

# A Discourse on the Bhāra Sutta

by  
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw  
of  
Burma



An English rendering by  
U Htin Fatt (*Maung Htin*)

Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization  
Mahāsi Translation Committee, Rangoon



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## Editor's Foreword

The Venerable Sayādaw's discourses were addressed to meditators practising intensively at Mahāsi Sāsana Yeikthā, in Rangoon. They contain many Pāli words which, though familiar to those who have heard regular discourses, may not be familiar to others. I have prepared this edition bearing in mind that it will be read by many who may be unfamiliar with Pāli terms. I have given the Pāli (in parenthesis), the first time a term is used, but thereafter have used only the translation.

All of these translations from the 1980's need to be brought up to date, but the task is a heavy burden. Even a relatively short book like this has taken many weeks. I took up the burden of editing this book a few times before, but put it down because I found it too difficult. Ideally, one would listen again to the original Burmese discourses and check the current edition against them, but that is beyond my ability, even if I had the recordings. I have to rely on my limited knowledge of Pāli and my familiarity with the Sayādaw's teaching to interpret the existing translation, and then render it in modern English.

The discourses were initially published in Burmese, and then later translated to English, and printed in Burma. I have done my best to adapt them for print by removing a few repetitions and filling in some elisions that are common in discourses, but unsuitable in books. I have added some footnotes to explain terms that, though understood by a Burmese Buddhist audience, would mean little to others.

In the footnotes, references are to the page numbers of the Pāli texts of the Pali Text Society which, in the translations, are given at the top of the page or sometimes in the body of the text. However, in the case of the Dhammapada or Apadāna, references are given to verse numbers.

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Bhikkhu Pesala  
September 2021

## Preface

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, Aggamahāpaṇḍita, since his arrival at the Sāsana Yeikthā Meditation Centre from his native place Seikkhun, Shwebo district, in November 1949, has been inducting numerous batches of meditators into the practice of insight meditation. He has also trained members of the Saṅgha as meditation teachers. While performing this noble work as a true disciple of the Buddha, the Sayādaw has given discourses on a regular basis. Never does he fail to rely authoritatively on the relevant teachings of the Buddha in all of his discourses. Every discourse so imparted is unique in itself and typically in tune with the present times.

The present discourse bearing the name of the Bhāra Sutta resembles a graceful flower in an ornamental string of Dhamma teachings. The usage and choice of words and the pattern of composition is classically modern. The literary style of the Mahāsi Sayādaw will, it is hoped, continue to remain distinctive for years to come.

This discourse, originally in Burmese, was translated into English by U Htin Fatt (Maung Htin), who is one of the prominent writers among the galaxy of journalists in Burma.

### About This Discourse

On one occasion, in response to a question of what attributes or qualities a monk should fully possess to deserve being regarded as an Expounder of the Dhamma (Dhammakathika), the Buddha's answer was that a monk deserves to be called an Expounder of the Dhamma if he could well convince others to become morally repugnant to his own self, the physical body, and give guidance to them to be able to get rid of sensual feelings or craving. According to the Buddha, a person who assiduously practises to free himself from sensual craving may be called a bhikkhu (a monk).

The Bhāra Sutta, like other discourses has its own objective lesson. The Buddha opened the subject of his discourse to an assembly of monks and lay followers while residing at the Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatti, mentioning the five aggregates of attachment as a heavy burden. He then reiterated the components of 'aggregates' which means a group. The Buddha referred to man as the sum total of five aggregates. In this discourse the Buddha elaborated on the Dhamma as briefly explained below.



All men and animals are composed of interrelated mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*). Mind and matter is constantly changing, not remaining the same even for two consecutive moments. Matter by itself is devoid of any sensation or feeling. Mind is so called because of its tendency to incline towards an object of sense. Matter, the physical body, is subject to perpetual change and is characterised by impermanence. The term 'mind' includes consciousness (*viññāṇa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and mental formations<sup>1</sup> (*saṅkhārā*).

Of the five aggregates, the first is form, shape, or matter — the physical body including the organs of sense. The second is feeling, which includes both mental and physical sensations, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The third is perception, which comprises all perception or recognition, whether sensual or mental. It is a response to sense stimuli, which may be described as "awareness with recognition." The fourth group, the mental formations signifies and includes all tendencies, mental and physical — the elements or factors in consciousness, all moral and immoral mental formations or characteristics that have been set in motion by past kamma. None of them is a self. They are incessantly changing — coming into being followed by dissolution. Thus all component things are impermanent. The fifth of the aggregates, consciousness, is just as perishable and fleeting as others. This is also in a state of flux. According to the Buddha, the aggregate of consciousness is without self or substantiality. This consciousness consists of six groups: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing.

All five aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, and operate within the law of cause and effect. There is no such

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<sup>1</sup> Originally translated in this book as "volitional activities," but for consistency with the Sayādaw's discourse on Dependent Origination "*saṅkhārā*" is translated as "mental formations." Volitional activities (*kamma*) that a being has done in previous lives have an effect in the present existence. Some are like a line drawn on water, which quickly fades, while others are like a line drawn on sand, leaving their effects for some time, and the strongest or most habitual volitional activities are like a line carved in rock, being deeply ingrained personality traits. In the present life, these latent tendencies or mental formations are the seeds from which spring fresh kammās of a similar nature, leading to further becoming (*bhava*), and hence future existences as effects of the volitional activities (*kamma*) of the present. Another way of explaining it is that "*saṅkhārā*" is the passive side of life or the present effects of past causes, while volitional activities or becoming (*bhava*) is the active side of life or the present causes of future effects (*ed.*)

thing as an ego. When such insight becomes mature and perfect, the one who achieves it transcends the mundane to reach a supramundane state.

The second part of this discourse on the Bhāra Sutta explains how the burden of the five aggregates is picked up, and how it should be thrown down or discarded.

The intangible force of kamma generated in the past, works through the processes of the physical universe to produce living beings. Birth is preceded by death, and death is preceded by birth. This succession of birth and death in connection with one individual constitutes what is known in Buddhism as the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*). In all this incessant cycle of rebirth and new existences, the formation of the five aggregates invariably takes place. The aggregates of attachment naturally brings forth passions of greed, anger, and delusion. To root out these passions and to eliminate craving, there is a way out. In other words, to get rid of the burden which causes all kinds of suffering, the Buddha has taught the Four Noble Truths and revealed to us the Noble Eightfold path, which leads to the end of suffering.

In essence, the six senses are the inevitable consequences of mind and matter. Existence brings all sorts of trouble, conflict, and suffering. The burden is very heavy indeed from the time of birth until death. To remove and be relieved of the burden thereby bringing about the cessation of the entire aggregate of suffering, it is most gratifying that the Dhamma shows us how to take up the practice of insight meditation, and how to achieve at least the stage of a Stream-winner, which would in due course lead to the highest stage of final liberation.

May all beings be happy.

Min Swe

Secretary

The Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization

October, 1980

# Part I

*Delivered on the full-moon day of Tazaungmon, 1328 B.E.*

*28th November 1966*

Today's talk is on the Bhāra Sutta from the Khandhavagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya. I will be brief and concise. I taught it a long time ago, but my audience might have forgotten it by now. However, if I repeat it, their memories may be revived. Those who have not heard it before, however, would be glad to hear it as a new discourse.

## Introduction to the Discourse

Four months after the *Mahāparinibbāna* or demise of the Buddha, the First Buddhist Council (Saṅgāyana) was convened by Venerable Mahākassapa and 500 monks at Vebhāra near Rājagaha. During the proceedings Mahākassapa asked where the Bhāra Sutta was delivered. Then Venerable Ānanda replied, saying, "*Evaṃ me sutam...* Thus have I heard," and recounted it in the following words: "At one time, the Blessed One was residing at the Jetavana Monastery, donated by Anāthapiṇḍika at Sāvatti."

Sāvatti was the capital city of the states of Kāsi and Kosala, ruled over by King Pasenadi of Kosala. At times the Buddha resided at the Bamboo Grove (Veḷuvana) monastery in Rājagaha, or on Vulture's Peak (Gijjhakūṭa) near the city. At other times he would be residing in Vesāli, Kosambī, Āḷavi, or at Kapilavattu. He changed his residence from time to time because he wished to teach the Dhamma to amenable audiences (*veneyya*). While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana Monastery, he drew the attention of the monks gathered before him saying, "O monks!"

## The Buddha's Daily Routine

Here, let me digress to tell you about the five periods in the daily routine of the Buddha.

1) The first period was between dawn and the end of the morning meal (*pure-bhatta-kicca*). At dawn his attendant offered him water and tooth wood. He brushed his teeth and washed his face then remained in solitude until the time for alms-round when he put on his robe and set out from the monastery. Usually he went out like any other ordinary monk — walking. At other times he used his supernormal powers. The Commentaries state that a gentle

breeze, acting like a broom, cleared the path that he took. Raindrops sprinkled from the sky settling the dust along the way. Clouds spread out like an umbrella to give him shade. Flowers fell about him as he walked, obstructions and potholes disappeared of their own accord,<sup>1</sup> and the road became smooth. Whenever he set his foot on the ground, lotus flowers sprang up to act as cushions. As he entered the city-gate six coloured rays: grey, yellow, red, white, pink, and iridescent issued forth from his body. Elephants, horses, birds, *etc.*, made mellifluous sounds while musical instruments unattended by players produced music.<sup>2</sup> Such were the mystic wonders.<sup>3</sup>

Some people had faith in the Buddha only when they saw him work mystic wonders as a supernormal being. This faith led them on to the path to liberation from suffering. It was for their benefit that the Buddha exercised supernormal powers (*pāṭihāriya*). Men are widely different in their nature. Some would appreciate the Dhamma best when it is expounded in a straightforward and ordinary way. Others, however, prefer teaching with a display of supernatural powers that produce strange and miraculous phenomena. I know of one lay woman who is fond of such things.

Once she was venerating an image of the Buddha saying, “May the Buddha come down and rest on my head fully attired in golden robes, equipped with a bowl studded with diamonds and a walking stick inlaid with many kinds of jewels.” On hearing this wish-making, her elder brother chided her. “You are too squeamish and punctilious. Must the Buddha work endless mystic wonders just to please you? If I were the Buddha I would have none of your supplications!”

Once a lady from a western country told me that she thought it redundant to venerate pagodas and images in memory of the Buddha with a paraphernalia of flowers and other artefacts made of paper, plastic, gold-leaf, and precious stones. “If the Buddha is with us today,

<sup>1</sup> A reference to this behaviour of the earth can be found in the [Debate of King Milinda](#) (*ed.*)

<sup>2</sup> This entire section on the five daily routines of the Buddha, and the supernormal events that occurred whenever the Buddha walked for alms are all apparently taken from the Commentary to the Brahmajāla Sutta, DA i 45 (*ed.*)

<sup>3</sup> Though the term “miracle” is often used in translations, and these events would indeed seem miraculous to an ordinary person, they should not be regarded as miraculous or supernatural. They may be the work of celestial beings, created by the mystic powers of the Buddha, or a result of his previous kamma, but they are the natural results of extraordinary causes. (*ed.*)

" she said, "he would refuse to accept such veneration." This shows the difference in the way of thinking of different people. I think it was because the Buddha wanted to oblige those who were drawn irresistibly to strange phenomena that he worked mystic wonders.

When citizens saw the mystic wonders they knew at once that the Buddha was on his way for alms to the streets in which they resided. Then they dressed themselves well and paid their homage to him with flowers and scents. Thereafter, they invited a number of monks accompanying him according to their capacity of alms-giving, and offered food.

Having eaten, the Buddha taught to suit the nature of the audience. Some of them gained faith in the Three Refuges, while others undertook to observe the five precepts, and some attained various stages of the Noble Path. After teaching, the Buddha returned to the monastery. He rested in the assembly hall for some time, waiting for the monks to return from their alms-round. When he was informed that all had returned and finished their meal, he retired to the perfumed chamber, having completed his morning routine.

2) The second period is his routine after the meal (*pacchā-bhatakkicca*). As he was about to enter the perfumed chamber, he washed his feet. Then, standing, he made this admonition:

"Monks! Be vigilant; and strive with diligence. It is hard to be born into the era when a Buddha appears in this world; it is hard to be born a human being; it is hard to get complete fulfilment; it is hard to gain monkhood; it is hard to get the opportunity of hearing the true Dhamma."

After the Buddha's appearance in this world his teachings still prevail, and so this is the era of the Buddha's dispensation (*sāsana*). This opportunity is hard to come by. Those who have obtained it should be vigilant to strive for the accomplishment of morality, concentration, and wisdom. The Buddha mentioned complete fulfilment (*samāpatti*), which needs clarification. Being able to live in a place suitable for practising the Dhamma that paves the way to the path and its fruition, being endowed with personal beauty, having strong faith in the Three Gems, being born during a peaceful and prosperous period, being affluent with nutritious food, being healthy and strong for the purposes

of practising the Dhamma — all these are the conditions that must be fulfilled to attain fulfilment.

After the admonition reminding the monks of the five kinds of rarities, the Buddha prescribed meditation exercises to suit the intellectual capabilities of those who asked for them. Having received these instructions, the monks retired to the forest and meditated under trees or in other suitable shelters. The Buddha retired to the perfumed chamber; and, if he wished, he lay down on his right side and took a rest.

When refreshed, he got up and surveyed the world with his knowledge of spiritual faculties (*indriyaparopariyatta-ñāṇa*), and his knowledge of latent inclinations (*āsayānusaya-ñāṇa*). These two knowledges are commonly known as “the Buddha’s eyes.” He surveyed the world to see who was ready for liberation from suffering. When such a trainable person was to come to him, he waited; but when he or she was in a far away place, he went there using his supernatural powers. These duties were done during the second period of the afternoon session.

In the third period, people from the streets where the Buddha previously walked for alms flocked to the monastery dressed in their best, carrying flowers and scents. In Rājagaha they came to the Bamboo Grove monastery; in Vesāli, to the Great Forest monastery (Mahāvāna); in Sāvatti, to the Eastern Gateway monastery (Pubbārāma). At the time of the Buddha’s delivery of the Bhāra Sutta, they came to the monastery in Prince Jeta’s grove (Jetavana) at Sāvatti. When they had thus congregated in large numbers, it was usual for the Buddha to enter the congregation hall and teach a suitable discourse. Then all the monks who were not sick made it a point to attend.

These monks took ordination with the aim of attaining Arahanthood, which annihilates all the suffering of the cycle of existence. That being so, they liked to listen with devotion and ardour to what the Buddha taught. The nuns also came. The audience, therefore, consisted of monks and nuns, and male and female lay persons. It was the Buddha’s practice to give precedence to the monks, so he always addressed them first.

In the present case when he was about to deliver the Bhāra Sutta, he addressed the monks, and the latter reverentially replied, “Venerable Sir!” The Buddha then continued to teach, after which the monks and laity of both sexes dispersed, after paying homage to the Teacher.

3) For his evening routine (*purima-yāma-kicca*), the Buddha took a bath if he so wished and then sat alone on the dais within the perfumed chamber. Monks would then ask him to explain certain knotty points in religious matters, or to prescribe further meditation exercises, or to teach. He spent the time complying with their requests, until about 10 p.m.

4) Then his midnight routine (*majjhima-yāma-kicca*) began. At night, *devas* and *brahmas* from tens of thousands of world systems (*cakkavāḷa*) approached the Buddha and asked him questions. The answers to these questions have been collated in the Sagāthāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya. This lasted a few hours past midnight, until about 2 a.m.

5) His routine in the last part of the night (*pacchima-yāma-kicca*) lasted for three hours. In the first hour, the Buddha walked up and down on the walking path to maintain his health. It was only during the second hour that he slept, and then only for about an hour. When he awoke in the third hour, he surveyed the world and extended his net of knowledge as he did during the afternoon to see if there were any who were ripe for liberation.

It will be seen that the Buddha had practically no time to spare for mundane things. He was always occupied with his religious duties. He might have delivered the Bhāra Sutta during the evening routine; but I am inclined to think that as it concerned all four kinds of audience, monks and laity of both sexes, he might have taught this discourse in the afternoon. It must also be remembered that, although the four kinds of audience were present, it was mainly directed to the monks, since the introduction began with the words. "O monks!"

"O monks! I will tell you about the burden, about the porter who carries the burden, about the act of transportation of the burden and about the laying down of the burden. Listen well and pay attention. I will speak of them now."

Thus did the Buddha enjoin the monks to pay attention to his discourse relating to the burden, the porter, the act of transportation and the laying down of the burden. The Buddha's admonition to pay attention is noteworthy. There is no benefit if one does not listen attentively. Only those who fix their minds on what is taught can gain the knowledge of the Noble Path and its fruition. In prefacing his discourse, his emphasis lay on how to throw down the burden much to one's relief and joy.

## What is the Burden?

When his disciples had pledged themselves to be attentive, the Buddha opened the subject with the following introduction: “What monks, is the burden? The five aggregates of attachment are the burden.”

In your travels you might have come across stevedores at ports or porters in railway stations, transporting heavy loads from place to place. Some loads are so heavy that cranes have to be employed. A familiar sight in Burma is a worker carrying sacks of rice. A strong man can keep it on his shoulders for quite a long time, but that is still just a matter of minutes. He cannot keep it for hours, not to say for days. If he were to keep it on his shoulders permanently, he might be crushed to death. What a relief when he throws it down! He feels relieved that the task is done. However, this is just an ordinary load that one can carry. What about the burden of the five aggregates of psycho-physical phenomena that we call a person? When we cling to these five aggregates, we have the aggregates of attachment. This is a great burden.

### The Burden is Heavy

What I would like to say is that this burden of the aggregates is far heavier than any other burden that working people carry from place to place daily. Every living being is occupied with keeping the body fit and well. It has to be fed daily to remain healthy. Some have to be mindful, not only of maintaining the health of their own bodies, but also the health of others, and this is not just for a while, but for the entire span of human life. This is said only in relation to the present existence. In fact, we are all carrying the burden through countless existences. We cannot remove it from our shoulders even for a while. What, then, are the heavy loads of the five aggregates of attachment? This is what the Buddha taught:

*“What, monks, is the burden? It is the five aggregates of attachment: the aggregate of attachment to the body; the aggregate of attachment to feelings, the aggregate of attachment to perceptions; the aggregate of attachment to mental formations, and the aggregate of attachment to consciousness. This, monks, is the burden.”*

I have lectured repeatedly on these five aggregates in this meditation centre because, in essence, there are only these five aggregates in all the phenomena of existence. I shall, therefore, repeat this discourse briefly.



## Aggregates, and Aggregates of Attachment

“*Khandha*” means a group or an aggregate. All phenomena — past, present, and future — are grouped into aggregates. This statement calls for further explanation. When a phenomenon arises, matter is involved. Matter existed in the past; it is still here at present; it will continue to exist in the future. It is within us, as well as without. It may be coarse or refined; it may be of inferior or superior quality; it may be proximate or remote. All such matter can be grouped into the aggregate of matter, that is, the assemblage of the material elements and properties that constitute what we call the body. When feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are similarly grouped or classified, they are respectively called the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of mental formations, and the aggregate of consciousness. All these together are the five aggregates. Here it may be argued that matter alone cannot be called an aggregate, since the term is a collective one for all five groups, but in fact, the components of the aggregates also may severally be termed aggregates. So matter is an aggregate, feeling is an aggregate, perception is an aggregate, mental formations are an aggregate, and consciousness is an aggregate. However, there is one phenomenon that cannot be grouped or classified in this way — it is *nibbāna*. It is unique. It has no past, no present, and no future. It is timeless.

“*Upādāna*” is attachment or grasping intensified by craving and wrong view. It therefore connotes a high degree of attachment. The aggregates of attachment (*upādānakkhandhā*) are so called because they form the objects of such attachment. At the time of the realisation of the path and its fruition, supramundane consciousness (*lokuttara citta*), is developed. It has eight states. These eight states of supramundane consciousness together with the concomitant mental states appertaining to the path and its fruition, are also known as aggregates, but they are not treated as the aggregates of attachment. In the five aggregates, the aggregate of matter concerns material phenomena while the remaining four are mental aggregates.

The aggregates of attachment encompasses all attachment to the five aggregates. In this discourse, where we are concerned with the discussion of the burden, we will deal only with the mundane, excluding the supramundane; so both the material and mental aggregates will be discussed. Note, however, that herein the aggregates refer to the five aggregates of attachment.

## The Four Attachments

Attachment is manifested in four ways:

1. attachment to sense objects (*kāmapādāna*),
2. attachment to wrong-views (*diṭṭhupādāna*),
3. attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbatupādāna*), and
4. attachment to the doctrine of self or ego (*attavādupādāna*).

### Attachment to Sense Objects

Pleasurable sensations arise when we come into contact with sense objects. Because of these sensations, a desire to enjoy them develops in us. Then we get attached to them. Our attachment may relate to sensations aroused within us, or sensations prompted from outside. When a man desires a woman, or vice versa, this is sexual desire. It is an example of strong attachment. We yearn for the pleasurable sensations that we have come into contact at present as well as those that we hope to contact in the future. We desire to have what is hard to obtain: and when we have what is not easily obtained, we cannot bear to part with it. This is attachment to sensual existence (*kāmabhava*). However, our desires do not stop there, they go beyond to the aggregates of mind and matter. As we cling to them an attachment to corporeal existence (*rūpabhava*) develops within us, and to formless existence (*arūpabhava*). They are also sensual attachment.

### Attachment to Wrong Views

Generally speaking we are attracted to ideologies. Hence it is not unusual for us to become attached, somehow or other, to this or that ideology, moderately or intensely. Here, we are concerned only with wrong ideologies or beliefs. There are wrong views about morality and the existence of a self or ego. I will leave aside these two for now, as they will be treated separately later. The belief that there is no kamma, action, whether wholesome or unwholesome, that there is no resultant of kamma, and that there is no hereafter fall into the category of attachment to wrong views.

### Attachment to Rites and Rituals

Attachment to religious practices that do not lead to the cessation of the cycle of rebirths and to the realisation of nibbāna is *silabbatupādāna*. *Silabbata* means performance of religious rites

inconsistent with the path of purification. It includes practices stemming from the belief that by behaving like cattle or dogs one can gain salvation from suffering: other similar beliefs relate to worshipping animals like cattle or dogs, or worshipping *devas*, *brahmas*, or similar powerful lords and masters with a view to liberation from human suffering. The belief that all sins will be expiated if one bathes in the Ganges, or sacrifices animals, are other examples of religious rites. In brief, all religious rites and practices where the Noble Eightfold path is absent cannot be regarded as wholesome deeds leading to the cessation of suffering.

### **Attachment to the Doctrine of Self**

There are many theories about the origin of life. Some relate to the belief that a piece of living matter resides in the body. One exists when that matter is living, but one's existence ceases the moment it dies. This way of thinking is annihilationism (*uccheda-dit̥ṭhi*), which means that existence terminates completely with death. Another ideology is eternalism (*sassata-dit̥ṭhi*), where the self or soul is presumed to be indestructible, and is, therefore, eternal since, at its death, it transfers to another body. In the final analysis the four attachments can be reduced to craving and wrong view. Sensual attachment belongs to craving while the remaining three attachments belong to wrong views. The former is based on sensual objects while the latter are based on wrong ideas.

### **How Attachment Arises**

Because of the sense-organs, attachment to sense objects arises. When the senses are sharp, they render the objects clearly manifest. When the eyes see an object distinctly, when the nose smells a fragrance, when the tongue finds a taste delicious, and when the body feels a soft touch, pleasurable sensations arise; and the attachment not only to our own body, but also to the bodies of others, develops. We are attracted to our own good features and to those of others. We are gratified with the performance of our limbs that causes bending, stretching, sitting, standing, *etc.* Because of this attachment to our own physical body, there arises in us the notion. "It is I; it is mine; this is my husband; this is my wife; this is my son, *etc.*" This is motivated by our attachment to matter or body, and it is known as sensual attachment.

As the senses come into contact with objects, sensations arise, to which we cling. All of these sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are presumed as emanating from the body, and the individual enjoying or not enjoying these sensations asserts, "I feel; I hear; I see." When he is doing fine, he says, "I am well." When he becomes sick, he says, "I am not well." When he feels uneasy or uncomfortable, he says, "I am suffering," or "I experience suffering." When he is in a sorry state of affairs, he says, "I am in difficulties; I am in danger; I am sad; I am disappointed." He thinks that in all such cases, "I" or "self" is involved. In other words, he thinks that all sensations he experiences are his, and that, therefore, they constitute "I" or "self." This is how attachment to feeling arises, and how sensations are construed as self.

Attachment to perception arises in much the same way. When a man perceives an object, he thinks that it is he who perceives it. So he declares, "I perceive it; I note it; I remember it; so I can recall it to my mind." This is how one gets attached to perception which becomes personified as "I" or "self."

Mental formations determine our physical and mental behaviour. Although all our actions are conditioned by volition, a person thinks that it is he who is doing things. So he says, "I sit; I stand; I think; I imagine; I am angry; I am attracted to it; I have no faith: I am foolish: I am wise; I have faith; I am compassionate." All these go to show that he takes all groups of mental state as his "self." This is how attachment to mental formations arises.

When a man sees an object he recognises it at once. "I know it," he says. Thus the notion "I" arises in him. He says. "I see it; I hear it; I taste it; I smell it; I touch it; I consider it." He is thus equating himself with his "soul" or "self." This is how attachment to consciousness, arises.

Clinging or attachment is *upādāna*; the aggregates of attachment are *upādānakkhandhā*. The notion, "It is I; it is mine," belongs to the aggregates of attachment. When a person visits a shop and sees items of clothing or footwear, a desire to wear them may arise. Then he imagines himself as wearing them. Just at that moment he thinks that he owns them. Craving has arisen in him. The moment that one feels pleasant at the thought that he has come into possession of the things he desires, one must recognise that craving is at work. Thus craving intensifies the sense of attachment.

The material aggregate is the entire physical body from head to toe. Attachment relates to any part of the body. You just pull somebody's hair, and he will protest at once saying, "Don't pull my hair," and he will protest that it is offensive to be pulled by the hair. It is because he regards it as himself. "The hair is mine. It represents me," so he thinks. All matter that constitutes his body is his. This is the attachment to materiality.

Those who have never had the experience of meditation on the nature of mind and matter, have the idea that this human body is a veritable living thing called self or ego. Even among those who have the experience of insight meditation, there are many who fail to distinguish mind from matter. They, therefore, regard that a living substance or soul resides in the body. This is attachment to self. They cannot get away from it. Even those who come to know the impersonality of mind and matter cannot completely detach themselves from this concept, although, it must be conceded, they have learnt that what is to be regarded as self is a personification of mind and matter. If a semblance of detachment can be detected in them, this detachment cannot be held as arising from personal conviction, but from traditional acceptance of the teaching. It is common knowledge, rather than insight, that reveals the truth about mind and matter.

If a meditator practises insight meditation, which reveals the true nature of the psycho-physical phenomena that arise and pass away, self can never assert itself. However, even then, if he or she fails to attain the Noble Path, it may reappear. The idea of self totally ceases only when one actually attains the path of a Stream-winner.

There is an assertion to the effect that if one wants to practise meditation, one must first get rid of the idea of self. I do not consider this to be feasible. When the notion of self is done away with, one becomes a Stream-winner. Therefore, the assertion amounts to saying that one can become a Stream-winner without practising insight meditation. In fact, detachment is achieved only through insight meditation. It has been said in the texts that purification of view is accomplished only when mind and matter are discerned in their true nature. Attachment to self is incompatible with the Dhamma. I hold that such incompatibility is not current among those who truly revere the law propounded by the Buddha. It is because of its absence among Buddhists that insight meditation can be put into practice.

In the Buddha's time people who had very strong views about the idea of self approached the teacher to hear what he had to say. As they listened to his discourse, they became completely detached from the view of self and realised the path and its fruition. This shows that they did not come to the Buddha abandoning their views of self beforehand. It was only while they were listening to the Dhamma that they saw the light of it and attained the path.

Believers who have acquired some knowledge about the fundamentals relating to mind and matter, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, should take up the practice of insight meditation. It involves noting mind and matter as it comes and goes at the six sense doors in accordance with instructions relating to the establishment of mindfulness. Note what the eyes see, note what the ears hear, note what the nose smells, note what the tongue tastes, note what the body touches, note what the mind thinks, then you will come to know all that is to be known in accordance with the degree of perfection you have acquired.

As a meditator practises mindfulness, concentration will become deeper and the mind will be purified. Then he or she will be able to distinguish the mind that knows from the matter that is known. Then he or she will realise the absence of anything called a self or ego. Repeated noting will lead the meditator on to the knowledge of the causes and effects of mind and matter.

Finally, the idea of self will be utterly destroyed. Before the practice of mindfulness he or she might have wondered if self existed in the past, if it exists at the present, or if it will exist in the future. After the practice of insight meditation, all such doubts will be resolved as the true nature of phenomena is understood. As the meditator continues noting, he or she will find that the sense-objects together with the consciousness that knows them disappear. They are all impermanent. They just arise and pass away of their own accord. What is not permanent is not satisfactory. Nothing is substantial. Then, what is there to cling to as "I" or "mine?" All phenomena are in a state of flux, now arising, now passing away. Contemplating on these matters, one can, with one's own conviction, do away with self.

Some may think that merely noting the arising and passing away of mind and matter is not enough. They would prefer to speculate what mind or matter are. Such speculations are not based on knowledge

acquired through practice, but on hearsay or book knowledge. Such knowledge is perceptual and not intuitive. Here, we are not concerned with mere perception, but with insight, which can only be gained through practice. When you watch people going through a gate, you will notice for yourself their goings and comings, you do not need to depend on others to know that they are going in and out of the gate. Similarly, if you yourself watch and note the six sense-doors, the eye door, the ear-door, *etc.*, you will actually see how mind and matter arise and pass away, without resorting to the process of thinking.

Take another example. Place a mirror at the roadside. All pedestrians and vehicles will be reflected in the mirror in their true nature. If you watch and note them you will see them as they really are. In the same way if you watch and note with mindfulness all that appear at the six sense doors, you will notice the sense-objects (which have no consciousness) arising while the mind (the subject that possesses consciousness) is taking cognizance of such arising. Then both the objects and the subjects pass away. Then this process is renewed. Then the meditator will come to realise that this is the phenomenon of mind and matter arising and passing away. Mind and matter are, after all, not everlasting. They are not permanent. They are suffering. They are not-self.

When you note the working of mind and matter you will come to know their true nature. Having known their true nature what remains to be thought of or considered? So it is not in the nature of things to merely think about mind and matter without actually noting how they arise and pass away. Having come face to face with them are you going to argue about their existence? Does it make sense if one merely recites, "arising," "passing away," without noting the actual process. Knowledge acquired by thinking or reciting is mere second-hand knowledge like that gained from books.

The essence of insight meditation, therefore, is to note all phenomena as they occur. If you are ruminating about them, concentration will not be established. Without concentration you cannot get purification of mind. As you think and consider about the philosophy of mind and matter, if you arrive at the truth, it is well and good: but when you are misled by wrong views you will be lost. For instance, you might have contemplated on impermanence as permanence or on not-self as self, then self-view will arise.

I advise beginners in insight meditation to note things as they occur. When one walks, one lifts the feet, extends them forward, and drops them down. Note each process of lifting, extending, and dropping of the feet. At first, the beginner may not be able to differentiate one process from another, but later when concentration develops he or she will be able to note not only each process, but also the mind that knows it. When lifting the feet, the feet are the objects noted. As concentration and attentiveness get stronger, one will clearly notice that the objects are one thing while the mind that takes note of them, is another. The objects constitute matter, while mind is the subject. In the same way, when one bends the legs, one will come to realise that “bending” is one phenomenon and “knowing” (that the legs bend) is another. In this way, mind can be clearly distinguished from matter. In every movement that one makes one will be able to recognise the phenomenon of “moving” as distinct from that of “knowing.” The whole idea of existence, therefore, depends on mind that knows and matter that is known.

There is no being, no individual, no living substance. Mind and matter come into being for a while and disappear, only to reappear the next moment. This realisation is analytical knowledge of body and mind (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*). It may be asked whether gaining this knowledge alone can contribute to the abandonment of self. I have spoken about it earlier. Even when a meditator feels convinced of the law of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, the sense of attachment to self may arise if he or she interrupts the meditation practice before attaining the Noble Path. Detachment occurs only when the successive stages of insight are duly established and the knowledge of the Noble Path bears fruition.

Earlier I spoke about attachment based on craving and wrong view relating to the five aggregates. We cling to the material object that we see because the sight is pleasing, goading us to develop attachment to self. This is attachment to matter. In the same way we cling to feeling, perception, mental formations, and to consciousness. Apply these principles of attachment to all the sense-doors where all phenomena occur, and we will arrive at the conclusion that all mind and matter constitute the aggregates of attachment, which are a heavy burden.



## **How Heavy is the Burden?**

Consider carefully, and you will realise just how heavy the burden is. When a foetus is conceived in the womb, the five aggregates have to be cared for. The mother has to give all necessary protection so that it may develop into a healthy baby. She has to be careful in her daily pursuits, in her diet, in her sleep, *etc.* If the mother happens to be a Buddhist, she will perform meritorious deeds on behalf of the child in her womb.

When the baby is finally born, it cannot take care of itself. It is looked after by its mother and others. It has to be fed with milk. It has to be bathed, cleansed, and clothed. It has to be carried from place to place. It usually takes at two or three people to look after and bring up this tiny burden of the five aggregates. Incidentally, let me tell you how much children owe to their parents and relatives for the care with which they are brought up and nurtured. Yet some say that one comes into being because of the sexual indulgence of the parents. What evil thoughts! The true cause of the burden of existence is not the parents, but one's own kamma. It is kamma fanned by the flames of mental defilements, that this burden of five aggregates appears in this world of living beings. The parents are only an auxiliary cause. If there were no human parents, those who have bad kamma and defilements would only find their way to the four lower realms.

When a person comes of age he or she has to look after himself or herself. He or she has to eat two or three times a day. If he or she wants good food he or she will have to make special efforts to get it. He or she will have to keep the body clean, by regular bathing, personal hygiene, and clothing. To keep fit one will have to do daily exercises — sitting, standing, bending, stretching, walking, *etc.* Everything has to be done by oneself. When one feels hot, one cools oneself, and when one feels cold one warms oneself up. One has to be careful to maintain health and well-being. When one takes a walk one has to take care that one does not stumble. When one travels one has to take precautions that one meets no danger. In spite of all these precautions, one may fall sick, then one will have to take medical treatment. It is a great burden to tend to the welfare of the five aggregates.

The greatest burden for a living being is to fend for oneself. In the case of human beings, some have to work for a living starting from the age of twelve or thirteen, and for that purpose they have to be educated. Some can get only an elementary schooling and so they can

get employment only as labourers. Those who can get a good education are employed in better positions; but then they have to work day in and day out without a break. Those who were born into this world with past good kamma do not feel the burden. Individuals born with the best kamma are fed and clothed since childhood by parents who give them the best education as they grew up. Even on reaching adulthood the parents continue to give full support to raise them to a position where they can fulfil their desires and needs. Such fortunate individuals may not realise how heavy the burden of life is.

Those whose past kamma is not good never know affluence. As children they know only hunger, not being able to eat what they would like, or to dress how they would like to dress. When they have grown up, they are just trying to keep a roof over their heads. Some do not even have their daily quota of rice ready for the table. Some have to get up early to pound rice for cooking. Some do not even have rice, and so have to borrow some from their neighbours.

If you want to know more about this life, go to poor areas and make enquiries yourself. Burma is a land of plenty; and so conditions here are not as bad as in those countries where rice is not produced. Grains are stored for distribution in times of need. For so long as men are civilized, problems are few, but in the animal world, finding food is a great problem. For herbivores, as grass and vegetables are still available abundantly, there is hardly any difficulty, but in places where water is scarce and vegetation sparse, animals find it a great burden in their search for food. For carnivores, the picture is different. They prey on weaker animals, which they kill for food. Where the law of the jungle prevails, life is miserable. It is unwholesome for the strong to be always thinking of killing others. While an animal is trying to kill others, it may itself be killed. When it dies, it dies with an unwholesome mind obsessed with anger, in which case it will be reborn in another realm of misery. As it dies with unpleasant thoughts of anger and enmity, how can it aspire to a superior plane of existence? Invariably it will be dragged down into an inferior one. The Buddha, therefore, says that once a being happens to be born into the animal world, it will be difficult for it to get reborn into the human world. All these facts show the heavy burden borne by the aggregates in the quest for food. We have seen that to eke out a living is a heavy burden. There are good people who practise right livelihood. They take up agriculture or trading, or

get into the business of management or administration, which are generally regarded as innocent occupations doing no harm to others. Such people may not encounter any severe suffering in their cycle of rebirths, and the burden of existence may not appear to be too heavy. One should, however, be apprehensive of living by dishonest and unfair means. Indolent opportunists who try to become rich as quickly as possible have no qualms about acquiring other people's property by foul means. For their own selfish ends they would not mind taking life, stealing, or cheating. When honest folks have to work with the sweat of their brow to earn five or ten kyats a day, money-grabbers make easy money by cheating or similar means to earn hundreds and thousands of kyats in a day. They don't hesitate to commit murder, robbery, theft, fraud, or extortion to make a fortune. This is earning one's livelihood by criminal means. However, crime does not pay, not only here and now, but also hereafter. Evil deeds produce evil results, as can be seen from the story of hungry ghosts as related by Moggallāna.

### **Hungry Ghost of Bones**

At the time of the Buddha, Venerable Moggallāna and Venerable Lakkhaṇa were residing together at Vultures' Peak, north of the City of Rājagaha. One day the two came out together for a round of alms in the city. On the way, Venerable Moggallāna, the elder monk, saw through his supernatural vision a hungry ghost made up of only bones. The creature was crying in great pain as crows, kites, and vultures pecked for food the flesh and viscera embedded in the skeletal cage of its body. Then it occurred to him that all karmas and defilements had become extinct as far as he was concerned and that, therefore, there would be no occasion for him in the future to be like that hungry ghost. This thought filled him with joyful satisfaction, and so he smiled. Arahants never laugh aloud; they usually do not smile unless there is a significant reason. Venerable Lakkhaṇa saw this and asked the elder monk why he smiled. The latter told him that he should ask about it when they were in the presence of the Buddha.

After the alms-round, the two monks went to the monastery where the Buddha was residing. Then the younger monk asked the elder why he smiled. Venerable Moggallāna replied: "While we were coming down from the hill, I saw a hungry ghost running across the sky pursued by crows, kites, and vultures who pecked

for food the flesh and viscera embedded in the skeletal frame of his body. He was crying in great pain. When I saw this I thought to myself how could such a creature be possible?"

On hearing this, the Buddha intervened to explain the existence of the hungry ghost. "O Monks! My disciples have eyes of wisdom. Truly they have seen such creatures, and let this fact stand testimony to their existence. I saw them myself when I gained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree a long time ago, but I never told you before about this for there might be unbelievers who doubted the truth. Their doubts would have produced unwholesome effects for themselves, so I refrained from saying anything about it. In fact, the hungry ghost that Moggallāna saw was, in one of his previous existences, a butcher. Because of this unwholesome kamma, he was consigned to hell for millions of years. The resultant of his bad kamma still remains to punish him. So in the present existence he has become a hungry ghost with a body of bones."

The Buddha mentioned eyes of wisdom. From this it may be inferred that ordinary beings are not able to see such creatures. They can be seen only by those with higher knowledge (*abhiññā*). Modern science has no proof of their existence, but lack of scientific proof is not a determinative factor for the conclusion that they do not exist.

The fact that the Buddha refrained from mentioning anything about the hungry ghost he had seen, lest it would lead the doubters to unwholesome thoughts is worthy of note. Such thoughts could result in unwholesome reactions. So only when Venerable Moggallāna was in a position to offer supporting evidence to the truth of the existence of hungry ghosts, he let it be known to his disciples. Criticism and arguments arising from lack of material evidence would create doubts that would generate only unwholesome kamma, which paves the way to lower realms.

What I would like to emphasize with regard to this story is that the hungry ghost, as a butcher, had killed many cattle just for his own sustenance that enabled him to feed and clothe his body, the five aggregates. However, he had to pay for it with suffering in hell that lasted millions of years. Even when he was released from that suffering, he was tortured by crows, kites, and vultures as his residual evil kamma was still working its effects on him. How heavy was the burden of his five aggregates can only be imagined.

## Hungry Ghost of Flesh

On another occasion, Venerable Moggallāna met a hungry ghost whose body was all flesh. He was also tortured by crows, kites, and vultures pecking his body for food. He ran crying in great pain. Venerable Lakkhaṇa again asked the elder monk about this in the presence of the Buddha who again explained to him regarding the existence of the world of hungry ghosts in much the same way as he did on the previous occasion. This fleshy hungry ghost, said the Blessed One, was also a butcher at Rājagaha in one of his previous existences. He was consigned to hell for millions of years, and on being released from there he became a hungry ghost tortured by crows, kites, and vultures owing to the residual bad kamma.

Here it may be asked why were the two hungry ghosts different, one being bony and the other fleshy. The evil committed by them was the same, but their destinies became quite different, and so why the difference? When decess-consciousness occurs, a sign (*kamma nimitta*) associated with the good or bad actions done in one's life presents itself at the mind-door of the dying person. (A lay person may, perhaps, explain this phenomenon as an omen seen by the dying man.) The sign seen by the first butcher at death was not the same as that seen by the second. Their evil actions were similar, but the signs were different. Perhaps the former saw bones, as it was his practice to carve out bones from meat. These bones might have appeared as a *kamma nimitta* at his mind-door as he lay dying. So when he was reborn as a hungry ghost, he was all bones. In the case of the latter it might have been his practice to collect only boneless meat, which he saw as a symbol on his death bed. So he was reborn as a fleshy hungry ghost.

## Many Kinds of Hungry Ghosts

Then Venerable Moggallāna saw other kinds of hungry ghosts on different occasions. There was the mince-meat hungry ghost, who, the Buddha said, had been a falconer in one of his previous existences. Then there was the skinless and bloody hungry ghost who was a butcher of goats and sheep. Then there was the hairy hungry ghost whose hairs were like daggers that flew about his body and lashed him. The ways of kamma are strange. Here these daggers cannot be regarded as the handiwork of ogres. They were what the bad kamma created. The crows, kites, and vultures that tortured the hungry ghosts

were also the results of bad kamma. Perhaps it may be conjectured that the daggers and the tormenting birds were just phantoms that arise of their own accord just to punish the evil-doers.

Venerable Moggallāna also saw a hungry ghost with hairs like lances sticking out of the body. They flew up into the air and rained down on it. He was a hunter in one of his previous existences. There was also a hungry ghost with hairs like arrows growing on the body. In one of his previous existences he tortured convicted persons with arrows.

He also met a hungry ghost suffering from a hydrocele which had developed into the size of a water-pot. In one of his previous existences he was a cunning judge who used to take bribes. He could not cover up his shame, sitting on his own heavy organ, carrying it about as he ran for life from the pestering crows, kites, and vultures.

There was also one female hungry ghost who, in one of her previous lives, had had illicit sex. Her body was unprotected by skin. Another female hungry ghost was very ugly. She was formerly a propagandist of wrong views. There were also men and women hungry ghosts, who, in their previous lives were monks and nuns who did not perform their religious duties properly. Their robes were on fire, and their monasteries were also on fire.

All these beings were consigned to the world of hungry ghosts because while they were humans they acted improperly just for the sake of their five aggregates of mind and matter. It is for this reason that we say that the burden of this body is very heavy. There are many similar hungry ghost stories, but I shall confine myself with only the last one about some female hungry ghosts, who, in the past existences, had earned their living by foul means.

### **Four Female Hungry Ghosts**

At the time of the Buddha there were four women in Rājagaha who traded in rice, oil, butter, honey, *etc.*, using false weights and measures. When they died they become hungry ghosts, near the moat outside the city, while their husbands who survived them remarried, rolling in the wealth left by them. One night the four met together and mourned over their present lot recalling their past. Their wailings were heard by the citizenry who regarded the unpleasant sounds with forebodings. To ward off evil they offered alms to the Buddha and his disciples and told them of the cause of their fear. The Teacher

comforted them and said, "Devotees! No danger will befall you for the ominous sounds you hear. They were caused by the cries of the four female hungry ghosts in distress as a result of their previous evil deeds. They bemoaned their lot saying that in their past existences as human beings they had amassed wealth by foul means and that when they died their ill-gotten gains were appropriated by others besides themselves. Now they are suffering in this world of hungry ghosts."

The four women in their previous existence amassed wealth dishonestly to serve their burdensome aggregates. When they died they failed to realise their aim of enjoying life. Heavy, indeed, is the burden of the aggregates.

## **Carrying the Heavy Burden**

This body is a heavy burden. Serving it means carrying the heavy burden. When we feed and clothe it we are carrying the burden. That also means that we are the servants of the aggregate of matter. Having fed and clothed the body we must also see to it that it is well and happy both physically and psychologically. This is serving the aggregate of feeling. Again we must see that this body experiences pleasant sights and sounds, thus we are serving the aggregate of consciousness. These three burdens are obvious. The aggregate of matter says: "Feed me well. Give me what I like to eat; if not, I shall make myself ill or weak. Or, worse still, I will die!" So we have to try to satisfy it.

Then the aggregate of feeling says: "Give me pleasant sensations; if not, I shall make myself painful or sad. Or, worse still, I shall die!" Then we shall have to pursue pleasurable sensations to serve its needs.

Then the aggregate of consciousness says: "Give me beautiful sights. Give me melodious sounds. I want pleasant sense-objects. Find them for me; if not, I shall make myself unhappy and frightful. Eventually I shall make myself die!" Then we shall have to do its bidding. It is as if all these three aggregates are perpetually threatening us. So we cannot help but comply with their demands; and this compliance is a great burden on us.

The aggregate of mental formations is another burden. Life demands that we satisfy our daily needs and desires and for that satisfaction we have to be active. We must be working all the time. This cycle of human activities gets encouragement from our volition prompted by desire. These activities make threatening demands

on us daily, indicating that, if they are not met, trouble or death would ensue. When human desires remain unfulfilled people resort to crime. How heavy is the burden of the mental formations that rests upon us! It is because we cannot carry this load well that we get demoralized, and then commit misdeeds that bring shame in their wake. Criminal offences are committed mostly because people are not able to carry the burden of mental formations skilfully.

When criminals die they may be consigned to hell or they may be reborn as hungry ghosts or animals. Even when they are reborn as human beings, their evil actions will follow them and punish them. They may be short-lived; they may be oppressed by chronic diseases; they may face poverty and starvation; they may be friendless; they may live in dangerous surroundings.

The aggregate of perception is also a great burden; because it is with perception that you train your faculties like memory to retain knowledge and wisdom, which can discern good from bad and reject unwholesome mental states produced by unpleasant sense-objects. If the demands of the mind for pleasant sense-objects are not met, it will pick up only evil which does nobody any good. Regrets and anxieties arise because we cannot shoulder the burden well.

For all these reasons the Buddha said that the five aggregates are a heavy burden. We carry the burden not just for a minute, an hour, a day, or a year; not only for one life, one world cycle, or one aeon. We carry the burden from the beginning of existence, which is infinite. It has no beginning, and there is no way of knowing when it will end. Its end can be reached only with the extermination of defilements, as we get to the stage of the Arahantship. Even Arahants have to tolerate this burden before they attain *parinibbāna*. The Arahants, therefore, used to contemplate thus: "For how much longer will I carry this burden of the five aggregates, which gives rise to suffering?" — *Kīva ciraṃ nu kho ayaṃ dukkhabhāro vahitabbo'ti*. (*Vism Mahāṭīka*)

Even an Arahant has to tend to the well-being of his body. To feed it he has to go round for alms. He has to take a bath to cleanse it. He has to excrete for its inner cleanliness. He has to take care of its health by daily adopting the four postures, of walking, sitting, standing, and lying down. He has to sleep regularly for its recuperation. Such are the loads that weigh him down.



