here in full because it forms the foundation of my understanding. I present the passage in both Pāli and English in order to limit discussion as much as possible.

This passage from the *Udāna* (8.3) ⁴ may be read as a forensic dismantling of language: a meticulous freeing of these words from what they are not.

At the same time, it is an approach to silence, in which meaning is not added but carefully stripped away, layer by layer.

The passage reads as follows:

Pāli

• *Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatāṃ. No ce taṃ, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatāṃ, na yidaṃ jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha.*

Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatāṃ, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatas-sa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyatī. •

English Translation

• *There is, monks, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned. If there were not this Unborn, this Unbecome, this Unmade, this Unconditioned, no escape could be discerned here from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.*

But because there is the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned, an escape can be discerned from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned. •

These words belong to the most profound and, at the same time, the most misunderstood passages of the early Dhamma.

This text introduces no metaphysical system. It does not attempt to define an absolute reality. It does not describe a hidden dimension behind the world.

On the contrary, it gradually strips away everything to which thought habitually tries to cling. Here, the terms function less as affirmations than as instruments of dismantling. Step by step, they dissolve whatever the mind seeks to grasp once again.

What then opens is not a doctrine, but an opening. Not an opening into metaphysical certainty and security, but into liberation from bondage. Liberation from *saṃsāra*.

For this reason, the passage seems less concerned with formulating a theory of ultimate reality than with revealing that complete liberation from conditioning is possible.

The text does not speak of an eternal essence that must be discovered, but of *nissaraṇaṃ*—an escape, a liberation from the conditioned domain of craving, attachment, identity, and ignorance.

It is not concerned with abstract metaphysics or union with an ultimate reality, but solely with the structures that sustain suffering.

This is precisely why the language of the *Udāna* remains so careful. The Buddha does not say what the Unborn *is*. He describes it exclusively through negations: