

# **A Discourse on the Sallekha Sutta**

by

**The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw**

of

Burma



Translated by

U Aye Maung

Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization

Mahāsi Translation Committee, Rangoon



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## Editor's Foreword

As with my other editions of the translated works of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have removed many of the Pāli words for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the technical terms. The original translation was published in Rangoon in 1981, about two years after the Sayādaw gave the Dhamma talks, which spanned a period of many weeks. To transcribe and translate many hours of tape-recordings is a huge task, but one productive of great merit as it enables a much wider audience to benefit from the late Sayādaw's profound talks.

This edition aims to extend the audience further still by publishing the book on the Internet. Since my target audience may be less familiar with Buddhism than most Burmese Buddhists, and many may know little about the late Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have retained his brief biography and added a few footnotes by way of explanation or cross-reference.

References are to the Pāli text Roman Script editions of the Pali Text Society — in their translations, the page numbers are given in the headers or in square brackets in the body of the text. This practice is also followed by Bhikkhu Bodhi's modern translations, like that below:

128	<i>Sallekha Sutta: Sutta 8</i>	i.44
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Thus, a reference to M.i.44 would be found on page 44 of volume one in the Pāli edition, but on page 128 of Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation. It would be on a different page in Miss I.B. Horner's translation, but since the Pāli page reference is given, it can still be found. In the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition of the Pāli texts on CD, the references to the pages of the PTS Roman Script edition are shown at the bottom of the screen, and can be located by searching.

I have attempted to standardise the translation of Pāli terms to match that in other works by the Sayādaw, but it is impossible to be totally consistent as the various translations and editions are from many different sources. In the index you can find the Pāli terms in brackets after the translations, thus the index also serves as a glossary.

A Burmese word used frequently in the Sayādaw's discourses is the instruction to note each and every mental or physical phenomena. The original translation used "watch," and Venerable Nyana-ponika used the word "notice" in his translation of "The Progress

of Insight," but I prefer "note" as it is not something done with the eyes, but with the mind only, and it is also volitional. The same word is used in other books such as "Practical Insight Meditation."

Many beginners get confused over this mental noting or labelling of each phenomenon. "Is it not better just to observe without noting?" they ask. The trouble is, if one fails to make a mental note, one also fails to notice or examine the phenomena clearly. The noting or mental labelling is the mental factor of initial application (*vitakka*), which pushes the mind towards the object to investigate it. When the meditator reaches the second *vipassanā jhāna*, mindfulness is well-established, and the noting drops away automatically. With the aid of sustained application (*vicāra*), the meditator just knows the objects as they occur from moment to moment. Do persist with the noting or mental labelling of every phenomenon as it occurs to keep the mind from wandering aimlessly. Do not try to run before you can walk.

The original edition published in Rangoon included two talks delivered by the Sayādaw on Buddha Day (Vesākha) and Mahāsamaya Day. These talks were included only because they were given during the long period when the Sayādaw was expounding the Sallekha Sutta. However, since they have no connection with the Sallekha Sutta, I have omitted them. Perhaps I will publish them as separate articles.

This on-line edition may still have many defects, but I hope it is already good enough to be useful. As my time permits, I will gradually improve it.

This latest edition fixes a number of links and other errors.

If you find any errors, please let me know.

Bhikkhu Pesala  
September 2021

# Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

## A Biographical Sketch

The Venerable U Sobhaṇa Mahāthera, better known as Mahāsi Sayādaw, was born on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1904 to the peasant proprietors, U Kan Htaw and Daw Shwe Ok at Seikkhun Village, which is about seven miles to the west of the town of Shwebo in Upper Burma.

At the age of six he began his studies at a monastic school in his village, and at the age of twelve he was ordained a novice (*sāmaṇera*), receiving the name of Sobhaṇa. On reaching the age of twenty, he was ordained a bhikkhu on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1923. He passed the Government Pāli Examination in all the three grades (lower, middle, and highest) in the following three successive years.

In the fourth year of his bhikkhu ordination, he proceeded to Mandalay, noted for its preeminence in Buddhist studies, where he continued his further education under various monks of high scholastic fame. In the fifth year he went to Mawlamyaing where he took up the work of teaching the Buddhist scriptures at a monastery known as “Taungwaing-galay Taik Kyaung.”

In the eighth year after his bhikkhu ordination, he and another monk left Mawlamyaing equipped with the bare necessities of a bhikkhu *i.e.* almsbowl, a set of three robes, *etc.*, and went in search of a clear and effective method in the practice of meditation. At Thaton he met the well-known meditation teacher, the Venerable U Nārada, who is also known as “The First Mingun Jetawun Sayādaw.” He then placed himself under the guidance of the Sayādaw and at once proceeded with an intensive course of meditation.

He had progressed so well in his practice that he was able to teach the method effectively to his first three disciples in Seikkhun while he was on a visit there in 1938. These three lay disciples, too, made remarkable progress. Inspired by the example of these three, gradually as many as fifty villagers joined the courses of intensive practice.

The Venerable Mahāsi could not stay with the Venerable Mingun Sayādaw as long as he wanted since he was urgently asked to return to the Mawlamyaing monastery. Its aged head monk was gravely ill and passed away not long after the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw’s return. The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was asked to take charge of the monastery and to resume teaching the resident monks.

During this time he sat for the Pāli Lectureship Examination on its first introduction by the Government of Burma. Passing this examination on the first attempt, he was awarded the title “*Sāsanadhaja Sri Pavara Dhammācariya*” in 1941.

On the event of the Japanese invasion, the authorities gave an evacuation order to those living near Mawlamyaing at the Taung-waing-galay Monastery and its neighbourhood. These places were close to an airfield and hence exposed to air attacks. For the Sayādaw this was a welcome opportunity to return to his native Seikkhun and to devote himself wholeheartedly to his own practice of insight meditation and to the teaching of it to others.

He took up residence at a monastery known as Mahā Si Kyaung, which was thus called because a drum (*Burmese: Si*) of an unusually large size (*mahā*) was housed there. From that monastery, the Sayādaw’s popular name, Mahāsi Sayādaw, is derived.

It was during this period, in 1945, that the Sayādaw wrote his great work, “Manual of Vipassanā Meditation.” A comprehensive and authoritative treatise expounding both the doctrinal and practical aspects of the Satipaṭṭhāna method of meditation. This work of two volumes, comprising 858 pages in print, was written by him in just seven months, while the neighbouring town of Shwebo was at times subjected to almost daily air attacks. So far, only one chapter of this work, the fifth, has been translated into English and is published under the title “Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages” (Buddhist Publication Society).

It did not take long before the reputation of Mahāsi Sayādaw as an able teacher of insight meditation had spread throughout the Shwebo-Sagaing region and attracted the attention of a prominent and very devout Buddhist layman, Sir U Thwin, who was regarded as Burma’s Elder Statesman. It was his wish to promote the inner strength of Buddhism in Burma by setting up a meditation centre to be guided by a meditation teacher of proven virtue and ability. After meeting Mahāsi Sayādaw and listening to a discourse given by him and to the meditation instructions given to nuns in Sagaing, Sir U Thwin was in no doubt that he had found the ideal person he was looking for.

In 1947 the Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization was founded in Rangoon with Sir U Thwin as its first President and with its

object the furthering of the study (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*) of Buddhism. In 1948 Sir U Thwin donated five acres of land at Kokine, Rangoon, to the organization for the erection of a meditation centre. It is on this site that the present Thathana (or Sāsana) Yeiktha, *i.e.* Buddhist Retreat Centre, is situated. It now covers an area of twenty acres, with a large number of buildings.

In 1949, the then Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, and Sir U Thwin requested that the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw come to Rangoon and give training in meditation practice. On December 1949, the Sayādaw introduced the first group of twenty-five meditators to the methodical practice of insight meditation. Within a few years of the Sayādaw's arrival in Rangoon, similar meditation centres sprang up all over Burma until they numbered over one hundred. In these neighbouring centres, the same method was taught and practised.

According to a 1972 census, the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Burma and abroad) had passed the figure of seven hundred thousand. In the East and in several Western countries as well, insight meditation courses continue to be conducted.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council (Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana) held in Rangoon for two years, culminating in the year 2,500 Buddhist Era (1956), the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw had an important role. He was one of the final editors of the canonical texts, which were recited and thereby approved, in the sessions of the Council. Further, he was the Questioner (Pucchaka), that is, he had to ask the questions concerning the respective canonical texts that were to be recited. They were then answered by an erudite monk with a phenomenal power of memory, by the name of **Venerable Vicittasārābhivamsa**. To appreciate fully the importance of these roles, it may be mentioned that at the First Council held one hundred days after the passing away of the Buddha, it was the Venerable Mahākassapa who put those introductory questions, which were then answered by the Venerable Upāli and Venerable Ānanda.

After the recital of the canonical scriptures, the Tipiṭaka, had been completed at the Sixth Council, it was decided to continue with a rehearsal of the ancient Commentaries and Subcommentaries, preceded by critical editing and scrutiny. In that large task, too, the Sayādaw took a prominent part.

In the midst of all of these duties, he was also a prolific and scholarly writer. He authored more than seventy works and translations, mostly in Burmese, with a few in Pāḷi. One of these deserves to be singled out: his Burmese translation of the Commentary to the Visuddhimagga (Visuddhimagga Mahā-Ṭikā), which, in two large volumes of the Pāḷi original, is even more voluminous than the work commented upon, and presents many difficulties, linguistically and in its contents. In 1957 Mahāsi Sayādaw was awarded the title of *“Aggamahāpaṇḍita.”*

Yet even all of this did not exhaust the Sayādaw’s remarkable capacity for work in the cause of the Buddhadhamma. He undertook several journeys abroad. The first two of his tours were in preparation for the Sixth Council, but were likewise used for teaching and instructing.

Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (1952); India and Sri Lanka (1953, 1959); Japan (1957); Indonesia (1959); America, Hawaii, England, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (1980), Nepal and India (1981).

In the midst of all these manifold and strenuous activities, he never neglected his own meditation practice, which had enabled him to give wise guidance to those instructed by him. His outstanding vigour of body and mind and his deep dedication to the Dhamma sustained him through a life of 78 years.

On 14<sup>th</sup> August 1982, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw succumbed to a sudden and severe heart attack that he had suffered the night before. Yet on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, he had still given an introductory explanation to a group of new meditators.

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was one of the very rare personalities in whom there was a balanced and high development of both profound erudition linked with a keen intellect, and deep and advanced meditative experience. He was also able to teach effectively both Buddhist thought and Buddhist practice.

His long career of teaching through the spoken and printed word had a beneficial impact on many hundreds of thousands in the East and the West. His personal stature and his life’s work rank him among the great figures of contemporary Buddhism.

## Translator's Preface

This book is the English translation of a series of talks that the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw gave on the Sallekha Sutta during the period 1969-70. It is an elaboration of an important teaching of the Buddha in the Majjhimanikāya. The Pāli text of the sutta covers only eight pages, but the transcripts of the twelve talks came out in a two-volume publication in Burma. This is no wonder for, as is well known to everyone who has heard his talks or read his writings, the Venerable Sayādaw<sup>1</sup> is very thorough and careful about small details and he spares no pains to make the Buddha's teaching clear to all.

In his introduction to the sutta the Venerable Sayādaw says: "The self-training leading to this goal (the lessening of defilements) forms the subject of the Sallekha Sutta. The sutta is beneficial to meditators and non-meditators alike; it is helpful to all those who wish to overcome immoral desires and cultivate skilful, wholesome desires." In other words, this sutta is not meant only for those who possess a high level of intellectual or spiritual capacity. Here the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw presents a sharp contrast to some Buddhist teachers who wish to confine the higher teachings of the Buddha to the intellectual elite.

Once a Sayādaw is reported to have said, "People memorise the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta; they make it a basis for insight practice. All this is ridiculous. It is not in the least proper for the common people to study Satipaṭṭhāna teaching." This scepticism is to be greatly deplored for it is largely responsible for ignorance or at best superficial knowledge of the Buddha's teaching even in a predominantly Buddhist country like Burma.

Of course we should have respect for the Buddha's teaching, but it does not follow that we should regard it as too sacred and profound for ordinary people. If the Dhamma is supposed to be above the comprehension of the common man, the Buddha would not have proclaimed it to mankind.

Some insist that the higher doctrines are intended only for the bhikkhus. However, this view is not in accord with the Tipiṭaka and the Commentaries, which mention cases of lay disciples who attained advanced stages on the path through the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā.

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<sup>1</sup> The Burmese word Sayādaw, meaning "Venerable Teacher" is an honorific term and way of address given to senior or eminent monks. (Editor's note)

The teaching in the Sallekha Sutta is not like the Vinaya rules, which the Buddha laid down exclusively for the bhikkhus. Nor is it intended only for lay followers, as is the [Siṅgalovāda Sutta](#) of the Dīghanikāya. The sutta represents the essence of the Dhamma that is universally applicable. The study of this sutta will benefit everyone because it points out the best way of dealing with moral dangers that have bedeviled mankind through the ages, and led to immense suffering.

It speaks volumes for the high quality of the Venerable Sayādaw's sharp intellect that he brings home to us important points implicit in the teachings of the Buddha, but which are never explicitly mentioned in the Piṭaka or the Commentaries.

Thus the Venerable Sayādaw broke new grounds in the teaching of insight meditation when he advised his meditator disciples to note the rising and falling of the abdomen in meditation practice. This teaching has run the gauntlet of criticism on the grounds that it lacks scriptural authority, that it is against the traditional instruction of insight meditation teachers. However, there can be no denying the fact that it agrees with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, that it is but a corollary of the Buddha's instruction about the contemplation of the body: "*Kāye kāyānupassī viharati.*" Despite all the criticism, this practice has benefited many meditators in Burma as well as in other countries.

The Sallekha Sutta is hard to understand and, except for a very learned and experienced teacher of insight meditation like the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, it is equally hard to explain clearly the teaching of the Buddha in the sutta. It deals with absorption, the path, fruition, *etc.*, and needless to say, today there are many Buddhists who do not know what these varieties of religious experience are all about. In fact, even some meditators who practise insight meditation are not free from misconceptions about them. As the Venerable Sayādaw points out, many of them meditate in the hope of having some unusual experience and they regard any such experience as proof of spiritual attainment.

Ignorance about insight meditation practice is widespread. Many people do not distinguish it from absorption (*jhāna*), they confuse its goal with its by-products such as visions, rapture, psychic powers, and so forth. It is said that an Arahant is necessarily a holy man who can fly in the air and this old-established belief



prevails even among college-educated Buddhists. No wonder that nowadays there are bogus meditation teachers who unscrupulously exploit mass ignorance and credulity for their own ends.

Real experience of insight may defy understanding and description, but the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's discourse on the Sallekha Sutta leaves no room for confusion or misconception about the goal, which is no less than the extinction of all defilements. Childer's Dictionary of the Pāli Language translates "*sallekha*" as the destruction of defilements (*kilesa*) and the Venerable Sayādaw describes the practice of effacement that forms the basis of insight as the way of life designed to root out defilements.

The Venerable Sayādaw's discourse is thus highly informative, illuminating and authoritative. It will be invaluable to all those who seek enlightenment about the Buddha's way to the end of defilements and suffering.

U Aye Maung  
Translator



# The Sallekha Sutta

## Introduction

A true follower of the Buddha should have few desires. He should be content with what he has and he should try to lessen his defilements. He should have little desire for material possessions or attendants. He should not want to speak of his accomplishments in the study of scriptures or in the practice of meditation. He should keep the depth of his learning or his spiritual attainments to himself. A true noble one does not reveal his spiritual insight although he wants to share it with other people. It is only the religious impostor who calls himself a noble one or an Arahant.

Contentment is also essential to spiritual development. One should be satisfied with whatever one has, whether it is good or bad. Equally essential is the effort to lessen one's defilements. The self-training leading to this goal forms the subject of the Sallekha Sutta. The sutta is beneficial to meditators and non-meditators alike; it is helpful to all those who wish to overcome immoral desires and cultivate skilful, wholesome desires.

## The Questions of the Elder Cunda

On one occasion while the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery at Sāvatti, Mahā Cunda, the Arahant who was the younger brother of Venerable Sāriputta entered a transcendental state of mind called the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*). The Arahant usually spent his time in one of these states when he had nothing else to do such as discussion or teaching of the Dhamma. Sometimes, he might abide in the attainment of absorption (*jhāna-samāpatti*), or the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*) where all the mental activities are suspended. Or, he might dwell in the attainment of the fruition of Arahantship (*phala-samāpatti*) that keeps him absorbed in the peace of nibbāna. After passing the whole day in this state of mind, the elder Cunda approached the Buddha in the evening and, after paying due respects, he asked the following question.

“Venerable sir, there are many wrong-views in regard to the theory of ego (*atta*)” or the theory of the world (*loka*). Venerable sir, does a monk dispel these wrong-views or completely renounce them just as he begins to reflect on them?”

## Explanation of the Question

Before the rise of Buddhism, a being was called the self or the world. There are three world — the world of living beings (*satta-loka*), the phenomenal world (*sañkhāra-loka*), and the physical world (*okāsa-loka*). Self and world mean essentially the same thing — a living being.

## Wrong Views About the Self

Some people regard the physical body as a self, ego, or soul (*atta*). For example, when they bend, stretch, or move their hands or feet they believe that it is they themselves who perform these movements. In this view, the self is identified with the physical body.

According to other people, the self is not the human body, but includes the body. Its relation to the latter is like the relation of a tree to its shadow. The movement of any part of the body is done not by the self, but by the body that belongs to it. The movement occurs in accordance with the desire of the self. This view identifies the self with the mind.

Then there is the view that the physical body depends on the self just like the scent of a flower depending on the flower. This view, too, makes mind identical with the self.

Some people believe that the self is inherent in the body. They say that the self pervades the whole body, its size being dependent on the size of the body. Some say that the self lies quietly in the cavity of the heart like the flame of a fire burning in a calm atmosphere. These beliefs about the self loom large in ancient Indian literature and similar beliefs about the self or soul are to be found in other countries.

The belief in the self does not prevail in a Buddhist country like Burma because Buddhism rejects it. Yet some people still believe in the existence of a soul or butterfly-spirit (*Burmese: leikpya*) in the body. Some women speak of the spirit being scared or seized by the devil. Many people describe the self as a living entity that enters or leaves the body.

There are four kinds of ego-belief that centre on the physical body. The first belief regards the body as the ego while the other three beliefs identify it with the mind. Or, the latter three beliefs may have nothing to do with mind or body because today those who believe in the ego insist that the ego is neither the body nor the mind. Despite all their negations, their belief centres on the mind and the body.

Similarly, there are four kinds of ego-belief in connection with feeling; 1) the belief that identifies the ego with feeling. "It is I who feels pain. It is I who feels happy or unhappy," 2) the belief that the ego is not identical with feeling, but that it has the latter as its property, 3) the belief that makes the feeling dependent on the ego, and 4) the belief that makes the ego dependent on feeling.

Likewise, we have four kinds of ego-belief in regard to perception (*saññā*), another four ego-beliefs in regard to formations (*saṅkhārā*) and still another four ego-beliefs in regard to consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

In brief, there are four kinds of ego-belief corresponding to each of the five aggregates and so, we have altogether twenty kinds of belief about the ego. These ego-beliefs are called self-view (*attadiṭṭhi*) or personality-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Ordinary people or worldlings are usually not free from the ego-belief. The only difference is that some are dominated by it while some do not hold fast to it. One can get rid of it completely only when one attains Stream-winning (*sotāpattimagga*).

## Theories of the World

Here, world (*loka*) is another term for self. There were eight different theories about the world current in India in the time of the Buddha.

1. The first theory is that the world or self is indestructible, that it exists forever. This is eternalism (*sassatadiṭṭhi*). Its adherents hold that although the physical body is destroyed at death, its essence or self does not share its fate. The self passes on to another body and continues to exist there. It is never subject to destruction. This view is somewhat like the belief of some Burmese people who have no knowledge of Buddhism. For them, conception marks the arrival of a living being in the mother's womb while death means the departure of the ego-entity for a new abode.

Those who are firmly attached to this belief do not practise meditation and so they cannot hope for spiritual progress. The belief is, indeed, a major impediment on the way to nibbāna. It is not, however, a deep-seated belief among Burmese Buddhists. They accept the teaching that life is devoid of a permanent self, that it is only a succession of cause and effect or of psychophysical states. They believe that the psychophysical process comes to an end with the extinction of its cause — the defilements consequent on the attainment of four stages of knowledge through meditation. The

eternalism of the Burmese people, therefore, does not pose a serious threat to spiritual progress. Yet, even though it is not deep-rooted, one cannot remove it completely until one becomes a Stream-winner.

2. Opposed to eternalism is annihilationism (*ucchedaditthi*). According to this belief, the ego-entity only exists until the dissolution of the body after which it is annihilated. In the time of the Buddha, there were only a few people who held this belief, but today the belief is gaining ground because non-Buddhists have put forward specious arguments for it. They reject the idea of a future life on the grounds that it does not admit of empirical investigation. Annihilationism has become popular probably because of their persuasive art of writing, and the strong human desire to enjoy life fully here and now.

In reality, there is no immortal soul nor annihilation after death — there is neither immortality nor complete annihilation. Buddhism denies the ego-entity and recognises only the psychophysical process conditioned by the law of cause and effect. There is only the continuity of cause and effect such as ignorance causing mental-formations (*sāṅkhārā*), this kamma in turn causing consciousness in a new life, and so forth. Death is not a mystery for it means the final dissolution of the psychophysical organism that is subject to the process of ceaseless disintegration. However, death is not annihilation. Due to defilements, and conditioned by kamma, physical and mental events take place in unbroken succession as before, in a new place and a new life.

Rebirth is neither the transmigration of the soul nor the transfer of mind and matter from one life to another. The physical and mental phenomena arise continually and always pass away. It is not the eye-consciousness that sees nor the ear-consciousness that hears. Each consciousness arises at the appropriate moment and passes away immediately. There is, however, a causal connection between any two consecutive units of consciousness.

Likewise, death destroys all mind and matter completely, but new psychophysical phenomena of existence arise in a new life, and these are causally related to those in the previous life. The rebirth-consciousness and other psychophysical factors contributing to the new life arise as a result of the attachment to any vision or sign (*nimitta*) relating to one's kamma or future life at the moment of one's death. Thus, there are only physical and mental phenomena in terms of cause and effect. Since there is no ego-entity, it is a mistake to believe in an immortal

soul that survives death and it is equally wrong to speak of annihilation. The psychophysical process will continue so long as it is not free from defilements. It will come to an end completely only in the case of an accomplished Arahant who passes away, after having been liberated from all attachments. The decease of the Arahant or his *parinibbāna* is not annihilation. It means only the complete cessation of suffering inherent in the psychophysical process. This process should be studied through Buddhist scriptures and through the practice of meditation.

3. According to the third theory, the self or the world is eternal and also non-eternal. This theory assumes the eternity of the creator of the universe, but denies this attribute to his creatures. It is called "*ekaccasassatavāda*" in the [Brahmajāla Sutta](#). Although the theory says that most creatures are impermanent, it does not accept annihilation at death. It holds that the self transmigrates to another abode after the dissolution of the physical body. Hence, it belongs to the group of eternalism.

4. The fourth theory says that the self or the world is neither eternal nor non-eternal. It is hard to understand this view. It is a speculation that makes no sense. Since it says nothing definitely about the self, it is also called eel-wriggling (*amarāvikkhepavāda*), "*āmara*" being the name of a species of fish that is hard to grasp.

5. The fifth theory says that the self or the world is finite. In other words, a living being is a world of its own. The self that pervades the body of a being is limited in size to that of the respective body.

Thus, the self of a human being is supposed to be at most a fathom in height and from two and a half feet to three feet in girth. Some say that the self lies in the cavity of the heart and that its size depends on that of its habitat. It is also said that the self is as small as an electron (*paramānumrū*) when it is in search of a new abode.

6. The next theory is that the self or the world is infinitely great. It rejects the idea of an individual soul in each living being and holds that every being is a part of the supreme soul (*paramatta*) of God who created the Universe. The supreme soul is infinitely great and pervades the whole universe and so the self too is infinitely great. These theories that insist on the infinity or otherwise of the self are to be found in modern Indian religious books. Buddhist Commentaries attribute them to illusion about the size of the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) that arises during the practice

of concentration on a device (*kaṣiṇa*)<sup>1</sup> and passes for the self or the world. However, the illusion occurs only to a few individuals at a higher stage of mental absorption. The beliefs that I have mentioned are those of common people.

7. Some believe that the self or the world is finite as well as infinite. This is somewhat like the *ekaccasassatavāda* (theory 3). It apparently means that some, that is, the souls of those created by God are finite while the supreme soul (*paramatta*) of God is infinite.

8. Again some say that the self or the world is neither finite nor infinite. This too is a nonsensical speculation (like theory 4), and eel-wriggling that gives no definite answer.

All of these theories are absurd because they revolve about a self that does not exist. They make confusion worse confounded just like the speculations about the non-existent horn of the hare or the hair of the tortoise. Yet these theories appealed to those who were not the followers of the Buddha. The elder Mahā Cunda asked the Buddha whether a monk can completely overcome these beliefs just at the beginning of his meditation.

In other words, the question of the elder was whether the attainment of concentration (*samādhi*), joy (*pīti*), or the seeing of light at the early stage of meditation meant the elimination of wrong-views about the self or the world.

There were grounds for raising such a question. Some people believed that concentration, mental absorption, joy, or other varieties of experience that are called defilements of insight (*upakkilesa*) would suffice to ensure the conquest of wrong-views and the attainment of Arahantship. Cunda's questions were designed to enlighten such deluded and conceited people.

The practice of meditation has an air of holiness and any experience that is somewhat unusual is likely to be mistaken for an extraordinary insight. In the absence of a skilful guide or a qualified teacher, the meditator tends to overestimate himself and have illusions about his spiritual attainments on the basis of his trivial and slightly unusual experience. This is not peculiar to the present age. Even in the time of the Buddha, among those who practised meditation under the expert guidance of the Blessed One and the great Arahants like Sāriputta who gave instructions in both

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<sup>1</sup>An object made for the purpose of meditation such as a disk of clay. (Editor's note)



theory and practice, there were some meditators who harboured delusions because of their unusual experiences. It is safe to assume that nowadays the number of such meditators may be very great.

In reality, the attainment of spiritual goal means discrimination between mind and matter, realisation of their constant arising and passing away and clear understanding of the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*) nature of existence. Above all, the meditator must have illumination as regards the nature of phenomenal existence — its state of flux and dissolution; illumination resulting from disenchantment, weariness, and equanimity. It is only when he has these illuminations or insight-knowledge that the meditator can see nibbāna. It is only when he thus sees nibbāna at least on the Path of Stream-winning (*sotāpattimagga*) that he can get rid of the wrong-views about the self or the world.

## The Buddha's Reply

The Buddha's reply to Cunda's question was as follows:—

“Cunda, it is true that in this world there are many wrong-views about the self or the world. These views stem from the five aggregates of mental and physical phenomena (*khandhā*), they lie dormant in the five aggregates, they constantly focus on the five aggregates. However, if a man knows, “This set of five aggregates is not mine, it is not my self,” if he thus sees things as they really are with his insight-knowledge, he will completely rid himself of wrong-views.”

It is hard to understand both the question and the answer. Cunda asked whether it was possible to overcome wrong-views just as one begins to reflect on them, but what is the beginning of reflection? The Buddha's answer is that contemplation of the insubstantiality of the five aggregates means the elimination of the wrong-views, but how is one to contemplate it?

To be free from wrong-views about the self or the world, we should know their source as well as the misconceptions that give rise to them. According to the Buddha's teaching, these wrong-views will dominate us if we naïvely regard the five aggregates as our possessions, or as our self, and we will overcome them when we contemplate the impersonality of the aggregates.

The five aggregates are found in every living being. They are: 1) matter (*rūpa*), 2) feeling (*vedanā*), 3) perception (*saññā*), 4) mental

formations (*saṅkhārā*), and 5) consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The first group refers to the whole physical body that is made up of billions of microscopic particles of physical matter. The second is the group of feelings, pleasant or unpleasant, that depend on contact with the external world. Perception is the mental phenomenon that helps us to remember the sense-objects. Mental formations give rise to bodily, verbal, or mental activities. This group includes sensorial contact (*phassa*), attention (*manasikāra*), volition (*cetanā*), greed (*lobha*), hatred or anger (*dosa*) and other mental factors numbering fifty. As for the last group, consciousness, there are many kinds of consciousness as determined by the corresponding sense-organs such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, *etc.* Thus we have material and mental groups (*nāma-rūpa*), the physical being matter and the mental comprising the four groups of psychic activities.

### The Five Aggregates in Action

The five aggregates become active when there is contact between the senses and their respective objects. When any object is seen, the eye together with the whole body plus the visual object constitute the matter (*rūpa*), the pleasant or unpleasant feeling at the sight is *vedanā*, cognition of the object is *saññā*, paying attention to the object or making any effort to see it represents the *saṅkhārā* and the awareness of the object seen is *viññāṇa*. Whenever we see, only these five aggregates occur and there is no self besides them. Yet, people usually identify each of the five aggregates involved in the event of seeing with their self or ego-entity. When a man sees himself, he regards the visual form as his ego-entity and when he sees some living being, he considers it the ego-entity of somebody else. Thus the ego-belief is rooted in the human tendency to identify the five aggregates with ego-entity at the moment of seeing.

Likewise, the five aggregates come into play when we hear, smell, taste, touch, or think. Again, we have the ego-illusion that stems from the human tendency to regard the aggregates as the ego-entity. Most ordinary people are under the influence of the ego-belief that has its origin in consciousness since they usually make their ego identical with their mental activities and mental states such as emotions, *e.g.* happiness or unhappiness, feelings, memory, perception, intention, effort, and so forth.

## Potential Defilements

In his reply to Cunda, the Buddha said that the erroneous views about ego “arise, lie dormant, and occur constantly.” They arise because of misconceptions about the aggregates at the moment of seeing, and so forth. They arise not once or twice, but repeatedly. They lie dormant in the sense that although they may not arise at the moment of seeing and so forth, because of systematic attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*) etc., they are ready to do so under certain circumstances. The five aggregates that become manifest when we see and so forth, leave a clear impression on us and reflections on such impressions may give rise to greed, ill-will, ignorance, conceit and so forth. A wrong-view may also prevail that identifies our experience with the ego (“It was I who saw,” etc.) Thus, the potential for the ego-belief lies in the clear memory of sense-objects.

## Averting Defilements by Contemplation

To counter the latent defilements, we should contemplate the arising and passing away of aggregates, their impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*) nature. We should try to see them as they really are. We should note, “seeing, seeing” at the moment of seeing. In the same way we must be mindful of other sensations that result from hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. The objects of introspection in regard to the sense of touch are manifold. The sense of touch is involved at the moment of walking, sitting, lying, bending, etc. The feelings of warmth, painfulness, itchiness or tiredness, too, stem from the sense of touch. There are also numerous objects for contemplation at the moment of consciousness of mental events such as intending, knowing, or thinking. Pleasure, joy, sorrow, anger, craving, and other emotions may also be the objects of introspection.

However, the beginner in meditation cannot be aware of every physical or mental event; nor can he or she develop the power of concentration by so doing. One should begin with a few physical activities such as sitting or touching. One can also practise mindfulness of breathing by noting the inhalation and exhalation at the tip of the nostril. However, the method that we recommend is noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. The meditator’s mindfulness is not confined to abdominal motion. While noting the abdominal

rising and falling, you should also note pains, aches, bending, stretching, *etc.* In brief, you should note all mental and physical events. Begin with the abdominal movements, but as you develop mindfulness, you should extend it to all other psychophysical phenomena.

As you gain experience in mindfulness, you will become aware of only the phenomena such as seeing and hearing without any sign of permanence, pleasant or unpleasant character or ego-entity. Initially, you will see the matter as the known object and the mind as the knowing subject, but with the development of concentration, you will find only cause and effect. Further deepening of concentration will lead you to realise the perpetual arising and passing away of phenomena at every moment.

### **“This is Not I”**

Then you will come to know the impermanence of the five aggregates and this knowledge is an antidote to conceit just as awareness of imminent death is bound to counter inordinate pride. Whenever a meditator realises that everything is transitory, he knows, “This is not I.” Moreover, he is fully aware of the unsatisfactoriness of everything that arises and invariably passes away. He does not regard any sense-object as his belonging, an object of attachment or as something on which he can depend. Whenever he is aware of the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of things, he reflects, “This is not mine.” Again, since everything that the meditator notes conflicts with his desire and passes away in accordance with their nature, he comes to realise the futility and impersonality of the aggregates.

This realisation of *anatta* (non-existence of ego) is of paramount importance. Whenever the meditator contemplates the three marks of the aggregates and knows, “This is not mine. This I am not,” he will have no ego-illusion about them. He will not regard himself as the subject who sees or hears and so, through meditation he will for the time being free himself from the belief in ego-entity. However, this temporary elimination of the ego-illusion does not mean its complete eradication.

The illusion will arise whenever the meditator fails to contemplate the aggregates. Insight-knowledge into the three characteristics of the aggregates, together with their arising and passing away, will in due course lead to knowledge of dissolution (*bhāṅga-nāṇa*), at which stage the meditator see only the dissolution of all phenomena. Then, he will

find the sense-object as well as the consciousness that he notes continually vanishing. He understands clearly that everything is impermanent, unsatisfactory, insubstantial and unworthy of attachment. Later on knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*) arises, i.e., awareness of the terrifying character of the aggregates. This gives rise to knowledge of misery (*ādinava-ñāṇa*), which in turn leads to knowledge of disgust (*ñibbidā-ñāṇa*). Then the meditator wants to renounce the five aggregates, which means knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*), and so exerts more effort to contemplate leading to knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*). This results in detachment from the aggregates, which is knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). With the maturation of this knowledge, path knowledge of Stream-winning (*sotāpattimagga-ñāṇa*) arises when the meditator sees the peace of nibbāna wherein all the physical and mental phenomena become totally extinct. At this stage, insight into the three signs of existence suffices to eliminate the ego-belief.

According to the Sallekha Sutta, the knowledge — “This is not mine” “This I am not” “This is not my self” — is sufficient to overcome the ego-illusion. Once one has seen nibbāna, it is impossible for anyone to have illusions about the aggregates. The illusion is completely eliminated, hence the Buddha’s reply to Cunda that we have already quoted.

### How to Eliminate Ego-belief

It is easy to know through book-learning, listening to a Dhamma talk or memorisation that the aggregates do not belong to the ego, that as such, they are unworthy of attachment. However, neither this hearsay knowledge nor the intellectual acceptance of the fact in itself helps us to remove defilements.

It is only the intuitive, empirical knowledge that will ensure their riddance. Through constant introspection the meditator notes that everything that arises passes away immediately and he gains an insight into the impermanence of all phenomena, their frightful aspect and unsatisfactoriness. He knows well that there is nothing internally or externally that belongs to the ego and so he becomes free from attachment.

Moreover, this insight helps him to overcome egocentric pride. Pride is due to ignorance of the transitory nature of existence. Ordinary people do not observe the arising and passing away of

psychophysical phenomena and they believe that the physical body and consciousness last a lifetime, that the man who now sees and hears is the same individual who saw and heard before. This illusion of permanence and identity is the main-spring of pride and conceit. However, for the meditator who is aware of the ceaseless dissolution of mind-body complex, there is no cause for conceit.

Since every physical or mental phenomenon arises and vanishes instantly, there is no reason to believe in a living ego-entity. The object known as well as the knowing consciousness is always subject to dissolution and the only reality is the ceaseless flux of psychophysical elements that are passing away.

When the meditator develops his insight-knowledge everything that arises disappears as soon as he notes it. If the mind wanders while observing the rising and falling of the abdomen, the meditator instantly notes it and it (the wandering mind) disappears. If he has a sensation of heat in a certain part of the body, he directs his attention to it and it is gone the next moment together with the consciousness that focuses on it. Certainly, the perpetual dissolution of the psychophysical phenomena cannot represent a living ego-entity, a man or a woman with a permanent self. Recognition of this fact is the real insight-knowledge of the impersonality of existence.

Some meditators say that they see the ceaseless arising and passing away of the objects of introspection but that they are not well aware of what is happening to the introspecting mind. In that case, they are not yet free from ego-belief in regard to the subjective role of consciousness. However, those who constantly observe every physical or mental phenomenon that stems from the six senses in accordance with the teaching of Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta find all sense-objects as well as the observing consciousness constantly passing away and so they become fully aware of the impermanence of everything. Then after passing through the successive stages of insight-knowledge, the meditator attains the first path of holiness and sees nibbāna, the cessation of all psychophysical phenomena. Only then will he be free from all misconceptions about the self or the world. This is what the Buddha taught when he replied to Cunda.

In brief, it is the insight-knowledge of the continuous flux of all psychophysical phenomena together with the three marks of existence that brings home to the meditator the futility of attachment, conceit

and ego-belief and makes him see nibbāna on the first path of holiness. It is only then that he is entirely free from wrong-views. The development of concentration or the mere knowledge of the arising and passing away of everything or the emergence of insight-knowledge in itself does not mean the elimination of the beliefs. On the contrary, the meditator who is wedded to such beliefs tends to overestimate himself as a result of his attainment of absorption. This is pointed out in the further dialogues of the Buddha.

### First Absorption and Conceit

“Cunda, I will tell you about the cause of misconception and conceit in connection with the practice of meditation. Among my disciples, there are some monks who have attained the first absorption that is characterised by joy (*pīti*) and freedom from sensual desire, hindrances, and discursive thinking.”

Absorption (*jhāna*)<sup>1</sup> is the concentration of attention on one single object such as earth, water, in-and-out-breathing, an organ of the body or a corpse. This state of consciousness involving concentration and tranquillity is *samatha jhāna*. The other kind of absorption is *vipassanā jhāna*, which has as its object the contemplation and insight-knowledge of the three characteristics: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

### Attributes of the First Absorption

In the first absorption the meditator is free from sensual desires that always dominate ordinary people and even embarrass the meditators who have not yet developed concentration. The first absorption also ensures freedom from the other four hindrances viz., ill-will, torpor and laziness, restlessness and worry, and doubt. This freedom is enjoyed not only while the meditator in absorption, but also just before and just after his attainment of this state of consciousness.

Freedom from hindrances is followed by joy (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*). The meditator has an indescribable feeling of ecstasy

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<sup>1</sup> The word *jhāna* is often assumed to mean *samatha jhāna*, and some seem to be quite unaware of the nature of *vipassanā jhāna*. In this edition I have used the word absorption to avoid this confusion caused by the word *jhāna*. Both here and later, the Sayādaw explains the distinction between tranquillity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation at some length. (Editor’s note)

pervading his whole body. He is completely free from stiffness, tiredness, and other physical discomforts.

Thus, besides his freedom from hindrances the meditator has five attributes indicating his absorption in the first absorption — ecstatic joy, intense bliss, very active initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) or concentration (*samādhi*). The body of the meditator who has attained the first absorption is motionless, firm, and composed. This state of consciousness may last two or three hours; or it may last the whole day or the whole night. There is no collapsing or swaying of the body. It is a mistake to regard, as some people do, lying or rolling on the floor as a sign of spiritual attainment. These attainments designated by such terms as absorption, path or fruition are “*appanajavana*,” which we may translate as attainment-impulsion. The Commentaries define it as maintenance and strengthening of bodily postures such as sitting and standing.

Because of the freedom from hindrances and the five varieties of experience that characterise the first absorption, the meditator tends to be elated and conceited. However, in his reply to Cunda, the Buddha says unequivocally that the attainment of the first absorption does not mean the lessening of defilements.

There are grounds for delusion on the part of the meditator who has attained the first absorption. He hopes to have some unusual experience and so if he does have such experience, he tends to be deluded into a false sense of attainment. Some have delusions because they are misguided by incompetent teachers. In the case of some meditators, relative freedom from hindrances, joy, and other experience are satisfying enough to give cause for complacency.

However, this absorption experience is a far cry from the higher insight-knowledge of the three characteristics. It is by no means to be confused with the practice of effacement that helps to lessen defilements. The first absorption can only keep off the defilements, whereas, through the practice of effacement the meditator can eventually remove them, root and branch. Yet, the attainment of this absorption tends to give the meditator the impression of being a Stream-winner or an Arahant. There were bhikkhus subject to such illusions in the time of the Buddha and after his *parinibbāna*.



### **Five Hundred Deluded Monks**

Once, five hundred monks meditated in the forest according to the instructions of the Buddha. When they became absorbed in *jhāna*, they found themselves without any defilements and, being convinced of their spiritual attainment, they came to report to the Buddha. At the monastery gate they met the Venerable Ānanda who informed them of the Buddha's instruction that they should see the Teacher only after visiting the cemetery, so the monks went to the cemetery. It appeared that in those days corpses were left unburied at the cemetery. The corpses to be burnt were apparently in a fresh condition at the time of the monks' visit. At the sight of the decomposed corpses, the monks were filled with disgust. Yet, they could not help lusting for the bodies of women who had died recently. Only then did they realise that they were not yet completely free from defilements. Then the Buddha emitted divine rays from his abode and gave a discourse. On hearing the discourse, all of the monks became Arahants.

### **The Story of the Elder Mahānāga**

About three or four hundred years after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha, in southern Sri Lanka there lived an Arahant called Dhammadinna. At that time there was an elderly monk named Mahānāga who regarded himself as an Arahant. One day, Dhammadinna went to the elderly monk and asked many questions, which the latter answered easily. Dhammadinna complimented the monk on his deep wisdom and inquired of him when he first became an Arahant. He said he had been an Arahant for more than sixty years. Did he possess psychic powers? Yes, he did. At the request of his questioner, the monk created a big elephant. Could he now make that elephant trumpet and rush towards him? He resolved accordingly, but as the animal came rushing towards him, he became frightened and was about to run away when Dhammadinna seized the fringe of his robe and said, "Sir, would an Arahant have any fear?" Only then did Mahānāga know that he was a mere worldlyling. He meditated in accordance with the instructions of Dhammadinna and became a real Arahant.

### **The Story of the Elder Cūlasuma**

The story of another ill-informed meditator monk is told in the Commentary on the Sallekha Sutta. He was called Cūlasuma and he

dwelt at a forest retreat that turned out many Arahants in those days. Cūlasuma, too, considered himself an Arahant. At the request of Dhammadinna, he created a lake and a big lotus flower with a girl dancing and singing sweetly on it. Dhammadinna told the monk to watch the dancing girl for a moment and went into a room. Then while the monk was watching the girl of his own making, the sensual desire that had been lying dormant for sixteen years began to rear its ugly head. Being disillusioned, the monk meditated according to Dhammadinna's instructions and attained real Arahantship.

### Unusual Experiences

These stories point to the misconceptions current in ancient India when the Buddhist religion was flourishing. The meditator monks of those days were spiritually advanced and endowed with psychic powers. Their misconception was due to unusual power of concentration. Nowadays, some meditators have illusions without making any spiritual progress. When the meditator who correctly practises gains an insight into the arising and passing away of all mental phenomena, he is overwhelmed with a variety of unusual experiences such as seeing the light, rapture, tranquillity, joy, faith and so forth. In the Visuddhimagga, the meditator is assured of these experiences. If the practice of meditation does not bring about these experiences, the question arises as to whether the method is correct or whether the meditator is lacking in effort. On the other hand, the meditator who has such experiences may overestimate his attainments.

### Abiding in Bliss Here and Now

The first absorption is not the practice of effacement that helps to root out the defilements. In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha calls it abiding in bliss here and now (*diṭṭhadhamma-sukhavihāra*). While the meditator is in absorption, the mind is fixed on a single object. With the mind free from all unwholesome distractions, he or she is calm and peaceful. This state may continue for two or three hours.

The Buddha also pointed out how illusion and complacency may arise from the second absorption with its three characteristics — rapture, joy, and one-pointedness, or from the third absorption with its joy and one-pointedness, or from the fourth absorption with its equanimity and one-pointedness. Of course, the second, third, and fourth absorptions

are more sublime than the preceding states of consciousness, but they ensure only bliss in the present life, and can by no means be equated with practice of effacement that is designed to eliminate defilements.