### **Delight Make the Burden Seem Lighter**

Ordinary people are obsessed with craving, so they do not consider the five aggregates as burdensome. To them the burden is light. If we say it is heavy they might consider that we are negative, because they think that the aggregates gives them enjoyment. There are pleasant sights to see, mellifluous sounds to hear, delicious food to taste, fragrant perfumes to smell, and pleasurable sensations to feel. There are also good things to know. Under the influence of craving, life is not considered blameworthy. Being delighted with the agreeable sense-objects, one feels that one's burden is light.

A man loves his wife very much. Neighbours may notice certain faults in her, but the husband is blind to them. As far as he knows, she has always been sweet to him, so her behaviour is beyond reproach. He does not believe what others say about her faults. In the same way one who is attached to the aggregates is unable to accept that they are burdensome.

### **Realising the Heaviness of the Burden**

Only when a man gets old and he is unable to move about as he would like, unable to relish his food as much as he would like, unable to sleep as much as he needs, and unable to satisfy his own desires, he becomes convinced that the burden of aggregates is heavy. When he falls sick, his conviction grows, and when he and his companions encounter all sorts of trials and tribulations, his realisation of the heavy burden becomes complete.

An Arahant has eliminated desire, so it is no longer necessary for him to contemplate on the burden. Knowledge about it occurs to him naturally. Let me revert to the story of the man very much in love with his wife. At first he thought that his wife was blameless. Then he discovered her infidelity and her plot against his life. When he realised the true situation, he need not be warned by others of the dangers that would befall him. In much the same way, an Arahant needs no warning about the heaviness of the burden he is carrying. He has only to think about how long he will have to carry it.

The load that a porter carries is no doubt very heavy, but he carries it only for a while. As soon as he feels that it will break his back, he throws it down and gets relief, but the burden of the aggregates rides on our back throughout our lives, and throughout

the cycle of existence. It can be discarded only when we attain Arahantship having exterminated all defilements, and even then only after reaching nibbāna. The Buddha, therefore, said that the heaviest burden is the burden of the five aggregates of attachment.

## Who Carries the Burden?

*“Katamo ca bhikkhave bhārahāro? Puggalotissa vacaniyaṃ. Yvāyaṃ āyasmā evaṃ nāmo evaṃ gotto; ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, bhārahāro.”*

“O monks! Who is carrying the burden? The one who goes by the name of Tissa, *etc.*, or who belongs to this or that clan. This, monks, is called the carrier of the burden.”

It means that the porter is an individual, assuming the name of Tissa or Datta, being a descendent of the Kaṇhāyana or Vacchāyana clan. To us Burmese he will be either Maung Phyu or Ma Phyu, or Maung Sein or Ma Sein. Names like Mahākassapa, Kaccāyana and Koṇḍañña are family names. Burmese family names are rare. In the text “*Āyasmā*” is used, which usually refers to monks, but the Buddha meant all beings, including laymen and even hungry ghosts, for they are all carrying the burden of the aggregates. In ordinary parlance, all individuals are carrying the burden.

As it has been postulated that the five aggregates are the burden and that the individual is the porter, the question arises whether or not they are distinct from the individual. Those who believe in the self or soul infer that as the Buddha recognises an individual (*puggala*), a being (*satta*), and a self (*atta*), then the individual is one and the aggregates are another. This inference merely reveals the nature of their attachment to a self.

The Buddha’s teaching about not-self (*anatta*), is as clear as day. If the Buddha’s philosophy is one of self, his teaching will not be different from those that were current before his time, in which case there would be no necessity for Buddhism to arise. Outside the Buddha’s teaching there was the belief that the five aggregates constitute self. Another belief, however, asserts that the five aggregates are not self, but that the self exists as a material separate entity. Buddhism denies the existence of self, irrespective of whether it is separate from the five aggregates or not. However, in

accordance with common custom and usage, the Buddha used the terms “individual” or “being.”

There were also occasions when he used the grammatical connotations of myself and others to distinguish one from the other. For instance, in the saying, *“Attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā* — Oneself is one’s own refuge, what other refuge could there be?” — *‘atta’* does not mean the philosophical concept of self, but is simply the pronominal “I.” There is another instance of the use of *‘atta’* as a personal pronoun in such a saying as *“Attānameva paṭhamam, patirūpe nivesaye* — Let him first establish himself in what is right.” There are also uses such as *“atta saraṇa* — to take refuge in oneself,” and *“anaññā saraṇa* — take refuge in none other than oneself,” where “self” and “others” are used as pronouns.

According to the Buddha there are four kinds of individuals: the man who act for his own benefit and not for another’s, the man who acts both for his own and another’s benefit, the man who acts neither for his own nor for another’s benefit and the man who acts not for his own, but for another’s benefit, employing the words *“attahita”* and *“parahita.”* Here too, *“atta”* refers not to the philosophical “self” but just the pronominal “self.”

Misconceptions derive from the grammatical connotations, and hence wrong views arise. This is shown in the Kathāvattu and in the Anurādha Sutta in the Khandhavagga Saṃyutta.

“Anurādha! What do you think: is matter a being?”

“Matter is not a being, venerable sir.”

“Is feeling a being? Is perception a being? Is consciousness a being?”

“No, venerable sir. They are not beings.”

This catechism shows that there is none whom we can call an individual or a being, whether in relation to his five aggregates or not. In that discourse, the Buddha declared that his teachings were concerned with suffering and the liberation from suffering caused by the five aggregates, and that he did not teach the eternal existence of an individual, being, or self.

### Sister Vajirā Replies to Māra

Māra asked: “Who creates beings? Where is the Creator? Where does the creature arise? Where does he vanish?”

Vajirā Therī, the female Arahant, replied as follows:

“What, Māra, do you think, is a being? What you think is wrong view, is it not? What is generally thought a being is just a heap of aggregates in a state of flux otherwise called mental formations. You cannot find the being in the mental formations. I shall give you an example. When the wheels, axles, and other parts are assembled, the assemblage becomes known by the word ‘chariot.’ In the same way when the five constituents of matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are grouped together, the group comes to be called a being. Indeed, there is no being, but suffering comes into being, establishes itself, and passes away. Nothing but suffering exists; nothing but suffering passes away.”

When we use the expression that someone comes into being, the someone referred to is not the individual, but the suffering inherent in the five aggregates. What has been established is not an individual, but a heap of suffering. In the same way, what has passed away is also a heap of suffering that is inherent in the aggregates. So when, in this Bhāra Sutta, it is said that the porter who carries the burden is the individual, the statement merely conforms to common usage. By the term ‘individual’ is meant the five aggregates, but it does not mean to say that there is an individual beyond the five aggregates.

When an object is given a name it is just a conventional truth (*paññatta*). ‘Individual’ is used just for identification purposes, it is just a name. To make things understood we have to fall back upon the use of concepts. If we say that the burden of aggregates is being borne by the aggregates, it would be too abstract, and few would understand the meaning.

### Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth

There are two methods of instruction in the Buddha’s teachings, namely, the ultimate way of teaching (*paramattha desanā*), and the conventional way of teaching (*paññatta desanā*), the former being concerned with abstract knowledge while the latter is concerned with ordinary or conventional knowledge, appealing to perceptions by which objects are known by their names. When we discuss about impermanence, suffering, primary material qualities, truths, establishment of mindfulness, and sense-faculties, we are concerned with abstract subjects. When we talk about men, women, *devas*, *brahmas*, etc., we are concerned with everyday subjects that

one mentions by name. There are people who can see the light of the Dhamma by the conventional method of instruction as well as those who get enlightened by the method of instruction in ultimate realities. A professor who knows many languages explains things to his English pupils in English, to Indian pupils in Hindi and to Burmese pupils in Burmese. The Buddha also taught employing either of the above two methods to suit his audience.

There are eight reasons why the Buddha used names in common usage and taught in the conventional way: 1) to arouse shame and fear of wrong doing, which act as deterrents, 2) to show that individuals have only kamma as their possessions, 3) to describe the outstanding deeds of individuals, 4) to explain the immediate and irredeemable nature of heavy kamma, 5) to encourage the exercise of goodwill towards all beings, 6) to reveal the nature of the supernormal faculty of remembering the past lives of oneself and others (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), 7) to explain purity of gifts and 8) to abide by current speech.

1) If we say that the aggregates are ashamed or afraid, the meaning may not be understood, but if we say that the girl was ashamed or afraid, everyone will understand what the statement means. Therefore when the Buddha wanted to emphasise the development of a sense of shame or fear as deterrents to evil deeds, he used the common mode of expression.

2) If we say that the aggregates have only their own kamma as their possession, the meaning may be ambiguous, but if we say that individuals commit deeds with wholesome or unwholesome intentions, and that therefore, these mental formations are their own possession, the individual nature of their kamma can be understood. When the Buddha expounded kamma he used names as employed in current speech.

3) If we say that the aggregates built houses or donated monasteries, the meaning will not be clear. So when we speak about Anāthapiṇḍika we say that he donated the Jetavana monastery, mentioning him by name. Then the meaning will be clearly understood. Hence the use of individual names.

4) When we say that the aggregates kill their parents, no one will be able to understand what it means, but everyone will understand if we say that the son killed his mother, or that Ajātasattu

killed his father, Bimbisāra. Evil kammās at once seize matricides and patricides the moment that they die, and this effect of kamma is said to be irredeemable. It is the heaviest type of evil kamma (*anantariya*) and bears fruit without fail in the next existence. In an explanation of this kind, the Buddha used common language.

Ajātasattu was seized by heavy kamma because he killed his father. So although he had had the opportunity to hear the Buddha teach, he failed to get illumined in the Dhamma. Killing his father acted as an impediment to the realisation of the path, and so is regarded as an obstruction (*maggantarāya*). After his death he went straight to the Lohakumbhī hell, losing the opportunity to be reborn in heaven. Therefore, it is also regarded as an impediment to gaining the celestial realms (*saggantarāya*).

5) If we say that aggregates send their good wishes to other aggregates for their long life and happiness one may not understand what it means. So we say that monks and laymen wish other monks and laymen happiness and liberation from human suffering. The Buddha taught his disciples about the practice of the Divine Abidings (*Brahmavihāra*)—the exercise of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity. Cultivation of these noble virtues is known as *Brahmavihāra*. When the Buddha wanted to expound this doctrine he used the conventional way of teaching. Here, those who do not know the Buddha's reasons in teaching the Dhamma imagine that the ultimate teaching is better and therefore, send their good wishes not to the individual, but to the aggregates. It must be remembered that in practising the Divine Abidings, not only the generic term, all beings, is used, but specific terms such as "all men," or "all women." In sending loving-kindness to others one has to direct the mind to the recipients as individuals, and not to mind and matter. Mind and matter being abstractions, they would seem like bricks and stones; and if so, what benefit is there in sending one's kind thoughts to inanimate objects? It is, therefore, the usual practice that when practising the Divine Abidings, you must recognise the individuality of those on whom your mind dwells.

6) If we say that our aggregates can remember their past, no one will be able to understand what that means. So we say the Buddha remembered this, or an Arahant remembered that. Therefore, when the Buddha wanted to say something about the

recollection of past events using his supernormal powers he used the conventional way of teaching.

7) If we say that we make offerings to the aggregates, it will be ambiguous. One set of aggregates gives food to another set of aggregates, or gives robes to another set of aggregates. How can aggregates give and receive? Which group of aggregates performs the meritorious deed of giving, and which group of aggregates makes demerits? Which group is wholesome and which unwholesome? If one uses such abstractions, confusion would surely arise. The Buddha, therefore, referred to the giver and the recipient as individuals.

### **The Purity of Gifts**

Here, let me tell you about the purity of gifts. There are four kinds of such purity, as follows:

1. When a person practising morality gives alms to one not practising it, the giver earns merit. The gift is pure.

2. When a person not practising morality gives alms to one practises it, the gift remains pure from the point of view of the recipient. The giver, therefore, earns merit all the same; and the merit is greater.

3. When both the giver and the recipient of the gift are immoral, the gift is impure; and the act of giving is of no avail. Even when the giver shares his merits to the hungry ghosts, the latter cannot receive them and will not be released from the world of hungry ghosts.

4. When both the giver and the recipient of gifts are pure in morality, the gifts will also be pure, and merits accruing from such giving will earn the highest merit.

Gifts can be further classified into those given to individuals and those given to the Saṅgha.

### **Gifts to Individuals**

There are fourteen grades of gifts according to the fourteen kinds of individuals to whom gifts can be made. They are gifts to:

1. An Omniscient Buddha
2. A Pacceka Buddha (a Solitary or non-teaching Buddha)
3. An Arahant
4. One who is striving for Arahantship
5. A Non-returner
6. One who is striving for Non-returning

7. A Once-returner
8. One who is striving for Once-returning
9. A Stream-Winner
10. One who is striving for Stream-winning (Here, all those embracing Buddhism are to be regarded as striving for Stream-winning. So, in this category are included initiates who have just taken refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, to those who are actively treading the Noble Path. (This is what the Commentaries say).
11. One who is endowed with supernormal powers, outside the scope of the Buddha's teachings.
12. One who is endowed with morality, outside the scope of the Buddha's teachings.
13. One who has no morality.
14. An animal.

### **Merits Accruing from Gifts to Individuals**

Gifts to animals can accrue merits a hundredfold.

Gifts to individuals not practising morality can accrue merits a thousandfold.

Gifts to individuals practising morality outside the scope of the Buddha's teaching can accrue merits a thousandfold, throughout a thousand lives.

Gifts to individuals endowed with supernormal power outside the scope of the Buddha's teaching can accrue merits for a million-million lives.

Gifts offered to individuals having the potential to become Stream-winners can accrue merits for innumerable life-cycles.

Such gifts can be classified according to the status of the recipients, and merits gained are graded according to their virtue. Gifts to those who abide by five precepts, bestow more merits than those to persons just taking refuge in the Triple Gem. The following recipients of gifts are arranged in ascending order of merit: individuals abiding by eight precepts, by ten precepts, those practising concentration, those practising insight meditation, lay persons practising morality, monks practising morality, monks practising concentration and insight diligently, those attaining insight knowledge in order of the stages reached, those striving for Stream-winning, and so forth.



Theoretically, the highest merit will be gained if one makes offerings to a meditator who is attaining the Noble Path, but as the duration of the Noble Path lasts only one thought-moment, it is impracticable to act at that particular moment so that it can accrue the highest merit. It is possible to gain the highest advantage out of a gift to an ordinary person of virtue, who has reached the stage of knowledge of equanimity about formations, the ninth stage of insight.

The enormity of the merits derived from gifts to Stream-winners, Once-returners, Non-returners, and Arahants can better be imagined than described. They can last for an aeon.

### Gifts to the Saṅgha

Gifts offered to the Buddha and the Saṅgha are called *Saṅghika dāna* which is of seven kinds.

Gifts of food and other allowable requisites offered collectively to the Buddha, the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, and the Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha accrue merits of the highest order.

Next is gifts made to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and the Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. Here the Saṅgha means all monks and nuns who came to the place of offering whether by invitation or not.

Third are gifts offered to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. These days it is customary for a benefactor to invite all the monks residing in a monastery to receive alms. Such charitable acts belong to this category.

Fourth are gifts offered to the Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha. Now-a-days such gifts are no longer possible as there are no longer any *bhikkhuṇīs*.

Fifth are gifts made by benefactors by invitation to a specified number of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuṇīs* from their respective monasteries. This kind of gifts is also not possible these days for the reason stated above.

The sixth are gifts made by invitation to a specified number of *bhikkhus*.

The practice prevailing now is for the benefactor to approach the head of the monastery and invite a specified number of *bhikkhus* to his house where the offering is to be made so that he can direct his veneration to the entire Bhikkhu Saṅgha which the invited monks represent. In this kind of almsgiving the benefactor has no personal aims for any particular monk or monks but for the whole Saṅgha. The head of the monastery would send his monks either

in order of their seniority or by drawing lots. Among them there may be some whom the benefactor would not like to revere. Albeit, he must be reverential to all of them as representatives of the Saṅgha.

When one offers flowers and lights to a the Buddha image, the image just serves the purpose of drawing one's reverential attention to the Buddha. Actually one's mind is not on the image, but on the Buddha. The image is only an object that directs one's mind to the Buddha. In the same way the monks who visit the benefactor's house to receive the gifts are only representatives, and they draw his mind to the existence of the Buddha's disciples for whom he is actually making the offering. The monks in his presence serve only as a means by which he becomes mindful of the fact that he is giving alms to the Buddha's disciples organised as the Saṅgha. It is this significance that renders *Saṅghika dāna* highly meritorious.