Nor can the practice of effacement be equated with the absorptions of unbounded space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*), unbounded consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*), nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*), and that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*), which do not help to overcome defilements. They lead only to peaceful bliss and as such are called peaceful abidings (*santavihāra*).

### Absorption in Insight Meditation

Insight meditation and absorption have some characteristics in common. When the practice of mindfulness is well established at the exploratory stage, *i.e.* knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*), there are initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), joy (*pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). Thus, whenever the meditator observes any phenomenon, his insight meditation is somewhat like the first absorption with its five characteristics.

When the meditator gains insight-knowledge of the arising and passing away of all phenomena, he is fully aware of an arising object without initial or sustained application. He has intense joy, bliss, and tranquillity, thus his meditation is somewhat like the second absorption with its three attributes.

The disappearance of the light, and so forth — the corruptions of insight (*upakkilesa*) — marks an advance in the insight-knowledge of the arising and passing away of phenomena. Then there is no joy, but bliss is very intense. The mind is tranquil and free from distractions. The meditator has the bliss and one-pointedness that are characteristics of the third absorption.

The higher levels of insight-knowledge such as knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), wherein the meditator sees only the passing away usually have nothing to do with joy. They are characterised by equanimity and one-pointedness. The former is especially pronounced at the stage of knowledge of equanimity about formations. At this stage the insight meditation is akin to the fourth absorption with its two attributes of equanimity and one-pointedness.

Furthermore, at times the meditator's whole body disappears, giving him the impression of being in space. At that moment he is

like a person absorbed in *ākāsānañcāyatana jhāna*. At other times, attention is fixed exclusively on consciousness and then the meditator's state of consciousness resembles *viññāṇañcāyatana jhāna*. On occasions, it seems as though he were noting nothingness, a state somewhat like *ākiñcaññāyatana jhāna*. Sometimes the consciousness may be so transcendental that it becomes non-existent, a state on par with that of *nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana jhāna*.

These characteristics that insight meditation has in common with absorption often leads to complacency, which is an obstacle to spiritual progress. In meditation it is necessary to note these unusual experiences and reject them. In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha, after pointing out the misleading nature of absorption, proceeds to spell out the practice of effacement that is calculated to root out defilements.

# The Practice of Effacement

The Sallekha Sutta mentions forty-four kinds of unwholesome acts, speech, and thoughts that we must avoid to overcome defilements. These are as follows:

1. Violence (*vihimsā*),
2. Killing (*pāṇātipāta*),
3. Stealing (*adinnādāna*),
4. Unchastity (*abrahmacariya*),
5. Lying (*musāvāda*),
6. Slander or Divisive Speech (*pisunavācā*),
7. Abusive or Harsh Speech (*pharusavācā*),
8. Idle Chatter (*samphappalāpa*),
9. Covetousness (*abhijjhā*),
10. Ill-will (*vyāpāda*),
11. Wrong View (*micchā-diṭṭhi*),
12. Wrong Thought (*micchā-sañkappa*),
13. Wrong Speech (*micchā-vācā*),
14. Wrong Action (*micchā-kammanta*),
15. Wrong Livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*),
16. Wrong Effort (*micchā-vāyāma*),
17. Wrong Mindfulness (*micchā-sati*),
18. Wrong Concentration (*micchā-samādhi*),
19. Wrong Knowledge (*micchā-ñāṇa*),
20. Wrong Liberation (*micchā-vimutti*),
21. Sloth and Torpor (*thīnamiddha*),
22. Restlessness (*uddhacca*),
23. Doubt (*vicikicchā*),
24. Anger (*kodha*),
25. Malice (*upanāha*),
26. Ingratitude (*makkha*),
27. Arrogance (*palāsa*),
28. Envy (*issā*),
29. Meanness (*macchariya*),
30. Hypocrisy (*sāṭṭheyya*),
31. Deceitfulness (*māyā*),
32. Disrespect (*thambha*),
33. Over-estimation (*atimāna*),
34. Stubbornness (*ḍubbacā*),

35. Evil Friends (*pāpamitta*),
36. Heedlessness (*pamāda*),
37. Scepticism (*asaddhata*),
38. Shamelessness (*ahirika*),
39. Recklessness (*anottappa*),
40. Nescience (*appassutātā*),
41. Laziness (*kosajja*),
42. Absent-mindedness (*mutṭhasacca*),
43. Foolishness (*duppaññatā*),
44. Dogmatism (*sandiṭṭhiparāmāsa*).

# The Exposition of Effacement

Absorption in itself does not ensure the total extinction of these defilements. Their total extinction calls for completed self-training in respect of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) that run counter to them. To this end, the meditator must attain at least Stream-winning. At this stage, wrong-views, dogmatism, scepticism, the wish to kill, in brief, all the defilements that can land a man in the lower realms are rooted out. This extinction is of paramount importance. Concentration, absorption, psychic powers and special illumination count for little without the extinction of defilements.

For the non-Buddhist meditator, the attainment of absorption and its preservation until death mean rebirth and longevity in the Brahmā realm. However, eventually he will return to the celestial or human realms and then his bent for sensual pleasures and unwholesome deeds may again lead him to the lower planes of existence. Moreover, the Buddhist meditator who is complacent because of his absorption attainment does not fare any better than the non-Buddhist meditator with absorption in that he is still in danger of descent into the lower realm. However, should he practise meditation on the basis of absorption, he can free himself from such a danger. The Buddha urged his disciples not to remain complacent over absorption, but to practise effacement that would ensure the total eradication of unwholesome propensities.

## Violence (1)

The first precept that the Buddha enjoined on his disciples is that of non-violence (*avihiṃsā*). We should avoid hurting any living being if only because we do not wish to be hurt. The doctrine of *ahiṃsā* is acceptable to all living beings.

India has a high regard for this doctrine of non-violence. It tops the list of five major rules of conduct binding on the Jains. However, the Jains go to extreme in their interpretation of non-violence. From their point of view, cold water, green vegetation, and earth are animate, so we should not harm them. The Vinaya rules forbidding the destruction of vegetation and digging the earth were designed to avoid controversy and ill-will. In reality, vegetation and earth are not living beings and a non-bhikkhu who cuts the plants

or digs the earth is by no means doing any evil. However, the Buddhadhamma insists that we should not hurt any living being, whether big or small, that is sensitive to pain and pleasure.

Non-violence is more enabling than absorption. To understand this, we should note that there are three levels of this defilement. First, we have the level of violence that hurts a living being physically or by word of mouth — defilements of transgression (*vitikkamakilesā*). Morality is the antidote against this kind of defilement. A man who values his morality will not hurt others. He may bear ill-will, but because of his moral sense he does not give vent to it physically or verbally.

The aggressive thoughts that we harbour are called active defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesā*). We have to overcome this kind of defilement through access concentration and attainment concentration associated with absorption. Concentration on an object such as in-and-out breathing counteracts unwholesome thoughts. This is abandoning defilements by suppression (*vikkhambhana pahāna*), which the Commentaries liken to the pushing aside of algae on a pond by a pot thrown into it. The meditator may be free from ill-will in his post-*jhānic* state of consciousness for many years, but just like the surface of water that is again covered with algae, the mind of the meditator will be defiled when there is cause for defilement, as in the case of the two Sinhalese monks with supernormal powers.

Aggressive desires lie dormant in a person who does not contemplate the psychophysical phenomena arising from the six senses or who has not yet reached Non-returning, and they become manifest under conducive circumstances. The Pāḷi term for these is latent defilements (*anusayakilesā*). A physical or mental event that escapes our notice leaving us unaffected at the time, may make us ill-tempered when it is recalled. Such latent defilements have to be eliminated through insight-knowledge. The meditator who constantly notes all psychophysical phenomena will take no offence in the face of an offensive sense-object. To him everything is momentary, subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Neither contact with a sense object nor any recollection of it makes him angry. This is the way to overcome aggression through meditation by momentary abandonment (*tadaṅga-pahāna*). Every object that a person fails to note is a potential source of ill-will. However, meditation is the basic practice that enables one to root out its cause. Once one attains



Stream-winning, one is free from the gross forms of ill-will that may consign one to the lower realms. At the second stage of Once-returning, the ill-will becomes still weaker, while at the stage of Non-returning it becomes completely extinct. The practice of effacement requires the meditator to avoid aggression until the attainment of Non-returning. Hence, its superiority over absorption.

The meditators at our meditation centre are dedicated to the practice of effacement. Effacement is integral to their morality. They constantly note all the feelings and sensations that arise from contact with the external world, and every moment of awareness means the suppression of aggression. After some time, they eradicate it completely. This accords with the Buddha's teaching in the Sallekha Sutta.

"Other people may harm living beings. However, we will not harm any living thing. Thus, you should practise effacement that will lessen the defilements."

This teaching also applies to the other forty-three defilements. It concerns the practical phase of effacement. The Buddha also taught its reflective phase.

### Thoughts of Effacement

"Cunda, I say that even the mere thought of wholesome qualities is very beneficial to you."

The mere thought of practising generosity (*dāna*), observing morality (*sīla*), and cultivating mental development (*bhāvanā*), is highly beneficial. The mere intention to observe the moral precepts, to listen to a Dhamma talk or to practise meditation is conducive to worldly or heavenly bliss. On his death bed, Maṭṭhakuṇḍali, a rich man's son, saw the Buddha, and was so inspired by wholesome thoughts that he became a celestial being in Tāvatiṃsa. A frog was once enraptured by the Buddha's voice, so that it became a celestial being after death. Just after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, a woman of Rājagaha was intent on offering some flowers to a pagoda, but on the way she was gored to death by a bull. Then, she found herself with a golden chariot among the retinue of Sakka, the king of Tāvatiṃsa.

In view of this meritorious nature of wholesome thoughts, it is hardly necessary to dwell on the benefits that result from carrying

them into effect. Prosperity in the human or celestial realm is rooted in such wholesome thoughts. These thoughts result in doing deeds, which in turn lead to happiness on earth and in the celestial realms. The effort to become a Buddha or an Arahant also begins with wholesome thoughts. The meditators at this centre are motivated by such thoughts and will gain the illumination that they seek in due course. Thus, even the conception of a wholesome idea, thought, or desire is very important. The Buddha said:

“Cunda, the mere thought of harmlessness is beneficial. You should cultivate the thought, ‘Other people may hurt living beings, but I will not hurt any being.’”

### Avoidance

Another method of approach to the way of effacement is that of avoidance (*parikkamanavāra*). Here, the Buddha cites the examples of a safe road and a safe harbour. Suppose there are two roads, one safe and the other dangerous, or two harbours, one safe and the other dangerous. One can avoid the dangerous road and the dangerous harbour by going along the safe road and by using the safe harbour. Similarly, if one follows the path of non-violence, it means one avoids the path of violence. Although the sutta refers to violent persons the Buddha’s teaching applies to non-violent persons as well. Although a man does not now commit violence either physically or by speech, he might have committed it in his previous existences and he may commit it in future by force of circumstances. No one is completely free from aggression until attaining Non-returning or Arahantship. We should practise effacement and strive to attain the higher stages of the noble ones that will wipe out the defilements.

### Spiritual Uplift

Another aspect of the practice of non-violence is its tendency to elevate the devotee to the higher realms (*uparibhāgavāra*). In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha says that all unwholesome deeds tend to land the doer in the lower realms, whereas all wholesome deeds ensure rebirth in the higher realms. All unwholesome deeds have their roots in greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Major misdeeds such as killing and stealing may lead to rebirth in the lower realms. Minor misdeeds motivated by desire or ill-will do not cause much

suffering to the wrong-doer, but they tend to prolong misery in the cycle of life. Those who have committed gross misdeeds such as killing have to suffer not only in the lower realms, but also in the human world where they may be reborn by virtue of their wholesome kamma.

Retribution follows for many lifetimes in the form of a short life-span, physical afflictions, poverty, and so forth. Ill-health is often the karmic result of aggression committed in a previous existence. An unwholesome deed will, at best, lead to rebirth as a poor, wretched celestial being in the heavenly realm, and at worst it means damnation in Avīci, the lowest hell. In the time of Kakusandha Buddha, a Māra called Dūsi, instantly landed in Avīci hell because of his wicked deed against the Buddha and the Arahants.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, wholesome deeds such as generosity and morality tend to lead the doer up the successive levels of existence to the realms of human beings, deities, and Brahmās. They also make the paths of holiness accessible, such as that of Stream-winning. Wholesome deeds help the doer to become a rich man or a king, as happened in the case of a flower-girl who offered the Buddha some food and before long became the queen of King Kosala.

When a bottle of oil is broken in water, the heavy pieces of glass sink, while the light oil rises up. Likewise, evil deeds tend to drag a person down, whereas wholesome deeds contribute to his or her uplift. A person who does wholesome deeds will enjoy longevity, good health, beauty and so on. He or she will become a celestial being or a Brahmā in a future life. He or she can also attain the paths of holiness. The person who has made spiritual or material progress on the basis of wholesome deeds is secure. So you should seek higher status, spiritual or otherwise, through the practice of non-aggression.

### Extinction of Defilements

We now come to the last aspect of the practice of effacement — that of extinguishing the fires of defilements (*parinibbānavāra*). In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha says that there is no reason why a man who is completely sunk in a quagmire will be able to save another man in a similar predicament. However, it is reasonable to assume that a man who is not sunk in the quagmire can save another man who is not bogged down in the mud. Likewise, only the man

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<sup>1</sup> See the Māratajjaniya Sutta, Majjhimanikāya, M.i.334. (Editor's note)

who has disciplined himself, trained himself in the threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path and extinguished the fires of defilements will be able to help another man in regard to discipline, mental development, and extinction of defilements.

According to the Commentaries, the quagmire refers to sensual pleasures and a person who loves pleasure is likened to a man sunk in a quagmire. The implication is that a man who is immersed in sensual pleasures cannot save another man from a similar entanglement. This should be especially borne in mind by those who give instructions in meditation without having practised it, as well as by those who are being guided by such teachers.

The Commentaries say that there are people who have become enlightened after hearing the talks of worldlings and that such enlightenment through proper reflection on Dhamma talks means deliverance by the Buddha. However, such cases are exceptional.

Here, the substance of the Buddha's teaching is that one who is not free from the dangers of *saṃsāra* and the lower realms cannot free others from such dangers, that one who has not overcome defilements cannot help others to do so. Just as a fire cannot be used for putting out another fire, so also a defilement cannot neutralize another defilement. Violence cannot extinguish violence. It can be ended only by non-violence.

Let us then vow that we will avoid violence, cultivate thoughts of non-violence, ward off violence with non-violence, raise our status through non-violence, and put out the fire of violence with non-violence. These are the five aspects of effacement that the Buddha explains in the sutta.

### **Karmic Effects of Violence and Non-violence**

The karmic effects of violence and non-violence are spelled out in the Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta<sup>1</sup> of the Majjhimanikāya. Subha, a young man asked the Buddha why some people live long, why some live only a few years, why some are healthy and some unhealthy, why some are good-looking and some ugly and so forth. The Buddha says:

“All living beings have kamma as their own property; they inherit the results of their kamma; kamma is the root cause

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<sup>1</sup> Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta, M.ii.203, Sutta 135.



With this verse, the Buddha reminded Tissa of the need to practise the Dhamma since he had nothing else on which he could rely in his last moments. Once he became lifeless, nobody would care for his corpse. It would become rotten and loathsome in a couple of days. It would be abandoned at the cemetery just as people take away only sound timber for making chairs, beds, and so forth, and leave the useless logs in the forest.

### **The Relics of the Arahant**

As he had had some training, Tissa became an Arahant on hearing the verse; and before long he passed away. The Buddha had the corpse burnt and the bones enshrined in a pagoda (*cetiya*). The bones left over after the cremation of a deceased Arahant are what we call his relics (*dhātu*). Burmese Buddhists usually believe that the relics of the Arahants are spherical objects like those of the Buddha.

This is not true. Only the Buddha's relics are somewhat like tiny balls as a result of his will. When we went to Calcutta to receive and convey the relics of the two chief disciples to Burma, we found them just like ordinary bones. There is no doubt that the relics of other Arahants, too, are nothing more than human bones. The popular belief that the relics of a revered saint turn up in the shape of balls after cremation is, therefore, to be taken with a grain of salt.

### **The Previous Life of Tissa**

The monks asked the Buddha about the destiny of their late co-religionist. The Buddha said that he had attained nibbāna. They asked the Buddha why Tissa had suffered so much despite his potentiality for sainthood.

According to the Buddha, Tissa was a fowler in the time of Kassapa Buddha. He killed and sold birds. As for the birds that remained unsold at the end of the day, he broke their wings and legs. As there was no cold storage in those days, this was his way of keeping the birds fresh and alive. For mutilating and killing birds, he suffered for a long time in hell, and when he was reborn in the human world, he had many diseases, and in his last existence his evil kamma worked itself out to its bitter end. His attainment of Arahantship was in part due to his offering almsfood to an Arahant, while making a prayer for sainthood during his life as a fowler.

Those who are kind and avoid violence will be free from disease and ill-health in a future life, like the Elder Bākula. When I was in Mawlamyaing, I met a woman whose health was simply amazing. She was in her early sixties and yet she had never taken any medicine and never had an ailment like headache or cold. The part of Mawlamyaing in which I resided was malaria-infested, and I had an attack every two or three months, but the woman was immune although she lived there the whole year. Her health was most probably due to the practice of non-violence and kindness in her previous existence. To enjoy good health and freedom from disease you should lead a life of non-violence and kindness.

## Killing (2)

The abstinence from taking life is one of the five precepts and so it is familiar to Buddhists. However, it needs elaboration. The Pāli term for taking life is *pāṇātipāta*. *Pāṇa* means a living being or life; *ati* means “very quickly” and *pāta* means to make something fall. Hence, *pāṇātipāta* literally means to cut off a life prematurely. As in the case of non-violence, the Buddha’s discourse on abstinence from killing deals with is five aspects.

## Effacement

Those who do not practise effacement leading to the elimination of defilements will not hesitate to take life. Yet such people are really afraid of death. The Buddha stresses the fact that every living being fears danger and death. This does not apply to Arahants and Non-returners, but such saints are rare.

All over the world the law of the jungle reigns supreme. Big animals kill and eat small animals for their survival. This is true of both land and sea animals. As the Buddha says, in the animal realm, cannibalism at the expense of the weak is the order of the day. However, animals are no worse than mankind in this respect. Mankind consumes all sorts of animals, including wild birds and even big whales from distant seas.

To take life and preserve one’s body at the sacrifice of other living beings is a gross injustice. Yet, people who kill for their own survival are greatly afraid of death. They are more afraid of being killed by others, or of being eaten by animals such as lions, tigers,

or big snakes. Once a group of Americans tried to catch dragons on an Indonesian island. These dragons are bigger than a man. The Americans shot them dead or set traps to catch them alive. On one occasion a dragon came rushing to attack a woman among the hunters. The woman was terrified, and had a narrow escape only because her companion shot the dragon just in time. This shows how people fear death although they kill living beings cruelly. In accordance with the Buddha's teaching, we should avoid taking life, or in other words, adopt the practice of effacement (*sallekhavāra*) that helps to reduce the defilement of killing.

### Thoughts on Non-killing

As in the case of non-violence, we should bear in mind the other four aspects of non-killing. We should cultivate thoughts about it (*cittuppādavāra*), and follow the path of non-killing to avoid the path of killing (*parikkamanavāra*). Then, there is the uplifting aspect of non-killing (*uparibhāgavāra*). Killing is an unwholesome deed that leads to the lower realms or to rebirth among the lower, wretched classes of human beings.

Some people achieve success and wealth at the expense of other people's lives, but their achievement is short-lived. They are bound to suffer in the cycle of life. On the other hand, non-killing leads to security and happiness on the higher planes of existence. Those who avoid killing will not revert to lower realms. Let us ensure spiritual progress through abstinence from killing.

Finally, we have the aspect of non-killing that contributes to the extinction of defilements (*parinibbānavāra*).

### Absorption and Non-killing

Abstinence from killing is a moral practice and so, why is it described as superior to absorption? According to the Commentaries, the absorptions were practised prior to the rise of Buddhism and, as such, they do not lead to higher spiritual attainments and nibbāna. On the other hand, non-violence and non-killing received impetus from Buddhism as part of the way to full liberation. Hence, the Buddhist emphasis on the practice of effacement.

In the Pāli text that mentions the popular belief in the high spiritual value of absorptions, reference is made to "some monks



in this Buddhist religion (*sāsana*).” This, of course, means the bhikkhus, and it might be argued that the Buddhist meditator is also not practising effacement if he or she becomes too complacent and proud because of absorptions. In my opinion, complacency resulting from *jhānic* attainment is incompatible with real spiritual progress. It does not square with the practice of effacement that leads to the total destruction of defilements.

I have already cited the cases of Mahānāga and Cūlasumana, the two devotees of absorption who were denied transcendental knowledge for sixty years because of their complacency. If not for the instructions of Dhammadinna, all their efforts and aspirations would have been futile, like those of the ascetics Āḷāra and Udaka. From the Buddhist point of view, absorption should not be confused with effacement.

In the Buddhist practice of effacement, one has to overcome defilements through morality, concentration, and wisdom or insight-knowledge. We have to depend on morality for the elimination of physical and verbal defilements such as killing, stealing, lying, abusing, and so forth. As for unwholesome thoughts we should dispel them through concentration. We can develop the power of concentration by means of *kaṣiṇa* exercises, by fixing the mind on in-and-out breathing, or by being absorbed in *jhāna*. Concentration on breathing may last five or ten minutes, while absorption may continue for a few hours. All unwholesome thoughts are expelled in these states of consciousness.

However, the conquest of defilements through concentration is temporary. Repeated concentration on the repulsiveness of the internal organs of the human body will fill the meditator with aversion to a very good-looking man or woman, but once he suspends his contemplation, he becomes attached to his sense-object. In other words, concentration provides only a temporary antidote against defilements.

### **The Permanent Remedy: Insight-knowledge**

Only insight-knowledge enables us to overcome the defilements completely. As the meditator notes the sense-objects such as the sight, sound, *etc.*, attentively, he finds that they pass away constantly, as does the consciousness that knows them. Nothing permanent can be found. No impression of visual objects or sounds is left on his mind. He is not defiled by greed or ill-will in connection with his

seeing or hearing. Nor does the recollection of any event lead to defilement since the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the sense-object is not apparent at the moment of seeing or hearing, and the insight into the impermanence of every object and the knowing consciousness leaves no room for unwholesome propensities. Mindfulness is essential, for the meditator cannot overcome the defilements stemming from sense-objects that escape his attention.

Constant mindfulness and the subsequent perfection of insight-knowledge lead to contact with nibbāna on the path of the noble ones. Such illumination roots out the respective defilements. At the Stream-winning stage, ego-belief and doubt become extinct, the meditator no longer commits unwholesome deeds such as killing, stealing, and so forth, that lead to rebirth in the lower realms. The Stream-winner is not yet completely free from greed and ill-will, and still craves for pleasant objects or takes offence at anything displeasing. However, greed and ill-will are not base or pernicious enough to make him or her kill or steal. A true Stream-winner is completely free from unwholesome deeds that lead to the lower realms.

This is the way to conquer defilements through insight-knowledge. The practice of effacement calls for such total conquest. Some meditators become complacent when they attain absorption. Concentration on in-and-out breathing or any other object often results in rigidity of the whole body and total oblivion. To the instructor and to those around the meditator, this state of consciousness may mean absorption. However, in the absence of insight-knowledge of mind and matter, the distinction between them and their three characteristics, such a state may indicate nothing more than deep concentration. Later on, the meditator may have serious moral lapses and betray his true character. This is because concentration by itself cannot root out defilements. For their total extinction we need insight-knowledge that leads to contact with nibbāna. Total extinction of defilements is assured only when we find that we are not capable of, say, killing under any circumstances. If we are capable of killing under extenuating circumstances, it is safe to assume that our practice of effacement is imperfect.

### **The Act of Killing**

We will now consider the constituent factors of the act of killing from the standpoint of Buddhist ethics. There are five essential factors:

1) The object must be a living being, 2) There must be the awareness of it being a living being, 3) The doer must have the intent to kill, 4) There must be the effort to kill or to cause death such as by striking or cutting, and 5) This effort must result in the destruction of life. If any of these factors is lacking, it cannot strictly be called an act of killing.

The destruction of grass or plants that are mistaken for living beings does not constitute an act of killing. It is, of course, unwholesome because it is motivated by ill-will. However, it will produce no harmful karmic effect worth speaking of.

Nor is the destruction of a living being that you mistake for an inanimate object an act of killing since there is no intent to kill. No less *karmically* sterile, is your act that results accidentally in the death of a living being as it is an involuntary act. For example, when a morally scrupulous man is bitten by an ant, he will have to remove it. If his act accidentally leads to the death of the insect, it has no karmic effect because it is devoid of the volition (*cetanā*) to kill.

Suppose the first four conditions are present, but the subject fails to cause the death of his victim. It is a morally unwholesome act, its karmic gravity depending on the life quality of the victim. If the victim dies as a result of your effort, it is an act of killing, pure and simple, and you will have to pay for it according to the victim's moral status. If the killer's volition is weak, the karmic effect is little. If it is strong, the effect is great. Again, the magnitude of the karmic effect is determined by the stress and strain involved in the effort to kill as well as by the moral character of the victim.

## Causing Others to Kill

An act of killing has karmic effect not only when you yourself kill, but also when you incite another person to kill. If you show by signs your desire to cause the death of a living being, that too is an act of killing on your part. This is important and should be borne in mind by housewives. It is said that at the fish stalls in the bazaar, fish are usually kept alive and battered to death only on demand by customers. Buying fish that have already been killed by fishmongers may not produce any karmic effect. However, to turn your back at the sight of live fish, and buy it later on, after it has been done to death, does not make you *karmically* less guilty. So you should be mindful when you are out shopping in the bazaar.

## Meat for Bhikkhus

A bhikkhu should avoid eating three kinds of meat — the meat of an animal that he has seen being killed expressly for his meal; the meat of an animal that he understands has been killed for him; and the meat that has raised doubt as to whether the flesh of the animal has been intended for him. In some villages where there are no meat-vendors, the chicken curry that a layman serves a visiting monk is suspect. Unless he can remove his suspicion, it is not proper for the monk to eat. Eating the three kinds of unallowable meat is not a karmic act of killing, but according to the Vinaya rules, it constitutes an offence, so it is unwholesome.

According to the Jains, a man who eats the flesh of an animal that he knows has been killed for his food, will have to bear half the karmic consequence of killing. This view is not shared by Buddhism. However, to eat knowing that the animal has been killed for you shows a lack of compassion and may lead to further acts of killing for you. It is improper for a bhikkhu to eat any meat if he suspects that the animal has been killed to provide food for him, for another monk, or for the Saṅgha.

It is said that Sinhalese bhikkhus consider it improper to eat eggs. This is reasonable, for when the eggs are offered as food, these have to be freshly boiled or fried. There is cause for misgiving even through the bhikkhu sees or hears nothing that makes him suspicious. There are eggs such as those preserved in salt or lime solution that one can eat with a clear conscience. The same is true of boiled eggs in the bazaar. Then there are infertile eggs, which many people suppose to be lifeless. Personally, I have some doubts about this view. The eggs may contain a living being that is destined to die in its embryonic state. The karmic destiny of some living beings is very strange. Some are conceived in rocks and crushed as they are in such a narrow place. They must suffer greatly, and one wonders what unwholesome kamma might have consigned them to this terrible fate. Perhaps there may be such ill-fated living things in unhatchable eggs. However, those who eat eggs assuming them to be lifeless are not *karmically* guilty because two essential factors — the sign of life and the intention to cause death — are lacking.

Public feasts on festive occasions in some villages call for reflection. There are no meat-sellers, so if people are to be served

with meat, an order has to be placed in advance for it. Thus, regrettably, the donor who is out to gain merit by giving alms has to bear at least in part the karmic responsibility for the slaughter of animals. It also raises the question of whether the bhikkhus should eat the meat-curry offered on such occasions. It is said that in some villages pigs are taken to the monastery to be killed on the eve of the religious feast. This is, of course, downright impropriety. Some thirty years ago, a friend of mine who was residing at a village monastery had to protest vehemently against the practice.

Again, we have to consider whether it is proper for the monks to eat *danbouk* (specially prepared rice with meat) supplied by hotels. Such kind of food is suspect in view of the possibility that animals have been killed specifically for that festive occasion. The best way to ensure strict conformity with the precept against taking life is to avoid eating meat. If we are not vegetarians, we should be very careful about our food to keep ourselves undefiled by any act of killing.

The best way to uproot the desire to kill is to note all phenomena arising from the senses. Those who are not mindful will wish to destroy any being that offends them. However, the ever mindful meditator who realises the three characteristics will not see or hear the offensive object, let alone desire to destroy it. In the event of being bitten by an ant, the unmindful and vicious man will kill the insect instantly. The virtuous man suppresses the desire to kill, so he will remove it. However, the mindful meditator will be aware of pain, and he will note its arising and passing away. He will, therefore, have no ill-will, much less the desire to kill. If the pain is unbearable, he will attend to it, but never with the desire to kill. His mind is invulnerable to unwholesome thoughts and he is always free from the defilement of killing.

### **The Karmic Effects of Killing**

The Buddha pointed out the karmic effects of killing and non-killing in his reply to Subha's question about the inequality of human beings. There are various causes of this inequality. We may explain it in terms of what we observe in regard to the influence of heredity and environmental factors such as food. However, even some identical twins do not have the same span of life and so observation of life does not by itself dispose of the problems of

human differences. We have then to consider two explanations that have nothing to do with empirical data. One presupposes a Creator while the other follows the law of kamma.

According to the first view, the world and all human beings were created by God or what the Hindus call Brahmā. The belief in the Creator arose long before the rise of Buddhism and it is mentioned in the Pāthika Sutta<sup>1</sup> of the Dīghanikāya. Those who believe in the Creator hold that the brevity or longevity of a man's life is predetermined by his Creator.

### **Stillborn Babies**

However, it is difficult to answer the question, "Why do some babies die shortly after their birth?" These ill-fated babies are to be found among all people irrespective of their religion or lack of it.

Notwithstanding all the best doctors and best child-care, civilized societies still have to contend with infant mortality. Many a woman with her strong maternal instinct devotes a lot of attention to the care of her child, and yet, it does not survive for long. On the other hand, some village women have a lot of children although they may not care much for their offspring.

If we are to believe that a baby dies in accordance with the will of God, why has he shortened the life of an innocent human being? Why has he caused the unhappiness of the child's parents who have faithfully worshipped him?

### **The Buddha's Answer**

According to the Buddha, the man or the woman who cruelly kills another living being is liable to be reborn in hell where he suffers for millions of years. If, after his release from hell, he is reborn as a human being, his lifetime will be comparatively short.

Here, the Buddha's discourse suggests only the possibility of the killer's suffering in hell. However, every killer is not so condemned on his death. Some killers may be reborn in the human or celestial realms by virtue of their overwhelming wholesome deeds. For example, the high ranking army officer in the [Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka](#) was a butcher in his previous existence. However, they have to pay for their unwholesome kamma in due course, and suffer in

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<sup>1</sup> See D.iii.31 on the origins of the world. (Editor's note)

hell for many years. If they are reborn as human beings, they do not live long. If their kamma is not good enough to ensure rebirth in the human world, they become animals, their life span is short and they usually die a violent death. Thus, fowls and ducks are killed for human consumption and so are cattle, pigs and goats.

The animals in the sea survive by eating the weak but they, in turn, are eaten up by the more powerful species. The living things with the shortest span of life are the insects that live on cultivated plants. They are usually destroyed for fear of an acute shortage of food. This brevity of life in the animal realm is, from the Buddhist point of view, largely due to acts of killing in previous existences.

In the human world, too, some are stillborn, some die immediately after birth and some die in their childhood or youth. Some die in accidents, some are murdered and the lives of some people are cut off by terrible diseases. All these premature deaths are due to unwholesome kamma associated with killing. There are many stories in the Commentaries to show the karmic effect of killing. One is as follows.

### **For Killing A Sheep**

Long ago a prince in Benares vowed to the tree-deity that when he became king, he would offer the blood of 101 kings and their queens. On his wish being fulfilled, he captured all the kings and queens and set about making preparations for the sacrifice. The queen of the youngest king was called Dhammadinnā. She made obeisance to her husband but not to the king. Then chided by the latter, she said that she paid respect only to her husband because he was her benefactor. Then she wept and laughed. When the king asked her whether she was crazy, she told the story of one of her previous lives.

Long ago, in one of her past existences, she was a housewife. One day, while her husband was sleeping, some of his friends came, and she sent her slave girl to buy meat for the guests. However, no meat being available, she cut off the head of a ewe at the back of her house and prepared food for them. For this unwholesome deed, she suffered in hell-fire and because of the karmic debt that still remained, she had been beheaded as many times as there were strands of wool on the body of the ewe. She wept because she was sorry for the king who would have to suffer like her for his bloody sacrifice. She laughed because she was happy at the thought that the suffering involved in the repayment

of her karmic debt was now drawing to a close. The king was shocked. He begged the captives for their forgiveness and released them.

### **Matakabhatta Jātaka**

This Jātaka is the story of a brahmin who offered animal sacrifice for the welfare of the dead in accordance with the Vedic instructions. Matakabhatta means offering food for the dead. It involved the ritual killing of a sheep, performance of sacrifice and feasting. For this misdeed, the brahmin became a ram for five hundred lives and got his head chopped off in every life of existence. The Burmese saying about five hundred lifetime of suffering for an unwholesome kamma is apparently based on this Jātaka.

What is then the karmic cause of the grief of the parents over the loss of their short-lived child? This is not hard to understand from the Buddhist point of view. Presumably, they were the parents of a killer in a previous existence. Probably, they approved of what their son or daughter had done, and hence their unhappiness in the present life.

### **The Wholesome Kamma of Non-killing**

According to the Buddha, one who avoids killing will enjoy longevity in a future life. This is what he says in *Cūlakamma-vibhaṅga Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*. The Commentaries on the *Khuddakapāṭha* and *Itivuttaka* also mention thirty-two benefits that accrue to those who avoid killing. Among them are beauty, longevity, health, popularity, the services of many attendants, freedom from worry, and association with one's beloved.

Those who want to be good-looking in a future life should avoid killing. The Commentaries mention eight characteristics of beauty — absence of deformities, well-proportioned body, shapeliness of the feet, gracefulness, softness (of the skin), purity, attractive features, and attractive form.

By longevity, the Commentaries mean living a long life and dying naturally, that is, not to die by the hand of a murderer. Health consists in freedom from disease, and endowment with strength, and agility. Popularity means being liked by other people and speaking inoffensively. One who avoids killing will have an unlimited number of attendants.

Freedom from worry is another karmic fruit that we can enjoy in a future existence, if we avoid killing. Everybody wants to live



a carefree life and hence the popularity of books like “How to Stop Worrying and Start Living.” The best way to overcome worry is to lead a moral life and practise Satipaṭṭhāna meditation constantly. As the Buddha says, this way of life, which the meditators at this meditation centre follow faithfully, is the only defence against grief and anxiety.

Still another agreeable karmic fruit is the non-separation from one’s beloved like wife, children, *etc.*, and from one’s greatly prized possessions. Equally pleasing is the karmic fruit in the form of having a sufficient attendants whenever one needs them. We should avoid killing if we wish to be assured of union with our beloved, our attendants and our property in a future life. Other karmic fruits of non-killing are courage, frankness, fearlessness and invulnerability.

Thus in the Commentary, we have twenty-three karmic advantages of non-killing. It is easy to see the harmful karmic fruits of killing, for they are just the opposites of the benefits that have been mentioned. Thus, they are ugliness, short span of life, illness and so forth.

### Stealing (3)

As the Sallekha Sutta says, stealing is one of forty-four defilements:

“Other people may steal or loot what is not given by the owner. We will avoid doing so.” Thus you should practise effacement that helps to reduce defilements.

Buddhists who faithfully follow the Buddha’s teaching observe the five precepts and avoid stealing. I will now explain the second precept in detail.

The immoral act in question is called “*adinnādāna*,” which literally means taking anything that is not given by the owner. This is, of course, stealing, which includes taking a person’s property surreptitiously or by force. The Vinaya Piṭaka spells out twenty-five kinds of stealing that are to be avoided by bhikkhus. It will take us far afield to dwell on them and so we will describe mainly stealing and robbing.

Stealing is taking surreptitiously what belongs to another person without his knowledge while he is asleep or off his guard or absent. To cheat a buyer by using false weights and measures, to fob off a worthless article on a buyer, to sell counterfeit gold and silver, not to pay due wages or conveyance charges, customs, or taxes; refusing to

repay loans of money or property or to return what is entrusted to one's care, and to refuse to compensate others for any damage or loss for which one is responsible. All of these constitute acts of stealing.

Robbery is using force to obtain other's property. It includes intimidation and extortion of money or property, excessive and coercive taxation, unlawful confiscation of property for the settlement of debt, court litigation for illegal ownership through false witnesses and false statements.

Stealing has five factors: 1) The item or property is in the possession of a certain person, 2) One knows that it is owned by somebody, 3) One has the intention to steal or rob, 4) Commission of theft or robbery, 5) Successful removal of the property. An act will amount to theft only if it involves all of these factors. If the thing taken has no owner, it is not theft. Nor is it theft if one takes it thinking that it has no owner or that it belongs to oneself. However, when one learns that the thing taken belongs to another, one must return it or pay compensation for it, otherwise, one has committed theft. If, without any intention of stealing, one takes an intimate friend's belongings on trust, it is not theft. However, it must be returned to the owner if he or she wants it. Otherwise, it is an act of stealing. As for the fourth factor, one is guilty of theft or robbery whether one commits the misdeed oneself or urges another person to commit it. Again theft is committed as soon as one takes a thing and displaces it with intent to steal. One may drop it when detected by the owner, but that makes no difference. In the case of a bhikkhu, if the thing in question is worth twenty-five *māsakas*,<sup>1</sup> he ceases once and forever to be a member of the Saṅgha. Putting the stolen property in its original place does not absolve one of guilt. What matters most is the meaning of "successful removal," which includes cases of theft that do not involve physical displacement. You commit theft if you decide not to pay due fees, wages, or fares, or when anyone who should receive money from you gives up all hope for it. If the court gives the decision in your favour in the case of property that you acquire unfairly through litigation, you commit theft. An act is theft if it fulfils these five conditions, whether it involves taking another person's property surreptitiously, through deception, or through intimidation.

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<sup>1</sup>*Māsaka*: a small coin of low value. A penny or cent, perhaps a shilling or a dime. The exact value is uncertain. The rule indicates that is of sufficient value to justify bringing criminal charges. (Editor's note)

In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha points out four phases of the practice of non-stealing. First, one makes the affirmation that one will avoid stealing. Secondly, one should cultivate thoughts and intentions, about non-stealing. Then one should avoid the dangerous path of stealing by following the safe path of non-stealing. The third phase of the practice of effacement is based on avoidance or abstention.

### Abstention from Stealing

There are three kinds of abstention: by attainment (*sampatta virati*), by undertaking (*samādāna virati*) and by cutting off (*samuccheda virati*). Abstention by attainment is abstention from doing unwholesome deeds when occasion arises without any prior commitment to the observance of the moral precepts. As an example the Commentary cites the case of a man named Cakkana.<sup>1</sup>

In Sri Lanka, a man named Cakkana went out to catch a rabbit because a physician had recommended rabbit flesh as food for his sick mother. Seeing him, a rabbit ran away, but it got entangled with a creeper. Cakkana caught the rabbit and then he had second thoughts about killing it. He considered it improper to kill the animal for the sake of his mother. Setting it free, he returned home and declared solemnly, "To my knowledge, I have never killed a living being in my life. May my mother recover from her illness because of the truth of what I say!" His mother instantly became well. In this story, Cakkana had not undertaken to observe the precepts, and he caught the rabbit, intending to kill it. However, as an afterthought he released the animal. This abstinence from killing, stealing, lying, *etc.*, when there is an occasion for it is abstinence by attainment (*sampatta virati*).

Abstinence by undertaking (*samādāna virati*) is abstinence out of regard for one's commitment to morality. Here the story of a lay Buddhist in a hilly region is a case in point. After vowing to observe the precepts in the presence of the Elder Buddhārakkhita, he ploughed the field. Since the bullock that he had unyoked after ploughing did not return, he went up a hill to look for it. There he was caught by a boa-constrictor. He thought of cutting off the reptile's head with his knife. However, he remembered the vow that he had taken before his greatly revered bhikkhu. Resolving to give

<sup>1</sup> MA.i.204, Commentary on the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (ed.)

up his life rather than break his vow, he threw away his knife. The boa instantly let him go and slipped away. This is a case of abstinence to honour one's commitment to morality.

Abstinence by cutting off (*samuccheda virati*) refers to the abstinence involved in right speech, right action, and right livelihood of the Noble Eightfold Path. From the moment this kind of abstinence is established by the noble path, one has no desire to kill, steal, or lie. One has no consciousness that is active enough to give rise to wrong speech, wrong action, and wrong livelihood. Such abstinence of the noble path helps one to eradicate unwholesome tendencies forever. In the time of the Buddha, the slave-girl Khujjuttarā misappropriated four out of eight gold coins (*kaḥāpana*) that she was given to spend on flowers by Queen Sāmāvati. One day, she heard the Buddha's discourse and became a Stream-winner. From that time onwards, she spent all of the money on the purchase of flowers and on being questioned by Queen Sāmāvati she did not lie, but confessed what she had previously been doing.

One who practises effacement as taught by the Buddha will have to observe at least the five precepts. One must always abstain from killing and other misdeeds. If possible, one must devote oneself to insight meditation, striving to uproot all defilements by means of abstinence by cutting off. Constant mindfulness of all phenomena arising from the six senses means abstinence from unwholesome deeds. This needs some explanation.

Unmindfulness may give rise to the desire to kill, steal, *etc.*, in connection with what one sees, hears and so forth. If these desires are powerful, they may result in the actual commission of murder, theft, or other misdeeds. The meditator who constantly notes everything that arises from the six senses, is aware only of mind and matter, their arising and passing away. The meditator regards them as neither pleasant nor unpleasant, still less as something that will arouse the desire to do misdeeds. Thus abstinence from unwholesome deeds is assured. When insight-knowledge is well advanced it leads to the knowledge on the level of the path. Then a meditator is completely free from the desire to speak, act, or earn a living unlawfully. These three kinds of abstinence mean diverting oneself from the path of stealing to that of non-stealing.

## **Non-stealing for Spiritual Uplift**

Unwholesome deeds usually lead to a low, ignoble life, whereas wholesome deeds are the foundation of a higher, noble life. The Buddha says that abstinence from stealing is conducive to our uplift. Unscrupulous people seize every opportunity to make themselves prosperous, and achieve higher social status by stealing and robbing. We should, on the contrary, resolve to seek higher life by abstinence from stealing. The Buddha also teaches that non-stealing contributes to the extinction of defilements. This is the extinction phase of non-stealing.

Buddhists who observe the precept against stealing should remember that their observance is in accordance with the Buddha's teaching in the Sallekha Sutta. They should improve and perfect their practice of non-stealing as far as possible.

## **The Karmic Effects of Stealing**

The Buddha's teaching about the karmic effects of stealing in the *Anguttaranikāya* is as follows:

“Monks, through repeated stealing and robbing, one is liable to be reborn in hell or in the animal realm or in the realm of hungry ghosts. At the very least, stealing leads to damage and loss of property.”

One who steals or robs suffers in hell and may be reborn as an animal. In a certain town of Burma an elderly man received payment for a loan of forty kyats, but he denied having received the money and demanded the settlement of the debt. He swore, “May I be reborn as a buffalo in the borrower's house after death if I do not speak the truth.” The borrower had to pay another forty kyats, and on his death the moneylender did become a young buffalo in the house of his former debtor. This was borne out by the animal's responsiveness when the daughter of its owner called it by his usual name. Many people believe that the story is credible.

A robber or thief may also become a starving and miserable hungry ghost. If by virtue of wholesome kamma he returns to the human world, the wealth that he has amassed is highly vulnerable. On the other hand, the karmic effect of non-stealing is just the opposite; rebirth in heaven and affluence that is indestructible and enduring on returning to the human world.

### **Karmic Effects of Non-stealing**

These are the karmic effects of stealing and non-stealing mentioned in the Pāli texts. The Commentaries on the Khuddakapāṭha and Itivuttaka point out eleven karmic benefits of non-stealing — affluence, abundant wealth, an unlimited supply of consumer goods, fulfilment of every desire, increase of wealth, speedy acquisition of things desired, security of wealth, freedom from the five enemies that constitute a threat to the security of wealth, undisputed possession of property, that is, possession with no one to contest it, high rank and leadership, and peace and happiness.

Here, the five enemies that endanger the security of property are kings or rulers, thieves, water, fire, and unworthy offspring. When we say that the king is one of the enemies posing a threat to our economic security, we mean unscrupulous kings. Usually, law-abiding kings help to promote the economic welfare of the people. Those who avoid stealing will not suffer from the loss of property through the action of bad kings, thieves, fire and water in their future lives, nor will they have to bequeath their wealth to unworthy sons and daughters.

The karmic consequences of stealing are, of course, just the opposite of those of non-stealing. These may be summed up as poverty, hunger and misery in spite of hard work, economic ruin, destruction of property by five enemies, low social status, and hardship and privation in daily life.

### **Non-stealing for Spiritual Uplift**

Everyone should avoid stealing for his or her uplift in status and prosperity. For the same reason, one should seek to eliminate the other forty-three defilements such as killing, aggression, *etc.*, that are mentioned in the Sallekha Sutta. Moral dangers are to be eliminated through commitment to precepts as well as through meditation. For the conquest of other defilements, the meditator can resort to wise reflection, meditation, and knowledge on the noble path. Of the forty-four defilements, some can be completely eradicated at the stage of Stream-winning, some at the stage of a Non-returner, while some can be rooted out only on the attainment of Arahantship.

## **Extinction of Defilements**

At this meditation centre, the meditators practise constant mindfulness to overcome defilements. Defilements arise from lack of mindfulness and even if they do not arise at the moment of seeing, *etc.*, they may find an outlet in fantasies. Such latent defilements lie dormant in us.

With the development of concentration, the ever mindful meditator becomes aware of only mind and matter in perpetual flux. Insight into their three characteristics leaves no room for greed, ill-will, or delusion. Unwholesome desires such as the wish to kill or steal, become extinct. The meditator overcomes them whenever he is mindful of them. This is overcoming by momentary abandonment. When insight-knowledge matures, the meditator attains the noble path. At the stage of Stream-winning, ego-belief, wrong-view, doubt, and all unwholesome desires leading to the lower realms become extinct. Later, at the stage of Once-returning, the meditator is assured of the complete extinction of gross defilements associated with sensual desires and ill-will. At the stage of Non-returning, he or she is completely free from the subtle forms of the same unwholesome propensities. Finally, with the attainment of Arahantship, he or she is liberated from all defilements rooted in the craving for existence, pride, and ignorance. To achieve this liberation, the meditator must be constantly mindful in accordance with the teaching of the Sallekha Sutta.

Some may ask what this sutta has to do with mindfulness. They need not ask this question if they understand the sutta. Every moment of mindfulness means the practice of effacement at its highest level. The meditator will vow to avoid all misdeeds through constant mindfulness, although unmindful persons kill, steal, *etc.*, in the wake of what they see, hear, *etc.*

Lack of mindfulness means harbouring potential for misdeeds and the choice of the wrong path leading to killing, stealing, and so forth. Every moment of mindfulness marks a step in spiritual development. Initially the meditator is a foolish worldling, ignorant of the arising and passing away of all psychophysical phenomena. Mindfulness develops concentration, unusual insight, and awareness of the matter as the known object and mind as the knowing subject. This is the first step.

The second step is the awareness of cause and effect as the only two aspects of reality. Then there is the clear realisation of the three characteristics and so on with other successive stages of illumination.

That is what the meditators themselves reveal to us. Among them are both men and women who have had a specially clear insight (into the nature of phenomenal existence). This morning a temporary *bhikkhu* (*dullabha*)<sup>1</sup> told us how he adored the Buddha because of his deeper understanding of the Dhamma. Before one practises the Dhamma, one's knowledge of the Dhamma is limited and based only on tradition. The instructions of the teachers fail to make much impression or arouse any interest. It is only practice that enlightens the mind and makes the meditator aware of the nature of reality.

Some do not know what to make of the experience of the meditators that I describe. They say that they do not remember what I tell them, so they do not appreciate my talks. Of course, I might have failed to teach something that they could understand readily. However, the meditators who have practised meditation appreciate my talks. Other teachings fail to satisfy them fully. To them, elaborate discourses with scriptural quotations, examples and analogies are not worthwhile if divorced from practice. To talk about the nature of mind and matter or impermanence in terms of Pāli texts requires detailed explanations with examples, but as for the meditator the distinction between mind and matter, or the arising and passing away of all phenomena is borne out by experience. This is a significant step in their spiritual development.

Through the practice of mindfulness the meditators realise the three characteristics and attain various stages of insight-knowledge. Of these, that of arising and passing away is striking. At this stage the perception is quick, the intellect is sharp, and it seems as if there were nothing that could not be perceived or known. The meditator experiences illumination and intense rapture. The mind is very clear and happy, and the joyful feeling is indescribable. The Buddha called it *amanussirati* — a joy beyond the reach of ordinary men." However, it is necessary to note these delightful stages of insight and reject them to attain the knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). At that stage the known object as well as the knowing consciousness vanishes imme-

<sup>1</sup> *Dullabha* = difficult to obtain, rare. Human rebirth is rare, the arising of a Buddha is rare, gaining confidence in the Dhamma is rare, and going forth as a *bhikkhu* is rare. Hence this term for temporarily ordained *bhikkhus* in Burma. (Editor's note)



diately. The concept of a human form with its head, hands, and other parts is nowhere to be found. Everything is passing away, and deeper insight into the three characteristics is realised by the meditator.

This is followed by successive stages of insight-knowledge: knowledge of fearfulness, misery, disgust, and desire for deliverance, which we touched upon previously. Later, the meditator reaches the knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), a very subtle and exquisite insight-knowledge that lasts for two or three hours and is characterised by automatic, effortless cognition, and equanimity. This stage leads to adaptation knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), and finally to knowledge of the noble path (*magga-ñāṇa*) and its fruition (*phala-ñāṇa*) at the stage of Stream-winning.

If the meditator keeps on practising mindfulness, he passes through the other two stages of the noble path and at last attains Arahantship, the supreme goal of the holy life. Progress on the path presupposes constant mindfulness, so one should practise mindfulness for spiritual growth and conquest of defilements.

## Unchastity (4)

The subject of our talk today is chastity. According to the Sallekha Sutta, we should practise chastity although other people may indulge in unchastity (*abrahmacariya*).

The vast majority of people cannot abstain from sexual acts. The only exceptions are the bhikkhus who faithfully abide by the Vinaya rules, and those lay people who are committed to precepts. The majority of mankind indulge in sex. However, sexual indulgence is not an immoral act like killing or stealing if it avoids illicit sexual intercourse. Unchastity by itself cannot land a lay person in the lower realms and so it is not a grave offence like killing.

There are two kinds of unchastity — unchastity that amounts to illicit sexual intercourse, and that which does not rank as sexual misconduct. Everyone should abstain from illicit sexual intercourse. If a lay person does not avoid the second kind of unchastity, *i.e.* legitimate sexual acts, the observance of the five precepts remains untainted. If he or she can avoid unchastity, it will be better for his or her spiritual life. However, the bhikkhu has to avoid all sexual acts completely.

Any indulgence in sex means a violation of his morality. Presumably, this passage in the sutta was primarily intended for the strictly

celibate bhikkhus. However, it concerns those who observe eight or ten precepts or any other moral discipline that stresses chastity. Chastity is the life-long practice of the Buddha and the Arahants. The lay person who practises chastity even for a single day possesses in part the moral attribute of the noble ones for that day. His or her life is then very noble and pure. If one cannot practise it, one should at least resolve to abstain from illicit sexual intercourse.

### Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāra*) refers to all kinds of sexual relations conducted in violation of the traditional code of sexual ethics laid down by virtuous and wise men. There are twenty kinds of women with whom men should have no sexual relations. Briefly, they are women under the guardianship of parents and relatives, women under the guardianship of relatives, women under the protection of a religious order, married women, betrothed women, and so forth. Men should avoid sexual contact with such women. As for a married woman, she should have no sexual relations with any man other than her husband. Men and women who engage in such illicit relations are guilty of sexual misconduct and so everyone should avoid this breach of morality.

### Chastity

Chastity is abstinence from all sexual acts regardless of the nature of such acts. Bhikkhus, recluses, and nuns have to practise chastity for life. Lay people are committed to it only while observing precepts of higher morality.

As in the case of killing and stealing, the Sallekha Sutta says that we should practise chastity even though others may indulge in unchastity; that we should cultivate thoughts about chastity. This resolution is meant for bhikkhus, novices, nuns, and lay Buddhists who have pledged themselves to the higher moral life. The meditator who observes eight precepts is committed to chastity for a number of days or months. Those who cannot practise chastity should avoid illicit sexual acts.

Like non-killing, *etc.*, the practice of chastity means the avoidance of a dangerous path; it contributes to spiritual growth and is conducive to the extinction of defilements. It is hard for those who have sexual

desire to practise chastity. This is because they are blind to the dangers of sexual defilements. It is, therefore, necessary to reflect on these dangers. Attachment to sexual pleasure means impurity of mind. People are dominated and enslaved by sexual desire. For the sake of sexual pleasure they have to suffer, commit crimes, and face penalties. They do misdeeds that lead to the lower realms after death; and cannot get free from the lower sexual life or from *samsāra*.

If a man leads a life of chastity, his spiritual status is high. Look at the bhikkhus. People revere the bhikkhu and offer almsfood, *etc.*, because of his chastity. His spiritual life will be much higher if he possesses moral integrity tranquillity and wisdom. However, morality in itself is a mark of a noble life and ensures the respect, adoration, and generosity of lay people. Such virtuous bhikkhus are seldom in need of food, robes, dwelling, and medicine. To those aged monks who come and ask for robes, I say, “Venerable sir, you are in dire need of robes because of your lack of moral attributes. If you have this attribute, the lay followers will surely offer you robes. Therefore, try to live up to the moral ideal.” The Buddha gave the same advice in the Ākaṅkheyya Sutta,<sup>1</sup> that is, that a bhikkhu should perfect his moral life if he wants to be well provided with the four necessities of life. Hence, chastity contributes to material and spiritual welfare in this life as well as to progress on the *samsāric* plane and towards final attainment of nibbāna.

Those who are committed to lifelong chastity should practise it strictly. I say “strictly” in the sense that you should avoid not only major sexual acts involving mutual agreement and intercourse between two persons, but also minor sexual activity. In the Methuna Sutta<sup>2</sup> of the Aṅguttaranikāya the Buddha mentions seven kinds of minor sexual acts.

## Seven Minor Sexual Acts

On one occasion a brahmin called Jāṇussoṇi approached the Buddha and asked him a question. He was a learned man, well-versed in the Vedas. In those days, learned brahmins used to question, discuss, and debate with the Buddha. The Hindus of modern times are the descendents of those brahmins and so Jāṇussoṇi might be called a Hindu pandit. He asked the Buddha,

<sup>1</sup> Majjhimanikāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Sutta 6. (M.i.33)

<sup>2</sup> Aṅguttaranikāya, Sattakanipāta, Mahāyaṇṇavago (A.iv.53)

“Does the recluse Gotama claim to be a holy man who practises chastity?” He asked this question because he considered the Buddha unqualified to be called a *brahmacārī* (one who practises chastity).

According to the practice of chastity prescribed in their sacred books, a brahmin remained unmarried and devoted himself to the study of Vedas until he was forty-eight years old. At forty-eight, some brahmins begged for alms with which they repaid the debt of gratitude to their teachers and then they became ascetics. Some went to the house of brahmins who had daughters of marriageable age. They asked for marriage to such girls for the perpetuation of their families in exchange for the merits that they had acquired through the practice of chastity for forty-eight years. Those brahmins who wished to acquire merit effortlessly, gladly gave away their daughters ceremoniously. It would be hard for Buddhists to understand such an offering, but this is not surprising in view of the occasional reports that we hear in Burma of daughters being offered to a charlatan who posed as a member of the royal family. Brahmins offered their daughters because of their faith in Vedas while some Burmese gave away their daughters under certain delusions. What some people do may seem absurd in our eyes, but it is born of their hopes and convictions.

With the birth of a child, the brahmin considered himself to have fulfilled the function of procreation and some became ascetics while some continued to live the life of a householder.

Jāṇussoṇi believed that only those who, like these brahmins, were pledged to chastity for forty-eight years should call themselves *brahmacārī*, a title which, he contended, must be denied to the Buddha who, had enjoyed married life as a prince for thirteen years.

The Buddha replied that he was a true *brahmacārī*. Then, he pointed out the seven minor sexual acts that tend to defile and degrade chastity. These are as follows:

1. Some so-called recluses and brahmins claim to be *brahmacārī* by merely abstaining from sexual intercourse with women. Yet, they welcome and enjoy being fondled, massaged, bathed, cleansed and powdered by women. Such indulgence causes the degradation of chastity. The chastity of these men is impure. It does not contribute to their spiritual liberation. This is the first minor sexual act. Among the Buddhist Saṅgha too, some elderly monks are reported to have allowed themselves to be massaged by women.

This practice will surely cast a slur on their chastity. Delight in contact with women and any effort to that end lay a bhikkhu open to a charge of a Saṅghādisesa offence.

2. Joking and talking merrily with women. There is no physical contact, but the act involves joking, teasing, and kidding. If the talk refers to obscenities, the bhikkhu is also guilty of a Saṅghādisesa offence.

3. Staring at a woman with pleasure.

4. The woman is not visible because of walls, partitions, or curtains, but her voice is audible. The recluse or brahmin is pleased to hear the woman laughing, crying, talking, or singing. This way of seeking pleasure is nowadays more widespread than before. The songs of women over the radio can be heard everywhere. To enjoy hearing these songs is to indulge in minor sexual pleasure.

5. Retrospective pleasure over the pleasant time that one spent formerly with women. This especially concerns those who take up monastic life after having indulged in worldly pleasures in their youth.

6. Envy of the rich who are given to the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Such envy cannot but lead to the degradation of chastity. This sexual act is subtle. These minor sexual acts from one to six are concerned with the present life.

7. The last minor sexual act is the desire to be reborn in the celestial realms by virtue of one's morality and chastity. This means the desire for sensual pleasure in the company of celestial nymphs in the next existence. It does not differ fundamentally from the desire of the monk who looks forward to having a good time when he leaves the Saṅgha. The craving for the pleasure of the celestial realms is described as a minor sexual act by the Buddha. The objective of joining the Saṅgha is to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth, not celestial bliss.

These seven minor sexual acts may be committed by a *bhikkhu* as well as by Buddhist laity who observe the eight precepts. Everything that we have said about the defilement of chastity applies to men and women alike.

Of the seven minor sexual acts, it is primarily the first two that lead to moral lapses. The other five acts by themselves are not so destructive though they tend to defile morality. A bhikkhu should avoid all seven acts as far as possible. It may not be possible for non-meditators to free themselves completely from the desire for heavenly pleasures. Even among meditators, the desire may lurk in those whose object is only

to avoid rebirth in the lower realms. However, the meditator makes a mental note of all thoughts and desires about minor sexual acts and overcomes them. This is no more difficult for them than it is for a sick man who has medicines to cure his disease. They also discard all unwholesome thoughts about sex through firm resolution.

The brahmins who practised chastity did not consider it necessary to avoid minor sexual acts, nor did they know how to exercise mindfulness and reflect wisely to that end. Hence, those who practised chastity for forty-eight years in the brahminical tradition were not free from minor sexual acts. Their married life after forty-eight years of chastity also made them sexually impure. The Buddha brought home these facts to the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi, adding that he claimed to be the Fully Enlightened Buddha only after he had completely overcome the seven minor sexual acts. Greatly impressed by this teaching, Jāṇussoṇi became a disciple of the Buddha.

Not only the Buddha, but the Arahants also have nothing to do with minor sexual acts. Even at the stage of Non-returning, the noble ones are free from attachment to the realm of form and formless realm. At the first two stages of holiness, the bhikkhu is usually free from sexual acts. It is also necessary for lay Buddhists to avoid them when they are meditating or observing the precepts. In this way, they can enhance their chastity and make it immaculate.

I have referred to minor sexual activity for the sake of those who are intent on higher chastity. As for the ordinary chastity that most people understand by the word "*brahmacariya*," its purity is not spoiled as long as one avoids sexual relations. The lay Buddhists who cannot keep themselves chaste should avoid illicit sex. Those who commit sexual excesses have to pay dearly for them in their future existences. According to the Buddha's teaching in the *Anguttaranikāya*; they are liable to be reborn in the lower realms. When they are reborn again as human beings they tend to have many enemies.

The karmic rewards of those who avoid illicit sexual intercourse are just the opposite. After their death they will reach celestial realms, and on their return to the human world, they will have no enemies, but many loyal friends.

The Commentaries on the *Khuddakapāṭha* and *Itivuttaka* mention twenty karmic effects of chastity. Of course, eight are specially worthy of note. The karmic rewards are: 1) Having no

enemies, 2) Being in no danger of rebirth in the lower realms, 3) Being in no danger from any quarter, 4) Being able to do anything openly without any fear, 5) Being able to speak fearlessly, “straight from the shoulder,” 6) Being able to speak without hanging one’s head, 7) Being loved by other people, 8) Happy married life, 9) Abundance of consumer goods, 10) Having all the sense organs such as eyes, ears, *etc.*, 11) Possession of the essential attributes of the male and the female, 12) Not being a eunuch, 13) No change of sex, 14) Having no occasion to part from one’s beloved, 15) Being able to sleep soundly, 16) Having no worry about food, clothing, *etc.*, 17) Not being short-tempered, 18) Having no fear or shyness.

These are the karmic benefits accruing to those who avoid illicit sexual intercourse while observing the five precepts or who practise chastity while observing the eight precepts. Needless to say, the same benefits accrue, too, from the lifelong chastity of bhikkhus. The following is a story illustrative of such benefits.

### Male Chastity

During the time of Kassapa Buddha, seven bhikkhus noticed moral corruption among some of their fellow-monks, and being monks of high integrity, decided to live in solitude. They went up to the top of a hill by means of a ladder and pushed away the ladder as they were bent on practising the Dhamma at the sacrifice of their lives. In due course, the eldest bhikkhu became an Arahant with psychic powers. He went about for alms and, on his return, invited the other monks to eat the food that he had collected. However, the six monks declined the offer as they believed that eating would make them less afraid of death, and so become less energetic in their spiritual endeavour.

The next day, the eldest of the six bhikkhus attained Non-returning together with psychic powers. He, too, offered food to the remaining five bhikkhus, but they refused to eat and continued practising the Dhamma. However, they lacked the capacity for spiritual development, so all of them died of thirst and starvation. It may be said that these monks lost their lives prematurely because of their excessive energy.

However, if we consider their case objectively, it was not a loss but a great gain for them. Without practising chastity, they might

have lived for twenty thousand years, but they would not have gained much after their death. Now by virtue of their serious practice of chastity, they were reborn in the celestial realms. There they spent, not a couple of life times, but a long period from the time of Kassapa Buddha until the time of Gotama Buddha when all of them attained Arahantship. The first three Arahants were Dabba, Kumārakassapa, and Bāhiya Dārucīriya. The fourth was the wandering ascetic Sabhiya who asked the Buddha some questions and became an Arahant. The fifth was King Pukkusāti who attained Non-returning after hearing the Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta.<sup>1</sup> Before long, he died and was reborn in the Suddhāvāsa Brahmā realm, where he became an Arahant. For all of these bhikkhus, their repeated enjoyment of heavenly bliss and their final attainment of Arahantship were due to their practice of chastity as monks. Thus, although they died of starvation in the time of Kassapa Buddha, it was a great gain for them.

### **Female Chastity**

In the time of Kassapa Buddha there was a king called Kikī who attended to the physical needs of the Buddha. He had seven daughters named Samaṇī, Samaṇaguttā, Bhikkhuṇī, Bhikkhudāyikā, Dhammā, Sudhammā and Saṅghadāyikā. These names indicate the king's high regard for the Buddha's teaching. Indeed the seven princesses adored the Dhamma greatly. They wished to join the Saṅgha and asked for their father's permission. The king did not agree and so instead of getting married, they practised chastity for 20,000 years.

As the king's daughters, they grew up in the tender care of their royal maids and attendants. They had no need to worry about food, clothing, *etc.* Because they were unmarried, they led a carefree life. They spent their time serving the physical needs of the Buddha. Although they lived for 20,000 years they did not get bored and never thought of marriage, but practised celibacy happily.

Because of their virtues they enjoyed heavenly bliss many times. When they were reborn in the human world, they lived in affluence. Finally, in the time of Gotama Buddha they had illuminating experiences. Of the seven daughters, Samaṇī, the eldest, became an Arahant and one of the Buddha's chief disciples.

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<sup>1</sup> Majjhimanikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsa, Vibhaṅgavaggo (M.iii.237)



## **The Story of Khemā**

Khemā was at first the chief queen of Bimbisāra, the king of Māgadha. When the Buddha came to the city of Rājagaha, accompanied by one thousand Arahants, former fire-worshipping ascetics of the Uruvela forest who had been converted to the Dhamma, he was welcomed by the king with a gathering of 12,000 people. The Buddha delivered a suitable discourse and, on hearing it, the king and most of his followers attained Stream-winning. The next day, the king offered food to the Buddha and the Saṅgha, and donated the Bamboo Grove (Veḷuvana) for their residence. The Buddha spent the second, third, fourth, seventeenth, and twentieth Rains Retreats in the Bamboo Grove. At other times, too, he stayed there in the course of his wanderings. While the Buddha was there, the king availed himself of every opportunity to see the Buddha and listen to his discourses.

However, his chief queen, Khemā, did not care to see the Buddha. She was very beautiful and spent a lot of her time in making herself beautiful. She had heard that the Buddha often spoke in contempt of physical beauty, so she was afraid and reluctant to see the Teacher. Having tasted the Dhamma, the king wanted to share it with her. The king was five years younger than the Buddha, so the queen was probably still in her early thirties, and due to her narcissistic vanity she had no desire to hear the Dhamma. The king devised a plan to bring about the Queen's encounter with the Buddha.

He had songs composed by poets and sung by minstrels, songs that paid a glowing tribute to the splendour of the Bamboo Grove. The poets did their best to paint a fine literary picture of the garden. Their songs extolled the attractions of the garden, depicting its resemblance to the Nandavana of the celestial realm, the visits of the deities to the garden, their wonder and infatuation, the residence of the Buddha that added to the splendour of the garden and so forth. The songs were in Pāli stanzas and they might have moved the listeners deeply if they had been recited by a singer gifted with a pleasing voice and fluent delivery.

These songs were also sung by ladies of the court. On hearing them, the queen became eager to visit the garden. In point of fact, there was no doubt about the splendour of the garden. Formerly, it was delightful just to enjoy the sight of its flowers and trees. Now, it was graced with the glory of the Buddha, with his teaching of

the Dhamma, with the meditators and bhikkhus absorbed in jhāna. No wonder that the deities took delight in visiting it and never tired of seeing the Buddha and hearing his discourses.

Queen Khemā then asked the king for permission to visit the Bamboo Grove. The king gladly gave his consent, but stipulated that she should see the Buddha. To avoid meeting the Buddha, the queen went there while the Buddha was going the usual round for collecting food. She was totally enraptured with the beauty of the garden. Wandering here and there, she saw a young monk in deep meditation under a tree. She wondered why the young man had dedicated himself to a holy life that was, she thought, only for old people who were given to the pursuit of sensual pleasures in their youth.

When she was about to return to the palace, the ministers who had accompanied her reminded her of the king's instruction and under their pressure she had to proceed to the Gandhakuṭi, the residence of the Buddha. She hoped that the Buddha would not yet be back from his morning almsround in the city, but the confrontation that she feared so much was unavoidable.

As she entered the main hall, she saw an extremely beautiful girl fanning and paying respect to the Buddha. The girl was just a phantom created by the Buddha. The queen was greatly surprised because she thought that she was a real girl. She had never seen such a beauty before, a girl so beautiful that her own beauty paled into insignificance. What she saw removed her misapprehension that the Buddha looked down on beautiful women. It also deflated her pride and vanity.

As Queen Khemā gazed at the girl, by exercising his supernatural powers, the Buddha made the girl grow old right under the eyes of the queen. The girl aged steadily until she became an old woman of ninety with her hair turning grey, her teeth broken, her skin shrivelled, and her bones protruding. Then the old woman lost her balance, collapsed, and was moaning and panting for breath. At this sight the queen was deeply shocked. She became aware of the impurity and loathsomeness of the human body and the vanity that made people attached to their bodies.

Then the Buddha spoke to the queen. He told her to reflect on her body. The body is the object of attachment for ignorant people despite its bad smell, impurities, loathsomeness, and susceptibility to painful diseases. "Khemā! You should fix your mind on the

repulsiveness of the body. Be sick of it. That woman's body was like yours before its disintegration. However, now it is repulsive, and your body will become the same in due course. You should avoid attachment to your body or to the body of any other person. You should contemplate the signless impermanence of everything."

The signless impermanence of everything usually escapes the notice of those who are unmindful of mind and matter at the moment of their arising. Living without reflection and wisdom, they believe that a person's physical body is the same as it was in childhood. To them the mind is regarded as a permanent entity, and to some people mind and body are aspects of the same enduring self. Thus, it is a human tendency to misapprehend the sign of permanence. This illusion is shared even by those who can describe body, mind, and its elements analytically, but who have not reflected correctly. However, the meditators who practise constant mindfulness have no visions of hand, feet, heads, *etc.*, when they develop concentration. They see only the momentary dissolution of everything subjectively and objectively. They clearly realise for themselves the impermanence of the phenomenal world.

The Buddha urged the queen to contemplate this nature of things that are devoid of any sign of permanence, for it was her ignorance of it that lay at the root of her inordinate vanity.

"Khemā! Through insight into impermanence, you should overcome the root of pride; through overcoming pride, you will live in peace."

"Just as a spider wanders ceaselessly in its web, so also through attachments of their own making, people ceaselessly wander from one existence to another and cannot detach themselves from the wheel of life. Those who renounce sensual pleasures and practise the Dhamma can overcome attachment and liberate themselves from *saṃsāra*."

The Commentaries say that after hearing the Buddha's discourse, Khemā attained Arahantship.

According to the Apadāna, she obtained the Eye of the Dhamma after hearing the verses, and according to the Mahānidāna Sutta, she attained Arahantship after practising the Dhamma as a *bhikkhuni* for a month and a half. The Eye of the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkhu*) may

here mean knowledge of Stream-winning or Non-returning. The Commentary on the Therīgāthā takes it in the former sense. In view of her renunciation of the household life, it is safe to assume that even if she did not immediately become an Arahant, she attained Non-returning that freed her from all sensual desires.

With the consent of the king, she joined the Saṅgha and was known as Khemā Therī. She was unmatched among the *bhikkhuni*s in respect of her intelligence and wisdom, and was honoured by the Buddha as the *bhikkhuni* with greatest wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

### The Story of Uppalavaṇṇā

Samaṇaguttā, the second daughter of King Kikī, became the daughter of a merchant of Sāvatti in the time of the Buddha. She was named Uppalavaṇṇā because the colour of her skin was like that of a lotus flower. To cut a long story short, she was so beautiful that the kings and merchants all over India sought her hand in marriage. Because there were so many suitors, and he didn't wish to displease any of them, the merchant was at a loss what to do with his only daughter. He asked her whether she would like to join the Saṅgha. With her spiritual potential carried over from her last existence, she readily agreed and was formally ordained at the monastery. Before long, she became an Arahant possessing psychic-powers.

### The Story of Paṭācārā

The third daughter of King Kikī was named Paṭācārā in the time of Gotama Buddha. Her story is often re-enacted on the stage and is well-known to many people. Having lost her parents, husband, and children, she became insane, and while wandering aimlessly she came to the Jetavana Vihāra where the Buddha was teaching. There she was cured of her temporary insanity and after hearing the Buddha's discourse she became a Stream-winner. She joined the Saṅgha and finally attained Arahantship. She ranked as the chief female disciple in regard to the knowledge of Vinaya.

### The Story of Kuṇḍalakesā

King Kikī's fourth daughter, Bhikkhudāyikā, became the daughter of a merchant in Rājagaha. She was called Bhaddā.

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<sup>1</sup>A.i.25.

Taking a fancy to a condemned robber, she ransomed him and became his wife. One day the robber took her to the top of a hill under the pretext of paying homage to the deities. There he relieved her of all the jewellery and decided to kill her. The woman asked for permission to pay him her last respects, deceived him with her amorous gestures and pushed him into the chasm below. Then being afraid to return to the home of her parents, she sought refuge in the abode of wandering ascetics (*paribbājaka*). On the occasion of her initiation into their order, her hair was plucked one strand at a time, so she must have suffered pain more than ten thousand times. The new growth of hair was circular in the shape of an ear-ring — hence her name Kuṇḍalakesā.

She studied all the doctrines of the ascetics and wandered about the country, challenging any teacher she met to a debate. One day she was defeated by the Elder Sāriputta. She became his disciple and after hearing the Buddha's discourse, attained Arahantship. The Apadāna mentions her liberation following the attainment of the Eye of Dhamma, and her subsequent ordination. She was the foremost *bhikkhuni* in respect of swift intuition (*khippābhiññānaṃ*).

### The Story of Kisāgotamī

Dhammā, the fifth daughter of King Kiki, became the daughter of a poor man in Sāvatti. Because of the poverty of her parents, she was despised by the relatives of her husband. They showed affection only when she bore a child. Unfortunately the child died and the mother was almost beside herself with grief.

Clasping the dead child, she went about the town in search of medicine that would restore the her son to life. On the advice of a wise man she sought the help of the Buddha who told her to bring a mustard seed from a house where nobody had died. She went about looking for such a house but, of course, it was in vain. People were taken aback by her inquiry and said, "Why, you foolish girl! So many deaths have occurred in our house that we cannot keep count of them." This kind of reply in three houses brought about her disillusionment. She realised that there was no house that had never known of death, that her child was not the only human being who had died, that all living things are mortal. She left her dead child at the cemetery and uttered this verse:

“Death is not confined to a village or a city. It concerns not only a clan or a family, but it is the destiny of all living beings whether human or deities, who are governed by the law of impermanence.”

It may be asked whether it would have been possible for a poor girl to compose such a stanza with its flawless rhythm and grammar. Since the Commentaries ascribe it to Kisāgotamī, perhaps she might have expressed her thought in plain prose, which the Buddha turned into verse. According to the Apadāna, this verse as well as another verse was uttered by the Buddha. On hearing it, Kisāgotamī became a Stream-winner. She joined the Saṅgha, practised the Dhamma and before long attained Arahantship. She was the chief among the *bhikkhuni*s who wore coarse robes.

### The Story of Dhammadinnā

Sudhammā, the sixth daughter of King Kikī, became Dhammadinnā, the wife of Visākha, a rich merchant. Visākha attained Stream-winning together with King Bimbisāra when he heard the Buddha’s discourse on the occasion of the latter’s first visit to Rājagaha. Later on he attained Non-returning. At this stage the meditator is free from attachment to sensual objects. He has no craving for beautiful sights, harmonious sounds, fragrant aromas, or agreeable bodily contact. On that day, when Visākha came home, calm and composed, Dhammadinnā looked out of the window. On other days, they would smile when they saw each other, but now she saw him coming with a serious expression on his face.

She came out to greet him, but he entered the house quietly instead of going hand-in-hand with her as on other days. Nor did he speak to her during the meal. He ate silently, making her worried about his odd behaviour. At night he slept alone instead of sleeping with his wife as usual. She was distraught. She wondered whether he was in love with another woman, whether someone had made him hate her, or wondered if she might have done something to offend him. She said nothing for two days but on the third day, she could restrain herself no longer and asked him bluntly what was the matter with him.

Visākha thought, “This spiritual experience is something that one should not reveal to others. However, I cannot evade her question. If I do not answer her, she will die of a broken-heart.” Then he said

to her, “My sister, I have had some transcendent experience after hearing the discourse of the Buddha. One who has had this experience is neither capable nor desirous of indulging in the kind of relation that formerly existed between you and me. You can do what you like with all the wealth that we have. Regard me as your brother. I will be content with the food that you provide. If you do not want to live here, you can return to your parents with all your wealth. If you wish to remain here instead of getting married again, I will regard you as my sister and look after you.”

Being a woman of high intelligence, Dhammadinnā reflected thus: “An ordinary man would not have spoken like this. He must have had a transcendent experience, it would be beneficial for me to have it, too.” She would have come to grief if she had thought otherwise and said to herself, “Why should I care for him if he does not care for me any longer? I can easily get another husband.” However, she was greatly impressed by what he said and wished to share his experience. She asked him if the experience was accessible to women. On being told that the Dhamma made no distinction between men and women, she expressed her desire to become a *bhikkhuṇī*. Visākḥā was pleased and sent her to the *bhikkhuṇī*'s *vihāra* on a golden palanquin. Soon after her ordination she attained Arahantship.

To the very profound questions posed by the merchant Visākḥā, Bhikkhuṇī Dhammadinnā gave clear-cut answers. The dialogue between Visākḥā and Dhammadinnā is recorded as the Cūḷavedalla Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya. Her exposition of some points of the Dhamma was so illuminating that the Buddha conferred on her the honour of the best *bhikkhuṇī* at teaching (*Dhammakathikānaṃ*).

## The Story of Visākḥā

Saṅghadāyikā, the seventh daughter of King Kikī, was reborn as Visākḥā, the lady who donated the Pubbārāma Vihāra to the Saṅgha. She had been a Stream-winner since the time when, at the age of seven, she heard the Buddha's discourse along with her five hundred girlfriends on the occasion of the Teacher's visit to the town of Bhaddiya. Later she moved to Sāketa with her parents at the invitation of King Pasenadi. When she came of age she married the son of the merchant Migāra and lived in Sāvatti. She donated the Pubbārāma Vihāra to the Saṅgha, served them gruel and

morning meals every day at home, provided juice and medicine at the *vihāra* and heard their discourses.

Of the seven daughters of King Kikī who practised chastity, the first six became Arahants and attained nibbāna. The last daughter, that is, Visākhā in the time of Gotama Buddha, did not attain the higher path of holiness. She died as a Stream-winner and is now the queen of the celestial king Sunimmita in Nimmānaratī, the fifth realm of deities. She will attain Non-returning there, pass through the five Suddhāvāsa realms successively and attain Arahantship in the Akaniṭṭhā realm.

Visākhā is now the chief queen in the realm of Nimmānaratī. The life-span there is 8,000 celestial years, which means 2,304 million years on earth. Perhaps, it would be boring to enjoy heavenly bliss for so long. When she dies as a Non-returner, she will pass on to the lowest of the five Suddhāvāsa realms, *i.e.* Avihā, where she will become a Brahmā. The Brahmā is neither male nor female, but takes on the appearance of a majestic male. The Brahmā is free from all sensual desires.

The life-span there is 1,000 world-cycles (*kappa*). From there she will go to Atappā, the second Suddhāvāsa realm. After 2,000 world-cycles there, she will pass on to Sudassā, the third Suddhāvāsa realm where she will live for 4,000 world-cycles. Then she will live another 4,000 world-cycles in the fourth Suddhāvāsa realm — Sudassī. After spending 16,000 world-cycles there, she will reach Akaniṭṭhā, the highest Suddhāvāsa realm, where she will attain nibbāna after a life-span of 16,000 world-cycles. All these life spans add up to 31,000 world-cycles. Thus Visākhā will be in the Brahmā realm for 31,000 world-cycles before she attains nibbāna.

We assume this post-mortem destiny of Visākhā on the authority of the Commentary on the Sakkapañha Sutta of the Dīghanikāya. There it is said that Sakka, the king of deities will have Akaniṭṭhā as his last abode. Though no mention is made of his Arahantship or attainment of nibbāna there, existence in Akaniṭṭhā rules out the possibility of rebirth or passage to other realms and so it means attainment of Arahantship. This is the destiny, too, of the meditators at the first three stages of the holy path who reach the Vehapphala and Nevasaññānāsaññāyatana realms. The same Commentary says that this is the destiny that Sakka has in common with Anāthapiṇḍika and Visākhā.



Some Stream-winners love worldly pleasures or the karmic fruits of their wholesome deeds. They long for worldly bliss, they take delight in it and are repeatedly drawn to it. Anāthapiṇḍika, Visākhā, Cūlarathadeva, Mahārathadeva, Anekavaṇṇadeva, Sakka and Nāgadatta-deva — it is said that these seven persons were fond of worldly pleasures and that they will pass through the six heavenly realms successively, reside in Akaniṭṭhā realm and attain nibbāna there.

It will not be proper to take literally the statement in the Commentary about the successive enjoyment of sensual pleasure in six celestial realms. Perhaps, it means Non-returning in one or two of the realms and subsequent passage to the Avihā realm, for that is the destiny of Sakka as stated in the Sakkapañha Sutta. A Stream-winner like Visākhā is not a Stream-winner with seven rebirths at the utmost (*sattakkhatuparāma*) nor a Stream-winner passing from one noble family to another (*kolaṃkola*). She is also not the one “germinating only once more” (*ekabijī*). She is called a “*Bonzinzan*” in Burmese because she will enjoy all the heavenly bliss in one realm after another. A *Bonzinzan* is so called because according to the Commentaries on the Saṃyuttanikāya and Puggalapaññatti, he or she will pass through all the lower celestial realms as well as the five higher ones successively.

The Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka describes the four stages of the holy path as the four realms (*bhūmi*). The noble ones who pass through all of these realms may also be called *Bonzinzan*. This name for such noble ones is more suitable because the gradual attainment of the noble ones differs from the destiny of the Stream-winner with seven rebirths. The Stream-winner is reborn seven times and after passing through the three higher stages of the holy path, attains Arahantship. This is the destiny too of the other two types of Stream-winner: *kolaṃkola* and *ekabijī*. However, if by realm (*bhūmi*) we understand the four stages of holiness, the Stream-winner attains Non-returning in one of the celestial realms, passes on to the five Suddhāvāsa realms and attains nibbāna in the Akaniṭṭhā realm. He is more aptly called *Bonzinzan* because of his progressive attainment of the three higher stages or realm of the noble ones.

These are the stories illustrating the karmic fruits of chastity practised by men and women. They tell us how chastity leads to material and spiritual progress — how the man or woman who is pledged to

chastity enjoys heavenly bliss in succession, how from celestial realms, he or she passes on to the Suddhāvāsa or Brahmā realms or how, starting from the ordinary state of a worldling, the successive attainment of the holy stages together with the supreme goal of Arahantship or nibbāna is possible for the meditator. Therefore, you should vow to practise chastity for spiritual growth and for the lessening or extinction of defilements. Those who can observe only the five precepts should vow to avoid all kinds of illicit sexual intercourse.

### Lying (5)

“Other people may speak falsehood; but as disciples of the Buddha, we will avoid it. Thus, we should commit ourselves to a practice that lessens defilements.”

This is the teaching of the Buddha. Here “*musā*” is falsehood and “*vāda*” means speaking; hence “*musāvāda*” is speaking falsehood or telling lies. You tell a lie if you deny seeing or knowing a thing when in fact you see or know it; or if you say you see or know a thing when in fact you do not see or know it. There are four constituent factors of lying: 1) what one says does not accord with reality, 2) the intent to deceive other people, 3) describing falsehood as truth, and 4) the statement is accepted as truth by another person who hears it. Making a statement that comprises these four conditions is a *karmically* effective act of lying. If the act is detrimental to the interests of other people, it may lead to the lower realms.

The karmic gravity or otherwise of lying is determined by the moral and spiritual status of the victim of deception. The higher the spiritual plane of the victim, the more serious is the offence.

If the victim is devoid of moral character, lying is not serious. However, it is a serious offence if it endangers the interests of another person. The more harmful the offence, the more serious it is. Lying that does not cause harm to others is not *karmically* grave. According to the Commentaries, it does not lead to the lower planes of existence. However, a virtuous man completely avoids lying. He will avoid even making a joke based on falsehood.

If someone comes and asks you for a loan of something belonging to you do not wish to lend it to him, what will you say? If you say that you do not have the thing when in fact you have it,

you will be lying. However, it is not a serious offence since it is not detrimental to the other person. Of course, even as a minor offence, lying should be avoided. If you say frankly that you do not wish to lend anything you will incur the displeasure of the borrower. City folk probably know how to give an evasive reply. Perhaps, it would be advisable to tell him that we have just enough for personal needs, that we do not have enough to lend or spare. We should thus avoid lying even in trivial matters. A man who speaks the truth is trusted and held in high esteem by other people.

## **Truthfulness**

### **Giving Evidence**

Respect for truth is of paramount importance in the settlement of a dispute. In a trial court or in any other place a witness under interrogation should testify truthfully. Some witnesses tell lies and so if a judge disposes of a case on the basis of their false evidence, they are guilty of a very grave offence. Perjury may lead to imprisonment, execution of one accused of murder, or to fines and imprisonment in other cases. It entails a severe loss for the innocent person. The judge who passes the sentence is also not free from guilt. In a court of law, judgment is based on the evidence rather than on a judge's personal knowledge, which is considered irrelevant.

The settlement of ecclesiastical disputes in the Buddhist Saṅgha also rests on the statements of witnesses. Truthfulness on the part of a witness is of utmost importance. False testimony in a civil dispute makes it difficult for the judge to decide rightly, and a wrong decision may cause great damage to the rightful owner or claimant, and the presiding authority is not free from responsibility.

When examined as a witness, one should speak the truth in regard to what one has seen, heard, found, or what one knows. The witness must be truthful too when he has to testify about what he has not seen, not heard, not found, or what he does not know. These eight kinds of right speech are called noble speech because these are the words of the noble ones. The falsehoods uttered by those in regard to what they have seen or not seen, heard or not heard, found or not found, and what they know or do not know are ignoble speech, which mean the words of wicked persons. You should avoid these

eight kinds of lying practised by evil-doers and devote yourself to eight kinds of right speech practised by the noble ones.

### **Cultivating Thoughts About Not Lying**

Then you should cultivate thoughts about abstention from lying. You should avoid lying through truthfulness. You should resolve to speak the truth for spiritual growth and for overcoming the defilement of lying. The Pāli term for truth is a word that has been assimilated into Burmese. To speak the truth means to avoid telling lies that leads to the lower realms. It means progressive attainment of heavenly realms, the Brahmā realms, the four stages of holiness, and the ultimate goal of nibbāna, the complete extinction of all suffering.

### **The Karmic Effects of Lying**

According to the Buddha's teaching in the Aṅguttaranikāya, the liar is liable to be reborn in the lower realms and if, after release there from, he is reborn as a human being, he is likely to face false charges. The karmic results of abstention from lying are of course just the opposite. A person who avoids lying is likely to pass on to celestial realms and on his return to the human world, he will not be subjected to malignant accusations, but will be trusted by the public. The Commentaries on the Khuddakapāṭha and Itivuttaka mention fourteen karmic results of speaking the truth. These are: 1) having a mouth that is fragrant like a lotus flower, 2) having a set of white, beautiful teeth. 3) having the power of speech that attracts the attention of other people, 4) having the power of speech that is persuasive, 5) having a personality that delights other people, 6) having clear faculties, 7) having a mind composed and free from distractions, 8) having no vanity, 9) having a reddish, soft and thin tongue, 10) having a well proportioned body that is not too fat, 11) a body that is not too thin, 12) a body that is not too short, 13) a body that is not too tall, 14) having the habit of speaking clearly and sweetly.

A fragrant mouth, a set of beautiful teeth, the ability to influence others by word of mouth — these are the attributes that everyone wants to possess. So are clear faculties, a composed mind and so forth. A well-proportioned body is desired by everyone. No one likes to have a body that is excessively fat or lean. Nor is it desirable to be abnormally tall or short. Equally important is the ability to

Speak clearly and sweetly. What we want to say may be fine but if we cannot speak well, it will not be acceptable to others. A speech marked by circumlocution and confusion will fall on deaf ears. Some speakers are sincere and what they say is worthy of attention, but the way that they speak is so aggressive that it jars on the ears of their listeners. Some are accomplished speakers. Their talks are clear, precise, orderly, and pleasant. As a result they appeal to many people and this contributes to the attainment of their objectives.