Regarding the use of such offerings, only the monks who are near at hand can use them, as allowed by the rules of discipline. When a donor offers food to a monk going round for alms saying "*Saṅghassa demi*," (I give to the Saṅgha), it is *Saṅghika dāna*, as the offering is intended for the entire Saṅgha. However, if the monk receives the offering saying, "*Mayhaṃ papuṇāti*" (It has come into my hands), the food becomes his own, and he can use it himself. However, there is a saying with respect to this privilege. When you offer lights to the Buddha image, you dedicate it to the Buddha who actually lived in the past. The light of your wholesome actions radiates all around. It is all-encompassing, but the light of the candle that you donate to the image can shed its rays only within its precincts. If the monk in question brings all the food he gets during the alms-round to the monastery, all the monks residing there can have a share, as according to the rules of discipline, the offering is *Saṅghika*. In that case it will be good both for the donor and the recipient. It is important that one should know the meritorious way of offering alms.

The seventh are gifts made by benefactors by invitation to a specified number of *bhikkhuṇis*. The head of the Bhikkhuṇī Saṅgha usually decided who should accept the invitation. Such gifts are now no longer possible for the reasons given before.

On *Saṅghika dāna* the Buddha has this to say: "Ānanda! Never would I say that charity towards individuals is more beneficial to the donor than that towards the Saṅgha." In the Commentaries it

has been shown that giving alms to an ordinary monk whom the entire group of monks directs to receive them as their representative in accordance with the rules of discipline accrues more merit than giving alms individually to a Noble One such as an Arahant. Gifts offered to the Saṅgha are always rated the highest.

When the Buddha wished to emphasize the purity and nobility of gifts to the Saṅgha he taught in the conventional way referring to the recipients of gifts using their personal names. So far we have the four kinds of pure gifts, fourteen kinds of gifts to individuals and seven kinds of gifts to the Saṅgha. In referring to them the ultimate way of teaching is not employed and therefore there is no mention of aggregates or sense-faculties. Only individuals are mentioned. This is a point worthy of note for donors and recipients alike when they are performing the act of libation.

### **Insight Meditation During Acts of Charity**

I emphasise this point just to remind you of the impropriety of allowing insight meditation to get mixed up with acts of charity. Some would like to think that it is better if, in practising charity, insight meditation is also practised. So during the libation the following formula is used:

“I, a group of mental and material aggregates, make this offering of material aggregates to this individual, who is also just a group of aggregates, and these are all subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.”

This formula is not in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching. It is incongruous. The act of giving is performed for the sake of merits derived from it. It is not performed for the sake of insight. If one’s mind is bent upon insight meditation, there is no need for one to be giving alms. One should merely retire to a place of solitude and practise insight meditation, then one’s concentration will get stronger, thereby giving the maximum benefit. One will gain merits derived from insight meditation. There is a world of difference between proper meditation practise and a few minutes during the performance of libation.

What is important during acts of charity is to render oneself worthy of the accumulation of merits derived from giving alms, by giving them away with sincerity of purpose. That is why we exhort almsgivers

to rejoice in their good deeds. Merits gained from charitable acts will be multiplied if the donor contemplates on the high morality of the recipients or the usefulness and suitability of the objects given away. Such contemplation would lead to more rejoicing because of which the giver will enjoy the cumulative effects of the merits gained. If one contemplates on the aggregates of the recipient and realises their true nature, one will not be able to discriminate between the morality and immorality or the nobleness and ignominy of the latter, for, these qualities emanating from the aggregates are all abstractions. Again, if one contemplates on the aggregates relating to the objects given away and realises their true nature, all that one has given away would be worthless like stones and pebbles, in which case what is there to rejoice about? Without rejoicing the merit comes to naught.

It may be argued, as indeed some do, that as insight meditation is more noble than charity, it will be more profitable to indulge in it than to give away things in charity. Indeed that argument is sound. Once all worries relating to alms-giving are eliminated, there will be more time to concentrate on meditation. In fact, charity is practised not for the purposes of insight meditation, but to gain merits from giving. Since that is so, it is better that the donor contemplates on the act of giving so that he or she rejoices at it with the result that merits are accumulated.

When, therefore, the Buddha wanted to teach his disciples and devotees about the purity of gifts, he employed the conventional method of teaching, naming the individuals.

8) The eighth reason why the Buddha taught in the conventional way is to follow common usage. Who could have realised more than the Buddha that all existences are the phenomena of mind and matter arising and passing away and that all conditioned things are in a state of flux? On appropriate occasions he taught them so, but there are terms like mother, father, son, daughter, man, woman, god, monk, *etc.* These terms are used in everyday speech, and the Buddha spoke the language of the people current in his time.

### **The Concept of An Individual**

After all, the concept of an individual is just conventional language. When we say that one is an individual, a being, a woman, or a man, we are being realistic, for all mankind has accepted the

descriptions given. Truth ordained by general consensus of opinion is conventional truth (*sammuti sacca*). In other words it is truth accepted by the conventional language of mankind, and so it is not falsehood. Not desiring to abandon convention, the Buddha, in this Bhāra Sutta, made references to the porter as an individual.

To sum up, the heavy burden is the five aggregates, which we regard as “I” or “Mine” and the one who carries it is the individual who is made up of the five aggregates, but note that the five aggregates cannot be conceived of as a separate entity from the individual. This has been extensively explained before. Some may not agree with the proposition that the five aggregates are both the burden and the porter. In that case, please regard the burden as the five aggregates which desire happiness and well-being, and the porter as the five aggregates which are actually belabouring for the realisation of that happiness and well-being.

Now that the burden and the porter have been identified, the only thing that remains to be considered is how to discard the burden. That will be the subject of my next lecture. Now that the time is up, I must close.

May those who have given their respectful attention to the discourse relating to the Bhāra Sutta be able to develop as sense of repugnance towards the five aggregates which oppress us as a heavy load does, to note the phenomena of the five aggregates arising and passing away at the six sense-doors, and eventually, by such noting or insight meditation practice, to reach nibbāna where the burden can be thrown away.

*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

## Part II

*Delivered on 12th December 1966*

This is the second part of my lecture, a continuation of the one I delivered a fortnight ago, wherein I dealt with the aggregates of attachment as the burden, and the individual as the porter carrying the burden. In other words, mind and matter are the burden while each of us is the porter. We are daily serving our five aggregates by cleansing it, dressing it, feeding it, entertaining it, nurturing it, *etc.* We are constantly paying attention to its well-being. By now, I hope, you are convinced how heavy the burden is.

### Picking Up the Burden

Now, why do people carry this burden knowing it to be very heavy? Who prompts them to carry it? A serious consideration is enough to show you that no one is prompting anybody to carry it. One carries it of one's own free will. Those who believe in creation might say that God makes us carry it. If that is so, the poor, the diseased, the maimed, the blind, the deaf, and the oppressed would have ample reason to quarrel with God. According to the Buddha's teaching no one ever imposed the burden on us. It is each individual who accepts it. The Buddha said:—

*“Katamañca, bhikkhave, bhārādānaṃ? Yāyaṃ tañhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandini, seyyathidaṃ — kāmatañhā, bhavatañhā, vibhavatañhā. Idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, bhārādānaṃ.”*

“O bhikkhus! What is picking up the burden? Craving that takes delight now here, now there, namely sensual craving, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence. This, monks, is called picking up the burden.”

### Craving is Hungry for Sense-objects

Craving is much like hunger or thirst. It yearns for pleasant, wholesome, and beautiful objects. It is never satiated and always hungry for new sense objects. Having seen a pleasurable thing, it desires to see another. It likes to hear sweet music, it likes to smell fragrant odours, it likes to enjoy delicious tastes; it likes to feel pleasant touch; it wants to think or imagine about fascinating ideas. It never gets satiated with objects that appeal to the senses.

When the mind dwells on a pleasant object, desire to possess it is aroused. This desire accepts the burden of the five aggregates. Desire for sense-objects is attachment, which strives for the fulfilment of desire. This produces wholesome and unwholesome kammās — good and evil actions. As one nears death, these actions appear as signs associated with good or evil actions done in the past, or signs that indicate the destiny about to result from such actions. Since individuals cling to these signs, a new group of aggregates arises after death as a result of that attachment.

It may be seen that the six senses play their part in the creation of desire or attachment. The development of desire is tantamount to the acceptance of the burden of the body. Because of desire, attachment is motivated, and this we describe as the craving that gives rise to new aggregates. Hence we say that craving creates a new existence after death. About the nature of becoming (*bhava*), please refer to my discourse on [Dependent Origination](#), wherein I have given the explanation at some length.

Craving gets absorbed into sense-objects with which it comes into contact, without discrimination, like dyes that permeate the material to be dyed. It attaches itself to them whether such attachment is proper or not. It takes a fancy to everything it sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks about. So it is described in the texts as taking delight in objects. It never gets weary with enjoyment. One may assume that a wealthy man will have no inclination for inferior living conditions. He would be dissatisfied or disgusted living in such conditions, but if he gets impoverished in his new life he will find it enjoyable. From a human perspective the bodies of worms or snakes are abhorrent. The very thought that one could be reborn as a worm or snake is disgusting. However, when kamma gives its results, and an individual is reborn as a worm or a snake, the worm or snake finds life in the animal kingdom highly enjoyable. That is the work of craving, which finds joy and pleasure wherever it is posted. The Buddha has described it as a disposition that revels in sense-objects wherever they exist. It is exemplified in the stories of Campeyya, the King of the Nāgā, and of Queen Upari.

### **Campeyya, the King of the Nāgā**

Once, the Bodhisatta was reborn as a poor man living by the side of the Campā river. At that time the human king of Aṅga and

Māgadha threw a feast as was the custom in honour of Campeyya, the nāga king residing at the bottom of the Campā river. Then all citizens came out to participate in the festival. The nāga king appeared among men in the guise of a human being together with his retinue of snakes, also in the guise of human beings.

The poor man, the Bodhisatta, saw the nāga king and his followers in all their glory, so he gave alms, wishing to be reborn as a nāga in his next existence, so he was reborn as a nāga. When he looked at his own body he felt it to be repugnant. He thought to himself: "The acts of charity that I did while I was a human being should have produced wholesome results and led to rebirth in the world of *devas* ... in one of the six celestial planes, but it did not because I longed for rebirth as a nāga. That was a mistake. It were better to die than continue to be a snake," and he thought of suicide.

However, at that time, the female nāga Sumanā was by his side. She at once gave the signal to nāga courtesans to entertain the new nāga king, also known as Campeyya, for that was what the Bodhisatta had become. All the snakes, in the guise of human beings, all beautiful, entertained him with music and dancing. On this, the new nāga king, came around to thinking that his abode was as good as that of the king of *devas*, then exulted in his new existence. He had now become at one with all the female Nāgā who entertained him.

For some time he was forgetful how he hated his snake life, but being a Bodhisatta, he came to his senses and realised the true situation. Then he thought of a way to escape the present existence and become a human being again. He discovered that the only way for him was to practice perfection through the commission of meritorious deeds like alms-giving and observing precepts. This he did by visiting the human world in the guise of a man.

This story illustrates that craving revels in any situation anywhere. From the point of a human being, it may be assumed that a Bodhisatta might have felt the life of a snake as loathsome since snake bodies are usually repugnant, but when he was entertained by female Nāgā he was delighted with his new life. This is the work of craving which was prompting him to accept the heavy load of the new aggregates as a nāga.



## The Story of Queen Upari

Long, long ago, King Assaka was ruling in Pāṭaliputta in Kāsi. his chief queen was Upari.<sup>1</sup> It was the tradition for kings to choose the prettiest maidens in the realm to be their queens, and, therefore, there can be no doubt that the queen was very beautiful. He doted upon her, but unfortunately she died while still young. In court language, her death was described as “going to heaven,” but actually she failed to reach heaven, and was reborn as a dung-beetle.

The king was heart-broken. He kept her body preserved in sesame oil in a glass coffin placed under his bed. He refused food and wept incessantly. His ministers tried to consol him, reminding him of the law of mortality, but he mourned for seven full days gazing at the preserved body of his beloved.

At that time our Bodhisatta was a meditator who had gained supernormal powers. One day he surveyed the world to see whom he could liberate from misery by teaching the Dhamma. He saw in his mind’s eye the king in great sorrow, and knowing that no one but himself could save him from such a situation, he visited the royal garden where he met a brahmin attendant. He asked the latter about the king. When he was told how bereaved the king was, he suggested that if the king would come to him, he would disclose the destiny of the queen. The brahmin hurried to the palace and told his master, “Sire! There has arrived at the royal garden a sage who possesses the divine eye. He can reveal your queen’s present existence and show you where she now is. Please, visit him.”

The King was very glad, and at once repaired to the garden by chariot. Arriving there, he paid due respects to the sage. Then he asked: “Is it true that you can tell me where my queen is?” “Yes,” said the Bodhisatta, “your queen, while in this human world was immensely proud of her beauty, spending her days caring for it, forgetting to do meritorious deeds of alms-giving and keeping the precepts. When she died, she was reborn as a dung-beetle, and is now living in the southern part of this garden.”

Pride is associated with riches, family connection, education, status in life, and physical beauty. When one is overwhelmed by pride, one forgets to be kind-hearted and respectful, or to be of service to

<sup>1</sup> The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names spells the name as Ubbari, but in the *Assaka Jātaka* (No.207) the spelling is Upari. A Princess Ubbari is referred to in the Dhammapada Commentary to verses 338-343, but that is a different story.

others to acquire merit. The Buddha said in the [Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta](#) that pride usually debases a person possessing it. If one is humble, one can aspire to nobility in the next existence. In the case of Queen Uparī it may be presumed that in her haughtiness she might have behaved disrespectfully to those who ought to be respected, and it is because of this that she was reborn as a lowly dung-beetle.

When the king heard this he could not believe it, so the Bodhisatta said that he would summon the beetle to appear before the king and talk with him. Using his supernormal powers the Bodhisatta called the beetle, and a pair of beetles, one male and the other female, appeared out of the dung-hill. He then showed them to the king, saying, “O king! Look at the female beetle following in the trail of her mate. She was your queen. She has abandoned you now in favour of her present husband. Look at her closely. She follows her husband wherever he chooses to go.”

Still the king was not convinced. Those who do not believe in the law of kamma and its effects and in the law of dependent origination are unable to accept that a human queen could have gone so low as to become a beetle in her next existence. Even in these days of the Buddha’s dispensation there are some who hold that once you are a human being, you cannot be reborn into a plane of existence inferior to that of human existence. Outside the aegis of the Buddha’s dispensation there were many who held the view similar to that of the dissenters of the present day. According to the Buddha’s teaching, as long as one has not attained the state of a Noble One, anyone in the fortunate planes of existence may descend to the four lower realms. Even if one is the king of the *devas* it does not matter. One’s mode of rebirth after death depends on how one is mindful at death’s door. If one’s mind is directed to wholesome thoughts when dying, one may be reborn as a man or a *deva*, however lowly he may be, but the converse is also true.

There is the story about Venerable Tissa. On his death-bed, his mind got attached to the saffron robe that he was wearing. The result was that he was reborn as a louse making its home in his saffron robe. There is another story about a frog being reborn in Tāvatiṃsa as a *deva* since it died listening to the the Buddha while he was teaching. However, as the king had never heard of such stories he could not believe what the Bodhisatta told him.

Therefore, the Bodhisatta made arrangements by which the female beetle could talk about herself. Through his supernormal powers he set the following conversation going, at the same time making it understood by the king and those present.

**Bodhisatta:** "Female beetle. Who were you in your previous existence?"

**Female Beetle:** "I was Upari, the Chief Queen of King Assaka."

**Bodhisatta:** "Do you love Assaka or your present husband, the beetle?"

**Female Beetle:** "When I was a human being, I felt happy with my former husband, the king, with whom I used to enjoy the pleasures of life in this very garden, but I am now leading a new life in this world of beetles. So Assaka has nothing to do with me now."