These, then, are the benefits of truthfulness. Their opposites are, of course, the karmic effects of lying. The bad smell emanating from the mouth of some individuals may be due to their habit of lying in their previous lives. The same may be said about the discordant and disunited teeth of some people and so forth.

### Benefits Here and Now

Truthfulness is beneficial not only after death, but also in the present life. It is said that solemn utterance of truth enables one to walk on water. In the time of the Buddha, King Mahākappina set out with his one thousand followers to become *bhikkhus*. On the way they crossed three large rivers after uttering the truth about the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. It is said that even the hoofs of their horses did not get wet. This story illustrating the power of truth may sound like a myth to modern people. However, we should consider the story rationally. Today, we see planes flying in the air, spaceships are circumnavigating the earth and astronauts have landed on the moon. If these marvels of our age had been predicted in the lifetime of the Buddha, the people in those days would have dismissed them as myths. In reality, the story of men walking on water is not preposterous if we take into account the possibility that the scientific achievements of modern age might have been paralleled by the psychic-powers of the meditators in ancient times.

### Remedy for Poison

Affirmation that something is true can also help to remove poison. This is borne out by the [Kaṇhadīpāyana Jātaka](#). While visiting the house of his lay follower Maṇḍavya, the hermit Kaṇhadīpāyana found the man's son lying unconscious as a result of snake-bite. The householder appealed to him for help. The hermit

said that since he did not know medicine, he must rely on affirmation of truth for therapy. So he declared solemnly:

“I was happy as a hermit only for the first seven days. After that, for fifty years I have lived the holy life unhappily. Yet, in order that nobody may know of my unhappiness, I have never deviated from the holy path. Because of this true statement, may the child be cleared of poison and restored to life!”

Then the upper part of the child’s body was purged of poison and opening his eyes the child cried, “Mama, Papa” and fell asleep again. The father then declared as follows:

“I do not like giving alms or performing any act of charity. I do not want to see those who ask for alms. Yet I have been giving alms regularly without letting the recipients know my aversion to almsgiving. May the child rid himself of poison and survive by virtue of this affirmation of truth!”

The poison above the waist of the child’s body was now neutralized and the child got up and sat. Then, the householder told his wife to affirm the truth of something she knew. The woman said that she dared not do so in his presence, but under pressure from her husband she uttered the following words:

“Dear child, I do not love your father any more than I love the snake that has bitten you. May this affirmation of truth make you free from poison and restored to life!”

Then the child became completely free from poison. After the child’s recovery, his parents and the hermit admonished one another and the merchant gave alms joyfully and wholeheartedly; his wife treated him affectionately; and the hermit practised the Dhamma with a zest that finally led to the attainment of absorption and psychic-powers.

This story may seem incredible to scientists. However, it will not be scoffed at by some people in Burma who have seen victims of snake-bite cured through mere recitation of stanzas and mantras.

### **Cure for Disease**

The cure of disease through the affirmation of a true statement is mentioned in the Visuddhimagga. About four hundred years

after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha, there was a bhikkhu in Sri Lanka called Mahāmitta. The bhikkhu's mother was afflicted with a disease that appeared to be breast cancer. She sent her daughter who was a *bhikkhuni* to her son for medicine.

Bhikkhu Mahāmitta said. "Since I have no knowledge of conventional medicine, I will give you the medicine of truth. Since my ordination I have never looked at a woman with lust. May my mother regain her health by virtue of my affirmation of truth! Now, sister, go back to my mother, repeat what I say and rub her body." The *bhikkhuni* did as she was told and her mother was instantly cured of the disease.

### Spiritual Healing

The story may be ridiculed by modern medical doctors who have seen diseases cured only through medication. They know that germs cause diseases and it is hard for them to believe that there is no need for medicines to get rid of germs. However, affirmation of truth is certainly one of the methods of treatment for diseases. It is a kind of spiritual healing. At our meditation centre there are many meditators who have recovered from illness through mindfulness of their unpleasant feelings. Some patients consulted doctors who recommended surgery. To fortify themselves for the operation they came to our centre and practised meditation. In the course of their practice their power of concentration developed and their diseases subsided automatically. They again consulted the doctor; the doctor examined them, found no symptom of the disease and was surprised to learn that it was meditation that brought about the cure. There is a variety of diseases that have been cured in this way such as gastric troubles, abdominal pains, hypertension, headache. A meditator who had been deaf for many years was able to hear again and there is a case of the cure of sinusitis of twenty years' duration. Mahākassapa and Mahā Moggallāna recovered from illness after hearing the Bojjhaṅga Sutta. As for the Buddha he overcame by meditation an affliction that was so severe as to threaten his life. It is, therefore, reasonable to believe that there are remedies other than medicines for some diseases.

### Rain-making

The affirmation of something that is true can also cause the rain to fall. This is evident in the Paritta to the fish who was a Bodhisatta.

Here the cure of poisoning and other afflictions and rain-making through the affirmation of truth are to be effected only by those who avoid lying. The potency of truth will become manifest only when they affirm something that is true concerning their private lives.

### **The Story of King Sutasoma**

In connection with the abstinence from telling lies, King Sutasoma's faithfulness to his principles is very interesting and a brief account of this king is in order. To distinguish him from his namesake in the Jātaka Story, the Commentaries refer to him as Mahā Sutasoma. However, here we will call him Sutasoma.

Porisāda in the story of King Sutasoma is well-known to many Buddhists. Some have the figure of Porisāda tattooed on their bodies. Originally, he was King Brahmadata of Benares in the kingdom of Kāsi. As he had been an ogre in many of his previous lives, he was very fond of meat and never had meatless meals. By and large, people today are also fond of meat. All over the world those who avoid meat are in the minority. Only the high caste Hindus of India are well-known as a community of vegetarians. There are only a few vegetarians in other countries. Doctors recommend meat as a nourishing food and of course their advice fits in with mankind's partiality for meat.

### **A Cannibal in Exile**

The king of Benares scorned meatless meals and so the royal cook had to serve him meat every day. Then one day no meat was available as the slaughter of animals was forbidden on that day. Fearing punishment, the cook went to the cemetery, cut off a piece of flesh from a fresh corpse and after cooking it served the human meat to the king. In ancient India it was customary to send a dead body to the cemetery immediately after death. The king found the human meat very delicious and he asked the cook what kind of meat it was. Rasaka, the cook dared not say anything but when threatened with death, he was forced to reveal the truth. Then the king ordered him to serve human meat every day. Rasaka killed the condemned prisoners in the jail to get meat for the king. When there was no condemned prisoner left in the jail, the cook killed one man every night. At last the king's cannibalism was found out and he was banished by the chief of the army and the citizens.



## **Porisāda the Cannibal**

The king left the country and with his cook he took up abode under a big banyan tree in the forest. He killed travellers coming along the jungle path and lived on human meat prepared by his cook. Thus he was called “Porisāda” (*pori* = human flesh, *sāda* = eater) — “the cannibal.” One day Porisāda came back empty-handed. He told the cook to put the pot on fire. The cook asked him about meat, but he said, “Oh! Don’t bother. We will get it.” Rasaka became greatly alarmed. Trembling with fear that his turn had come, he made a fire and put the pot on it. Then Porisāda killed Rasaka and cooked him for his meal. When nothing else was available, Rasaka was expendable.

After that Porisāda was left alone. He pounced on the travellers passing through the forest and prepared his meals. One day a brahmin who travelled with many escorts fell into his hands. With the escorts chasing him relentlessly, he jumped over a hedge and got his foot pierced by a sharp edge of a wood stump. Thus seriously injured, he abandoned his captive and lay down under the banyan tree. He besought the tree-god to help him heal his wound and promised to offer the blood-sacrifice of 101 kings if his prayer was fulfilled. I learnt something about the propitiation of nature spirits when I was young. A village woman would, for example, appeal to the nature spirits for the recovery of her sick child, promising to do something in return for their help. In fact, nature spirits cannot cure a disease but owing to their ignorance, women in rural areas rely on nature spirits in accordance with their age-old beliefs.

Perhaps, because he was deprived of food, Porisāda’s wound quickly healed up in a week. He attributed the healing to the tree-god’s will. True to his pledge, he captured one hundred kings within a week, tied them with a cord and kept them together at the foot of the banyan tree. India, or Jambudīpa<sup>1</sup> as it is called in the sacred books, is between two and three thousand miles wide from east to west and north to south. He would have made one hundred trips, each trip covering such a long distance. As he is said to have spent only a week for the capture of the kings, it couldn’t have taken him more than 168 hours, which means less than two hours for each king. Thus, it would have been impossible for him to capture the kings from all over India. Perhaps his captives were only rulers of local city states.

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<sup>1</sup> The island or continent of the Rose Apple. (Editor’s note)

One of the kings not included among the captives was Sutasoma. As he was once under the tutelage of Sutasoma, Porisāda thought it inadvisable to capture his former master and so he proceeded to make a blood-sacrifice of the other kings in captivity. However, the tree-god knew that he had nothing to do with the cure of Porisāda's foot sore and he did not relish the prospect of the blood sacrifice that would make his tree dirty and involve the senseless slaughter of the kings. On the advice of his superior gods he made himself visible to Porisāda and insisted on the capture of the famous King Sutasoma. Then Porisāda set about to fulfil the wish of the tree-god.

### **Capture of Sutasoma**

The next day was an auspicious day for King Sutasoma on which he would have a ceremonial washing of his head. Before the king's security guards arrived, Porisāda hid himself under a lotus leaf in the pond of the royal garden. The royal garden and its surroundings swarmed with regiments of war-elephants, infantry, cavalry, and so forth.

At the appointed hour the king came riding an elephant with a large retinue of troops. At the city gate he saw Nanda the brahmin standing on an elevated spot and blessing him. On inquiry, the king learnt that the brahmin had come to recite four stanzas on Dhamma each worth a hundred gold coins. The king instructed his ministers to arrange suitable accommodation for the brahmin and saying that he would listen to the discourse on his return, proceeded to the garden. There he had his hair and beard trimmed, bathed in the pond and then he was presented with a new robe and other regalia pertaining to royalty.

At this moment Porisāda decided to capture the king; for the king's body would be heavy if he had to carry it with the robe and other royal emblems. Brandishing his sword and shouting his name in a loud, piercing voice, he jumped out of the pond. As soon as they heard the name "Porisāda," the royal guards fled helter-skelter. It is said that even the soldiers on elephants tumbled down. It was an age of heroes. A hero could then strike terror into the heart of his enemy and he was more than a match for a host of soldiers. Today heroism counts for little, for, it is weapons, intelligence, and manpower on which victory depends. However, in ancient times nobody possessed any superior weapon and the warrior who had

strength and courage was greatly feared. Porisāda put the soldiers to flight and ran off with the king on his shoulder. He ran fast, but slowed his speed when he saw no one pursuing him. He carried Sutasoma on his shoulder instead of dragging him by his feet as he had done to other kings, for Sutasoma was his former master. As Sutasoma had just finished bathing when he was kidnapped, water-drops from his hair fell on to Porisāda's body. Porisāda thought it was tear drops and said, "Sir, wise men usually do not weep. Are you afraid of death? Or are you worried about your family?"

### **The King's Concern**

The king replied, "Porisāda, I am not crying. The water drops on your body are dripping from my hair. I do not fear death nor do I worry about my family. However, one thing is worrying me. When I came to the garden, I made an appointment with a brahmin called Nanda. I am anxious to keep my promise. If you let me go back, I give you my word that I will come back to you after seeing the brahmin."

Porisāda said, "Sir, I do not believe that a man who escapes death will dare return and face it again. It is unthinkable that you would come back to your enemy after living happily in the palace with your family and attendants. Nor would it be possible for me to capture you again in the face of the troops that will be guarding you."

King Sutasoma replied, "Porisāda, you lived with me for a long time when I was your master. I do not tell a lie under any circumstances. If, in spite of my pledge, you do not trust me, I will take an oath. May I die by my own sword if I do not come back to you!"

Porisāda thought, "Kings do not usually swear by swords. This oath is terrifying. He must be really concerned about the breach of his promise to the brahmin." Then Porisāda released the king telling him to come back without fail after he had attended to his business.

### **Valuable Stanzas**

After his return to the palace, arrangements were quickly made for the discourse of the brahmin Nanda. The four stanzas that formed the subjects of the brahmin's discourse are worthy of note. Originally they were recited by Kassapa Buddha. Taking a seat that was lower than that of the brahmin, King Sutasoma listened to the discourse. The first stanza says:

“Companionship with the wise even on a single occasion is beneficial. Companionship with the unwise even on many occasions is not beneficial.”

A wise man avoids doing anything that is detrimental to his own or another’s interest. He thinks, speaks and acts only for his own welfare or for that of others. He promotes the welfare of the person with whom he associates only for a short time. However, a bad man who thinks, speaks and acts against his or another person’s interest is harmful even when you come into contact with him many times. The second stanza:

“One should keep company only with the wise.  
One should seek their advice.”

We should live with the wise. If we live with them, we get accustomed to their way of life and tend to emulate their virtuous behaviour. However, we should seek something more than the company of a wise man. We must look up to him as our teacher and follow his advice.

The stanza that King Sutasoma learnt from the brahmin Nanda was originally taught by Kassapa Buddha. The brahmin came by it as it was recited by successive generations of non-Buddhist teachers. Today, there are some verses of the Buddha that pass for the original teachings of Brahmanism although they were incorporated into their scriptures by ancient brahmins. These verses will remain in their sacred books even after the disappearance of Buddhism.

### **Ennobling Influence of Parents**

“When one knows the teaching of the wise, one is more ennobled than ever; it does him no harm.”

A person is morally and spiritually advanced in direct proportion to his knowledge of the teachings of wise men. Buddhists acquire knowledge of the real Buddha from their wise parents and teachers. Knowledge of an attribute of the Buddha means a step forward in moral character. For example, according to the attribute that denotes freedom from defilements (*arahant*), we know that the Buddha was free from unwholesome desire, ill-will, and ignorance. This knowledge helps us to revere the memory of the Buddha and enhances our

spiritual outlook. So too does our knowledge of the fact that the Buddha knew all the Dhamma, that there was nothing unknown to him. Again, we know that the practice of the Buddha's teaching prevents one from being reborn in the lower realms, that it contributes to the attainment of prosperity on earth, celestial bliss, or nibbāna, that the Dhamma can be realised for oneself, that one gets instant benefit from its practice. Such a knowledge of the Dhamma means nobility of character. The same is true of our knowledge about the Saṅgha.

The Saṅgha is dedicated to morality, concentration, and wisdom for the conquest of greed, hatred, and delusion. Thus, reverence for the Saṅgha is beneficial in terms of longevity, health, and so forth. This knowledge about the Saṅgha will certainly enhance our moral stature.

### **Ennobling Power of the Wise Man's Dhamma**

Naturally, children know little about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. They have no moral standards to speak of. When they grow up and become more intelligent, wise parents teach them to revere the Saṅgha and the memory of the Buddha, and impress on them the benefits resulting from such reverence. They teach the children the formula "I take refuge in the Buddha..." As a formally established Buddhist, the child is free from rebirth in the lower realms.

Then the child is taught the solemn undertaking in regard to the five moral precepts and their application to daily life. It is up to parents to teach the child the essentials of Buddhism, and if they are not equal to the task, they should entrust him to the care of a skilful teacher. Wise parents teach the child the recitation of texts and formulae. Thus, thanks to the intelligence and wisdom of parents, children are assured of a spiritual heritage that contributes to their moral development.

### **Conformity to the Buddha's Teaching**

When a child grows up, he or she gives alms and observes the precepts, thereby ennobling his or her character. He or she hears talks on meditation that conform to the Buddha's teaching, meditates correctly and enhances his or her moral status. We should be mindful of the need for conformity to the Buddha-dhamma and the correct approach to meditation. There are teachers whose doctrines do not accord with the Dhamma as well as meditators who practise medita-

tion in the wrong way. These people misunderstand and disparage the true teaching, thereby degrading themselves spiritually.

The effort to develop concentration in accordance with the Buddha's teaching is noble. Some tend to belittle the practice of concentration. However, this is due to their ignorance, for tranquillity meditation, which leads to the attainment of absorption, is beneficial to the meditator. It is most beneficial if the absorption forms the basis for insight meditation. This is the excellent way of the Buddha and his chief disciples. The practice of tranquillity meditation is noble, but the practice of insight meditation is more noble.

### Purity and Insight-knowledge

Meditators who practised at this centre did not know the method of meditation thoroughly at first. Some were completely ignorant of it. They became familiar with the method and with the development of insight through friends, books, and talks. This means, of course, an advance in their spiritual outlook. We may take for granted such an advance at every stage in the development of insight-knowledge. These stages are concentration and tranquillity through mindfulness, or purity of mind (*cittavisuddhi*). The meditator finds only matter as the object of mindfulness and mind as the subject, which is purity of view (*ditthivisuddhi*). Then he or she discerns the causal connection between them, which means purity by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*)—a stage that the Visuddhimagga describes as that of a Lesser Stream-winner (*cūḷasotāpanna*) who will not usually be reborn in the lower realms. Next, the meditator is aware of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), and the nature of the three characteristics, a stage that is marked by illumination, joy, bliss, etc. Later, the meditator finds that the noted object and the noting consciousness dissolve in pairs at every moment of mindfulness (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). He or she experiences fear at every moment (*bhaya-ñāṇa*), has awareness of misery (*ādinava-ñāṇa*), then disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), then knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcītukamyatā-ñāṇa*). After that come knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*), special knowledge, and knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). The meditator is then very close to the goal. Before long the meditator has specially sharp insight-knowledge leading to the extinction of mental and physical formations (*nāma-*

*rūpa saṅkhārā*), that is, realisation of nibbāna through the four paths (*magga*) and four fruitions (*phala*). This is the apex of spiritual development. Thus every successive stage in the development of insight-knowledge marks a further advance in spiritual life.

### **Royal Chariots Are Subject to Decay**

The third stanza says:

“The royal chariots, which are so exquisite and splendid, decay and become old.”

In ancient times the chariots that kings as the head of state rode in were very beautiful and majestic. They were, of course, not like modern motor vehicles. Motor cars have been available only for a century. Prior to their appearance there were only horse-drawn coaches. They were so exquisite and splendid that a new coach would have fascinated many people. However, in spite of its magnificence, a coach used by a king became old by the time of his successor, and was worn out and almost unserviceable by the time his grandson became king. Some kings reigned for fifty or sixty years. Among such kings even the coaches used in the early years of the reign became old after fifteen or twenty years. The same is true of royal coaches today. Likewise, the latest model of a car may be an object of admiration, but it is bound to be out of fashion in twenty-five or thirty years. It becomes ugly and obsolete when compared to a new model. It is said that officials and wealthy people have to buy new cars since their sons and daughters disdain old cars. New houses and brick buildings are also impressive, but they too become old within fifty or sixty years.

Rājagaha and Sāvatti were magnificent Indian cities in the lifetime of the Buddha, but today their sites are covered with bushes and jungles without any remains of human dwellings. The ancient glorious cities of Pagan and Ava are now just small villages. Like the royal coaches, majestic buildings also become old and fall into decay.

### **The Human Body Also Becomes Old**

The human body is also subject to old age and decay. This is, of course, the experience of elderly people over sixty or seventy years old. Every elderly man who reflects on his body has to face the fact

that age is telling on him. With a few rare exceptions, grey hair, decayed teeth, and other signs of senility such as flabby muscles, shrivelled skin, and wrinkled face are apparent. A bundle of skin and bones, an old man is far from good-looking. Some have poor eye-sight, some are hard of hearing, and some have become weak and feeble. Disfigured and incapacitated by old age, the body of an old man presents a sharp contrast to what it was forty years ago. It was then like the body of a teenager. The teenager is good-looking and constantly attentive to his personal appearance. However, an old man is no longer in good physical condition as he was in his youth. He has undergone many changes, and so will the young men and women of today. Young people should reflect on old age, which they will have to face one day, instead of dismissing such thoughts as negative.

The human body is bound to become old since it is composed of matter that is subject to aging and decay. At the moment of conception life begins with the fluid that is called "*kalala*" in Buddhist books. This Buddhist view of the origin of a human being does not differ essentially from the account given by Western medical scientists. According to them, the human being is born of the combination of the ovum (fertilized egg) and sperm. The fluid develops into a foam, which in turn becomes a lump of flesh or an embryo. The embryo has five protrusions, which later become head, hands, and legs. Its head is big and its body is small. Gradually, the eyes, ears, nose, and other bodily organs develop together with sexual characteristics.

The embryo develops, and after nine or ten months a child is born. Thanks to the nursing and care of its parents, it grows up. Childhood lasts until the age of twelve or thirteen. The adolescent is still a child, but compared with an infant, has aged physically. A teenager is youthful and good-looking and may be able to maintain this youthful physical appearance until the early thirties. From then on he or she is subject to the disruptive effects of aging. Some do not show signs of old age until they are over forty, but by and large, old age clearly tells on us in our early fifties, and its signs are unmistakable in those over sixty. We should reflect on the inevitability of old age and look for something reliable in anticipation of it. Those who are already old should seek the Dhamma that will ensure freedom from old age.

The brahmin refers to this Dhamma in the next verse:



“The Dhamma of the wise is ageless.

This is what the wise talk about among themselves.”

This ageless Dhamma is the Dhamma of the wise men, not the ordinary wise men, but the sages whom we recognise as the Buddhas, the Arahants, and other noble ones. Their ageless Dhamma is nibbāna. When one realises nibbāna on the level of Arahantship, one is assured of freedom from rebirth, which means of course freedom from old age, sickness, and death. The brahmin’s verse refers only to agelessness because in the example of the royal chariot, its old age and decay are well-known to many people.

Through countless rebirths, living beings have aged, become sick and died innumerable times. Therefore, we should seek the Dhamma of agelessness, painlessness, and deathlessness. The Bodhisatta searched for it for aeons and in his last existence he renounced all his wealth and pleasures and became an ascetic to achieve his ultimate object. Then, 2,559 years ago the Bodhisatta realised nibbāna, the extinction of all suffering. Those who practised the Dhamma have attained nibbāna. The meditators at this meditation centre have set their heart on it and they will realise it for themselves with the full development of knowledge attendant on concentration (*samādhi-ñāna*).

### The Story of Sāriputta and Moggallāna

In this connection, the quest for enlightenment on the part of Upatissa and Kolita (who were later to become Sāriputta and Moggallāna respectively) is very interesting. They had been intimate friends since their childhood. One day, while they were watching a play, it occurred to them: “All of these spectators at the play will no longer be alive after a hundred years. By then all of them will have aged, sickened, and died, so it is advisable for us to seek the Dhamma that will help us to eradicate old age, sickness, and death.” Thinking thus, they became ascetics and went about in search of the supreme Dhamma all over India. However, the object of their quest was nowhere to be found. Finally they met Bhikkhu Assaji. After hearing one verse uttered by the bhikkhu, Upatissa became a Stream-winner and so did Kolita when he heard it from his friend. Then they went to the Buddha and received ordination. Moggallāna became an Arahant in seven days and Sāriputta in fifteen days. The two chief disciples passed away before the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha.

This is an inspiring example of persons in search of the Dhamma that leads to the extinction of old age, sickness, and death. It shows also how, as the brahmin's stanza says, we can benefit immensely by a single meeting with a wise man who can teach the true Dhamma. The Dhamma of the wise, that is, nibbāna is ageless and permanent. The Arahant who realises it fully is free from old age, sickness, and death after his *parinibbāna*. The fourth stanza says:

“The sky is far from the earth, and the earth is far from the sky.”

The sky is what we call the space above the earth. However, it is not the space that extends to a few feet or yards above the earth, but the space that is beyond the range of visibility above us. In ancient times there were various speculations about the sky. Some people said that like a big bowl, the sky had an arched roof with the stars hanging like lamps. Some believed that God first created the earth and the sky. In fact the sky is a dark space without any solid matter that is visible to the human eye. At night we see the shining stars while in the day time we find the sun in the sky. The sky is very far away from the earth.

The other two objects that are far apart are the shores of the ocean. For example, the shore of Sri Lanka is beyond our visible horizon; there is an immense distance between the two shores of Sri Lanka and Burma.

### **Farthest Apart**

“However, the two objects that are farther apart than the sky and the earth, or the opposite shores of the ocean, are the teachings of the wise and the unwise.”

The teachings of the wise and the unwise are diametrically opposed. The teachings of the former are wholesome while those of the latter are unwholesome. The Sallekha Sutta describes forty-four misdeeds such as violence and killing as the unwholesome practices of the unwise, and the forty-four wholesome deeds such as non-violence and non-killing as the wholesome practices of the wise. The practices of the ignorant are ignoble, though the degree of depravity is not the same for all their practices. Some misdeeds such as killing, stealing, *etc.*, are extremely depraved,

while ordinary moral lapses such as sloth and restlessness are not so bad. All wholesome deeds are noble, but those leading to the attainment of the holy path and its fruition are more noble. Such noble deeds are the practice of generosity, morality, and meditation, and the cultivation of mindfulness for the sole purpose of overcoming all biases and attaining nibbāna. More noble still is the attainment of the four stages of the holy path.

Therefore, evil men of ordinary type will do unwholesome deeds of ordinary type while extremely evil men will do extremely unwholesome deeds. Evil men are interested only in unwholesome deeds to which they are accustomed. They do not take interest in anything that is free from evil. In the same way, wise men are interested only in wholesome deeds. They are absolutely against anything unwholesome. Thus the wise and the unwise are poles apart in regard to their tastes and inclinations. Furthermore, an unwholesome deed is harmful and degrading whereas a wholesome deed is beneficial and ennobling, and thus these two different kinds of deeds are diametrically opposite.

King Sutasoma was greatly pleased with the brahmin's discourse on the four verses and donated a thousand pieces of money for each verse to show his gratitude, which was ten times what the brahmin used to get elsewhere. He also gave the brahmin a small vehicle. Then, he paid his last respects to his parents, saying that he would go back to the jungle in accordance with the promise he had made to Porisāda. His parents as well as his ministers told him not to go back, saying that they would catch the great robber with their troops. The courtiers wept and implored him not to go back.

### **Keeping One's Promise**

King Sutasoma said, "Virtuous and wise men make it a practice to keep their promises. Porisāda trusted me and so permitted me to come back here. It is because of his permission that I kept my promise to the brahmin and had the opportunity to listen to his discourse. I am indebted to Porisāda, so as a mark of gratitude I must return. If I do not return to him, it will be a breach of my solemn promise, which means lying." After explaining his attitude, he returned to Porisāda.

Some people make a promise sincerely, but they cannot keep it because circumstances prevent it. However, it is only a breach of

promise and not an act of lying. It is an act of lying as well as a breach of promise only if you break a promise that you have made insincerely.

Porisāda was making a fire and sharpening the stakes in preparation for a blood sacrifice when Sutasoma came back to him. The king said fearlessly that as he had listened to the discourse and completed what he should have done, he was now ready to offer himself for sacrifice, or for the cannibal's feast. Porisāda was greatly impressed by the king's fearlessness. He attributed it to the brahmin's discourse and he wished to listen to a teaching that might inspire him with similar courage, so he requested the king to recite the four stanzas to him.

### **The Conversion of Porisāda**

The king replied that it would serve no purpose to teach a lawless, unscrupulous cannibal like Porisāda. The king's reply was harsh and humiliating because he wanted to put Porisāda to shame and bring him to his senses. His words made the cannibal more anxious to hear the discourse. He said that after listening to the discourse he would be able to distinguish between good and evil, and that he could aspire to the higher things in life. Considering that it was the right time for Porisāda to listen to the discourse, King Sutasoma taught the four stanzas.

Though Porisāda was a barbarian as a karmic result of his habits in his previous existence, he was intelligent enough to appreciate the king's teaching. As he listened to the discourse, he was filled with intense joy and admiration. He wished to offer something in appreciation of the discourse, so he invited Sutasoma to ask for a gift other than gold and silver for each of the four stanzas. The king ridiculed Porisāda wondering and speaking aloud as to what kind of gift he could expect from an scoundrel who did not know what was beneficial for himself. Porisāda replied that he would fulfil the king's wish even at the sacrifice of his life.

Then the king expressed his first wish. "Dear Porisāda, friendship between two virtuous persons or between two wise persons is good. I wish to see you healthy and free from disease for one hundred years."

This statement was apparently meant for the welfare of Porisāda, but it also implied the king's wish that he should not be killed, as

he would have the opportunity to see Porisāda alive for a hundred years only if he was not killed. This is typical of the exemplary sayings of the wise that serve the interests of both parties. Porisāda was pleased to learn that the man whom he intended to kill had no ill-will against him, and was even interested in his welfare. He was, of course, only too glad to fulfil the kings' wish.

The second and third request of King Sutasoma were also granted. The second request was not to kill the kings in captivity and the third request was to send them back to their countries.

As his last request King Sutasoma told Porisāda to give up the taking of human flesh. Porisāda rejected this request, saying that he had even left his country because he was so fond of the human flesh. He craved human flesh so much that he had left his country and lived in the forest. However, the king insisted that his request be granted.

Porisāda was in a quandary as he had agreed to grant any request even at the sacrifice of his life. Moreover, it was a tradition among ancient monarchs not to refuse a request if they had given their word of honour. On the other hand, it was very hard for him to give up cannibalism. Obviously, he was very fond of human flesh as was borne out by his renunciation of sovereignty and family in preference to a life of hardship in the jungle. This is not surprising to us if we consider it on the basis of our observation. Most people today are fond of meat and they would not welcome any suggestion to give up meat-eating. Neither would most people among this congregation. The suggestion would be more embarrassing to some monks than to lay Buddhists for we understand that they are rather reluctant to accept strictly vegetarian meals. Some monks are said to have deprecated vegetarianism as a practice advocated by Devadatta. Some contend that eating only vegetables makes no difference because to take delight in doing so means craving. This is true. Eating without due reflection or mindfulness tends to produce craving regardless of the kind of food one takes. However, the nature of craving is not the same and this is evidenced by the inability of many people to avoid eating meat. Some do not like meals that lack chicken, pork, mutton and so forth, a fact that points to their excessive attachment to meat.

No wonder then that it was very hard for Porisāda to give up eating human flesh. He wept and implored the king to make an alternative request. However, the king was adamant and in the end

Porisāda had to promise to give up cannibalism. His act of renunciation was exemplary and inspiring. If Porisāda, the very notorious robber could avoid human flesh, which he relished, there is no reason why we should not avoid unwholesome deeds. Porisāda followed the advice of Sutasoma who was only a Bodhisatta, so why should we not follow the advice of the Buddha? Thus inspired by the example of Porisāda we should try to avoid evil and do good.

His last wish having been thus granted, King Sutasoma had Porisāda undertake the five precepts; and after all the captive kings were set free, he made arrangements for their repatriation to their respective countries. First, he urged Porisāda to return to his country. The latter did not wish to go back. He said that he would not be alive without eating human flesh. Instead he would rather remain in the jungle, subsisting on fruits and roots. However, finally Sutasoma won him over and he left the forest together with the king. According to the Commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta,<sup>1</sup> the place where Porisāda's conversion took place was the same as that where the sutta was delivered. Delhi is said to have been the old site of Indapatta city of Kuru state, and so most probably Porisāda might have been converted at a place somewhere in the township of Delhi.

From his city of Indapatta, King Sutasoma went to Benares with his nobles, courtiers, troops, and Porisāda. The chief commander of the army who had sent Porisāda into exile refused to welcome him and Sutasoma had to do his utmost to persuade the commander, and get the ex-cannibal reinstated. Then, after he had had other kings repatriated to their respective countries, he returned to his own country.

During the life time of the Buddha, Porisāda was Aṅgulimāla, the army commander was Sāriputta, the brahmin was Mahā Kassapa, and King Sutasoma was the Buddha. All of them have attained *parinibbāna*.

### **Moral of the Story**

The moral of the story is King Sutasoma's firm commitment to his promise. He managed to listen to the discourse of the brahmin on his return from the garden as he had promised to do so. After listening to the discourse, he returned to Porisāda, thereby risking his life to keep his promise. Such acts of heroism are worthy of emulation.

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<sup>1</sup> MA.i.226.

Let us, therefore, affirm that while others may lie, we will avoid lying. We will practise not lying that will lessen defilements; we will cultivate thoughts for it. We will be truthful and avoid lying, for our spiritual growth.

### **Slander or Divisive Speech (6)**

We commit the unwholesome deed of slander (*pisuṇavācā*) when we speak ill of someone to cause discord, hatred, and enmity among people where harmony, good-will, and friendliness prevail. The Pāli term “*pisuṇavācā*” literally means speech that is destructive of love between two persons. To disparage a person behind his back is also slander for it tends to discredit him in the eyes of the hearers.

The Buddha’s characterisation of the slanderer is one who creates discord between two persons or two parties by gossiping. His speech tend to destroy unity and inflame those who are already at loggerheads with one another. He wants to see others disunited and takes delight in their division. Therefore, his words lead to discord and disunity.

There are many people who indulge in such backbiting. They are fond of gossiping, listening to gossip or reporting all the gossip they have heard. The subject matter of the gossip attracts their attention like a special news-report. Only those who love wisdom are free from such idle talk. Those who love wisdom should avoid slander.

### **Divide and Rule**

As an ethical value, abstinence from slander is a noble virtue, but some people consider it advisable to resort to slander under certain circumstances for their own ends. In ancient times, kings employed deceptive tactics to create discord among their united enemies and thus achieved victory. King Ajātasattu defeated the Licchavī by means of this kind of stratagem. He first banished his minister, the brahmin Vassakāra, under the pretext of punishing him for some offence.

Vassakāra went to Vesāli. Some Licchavī princes said that the brahmin was very cunning and objected to his residence in their city. However, most of them had no suspicion because they believed that his banishment was due to what he said in their favour. They welcomed him and entrusted him with the education of their children.

To gain the confidence of the public, the brahmin at first taught the young princes properly. The princes held him in high esteem

and regarded him as their trustworthy teacher. Then the brahmin sought to create discord and misunderstanding among them. The way he did it was subtle. He would call a prince and ask him in whisper. "Have you had your meal? What curry did you eat?"

His question was designed to make other princes suspicious. Again he would ask another prince in whisper, "Does your father plough with two oxen?" Thus there was an air of secrecy about his questions and the manner of asking them. The prince who was questioned by the brahmin became an object of suspicion by others. He said that he did not know what to make of the brahmin's questions, but they thought he was only lying. Then the brahmin asked another prince whether he was afraid as reported by a friend of his named so-and-so. Naturally the prince was offended at what he believed to be slander on the part of his friend. In this way, Vassakāra set the princes against each other, and in just three years they were so disunited that they hated the sight of each other.

Then Vassakāra sent a message to King Ajātasattu that the time was ripe for him to seize Vesāli. King Ajātasattu marched on to the city with his troops. The alarm was sounded by the beating of war-drums, but since the princes were not united, no one came out for the defence of the city. They sulked at home doing nothing. There was no resistance and King Ajātasattu took the city easily. This is an example of divisive tactics based on slander, leading to victory, an example that teaches us valuable lessons.

Today, politicians and others engaged in worldly affairs employ deceptive tactics for their own ends. Propaganda involves a lot of talk that is intended to discredit one's opponents. Even in matters of religion some make remarks harmful to others. Any remark that is calculated to discredit or arouse hatred against a person or persons is slander. However, if some people have a high regard for a person who is not worthy of respect, you may have to speak ill of him by way of warning them against an illusion that is detrimental to their interests. This kind of remark is not slanderous and wicked.

### **Overcoming Slander**

However, you should avoid making any remark that will create misunderstanding and discord. Your words should serve to infuse in others respect for a person who is worthy of respect and unite



those who are on the verge of conflict. If you hear someone being criticised through misunderstanding, you should counsel restraint. You should appease the critic; saying, "This man would not have spoken such a thing," or "He might have said it not with ill-will, but with the best of intentions."

The Buddha describes abstinence from slander as follows:

"The man who is committed to abstinence from slander avoids tale-bearing. He brings about reconciliation among those who are divided. His words strengthen the unity of those who are already united. He delights in seeing people in harmony. He loves harmony, so he will make only the remarks that tend to encourage harmonious relationships."

Therefore, we should not convey slanderous remarks to the person concerned. We should not tell a person about the faults of another. We should utter only words that are discreet and beneficial. We should make only remarks that are conducive to unity, remarks such as "Your friend often extols you for your honesty, broadmindedness, and capabilities." When we hear someone speaking ill of another, we should say, "What you say may not be true; perhaps you have misunderstood him or he has made a mistake unintentionally. He is a very good man. He could not have made such a senseless remark." We should not support a disparaging remark. Instead, we should say something that will mollify a person's anger. Such words help to avert conflicts and restore unity among those who are divided.

We should practise effacement by abstinence from slander; cultivate thoughts relating to it; avoid slander by following the path of abstinence; abstain from slander for our spiritual growth; and avoid slander for the attainment of nibbāna.

There are people who are by nature free from the habit of slandering and there are those who avoid it because of their firm commitment to moral precepts. This is the extinction of defilement rooted in the transgression by word of mouth, an extinction that is based on inherent or self-imposed morality. This kind of extinction is beneficial and is commended in the Sallekha Sutta. However, one should not remain content with it as it is not permanent. Although you are now free from the defilement, you are not assured of the same freedom in your next existence. Thus it is necessary to root it out on the plane of

the noble ones. Such total extinction is called abstention by cutting off, one of the three kinds of abstinence that I explained earlier.

### The Karmic Effects of Slander

The Aṅguttaranikāya mentions the karmic effects of slander. It says that the slanderer is liable to be reborn in the lower realms and that if he is reborn as a human being, he will be at odds with his relatives and friends. The more he is slanderous, the more karmic harm there is in store for him.

Those who utter slander against wise and virtuous persons will have to pay dearly for their evil words. The karmic rewards for abstinence from slander are just the opposite. One who abstains from slander will enjoy heavenly bliss and on return to the human world will have happy and harmonious relations with his friends and relatives.

The following is a story about a woman who had to suffer after her death because of slander. It concerns both men and women and is worthy of note.

### The Story of Isidāsi

During the lifetime of the Buddha and for nearly a thousand years after his *parinibbāna* there were *bhikkhuṇīs*. The location of the story was Pāṭaliputta, a city that became famous only after the Buddha's demise, so the events may have occurred after his *parinibbāna*. However, since the story is found in the Tipiṭaka, it apparently relates to events before the second Council or events that took place within a hundred years of the Buddha's demise.

One day, two *bhikkhuṇīs*, Isidāsi and Bodhi, sat on the clean, white sand-bank of the Ganges near the city of Pāṭaliputta. Both were Arahants with all of their biases or unwholesome tendencies totally extinct. They sat in a contemplative mood, breathing the fresh air and watching the cool, clear water of the river. Then as she looked at her companion, Bhikkhuṇī Bodhi was struck by her beauty and youthfulness. By and large, young and beautiful women enjoy sensual pleasures. They seldom visit holy places, let alone entertain any idea of joining the Saṅgha. Bhikkhuṇī Bodhi wondered what unusual circumstances had led Isidāsi to become a *bhikkhuṇī* in her youth, so she asked Isidāsi, "My friend, the world should be a happy

place for a young and attractive woman like you. What disillusionment with life made you join the Saṅgha?" Then Isidāsī told her story.

As the only daughter of a merchant of good moral character in Ujjeni, she was greatly loved by her parents. (Ujjeni is now known as Ujjain of Bhopal state in west central India. It is not far from the famous stūpa at Sanchi.) When Isidāsī came of age, a rich merchant of Sāketa in north central India sought her hand in marriage with her son. Sāketa was far away from Ujjeni; and in those days it probably took two to three months by bullock cart or carriage.

The two families being well matched in respect of social status and wealth, Isidāsī's parents agreed to the proposal. After marriage, she lived in the house of her mother-in-law in accordance with the Indian custom. As a girl from a good family, she revered her husband's parents as her own, paying customary respect to them twice a day. In India, it is still customary for young people to pay homage to parents, parents-in-law, and elders. On the way to Sri Lanka in connection with the sixth Buddhist Council, we stopped at Madras to call on a well-to-do Indian man. The man was out, so we had to wait for him at his house.

When he came back, his wife and all the other inmates of the house paid homage to him. It is their way of greeting. Elderly people, too, greet one another by raising their hands with palms placed together. There is no such custom in Burma and it is not usual to pay homage to parents and elders. Public respect is accorded only to images of Buddha, pagodas, and bhikkhus. Animists pay respect to nature spirits, but they do not show the same gesture towards their fellow human beings. All this is due to their lack of training. Some even do not know how to pay respect to their parents.

Some, however, make it a practice to pay homage to the elders in October (*Thadingyut*) at the end of the Rains. Some children do not hesitate to pay homage to their parents and elders because they had been trained to do so. This is an excellent tradition of a cultured society and every parents should implant it in their children.

Isidāsī was courteous to her husband's brothers and sisters as well. She gave up her seat when they came and provided them with food. She approached her husband respectfully, with her hands and feet washed and cleaned. She groomed his hair, gave him a mirror and applied a brown lotion to his eyes in Indian fashion.

She arranged his clothes like a slave girl. She prepared his meals herself instead of leaving the job to her servants. She washed the dishes and pots too. In brief, she served her husband tenderly like a mother attending to the needs of her only child. Her fulfilment of her duties should have been gratifying to any man.

Yet, by an irony of fate, one month after the marriage, her husband hated her bitterly and told his parents that he could not live with her any longer. They asked him why he disliked his wife who was in their eyes a virtuous, hard-working, and conscientious woman. The young man said that his wife gave him no trouble, but that in spite of her good character he did not love her any longer. If his parents insisted on his marital fidelity, he would have to leave the house.

The merchant and his wife asked Isidāsī what mistake she had made in her relation with her husband. Isidāsī replied sorrowfully that she had said or done nothing that might offend or make him unhappy and that she had served him with respect and deep affection. If in spite of her faithfulness he hated her, she could not help it. They were convinced of Isidāsī's innocence, but their sense of justice was outweighed by their attachment to their son. They sent her back to her parents although they were unhappy at the loss of their charming daughter-in-law.

The young man's hatred for his innocent wife was due to her unwholesome kamma in the past. However, the fault did not lie entirely with her. The man's dislike of Isidāsī might also be attributed to his lack of kamma that was good enough to make him worthy of a noble woman like her. I will explain it later.

Isidāsī's father was confident of her ability to get another good husband and he married her to the son of a well-to-do second-rate merchant. Isidāsī served him respectfully. However, again after a month, her husband said that he could not live with her. She was later sent back to her parents.

Then her father thought that it was their wealth that had made her husbands and their parents despise her, so he looked for a poor man who would suit his daughter. Before long, a good-looking beggar came by. The merchant gave him new clothes and persuaded him to live comfortably in his house as his son-in-law. However, after a fortnight the beggar changed his mind and said that he wished to leave the house. The parents and relatives of Isidāsī entreated him not

to leave them, but it was in vain. He said that he could not live any longer with Isidāsi in the same house. Then he deserted his wife.

The working out of kamma is at times very surprising. The beggar's reluctance to live comfortably in the merchant's house as his son-in-law might probably be due to the inadequacy of his karmic potential for such a better life. The beggar was like the man in the *Umaṅga Jātaka* (Mahosadha Jātaka) who deserted his wife.

### The Story of Udumbaradevi

In the city of Mithila in the kingdom of Videha, there was a young man called Piṅguttara who went to Taxila<sup>1</sup> for his education. As he was an intelligent youth he accomplished his objective in a short time and so took leave of his master to return to his native place. It was the usual tradition for the master to marry his grown-up daughter to his pupil. At that time the master had a marriageable daughter of great beauty and so he married her to his pupil. Piṅguttara was poor in his karmic potential and therefore, he had no love for the master's daughter who, as a girl of high karmic potential, was ill-matched for him. However, since he did not wish to displease his master, he agreed to accept her as his wife.