According to the Commentaries, she went further than that and added:

"I would relish cutting up the jugular vein of King Assaka so that I could wash the feet of my present dear husband with his blood."

Isn't that cruel of the ex-queen? It may be that she was trying to please her present husband, the beetle, but in life there are many instances similar to this. When a family breaks up, the wife gets divorced from her first husband and takes another husband. In such a case, the wife may love and care for her present husband without any consideration for her former husband. The following is the version of the Commentaries regarding the female beetle's reply.

"I, who loved Assaka when I was his queen, often used to wander in this southern part of the garden, enjoying all the comforts and luxuries of life as the beloved Queen of my lord and master, but the joys and happiness in this life as a beetle far transcends those of my past life. Therefore I love my present husband, even though he is a lowly beetle, far more than I loved the king."

Hearing this unkind remark of the female beetle, King Assaka was mortified. "I loved and adored her so much," he thought, "that even when she died I could not part with her body, but she is hard and cruel to me." So he at once ordered his attendants to throw away her dead body. Later, he chose another beautiful lady of the court to be his queen. Having admonished him, the Bodhisatta returned to the Himalayas.

Queen Uparī, while a human being, could never have entertained, without feelings of repugnance, thoughts of being reborn as a beetle, but when kamma was at work, she became a beetle and felt delighted with the body of a beetle, which she considered far superior to King Assaka. This is why the text says that craving takes delight in any situation in which it operates.

Dogs delight in being dogs, pigs in being pigs, chickens in being chickens, and worms in being worms. In our human lives, there are instances of wealthy people suddenly being reduced to poverty. They not only tolerate the new situation into which they are thrown by the force of kamma, but also revel in it. Feeling so happy with the new destiny, some erring youths revolting parental authority in preference for an inferior way of life would refuse to return to their former environment despite the entreaties of their parents, so much enchanted were they with their new surroundings. This is because of the machinations of craving.

### Threefold Craving

Craving is threefold, namely, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for sensual pleasures associated with the view of eternalism and craving for sensual pleasures associated with the view of annihilationism. These cravings receive and accept the aggregates.

### Sensual Craving

Sensual craving is craving for objects that yield sensual pleasures. Such objects may originate in ourselves or in others. When things of joy and beauty attract us, we must at once recognise that craving for those things has developed in us. Beautiful sense-objects do not merely mean the primary objects of joy and beauty. When we refer to a beautiful girl or a handsome boy, we are not referring only to the girl or the boy who possesses good looks, but also the accessories of beautification such as dress *etc.* So when we say craving has developed, we do not mean that it is only for sights and sounds that are enjoyable, but also for the accessories. Consider when we speak of craving for good smell, delicious taste, pleasurable touch, or a fascinating idea. When we desire to become human beings, *devas*, men, women, *etc.*, our desires relate to sensual pleasures to be expected from sense-objects that appear at the six

sense-doors. The development of craving is due to delusion, which covers up the true nature of phenomena, showing only the opposite of truth, thus contributing to the emergence of wrong thinking.

As it covers up the truth, falsehood shows things in a favourable light. It reveals impermanence as permanence, unsatisfactoriness as satisfactoriness, and not-self as self. Hence not-self is mistaken as self. Likewise, unwholesomeness and ugliness are mistaken for wholesomeness and beauty. When delusion invokes craving, attachment arises, and because of this attachment we try our very best to fulfil our desires. As we make great efforts to fulfil desire, kamma and mental formations are brought into play. They create new aggregates. So, after one life we go over to another in a new groups of five aggregates, by virtue of the craving prompted by delusion. As a result, we are left with the burden of aggregates to carry.

### **Unfulfilled Desires**

We always want the best, but we rarely get it. An individual may long to become a human being or a deity, but instead of becoming what he or she wants to become, may have to go down to the four lower realms by the force of kamma. One may be reborn an animal: as a buffalo, an ox, a chicken, or a worm. It is a lottery. Everybody enters the lottery hoping to win the star prize, but only the luckiest gets it. Others have to be content with a prize of ten-thousand or one-thousand. Many go away with just a few hundred. Most draw only blanks and get nothing — not everyone can get the first prize.

Likewise, not everyone can become a human being or a deity. Those who possess good kamma may be reborn in those higher planes of existence, but good kamma can be achieved only through the practice of charity, morality, and concentration. Those who fail to perform these wholesome deeds, cannot gain rebirth into this human world or the celestial realms, but are likely to be consigned to hell, or to the animal or hungry ghost realms. All new aggregates have their genesis in craving, which finds enjoyment in pleasant objects, and is, therefore, said to be the one who picks up the burden.

Every time we accept a desirable sense-object, we are accepting the heavy burden of the aggregates. Having accepted it, we have to carry it and serve it for forty, fifty, or a hundred years amidst untold hardship and misery. Had we realised this before, we would have

regarded attachment to desirable objects with abhorrence. In fact, we would be more than horrified had we known beforehand that because of this attachment we would be reborn into the animal realm to bear the burden of an animal's aggregates, or worse still, into the hungry ghost realm to bear the burden of a hungry ghost's aggregates.

Earlier, I told you about hungry ghosts who suffered because of their evil deeds, which they committed urged by their desires. If we knew beforehand that such desires would ultimately lead us to hell we would be all the more frightened. King Ajātasattu had a strong desire for the life of a king lolling in luxuries, so he killed his father. As a consequence of this evil deed, he was thrown into the Lohakumbhī hell to which four sons of rich men had already been consigned after death for their lustful desires. As humans they had committed adultery, sleeping with other people's wives whom they seduced with money. The Lohakumbhī hell is a cauldron of immense size. The four sinners were boiled in molten iron, now sinking to the bottom, now rising to the surface, off and on.

It took 30,000 years for each of them to sink from the surface to the bottom, and another 30,000 years to rise up to the surface. After a period of 60,000 years, the four met together for a fleeting moment on the surface of the molten iron, when they sought to say something about their torment, but each could utter only one syllable and sank down again.

What they tried to say could only be heard as four syllables: "*du, sa, na, so.*" The first man who uttered "*du*" meant to say that while he was a human he failed to practice acts of charity and observe morality, spending his whole life in doing evil. Just as he was beginning to say what he wanted to say, he was dragged down to the bottom. The second man who began articulating "*sa*" wanted to say that he had been more than 60,000 years in hell wondering when he would be released. Like the first man he was also dragged down to the bottom able to utter only one syllable. The third man had barely time enough to say "*na*" when he sank again. He meant to say that he and his companions could see no end to their misery because they had done nothing but evil in their human existence. The last man who cried out "*so*" and sank to the bottom meant to express his regrets promising that if he were released from hell he would practise alms-giving and observe precepts to gain merit.

They were, no doubt, repentant, but it was to no avail since regrets came after the commission of evil deeds, which had already produced consequences. The Buddha, therefore, always enjoined us to be mindful in good time.

“O monks! Bear this in mind. Be vigilant so that you do not feel remorseful only after the commission of evil deeds. I have repeatedly warned you about this.”

Indeed, one must be vigilant. One must not be forgetful. One becomes unmindful when one lolls in the luxury of sensual pleasures. The Buddha, therefore, warned us not to be hankering after them.

Only when you get old, or when you are nearing death, or when you have already degraded yourself into the world of animals, hungry ghosts, or into hell, you may repent for not having practised the Dhamma when you were hale and hearty in the world of human beings, but then it is too late. It is useless to repent, for, under the circumstances described above, you will not be able to do anything to make amends. Now that you have the opportunity to practise insight meditation, be heedful.

Every lay person or monk should consider the words of the Buddha seriously and abide by his admonition. We are enjoying life now, but for how long? Leaving aside the period of youth and old age, there is left barely a span of forty or fifty years during which we serve our aggregates. If, during that service, our life is unsupported by meritorious deeds, only demerits would accumulate and they will direct us to the four lower realms. The four rich men's sons who sank to the bottom of hell as they cried “*du, sa, na, so,*” suffered for millions of years in their single span of life.

Unwholesome kamma can send us to the same fate met by the four men. Remember too the fate of the hungry ghosts about whom I told you before. Those who are still suffering in the world of hungry ghosts bowed to the wishes of their aggregates, forgetful of doing meritorious deeds of charity and morality. If, during this present life, we fail to practise the Dhamma for the realisation of the path and its fruition, yielding to carnal desires, who can guarantee that we will not go to the four lower realms after our demise? Now is the opportunity for us to get the benefit of the teachings of the Buddha as his dispensation is still flourishing. Seize this opportunity and practise

charity, morality, and meditation: especially insight meditation. Regarding this, there is a verse composed by an experienced Sayādaw:

*“Nāhaṃ dāso bhato tuyhaṃ; nāhaṃ posemi dāni taṃ;  
tvameva posento dukkhaṃ; patto vaṭṭe anappakaṃ.”*

“O body! I am neither your slave nor your employee. Having had the benefit of the Buddha’s teaching. I can no longer nourish or nurture you.”

Before the Buddha’s time, when his teachings had not been propagated, people nourished their bodies according to their dictates, but when the Buddha taught that the aggregates were a burden, that the burden was very heavy, that these aggregates could never be satiated with whatever nourishment fed to them, that they could never be depended upon for help in times of crisis since they are impermanent, and that nurturing them meant untold miseries in the lower realms throughout the cycle of existences, they stopped bowing to their wishes and desires, and turned their minds to the practice of the Dhamma. Why did they stop? The second verse gives the answer.

“I have nurtured you and yet I have suffered untold miseries going round and round in the endless cycle of existence.”

We have been yielding to the wishes and desires of our bodies. When we are commanded to go, we go; when we are commanded to speak, we speak; when we are commanded to find food, we find food. In this way we are servants to our bodies. Perhaps as servants, we might have done our duties faithfully and justly. Doing these things is wearisome, but it does not generate evil. So it may be all right, but if, in the service of our bodies, we happen to do evil, such as earning a livelihood by dishonest means, we are done for.

Inevitably we will be going round and round in the endless cycle of existence, suffering either in hell, in the animal realm, or in the realm of hungry ghosts. For example, just to sustain our life, we might have resorted to killing, looting, stealing, or cheating. Perhaps we might have maligned others or indulged in gossip about others, just to make capital out of the disharmony created. All these are unwholesome karmas, which pave the way to hell. Those indulging in such misdeeds may sometimes be reborn in the world of human beings and deities, but they are bound to be miserable in spite of their favourable existence.



## Suffering as Seen by Meditators

The suffering described so far relate to that experienced by ordinary human beings. To meditators even the apparently happy lives of human beings, *devas*, and *brahmas* are regarded as *dukkha*, a term commonly translated as suffering. In this human world, even though one feels quite happy, one is burdened by the aggregates, which have to be fed and cared for throughout life. This in itself is suffering, but it will be more obvious if one falls sick. Someone who has nothing to do with us would not care to nurse us. Of course one may hire a nurse, but even then it is unlikely she can attend constantly, even if one pays her very well. When we speak of the life of *devas* we may not be able to say with certainty because we have never seen them, but consider them enjoying a sensuous life. They too will have the suffering of satisfying their sensual desires. The king of *devas* is reputed to have many female attendants, but he may not always be able to satisfy their desires. When they remain unfulfilled, misery will get the better of the *devas*. *Brahmas* do not indulge in sensuality, but even then they will have the trouble of their mental formations, for they are always busy whiling away their time in thinking this or that as they carry the burden of their aggregates.

A meditator considers this state of affairs as unsatisfactory. If one were to sit the whole day long without doing anything, one would feel weary. If one were to be sitting and ruminating for a month one would feel miserable. Then what shall we say about those *brahmas* sitting for hundreds or thousands of years doing nothing but cogitating? Consider that this cogitation last for aeons! This is the misery of indulging in mental activities. When a *brahma* dies, he again gets into the world of human beings which is waiting for him with all the concomitants of human misery. When circumstances are unfavourable, even a *brahma* can be reborn as an animal or a hungry ghost, or he may go down to the lower realms if the worst comes to the worst. So from the point of view of a wise man or a meditator, the state of being a *brahma* is unenviable, for he too has to bear the brunt of the five aggregates which portend suffering. So on the eve of their *parinibbāna* the Arahants used to contemplate: "For how much longer will I carry this burden of the five aggregates, which gives rise to suffering?"

### Craving for Existence

Having dealt with sensual craving, I now come to craving for existence (*bhavataṇhā*). There are two wrong views held by ordinary persons about life. One is called eternalism (*sassata-dit̥ṭhi*) while the other is annihilationism (*uccheda-dit̥ṭhi*). Craving for existence arises in conjunction with the eternalistic view, which assumes that pleasures are indestructible since a living being continues throughout eternity. The physical part of the body may be destroyed, but the spiritual part of lives on as it migrates from one body to another, giving rise to a new entity. The universe may get destroyed, but the spirit or eternal soul lives on. It is permanent, it is eternal. Outside the teaching of Buddhism this view is the most popular. Some who hold this view presume that when a man dies, he is raised to heaven where he lives eternally, or alternately, he is consigned to hell, also eternally, according to the will of God. Others would like to believe that one's spirit migrates from one body to another and renews itself according to the working of one's kamma. Another belief is that life is predetermined and fixed and it goes on eternally according to that predetermination. Briefly stated, a belief in eternity of the soul is eternalism. Under such a notion, life is like a bird hopping from tree to tree as the old tree on which it has first perched falls into decay. When the physical body dies, the living matter moves out to another new body.

Under the influence of craving for existence supported by the idea of eternity, an individual is gratified with the thought that the self abides in him permanently. He feels that what now exists is himself, confident that what he is now enjoying can also be enjoyed in future lives. Hence his attachment to all that he sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches, and thinks grows stronger throughout existence. He not only delights in sense-objects, which he experiences in the present life, but also in those which he hopes to experience hereafter. He wants to enjoy life now and to continue enjoying it in his next existence. Having led a happy life as a human being, he goes even further than that, hoping for happiness as a deity. Thus desire grows. Some would like to be male in all their existences, while others aspire to be female. All such longings are the work of craving for existence. Yearning for the sense-objects to which one has become attached means acceptance of the burden of the aggregates. Craving for existence is, therefore, craving for sensual pleasure with the belief that the living soul is eternal.

### Craving for Non-existence

Briefly put, craving for non-existence (*uccheda-dit̥ṭhi*) is the belief in no hereafter. Everything perishes after death. It is the doctrine taught by Ajita who flourished during the Buddha's time. It runs thus: an individual consists of the primary elements of earth, water, fire, and air. When he dies, the earth element goes into the mass of the earth; the water element flows into the mass of water; the fire element changes into heat; the air element flows into the mass of air. All organs of the senses — seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking — disappear into space. When an individual, be he a wise man or a fool, dies, his body is destroyed and annihilated. Nothing is left after death. While residing in the living body, the earth element manifests itself in the form of hardness or softness, but when the body dies, it leaves it merging itself with the earth outside it. In other words, the earth element in the dead body turns into the material earth, from which trees and plants grow. Likewise, the water element in the dead body assumes wetness and fluidity of the material water.

The annihilationists of the Ajita school do not recognise the existence of consciousness. All the faculties of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, are conditioned by matter. So when they referred to these faculties they used the term organ of sense (*indriya*). So, when a man dies, his matter is annihilated, his faculties of the senses fritter away into space. No matter who dies, whether a wise man or a fool, his existence is "cut off" or snuffed out. When a fool dies, there will be no rebirth and so he need not have any qualms of remorse for his evil deeds, just as the wise man is not benefited by his wholesome deeds.

This, briefly, is the way of thinking of Ajita. His doctrine appeals to those who revel in committing evil, finding it irksome to do good. As it postulates that there is no life after death, it may be argued that there is life before death. If that be so, it may further be asked: "What is life before death?" The answer, according to the line of reasoning of Ajita and his ilk, would be the living self or being. It suggests that, despite its views on the four primary elements, the self or being exists. This is attachment to self pure and simple. Those who hold annihilationist views stipulate that one should not waste time doing meritorious deeds for forthcoming existences (which will not be forthcoming), but occupy oneself with full enjoyment of the present existence, the only existence one will have.