When at night the bride got onto the bed, Piṅguttara stepped down and slept on the floor. When the girl in duty bound followed him and lay down to sleep beside him, he shifted onto the bed. However, he got down at once when the girl again followed him. In this way, the girl slept on the bed while he slept on the floor for seven days. This shows the incompatibility of two karmic potentials of opposite nature.

After a week, Piṅguttara paid respect to his teacher and left Taxila with his wife. They did not speak to each other during the whole journey. When they came near the city of Mithila, they saw a water-fig tree laden with ripe fruits. Piṅguttara climbed up the tree and ate some fruits. His wife asked him to drop some fruits for her, but he told her to get on to the tree herself. When she was up on the tree eating the fruits, he got down and fled, after encircling the foot of the tree with thorns. Surely, he was cruel but he had to abandon his wife because he was not deserving of her.

As it happened, before long the king of Videha arrived near the tree, and seeing the beautiful lady of Taxila on the tree, he fell in love

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<sup>1</sup>Pāli: Takkasilā, now in Pakistan, it was a famous centre of learning. (Editor's note)

with her. He asked whether she was married or unmarried. She told the king who she was, how she was left on the tree by her husband whose whereabouts she did not now know, and how she was in trouble, being unable to climb down. The king concluded that she had no husband to claim her and so, after letting her come down, he made her his queen. She was named Udumbaradevi (Queen of the water-fig tree), after the name of tree on which she was found.

One day the villagers near the city gate were ordered to repair the road in anticipation of the king's visit to the garden. As one of the villagers, Piṅguttara was working on the road when the king and the queen came along in a royal chariot accompanied by the ministers and courtiers. On seeing Piṅguttara with his loin cloth tucked up and a spade in his hand among the village labourers, the queen could not help laughing. The king asked her why she laughed. The queen pointed out her former husband and said that his inferiority complex had struck her as so ludicrous as to make her laugh. However, the king did not believe her. He said, "You are lying to me. You must have laughed because you saw a man whom you love. I must kill you." Saying this, he took out his sword. The queen was frightened and implored the king to consult some wise men about her statement. The king then asked the minister Senaka for his opinion. Senaka replied that no man would have deserted a beautiful woman like her. Senaka's reply terrified the queen greatly, but having some doubts about his wisdom, the king decided to seek the opinion of Mahosadha, a wise minister. He asked Mahosadha whether it was possible for a man to dislike and abandon a beautiful and virtuous woman.

Mahosadha replied, "Your Majesty, the man who abandons a beautiful and virtuous woman may be one who has low karmic potential. Therefore, I believe that it is possible for a man to dislike such a woman. A person of high karmic potential is never compatible with another person of low karmic potential. It is not in the nature of things to find them together." Only when he heard Mahosadha's answer did the king accept the queen's statement and his love for her remained intact. If not for Mahosadha he would have acted on the advice of the foolish Senaka and lost the worthy queen. He owed the life of his beloved queen to Mahosadha and so as a mark of gratitude he presented him with a large sum of money.

Senaka's answer was erroneous. Moreover, it was a kind of slander that served to aggravate the situation that was already tense because of the king's suspicion. It was not the kind of answer that should be given by counsellors. On the other hand, Mahosadha's answer was reasonable and true. It was also intended to remove discord and restore harmony between the king and the queen. Such are the words of the wise, free from slander and worthy of emulation by all counsellors.

It is obvious that Piṅguttara's desertion of Udumbaradevi was due not to the unwholesome kamma of the latter, but to the low karmic potential of the former. Likewise Isidāsi was deserted by the beggar because he did not have the wholesome kamma that would ensure a fortunate life in the house of the merchant. Likewise, the desertion by her two former husbands was not entirely due to her bad kamma, but it might be attributed in part to their kamma that was too poor for their association with a noble woman.

### The Ordination of Isidāsi

The merchant was at a loss what to do for his daughter. Deserted even by a beggar, Isidāsi was very unhappy. She felt humiliated and despaired of her fate, and the worldly life. She thought of leaving her parents either to die or to join the Saṅgha. At this time an elderly *bhikkhuṇī* named Jinadattā came to the merchant's house for her daily collection of food. Isidāsi paid obeisance to her and, after offering the food, asked her for admission into the Saṅgha.

The merchant dissuaded his daughter from becoming a *bhikkhuṇī*, saying that she could as well give alms and lead a virtuous life as a laywoman. Of course, he did not want to part with his only daughter. With tears in her eyes, Isidāsi replied that her misfortunes were probably due to the unwholesome deeds she had committed excessively in her previous life, that she wished to cleanse herself of her unwholesome kamma by practising the Dhamma as a *bhikkhuṇī*. Thereupon, her father considered it inadvisable to obstruct her and gave his permission. He also expressed his best wishes for her, "May you attain insight-knowledge on the level of the noble path and the highest bliss of Arahantship that has been realised by the Supreme Buddha! May you attain nibbāna!"

Isidāsi took leave of her parents and other elders of her family and received ordination from Bhikkhuṇī Jinadattā and, by virtue

of her high karmic potential, within a week she became an Arahant endowed with the three kinds of higher-knowledge (*tevijjā*).

The attainment of Arahantship after the practice of the Dhamma for seven days was due to special potential. Those who achieve extraordinary insight in such a short time are extremely rare among the meditators here. Those who practise the Dhamma ceaselessly and diligently day and night usually attain knowledge of arising and passing away and knowledge of dissolution in a week, but Bhikkhuni Isidāsī attained the three higher knowledges after just seven days. This means: 1) knowledge that enables one to recall former existences (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), 2) knowledge that enables one to see everything in heaven, hell, and other parts of the universe that are invisible to the naked eye (*dibbacakkhu-ñāṇa*), and 3) knowledge of the destruction of defilements (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*). This last knowledge means the attainment of Arahantship. Isidāsī achieved her object in seven days. In retrospect, she might have thought herself very fortunate to have been deserted by one husband after another. If not for desertion by her first husband, she would not have married the second man, still less thought of becoming a *bhikkhuni*. Even if her marriage to the beggar had been successful, it might have ruled out the possibility of a religious life. As it turned out, she joined the Saṅgha due to her disenchantment with life. She became an Arahant in seven days and achieved complete freedom from all suffering rooted in *saṃsāra*. For her, desertion by one husband after another was in a blessing in disguise.

We should regard the case of Isidāsī in this light. It must have been very gratifying to her that though she had to suffer greatly due to her unwholesome kamma, she eventually benefited from her suffering by becoming an Arahant. Therefore, when misfortune befalls us, we should not be obsessed by it and become despondent. We should take an optimistic view. This mental attitude that helps to console us and serves our spiritual needs is systematic attention (*yonisomanasikāra*). Nevertheless, no woman would want to be deserted by her husband like Isidāsī. Although Isidāsī became an Arahant, it will be difficult for other women to turn their misfortune to advantage as she did.

As Isidāsī recalled her previous lives using her higher knowledge, the recollection of her unwholesome deeds and the consequent suffering during the next seven existences dawned upon her.



1) In the first existence she was a goldsmith in the city of Erakaccha. As a young man in close contact with many women, he committed adultery. Because of this unwholesome deed, on his death 2) he landed in hell where he suffered for a long time. 3) Then he was reborn as a monkey. Seven days after its birth the herd leader bit off its testicles and castrated it as it did not want any male rival. This was the karmic effect of adultery. 4) Then in his next existence he became a ram. The ram was castrated and killed for human food. 5) In his fifth existence he was also castrated to be used for ploughing or drawing carts. The bull is usually castrated for its docility. When I was young I saw some bulls being castrated. It was a terrible sight. The bull was tied down and his testicles were battered with a wooden club. It must have been very painful. The animal could not eat for three or four days. Afterwards, when it was strong enough to work, it had to toil under the burning sun or in the rain without being able to complain of even sickness. In the end when it became very old, it was sold to the butcher regardless of its long service to the owner. Then it died helpless and forlorn at the hands of the butcher. The life of such an animal is heart-rending indeed.

6) In her sixth existence she was conceived in the womb of a slave woman and thus was born into slavery. Even worse, she had no male or female organs at birth, a shameful abnormality that was the karmic effect of adultery. For thirty years she suffered and then 7) in her seventh existence she was reborn as the daughter of a poor carter. As her father could not repay his debt to the caravan chief, the girl was enslaved by the latter. She had to do all kinds of work at the chief's house. Fortunately, she was good-looking and when she grew up, she became the lover of the chief's son, Giridāsa. The wife and the lover usually do what is harmful to each other's interest. The lover slandered the wife to create discord between her and her husband. However, the wife was a woman of good moral character and so the slanderous remarks against the virtuous woman were fraught with grave negative kamma and now, with adultery in a previous life, she was worsening her destiny by her spiteful speech.

Fortunately, Isidāsi realised her mistake and attributed her former husbands' hatred despite her loyal devotion to them to the karmic effect of her slanderous remarks in a previous life. She added that because of her unwholesome kamma, she was deserted even by a beggar and that

she had eradicated her karmic debt by following the way to Arahantship and nibbāna. This is most important. Arahantship means the complete extinction of all karmic potentials. Kamma bears no more fruit, it is the Arahant's last existence and when its course is run, he or she attains *parinibbāna*. After *parinibbāna* there is no renewal of life. Isidāsī attained *parinibbāna* and her suffering came to an end forever.

This story has a lesson for both men and women. Adultery led the goldsmith to hell and then when reborn as a monkey, a ram, and a bull he was castrated. Then he became a sex freak born of a slave girl. These were the heavy karmic price he had to pay for the momentary pleasure of adultery. The girl's kamma worsened when she slandered a virtuous woman. Her misdeed must have caused a lot of discord and suffering to others. This should be a good lesson for wives, lovers, and polygamous husbands. As a result of her misdeed, even in her last existence as Isidāsī, the daughter of a rich man, she was deserted by three husbands in a row, the last one being a beggar. All these are the harmful karmic effects of slander.

### Abusive or Harsh Speech (7)

“Other people may indulge in harsh speech, but we will avoid it.” Thus you should practise effacement that lessens defilements.

Harsh speech (*pharusavācā*) means speech such as abusing, scolding, and cursing. This kind of speech is very painful to the person concerned, and unpleasant even to those who have nothing to do with it. Nobody wants to hear such utterances; and a wise man abhors them. To be *karmically* effective, the use of harsh language must involve three factors — the person who is abused or cursed, ill-will against that person, and the act of abusing or cursing.

In the absence of any unwholesome desire to cause pain or annoyance, the use of harsh language is *karmically* fruitless. Once a boy went into the jungle against the advice of his mother. The mother was angry and cursed him, “May you be gored to death by a buffalo!” In the jungle the boy saw a she-buffalo that threatened to kill him. The boy invoked the power of truth, saying, “Let it happen, not according to my mother's words, but according to her wish.” It is said that the animal then stopped and stood still. Although some

parents may curse their disobedient children, in reality, they do not wish the slightest harm to befall them. Teachers may scold unruly pupils, saying, "Go away, all of you! Don't stay with me! I don't care a damn what happens to you!" However, they have the welfare of their pupils at heart. Such speech, though verbally harsh, does not stem from ill-will, and as such, it is not *karmically* fruitful. On the other hand, a gentle remark rooted in evil desires is *karmically* effective. "Let this man sleep soundly" is what ancient kings used to say euphemistically about a man they wanted to be executed. If a remark is based on ill-will, it has karmic effect.

We should avoid abusing and cursing. We should utter only words that are rightly motivated, gentle, pleasant, and acceptable. We should overcome the use of harsh language through commitment to moral precepts and concentration on a meditation object. We must rely on insight meditation when faced with unpleasant sense-objects. We tend to use harsh language when we are irritated by undesirable sense-objects. We should eliminate ill-will through mindfulness. In particular, a remark that one dislikes often evokes harsh language, so we must be especially mindful when we hear unpleasant words.

### **A Man Who Conquered Through Mindfulness**

In my native village of Seikkhun in Shwebo district there is a meditator who is very mindful. He has been a monk for twenty years. While he was a layman he noted, "hearing, hearing," whenever he heard his father-in-law rebuking him. The rebuke lasted probably about ten minutes. To him the voice of the speaker as well as his words disappeared instantly and he did not know anything about what the old man was saying. He was not angry nor did he have any desire to retort. However, if not for his mindfulness, he would have retorted angrily and uttered harsh words. This is a very effective way to overcome the habit of speaking harshly that anyone can follow. It also helps to overcome anger and ensures the complete extinction of the habit when, through the development of insight-knowledge, the meditator attains the noble path. However, since slander and harsh speech stem from anger, the meditator can completely overcome these defilements only at the stage of Non-returning. Stream-winning ensures only the extinction of unwholesome speech that leads to the lower realms. At the stage of Once-Returning, a meditator is

assured of the extinction of the gross forms of harsh speech and slander that do not lead to the lower realms. He or she is not yet free from the subtle forms of slander and harsh speech, which become completely extinct only in the Non-returner. The Visuddhimagga describes slander, harsh speech, and ill-will as the three unwholesome propensities that are eliminated by the Non-returner. The meditator should try to attain Non-returning to overcome them.

### **The Karmic Effects of Harsh Speech**

According to the Aṅguttaranikāya, those who use harsh speech are liable to be reborn in the lower realms. If reborn in the human world they will often be abused and scolded. Some people curse a thief with violent death or damnation. Such curses are customary among Indian sadhu and fakirs. They curse a man who does not give them what they ask for and it is the popular belief that anyone who has been cursed by them is in for a lot of misfortune. People are probably afraid of their curses because their holy books, the Purāṇas, tell them how misfortunes befell those who were cursed by holy men. Buddhist monks do not curse others or swear an oath.

According to Buddhism, a curse by itself can cause no misfortune, which is only due to bad kamma. In fact, a curse is likely to recoil on the one who utters it, as shown in the following story from the Petavatthu.

### **Rebirth As a Hungry Ghost Because of Curses**

In the time of the Buddha, twelve bhikkhus spent the Rains at a village of eleven families. The chief weaver provided the necessities of life for two monks while each of the other ten families cared for one of the other ten monks. The weaver's wife was a non-believer and had no faith in the Saṅgha; so she did not serve the monks respectfully. Then the weaver married his wife's sister to whom he transferred all of his property. As a pious woman, she served the monks with great respect. At the end of the Rains each monk was offered a robe. The elder wife was so enraged that she cursed; "Let the food and drink that you have offered to the monks become excreta, urine, pus, and blood; let the robes turn into glowing iron sheets!"

After death the weaver became a tree deity and his elder wife became a hungry ghost near his mansion. She had nothing to wear

and nothing to eat. She begged the tree deity for food and clothes. However, when the god gave food and drinks they turned into excreta and urine in the hands of the hungry ghost. The deity provided celestial clothes too, but they became glowing iron sheets as soon as they were worn by the hungry ghost. The hungry ghost discarded the burning iron clothes and ran away crying, the curse she made in her previous life had recoiled on her.

Her unhappy plight came to the notice of a monk who was visiting the place. On his advice the tree deity offered food to him and shared the merits with the hungry ghost. The hungry ghost was then able to eat the celestial food and she became well-nourished. Then the deity entrusted to the care of the monk a pair of celestial robes to be offered to the Buddha and again the hungry ghost got part of the merit and this made her beautiful like a goddess in her new dress. A wholesome deed is a remedy for a person who is suffering because of his or her own curse.

### **Abuse Leads to the Realm of Hungry Ghosts**

In the time of the Buddha in a village near Sāvatti there was a faithful lay Buddhist called Nandisena. His wife Nandā had no faith and no manners. She did not respect her husband and she abused him and her mother-in-law. After her death she became a hungry ghost and prowled in the village neighbourhood. One day she appeared before Nandisena, identified herself as his former wife, and attributed her rebirth in the realm of hungry ghosts to her rudeness, lack of respect for her husband and the habit of abusing him in her previous existence.

Life as a hungry ghost was the price she had to pay for her rudeness to her good husband. Had she apologized to him, she might have been freed from harmful karmic effects; but the woman Nandā had done nothing of the sort. Nandisena handed his cloak to the hungry ghost and told her to wear it and follow him to his house where she could have clothes and food. However, the hungry ghost said that she could have such things only if he made offerings to the virtuous bhikkhus. Nandisena did so and shared his merits with her and she said, “*Sādhu! Sādhu!*” (well-done; well-done). The hungry ghost got celestial food and clothes and became beautiful like a goddess.

These stories show how abusiveness leads to the lower realms. The karmic rewards for those who avoid harsh language and speak gently are just the opposite. Those who speak gently and tolerate abuse instead of retaliating are reborn in celestial realms. There are stories in the *Vimānavatthu* illustrating such karmic rewards. If reborn in the human world, they are spoken to gently and hear only sweet voices. Abstinence from the use of harsh language is also beneficial in the present life. A man who speaks gently endears himself to everybody, he is highly esteemed and is not in conflict with his friends. We should cultivate the habit of speaking gently. We must not speak when we are angry. We should first overcome anger through mindfulness and then speak gently. We can profit by this practice here and now.

### **Idle Chatter (8)**

We should also avoid idle chatter that has nothing to do with truth, one's own welfare, the Dhamma, or the Buddha's instructions. It is frivolous talk that is not worth remembering. In brief, it is a misrepresentation of fiction as fact. However, by and large, people are fond of fiction. With their clever imagination, writers produce popular novels that are sold out in a month. There is a big demand for their books. By contrast, religious books have only a few readers because they do not have mass appeal like works of fiction. Most novels pander to popular desires and turn the weal and woe of human life into fiction with various elaborations. True to the practice of effacement, we should pledge to avoid speaking, writing, or spreading anything that is frivolous.

One who practises effacement will talk only about what is true or beneficial, or about the Dhamma, and that is worth remembering. Even when we speak wisely, we must speak at the right moment. Moreover, we should not talk excessively. Even in our talks about the Dhamma we must pay due regard to circumstances.

If you say too much to a man who has no spiritual inclination, he will be afraid to listen to the Dhamma; and if you repeatedly urge him to practise it, he will soon give you a wide berth. You should be discreet and teach him gradually at the right time. However, in case of a very intimate friend, we should bear in mind the story of Ghaṭikāra and urge him persistently to take interest in the Dhamma.

## The Story of Ghaṭikāra

In the lifetime of Kassapa Buddha there was a potter called Ghaṭikāra. He was a lay disciple who had attained Non-returning. One day he urged his friend Jotipāla three times to go and see the Buddha. Jotipāla demurred and spoke in contempt of the Buddha. Jotipāla was not an ordinary man. He was a Bodhisatta. However, as a brahmin with deep-seated religious beliefs, he had a low opinion of the Buddha, hence his scornful rejection of the potter's advice. Traditional beliefs are really formidable and so Ghaṭikāra, the potter, took Jotipāla to the river for a bath. After taking his bath, Jotipāla put on his loin-cloth and was standing for a while to get his hair dry when the potter again urged him to go and see the Buddha at his residence nearby. Ghaṭikāra proposed three times and his proposal was turned down each time as before. Then the potter got hold of his friend's loin-cloth and again urged him to see the Buddha, but it was in vain. At last the potter grabbed him by the hair and repeated his suggestion.

Jotipāla was stunned. He wondered why a low-caste potter had dared to take hold of his hair. He thought that the potter probably had the courage to do so because of his faith in his teacher, the Buddha, so he asked the potter, "Is this matter so important that you take hold of my hair?" "Yes, it is," said the potter. Considering the potter's request seriously, Jotipāla concluded that it must be a serious matter, and so agreed to visit the Buddha with his friend. After seeing the Buddha and hearing the Dhamma, he was converted and joined the Saṅgha.

Because his suggestion was sure to benefit his friend, the low-caste, untouchable potter urged the high-caste brahmin, first, by word of mouth, then by catching hold of his loin-cloth, and finally by taking hold of his hair. His persistence contributed to the spiritual welfare of his friend and the latter was very grateful. Likewise, today although some people at first had no interest in the Dhamma, they came to our centre to meditate in response to the persistent requests of their friends. By virtue of their effort and karmic potential they gained spiritual experience for which they are greatly indebted to their Dhamma friends. There are many such meditators, and their experience shows how persistent urging often pays off. That is why the Dhamma has the attribute of come and see (*ehi-passiko*). It invites everyone to test it. Just as a man who enjoys delicious food is grateful to the man who invited him to the feast, so too, the meditator who

has had some spiritual experience is grateful to the person who has urged him to practise the Dhamma. So we should persist in urging our intimate friends to practise Satipaṭṭhāna meditation.

Of the talks that are commendable, those about welfare (*attha*) and teaching or discipline (*vinaya*) concern worldly matters too. In other words, we should engage in talk that is beneficial or edifying in our everyday affairs. However, monks have to avoid any kind of talk that is proscribed in the Vinaya Piṭaka. Even the meditating layman should avoid “animal talk” (*tiracchānakathā*), which means any talk that is incompatible with spiritual progress. Talk of this kind is that about kings, thieves, rebels, ministers, armies, food, drinks, clothes, relatives, vehicles, villages, towns, men, women, and so forth. If this talk has nothing to do with religious zeal, disenchantment, faith, or wisdom, they are to be labelled idle chatter, and as such should be avoided.

### The Karmic Effects of Idle Chatter

According to the Aṅguttaranikāya, the karmic result of idle chatter is that the talker is liable to be reborn in the lower realms, and if reborn as a human being, most people do not pay attention to what he says.

Typical of the idle chatter that is vicious enough to lead to the lower realms is serious talk about such things as the story of the fighting of Bhārata kings in Mahābhārata, the legend of the kidnapping of Sitadevi by the ogre Rāvaṇa called Dasagīri and so forth. The Commentaries describe only such talk as idle chatter. The following is a brief summary of the story in the Mahābhārata.

On the bank of the Yamunā river a son was born of the union of the hermit Parāsara and Saccavati. The son was called Depāyana. After his birth his mother became a virgin again through the supernatural power of the hermit. Depāyana later became a hermit named Bhyāsa. He promised to come when his mother wished to see him. Later, Saccavati was made queen by Santanu, the king of the Kurus. She bore him two sons, the elder Citriṅgadahū and the younger Citraviriya. When King Citraviriya died, leaving two queens but no offspring, Saccavati sought the help of Bhyāsa the hermit to preserve the royal family line. The hermit was so ugly that on his approach the elder queen shut her eyes and so she gave birth to a blind son, Dhataṛaṭṭha. The younger queen looked at him with her feeble eyes and so she got



a feeble son, Paṇḍu. Paṇḍu became king because his brother was blind. The latter married Gandhāri, daughter of the Gandhāra king. She had one hundred sons, the eldest being Duyodhana.

One day King Paṇḍu killed a couple of mating deer with his bow. Being a powerful hermit, the stag cursed the king to die while enjoying sex. Thus Paṇḍu decided to avoid sexual intercourse. He had two queens, Kuntī and Maddī. Neither of them had a son to succeed Paṇḍu.

Kuntī prayed and had three sons, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhima, and Ajjuna through her relations with the god Dhamma, the wind-god, and Sakka respectively. Maddī had twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, through two Assavi gods. Paṇḍu died and was succeeded by the blind prince Dhataratṭha.

Dhataratṭha's son Duyodhana and others were called Korabhyasa while Paṇḍu's sons were hated by Duyodhana and others. Yudhiṣṭhara and other were called Paṇḍavas. Being brave warriors, Paṇḍu's sons were hated by Duyodhana and others. After consultation with his younger brother Pussāsana, his friend Kaṇṇa and his uncle Saṅgī, he ordered the Paṇḍavas in the name of the king to practise elephant-warfare at a rural house. His plan was to burn the house and kill them while they were sleeping at night. However, being warned by Vidura, the wise man, Kuntī and her five sons fled and escaped death. However, they had to endure great hardship in the jungle and the five princes had to lie low in the guise of brahmins. The story also tells us how Bhima killed two man-eating giants. Later, disguised as brahmins the five princes attended the ceremony for the choice of a suitor by Kaṇhā, the daughter of king of Pañcāla. The princess was to garland the suitor of her choice. The meeting was also attended by Duyodhana and his party as well as by local princes. Kaṇhā's brother announced the names of suitors. This was to introduce them to the princess. It was a contest of skill. The contestants tried one after another to string a bow, but no one was successful. Kaṇṇa, a charioteer of the Duyodhana faction managed to string the bow and he was about to shoot the target when the princess shouted that she would not choose him. At last Ajjuna who was disguised as a brahmin stringed the bow, shot, and hit the target. Kaṇhā garlanded and chose him, but Ajjuna said that she was not meant only for him and in accordance with the family tradition she became the wife of

the five brothers. (She was somewhat like Kaṇhādevī in the Kuṇāla Jātaka). Fighting broke out between the princes headed by Duyodhana and their cousins led by Yudhiṭṭhira, and they killed one another. The war is described in the Mahābhārata.

People are expected to accept all this as fact and listen to the story repeatedly. Everyone who recites or hears it sincerely is assured of liberation from all unwholesome kamma and passage to higher realms after death.

The Rāmāyana tells us elaborately how Rāma's wife, Sītādevī, was abducted to Sri Lanka by the giant Rāvaṇa and how Rāma fought Rāvaṇa with the help of the monkey Hanuman and recovered his wife. The believer who recites and hears this story is also guaranteed a heavenly life after death. In fact, to intelligent people who are not orthodox Hindus, it is obvious that these stories are myths and fabrications. If we regard these stories as real events, this view will impede spiritual progress and cause great harm. To encourage belief in such stories will, therefore, lead to lower realms and lack of credibility in case of rebirth in the human world.

According to the Commentaries, listening to frivolous stories is *karmically* harmful only if one believes them. Again the Visuddhimagga and other Commentaries say that the meditator can overcome interest in idle chatter only at Arahantship. Therefore, we assume that interest in the thirty kinds of "animal talk" that do not lead to the lower realms still lingers at the lower stages of the path.

The karmic results of abstinence from idle chatter is, of course, the opposite of the dangers that beset one who indulges in it. One who avoids idle chatter goes to higher realms after death and if reborn as a human being, he is highly esteemed and trusted by other people.

## Covetousness (9)

You should also avoid covetousness (*abhijjhā*). Covetousness is the intention to possess another person's property unlawfully. However, in the Sallekha Sutta, sensual desire as a hindrance to concentration is also described as covetousness. Thus we should regard it as both kinds of desire, that is, desire that is productive of evil conduct and desire that arises in the mind only. We have the first kind of covetousness when we crave for another person's property. Here, covetousness means not the intent to buy the property, but the intent to own it unlawfully.

### Four Kinds of Covetousness

Covetousness as a mental hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*) is of four kinds: 1) ordinary desire 2) evil desires (*pāpicchā*) 3) rapacity (*mahicchā*), and 4) discontent (*atricchā*).

1) Ordinary desire is desire for something that one sees or hears or knows about. This kind of desire is hard to overcome by making a vow or just by an act of will. It will dominate us as long as we are not free from greed (*lobha*). The meditator should be on guard against it; whenever it crops up, the meditator must note and reject it.

2) Evil desires (*pāpicchā*) are the longing for the respect and admiration of others although one is not worthy of that respect. Some people like to give others the impression of having faith that they do not have; possessing moral integrity that they do not possess; having knowledge that they lack; having practised the Dhamma without any practice; attaining absorption without any attainment; having insight-knowledge or psychic-powers that they do not have; being noble ones or Arahants without having any attributes of those noble ones. Some pretend to be Arahants to mislead other people. They welcome people who regard them as Arahants. This desire to be esteemed and admired for the quality that one does not have is called evil desire. The Sallekha Sutta stresses the need to free oneself from this kind of desire.

3) Rapacity (*mahicchā*) is inordinate greed. A man who is consumed with insatiable greed is not content with what he has. He wants to have too much of everything and to have things of better quality. It is vital to curtail this kind of greed.

4) Discontent (*atricchā*) is desire for something that belongs to another under the impression that it is better than what one has. In other words, it is dissatisfaction. The effort to overcome discontent is crucial, since many people suffer needlessly in their quest for something new, which they think is better than the old.

The sutta's teaching on covetousness is primarily concerned with covetousness that is productive of evil conduct, so I should say more about it. Covetousness is the desire to obtain unlawfully something that belongs to another. Nowadays, this kind of desire seems to dominate many people. There are talks and advice on ways and means of getting other people's property. As a result there are people who apparently look forward to possessing things that do not belong to them. In reality they are unlikely to realise their dreams. However,

whenever we think of getting another person's property, the unwholesome thought occurs together with its karmic effects. If we wish to practise effacement, we should not harbour such thoughts, but should try to get whatever we want only by lawful means. We should buy it at a fair price and honestly seek the money to pay for it.

Covetous thought by itself is *karmically* effective and the effect may be potent enough to lead to the lower realms. The intent to steal or rob is more serious in that it is the volitional prelude to the commission of crime. Still worse, of course, is the actual commission. We should, therefore, overcome such serious unwholesome deeds through moral integrity and reflections such as, "I do not like anyone who tries to get my property unlawfully; in the same way nobody will like me if I try to get his property unlawfully." We should also cultivate concentration constantly to leave no room for covetous thoughts. Covetousness may arise when we see, hear, smell, taste, contact, or use desirable objects belonging to others. A meditator who is constantly mindful at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, finds everything vanishing whenever noting any phenomenon with powerful insight-knowledge. This prevents the arising of covetousness for another person's property, let alone thoughts and schemes to obtain it unlawfully. Thus we can overcome covetousness through insight meditation. It can be rooted out when we attain the noble path. The complete extinction of the covetousness that leads to misconduct is assured at the stage of Stream-winning, and so is the extinction of evil desires. Other kinds of covetousness are eliminated only at the three higher stages of the path.

The Visuddhimagga says that covetousness is finally eradicated only at the stage of Arahantship. It says so because it describes ordinary greed (*lobha*) as a kind of covetousness. We assume that Stream-winning ensures the extinction of covetousness inclined to commit unwholesome deeds, and that connected with evil desires, since these two defilements are liable to lead to the lower realms. The Sallekha Sutta that teaches us to overcome covetousness is very profound in that it tells us to practise effacement to overcome covetousness through the attainment of the four noble paths. Let us affirm:

"While other people are covetous, we will avoid covetousness.  
We will seek spiritual growth through non-covetousness.  
We will put an end to the defilement of covetousness  
through non-covetousness."

### Ill-will (10)

Ill-will (*vyāpāda*) is the evil intent to bring about the death or destruction of another. In the Pāli text defining the term “*vyāpāda*” it says, “May these living beings be ill-treated or killed! May the whole tribe or clan be wiped out, destroyed or become extinct! There is such kind of intent to do wrong and destroy other beings.” Thus ill-will is the intent to cause the death or ill-treatment of a hated person or person. The intent in itself is unwholesome mental kamma. At the very least the desire for the death or destruction of mosquitoes and bugs amounts to *karmically* effective ill-will. However, as these lower forms of life have no morality, ill-will against them is not very grave in its karmic effect. The effect is very grave if we long for the death or destruction of people or monks who possess morality and other virtues.

Therefore, we should remove ill-will by cultivating loving-kindness and radiating good-will, “May all beings be free from danger! May all beings be free from mental and physical suffering! May all beings live happily!” This is the way to avoid the unskilful path of ill-will by means of the skilful path of love. If we cultivate loving-kindness in this way, we can advance from one stage to another and put out the fire of ill-will by means of the pure water of loving-kindness.

People who have no self-control are intent on the death and destruction of those whom they hate. We who live among such people will free ourselves from ill-will; we will overcome ill-will by cultivating love. If we have ill-will, we must remove it through mindfulness. Such is the practice of effacement.

We can conquer ill-will through insight meditation, that is, through mindfulness at every moment of seeing, hearing, and so forth. When we see a person whom we do not want to see, or when we hear a sound that we do not wish to hear, especially when we learn what a person is doing to endanger our interests, or when we find or learn what we do not want to find out or know, we have ill-will, “Damn that fellow! A plague on him!” However, with mindfulness at every moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, you will find that every thought and feeling passes away instantly — then it is impossible for ill-will to arise. Therefore, constant mindfulness of every mental event rules out the possibility of ill-will, and that is the way to overcome it through the practice of insight meditation.

If we cannot practise insight meditation we can overcome ill-will through the development of loving-kindness (*mettā*). We should radiate loving-kindness to every living being whom we see or hear. Then, there will be no ill-will against those people. Living beings whom we do not see or hear should also be the focus of our loving-kindness. If we note the mind that suffuses loving-kindness, that is insight meditation. By suffusing loving-kindness and making a note of it, we can progress from one stage of insight to the next until we attain Non-returning, when ill-will becomes completely extinct. Even at the stage of Stream-winning, the meditator is free from ill-will that can lead to the lower realms, so we should seek at least Stream-winning to overcome ill-will. If possible, we should strive to attain Non-returning for its total extinction.

Let us then develop loving-kindness and meditate:

“May all beings be free from danger! May all beings be free from mental suffering! May all beings be free from physical suffering! May all beings live happily!”

In developing loving-kindness, the consciousness that is focused on it as well as the mental act of willing disappears instantly. This disappearance indicates the law of impermanence. Impermanence is suffering, and these are both signs of insubstantiality. Such awareness of the nature of things as we develop loving-kindness is insight-knowledge. Let us then practise insight meditation while developing loving-kindness at the same time.

“May all being be free from danger! May all beings be able to bear the burden of the aggregates!”

## **Wrong View (11)**

### **Ten Wrong Ideas**

The term “*micchatta*” is a compound of “*micchā-*” and “*atta.*” *Micchā* means wrong and *atta* means idea and so “*micchatta*” means wrong idea. Of the ten wrong ideas the first eight constitute the wrong eightfold path that is opposed to the right eightfold path. These are wrong-view, wrong thought, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration. They are opposed to right view, right thought, right speech, right

action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This wrong eightfold path leads to one of the four lower realms: hell, animal realm, the hungry ghost realm and the realm of jealous gods (*asura*). If, because of wholesome kamma, the follower of the wrong path is reborn as a human being, he will be short-lived, sickly, and subject to other hardships. Then there is wrong knowledge (*micchā-ñāṇa*) as opposed to right knowledge (*sammā-ñāṇa*), and wrong liberation (*micchā-vimutti*) as opposed to right liberation (*sammāvimutti*). Thus there are ten wrong ideas in all.

Wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) is the opposite of right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). People usually resent being called non-believers<sup>1</sup> or holders of wrong-views. However, this is an expression of one's view, so there is no need for resentment. Every religion lays claim to exclusive possession of truth and regards the teachings of other religions as wrong-views.

Some fourteen or fifteen years ago a young teacher from Sudan came to Rangoon and practised meditation at our centre. He spent over a month and as far as his insight-knowledge was concerned, he could speak of knowledge of comprehension. About four months after returning to his native place he wrote to us that his father asked him whether he was still a non-believer and he admitted to still being a non-believer. There is no reason why we should resent being labelled non-believers by those who do not follow our religion. It is only a matter of opinion and in our eyes they, too, would be non-believers. What matters is that our views must be true in the context of the realities of nature. We have to say that non-Buddhist teachings are wrong-views, but this should not be considered an overly harsh judgment. We have to consider only whether our view has any basis in fact.

The wrong-view that we speak of here is of two kinds: the wrong-view included in the ten unwholesome actions, and the wrong-view that forms part of the eightfold wrong path. I have given talks on the three unwholesome deeds — killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct — as well as the four kinds of wrong speech: lying, slander, harsh speech, and idle chatter. All of these seven unwholesome deeds should be avoided. Of the three unwholesome deeds in thought we

<sup>1</sup> "Non-believer" is, I think, a better translation in this context than the original "heretic," which would be applicable only for one who claims to be a Buddhist, yet proclaims a wrong-view. (Editor's note)

have dealt with covetousness and ill-will. I will now go on to explain wrong-view. An analytical knowledge of wrong-view is very important, and it concerns those who do not meditate as well as meditators.

The wrong-view leading to evil conduct is the view that there is no kamma and no karmic effect. It will benefit you if you remember this brief statement about it. Generally speaking, wrong-view has ten aspects. I dwelt on them at length in the discourse on Dependent Origination, but I will repeat them here because of their importance.

### **Ten Wrong Views**

1) The first of the ten is the view that the act of giving is not fruitful. In other words, that the act of giving is not beneficial, that it is only a waste of one's property. However, careful reflection leaves no doubt about the benefits of giving. The recipient is pleased with what he gets. Your act of giving makes him happy physically and mentally. The food that you give to a starving man may prolong his life. The donor, too, is happy by reflecting on the results of his act. Moreover, he endears himself to many people. The man who contributes liberally to a fund for a certain project in the neighbourhood is greatly respected. He is praised by wise men. He wins admiration and fame, and is respected at every meeting he attends. He has attendants wherever he lives. He has influence and is successful in every undertaking. These are the benefits that accrue to him here and now.

After his death the donor is reborn as a prosperous man or he attains heavenly realms. Of course, these are post-mortem rewards that do not admit of empirical investigation. For those who insist on actual facts, it is hard to understand. However, we should accept the teaching on kamma, bearing in mind that it is beyond the comprehension of the ignorant and that its verification lies within the intellectual sphere of the enlightened Buddha, the Arahants, and psychic meditators. If you wish to realise its truth, you should develop supernormal powers that will help to fulfil your desire. With the divine-eye you can see millions of donors enjoying heavenly bliss as well as millions of evil-minded misers who are suffering in hell or as hungry ghosts. Some meditators who do not have such supernormal powers see beings attaining heavenly realms because of wholesome kamma and being reborn in the lower



realms because of unwholesome kamma. This, of course, raises the question of whether what these meditators see is real or only imaginary. However, it is reasonable to accept it as real in view of the independent accounts of similar experience by other meditators. The denial of any benefit accruing from giving is part of wrong-view.

2) The second part of wrong-view is the view that “There is no use in making an offering on a grand scale,” that it is only a waste of goods and human energy to do so.

3) The next wrong-view is that feeding, giving gifts, and other trivial offerings are also useless. In other words, that feeding guests, giving a feast or presents on occasions such as a wedding or on New Year’s Day, do not produce any benefit. The second and the third views are essentially the same as the first. They refer to the kinds of wholesome deeds that were customary in ancient India and mention the specific acts of giving that are repudiated by non-believers.

4) The fourth wrong-view is that a wholesome or a unwholesome act is devoid of any major or marginal effect. In other words, it says that the so-called wholesome deeds produce no beneficial effect, but are only a waste of energy and that so-called unwholesome deeds have no harmful effect, that the doer is free from guilt.

As we have pointed out, the beneficial fruit of a wholesome deed is abundantly clear in the present life and its fruits in the afterlife can be seen by clairvoyant meditators. The same may be said of an unwholesome deed. Those who do wrong in deed or speech will, at the very least, be blamed by the wise. If they commit crimes, they will be punished. They will be economically ruined if they do any unwholesome deed that harms their economic interest. As to their post-mortem passage to the lower realms, this is obvious to those who have the divine eye. We should accept it on the authority of the Buddha and the Arahants who have witnessed it. However, the man who is very fond of sensual pleasures thinks only of indulging in pleasure — he does not like wholesome deeds that stand in his way. Nor does he wish to avoid unwholesome deeds. If one believes in the karmic effect of wholesome and unwholesome deeds one will have to do what is right even at the expense of one’s material welfare. The non-believer may think that he cannot make any material progress as long as he has to avoid dishonesty in business. Therefore, he does not consider the karmic effect of his deeds. He is inclined

to reject it and thinks of various arguments to support his view. This is primarily due to his excessive love of sensual pleasures.

5) and 6) Another wrong-view is that there is no mother or father. Wise men teach us to regard our parents as our greatest benefactors, to revere them, to care for them and to support them in return for what they have done for our welfare. The person who holds wrong-views does not accept this teaching. He rejects it, saying that people get their children by accident in the course of their sexual enjoyment, that they care for their children because of their sense of responsibility, and that there is no reason why the latter should be grateful to them. Moreover, since he makes no distinction between good and evil, he does not believe that supporting his parents or any wrong done to them is productive of karmic effects. When he says that there is no father or mother, he is denying that parents deserve the special respects of their children. It is a heinous view. One result of this view is certain, and it is that the person who holds it will not be respected by his children.

7) This is the view that there is no such thing as this world (as distinct from the other world). In other words, there is no rebirth in the human world following death in the other world. One who holds this wrong-view rejects hell, the celestial realms, and the hungry ghost realms, which are invisible. In this view, the only other world is the animal realm, and it is impossible for an animal to die and pass onto the human world after death, for death annihilates every living being.

8) This view denies the existence of other realms. It denies the possibility of rebirth in hell, heaven, or as a hungry ghost following death in the human world. It insists that annihilation is the fate of every dying person.

9) This view says that there is no being who emerges in a new existence after death in a previous existence. In this sense, this view is the same as views 7) and 8). The Pāli text says, "*Natthi sattā opapātikā,*" which means "There are no beings with spontaneous birth (*upapatti*)."  
In other words, it refers to beings who emerge with complete body-organs. These beings are deities, Brahmā, hungry ghosts, jealous gods, denizens of hells and beings at the beginning of the world. The non-believer denies their existence because he has never seen them himself. There is no basis for this scepticism for good spirits as well as evil spirits are to be found in many places. There are tree deities who give instant trouble to those who destroy their

abodes. The spirits that guard ancient treasures have been seen by some people and the psychic feats of some wizards have been witnessed by others. Then there are meditators who have really seen celestial beings, Brahmās, hungry ghosts, and infernal beings by means of their power of concentration. In view of these facts, the view that denies the existence of the spiritual realms is untenable.

10) This view is important, so I will give an almost literal translation of the Pāli passage and explain it. "There are recluses and brahmins who say that they have a special knowledge of and actually see this present world and the other, invisible world. However, in this world there are no recluses and brahmins who lead their lives and conduct themselves rightly."

To put it another way, the non-believer's view is that among those who have founded religions and proclaimed their doctrines there is no one who can teach on the basis of their independent, special, and empirical knowledge of the visible human world and the invisible heaven and hell. There is not one whose teachings accord with their practice. All their teachings are speculations and conjectures born of ignorance. The implication is that no religion is beneficial or right. This charge against religion was made not only in ancient times — today it is also made by those hostile to religion.

Thus the non-believer denies the existence of the Buddha and the Arahants who know the truth about the world as a result of their spiritual effort. However, if one thinks rationally, one will have to conclude on the basis of the non-believer's own saying that the non-believer is also just an ordinary man, and that his argument is also mere speculation without any special knowledge. One should not accept as true the words of an ignorant person. One must think deeply and independently.

There are many religions in the world. Some of them concede in their holy books that their teachings are based on speculations and not on actual experience. Moreover, these religions do not promise any personal experience to those who practise their teachings. Instead, they only insist on blind faith and worship. Such religions do not appeal to the wise. As for the Buddhadhmma, it claims that its teaching is based on personal, extraordinary knowledge. True to its claim, steadfast practice will ensure personal experience. The Buddha's teaching is confirmed by science in many

respects. However, to verify the teaching decisively, one will have to practise systematically and thoroughly. Anyone who holds this last wrong-view should practise properly and see for himself.

The man who proclaimed this tenfold doctrine in the lifetime of the Buddha was Ajita, a teacher of a religious sect. However, he was already teaching before the rise of Buddhism, so initially his attack might not have applied to the Buddha and his disciples who were true Arahants, but as he continued to make a sweeping charge against all holy men in the time of the Buddha, it implies an attack on the Buddha and the true Arahants.

### **Denial of Kamma and its Effects**

The ten wrong-views that we have mentioned all boil down to the view that rejects kamma and its effect. The denial of the benefit of giving (1), the benefit of giving lavishly (2), the benefit of feeding (3), and the appropriate effects of wholesome or unwholesome deeds (4) means the rejection of kamma and its effect. The denial of mother (5) and father (6) means the rejection of the effect of reverence for parents and of wrong done to them, hence it also rejects the law of kamma. The denial of this world (7) the other world (8), and beings that emerge spontaneously (9) is also rejection of kamma that leads to new existence and the rejection of the law of kamma. The last view that denies the existence of the Buddha and the Arahants (10) means rejection of the potential for Buddhahood and Arahantship, and as such it too is the rejection of the law of kamma. Thus the tenfold wrong-view means the rejection of kamma and its effects.