Craving arising out of this view of non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*), promotes enjoyment of pleasures while they last since everything perishes after death. Naturally this ideology has a great appeal to those who delight in evil, shrinking from the practice of morality and other meritorious ways of life. Since nothing happens after death, there is no necessity to acquire merit. Those enamoured by this view do not like the idea that life is being constantly renewed and that the effects of good or bad kamma follow them in their trail. If no new life occurs after death, all their evil actions will come to an end with the end of their existence, and they will not be held responsible for any consequences, good or bad. In fact evil deeds done by them will be expunged when they pass away, emerging from them as innocent as a lamb.

Craving for non-existence finds satisfaction in the idea of total annihilation. A man possessed by it is always eager to enjoy all the pleasures of life without any restraint in the commitment of sins. This acceptance of pleasures in the present existence is tantamount to the acceptance of the aggregates that will arise in the next existence. Evil actions that accumulate in this life are unwholesome kammās to which the dying man gets attached; and by virtue of these kammās, new aggregates will arise. For as long as craving persists, new existence is inevitable, notwithstanding his annihilationist view. Medical advice says that the patient should not take any food unsuitable to his health, but the patient cannot restrain himself and takes what has been proscribed. The result is that his condition worsens. He might even die. The man afflicted by annihilationism is like that patient. Although he believes in no hereafter, his craving for pleasurable objects is so intense that he “becomes” again, whatever his philosophy says. His new existence will hardly stand him in good stead for he has never done any meritorious deeds before. Every evil action produces evil result. (It may even be put forward that to every evil action there is an equal and opposite evil reaction). His philosophy has all along been the fulfilment of selfish desires regardless of the adverse consequence for others. Let others die so that he may live; that is how he thinks. He has no remorse for his actions that harmed others. As he develops only bad kammās in this way, he will have nothing to hope for except inferior and miserable existences throughout future cycles of existence.

To repeat, craving for non-existence is craving for sense-objects in a life which is believed to have no hereafter. One who is afflicted with

this kind of craving indulges in pleasures without restraint in, what he considers, the happy notion that, since all things perish at death one will not have to answer for actions good or bad during this life-time.

Let me repeat what has been put forward earlier. What is the heavy burden? Aggregates are the heavy burden. Who carries the heavy burden? The individual made up of aggregates carries the heavy burden. Who picks up the heavy burden? Craving picks up the heavy burden.

## Throwing Down the Burden

Now I will deal with the subject of how to throw down this heavy burden, which is the most important part of this discourse. Regarding throwing down the burden, the Buddha has this to say:

*“Katamañca, bhikkhave, bhāranikkhepanaṃ? Yo tassāyeva tañhāya asesavirāgaṇirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo. Imaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, bhāranikkhepanaṃti.”*

“O monks! What does throwing down the burden mean? It means completely annihilating, renouncing, abandoning, and relinquishing desire, and freedom from it.”

As soon as craving is rejected, the burden will fall from one’s shoulders. The rejection can be effected through the application of knowledge relating to insight meditation and to realisation of the Noble Path. Craving recedes from such knowledge as darkness is extinguished, there will be no cause for the aggregates to arise. The path of Arahantship brings about the complete annihilation of all forms of craving. At the stage of Non-returning, all craving for sensual pleasures or lust (*kāmarāga*) is extinguished. Because of the absence of that kind of craving, a Non-returner is released from sensual becoming, and so will not be reborn as a human being or a deity to shoulder the burden of the five aggregates of human being or a *deva*.

The path of Once-returning also exterminates lust to a great extent, so he or she can throw finally down the burden after two existences. At the stage of Stream-winning, self-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*) are extinguished. These two fetters (*saṃyojana*) are much like craving. Once these fetters are removed there will be no opportunity for aggregates to arise. A Stream-winner can throw down the burden after seven existences.

To illustrate the advantages gained by a Stream-winner the Buddha employed the simile of grains of sand. He picked up a few grains of sand on his finger-nail, and showed it to the monks asking: “Which is greater, the few grains of sand on my finger-nail or the sand on this entire earth? When the monks replied that the sand on his finger-nail was insignificant compared to the sand on this entire earth, the Buddha admonished the monks that the suffering before attaining Stream-winning was uncountable like the grains of sand on the earth; and that after attaining the path and its fruition, the suffering that would remain for just seven existences would be insignificant. He urged his disciples to strive for the realisation of the Four Noble Truths.

### **Throw Down the Burden by Developing Insight**

So far I have shown that the burden can be thrown down by means of the four stages of the Noble Path, but to get to the Noble Path, one must acquire insight knowledge through meditation. One who chooses to reject the burden must strive for that knowledge. When you are unmindful of what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think, you will not know the true nature of the sense-objects. Your knowledge about them would be superficial and, therefore, wrong. You might regard what is impermanent as permanent, what is unsatisfactory as satisfactory, and what is not-self as self. That is to say, you will never realise the true nature of phenomena. Not knowing that all things are unsatisfactory is ignorance or delusion. It is delusion which allures us to getting attached to pleasurable objects, just as we get attached to our physical selves. This is the nature of craving; and every time this craving rears its head, we have to accept the heavy burden of the aggregates. Because of craving, attachment arises, and attachment activates kamma and becoming, thereby new aggregates come into being.

The moment one neglects to practise insight meditation and fails to note the sense-objects, craving will rear its head. It may arise in conjunction with seeing or hearing, or it may lie low for some time, waiting for favourable conditions to arise. That is why we must seize the moment when the mind comes into contact with the sense-objects; for, if we fail to do so, craving, accompanied by delusion will gain the upper-hand. In that case we will have to accept new aggregates and obey their dictates. Therefore, we must deny it the

chance to assert itself by nothing the arising and passing away of mind and matter whenever we see or hear anything. As we note the phenomena in this way our concentration will become well-developed, and thereby we can realise their true nature. We will then come to know that the mind that knows is distinct from the known object, and that the former arises anew soon after it has passed away, just as the latter does. Conversely each of them passes away soon after arising. Both are in a state of flux. When you observe this you will come to realise that nothing is permanent, but all is transitory, and that, therefore, all phenomena are subject to impermanent. The fact that whatever comes into being soon perishes cannot be deemed satisfactory, and unsatisfactoriness is suffering. All things happen according to conditions, self having no control or authority over them. This is not-self. To realise that mind and matter are subject to the three characteristics means enlightenment.

We say that insight meditation helps us to gain the light of wisdom having dispelled delusion. At this stage we are able to reject the wrong notion that what is pleasurable is to be desired. Craving is dispelled at the very moment we note the sights and sounds that present themselves to our minds. While thus noting, there is no opportunity for desire to occur. It cannot make itself felt even when we later try to recall what we have seen or heard. One is entirely free from craving for one thought-moment. When the wholesome state of mindfulness is established, for that thought-moment, craving does not arise. It means the rejection of craving at every moment of effective noting, and desires that might otherwise arise later are also rejected by virtue of the wholesome states gained through insight.

Rejection of craving every time we note the arising and passing away of mind and matter means throwing down the burden of the aggregates, for such noting awakens us to the facts of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self; and this knowledge enables us to throw down the burden.

When one notes the rising and falling of the abdomen, or the movements such as sitting, standing, bending, or stretching, one is turning the mind inward. When one realises the actual development, stage by stage, of all these activities of one's body, craving for pleasurable sensations fails to occur. However, if one cannot grasp the true nature of phenomena, one is misled by the notion that what

is rising and falling is one's own abdomen. "It is my abdomen" is, after all, a delusion. Because of this delusion, one feels, "What is mine is pleasant." It leads one to do things in the interest of all that one holds it to be one's own. Then kamma and mental formations are brought into play. It is because of these two activating factors that new aggregates arise. How do they originate? They originate by the machinations of craving. When one is forgetful about the arising and passing away of mind and matter, one feels pleased with the idea that it is one's abdomen that is working. As soon as this notion comes up, craving develops. When one meditates on the phenomena of mind and matter, it disappears, and so we say that rejecting it means throwing down the burden. Sometimes it so happens that as you are noting the rising and falling of your abdomen, you may fall into thinking. This thinking leads to its corollary, intentions or desires. For instance, as you are thinking of an object, it might occur to you that you would like to do something, or have something. Whether your intentions are realised or not, whether your desires are fulfilled or not, it does not matter as long as you are pleased with thinking about them. Such thinking is so pleasurable that the meditator may dislike the suggestion that one must note the phenomenon of thinking that occurs while noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, but the workings of the mind must also be noted. If you fail to note your thinking, you may develop attachment to it, being pleased with the idea that it is you who are thinking. This is how self-view comes in. Once this idea takes hold, you would like to strive only for the good of self. Then kamma and mental formations will be brought into play, and these two will cause new aggregates to arise. So, whenever you fail to note what you are thinking about, you are accepting new aggregates.

A meditator who is aware of thinking will be mindful that thinking is not a self, but is only a phenomenon that occurs naturally. As one notes "thinking, thinking," the thinking will cease. As one notes "intending, intending," or "desiring, desiring," intentions and desires will disappear. Then one will come to realise that such thoughts, intentions, and desires were not there before, that they came up only now, and that subsequently they disappear. One will come to know this intuitively, without trying to know it. One no longer takes delight in thoughts, intentions, and desires, and so becomes detached from them, not recognising them as



products of a self. This signifies the eradication of craving; and when craving ceases, aggregates originating from it also cease. So, whenever one notes thinking, one is throwing down the burden.

This will be made clearer when I speak presently about knowledge of dissolution. A meditator who has attained knowledge of dissolution finds that both the sense-objects and the mind that knows them get dissolved one after another as soon as both have arisen. When one notes the rising of the abdomen, the rising abdomen together with the noting mind get dissolved during observation. They never persist. Their images cannot be seen, they give no sign of their presence, and their existence is fleeting. Hence there is absolutely no reason why anyone should take delight in the aggregates as "my body", or the abdomen as "my abdomen," or in the mind as "my mind." No craving can then develop. As craving cannot arise, neither can attachment, nor kamma, nor the active process of becoming. When noting all other phenomena such as the falling of the abdomen, or the bending and stretching of the limbs, one will feel that the object known and the mind that knows dissolve in pairs without leaving any trace of their form or substance. They are all transitory. These phenomena, therefore, cannot be perceived as "my abdomen, my hand, my leg or my body." Craving is annihilated. With its annihilation, attachment, kamma, and mental formations cannot operate. With the cessation of their activities, the aggregates fail to arise. In this way the burden is thrown away.

Then, there is the practice of noting sensations. You may feel tired, hot, or painful as you sit in meditation. Note all of these sensations. As you are noting the phenomena of mind and matter arising and passing away, you will find such sensations disappear together in pairs. Concentrate on heat felt in any part of your body. An ordinary person thinks that this heat occurs continuously, but when you note the heat in accordance with the method of insight meditation, you will find that it occurs as a series of hot sensations, appearing and vanishing, reappearing and vanishing again. There are gaps in the chain of sensations. To an insight meditator each gap is apparent while to an ordinary person the whole chain of sensations seems continuous with no break at all. This applies not only to sense-objects that produce sensations, but also to the mind observing them. At one moment the mind cognises the sensation and then this cognition disappears. Then another moment

arrives when the successor to the previous mind cognises the new sensation that appears and this cognition also disappears as before. This goes on *ad infinitum* for as long as the sensation lasts.

The sensation of heat under observation is not “T”. What is not “T” is not something in which to take delight. As soon as this thought occurs, craving ceases. With the cessation of craving, its concomitants — attachment, kamma and mental formations — cease to operate. In the absence of mental formations new aggregates fail to arise. So, every time you are noting the sensations that occur, you are throwing away the burden. This is said in relation to pleasant sensations, but the same remarks apply to unpleasant sensations, and to sensations that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. As you practise noting the phenomena, you will come to realise that sensations do not happen continuously, but that each part of them arises and passes away repeatedly for as long as they last. In the example given about heat, the sensation of heat can be divided into parts, moment by moment. As one takes note of unpleasant sensation, pleasant sensation, or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant sensation, one gets detached from the idea of a permanent “T”, a suffering “T” or a happy “T”. This detachment brings an end to attachment, kamma, mental formations, and aggregates. Ultimately, the burden is discarded from one’s shoulders. With the cessation of the aggregates, old age, disease, and death cannot arise. In alluding to this the Buddha said that a meditator would not be seen by death as soon as the burden is laid aside.

*“Yathā pubbulakam passe, yathā passe maricikam.  
Evaṃ lokam avekkhantam, maccurājā na passati.”*

“One who looks down on the world of aggregates as devoid of substance like a bubble or mirage cannot be seen by the King of Death.” (*Dhp v 170*)

A bubble bursts soon after it has been formed. A mirage conjures up an image of reality, which disappears on close examination. There is absolutely no substance in either of them. This is common knowledge. As we know their true nature we must also know the true nature of phenomena. When a meditator acquires concentration through the observance of the dissolution of aggregates, he or she will discover that the known object and the knowing mind are in a state of flux, just appearing and vanishing. They are transitory. There is nothing in them worthy to be called “mine.” They signify only the

processes of becoming and dissolution. Death cannot discover one who possesses this realisation. One is said to be liberated from it at the moment of practising insight meditation. When, as one practises it, one gains Arahantship, one will be liberated from it forever.

The metaphor that death cannot discover the meditator used in that verse is in accord with the saying in this Bhāra Sutta that as craving has no opportunity to arise, one is able to throw down the burden from one's shoulders. Here, death is personified with a view to excite a sense of fear. At that particular moment when a meditator has done away with ignorance, craving, attachment, kamma, and mental formations, he or she is said to have lain down the burden for that particular moment.

### **A Stream-winner Is Relieved of the Burden**

With the gradual maturity and accomplishment of insight leading to the realisation of Stream-winning, the meditator can spiritually conceive nibbāna where mind, matter, and mental formations become totally extinct. He or she can actually feel the sensation of peace with the termination of mental formations that condition the sense-objects and meditation.

Where all phenomena cease, there is absolute peace. One is released from the self-view that takes mind and matter for a self or a being. That which sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches, or thinks constitutes only the aggregates of mind and matter. Bending, stretching, or moving denotes the activity of these aggregates. All behaviours, physical, verbal, or mental originate in the same aggregates. Before meditation, one might have thought that all activity and behaviour constitute oneself, so one might have asserted: "It is I who sees. It is I who hears." One had taken all phenomena of the mind and body for a living substance that resided in oneself. Now that one has been awakened by the path of Stream-winning, self-view disappears with the realisation that all seeing, hearing *etc.*, are just the manifestations of mind and matter arising and passing away. This describes the process of eliminating self-view. The moment that self-view is eliminated, knowledge unfolds; and the meditator dispels all doubts about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and the sanctity of morality, concentration, wisdom, and moral training. Here, for the sake of brevity, I will leave aside moral training, but it must be borne in mind that once a meditator becomes estab-

lished in the Three Refuges, it naturally follows that he or she has developed faith in moral training. In the practice of the path, morality, concentration, and wisdom are paramount. A Noble One means a person who practises these three trainings.

With the elimination of doubt and self-view, mental defilements are removed. These include greed, anger, and delusion because of which an ordinary person is reborn for more than seven existences. Any individual failing to practise insight meditation fully will not attain the path, and is therefore liable to suffer in the lower realms as a result of bad kamma. A lesser Stream-winner may, perhaps, be able to avoid hell in the next existence, but in the third existence one is liable to be caught in the whirlpool of existences, endlessly passing through births as a human being or deity. However, if he practises insight meditation during any one of these existences, having had the opportunity to get the benefit of the Buddha's teachings, one can aspire to the path and its fruition within the short space of a few more existences, even though one misses the chance in the present existence. It means that a limit has been set to his rebirths. This is the benefit gained by a meditator over a non-meditator. Delusion and craving prevent ordinary people from setting a limit to the number of existences. The Buddha said:

“O monks! The cycle of existence, is incomprehensible. It has delusion for obstructing (the path): it has craving for binding beings to continued existence. Hence one passes from one life to another in this cycle of existence, the beginning of which is unknowable.”

Ordinary knowledge about seeing, hearing *etc.*, by the aggregates composed of mind and matter is not true knowledge, it is delusion. It creates a deception of the permanence of the things seen or heard. It hoodwinks us into believing that an object is wholesome, desirable, and beautiful. It misleads us into the idea of self. “It is I, it is he, it is a being,” so we think. It covers up the true nature of the aggregates, and so we are led into thinking that an object is pleasing or desirable, thereby becoming attached to it. This is how craving works in collusion with delusion. It is like a tether. The tethered cattle can move about as much as the length of the tether allows, unable to go beyond its limit.