The word “*kamma*” is a Pāli term that means volitional action. Bodily action, verbal action, and mental action are self-evident. These deeds are what we call kamma, and are the effects of these deeds not equally obvious? Clearly a wholesome deed is beneficial while an unwholesome deed produces a harmful effect. People who seek their own welfare, focus on wholesome deeds every day. They are engaged in work for their prosperity and happiness. They send their children to school, hoping that education will ensure a well paid job and prosperity in later life. The child who leads a moral life and studies hard will benefit from these skilful deeds by gaining a thorough education, superior employment, and material wealth. These are the benefits of wholesome deeds.

On the other hand, unwholesome deeds have harmful consequences. Those who do unwholesome deeds are blamed; if they commit crimes they are convicted. These results of wholesome and unwholesome deeds are to be experienced in the present life. Likewise, there are beneficial and harmful results of our actions that pass on to the future existences. We need not have any doubt about these karmic results if we think rationally.

Everyone wants to be prosperous and happy, but not all fulfil their ambition. Most people remain poor. Human beings are born equal, but some die at an early age while some live long. Some are sickly while some are relatively free from disease. Some are good-looking and some are ugly. Some have many enemies, but some are popular. Some meet with success and make fortunes while some are unsuccessful and suffer financial losses. Some are intelligent and some are dull. Why do human beings differ from one another in so many respects? The difference between identical twin brothers or sisters is certainly not due to their parents. Farmers who work on the same plot of land may differ vastly in the output of crops in spite of the equality in soil, water, and labour. There can be no cause for their inequality other than their deeds in their previous lives.

## **Creation Theory**

Some teachers say that the world and all living beings were created by an Almighty God who has infinite power. According to Buddhist texts, these teachers describe the world and all beings as the creation of the supreme ruler or the Great Brahma. Therefore, differences among human beings are the will of the Creator. However, this view is not acceptable to intelligent people. It does not fully explain the differences among human beings. Why does the Creator create a fortunate life for one person and a miserable life for another? Why does he prolong the life of one man and shorten the life of another? Why is one child still-born while another dies in the womb? The hypothesis of an Almighty Creator does not answer these questions satisfactorily.

Again, why does the Creator fail to make all human beings equally rich? Why does he make many people poor? Why has he created snakes, tigers, and other animals that are harmful to

mankind, and germs that cause diseases? These facts of human life raise doubts about the belief in a Creator. The Sinhalese Sayādaw, U Nārada, asks why the Creator has made the Europeans and Americans rich and the peoples of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Indonesia poor. This disparity has nothing to do with creation for it is most probably due to different degrees of intelligence, energy, and effort — that is, actions in the present life. The theory of creation cannot satisfactorily explain the facts of human life, so it is not acceptable to the wise.

Then there is the view that describes everything as happening by chance. This view is completely untenable for everything that we see has its corresponding cause. A wholesome deed benefits us while an unwholesome deed harms us. Obviously, anyone who commits a crime is bound to suffer because of his unwholesome deed. Among those who do the same kind of job some prosper and get promotion while others do not achieve much success. This is presumably not just due to their present deeds, but also to their past kamma. Moreover, there are people in many parts of the world who can remember their previous lives. They can tell you what they have done and what kind of lives they have passed through. The average human being is oblivious to the past existence because of the suffering while in the womb. However, the deities do not suffer at the time of the renewal of their existence. Like a man waking up, they are reborn spontaneously with clear recollections of their past, so they can recount the wholesome deeds that have led them to heaven.

### **Kamma, the Only Explanation**

In brief, in the absence of the present actions that condition it, the disparity in the fortune of human beings is obviously due to past kamma. The doctrine of kamma is the key to all problems of human life. Some people die at an early age as a result of their acts of murder in their previous lives.

Some are afflicted with diseases because of their ill-treatment of others in their past existences. I explained these karmic effects in my last discourse. No one should resent the law of kamma for it is a fact of human existence. Every action, whether wholesome or unwholesome, has its consequences. The law of kamma can explain everything satisfactorily and the view that rejects it is clearly wrong.

## A Very Terrible View

This wrong-view is one of the ten unwholesome deeds and is described as a view leading to evil conduct. Views leading to evil conduct are of three kinds: nihilism (*natthika-dit̥ṭhi*), no-cause view (*ahetuka-dit̥ṭhi*), and non-action view (*akiriya-dit̥ṭhi*). Purāṇa Kassapa, one of the six prominent teachers of other religions in the time of the Buddha, declared that there was no moral action that produced beneficial or harmful results. This view, which denies causal agent of kamma, is called “*akiriya-dit̥ṭhi*.” Another teacher, Ajita, said that there was no result of a wholesome or unwholesome deed since death annihilated every living being. This view, which rejects the result of kamma, is called “*natthika dit̥ṭhi*.” Another teacher, Makkhali Gosāla, taught that there was no moral cause that made a man happy or unhappy because every man’s happiness or unhappiness was inexorably predetermined. This view called, “*ahetuka-dit̥ṭhi*,” rejects kamma both as a cause and as an effect. Although the other two views differ in their rejection of kamma, they are essentially the same for the denial of cause implies the denial of effect and vice versa. All of these views are wrong in that they reject kamma and its effect. A strong attachment to any of these views is fraught with grave consequences. The man who holds them is denied spiritual progress because he makes no effort for it. After death he cannot attain heaven, but is bound to be reborn in the lower realms. According to the Commentaries, he will not be liberated from hell as long as he clings to the view. It is the worst of all evils, the most serious of all wrong-views. Even if renunciation of the view frees one from hell, one is still likely to be reborn in the hungry ghost or animal realms, unless some wholesome kamma is good enough to ensure rebirth as a human being. Thus, this wrong-view is horrifying.

In the Sallekha Sutta, the Buddha teaches us to reject the view.

“Others may believe that there is no kamma and its effect. We will hold the right view that there is kamma and its effect. Thus we should practise effacement that will lessen defilements.”

The right view that our actions are our own property (*kammassakatā sammādit̥ṭhi*) leads to virtuous conduct. Wholesome deeds benefit us and unwholesome deeds harm our welfare. This view is very important because it forms the basis of all wholesome deeds. Only this right view

makes us avoid evil and do good. It leads to prosperity in heaven or in the human world through the practice of ordinary charity, morality, and mental development. It may also lead to the attainment of the path and its fruition through the practice of meditation, so it is very important to hold this right view. Those who are born of good Buddhist parents inherit this invaluable right view in their childhood, so they do not need to make a special effort to acquire it. They should only protect and strengthen it through right mindfulness.

### **Affirmation of the Belief in Kamma**

It is more important to affirm our belief in kamma when we have to deal with non-believers or when we are among them. We should stick to the right view regardless of what is said by those who reject it. Some lack a firm conviction and so they go astray after reading books that support wrong-views. Some have deviated from right views following their marriage or social relations. This means a loss of spiritual heritage that is very deplorable. Such misguided people will realise their mistake and suffer remorse on their death-bed and hereafter.

Wrong view means wrong path, right view means right path. Just as one follows the right path to avoid the wrong path, one who is not entirely free from wrong-view should change his view. This is what the Buddha taught concerning the choice of right view as the alternative to wrong-view. Moreover, wrong-view leads to the lower realms, while right view leads to the higher realms of existence. Of these two paths the Buddha tells us to choose the higher one. A man who does not believe in kamma and its effect will not do good nor will he avoid evil. He cannot hope for a higher life, but is bound to be reborn in the lower realms. However, a man who believes in kamma and its effect avoids unwholesome deeds, leads a virtuous life as far as possible, and by virtue of his wholesome deeds attains the higher realms of human beings or deities. He may also attain the noble path to nibbāna through the practice of insight meditation. Thus one can make spiritual progress only through right views.

Everybody wants and seeks a better life, but some seek it by following the wrong path. Some people do not believe in kamma and its effect, yet they have attained the current human life and prosperity because of their past kamma and hard work in the present life. The



man who has thus become prosperous despite his rejection of kamma is esteemed by some people who accept his views and follow his advice. In this way, they may achieve their aims in the present life, but they are likely to be reborn in the lower realms after death. Therefore, we should seek a better life by means of right views.

Finally, according to the Buddha, the acceptance of right views is essential to the total extinction of defilements or in other words, the attainment of nibbāna. If one believes that there is no kamma and its effects or is inclined to such a view, one should reject it and accept the right view after hearing good talks and reflecting wisely. This will lead to the extinction of the defilements rooted in wrong-views. The ordinary worldling who is not yet entirely free from wrong-views will also be assured of complete freedom from them if he strengthens the view in kamma, practises meditation, and attains Stream-winning. Therefore, in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha, let us affirm:

“Other people may hold that there is no kamma and its effect, but we will hold the right view that there is kamma and its effect. We will practise effacement that lessens defilements. We will cultivate the thoughts for the right view of kamma. We will avoid the wrong-view by adopting the right view for our spiritual growth and for the extinction of defilements.”

Thus we should strengthen the belief in kamma. Whenever we come across or hear of an unwholesome deed we should remember that it will have a harmful karmic effect, and avoid it. Whenever we do a wholesome deed, we should do it wholeheartedly, bearing in mind that it will benefit us. This way of doing good is born of knowledge. It assures us of a fortunate rebirth in the next life. Moreover, whenever we contemplate the law of kamma, we have wholesome thoughts, which is the wholesome deed of straightening one’s views (*ditṭhūjukamma*). This is a kind of mental training and we need to cultivate it before we can practise other kinds of mental development.

### **Wrong View and Right View About the Path**

I have told you how to remove the wrong-view that is productive of harm and cultivate the right view that is productive of benefit. I now urge you to remove the wrong-view regarding the path. It is

called “*Aniyyānikadiṭṭhi*,” which means the wrong-view that is an obstruction to liberation from suffering. There are four such wrong-views — *attadiṭṭhi*, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *sassatadiṭṭhi*, and *ucchedadiṭṭhi* — that run counter to insight-knowledge and path-knowledge.

Of these, *attadiṭṭhi* and *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* are the belief in the existence of a living entity or soul. The living entity is called self (*atta*), and the Pāli texts refer to both a living being (*satta*) and a self (*atta*). Ordinary people suppose themselves as well as others to be living beings. In reality there are only the five aggregates, or only mind and matter. There is no self or living entity. People believe in the existence of the non-existent self and this wrong-view is called self-view (*attadiṭṭhi*) or personality-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). *Sakkāya* means the mind-body complex, so *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is the wrong-view that this mind-body complex is a living being or self.

For example, seeing involves the eye-organ, the visual object, and the eye-consciousness. However, those who cannot contemplate or understand with insight-knowledge regard the eye-organ, the visual object, and eye-consciousness as a living being. They believe, “My eye is clear and good,” “I see my hand,” “I see his body,” “It is I who see,” *etc.* This is personality-view, which identifies the apparent mind-body complex with a self. This kind of wrong-view is also associated with acts of hearing, smelling, eating, touching, and thinking. To give another example, when you bend or stretch your hands or legs, the desire to bend and stretch is mind, while bending and stretching are matter. There is only the mind-body complex. However, those who do not contemplate or understand with insight-knowledge have the illusion “It is I who bend or stretch because it is I who wish to do so.” This is personality-view that regards the mind-body complex as self. This view also arises in connection with other kinds of physical activity.

It is hard for common people to be entirely free from ego-belief (*attadiṭṭhi*). There is only a difference in degrees, some being strongly attached to it, while others are not so attached. The view is deep-rooted in those who do not know anything about the aggregates. I held this view when I was young and ignorant. I believed then that there was a living entity in a man’s physical body, that on his death it left the body either through the mouth or the nose. I thought that life entered the mother’s womb during pregnancy. This view is supported by

doctors who recognise the start of life in the foetus only when they hear its heart-beat. People who lack adequate knowledge about mind and matter cling to the view. However, it does not have a firm hold on Buddhists who are familiar with the impersonality of life. The view is not strong enough to impede spiritual effort and the practice of the Dhamma. It is possible for Buddhists to practise and attain the noble path and its fruition in spite of their ego-belief.

The view is weak in those who have a thorough knowledge about the nature of mind and matter. Not that they are completely free from it. While talking about the nature of mind and matter, they may have the illusion that "It is I who is talking," a fact evident in the heated and impassioned arguments that occur while discussing the Dhamma. It is insight meditation and the noble path that can ensure the extinction of this view. Of the two, insight meditation brings about the extinction of the view by momentary abandonment, or in other words, the illusion regarding the object contemplated is eliminated by the opposite. Constant mindfulness means overcoming the illusion by suppression (*vikkhambhana*). The view may still arise, however, when one stops meditating and is off guard. It is completely rooted out only when the meditator attains Stream-winning. It is up to each person to strive for Stream-winning.

## Essential Knowledge

To attain this goal, one must start with meditation that is the prelude to path knowledge. The practice of meditation presupposes knowledge. Some say that before meditating the meditator should be thoroughly familiar with the concepts of the five aggregates (*khandhā*), the sense-bases (*āyatanā*), the elements (*dhātu*), the faculties (*indriya*), the truths (*saccā*) and Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). This is sound advice since it accords with the Visuddhi-magga. A meditator who has to practise without a teacher, needs such knowledge for self-examination. We should not assume, however, that this knowledge is indispensable to all meditators, for not every meditator who practised according to the instructions of the Buddha did so only after thoroughly studying the concepts of the five aggregates, and so forth. Perhaps giving instructions to meditators in those days did not usually last even an hour. Especially if there is a teacher to guide the meditator, it is sufficient to bear in mind that

there are only mental and physical phenomena that are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial. The Buddha pointed out the need for sufficient knowledge in a few words as follows:

“O King of deities! The bhikkhu who wants to meditate until he attains Arahantship should remember to regard no phenomena as permanent, pleasant, or substantial.”

This was the Buddha’s brief statement in response to the king of deities’ question as to the extent of knowledge that is essential to the attainment of Arahantship. It is the word of the Buddha, not a post-canonical teaching. To put it another way, all phenomena that occur to oneself or others should be regarded as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial. This knowledge suffices to equip the meditator intellectually for the practice of meditation. We can get this knowledge merely by listening to Dhamma talks. Religious Buddhists have learnt for a long time that there are only physical and mental phenomena, that everything is transitory, suffering, and devoid of ego-entity. If you know the method of meditation, you can meditate at any time.

### **The Buddha’s Method of Meditation**

The Buddha’s method of meditation is given in a few words: “The meditator knows all phenomena intelligently and mindfully (*So sabbam dhammam abhijānāti*).” Here all phenomena means the psychophysical phenomena involved in hearing, smelling, eating, touching, bending, moving, thinking, *etc.* The meditator should note them to comprehend them as they really are: “*Abhijānāti*” means to fix one’s attention on the object intelligently, to be mindful of it; and to know all phenomena. Awareness should not be confined to a single phenomenon. One must be aware of each and every event that occurs when one sees, hears, contacts, or knows it.

However, in the beginning one cannot pay attention to all events. One should start with the observation of one or two obvious events. While sitting, one must fix the mind on “sitting,” or one can concentrate on the nostrils, which is the point of contact with inhaled or exhaled air and make a mental note, “in,” “out,” “in,” “out.” Or one may note rising and falling with the mind fixed on pressure and movement of the abdomen. If while thus noting, some thoughts occur, one should note them and return to the original phenomenon that

one has been noting. If stiffness, pain, heat, and any other sensations occur, one must note, "stiff," "stiff," "pain," "pain," "hot," "hot," *etc.*, and then resume one's original introspection. If there is bending, stretching, or any other movement, it should also be noted. When the meditator stands up, he must do so mindfully. When the meditator walks, he must be aware of every step that he takes; if possible, he must make a note of every act of seeing or hearing.

By virtue of this mindfulness, one develops the power of concentration and comes to realise independently that there is no living ego-entity, nothing apart from the knowing mind and the known matter. This is the analytical knowledge that enables the meditator to discriminate between mind and matter and it is basic for right view in meditation. This view is opposed to the ego-belief and the personality-view. It is important to grasp this right view properly. Some people think that they have the right view if they merely recognise that there are only matter and mind, the former comprising the four primary elements plus the twenty-four derived physical phenomena (*upādārūpa*) and the latter being made up of eighty-one kinds of mundane consciousness plus fifty-two mental states (*cetasikā*). This does not accord with the Buddha's teaching that all phenomena should be known.

Nor does such kind of reflection in itself ensure the elimination of the ego-belief that arises at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.* However, the meditator who keeps note of what is actually happening to the psychophysical organism will, at the moment of noting the arising (of the abdomen), realise that there are only the arising matter and the knowing mind; and at the moment of noting the falling of the abdomen, he knows that there are only the falling matter and the knowing mind. At the moment of bending or stretching, he knows that there are only the matter that bends or stretches and the mind that makes a note of it. The same may be said of his knowledge of the distinction between mind and matter while walking, seeing, hearing, *etc.* Every moment of mindfulness means rejection of the ego-belief and the personality-view. That is the way the Buddha pointed out for dispelling these views in the Sallekha Sutta.

"Other non-meditators may believe in the ego-entity. However, we who are familiar with the Satipaṭṭhāna method of introspection will, by examining the psychophysical phe-

nomena at the moment of their occurrence, hold the correct view that there is no ego-entity but only mind and matter. Thus we will practise effacement.”

Our interpretation of the Buddha’s teaching is advanced and profound. Those who do not meditate are included in the “other” people. However, we should assume that knowledgeable persons who are not firmly attached to ego-belief are to be excepted. The view will have a strong hold on those who do not meditate, and also have little knowledge. According to our interpretation, such persons will have to be labelled non-believers. However, the wrong-view of self is not as serious as wrong-view that leads to evil conduct. It does not, by itself, lead to the lower realms. The believer may be reborn in heavenly realms by virtue of his charity and morality. Or he may attain absorption and pass on to the Brahmā realm or even the highest realm.

The ego-belief is not a barrier to the celestial realms. However, a person who is dominated by the belief lacks faith in the Buddhist teaching and so it may impede his spiritual progress. The extreme ego-belief usually prevails among non-Buddhists and is hardly to be found among Buddhists. A Buddhist may hold the ego-belief because of his ignorance and yet he may have faith in the Dhamma and practise meditation. If he exerts wholehearted effort, he may attain the path and its fruition. While living in a world that is wedded to ego-belief, we should meditate and hold the right view based on insight-knowledge.

### **Affirmation of Right View**

“Other people may believe in a living soul or an ego-entity, but we will hold the right view that there are only mind and matter. We will practise effacement. We will cultivate thoughts about such a view. We will avoid the ego-belief and personality-view by adopting right views. We will achieve spiritual growth through right views. We will put out the fire of defilement arising from ego-belief and personality-view through adherence to right view.”

Implicit in this affirmation is that those who hold the ego-belief are non-believers, an implication that may be offensive to the followers of other religions. However, as we have pointed out, such

an ego-belief is not as serious as wrong-view that leads to evil conduct. It only prolongs one's existence in *saṃsāra*. Moreover, ordinary people are seldom free from the view. We are temporarily free from it only when we are meditating. There is no reason why followers of other religions should resent being called non-believers. If they resent it, they can switch to the right view through introspection. There are people who have set their heart on greater spiritual heights without giving up their ego-belief. As for the meditator, he makes spiritual progress on the basis of his right views just like Visākḥā and Anāthapiṇḍika did in the lifetime of the Buddha.

These two disciples of the Buddha passed on to heavenly realms on their death. There they attained Non-returning, and will pass through the five Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsa Brahmāloka) in succession. They will spend one thousand world-cycles in the Avihā realm, two thousand world-cycles in the Atappā realm, four thousand world-cycles in Sudassā realm, eight thousand world-cycles in Sudassī realm, and sixteen thousand world-cycles in Akaniṭṭhā realm; altogether thirty-one thousand world-cycles. Finally, in the Akaniṭṭhā realm they will become Arahants and attain nibbāna. This is how the meditator makes spiritual progress through right view on the basis of insight meditation and the noble path. We should also follow their example.

## Eternalism and Annihilationism

Eternalism (*sassatadiṭṭhi*) is the belief that a living being remains permanent, passing from one existence to another. According to this view, the soul or the ego never perishes although the gross physical body is subject to death and destruction. After the death of the body the soul moves on to another physical abode. It is indestructible and it survives the disintegration of innumerable world-systems.

By and large, eternalism is prevalent among people who believe in kamma. It is explicitly accepted by the Hindu holy books. According to their view, a living being has two kinds of bodies: a gross body and a subtle body. The gross body eventually perishes, but the subtle body passes on to a new abode and remains intact. The soul that thus seeks a new abode is very small, smaller than the tip of a pin that can go through the eye of a needle. It can reach a very distant place instantly and pass through mountains and brick walls. They have to credit the soul with such supernormal power for only

then would it be able to gain access to a potential mother who is sleeping in a brick-building without any opening. There is no Buddhist book that explicitly states such a view. However, ignorant people believe that the soul leaves the body after death and passes on to another abode or existence. The belief does not have a strong hold on those who have knowledge about causal relation between mind and matter. No one is, however, completely free from it as long as he lacks insight-knowledge on the level of the noble path.

Opposed to eternalism is annihilationism, which insists on annihilation after death. If you believe that there is nothing after death, you assume that there is something before death and presumably that something is the ego. Although annihilationists insist on the primacy of matter they are not really free from ego-belief. In other words, annihilationism is also rooted in ego-belief. According to eternalism, the ego continues to exist after death, while according to annihilationism it is annihilated by death. Both views attribute ego to a living being, the only difference being that the first view insists on permanence, while the second view rejects the continued existence of the ego after death.

Some people hold that the mind and body of childhood still exist in the grown-up man, but this is not eternalism. It is only the idea of permanency; you may call it self-view (*attaditṭhi*), but it is not the same as eternalism in as much as annihilationism also insists on such permanence before death.

Moreover, if the belief in the mind and body of childhood is to be labelled eternalism, our awareness of their ceaseless passing away will have to be called annihilationism. In fact, this awareness is based on reflection and insight meditation. The view opposed to it is only ego-belief, not eternalism. In brief, eternalism insists on permanence while annihilationism insists on the annihilation of the ego after death.

The annihilation doctrine was taught by Ajita in the lifetime of the Buddha. The substance of his teaching is that when a man dies, his corpse is placed on a bedstead and taken to the cemetery by four men. There it is burnt to ashes and nothing is left. According to this view, there is no need to avoid unwholesome deeds. One can do anything that will serve one's interests. Nor is it necessary to do good. Those who hold this view urge us to do whatever is beneficial for ourselves, and they tell us not to do good at the sacrifice of our own



interests. Thus the annihilationist view rejects kamma and its effects, and as such it is one of the wrong-views that give rise to evil conduct.

### Right View Based on Knowledge of Conditionality

Eternalism and annihilationism have to be repudiated through the right view regarding cause and effect or through the reflective insight into the causal relation of Dependent Origination. It can also be removed through knowledge by discerning conditionality.

There is no living soul either before or after death. The only thing that exists is the psychophysical process based on cause-and-effect relationship. There are only consciousness, mind, matter, *etc.*, that arise ceaselessly because of ignorance and other causes. Today most people do not know the four noble truths rightly. In brief, they do not really know the truth of suffering. This truth is evident in every phenomenon that occurs at the moment of seeing, hearing, eating, thinking, *etc.* All phenomena are continually arising and passing away and so they are impermanent, unpleasant, undependable, and insubstantial. We do not know them as they really are and so consider them permanent, pleasant, dependable, and substantial. This is ignorance.

Because of ignorance we take delight in sensual objects and become attached to them. We cling to them. We try to get the object of our attachment. Thus ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), attachment (*upādāna*), action (*kamma*), and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) are the five causes, or the cycle of kamma involving wholesome and unwholesome deeds.

### Renewal of Existence

The cycle of kamma is followed by the cycle of result (*vipākavaṭṭa*). It happens in this way. A dying person has certain mental images as a result of the wholesome or unwholesome deeds that he has done in the course of his life. There are images of his deeds (*kamma*), the objects and circumstances concerning his deeds (*kammanimitta*), and the future life conditioned by the deeds (*gatinimitta*). These images flash across his mind when he is close to death, so he dies while attached to one of these images.

Death is nothing but the cessation of the ever arising and passing away of the mental process following the dissolution of the last thought-moment. However, it is not complete cessation. Consciousness

arises in a new existence, in a new realm, in accordance with one of the mental images to which the dying person was attached at the last moment. Together with this rebirth-consciousness there follow other consequences: mind and matter, sense-bases, contact, and feeling. Thus there are five causes (ignorance, etc.) and the cycle of action followed by the cycle of results (consciousness, etc.) Likewise, from the moment of conception to the moment of death the psychophysical phenomena arise ceaselessly. In the course of their arising, pleasant and unpleasant feelings cause craving, *etc.*, in the next existence. Thus there are only causes and effects. Because of ignorance, kamma, *etc.*, new existence, consciousness, *etc.*, arise and then we speak of a man's attainment of the celestial realm or damnation in hell.

In reality there is no transmigration of a person, a being, or an entity. There is only the arising of mind and matter afresh in a later life as the result of kamma in a former existence. During a single life we have only a psychophysical process as a result of former states of consciousness. You should understand this nature of life by listening to discourses and by reading scriptures. Those who have such knowledge are free from two wrong-views: the annihilationist view that a man's life is annihilated at death and the eternalistic view that a man's soul passes on to another place after death and remains permanent.

### Gaining Freedom from Wrong View

However, the knowledge that we acquire from books and teachers (*sutamaya-nāṇa*) is not well-founded. Insight-knowledge (*bhāvanāmaya-nāṇa*) is more trustworthy, so you need to meditate to discriminate between mind and matter, and comprehend their characteristics. When you bend, stretch, or move your leg or hand, you recognise the mind that wants to bend, *etc.*, and then you come to know without thinking that the bending of the leg is due to the mind's inclination to bend and so forth. When you make a mental note of seeing something, you know that you see because of your eye, the visible object, and consciousness. The same may be said of hearing, *etc.*, and we become aware of mind and matter as the cause, and seeing, hearing, *etc.*, as the effect. We come to know, too, that preceding thought-moments determine succeeding thought-moments, that perception depends on the presence of the object to be perceived, and that thought-moments arise and pass away afresh as units.

To the meditator, death is like the dissolution of the thought-moment that is now apperceived. It is not the dissolution of a person or being. Rebirth is also like the arising of a unit of consciousness that is apperceived. It is not the passing on of an individual being. Rebirth means the arising of a new moment of consciousness following an attachment to an object just before death.

Thus the meditator realises independently the cause-and-effect relation (of psychophysical phenomena) and some meditators can explain it clearly though they have no academic knowledge.

Once you realise the purely psychophysical phenomena of life that are in a constant, causally related state of flux, you are free from eternalism (that the soul continues to exist after death) and annihilationism (that the soul is annihilated by death). Also abandoned are the belief that man is created by God, and the belief that man comes into existence without any cause. Creationism (*visamahetukadiṭṭhi*) is a kind of eternalism, while the belief in no root cause (*ahetukadiṭṭhi*), belongs to the category of wrong-view leading to unwholesome deeds. Knowledge by discerning cause and effect (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*) is opposed to these four wrong-views.

## The Arising of Knowledge by Comprehension

The two right views that we have mentioned: analytical knowledge of mind and matter and knowledge by discerning conditionality are basic to meditation, hence they are called right view through insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-sammā-diṭṭhi*). In the course of further introspection the meditator realises independently that all the psychophysical phenomena arising from the six senses are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial. This realisation is due to the discovery of the fact that everything that arises invariably vanishes. If some thoughts occur to you while you are noting the rising, falling, *etc.*, you should note them, too, and they will pass away. You see the arising and vanishing of a new mental event, realise its impermanence, and reflect on the impermanence of all mental phenomena. This is knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*).

If while being mindful of the arising, falling, *etc.*, you have an unpleasant feeling of stiffness, pain, itchiness, *etc.*, you should fix your mind on it and note “stiff, stiff,” “pain, pain,” *etc.* Then your unpleasant feeling will gradually disappear. You realise its

impermanence and infer the impermanence of all feelings. This is also knowledge by comprehension. You should also take note of craving, anger, displeasure, and other mental states that arise. You will find that they vanish as you note them. Reflection on their impermanence is knowledge by comprehension,

Fixing your mind on the movements of any part of your body such as bending, stretching, *etc.*, is momentary and impermanent, and so is the mental state at the moment of noting the rising of the abdomen. Each mental event vanishes together with its corresponding physical event. Thus you can realise their impermanence. Their impermanence leads you to realise their unsatisfactoriness, undependability, and painfulness, your lack of control over them, and the occurrence of phenomena in their state of nature. This reflection is the first insight-knowledge that you gain in meditation.

It is knowledge by comprehension, the first of the ten kinds of insight-knowledge. As you keep on making a note of all phenomena that occur without reflection, your insight quickens. Arising is followed so quickly by vanishing that at last your attention is confined only to vanishing. At this stage, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self become more clearly manifest. This insight into the rapid arising and passing away is called "*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*."

At this stage, the meditator sees lights, feels elated, ecstatic, and excessively joyful. These sensations and visions have to be noted and rejected. Overcoming them, the meditator finds that the arising of the phenomenon that he notes is no longer apparent and only their vanishing remains in the focus of his attention. The meditator thinks he is aware only of the vanishing of the phenomenon and this awareness clearly points up to the rapidity with which everything dissolves and passes away.

This insight into passing away as the only reality is knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). At this stage, no image, vision, or sign occurs to the meditator. He finds that everything vanishes instantly without getting from one place to another. For example, when he directs his attention to bending, the meditator sees no image of his hand or leg. He finds only the physical phenomenon and the corresponding consciousness vanishing. The same may be said of stretching, walking, rising, falling, and so forth. This discovery helps to underscore the nature of the three characteristics.

With the development of knowledge of dissolution knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*) and other kinds of knowledge arise. These latter kinds of knowledge make the meditator more fully conscious of the dissolution of everything and the three marks of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Among these insights, knowledge of equanimity about formations (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) is very subtle and satisfying. It makes the meditator indifferent to both pleasant and unpleasant sense-objects, which can, therefore, neither repel nor attract him. The meditator can then remain mindful for two or three hours at a stretch. When this knowledge is fully developed, the meditator gains insight leading to emergence (*vuṭṭhānagāmini-ñāṇa*). The last part of this insight is called knowledge of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*). This insight-knowledge means a clear grasp of any one of the three marks of existence and it is the right view based on insight.

### The Arising of Path Knowledge

Knowledge of adaptation is the last of the different levels of knowledge associated with mindfulness. Immediately after the end of this knowledge the meditator is face to face with nibbāna where mind, matter, and mental formations become extinct. This contact with nibbāna involves maturity-knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*), path-knowledge and fruition-knowledge. Of these three, the path-knowledge is the right view of the path (*maggā-sammā-diṭṭhi*).

Contact with nibbāna means seeing that the mind and matter and mental formations that arise and pass away are completely extinct. At the moment of the arising of insight-knowledge the meditator sees only the psychophysical phenomena arising and vanishing. With the end of the last adaptation-knowledge, the psychophysical phenomena cease to arise and their complete extinction means realisation of the peace of nibbāna. This will be fully understood only by those who have had the experience. Those who have no experience may just imagine it.

### Seeing the Four Noble Truths Simultaneously

Seeing nibbāna means seeing the Four Noble Truths. When the meditator sees the complete extinction of all psychophysical phenomena that arise and pass away, he knows that it is the highest bliss. He knows, too, that compared with nibbāna, the ever arising

and vanishing phenomena are painful. Because of this awareness he is more or less free from craving for such phenomena. At the stage of Stream-winning he is free from the craving that is strong enough to consign him to the lower realms. At the stage of Once-returning he is free from gross sensual desire, at the stage of Non-returning he is free from the subtle sensual desire, while at the stage of Arahantship he is free from the desire for the realms of form and the formless realms.

Thus the meditator knows freedom from desire through avoidance (*pahānābhisamaya*). Actual contact with nibbāna is the third noble truth. The realisation of this truth occurs in the mind of the meditator and so it is known through development (*bhāvanābhisamaya*). In brief, the meditator's insight into the third truth (the truth of cessation) means immediate realisation of the other three noble truths.

### The Three Stages of the Path

There are three stages of right view. First we have the basic right view; then there is right view based on insight-knowledge, which is the forerunner of the noble path (*pubbabhāga-vipassanā-sammā-diṭṭhi*), and lastly we have the right view of the noble ones (*ariya-sammā-diṭṭhi*). The same may be said of the other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. Each part of the path has three stages: the basic path, the preliminary path, and the noble path.

We may consider right view as an example. The belief in kamma is very important because it is the basic path. Without the belief in kamma one will not avoid misdeeds and it will be difficult to do wholesome deeds such as almsgiving and morality. Even when such a man has to give alms by force of circumstance, it will be an act divorced from knowledge and so the merit he gains will be inferior. He is likely to be reborn in the lower realms and stands little chance of achieving a fortunate rebirth, let alone the noble path or nibbāna. On the other hand, the man who believes in kamma avoids misdeeds, devotes himself to wholesome deeds, hears the discourses on the Dhamma and practises insight meditation. Even if he does not have unusual spiritual experience, he will be happy in his future lives. If he fully develops right view up to adaptation-knowledge, there will arise the right view about the noble path and he will actually see nibbāna.

Let us affirm our belief in kamma in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha. Those who cannot as yet practise insight meditation should pay special attention to this right view. They should also implant the belief in the minds of their children. Without this belief, a child is not a true Buddhist although he may be called a Buddhist by birth. He would have unwholesome thoughts and ridicule the wholesome deeds of his parents such as revering the memory of the Buddha, keeping Sabbath, giving alms, *etc.* When he grows up he may convert to another religion through marriage or for some other reason, or he may become an agnostic. You should instill this right view in your children and if possible, make them strengthen it through meditation. Let us then affirm our right view in kamma although others may reject it; cultivate right thoughts and adopt right practice that will lessen defilements. Let us avoid wrong-views and stick to right views for our spiritual growth.

Those who believe in kamma should strengthen the belief. Those who have not gained insight should practise meditation. Those who are engaged in meditation or have had much practice in it should set their heart on having higher insights. They should try to gain knowledge of arising and passing away that affords unusual spiritual experience, ecstasy, and a firm basis for path-knowledge and its fruition. They should seek knowledge of equanimity about formations, which is very subtle, calls for relaxed attentiveness, and is something like spontaneous awareness. It will make them completely detached in the face of pleasant or unpleasant sense-objects. At this stage they will have the Arahant's attribute, indifference to six sense-objects (*chalaṅgupekkhā*), which is gratifying to the meditator and awe-inspiring to others.

With the perfection of this knowledge there arises the right view about the path that brings one into contact with nibbāna. At this stage all the wrong-views become completely extinct. You should, then, try to gain at least the right view on the level of Stream-winning and, if possible, right view on a higher level. Through right views we can overcome self-conceit (*asmimāna*, *diṭṭhimāna*), which dominates us on the lower paths. This self-conceit is rooted in qualities that we really possess and so it is also called *yathāvamāna*. We can finally eradicate this kind of conceit only when we become Arahants. To overcome it we have to replace wrong-views with right views. It is up to us to conquer it through Arahantship.

## Wrong Thought (12)

“Other people may have wrong thoughts, but we will have right thoughts and thereby lessen our defilements.”

That is what the Pāli text says. There are three kinds of wrong thoughts: thoughts arising from sensual desires, *i.e.*, the thought to possess the object of one’s desire (*kāmaavitakka*), thoughts arising from ill-will or the thought to ruin another person (*vyāpādavitakka*), and thoughts arising from aggressive desire or the thought to hurt another person (*vihimsavitakka*).

Nowadays people harbour many wrong thoughts, the most common of which is that stemming from sensual desire. People are usually intent on getting the objects of their desire — delicious food, fashionable clothes, beautiful houses, cars, land, gardens, and so forth. They plan to fulfil their ambitions, social relations, professions, families, maintenance of property, *etc.* In brief, they are pre-occupied with sensual desires for almost the entire day.

Of these thoughts, the self-serving thought may be called right thought. However, since it is based on unwholesome sensual desire, it is termed wrong thought from the point of view of the Dhamma. However, the thought to seek lawfully the necessities of life is not very harmful. Even bhikkhus who are devoted to the Dhamma have to seek food, *etc.*, and it is quite proper to think of doing lawfully what is unavoidable. However, the meditator should not harbour such thoughts for a long time. They should be noted and rejected.

What is seriously harmful is the thought to get something that one does not deserve unlawfully, or in the case of those who deserve it, obsession with desire. These kind of sensual thoughts prolong *saṃsāra* even if they do not lead to the lower realms.

The best thing to do is to reject sensual thoughts. The bhikkhus and meditators who have a high regard for morality based on restraint of the senses should avoid sensual thoughts about the opposite sex. Bhikkhus and male meditators should avoid thoughts about women and nuns, and female meditators should not think about men. Such sensual thoughts impede concentration, insight-knowledge, and mental development, so they should be noted carefully, and rejected.

Again, when we think of someone whom we hate, we tend to bear ill-will. We blame them for having done us harm, of having



obstructed our plans, so we long for their destruction and ruin. We may even think of killing them. This is hatred arising from ill-will. The object of ill-will is not necessarily a human being. When we seek to destroy snakes, scorpions, mosquitoes, bugs, *etc.*, we are also motivated by ill-will. We may justify our attempt to kill snakes, tigers, *etc.*, but the unwholesome karmic volition involved leads to suffering, so every thought of killing for any reason is a wrong thought.

If the intention is not to kill one's enemy, but only to ill-treat him, it is called violence. Here one intends to beat, abuse, scold, or otherwise cause suffering to another. If one is motivated by good-will in his intention, there is no karmic result. However, the aggressive thought that stems from hatred is *karmically* unwholesome, and the karmic result is grave in proportion to the moral purity of the person who is hated.

## Right Thought

Right thought is the opposite of wrong thought, and is of three kinds: thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhammavitakka*), thoughts of non-hatred (*avyāpādavitaṅka*) and thought of harmlessness (*avihiṃsāvitaṅka*). Of these, the thought of renunciation is the intention to liberate oneself from sensual desire defilements and the cycle of life. According to the Commentary, entering the Saṅgha is renunciation. So too are the practices of charity, morality, tranquillity, insight meditation, and attaining nibbāna. Thoughts about entering the Saṅgha, developing concentration, attaining nibbāna, going to a meditation centre, observing the moral precepts, giving alms, listening to the Dhamma — each of these is a thought of renunciation. Every thought of renunciation presupposes the right view regarding kamma. This right view is also involved at the time of transforming thoughts into actions. Thus, when you cultivate right thought, you also cultivate right view, and the converse is also true. The other path factors are also cultivated simultaneously.

The thought of non-violence is the opposite of violent thoughts. It is concern for the welfare of all living beings based on good-will and kindness. Thought of harmlessness is the opposite of thought of harmfulness. It is the thought arising from compassion and sympathy. People usually have regard only for those who are associated with them. They tend to ill-treat any person who oppose them. In this world of such moral degradation it is very noble to

think of the welfare of all living beings universally with love and compassion. Here we will cite the story of Bodhisatta Sumedha's thought of renunciation that is so memorable.

Bodhisatta Sumedha was born ninety-one aeons ago. His parents died when he was young. The family's treasurer handed over to the young man all of the wealth that had been accumulated by seven generations of his forefathers. Sumedha reflected on the mortality of his forefathers who had left all their wealth in the hands of others. They could not come and look after their property.

They could not use any of their former property nor could they take it away with them. Now Sumedha hoped to take away his wealth in the form of karmic effect by giving it away. In other words, he hoped to gain merit by alms-giving. Merit is called *anugāṃika* property because it always follows the donor throughout *saṃsāra*.

There are four kinds of property: movable (*jaṅgama*), immovable (*thāvara*), one's own limbs (*aṅgasama*) and accompanying (*anugāṃika*). The Commentary describes slaves, cattle, and other living things as movable property, and lifeless things as immovable property. However, we will classify property in the traditional way. Gold, silver, clothing, *etc.*, which are easily exchanged can be regarded as movable property. This kind of property is not durable. Although it is one's own property, it is another person's possession when it gets into the hands of a thief, a robber, or a swindler. For example, a fountain pen, or pocket watch that is stolen by a pickpocket becomes his property. It is hard to recover unless it bears identification marks or someone can testify to your ownership. You cannot be said to own a thing permanently if it can change hands so easily. It may be yours at the moment, but it may belong to another in the next moment.

Gold, silver, and money, which are of no immediate use, have to be exchanged for property such as land or buildings. A building or land cannot be moved secretly, so it is more durable than movable property. Yet you may lose it if the legal owner claims it by right of inheritance. You may also lose it through change in your personal circumstances. You cannot always rely on keeping such property.

The property that is part of your five aggregates is more dependable. You carry this property wherever you go, just like your legs or hands. This kind of property means a person's professional skill, such as painting, teaching, writing, dancing, medicine, or

law. A person can earn a living by a profession, which cannot be stolen, so wise people spend money on the education of their children. However, even a vocational skill or knowledge may become worthless if changes in the law or the economy prevent its practice.

More dependable than the property of a profession is property in the form of alms-giving, morality, *etc.* Nobody can steal it from you, or prevent it from producing its beneficial effects. It will always follow you throughout *saṃsāra*, and continue to provide benefits. The young man Sumedha thought of converting his wealth into the most dependable property that he could take with him after his death.

Think thus, the Bodhisatta Sumedha gave away all of his wealth and became an ascetic. He was then only about sixteen or twenty years old. As a young ascetic, he developed concentration, trained his mind, and within seven days attained absorption and psychic-power. Later, he offered his body as a bridge at the feet of Dīpaṅkara Buddha, who prophesied that he would become Gotama Buddha.

The Bodhisatta's intention to give away all of his wealth was the right thought of renunciation, as was his thought of becoming an ascetic and striving to attain absorption and psychic-powers. So too was his thought of seeking Buddhahood by offering his body to be used as a bridge by the Buddha.

Likewise, the thought of making daily devotions before the shrine of the Buddha and observing the five precepts, *etc.*, is the thought of renunciation. So is the thought of observing the eight precepts on Uposatha days or the thought of listening to the Dhamma and practising it. Here the practice of the Dhamma means renunciation of desirable and pleasant sense-objects. The Dhamma will be alien to those who are immersed in sensual pleasures. Although you urge them to practise it they will refuse to do so on one pretext or another.

You have thoughts of non-hatred when you diffuse love and good-will toward a person or persons; or when you are concerned about their welfare; or when you work for their welfare verbally or physically; or when as a leader you do something for the welfare of your followers.

You have thoughts of harmlessness when you avoid harming a person out of compassion and sympathy; or when you think of saving or helping a suffering person. Such compassionate thoughts occur often in nurses and doctors who attend the sick kind-heartedly. It is with compassion

and thoughts of harmlessness that we pray for the end of suffering among other people. Let us cultivate compassion especially towards those who are sick, distressed or wailing over their misfortunes.

During the practice of insight meditation every moment of mindfulness means the rejection of three kinds of unwholesome thought and the cultivation of the three kinds of wholesome thought.

If, at the moment of seeing, the visual object is noted and its true nature realised — *i.e.* the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self — there can be no sensual thoughts, no hateful thoughts, and no harmful thoughts. The same may be said of the state of consciousness at the moment of hearing or eating, *etc.* Every moment of mindfulness means the development of wholesome thoughts as opposed to unwholesome thoughts. In other words, the right thought in itself that is involved in mindfulness helps to develop thoughts of renunciation, thereby excluding sensual thoughts. Ill-will and aggressive thoughts are removed in the same way. If you are aware of the impermanence of everything at every moment of mindfulness, how can there be the desire for an impermanent object or malicious and aggressive thoughts on account of it?

Meditators develop the three kinds of right thought at each moment of mindfulness. As their insight-knowledge develops and becomes perfect, they see nibbāna and attain the noble path. Right thought on the level of a noble one helps the meditator to overcome the unwholesome thoughts progressively. At the first stage it removes the sensual thoughts that lead to the lower realms. At the second stage it removes the gross forms of sensual thoughts, *etc.* At the third stage the subtle forms of sensual thoughts are eradicated while at the final stage, *i.e.*, Arahantship, right thoughts root out unwholesome thoughts arising from the desire for the realm of forms and the formless realm.

The Buddha urged his disciples to lessen their defilements by having right thoughts. We should cultivate right thoughts to avoid the wrong path of wrong thoughts for our spiritual growth and for the extinction of wrong thoughts.

### Wrong Speech (13)

Wrong speech is speaking wrongly or improperly. It is of four kinds: lying, slander or divisive speech, abusing, and idle chatter. These kinds of speech may serve the interests of the speaker, so they may find

justification for them, but they are harmful to others, and the speaker will have to suffer the harmful effects of wrong speech in future.

## Right Speech

Right speech means abstinence from wrong speech. Here the term *sammāvācā* refers not to what one says, but to the avoidance of lying, *etc.*, whenever the occasion arises, which means abstention (*virati*). Those who are committed to the five precepts should avoid lying and wrong speech such as slander, abuse, and idle chatter. Needless to say, the abstention from the four kinds of wrong speech is binding on those who have committed themselves to the eight precepts with right livelihood as the eighth (*ājīvaṭṭhamaka sila*).<sup>1</sup> During meditation, abstention is effected through overcoming by momentary abandonment (*tadaṅga pahāna*).<sup>2</sup> In effect, meditation involves abstention (*virati*) although it has little to do with speech. Then on the noble path the four kinds of wrong speech are rooted out by cutting off (*samuccheda-pahāna*).

## Wrong Action (14)

Wrong action is of three kinds — killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. These acts may be justified by those who commit them, but they are by no means justifiable from the point of view of the victim. How can you say that it is proper for a person to kill you for the benefit of others, to steal or rob you of your property, or to have illicit sex with your wife or daughter? Everyone will agree that these acts are evil and those who commit them will have to suffer in future for their unwholesome deeds.

## Right Action

Here, too, right action means abstinence from killing, *etc.* Those who have committed themselves to non-killing and so avoid killing

<sup>1</sup> This refinement of the five precepts for lay people is popular among devout Burmese Buddhists. From today throughout my life I will abstain from: 1) killing 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, and from the five kinds of intoxicants, 4) false speech, 5) divisive speech, 6) abusive and rude words regarding the caste, race, *etc.*, of any person, 7) idle chatter, which is not conducive to the well-being of others either in the present life or in the next, 8) wrong livelihood. The five kinds of wrong livelihood for Buddhists are: trading in i) weapons, ii) living beings, iii) meat and fish, iv) intoxicants, and v) poisons. (Editor's note)

<sup>2</sup> Momentary abandonment of wrong speech by noting the intention. (Editor's note)

are practising right action. Every moment of mindfulness during meditation leads to abstinence from killing, *etc.*, although it involves no mental factor (*cetasikā*) as regards abstention (*virati*). On the noble path all wrong actions are eradicated through destruction.

### **Wrong Livelihood (15)**

Wrong livelihood is to earn one's living by obtaining money improperly.<sup>1</sup> Some people commit unwholesome deeds such as killing to make their living. However, some commit unwholesome deeds not for economic reasons, but because of their greed or anger. Unwholesome deeds that have nothing to do with one's living, but stem from anger or greed are not wrong livelihood, but wrong action or wrong speech. For example, the killing of mosquitoes, snakes, *etc.*, or one's enemy through anger is wrong action. However, the killing of chickens, pigs, fish, *etc.*, for the market or for one's own consumption is wrong livelihood. As for stealing or robbing, it is usually done for economic reason and so most of these acts are to be classified as wrong livelihood. Stealing out of malice or through ill-will, habit or propensity is, of course, wrong action. Illicit sexual intercourse has usually nothing to do with one's living. To seduce a woman, however, for the sake of money or for one's living is wrong livelihood.

Telling a lie in a business transaction is wrong livelihood; but if you lie for another reason, it is wrong speech. The same may be said of slander. Nowadays some kinds of propaganda are defamation that fall within the category of wrong livelihood. They are very harmful. Abusive language is not often used in business. However, there are many kinds of wrong livelihood in the form of idle chatter that we can find in fiction-writing, play acting, film-making and so forth.

All kinds of wrong livelihood involve violation of the moral code that prescribes abstinence from killing, *etc.* Those who observe the five precepts are free from the seven kinds of wrong livelihood that we have mentioned about. It is obvious that those who adhere to the eight precepts with right livelihood as the eighth are especially free from wrong livelihood. Right livelihood is to earn money lawfully with moral life untainted by any kind of wrong livelihood.

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<sup>1</sup> Not just "unlawfully." Selling alcohol or livestock may be lawful in most countries, but for a Buddhist it is still wrong livelihood. (Editor's note)

## **Right Livelihood**

To put it another way, right livelihood is to make one's living without killing, stealing, *etc.* Wise men of ancient times described it as honest farming, honest trading and so forth. Obviously honest farming is cultivating crops or gardening by one's own labour without ill-treating others. Honest trading is to buy goods at a fair price without ill-treating, killing, stealing, robbing or cheating another person, and then to sell them at fair market prices. In ancient times there were few traders who made a profit of one kyat on something that was worth ten kyats. When business men become greedy some of them sell their goods at a profit of a hundred percent if they can. This is not honest trading. Honest trading means to sell goods of genuine quality at fair prices without any attempt at profiteering.

Those who trade honestly can still profit from their business. In 1952 in Zeygyo bazaar at Mandalay there was a grocer named Ko Nyan. He was a Burmese Buddhist. He spoke to his customers courteously, "Sir, what can I do for you?" He did not overcharge for his goods, but stated the exact price. If a customer haggled, he would say, "Sir, I cannot reduce the price: I only make a profit of two percent." Even if the buyer happened to be a child, he never thought of cheating over the price and quality of the goods. If the wrong article was sold by mistake, the buyer could change it for the right one. His four or five assistants were always busy, so all followed a form of right livelihood that was truly commendable.

Again, a Government employee, a worker in a private business, or a porter who does his work dutifully for a reasonable wage is earning a right livelihood. So is the driver or boatman who works conscientiously and charges a fair price for his services.

## **Right and Wrong Livelihood for Bhikkhus**

Unlike the laymen with their seven rules of conduct the bhikkhus have a wide variety of moral rules binding on them. A bhikkhu should not ask for food, robes, or a dwelling unless the person asked is his relative or has invited him to ask. Neither he nor other bhikkhus should use anything that is received improperly. Asking for donations outright as is done nowadays is very unbecoming. A bhikkhu should not even hint or make indirect remarks that would induce a

layman to offer food or robes. It is wrong livelihood for a bhikkhu to use anything obtained by begging,<sup>1</sup> hinting, or scheming.

Moreover, any effort on the part of a bhikkhu to make himself intimate with laymen or laywomen or to endear himself to them by giving flowers, fruits, or food is an offence called “corruption of families (*kuladūsana*), which means destroying the faith of the laity. Giving flowers, *etc.*, may help to win the affection of the recipients, but it will not contribute to their faith. Respect for a bhikkhu is genuine only if it is due to his moral purity and other virtues. Any attempt to cultivate intimacy by giving flowers, *etc.*, is harmful to the true faith that depends on the bhikkhu’s virtuous life. Lay followers may come to revere only monks who gives presents. They will no longer care for virtuous monks. The so-called reverence for the liberal monk is, in reality, nothing more than affection that we find among ordinary people — it has nothing to do with genuine faith. It is improper for a bhikkhu to offer gifts such as flowers or food to his lay followers, to flatter them, to serve them, to care for their children, to practise medicine, to read their horoscopes, or to engage in any other forms of faith-destroying wrong livelihood. It is wrong livelihood for a bhikkhu to use anything obtained by such practices.

A bhikkhu should avoid hypocrisy in regard to material goods and attainments in the practice of meditation. Some bhikkhus pretend to have no desire for the robes or food offered by their lay followers. They refuse to accept it, “I do not want fine robes and delicious food. I am content with cast-off rags and food collected on almsround.” Their refusal strengthens the faith of their lay followers who repeatedly request them to accept offerings. Then they accept and never decline the offer of the lay followers on whom they have thus impressed their apparent distaste for the good things of life. This is the way of earning one’s living wrongly by pretending to be an ascetic.

A monk may say, “A bhikkhu who wears his robes like this or who dwells in such a place is usually a noble one, an Arahant or one who has attained absorption and psychic powers.” The description conforms to the speaker’s mode of life, or the way that he wears the robe. This is another kind of wrong livelihood by a hypocritical monk.

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<sup>1</sup> When a *bhikkhu* walks for alms, he is not permitted to beg. He may stand in silence near any place where he thinks a donor may wish to offer something. If nothing is offered, and he is not invited to wait, he moves on. (Editor’s note)



Some monks do not meditate, but they behave quietly and gently like a meditator. They stand, sit, lie down, bend or stretch their hands like a meditator absorbed in concentration. This is also wrong livelihood by making false pretences.

Some pretend to be able to read the mind of another person. If a monk who is teaching says, "Ho! The woman over there is distracted. Be attentive and practise breathing," there may indeed be some distracted women in the congregation. Such women might be greatly impressed and have a high opinion of the monk. If a monk says that he was a king and that such and such a woman was his queen in a previous existence, he will be credited with psychic powers by some of his followers. This is also wrong livelihood by deception.

A bhikkhu should not use anything offered by a lay disciple who has been deceived in such ways. He should live only on those things that he can obtain by right livelihood. If there is no one to offer him food, he should go on almsround. If he has no proper robe, he should search for cast-off rags. Otherwise, he can stand in front of a lay supporter's house, and if he is asked what he wants, he can express his need for a robe. It is not improper to say what one wants in response to an inquiry. To seek the requisities through bodily expression is right livelihood.

Food, robes, *etc.*, that a donor offers out of regard for the learning, spiritual life, and talks given by a monk are of pure origin since the monk receives them lawfully. The Buddha urged his disciples to make their living honestly.

### Three Kinds of Abstinence

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are three wholesome abstentions. Each abstention is of three kinds. First there is the case where a man abstains from a misdeed without having undertaken any precepts (*sampatta virati*). A man who has not undertaken the precepts may abstain from lying, stealing, or killing when faced with the temptation to do so. Secondly, a man who has undertaken the precepts ensures that his morality remains pure (*samādāna virati*). The third case is the natural morality of noble ones, which eradicates defilements from the root (*samuccheda virati*).

Of these three kinds of abstentions, the last is not associated with any thought of abstention. The meditator's mind is focused on

nibbāna, so from the time of attaining the noble path no desire to do unwholesome deeds ever arises. Evil desires become totally extinct, which means complete abstention. Similarly, while meditating, the mindful meditator realises the three characteristics of all sense-objects and so he or she has no unwholesome desire to kill, steal, lie, *etc.*, which naturally means abstention from misdeeds. Insight meditation thus effectively includes the three kinds of abstention. When meditation is perfect there is abstention on the level of a noble one, then all wrong action, speech, and livelihood are eradicated.

### Wrong Effort (16)

Wrong effort means striving and perseverance in regard to misdeeds. Some people have a very strong will to do unwholesome deeds. They try hard to kill, steal, or rob in the face of grave dangers. It is a clear example of wrong effort. For example, in killing mosquitoes or bugs, there is an effort to crush the insects. Lying involves effort and so does abusing. Wrong effort is obvious in the manufacture of weapons, in defamation, modern fiction-writing and film-making. Wrong effort arouses unwholesome mental states that have not yet arisen, and increases unwholesome states that have arisen. It is also wrong effort to seek sensual pleasure and sense objects. This is evident in the case of people who queue to buy tickets at cinemas and theatres. In brief, trying to do an unwholesome deed is wrong effort.

### Right Effort

Right effort is the opposite of wrong effort. It is strenuous effort in connection with almsgiving, morality, and mental development. There are four kinds of right effort:

1) The effort to overcome unwholesome tendencies that have occurred. If, for example, you have killed mosquitoes, *etc.*, it is up to you to avoid doing so in future. If you have lied before, you should try to avoid lying in future.

2) The effort to avoid unwholesome tendencies that have not yet occurred. If you see others killing, lying, or stealing, you should seek to avoid such misdeeds just as you seek to avoid contracting a disease, which you see afflicting other people.

3) Trying to do wholesome deeds that you have not yet done is also right effort. You should give alms and observe moral precepts,

if you have not done such things. You should regard the Buddha with his nine attributes as the noblest being and determine to have confidence in him, and to practise his teaching, by reciting the formula: "I go to the Buddha for refuge." Similar resolutions should be made in respect of the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. We should observe the five precepts or the eight precepts and if possible, become a novice (*sāmaṇera*) or bhikkhu and live up to precepts prescribed for them. If it is not feasible to become a lifelong bhikkhu, one may join the Saṅgha temporarily. There are also other skilful things to do such as revering those who are worthy of reverence, doing service for them, listening to their talks, *etc.*

We should also meditate on the Buddha, loving-kindness, repulsiveness of the body, in-and-out breathing, *etc.*, for concentration and mental development. Then we should practise insight meditation. Even if we have practised it, we should continue the practice if we have not yet developed unusual insight-knowledge. We should especially seek knowledge of arising and passing away, and knowledge of equanimity about formations. Wholesome states on the noble path are those that have never occurred before to worldlings. We should seek to cultivate such wholesome states on the path, which is right effort.

4) It is also right effort when we try to strengthen and perfect the wholesome things that have already developed. This needs no elaboration.

The meditators here who are practising insight meditation are trying to expel unwholesome mental states that have arisen at every moment of mindfulness. They are trying to prevent unwholesome states that have not yet arisen, to cultivate wholesome states that have not yet arisen, and to strengthen and perfect the wholesome states of insight meditation that have already arisen. Such efforts concern the higher stages of insight and the noble path. These four are called the four right efforts (*sammappadhāna*).

## Wrong Mindfulness (17)

Wrong mindfulness is the recollection of worldly matters and unwholesome deeds of the past. Some remember the unwholesome things they did when they were young, their companions, the places they visited, their happy days, and so forth. They may be likened

to cows chewing the cud at night. These recollections are wrong mindfulness. However, it is not wrong mindfulness when one recognises the mistakes of the past, repents, and resolves not to repeat them in future. Such repentance is right mindfulness. Some monks think of their parents, relatives, native places, and the companions of their childhood. They recall how they spent their days as laymen. They think of what they have to do for so-and-so. All these recollections of the past are wrong mindfulness.

Laymen need not reject thoughts about their sons, daughters, *etc.*, for such recollections are natural. However, while meditating, the meditator should note and reject them. As he sits in his retreat at the meditation centre, noting the rising and falling of the abdomen or his other bodily movements, "sitting," "touching," *etc.*, the meditator recalls what he did formerly, his sayings and doings in his youth, his friends, *etc.* These are wrong mindfulness and have to be noted and rejected. Some old men and women think of their grandchildren. While noting their thoughts, they have mental visions of the children near them and they fancy they hear the children calling them. All these have to be noted and expelled. Some meditators felt compelled to return home because they could not overcome these unwholesome thoughts. A meditator's spiritual effort is often thwarted by wrong mindfulness. In the final analysis a wrong recollection is not a distinct element of consciousness. It is a collection of unwholesome elements in the form of memories concerning worldly and unwholesome things of the past.

### **Right Mindfulness**

Opposed to wrong mindfulness is right mindfulness, or recollection of wholesome things concerning alms-giving, morality, and mental development. One recalls how one did certain skilful things at some former time — wholesome deeds such as offering *kathina* robes and almsfood, keeping precepts on Uposatha days, *etc.* This recollection of wholesome things is right mindfulness. It is the kind of mindfulness that goes along with wholesome consciousness. It is involved in every arising of wholesome consciousness such as alms-giving, devotion before the Buddha image, doing service to one's elders, observing the moral precepts, practising mental development, *etc.*

No wholesome consciousness is possible without right mindfulness. However, it is not apparent in ordinary wholesome consciousness. It is evident in the practice of mental development especially in the practice of insight meditation. Hence, in the Tipiṭaka the elaboration of right mindfulness is to be found in the discourse on the four foundations of mindfulness. It is right mindfulness to be attentive to all bodily activities and postures, to all pleasant and unpleasant feelings, to all states of consciousness and to all mental phenomena or mind-objects.

The meditators who practise insight meditation are cultivating right mindfulness. They note all psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses, focusing their attention on the arising and falling of the abdomen, sitting, bending, walking, and so forth. This is developing mindfulness of the body. Sometimes the meditator notes his feelings, "painful," "depressed," "joyful," "satisfying," *etc.* This is to develop mindfulness of feelings. At times, attention is focused on "thinking," "intending," *etc.* This is developing mindfulness of consciousness. Then there is mindfulness in regard to "seeing," "hearing," "desiring," "being angry," "being lazy," "being distracted," *etc.* This is developing mindfulness of mental objects. Every moment of mindfulness means developing mindfulness for insight, which is very gratifying. When this mindfulness develops and becomes perfect, mindfulness on the noble path makes the meditator aware of nibbāna. So you should practise until you attain this final stage of mindfulness.

### Wrong Concentration (18)

Wrong concentration is focusing the mind on a misdeed that one intends to commit by body or speech. It is concentration that enables one to do unwholesome deeds successfully. For example, when you intend to tell a lie, your intention will materialise only if you fix your mind on the words that you have to utter falsely. If your mind wanders, you are likely to speak the truth unwittingly. It is said that in courts the truth about some cases comes to light when witnesses who have agreed to give false evidence are tricked by lawyers whose cross-examination is designed to create confusion. This is due to lack of concentration on the part of the witnesses, so concentration is vital when doing an evil deed. Wrong concentration is very powerful when men plan a massacre, a big robbery, or produce lethal weapons.

## Right Concentration

Right concentration is attentiveness in regard to wholesome deeds such as alms-giving or observance of moral precepts. Alms-giving involves concentration that is strong enough to effect it, and so does paying respect or doing service for others. Concentration is important for exercises in mental training such as teaching and listening to discourses. It is vital in the practice of mindfulness of respiration where you have to fix your mind fully on a single object. Concentration related to such wholesome consciousness is right concentration.

Right concentration is of three kinds: 1) momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhī*), 2) access concentration (*upacāra-samādhī*), and 3) attainment concentration (*appanā-samādhī*).

Concentration that is involved in ordinary forms of wholesome consciousness such as alms-giving and morality is called momentary concentration as it is temporary. This ordinary concentration is not remarkable, so the scriptures make no mention of it. It is mentioned only in connection with the foundations of concentration and insight meditation. Therein it is concentration that occurs at the preparatory stage of mental development or at the beginning of the exercise.

Concentration that is powerful enough to exclude hindrances is called access concentration (*upacārasamādhī*). The concentration that a meditator has on the attainment of absorption is called attainment concentration (*appanāsamādhī*).

In insight meditation there is momentary concentration when the meditator concentrates on the four elements, the five aggregates, mind and matter, *etc.* In the beginning, however, concentration is not apparent as it is not well-developed. When it is well-developed, the mind remains entirely fixed on the object of contemplation. At that stage the meditator is free from hindrances such as sensual desire. The mind becomes a ceaseless stream of thought-moments characterised by mindfulness. This is the momentary concentration of insight meditation. It is also called access concentration because it frees the mind from the hindrances. In the Commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the bodily postures (*iriyāpatha*), clear comprehension (*sampajañña*), and attention to the four elements (*dhātumanasikāra*) are described as meditation objects for access concentration (*upacāra-kammaṭṭhāna*). The Visuddhimagga also identifies attention to the four elements of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

with analysis of the four elements (*catudhātuvaṅṅatthāna*) and describes the attainment of access concentration by using it.

From the time that concentration is developed enough to exclude the five hindrances, the concentration that arises at every moment of mindfulness is momentary concentration for insight that is like access concentration. It is called access concentration because it resembles the latter in respect of its ability to free the meditator from hindrances. The meditator then has purity of mind because the mindful investigating consciousness is pure. When insight-knowledge is mature, the meditator attains the noble path that brings him or her into contact with nibbāna. The concentration at the moment of attaining the fruition of the noble path is supramundane attainment concentration.

Wholesome right concentration is of three kinds: momentary concentration, 2) access concentration, and 3) attainment concentration. The Pāḷi Tipiṭaka explains right concentration in terms of the four absorptions. The Pāḷi texts mention only the absorption of the fine-material sphere, the immaterial sphere (*arūpajhāna*), and path and fruition concentration as the three primary types of concentration. We must assume that access concentration and concentration for insight are of secondary importance since these are included in the first absorption concentration. Without momentary access concentration, mundane absorption and the supramundane concentration are not possible. Moreover, this momentary access concentration helps to overcome wrong concentration.

## Wrong Knowledge (19)

It is wrong knowledge to have a misconception and to misuse one's intelligence. Such kind of knowledge is born of ignorance. The Commentary defines it as devising means of doing unwholesome deeds and gloating over one's unwholesome deeds.

One has to plan in the face of difficulties to kill, steal, rob, or lie. Planning is also essential to succeed in doing unwholesome deeds. To kill a large number of living beings easily, it is necessary to plan the production of machines, weapons, and poisons. The mastermind behind such planning is generally recognised as intelligence, but in reality it is ignorance or misdirected knowledge. Moreover, after doing unwholesome deeds, we often justify ourselves or rationalise our actions. This, too, is misuse of intelligence rooted in ignorance.

## Right Knowledge

Opposed to wrong knowledge (*micchā-ñāṇa*) is right knowledge (*sammā-ñāṇa*), which means knowledge regarding the path, fruition, or nibbāna, which one has attained, or knowledge about defilements that have been eradicated or that are still dormant.

These knowledges are termed knowledge of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*) and the meditator at the stage of Stream-winning has four kinds of this knowledge; the Once-returner has five kinds; the Non-returner has five kinds, while the Arahants who have no defilements have four kinds of this knowledge.

The meditators who contemplate all the mind and matter that arise from the six senses are on the way to developing right knowledge. When the knowledge becomes perfect through constant mindfulness the extraordinary insight called “knowledge of equanimity about formations” arises. At this stage the meditator can note the sense-objects for two or three hours at a stretch. He or she is unaffected, neither pleased nor displeased in the face of pleasant or unpleasant objects and experiences. He or she is barely aware of, and indifferent to, all events. Perception sharpens and he or she realises the arising and passing away of all mind and matter. He or she reflects on the dissolution and then on the extinction of all phenomena.

This reflection on the extinction without arising-and-passing away is knowledge of nibbāna (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*). Some meditators reflect on the extinction of the illusion of ego-entity and all doubts about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Some reflect on the need for further effort in view of the vestiges of defilements such as craving, anger, or ignorance. According to the Commentaries, such knowledges of defilements occur only to some knowledgeable meditators. They occur on the attainment of Stream-winning and its fruition.

If the Stream-winner strives for higher spiritual experience and if he has the potential for it he will attain it and there will occur other knowledges. As we have pointed out above, there are altogether nineteen such knowledges. According to the Buddha, the disciples should develop all these kinds of right knowledge.

## Wrong Liberation (20)

Wrong liberation is the state of mind that one mistakes for real liberation. There are many kinds of wrong liberation. There are



many wrong-views about liberation among Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Non-Buddhists believe that they are liberated when they succeed in their search for the soul (*atman*) or when they differentiate the soul from the aggregates of personality. In the lifetime of the Buddha the Jains who were the disciples of the prominent religious teacher Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, held that they could achieve liberation through the practice of austerities that would help them to exhaust the old kamma and make them immune to new kamma. They lived in a state of nature because they believed that non-attachment to cloths was a sign of full liberation. These naked ascetics were honoured as Arahants by their followers.

There are still such ascetics in India. Some seek liberation by worshipping fire, some hope they will be liberated if they cleanse themselves of their sins by bathing in the Ganges. Some hope to attain liberation in heaven by worshipping the Almighty God. Some people like the rishis Āḷāra, Rāma, and Udaka believe in liberation through Nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana-jhāna*) or Neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-jhāna*). Some people identify liberation with absorption of the fine material sphere. Baka Brahmā held that liberation was attainment of the brahma realm of his first absorption.

Among Buddhists, too, there is the view that equates liberation with the attainment of one of the absorptions. The Buddha mentioned it at the beginning of this sutta. I have also referred to the elders Mahānāga and Mahātissa who harboured such a delusion. Then there are meditators who speak of their attainment of the path and its result when they have unusual experiences such as seeing the light, joy and ecstasy attendant on the emergence of the knowledge of arising and passing away. Some believe they have made much spiritual progress even when they have less significant, but unusual, experiences such as feeling cool and fresh, feeling light, sudden tremors, collapsing, seeing extraordinary forms and visions, hearing strange sounds, seeing repulsive objects, feeling contact with space, feeling oneself on a big expanse of water, seeing the light and so forth.

Some become unconscious while sitting within two hours or two or three days after practising mindfulness. When the body of such a meditator is lifted, his sitting posture remains intact, but when questioned, he cannot point out the distinction between mind and matter or the nature of the three characteristics. These

unusual experiences are purely based on concentration. However, for ignorant people they may be regarded as cessation of psycho-physical phenomena or absorption in the fruition of the path.

What is important is the successive arising of the different kinds of insight-knowledge that lead to the knowledge of the path and fruition and liberation. Those who consider themselves liberated should at least have unwavering faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. They should have no faith in any practice that is devoid of the path, and they should be free from ego-belief and doubt, and very strict in the observance of the five precepts. If anyone claims spiritual progress or Stream-winning without being free even from the breaches of the five precepts, his sense of liberation is just wrong liberation.

For the information of readers we will mention the cause of wrong liberation cited in the Commentary on the Sāmagāma Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya.

### The Light Arahant

In response to the request of his disciples a monk gave instructions for what he described as instant attainment of Arahantship. Each meditator was to meditate on his original object in his room. If while he was thus meditating, there appeared a light he would be on the first path. The second appearance of the light would indicate the attainment of the second path, the third and fourth lights indicated the third and fourth paths respectively. The meditator would then become an Arahant. Because of such instructions his disciples decided that he was an Arahant. When he died later they believed that he had attained nibbāna and so they honoured and cremated his remains pompously. The bones were enshrined in a pagoda. At that time some knowledgeable monks arrived as guests and the hosts told them about the instruction of their teacher, his supposed *parinibbāna* and so forth.

The visiting monks said: "Sirs, the light that your teacher saw is not the path. It is a corruption of insight (*upakkilesa*), something that defiles insight meditation. You are not well-informed on insight meditation. In fact, your teacher was a mere worldlyling." Their explanation was based on scriptures, but it was not acceptable to the other monks who resented any adverse comments about their teacher, and they argued the case for his spiritual attainments. Thus

some people credit a person with Arahantship when he is in fact not an Arahant. The Commentary states that these people cannot attain the path and fruition or even the celestial realm so long as they do not renounce their wrong-view.

The Subcommentary explains the Commentary's statement as follows:- "To cling firmly to a wrong-view that makes one upgrade the blameworthy worldling to the status of a noble one, talk about it (the wrong-view), to extol it or to argue for it, is an obstacle to the attainment of the celestial realms or the path." We should bear in mind then that it is a grave mistake to glorify one's teacher and claim that he is a noble one when he is just an ordinary person.

### **Iron Pot Roasting Arahant**

The Commentary continues with another monk's account of Arahantship. The monk said that his disciples should imagine kindling a fire and putting an iron pot over it. Then the disciple should imagine his physical body to be put into the pot and roasted. When the body is reduced to ashes, they must be blown away with the mouth. Then the disciple becomes a monk who has been purged of all defilements. The teacher who taught thus was also honoured as an Arahant and after cremation his bones were enshrined in a pagoda. His disciples also argued with the visiting monks about him.

### **Earthen Pot Arahant**

Still another monk said that his disciples should imagine a large earthen pot placed on a fire, a pot that is imagined to contain the thirty-two parts of the body. The contents of the pot are then to be stirred up and dissolved and the froth that comes up is to be consumed mentally. This is, the monk said, imbibing the nectar of the Dhamma. This view is in fact the misinterpretation of the Buddha's teaching that those who devote themselves to mindfulness of the body enjoy nibbāna. The teacher who taught thus was also honoured as an Arahant and a pagoda enshrining his bones built as a memorial. He, too, was the subject of controversy between his disciples and other monks.

These are instances of wrong liberation in ancient times. Cases of this kind are likely to be on the increase nowadays. At one time some taught that a knowledge of the Four Noble Truths meant

Buddhahood and so there arose some of their followers who impudently called themselves Buddhas. However, if we were to expose cases of wrong liberation in detail, it would mean indirect attack on some people, so we will leave it at that.

## **Right Liberation**

Right liberation is liberation that presupposes the eight stages of purification, the twelve kinds of insight-knowledge, the four noble paths and the four noble fruitions.

Before the meditator practises insight meditation, he must be morally pure. Then he or she must have access concentration or attainment concentration that will ensure mental purity. While noting, the meditator should know the distinction between the matter that is being noted and the noting mind. Then he or she must know cause and effect, and reflect independently on the three characteristics. Then he or she must have knowledge of the instant arising and vanishing of the mind and matter that is noted. He or she will have unusual experiences such as seeing light, feeling joyful, faith, *etc.* He or she must note and transcend them. Then knowledge of dissolution and knowledge of fearfulness insights will arise that see the object of attention and the attending consciousness vanishing together. Then he or she must clearly have knowledge of equanimity about formations, and bare awareness without effort.

This should be followed by adaptation knowledge that occurs very quickly and insight that brings the meditator into contact with nibbāna and finally leads to liberation. This is right liberation. According to the Commentary, all the aggregates of mental elements and consciousness relating to fruition with those of the eightfold path excepted is in effect right liberation. Other Pāli texts define liberation as the sum-total of fruition-consciousness and mental elements. In accordance with their explanations, we may as well understand right view, *etc.*, in terms of knowledge, *etc.*, at the moment of attaining the path and the right liberation in terms of right view, *etc.*, at the moment of attaining the fruition of the path.

I will now go on to explain the three hindrances: sloth and torpor, restlessness and doubt. I have dealt with the other two hindrances: sensual desire and ill-will in my talk on the ten unwholesome propensities.

## Sloth and Torpor (21)

The Pāli books describe “*thīna*” as the torpor of the mind and “*middha*” as the torpor of mental factors (*cetasikā*). However, *cetasikā* is not a common word in Burmese, so we will translate *thinamiddha* as mental torpor. Since mental factors are always connected with consciousness (*citta*) the torpor of consciousness inevitably means torpor of mental factors. Mental torpor means a decline in energy, or laziness. For the meditator, low energy and a dull, sluggish mind are obstacles to the development of concentration. Hence sloth and torpor is described as a hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*). The meditator must first get free from the hindrances and make the mind pure. The hindrances should be overcome by means of attainment or access concentration.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta contains two parts, the first dealing with tranquillity and the second with insight. Practice of in-and-out breathing and contemplation on impurity, as described in the first part, lead to the attainment of absorption. The section on in-and-out breathing says: “The meditator breathes in (*assasati*) attentively; he breathes out (*passasati*) attentively.”

*Assāsa* is translated as exhaled air and *passāsa* as inhaled air in secular treatises and dictionaries. However, in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, which sets forth the course of training in the holy life, *assāsa* and *passāsa* are described as inhaled air and exhaled air respectively. This interpretation is more reasonable in practice, because if you fix your mind on the nostril in the practice of breathing, the inhaled air is first apparent. It also fits in with the Pāli term “*ānāpāna*.” “*Ānā*” means inhaled air while “*pāna*” means exhaled air, so I have translated “*passasati*” as breathe out.

In breathing in and out the meditator should do so mindfully. According to the Commentary, if contact with the in and out breath is apparent at the nostril or the upper lip, the meditator should note the point of contact. He must ignore the air that is breathed into the body or the air that is breathed out. He must note “in, in,” and “out, out.” The Commentary suggests that the beginner should practise by counting, “one, two, three,” etc. However, what matters most is the development of concentration through the practice. It will do just as well if the meditator notes mindfully “in, in,” “out, out,” whenever he breathes. Through such practice he will be free from sensual desire and other hindrances and attain access concentration and the four absorptions.

This is the way to cultivate mental purity according to the section on mindfulness of respiration in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

Then as regards contemplation on impurity, the meditator should reflect on the thirty-two parts of the body such as hair, bones, heart, liver, lung, intestines, urine, saliva, *etc.* This contemplation will free him from hindrances and ensure access concentration and the first absorption. This is the way to achieve purity of mind through contemplation on impurities.

### Mental Purification Through Insight

The other nineteen sections are described as those relating to insight meditation and access concentration. The meditator notes that he walks when he walks, that he stands when he stands, that he lifts his foot when he lifts it, and so forth. In brief, he notes and notes all kinds of bodily movement.

He must also have clear comprehension (*sampajañña*). He must have clear comprehension in looking straight, on looking sideways, in bending or stretching the legs or hands, in holding the robes or alms-bowl, in eating, in drinking, and even when urinating and defecating.

When he walks, stands, sits, falls asleep, wakes up, speaks, or keeps silence, he must do these things consciously. In brief, every activity of the body must be governed by consciousness. There is no bodily activity that we should not note or that should not be the object of our consciousness. We should also note and make ourselves aware of the air-element or the element of stiffness and motion as manifested in the rising and falling of the abdomen.

The meditator should also contemplate the three kinds of feelings: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neutral feeling. This may be expanded to nine kinds of feelings. The meditator should know and note all of these feelings.

As regards the mindfulness of consciousness (*cittānupassanā*) the meditator is instructed to attend to and know every state of consciousness that occurs as it is, whether it is greedy or not and so on.

As for the mindfulness of the mind-objects (*dhammānupassanā*) there are five subjects for practice. The meditator should know the kind of hindrance that he has whether it is sensual desire or not, *etc.* He must know the five aggregates: matter, feeling, perception,

mental-formations and consciousness. He should know the twelve sense faculties such as the eye and visual objects, *etc.* When the meditators of today note and become mindful of their seeing, hearing, and so forth, they are practising the Satipaṭṭhāna method, and their practice conforms to the section of the sutta on the sense faculties.

The meditator is also instructed to know the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*). This accords with the experience of the meditators when they have special illuminations following the development of insight-knowledge such as knowledge of arising and passing away. The meditator should also know the Four Noble Truths. According to the Commentary, we should distinguish between two mundane truths — the truth about suffering and the truth about the cause of suffering. When the meditator notes the desire and attachment that arise, he is aware of the truth about the cause of suffering. He also knows it after reflection. Noting everything that arises on the basis of the abdominal rising and falling is to practise the four kinds of mindfulness in accordance with the teaching of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Each of the four methods of contemplation is especially suitable for some meditators. The meditators will attain the noble path and its fruition through any method that suits them best.

We advise the meditator to note everything starting with the rising and falling. While noting in this way, the meditator is likely to be distracted by habitual thoughts, which are primarily the hindrance of sensual desire. Such thoughts should be noted and rejected. We become angry in the face of an unpleasant object. This is the hindrance of ill-will that has to be noted and rejected.

The meditators who practise meditation are at first motivated by strong faith, will, and energy. However, when insight-knowledge does not develop, some meditators lose heart and slacken their efforts. This is the hindrance of torpor, which must be removed through constant mindfulness. If noting is not helpful, the meditator should reflect on the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, on the dangers of *samsāra*, and the benefits of insight. Those who do not know how to reflect should consult their teacher and listen to suitable discourses. Listening to discourses tends to dispel laziness.

“*Thīnamiddha*” is also translated as drowsiness. Drowsiness may be due to torpor or to physical exhaustion. While noting, the meditator may lose energy, become slothful, and his perceptions

gradually become dull. If he or she cannot overcome sloth by noting, he or she becomes drowsy and falls asleep. Even the chief disciple Moggallāna was overcome with torpor while meditating before he became an Arahant. The Buddha instructed his disciples to dispel torpor by fixing the mind on light, washing one's face, and so forth.

### **Drowsiness is Not Always A Defilement**

Drowsiness through exhaustion of the physical body may occur in the Arahant who has no defilements. When Saccaka, the wandering ascetic asked the Buddha whether he ever slept in the daytime, the Buddha replied that he slept during the day in the last month of summer. Saccaka said that sleeping in the daytime was regarded by some people as a form of delusion (*sammoha*). Although he thus referred to the views of some people, he was in fact implying that the Buddha was not free from delusion. The Buddha then said that sleeping was neither delusion nor non-delusion, that one who is not free from biases and defilements may be in delusion, that the Buddha who was free from defilements was never in delusion. Since even the Buddha slept, this shows that the desire to sleep because of physical exhaustion is not to be described as torpor, nor as a hindrance.

### **Physical Torpor**

The *Vimuttimagga*, "The path of Liberation," mentions three kinds of torpor according to their causes — psychological factors, hot weather, and excess of food. It says that only the psychosomatic torpor is a hindrance or defilement, other kinds of torpor cannot be so described because even the Arahants are not free from them. This view is repudiated in the *Visuddhimagga* and the Commentary on the *Aṭṭhasālini*. However, physical torpor due to climate and food is also mentioned in the *Milindapañha*, "The Debate of King Milinda," and the *Petakopadesa*. Thus the theory of physical torpor was advanced by three ancient Indian books and rejected by the Sinhalese Commentaries. We should, therefore, assume that the physical origin of torpor was accepted by Indian bhikkhus. The theory is reasonable because it is said that even the Buddha slept during the day when it was very hot.

The term "*thīnamiddha*" is thus restricted to the laziness, drowsiness, or lethargy that beset us in doing wholesome deeds, or in the practice of meditation. It is sloth and torpor if it laziness



that prevents you from listening to a discourse or from meditating on the Buddha. Such sloth and torpor should be rejected after due reflection. In particular, laziness, low energy, or drowsiness while you are noting the sense-objects in meditation means sloth and torpor. This should be noted and dispelled. True to the teaching of the Buddha in the Sallekha Sutta, the meditator should affirm his or her will to overcome sloth and torpor.

He or she should note vigilantly and focus the mind on the contact between consciousness and the object that is noted. In this way, before long he or she will attain concentration. Concentration means insight because, when the mind is concentrated, it is fixed on the object of attention. There is no lethargy, no hindrance. The noting mind is pure and this is purity of mind. Just as when you look in the darkness at night you see nothing clearly, but when you switch on your flashlight, all the objects that are within the focus of the light become clearly visible. Concentration is like an electric light. All the phenomena on which you concentrate your mind become clear.

When you note the rising and falling, you become clearly aware of the rising, falling, and stiffness of the abdomen. The same may be said of the bending, stretching, and lifting of your limbs. The meditator knows stiffness and motion clearly; every unit of the noting consciousness is also clearly perceived as if it were moving towards the object of attention. Thus insight into the distinction between mind and matter arises, and the occurrence in tandem of the mind that knows and the matter that is known.

I will talk more of the relation between concentration and insight later. For the moment I stress the need to overcoming sloth and torpor through intensive mindfulness.

## Restlessness (22)

Restlessness (*uddhacca*) is mind-wandering or the straying of the mind away from the object that is to be noted. This is so well-known that it needs no elaboration. While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, the body postures, *etc.*, the mind tends to wander to vague, indefinite objects. These thought-objects are apparently not objects of desire, irritation, or doubt. Sometimes the thoughts seem to slip away in spite of all the special attention paid to the object. Occasionally the mind wavers between this and that

way of noting, becoming distracted and restless. This restlessness is due to too much zeal. The meditator should relax, take it easy, and note more steadily. More often than not, restlessness is due to weak concentration. To avoid it the meditator should take special care to fix the mind on the object of attention.

Noting should be done with special care just as one exercises great care to prevent a fragile object slipping from the hand. The Commentary says that some people are not tranquil even for a few seconds, their minds are always wandering. They do not try to keep their minds stable even for a moment nor do they know that it is worthwhile to do so. The Buddha urged his disciples to overcome restlessness by fixing their mind on the object of attention instead of allowing it to wander restlessly.

At the beginning, the meditator should focus on the rising of the abdomen from the beginning to the end. The same may be said of noting the falling, or the sitting, lifting, and moving forward of the feet. If the meditator thus keeps on noting carefully, he or she will develop concentration and find that the mind falls right on the object of attention. Just as, for example, when you throw a heavy rice bag off your shoulder, it stays where it falls instead of rolling away, or just as when you plunge a spear or a pointed stick into soft ground, it stays stuck wherever it falls.

With the development of concentration, the mind is focused on the object and is no longer restless, but becomes pure. This purity of mind is free from restlessness and other hindrances. Mental purity leads to insight that discriminates between mind and matter.

## **Doubt (23)**

Doubt (*vicikicchā*) is scepticism about the Buddha, his teaching, the Saṅgha and the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom. All these four kinds of scepticism are implicit in the scepticism about the true Dhamma. For one who has doubt about the true Dhamma will also have doubt about the Buddha who taught it, about the members of the Saṅgha who practise it, and about the way of life that conforms to it. Hence our translation of *vicikicchā* as doubt about the true Dhamma. Also implicit in the doubt about the true Dhamma are doubts about past lives, doubts about future lives, doubts about the relationship of the present to past and future, and doubts about the relationship

between cause and effect (Dependent Origination). The past, present, and future lives of *saṃsāra* are connected to the true Dhamma.

Thus doubt about the true Dhamma means all the eight kinds of doubt that we have mentioned. It does not include doubts that have nothing to do with the true Dhamma, doubts such as whether this road will lead to the pagoda, whether this business is likely to be lucrative, and so forth. Such doubt in worldly affairs is not a hindrance. Only the eightfold doubt about the Dhamma is the hindrance of doubt.

### **Doubt About Tranquility Meditation**

The meditator who devotes himself to tranquillity meditation may have doubts about that practice. Could this meditation on breathing lead to the attainment of absorption? Would it be possible to attain the four absorptions merely by meditating on the earth-*kaṣiṇa*? Would such absorptions lead to attainment of psychic powers? Is it a fact that such powers enable a man to create things, to go underground, to fly in the air, to see or hear everything? Would noting and reflecting on the thirty-two parts of the body ensure the attainment of absorptions? These are doubts that pose a hindrance to the development of tranquillity.

### **Doubt About Insight Meditation**

Could mindfulness of the bodily activities of standing, sitting, walking, *etc.*, by itself develop insight into the distinction between mind and matter? Is it possible for a meditator to gain insight-knowledge simply by noting every phenomenon that arises from the six senses, such as the arising and falling of the abdomen? These are instances of doubt that form a hindrance to the progress in the practice of insight.

The meditator who harbours such doubts is like a traveller at a crossroads. If he is travelling in unfamiliar territory, he should ask those who have travelled there before. He must travel fast if he is being followed by enemies. Suppose he stops at a crossroads and wavers without taking one way or the other. He will then be overtaken, looted and killed by the pursuing enemies. His suffering is due to his hesitation at the crossroads.

Likewise, the meditator who has doubts is hampered in his effort to practise mindfulness. He is at the crossroads. Because he

hesitates inattentively, he does not know the sense-objects as they really are. Because of his ignorance, he clings to them as if they were permanent, pleasant, and substantial. Clinging causes greed, hatred, and other defilements as well as wholesome and unwholesome kamma that lead to the lower realms and other suffering such as birth. Thus the doubting meditator suffers just as the hesitating traveller at the crossroads suffers at the hands of his enemy.

It is imperative to dispel doubts about the true Dhamma. Because of scepticism, some cannot practise meditation; some do not listen to discourses, and some do not care to read books on meditation. They miss opportunities because they confuse doubt with an inquiring mind.

### Cause of Confusion

Some people do not appreciate meditation since they do not take the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta seriously. The Buddha's teaching is simple and straightforward, but they mix it up with the teaching of the Abhidhamma and Commentaries — hence their confusion. The Buddha said, "Be mindful of your physical body ... *Kāye kāyānupassī viharati,*" which means that the meditator should focus his mind on the parts of the body and its activities. Meditation on the parts of the body is described fully in the method of contemplating the thirty-two parts such as hair. Contemplating hair, and so forth, as loathsome objects is undoubtedly the practice of mindfulness of the body. Again meditation on the activities of the body is described in the words, "The meditator knows that he walks when he walks ... *Gacchanto vā gacchāmi'ti pajānāti.*" The text tells us plainly to be mindful of walking when we walk, of standing when we stand, of sitting when we sit and so on. If we do not note this activity of the body at the moment of its arising, we tend to regard it as permanent, pleasant, and substantial. However, noting all kinds of activity makes us aware of the three characteristics, and this awareness in turn makes one free from attachment. Hence the Buddha's insistence on the need for mindfulness at every moment. Here the bodily activity that is the object of attention includes the abdominal rising and falling.

Tenseness and motion at the moment of rising and falling form wind-body (*vāyokāya*), noting and knowing means "*anupassanā*" and so to note and know the rising and falling is *kāyānupassanā*.