In much the same way, beings are tethered to craving, and they circle around it unable to get away. They are reborn repeatedly in

different forms without end. Inasmuch as they cannot break away from the aggregates, they cannot break away from the cycle of existence. In fact, they cannot even think about escape. So aggregates arise repeatedly for trillions of world-cycles, and there is no knowing when they began. They will continue to arise until the realisation of Stream-winning. When the path is realised, one may assume new aggregates for the space of only seven existences, after which there will be no more becoming. Eternal peace will finally be established. This is how the burden is laid aside.

In the Pāḷi text of the Niddesa, the following is mentioned:

“By virtue of the path of Stream-winning, accumulation of kamma, merit and demerit, ceases, and with this cessation, all mind and matter which would have arisen indefinitely throughout the cycle of existence, had the path not been reached, will be annihilated after seven existences.”

Just like a disease cured by medicine, the realisation of the path (the medicine of Stream-winning) would save one from endless rebirths, that one would otherwise have to undergo. Now one will escape the endless cycle of existence and will have no more than seven existences, after which no further rebirths will take place. This shows how the burden is to be removed and rejected by means of the path knowledge of Stream-winning.

### **Throwing Down the Burden at Higher Stages**

With the realisation of the knowledge of Once-Returning, one will be able to throw away the burden at the end of the next existence, for one is destined to be born again only once. The Non-returner, however, can dispense with rebirth in the present existence, either in the Form Sphere or in the Formless Sphere. Existence cannot be counted in lives, because in the Form Sphere one can be reborn up to five times in the five Pure Abodes. In the Formless Sphere there are four abodes, and one can be reborn in those four abodes.

This interpretation applies also to references made in connection with Once-returners and Stream-winners. They relate to planes of existence and not to rebirths. This is explained in the Mūla Tīkā and is a matter for the learned to discuss.

With the realisation of the knowledge of Arahantship, the Arahant does not become again after *parinibbāna*, all aggregates having come to total extinction. This is described as *anupādisesa parinibbāna*, which means that nothing of the aggregates remains. Hence the Buddha said:

“O monks! When craving becomes totally extinct, leaving no trace, when it is completely abandoned, when it is finally rejected, when it is discarded, relinquished, and when one is detached from it, such an annihilation means throwing down the burden of aggregates of attachment.”

The elimination of craving means throwing down the burden. If one fails to note the sense-objects occurring at the six sense-doors, craving and delusion will get the upper-hand momentarily. Allowing craving to arise means picking up the burden. When one notes whatever occurs at the six sense-doors, one gets familiar with the three characteristics, and the knowledge of impermanence, *etc.*, dispels craving momentarily. Every moment of noting means throwing down the burden instantaneously. When one achieves the Noble Path, one annihilates craving. If you sincerely wish to abandon the burden, you must practise insight meditation, which leads to the attainment of the path.

## The Burden and the Four Noble Truths

This discourse on the Bhāra Sutta is now complete, but let us apply this teaching to the Four Noble Truths. The five aggregates of attachment constitute the Noble Truth of Suffering. It has been shown that the porter who carries the burden of the aggregates, is an individual, which is but a name. He has no entity when viewed from the standpoint of ultimate truth. Considered in this light, the individual remains beyond the pale of the Four Noble Truths. In other words, in this discussion, individuals are not taken into account. It is craving which is the cause of suffering. Accepting this fact we come to the Truth of the Cause of Suffering. I have already told you about the method of exterminating craving, which is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. In this Bhāra Sutta, the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is not mentioned, however, since the Buddha taught us about the cessation of suffering, we can deduce that the path leading to its cessation is included in that. Therefore, in my lectures I have

referred to the practice of insight meditation and the Noble Paths. So, please note the following:

The burden means the five aggregates of attachment. It reveals the Truth of Suffering. The one who takes up the burden is craving. It reveals the Truth of the Cause of Suffering. Throwing down the burden means annihilation of craving. It reveals the Truth of Cessation. Insight meditation and the Four Noble Paths are the way to annihilate craving. They reveal the Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

### Some Key Points to Remember

To conclude the Bhāra Sutta, the Buddha spoke some verses to serve the audience as aids to their memory. This has been recorded by the Buddhist Council as follows:

“Having taught this Bhāra Sutta, the Buddha, who always taught for the benefit of his audience as the Teacher of gods and men, composed two verses to summarise what he had taught.”

Now I will give you those two verses, the first of which is as follows:

*“Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā, bhārahāro ca puggalo.  
Bhārādānaṃ dukhaṃ loke, bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ.”*

“Heavy, indeed, is the burden of the five aggregates. One who carries it is the individual (who is also a bundle of the five aggregates). In this world of beings, picking up the burden is suffering. Happy is one who lays down the burden (applying insight knowledge and the knowledge of the Noble Path).”

The heaviness of the burden is felt daily as one feeds and cares for one’s body. This burden is even heavier for those who lack merit. The diseased and the aged also feel the oppressive burden of their bodies. Those in the hungry ghost or other lower realms suffer far more. Their miseries are of the greatest severity, yet they cannot get away from them. Animals are not much better off. Food is a perpetual problem for them. They are unprotected from all kinds of dangers. They run and hide to maintain their lives, since they are liable to be eaten by predators. Chickens, ducks, pigs, goats, *etc.*, live in fear, ever anxious of the dangers that might befall them. While trying to

protect themselves, they get killed for food. They have no protector. The plight of cattle is even more heart-rending. They must labour for their masters in all weathers as long as they are hale and hearty, but they meet their end at the slaughter-house. It is because of their bodies that they suffer. If they did not have them, they would not have been killed and eaten. Even among mankind, the strong victimise the weak, so what can be said of the animal realm?

Regarding the meaning of 'individual,' mentioned in the verse, the word is used in the conventional way of teaching, for there is no individual in the ultimate sense. Alluding to the five aggregates we say in conventional language that one is an individual, a being, a man, a woman *etc.*, but they are mere names. Ultimately an individual does not exist, it is the aggregates that bear the weight of the burden. Even tending to one's physical well-being or caring for one's health is, in effect, carrying the burden.

Taking up the burden is suffering and throwing it down is conducive to happiness. Craving arises when we fail to note the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, in meditation. It arises at the moment of seeing or hearing, or it may lie dormant for some time to arise on later reflection. In whatever way it arises, it brings with it attachment, kamma, and mental formations, which in their turn create new aggregates, then suffering follows. If we note the phenomena of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking as each occurs, we will realise their true nature, and with this realisation we can exterminate craving together with its supporter, delusion. When the Noble Path is achieved this extermination of craving offers no opportunity for attachment, kamma, and mental formations to operate, and so the aggregates cease becoming. Finally, suffering comes to an end, and peace is established. To throw down the burden having eliminated craving means the achievement of peace.

Now I come to the second verse:

*“Nikkhipitvā garuṃ bhāraṃ, aññaṃ bhāraṃ anādiya.  
Samūlaṃ taṇhamabbuyha, nicchāto parinibbuto”ti.*

“Having thrown down the heavy burden, having rejected new burdens to follow, having uprooted craving from its very foundation, no desires arise, and peace is established.”



This verse alludes to the Arahants, but even an Arahant has to carry the burden before *parinibbāna*. An Arahant has to tend the body, bathing it, feeding it, cleansing it, *etc.*, and all these tasks only end with death. So the Arahants on the eve of their *parinibbāna* used to contemplate saying, “For how much longer will I have to carry this burden?” To them death is a relief from that burden, but ordinary people under the spell of craving take it as a sad occasion.

In fact, even Venerable Ānanda wept on the eve of the *Mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha, and, this was also the case for the women weeping on the eve of the *parinibbāna* of [Mahāpajāpati Gotamī](#), the step-mother of the Buddha, who had to console her disciples with the words: “My daughters, do not weep! This is no occasion for sadness. It is a time for rejoicing (*hāsakālo*).” Indeed for the Arahants death is an occasion for joy!

As has been explained in earlier passages, new aggregates come into being because of the sense-objects conditioned by kamma, actions, signs of actions, and signs of destiny. This is picking up the burden; and this is repeated in one existence after another without end. Because a porter accepts one load, he has to accept another, and still another, so that many loads fall upon his shoulders. A porter can at least take a break, but ordinary people do not have even a moment’s rest. Even Stream-winners know no rest for seven consecutive existences during which they have been trying unsuccessfully to extricate themselves from craving. For Once-returners it is the same for two consecutive existences and with Non-returners for one existence in the Form Sphere or Formless Sphere. A Non-returner may even have to tolerate rebirths for four or five times in accordance with the number of abodes that can be met with in those Spheres. Having exterminated craving once and for all, the Arahants are entirely free from being reborn with new aggregates once *parinibbāna* is achieved. It is said of the Arahant that he or she has rejected the new burdens as craving has ceased entirely.

Craving, like hunger, is insatiable. Ordinary people possess it. Even Stream-winners, Once-returners, and Non-returners cannot break away completely from it. They also develop attachment on the eve of death to sense objects created by kamma, signs of kamma, and signs of destiny. Because of such attachment, new aggregates arise. However, an Arahant has destroyed craving with the weapon

of the path of Arahantship. He or she has uprooted it from its very foundation. What is this foundation or root? It is ignorance. It is, in fact, the very root of all suffering. It even deludes beings into remaining oblivious of its presence. Hence uprooting it is stressed. If one fails to note the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, in meditation, one is liable to take them as an individual, a being, a man, a woman, *etc.*, then craving for existence as an individual, a being, a man, or a woman arises. This delusion is the originating factor of craving, and so it is not enough to cut down craving only. Its foundation or root must be torn up and destroyed. If not, craving would rear its head again when an opportunity arrives. There are instances of meditators possessing supernormal powers losing them the moment that delusion wakes craving up from its slumbers.

In the [Mudulakkhaṇa Jātaka](#), our Bodhisatta was a meditator possessing supernormal powers, dissociating himself from lust, but as craving had not yet been uprooted from its foundation with the application of the knowledge of the path, it asserted itself when he saw Queen Mudulakkhaṇā's naked beauty, which excited his lustful desires. He at once lost all his supernormal powers. Before that he journeyed through the sky to get to the king's palace, but after losing those powers he had to wend his way back to his dwelling on foot. This incident proves that he had only dissociated himself from craving for sensual pleasures, failing to uproot it. When a pleasant sight was in view it wreaked havoc on his mind.

There is another similar story. In about 400 Buddhist Era, when [Duṭṭhagāmaṇi](#) was ruling in Sri Lanka, there was a meditator who thought he had attained Arahantship because he had eliminated craving. One day, Dhammadinnā, a *bhikkhuni*, who had truly attained Arahantship, visited him and asked him for how long he had been an Arahant. He told her that he had been an Arahant for sixty years. He said this in the sincere belief that he had become an Arahant as he had never felt craving arise in him. However, she knew that he had not truly attained Arahantship, that is to say, he had not really eliminated craving. So she next asked him if he could exercise supernormal powers. On being told that he could, she asked him to create a lotus-pond with a huge lotus flower inside which a pretty girl would be dancing. He created the pond complete with the dancing girl,

as requested. Then Dhammadinnā asked the so-called Arahant to set his eyes on the girl of his own creation. He accordingly did so when suddenly he felt the urge of lust. Then he came to his senses and admitted that his task as an aspirant to Arahantship had not yet been accomplished. He asked Dhammadinnā to show him the right way to practise the Dhamma to uproot craving together with delusion so that he could become a genuine Arahant. So far, he had been able to remove craving only temporarily like a water-pot that strikes the surface of the water removing the moss which, however, gathers again as the pot is lifted. Craving can be uprooted from its foundation only when Arahantship is attained. When thus uprooted, no meditator could have been corrupted even by a dancing girl in flesh and blood, not to say of an imaginary one. When craving for existence is completely exterminated, no new mind and matter can arise. Without aggregates all suffering comes to an end.

I have composed a verse for the audience to help them remember the gist of what I have said:

“If craving is uprooted, desire will be eliminated. When one throws down the old burden, no new burden can be imposed. Then the peace of nibbāna will be attained. When craving and delusion are eliminated, desire will completely disappear. When the old aggregates are rejected, the burden of carrying new ones is removed. Then suffering ceases, and peace is established.”

### Conclusion of the Discourse

This discourse on the Bhāra Sutta now requires only conclusion. You have seen that the five aggregates assuming themselves as beings are a great burden and that we are carrying the burden of these aggregates throughout the cycle of existence. According to the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths this burden indicates the Noble Truth of Suffering. You have also realised that as long as you take pleasure in sense-objects — sights and sounds, *etc.* — you are accepting the burden, which is suffering. You take pleasure in the aggregates because you fail to know their true nature. The more ignorant you are of their true nature, the more your craving for sense-objects intensifies.

Craving, which picks up the burden, is the cause of all troubles. This brings you to the conviction that craving indicates the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering. You have also realised that eliminating craving means throwing down the burden, and this shows the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. Delusion brings about misunderstanding of the nature of the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, which you fail to realise in the process of noting in meditation. It is the genesis of craving. So whenever you try to do away with craving, delusion must also be done away with, which you have also come to know. When delusion is eliminated, knowledge matures. Light has come where darkness once was. This too you have understood. As knowledge is attained, you come to the Truth of Cessation, and as you contemplate it further, your insight knowledge will develop and you will realise the Noble Truth of the path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

If we take pleasure in sense-objects such as sights and sounds, craving will develop, and this amounts to picking up the heavy burden. This also you have understood. Craving is developed because we fail to recognise the real nature of phenomena. It is this ignorance or delusion that accepts the burden. Craving, therefore, is the root of all troubles, and so we say that it is the cause of suffering. This also you have seen. If craving is dispelled, we will be liberated from suffering, and this means that we have arrived at the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. Delusion is the genesis of craving. So it must also be dispelled. It arises when we fail to be mindful of the sense-objects. If we note the arising and passing away of phenomena while we meditate, knowledge will develop. With the light of knowledge, delusion disappears just as the darkness disappears when light shines. In its absence of craving, the burden of the aggregates cannot arise, and so we have no desire to pick it up. As we develop the habit of noting sense-objects, insight will develop and the four Noble Paths will be attained.

Of the four Noble Paths, if you have developed the path of Stream-winning, you have only seven existences to suffer in the cycle of existence, after which all aggregates cease. This has alleviated the burden to a great extent. If, however, you continue practising insight meditation, to lighten the burden still further, as you ought to, you can attain the path of Once-returning when all burdens of the

aggregates will be laid aside after two existences. As your perfections mature you will come up to the stage of Non-returning when all burdens can be set aside after existence in the Form or Formless Realms. Then all the five aggregates, which indicate the Truth of Suffering, will cease entirely, and peace will reign supreme.

It may be recalled here what the Buddha said to the effect that once craving is uprooted no desires arise and peace is established. If you really wish to lay down the burden and establish peace where all suffering comes to an end, you must practise what I have taught you.

I will conclude by summarising the aphorisms that I gave earlier:

- What is the heavy burden? aggregates are the heavy burden.
- Who carries the burden? The individual, made up of aggregates, carry the heavy burden.
- Who accepts the heavy burden? Craving, accepts the heavy burden.
- What is meant by throwing down the burden? Annihilation of craving is throwing down the burden.
- The burden of the five aggregates is heavy. The individual who carries the burden is known by his or her name in accordance with the conventional method of teaching. Picking up the burden is the acceptance of suffering and rejection of it is conducive to happiness:
- When craving is uprooted from its very foundation, no desire arises. Old burdens having been laid aside, no new burden can be imposed. Then one attains nibbāna, which is eternal peace.

May all of you who have listened to this discourse on the Bhāra Sutta come to the realisation that the five aggregates arising and passing away perpetually in you are a great burden; that your craving for sense-objects such as sights and sounds means the acceptance of the burden of new aggregates; that it is the cause of all suffering; that the rejection of it leads to peace; and that peace can be achieved with the practice of insight meditation.

I fervently pray that you all attain nibbāna soon, by virtue of the knowledge of insight meditation and of the path that you have trodden.

*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

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