## All Forms of Matter as Subjects for Contemplation

The meditator should ensure that the method of contemplation is correct. The physical body is impermanent, painful, repulsive, and lacking in any ego-entity. One should contemplate to realise these unpleasant facts of life. To this end one must first know the nature of the physical body. This calls for noting all forms of bodily activity at the moment of their occurrence.

### Earth Element

In other words, the meditator contemplates all forms of matter that manifest in the whole body. These include solid and gross matter, that is earth-element (*pathavi-dhātu*) represented by hair, *etc.* The meditator is mindful when in contact with the hair, finger-nails, toe-nails, or skin, *etc.* The earth-element is also to be noted and known when there is contact between the teeth and the tongue or between the flesh and the bones. All solid, gross, or soft earth-element that is manifest is the subject for contemplation. There is no earth-element that is not worthy of contemplation.

### Water Element

The flowing and compounded water-element (*āpodhātu*) should also be contemplated. The water-element is found in bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, *etc.* According to the Commentaries, this element is intangible, not an object of body-contact, but there is flowing and wetness only after the contact between the water-element and other elements that are bound up with it. The flowing, cohesive water-element is apparent when one contacts and notes tears, nasal secretions, saliva, sweat, *etc.* The meditator can note any manifestation of the water-element.

### Fire Element

The hot, warm, or cold fire-element (*tejo-dhātu*) should also be noted. The heat element comprises: 1) the normal heat of the body that causes a man to grow old, 2) the feverish heat that exceeds the normal temperature of the body, 3) burning, excessive heat, and 4) the internal heat of the digestive system that digests and burns up all the food that is eaten. This fire-element should also be noted wherever it is apparent.

## Air Element

The element of stiffness and motion, or air-element (*vāyo-dhātu*) is also a subject for contemplation. The element of motion is six-fold: motion upwards, downwards, in the intestines, in the abdomen, that which causes walking, standing, sitting, lying, bending, stretching, handling, *etc.*, and motion produced by in-and-out breathing. The meditator can contemplate any aspect of this air-element. To note the activity of one's body such as "walking," "sitting," or "lying down," in accordance with the teaching of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is to know the fifth aspect of the air-element. The practice of in-and-out breathing means contemplation of the air-element of the sixth kind. To note the rising and falling of the abdomen is to know the air-element that is in motion because of the pressure of the inhaled air. By noting thus the meditator knows the pressure of the inhaled air, so it can be said that he notes breathing in-and-out air. Some meditators may think that they should focus only on their nostril.

This is true if the aim is the attainment of absorption, which develops only if the mind is focused on a single object in one place. To attend to several objects in several places is bound to impede its development. However, this does not apply to insight meditation, which does not require the meditator to restrict his attention to a single place or a single object. Every phenomenon that arises from the six senses is a valid object of mindfulness. The Buddha says, "*Sabbaṃ abhiññeyaṃ, Sabbaṃ dhammaṃ abhijānāti,*" which means that the meditator should be mindful of everything, so in the practice of insight meditation there is no restriction as to the part of the physical body that is or is not to be noted. Just as upward motion, downward motion, abdominal motion, intestinal motion, and other motions in any place are worthy objects of contemplation, so is the motion of air breathed irrespective of any part of the body. In other words, the rising and falling indicate tension and motion in the abdomen and so to note them is to know the abdominal motion.

## No Doubt About the Cultivation of Mindfulness

To note the rising and falling is to know the air-element in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. It means noting the in-and-out breathing air-element, one of the six kinds of air-element that is apparent in the abdomen. This is also contemplation through bodily postures and clarity of consciousness.

Hence to note the rising or falling while sitting or to note, "sitting, sitting," is to know the air-element and its behaviour. This is mindfulness of the body, and so is noting other forms of bodily activity such as bending, moving, walking, and so forth. Again, to note one's feelings: "it is cramping," "it is hot" "it is painful," is mindfulness of feelings. To note every mental event whenever it occurs, imagining, thinking, intending, *etc.*, is mindfulness of consciousness. To note seeing, hearing, *etc.*, when these become especially manifest, is mindfulness of mental states.

Hence mindfulness of rising and falling and all other psychophysical phenomena at the moment of their occurrence is the right practice that accords with the teaching of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. There is no doubt about it. Yet those who do not fully understand the nature of insight meditation tend to be sceptical. Most of these sceptics are well-read and critical. Women have implicit faith in the meditation teachers and, by and large, they devote themselves to insight practice wholeheartedly. They easily attain tranquillity by virtue of their uncritical approach and unwavering faith. Tranquillity is, of course, followed by insight and so it is not difficult for them to pass through successive stages of insight-knowledge. However, this is not true of every female meditator. There are those who do not make any progress because of their critical minds.

Some fail to attain insight because of their laxity, age, poor health, and lack of all-out effort. There are also meditators among laymen and bhikkhus who attain concentration and insight quickly by dint of systematic effort in accordance with instructions. It is easy to attain concentration if the meditator is convinced about the effectiveness of the insight method that we have mentioned above, and if he or she practises steadily and zealously.

### **Purity of Mind Through Temporary Tranquillity**

The meditator should not harbour doubt and critical thinking, but should note and reject them. Equally important to note and reject are sensual desire, ill-will, torpor, and restlessness. In this way one will be free from doubt and other hindrances, and being always mindful, the mind will be pure. This is insight-oriented temporary tranquillity that is on a par with access concentration. It may also be called access concentration because it is freed from hindrances. Hence in the Com-

mentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, contemplation on bodily postures, clear comprehension, contemplations on the four elements, and other insight methods are described as access contemplation. Momentary concentration and access concentration ensure mental purity.

Hence the Buddha's teaching: "Other people may have doubts about the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. However, we will overcome such doubts." Thus you should practise effacement that lessens your defilements. You should affirm your will to overcome doubt by following the path of right view and right resolution. You should practise for your spiritual growth and put an end to the defilement of doubt by determination.

### **Overcoming Doubt by Insight and Path Knowledge**

Freedom from hindrances by itself will not enable us to overcome doubt. We should try to overcome it until it is uprooted on attainment of Stream-winning. Even after mental purity has been attained with the extinction of the hindrances we should keep on noting the rising and falling and other psychophysical phenomena. The meditator then discriminates between the object that is noted and the noting consciousness. He will note as he notes that the stiff, moving, and arising matter is one thing and the noting consciousness another. He will make the same distinction at the moment of sitting, bending, *etc.* In brief, the distinction between mind and matter will become apparent at every moment of mindfulness. The insight into such a distinction is called analytical knowledge of mind and matter.

This knowledge is the basis of insight meditation so it is important to have it in its proper perspective. It is only after the independent, proper development of analytical knowledge of mind and matter during the practice of mindfulness, that the meditator makes progress and passes through the higher stages of insight. The distinction between mind and matter, which the meditator realises, is genuine. Originally it is impossible to distinguish between mind and matter. The two are closely bound up and do not lend themselves to intellectual analysis.

For example, when you move your hand, you cannot differentiate its motion from the desire to move it. When you note and the distinction becomes clear, it is not possible to confuse one with the other. The noted matter and the noting consciousness remain sharply distinct. The distinction is borne in on you at every moment



of noting and so is the non-existence of the living ego or soul apart from mind and matter. This is purity of view (*diṭṭhivisuddhi*).

As you keep on noting, you will realise the causal relationship between mind and matter. For example, your hands bend because of your desire to bend them; you have consciousness because there is an object for it, and so on. You reflect on the causal relation between defilements in your previous life and the manifestation of mind and matter such as rebirth-consciousness in your present life; the causal relation between the benefit and harm that you experience; your effort and hope for a fortunate life and the continuity of mind and matter in the future life. This insight into the conditioned nature of mind and matter is called “knowledge by discerning conditionality (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*).

The meditator now discerns clearly that mind and matter is only conditional, or just mere cause and effect, and that there is no permanent soul or ego-entity that passes on from one life to another. This is purity by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*). With this purity, the meditator is free from all doubts such as “Did I exist in the past?” “Did I come into existence only in this life?” “Was I created by deities, Brahmās, or God?” “Will I continue to exist after my death?” *etc.* He or she is convinced of the cause and effect relation between one life and another and the non-existence of a living soul.

The meditator should overcome doubt through this purity. Then he or she must continue noting. He or she will see the noted phenomenon arising and passing away. He or she realises the law of impermanence and the suffering of life that is unsatisfactory and undependable. He or she becomes aware, too, of the conditionality of everything. His or her awareness is not confined to mind and matter. It encompasses all the phenomena that arise from six senses. This kind of awareness is in accord with what the Buddha says: “Everything is to be analysed and known in terms of the three characteristics ... *Sabbaṃ pariññeyyaṃ.*”

When such analytical insight-knowledge is complete, the meditator will, while noting the ceaseless arising and passing away of mind and matter, see the cessation of mental formations, that is nibbāna at the stage of Stream-winning. He or she cannot then have any doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Nor will he or she be sceptical about his or her practice, the past, the present, and the future of *saṃsāra*,

or the conditionality of all phenomena. The meditator is then beyond all doubt. A meditator who is totally free from doubt is a Stream-winner, so you should overcome doubt at least on the Stream-winner level.

### **Anger (24)**

There are unwholesome emotions (*kilesa*), which defile the mind. The first of these defilements is anger. We usually fly into a rage in the face of an odious sense-object. Some people are very short-tempered and highly irritable. They become furious when they hear even a slight remark that offends them. Their faces blacken, they scowl, and rant without restraint. Anger causes instant disfigurement, and according to the Buddha's teaching in the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta*, it leads to hell in a future life, and makes its victim ugly in his or her rebirth in the human world.

If a man restrains his anger even when there is occasion for it and speaks pleasantly and sweetly, he will not become ugly, but will retain his good looks. On his death he will be reborn in the celestial realms, or when reborn as a human being, he will be good-looking. I have told you about the harm of anger and the benefits of forbearance with illustrative stories in my other discourses, so I will not dwell on them. Forbearance brings us instant benefits, so we should practise it when we get angry. We must not give vent to anger in speech or bodily actions, but must note and suppress it. If our remarks or facial expression betrays it, we must try to overcome it before it draws the attention of others. We must affirm the will to compose ourselves and restrain anger under circumstances that may provoke others.

### **Malice (25)**

Some people not only give way to anger, but also harbour malice against the object of their offence. In other words, they are out to take revenge when they have the opportunity to do so. Some bear grudge not only against living beings, but also against lifeless objects such as a stump or a post. They would beat or batter a stump when they stumble over it. When they bump against a post, they would deliberately bump their heads again and again against it. If a thing topples or rolls away or falls down, they would break or throw it away in a rage. Such a short-tempered man who behaves like a lunatic is a laughing-stock and pitiable creature in the eyes of observers.

### Causes of Malice

There are nine reasons why we bear malice against a person. We bear malice against a person 1) because he has done something harmful to our interests, 2) because he is now doing harm to us, 3) because he will do us harm in future, 4) because he has done harm to our friends, 5) because he is now doing harm to our beloved, or 6) because he will do harm to our friends in future. In the latter three cases we bear a grudge against a person not for self-preservation, but for the sake of someone whom we love, *e.g.*, a member of our family, a relative, a friend, a teacher, or a pupil. We bear malice when our son is ill-treated or our daughter is molested. Again we bear a grudge against a person 7) because he has done good to someone whom we hate, 8) because he is doing good to someone we hate, or 9) because in future he will do good to someone we hate.

These are the causes of malice. We should not harbour malice because malice is harmful to us in the present life as well as after our death. If A bears malice and does something harmful to B, the latter's descendents will seek to settle old scores and again A's descendents will try to get even with them. This feud will continue endlessly and thus the destructive effect of malice is obvious in this very life.

Mutual ill-will also tends to lead to enmity and disaster throughout *samsāra* as is evident in the story of Kālayakkhini in the Commentary on the Dhammapada.

### The Story of Kālayakkhini

Long ago there was a man who supported his mother without getting married. He worked single-handed at home and at his farm. Seeing this, his mother told him to get a wife as his helpmate. He said that he wished to remain unmarried in order to devote his full attention to her welfare. However, she urged him again and again, so at last he married a woman.

He did not have any child by his wife, so in compliance with the wish of his mother, he reluctantly kept a young woman as his second wife. After some time the younger wife became pregnant. Being jealous and concerned about her future, the elder wife put some drug in the food that terminated the pregnancy. She caused a second abortion in the same way. Then on the advice of her neighbours, the young woman did not tell the elder wife anything about her third pregnancy. However,

the elder woman finally found out and tried to terminate it. However, the pregnancy being advanced, she did not succeed outright, but caused great suffering to the young woman. As she lay dying, the younger wife said, "Sister, you told me to live in this house and yet you have destroyed my pregnancy three times." She vowed, "May I, in my future life, be in a position to destroy your children."

After her death she became a cat in the same house. The elder woman died, too, because she was beaten by her husband for making him childless. She became a hen in the house. When the hen laid an egg, the cat came and ate it. After she had eaten the eggs three times, the cat was about to eat the hen herself when the latter prayed that she might be able to get even with her enemy in her next life.

On her death the hen was reborn as a leopardess while the cat became a doe. The leopardess ate the doe's litters three times and finally ate the doe herself. However, before she died, the doe prayed for the opportunity to wreak vengeance in her next life. Sure enough, on her death she became an ogress while her enemy was reborn as a woman of Sāvatti. When, as a married woman, she gave birth to a child, the ogress came disguised as her friend and ate the child. When she got the second child, it was again eaten up by the ogress. When she became pregnant for the third time, she went to her parents' house for security.

After naming the child, she left for her home with her husband. On the way, while her husband was bathing in a pond near the Jetavana monastery, the ogress appeared. The woman called her husband loudly and ran into the monastery with her child. At that time the Buddha was teaching some bhikkhus and lay followers. The woman crouched at the feet of the Buddha and appealed for help.

The celestial being guarding the entrance forbade the ogress to enter the monastery. The Buddha sent Ānanda to bring the ogress. At the sight of her enemy the child's mother was alarmed, but the Buddha soothed her. The Blessed One then gave a talk, stressing the fact that forbearance and not retaliation helped one to overcome another's enmity. At the end of the talk the ogress became a Stream-winner and there was no longer any enmity between her and the woman. By order of the Blessed One the woman took the ogress to her house and boarded her. According to the Dhammapada Commentary, the ogress forecast the weather and guarded the woman's household.

The long-standing feud in this story would not have come to an end, but for the Buddha's intervention. The story leaves no doubt about the dangers of malice.

### **Retaliation May Lead to Heavy Kamma**

The person against whom we bear malice may be an ordinary person, but the victim of our vengeance may turn out to be a noble one, an Arahant or even a Buddha. Thus Devadatta and Ciñca-māṇavikā had ill-will against the Bodhisatta, but it was against the Buddha that they plotted.

Again a woman who was robbed and killed by four young men prayed for an opportunity to take vengeance. However, when she became an ogress and finally paid off old scores, all the victims happened to be Arahants. She disguised herself as a cow and gored to death Bāhiya Dārucīriya soon after his attainment of Arahantship, Pukkusāti soon after he attained Non-returning, the leprous Suppabuddha who was a Stream-winner and Tambadāthika soon after he attained insight-knowledge. She thus incurred the heavy karmic debt resulting from her murder of the Arahants.

Malice is very destructive, so it is best to exercise forbearance. Let us then affirm that we will take things philosophically. In other words, if we suffer at the hands of others we should regard it as repayment of an old karmic debt, and cultivate loving-kindness to overcome ill-will and lessen defilements.

### **Ingratitude (26)**

Ingratitude (*makkha*) means ingratitude to a person to whom we should be grateful for help or acts of kindness. A good man should be grateful to his benefactor even though he may not be able to show it. He must express it verbally and if possible repay the other's kind acts. This is part of our moral tradition and yet some fools who are steeped in ignorance tend to speak impertinently to their benefactors. They are ungrateful and speak lightly of what their parents, teachers, or friends have done to help them. Some do not only lack a sense of gratitude, but do things that are harmful to their benefactors.

According to the Buddha, there are two types of rare persons. There are persons who give priority to other people's welfare. They first work for the welfare of those who have never done anything

beneficial to them. They are motivated by pure love, compassion, or good-will, and they do not expect any reciprocal service from those they help. Such cases of pure altruism as exemplified by parents in their relation with their children are rare.

Equally rare are the persons who have a sense of gratitude or who reciprocate for acts of good-will. At the very least we should acknowledge what we owe to others. If possible we should reciprocate their good-will by deed or word. We must defend our benefactors if we see or hear anyone doing or saying something harmful to them. We should promote their welfare by deeds or speech. A person who recognises his indebtedness to another by doing a good deed in return is called a grateful person (*katavedi*). Such persons are rare.

We do not attach much value to abundant things such as grass, stones, *etc.*, because they are available everywhere. However, rare things such as diamonds and rubies are very valuable. Likewise, people who have a sense of gratitude are rare and noble, whereas ungrateful persons, whom you can find everywhere, are mean and low. You should try to belong to the class of noble persons of sterling character. To this end you should be grateful to others for what they have done in your interests and do them some favour by way of reciprocation.

### The Elder Sāriputta's Gratitude

In the lifetime of the Buddha there was an old brahmin who, being helpless and neglected by his sons and daughters, lived in a monastery, attending to the needs of the bhikkhus. The bhikkhus were kind to him, but as he was very old, nobody wished to assume the role of a preceptor, and ordain him. He felt rejected and depressed for being refused admission into the Saṅgha. However, knowing his potential for Arahantship, the Buddha summoned the bhikkhus and asked whether there was anyone who had any sense of gratitude to the brahmin. Then the Elder Sāriputta told the Blessed One how he was grateful to the brahmin for once offering him a spoonful of rice during his almsround in Rājagaha. The Buddha said, "Sāriputta! Would it not be advisable for you to help such a benefactor to attain salvation?"

Venerable Sāriputta promised to ordain the brahmin and before long the brahmin Rādha became a bhikkhu. Following the advice of his preceptor, the bhikkhu practised the Dhamma and in a few days attained Arahantship. Later on, the Buddha asked the chief

disciple whether Rādha was docile. “Yes, Lord, he is.” “How many such docile disciples would you be able to accept?” “I would welcome many such disciples, Lord,” replied Sāriputta.

Here the Elder Sāriputta’s sense of gratitude even for a spoonful of rice is exemplary and so is the docility of the old monk Rādha. We should dispel ingratitude and be ever grateful to our benefactors.

## Arrogance (27)

Arrogance (*paḷāsa*) is to regard oneself as on an equal footing with noble persons and to speak disrespectfully of them. It is the tendency to rival great men who are unique and peerless in intellectual and spiritual spheres. Some men have little learning, but they consider themselves on a par with learned scholars of whom they speak irreverently. They contend that some Sayādaws are not free from errors and ignorance, a contention that is designed to enhance their prestige. Some people have no moral character and yet they consider themselves on a par with the saintly Sayādaws.

Some have little knowledge, but they do not care for a learned person. Some have never practised meditation seriously, but they wish to look down upon those who have had many years’ experience. Recently some monks who joined the Saṅgha only in old age have gone so far as to challenge the scholarly and saintly Sayādaws, insisting on the truth of their sayings and denouncing some teachings of the ancient holy books as erroneous. Their views are often taken seriously by ignorant people. Thus these monks accumulate unwholesome kamma because of their misguided rivalry.

I have now dealt with seven defilements: sloth and torpor, restlessness, doubt, ill-will, malice, ingratitude, and envy. Of these, sloth and torpor, and restlessness can be rooted out at the Arahant stage, ill-will and malice at Non-returning, and the remaining three defilements at the stage of Stream-winning. These three defilements can lead to the lower realms and so at the very least it is imperative to seek the conquest of doubt, ingratitude, and arrogance.

## Envy (28)

Envy (*issā*) is the feeling that one has against another person who is better than oneself. We do not want to see a man who is more prosperous and wealthy than we are. The average man does not want

to see or hear of anyone who excels him in wealth, social status, physical appearance, intelligence, or knowledge. We feel more envious when the object of our envy happens to be a person whom we dislike, a person who is in the same profession, or who has the same social status. Thus a boy will envy another boy, a woman will envy another woman, there is envy among teachers, monks, and so forth.

The rich are usually envied by the poor. In rural areas, villagers who work on their own farms are likely to excite the envy of those who are less fortunate. Government employees who do not get promotions envy those who are promoted. The great and the powerful cause envy in those who are of small consequence. The accomplished speaker is envied by the poor speakers. Thus there are many causes of envy in human beings.

In the final analysis envy gives rise only to unwholesome kamma without doing us any good. Envy makes a man unhappy and so it is self-destructive. According to the Buddha's teaching in the Cūlakamma-vibhaṅga Sutta, envy leads to the lower realms and if reborn as a human being, the envious man will have few attendants and friends.

Opposed to envy is sympathetic-joy (*muditā*) — one of the four sublime states, the other three being love, compassion, and equanimity. Sympathetic-joy makes us interested in the prosperity and welfare of others. It is conducive to happiness because it makes us rejoice at the good fortune of others. According to the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, rejoicing at the prosperity of others will lead to rebirth in celestial realms and in case of rebirth as a human being, it makes a man powerful with many attendants at his service.

In cultivating loving-kindness, the first of the sublime states, one should say, "May all beings be free from the suffering that engulfs them!" To cultivate sympathetic-joy one should express the wish: "May all those who are prosperous and happy retain the same good fortune!" Through the cultivation of sympathetic-joy one can accumulate wholesome kamma without spending anything. This wholesome deed may lead to the celestial realms and rebirth as a great leader with many attendants. On the other hand envy causes unwholesome kamma without any benefit accruing from it. It leads to hell and a lonely life of poverty in the next existence.

We should take special care not to harbour envy in doing wholesome deeds, in teaching or practising the Dhamma. To envy



others who are doing many wholesome deeds, who can give talks that have wide appeal, or who have made spiritual progress in meditation is to do great harm to oneself. It is imperative to avoid envy while doing wholesome deeds.

### Meanness (29)

Meanness (*macchariya*) is the desire to hoard up one's property so that others cannot share it. Its characteristic is described by the Commentary as the secrecy with which one hides one's wealth. The miser does not want other people to know what he has, let alone give his property to them. In the lifetime of the Buddha when the youth Maṭṭhakuṇḍali was seriously ill, his father kept him outside the house so that his relatives and friends who came to see the patient might not find out what he had in the house.

However, on his death-bed the young man saw the Buddha as the latter passed the house, paid his respects, and attained the celestial realm in his next life. Later on his father went to the cemetery and was mourning over his dead son when the young celestial being appeared and reminded him of something. Then the old man approached the Buddha and asked a question. The Buddha answered it and gave a talk. According to the Dhammapada Commentary, both the father and the son attained Stream-winning after hearing the Blessed One's discourse.

### The Story of Macchariyakosiya

The classic story of the miser in Buddhist tradition is that of Kosiya. He was so miserly that he was known as Kosiya the miser. He lived in a village near Rājagaha. He was a multi-millionaire, but he was so stingy that he did not offer even a drop of cooking oil to alms mendicants. Nor would he use his wealth for himself. One day on his return from the royal palace he saw a man eating fried food heartily and there arose in him a desire to eat such food. However, he did not wish any food to be prepared for his wife, let alone for the other members of his household since that would mean using a lot of rice, butter, *etc.* Because of his stinginess he did not tell anyone about his desire. However, the desire became oppressive and at last he lay miserably in his bed. When pressed by his wife, he expressed his desire and in compliance with his wish the woman

prepared to make food just enough for her husband. Lest he should have to give food to those who saw him eating, the couple went up to the top storey of the seven-storey building and there with all the doors bolted, they set about to prepare the food.

Then the Buddha, seeing their potential for the attainment of Stream-winning, sent the Elder Moggallāna. The elder went there and stood in the air near the window of the chamber where they were preparing the food. The millionaire was shocked at the sight of the elder. He wondered how the elder had come to his hideaway and told him that he would not get any food whatever he might do. Moggallāna performed miracles such as walking, sitting in the air, emitting smoke, *etc.* Kosiya dared not challenge the elder to emit flames lest his house be burnt down.

Then knowing that the bhikkhu would not go away unless he got some food, the miser told his wife to prepare a small cake. However, the cake became so big that it filled the frying pan. The miser tried to make it small, but every time he tampered with it, it became bigger and bigger. The frustrated miser told his wife to offer a cake to the elder. However, when the woman took a cake, all the cakes stuck together and it was impossible to separate them. First the miser tried, then he and his wife tried together to separate the cakes, but it was in vain. At last, tired and frustrated, the miser no longer had any desire to eat, and so he told his wife to offer all of the cakes to the bhikkhu.

Then Moggallāna gave a talk on the benefits of alms-giving. The talk inspired Kosiya with so much faith that he asked the elder to eat the cakes in his house. However, the elder said that the Buddha was waiting for food together with five hundred bhikkhus and with their consent he took them to the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti, which was forty-five leagues<sup>1</sup> away. It is said that Moggallāna took them there by means of his supernormal powers, so they reached the gate of the Jetavana monastery just as they passed the foot of the staircase of their house. There the merchant and his wife offered cakes, milk, honey, sugar, *etc.*, to the Saṅgha.

Originally the cakes made were just enough for one person, but by virtue of the Buddha's supernormal powers there was no end to the cakes after the Blessed One and five hundred bhikkhus, the merchant and his wife had eaten them. Even after the beggars had been fed, there

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<sup>1</sup> *Yojana*: a distance of about seven to ten miles. (Editor's note)

were so many cakes left that they had to be thrown into a valley near the monastery. Then the Blessed One gave a talk, and after hearing it both the merchant and his wife attained Stream-winning.

### **The Nature of Meanness**

The above story shows that meanness is characterised by secrecy arising from jealousy regarding one's property. Moreover, meanness makes one unhappy, discomfited, and mean if other persons have something to do with one's possessions. One who is mean does not want another person to use his property. As is borne out by writers and what we see in life, a jealous husband or wife will frown on anyone who looks closely at his or her spouse: he or she is wretched and cannot bear the sight of his or her spouse speaking pleasantly to another person.

### **Not All Hoarding is Meanness**

However, we should not call a man a miser simply because he does not give alms. A man may be called a miser only when he does not give alms although he can and should do so. The reluctance to offer to an immoral person something that was intended for a moral person is not a sign of meanness. When Udāyi asked for the under-robe of Bhikkhuṇī Uppalavaṇṇā, the latter refused to give it. Her refusal was not due to her meanness, but due to the impropriety of the request. Likewise, it is not meanness to refuse to give a person anything that he does not deserve; nor is it meanness not to give away a thing that one adores for this is due to attachment.

### **The Karmic Effects of Meanness**

It is meanness when one does not wish to give things when one has more than enough. Some people never give alms in spite of their affluence. They hoard up their wealth. They neither share it with their families, nor use it for themselves, and they prevent others from giving alms. This extreme meanness has grave karmic effects. According to the Buddha's teaching in the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, it makes one helpless in the next life, leading to hell and the lower realms. If one gains rebirth in the human world, it causes poverty and suffering. It is said in the same sutta that the liberal, alms-giving man attains the celestial realm and if reborn as a human being he is rich and prosperous.

## The Brahmin Todeyya

The Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta is a discourse that the Buddha gave in response to the questions of Todeyya's son, Subha. Todeyya was the chief of the Tudi village granted to him by King Pasenadi. He was a multi-millionaire, but very stingy. His advice to members of his household was, "A wise man should manage his household by bearing in mind the erosion of a whetstone whenever it is used, the growing in size of an ant-hill day by day, and the accumulation of honey by bees."

The erosion of a whetstone, when we use it once or twice, is of little consequence, but when used repeatedly, it will eventually be worn away. In the same way, we may spend or give away our money bit by bit, but this may lead to significant dwindling of our wealth in the long run. Bearing this in mind, we should be frugal and avoid alms-giving. This is implied by the first part of Todeyya's advice. It is sound advice from the economic point of view. Rich and prosperous people are usually frugal, while on the other hand some people are poor largely because of their extravagance.

In Burma it is the custom to celebrate weddings and novice initiations (*shinpyu*) with great pomp. This may not affect well-to-do people. However, those who are poor, and borrow from others, spending lavishly just to show off are in for trouble. Because of their over-spending, some villagers found themselves heavily in debt after the initiation of their sons, and they were forced to mortgage or dispose of their carts, oxen, farms, *etc.* Then there are funerals of monks and pagoda festivals to which villagers have to make monetary contributions reluctantly. These do not benefit them very much, and are in part responsible for their economic distress.

However, from the religious point of view we should give donations to worthy causes. In accordance with the advice of ancient sages we should invest one quarter of our income in business, save another quarter for a rainy day and spend the rest. Or we may adjust our expenses otherwise to the needs of modern times. Alms should be given to worthy persons. The initiation should be done within one's means. With a set of robes, a bowl, and food for the morning meal, it may be carried out at the monastery. Wealthy people may spend lavishly for such alms-giving, which is beneficial to the donor throughout *saṃsāra*, but we should only give alms within our means.

Todeyya's advice is not commendable because he told his family not to give alms. He deprecated alms-giving as a waste of money. His reference to the collection of honey by bees is, however, worthy of note as it concerns purely the accumulation of wealth.

True to his word, Todeyya never gave alms and, dying with attachment to his wealth, he was reborn as a dog in his own house. The young man Subha was very fond of the dog. He fed the animal and allowed it to sleep in a comfortable place. One day seeing Subha's spiritual potential, the Buddha came to his house. The dog barked and the Blessed One said, "Hey, Todeyya, you are now a dog because you spoke irreverently about me when you were a human being. Now you are barking at me and so will go to hell." Seeing that the Blessed One knew who he was, the dog became dejected and went to sleep on the ashes near the hearth. When Subha returned home, he learnt what the Blessed One had said about his father.

He was angry because the brahmins believed that when they died they attained the Brahma realm. Subha went to the Buddha and accused him of having told a lie about his father. The Buddha asked him whether there was anything that his father did not mention before his death. He said that his father had not told him the whereabouts of a golden garland, a golden shoe, and a golden cup — each worth one hundred thousand — and cash to the value of one hundred thousand. The Buddha told him to return home, feed the dog and ask about this treasure when the dog was about to fall asleep. Subha did as he was told and thinking, "the Buddha knows all about me," the dog showed the place where the treasure and money were hidden.

### **Fourteen Questions Asked by Subha**

Subha became convinced of the Omniscience of the Buddha and asked fourteen questions. "Why do some people die young? Why do some live to an old age? Why are some sickly and some healthy? Why are some ugly and some good-looking? Why do some have many attendants and some have few attendants? Why are some rich and some poor? Why are some born of high families and some of low families?" I have referred to some of the Buddha's answers to these questions in previous talks. Now I will say something about the rich and the poor.

If a rich but miserly man does not give alms he will not gain merit. It is not easy to avoid doing wholesome deeds, but we live

under conditions that expose us to temptations daily. We are greedy and covetous in the face of a desirable object. We may be tempted to steal, rob, or swindle.

We have ill-will at the sight of someone we hate, ill-will that arouses the desire to hurt or kill. Those who do not give alms will suffer in hell after death as a karmic result of their unwholesome deeds. They are helpless because they have done no wholesome kamma that will save them from hell. They are like people who, having no friends and relatives, are at the mercy of their enemies. If, because of some wholesome kamma, they are reborn as human beings, they are likely to be wretched and poor.

Those who give alms and share what they have with the needy can attain the celestial realm in spite of their unwholesome deeds for these will be outweighed by their acts of generosity. They are like a man who escapes punishment for his crime because of his prestige. If reborn in the human world, they tend to be wealthy as a karmic result of their previous alms-giving. We should therefore overcome meanness and give alms to the best of our ability.

Burmese Buddhists do not need such exhortation. They are very generous. The thirty or forty monks at this meditation centre go to collect food every morning and get more than enough rice and curries. Even in times of acute rice shortage, the amount of food they collect is considerable. Most of these donors are not rich, but motivated by good-will and faith, they somehow manage to offer food. They will prosper throughout *saṃsāra*. Some are giving alms so often that we have to restrain them.

### **Five Kinds of Meanness**

The Abhidhamma Piṭaka mentions five kinds of meanness — regarding 1) abode 2) disciples and followers 3) property 4) qualifications, and 5) learning.

#### **Meanness Regarding Abode**

The first is meanness in regard to abode. All the five kinds of meanness have special reference to bhikkhus and these concern the Saṅgha more than the laymen. The first is the one that makes a monk miserly and unhappy when he sees other bhikkhus of high moral character dwelling in a monastery, or in a separate building in the

monastery's compound, or in another monastery. In ancient times monasteries were large buildings donated to the Saṅgha. Such Saṅghika monasteries were open to bhikkhus who came from anywhere. They were accommodated in order of seniority in the Saṅgha.

To begrudge a virtuous monk lodging in a Saṅghika monastery is meanness. However, it is not meanness to refuse lodging to an immoral, contentious, or quarrelsome monk. Private monasteries cannot be blamed for exclusivity. However, if the visiting monk is of good character and the monastery is spacious, it is meanness to refuse admission unreasonably. Among lay people, too, good visitors should be accommodated temporarily if there is room for them.

### Meanness Regarding Lay Followers

Every bhikkhu has lay followers among Buddhist men and women. Some bhikkhus do not want their lay followers to have relations with other monks. They even forbid a lay follower to go to certain monks. They are justified in doing so if the monks in question happen to be immoral and unworthy of respect. However, it is meanness to prevent a lay follower from seeing virtuous monks. In some places distinction is drawn between two groups of lay followers, those belonging to one's monastery and those belonging to another. We understand that even inquiries are made to see whether one's followers go to any other monastery.

The primary objective of every monk is to free himself from the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. Yet some monks are miserly in respect of their lay followers where it is downright improper for them to be mean. Meanness is intense in places where a village may have one or two monasteries and monks are few, but have great influence. Once I received a letter from a monk in a village in Bamo district. According to his letter, there were two monasteries in his village and he resided in one of them. He and the other monk agreed to have no contact with the laymen and laywomen who supported the other monastery. Some of his lay followers visited the other monastery and gave alms to the other monk. The writer asked for judgment as to whether or not the other monk was violating the Vinaya rule about stealing because of his acceptance of alms from his (the writer's) followers.

The writer had fallen prey to meanness. He was under the delusion that his lay followers as well as their offerings all belonged

to him as a result of their agreement. Whatever their agreement, the two monks do not possess the lay followers or their offerings. Lay Buddhists have the right to show their faith in any monk, visit any monastery, or give alms to whom they like.

In the lifetime of the Buddha some followers of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta became the Buddha's disciples because they were greatly impressed by the Blessed One. The lay Buddhists in the case of the above writer might have gone to the other monastery because of the defects of their teacher. A teacher should prevent his pupils from doing anything that is harmful to them. He must instruct them to do things that are beneficial to them. He must teach the Dhamma that is new to them and repeat the Dhamma that they have heard for further understanding. He should point out the wholesome deeds that lead to heavenly realms; suffuse his lay followers with loving-kindness for their welfare; and do by word or deed everything that does not conflict with Vinaya rules, but that is beneficial to them. Most probably the above-mentioned monk was deserted by his followers because he did not fulfil his duties as a teacher.

There are four ways of helping others (*saṅgha-dhamma*). We should give to others what they need. However, it is not proper for a bhikkhu to give anything to a layman. The second way is that we should speak courteously. This is important, as some monks tend to speak with pride and aversion. The third way requires us to promote the welfare of others. Monks should instruct young boys and teach their followers, but they often fail to fulfil their duty. Monks and laymen alike tend to find fault with those who do not come to visit them without thinking of their failure to do their duties. This is their big mistake. The last way is that one should associate with a person as one's equal without looking down upon him, but this applies only to relationship among laymen.

The monk who wrote to me was probably deserted by his lay followers because he failed to live up to the two ways of helping others: speaking courteously and working for the welfare of his disciples. I sent him a reply, stating my views and advising him to do his duty towards his disciples thoroughly.

It is the duty of a head of a monastery to teach. A monk is qualified to be the head of a monastery only after he has spent ten years in the Saṅgha. However, nowadays the Sayādaw may turn out



to be a self-styled Sayādaw who was once a married man and has not yet spent even one or two years as a bhikkhu. The Sayādaw should be well-versed in the twofold Vibhaṅga — the Bhikkhu-vibhaṅga and the Bhikkhuṇīvibhaṅga, Pārājika, and Pācittiya Pāli texts. At the very least he must have learnt the Pāṭimokkha by heart. Today, however, there are monks and Sayādaws who have not yet studied the four Pārājika rules.

The Sayādaw must also be familiar with the rules of conduct laid down in the Mahāvagga and Cūlavagga of the Khandaka (a book of the Vinayaṭṭaka) and the procedures for carrying out the ecclesiastical functions (*Saṅghakamma*). An ignorant Sayādaw is likely to conduct even initiation, ordination, *etc.*, improperly, thereby doing a disservice to Buddhism. The last essential qualification of the Sayādaw is the ability to explain thoroughly the nature of mind and matter. This is very important. Lay Buddhists rely on monks for instructions about the way to heaven or nibbāna. They do not have the time to study scriptures because they have to work the whole day for their living. It is important for the Sayādaw to teach the Dhamma according to the Tipiṭaka.

The Sayādaw should teach his lay disciples the way to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha and the way to keep Sabbath. He should teach about generosity and, to those who ask for it, the method of meditation according to scriptures. It is up to the Sayādaw to fulfil these duties. If he fails to do so, those who wish to hear the Dhamma will go to other monks who can teach. They will seek their own interest and this is no reason why their teacher should be embittered.

It is regrettable that in some villages the Sayādaws forbid their lay followers to attend lectures on meditation. If the talks conflict with the Tipiṭaka, such a prohibition may be well justified. Otherwise it is a grave misdeed, so the bhikkhus should be on guard against this kind of meanness. Among lay people, too, it is meanness to seek exclusive association with certain persons. However, it is good-will and not meanness to disapprove of a friend's association with a person of undesirable character.

There are many people who have various objectives and spread various views. Some teach doctrines that are diametrically opposed to the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha urged his disciples to avoid evil, do good and develop tranquillity and insight-knowledge. Some

teachers say just the opposite. They would have us believe that if we realise the truth as proclaimed by them, we are assured of salvation and there is no need to avoid evil, do good, or develop the mind. Some call themselves Arahants. Some claim Buddhahood, saying that a knowledge of the Four Noble Truths mean the enlightenment of the Buddha. Yet they are not free from sensual desires. There are people who encourage such teachers. It is a pity that they are so ignorant and follow the false teachings that they mistake for the true Dhamma. They are led astray in spite of their desire to know the true doctrine. I think it would be better for them to remain ordinary Buddhists by birth without any interest in their religion rather than accept wrong-views.

We have been giving instructions in insight meditation based on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and in accordance with the Tipiṭaka and the Commentaries, for thirty-two years. Sixty thousand meditators have practised according to our instructions during these years. Among them are learned monks and hundreds of laymen. These learned meditators can evaluate our teaching accurately. Then there are thousands of people who have meditated seriously although they have no knowledge of the scriptures. With their clear insight, which they have gained independently, they can distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Most of those who meditated at our centres wished to attain transcendental knowledge and its result. If we had not taught them the Satipaṭṭhāna method, some would have been misled by false teachings. Those who have seriously practised the Dhamma under our guidance may hear talks by any teacher. We do not prevent them from doing so. They are in a position to think and judge for themselves.

It is our duty to instruct our disciples so that they may know the true Dhamma and have spiritual experience. Likewise, those who have a thorough knowledge of our methods propagate it elsewhere. Sometimes we have to point out the mistakes of other teachers. Herein, our intention is to keep our disciples off the wrong path. This is the teacher's duty — it has nothing to do with meanness. Meanness in regard to followers is pure selfishness regardless of the interest of others, the only motivation being the desire to have exclusive influence over them. However, to point out the mistakes of others for the edification of their disciples is not meanness, but the duty of the teacher.

## Meanness Regarding Property

*Lābha macchhariya* is the desire to keep things only for oneself, to deny them to others, to use a thing selfishly without sharing it with others. Bhikkhus have property, which may be summed up as food, robes, abode, and medicine. Food means all things that we can eat or drink. All articles of clothing are to be regarded as robes. All dwelling places together with means of transport are included in abodes. Medicine means all things related to health. It is meanness for a monk to wish to be the exclusive recipient of these things from the laity, to begrudge his fellow-monks the offerings made by their lay followers, or to have no desire to share his property with other monks or his pupils.

Some monks are so miserly that they do not eat the food they have, nor do they give it to their pupils so that it has to be thrown away when it becomes rotten. Some monks hoard robes, which are found to be useless after their death. Meanness regarding property is also found among lay people. There is a story of a married couple who quarrelled while taking their meals because one ate more than the other.

Businessmen do not want to see their rivals booming. A mill-owner once told me that formerly it was painful to him to hear the siren of another mill, a sign of envy that he overcame only through meditation. Some monks may cause damage to the thing they have acquired; it may rot from want of use, it may be given to unsuitable persons, or it may be sold for profit. We should therefore assume that it is not meanness to wish to see a monk or a layman denied certain things, if we think that he may use them improperly.

## Meanness Regarding Virtues

*Vaṇṇa* means any praiseworthy quality and it is *vaṇṇa macchhariya* to begrudge a person any quality such as physical beauty, a pleasing voice, fluent speaking, physical strength, intelligence, scholarship, or morality. Some people desire these qualities, but do not want to see them possessed by others. Some want to distinguish themselves in learning, but they do not wish to see others so distinguished. Some want to be virtuous, but they do not want to hear of the good moral character of other people. These are examples of meanness that usually arise in connection with those who are one's peers or those whom one dislikes.

## **Meanness Regarding Learning**

*Dhamma macchhariya* is meanness in respect of the knowledge of the Dhamma. Some do not wish to see others well-versed in the Pāli texts, so they do not teach their pupils thoroughly, but keep something to themselves. They are reluctant to lend important books. These are signs of meanness, but this kind of meanness was more common in ancient times when there was not much writing and monks had to rely on memory for their knowledge. Nowadays it is not dominant because of the abundance of books. Still it may assert itself in connection with rare books. If reluctance to lend books is due to respect for them it is not meanness. It is meanness regarding property if there is the desire to deny others the use of books and meanness regarding the Dhamma if it is to deny knowledge to them.

Meanness does not arise with regard to transcendental knowledge. The meditator who has attained the noble path and its fruition never stoops to such meanness. On the contrary he or she wants to share this knowledge with others. If a person considers himself or herself to be a noble one, and yet begrudges others a similar or higher spiritual status he or she should face the fact that he or she is not really enlightened. The meditators who have practised at our centre convey the message of the Dhamma to their friends. Some have attained only the lower stages of insight such as knowledge of arising and passing away, yet they urge their friends to seek such illuminations.

This augurs well for the future of the Buddha's teaching. Nowadays, lay people establish meditation centres, build retreats for the meditators, support meditation teachers, attend talks on meditation and urge others to practise it. This shows that they are free from meanness regarding the Dhamma, and that they want to share their experience with others. However, a meditator who has had unusual experience does not reveal it because he or she has no wish to take pride in that attainment. This is fewness of wishes, or modesty in regard to spiritual experience.

We should overcome meanness by regarding it as an unwholesome, ignoble, and unworthy state of consciousness. It leads to unwholesome deeds and often dominates lower forms of life. It is found to a high degree in dogs, which are very mean in some respects. Other animals are considerate and helpful among their own species, but dogs will pursue and bite another dog that comes

from elsewhere, or if they lack courage, they will bark and drive it away. Throw a bone to two dogs that are playing together and the stronger of them will growl and grab it. Meanness such as that is latent in such animals should not be allowed to defile a man of noble character. Bearing this in mind, you should overcome it through mindfulness or seek to uproot it through enlightenment.

### The Fetters of Suffering

In the Sakkapañha Sutta the Buddha describes envy (*issā*) and meanness (*macchariya*) as the two defilements that cause suffering and frustration among living beings. Sakka, the king of gods asked the Buddha why human beings, gods, and animals in the sensual realm are suffering although they all want to live happily. No doubt all living beings are alike in their desire for happiness and yet they quarrel with one another, becoming wretched and miserable. According to the Buddha's reply, the whole world is mired in conflict and suffering because of envy and meanness. If we can root out these two defilements, the world will be a very nice place just like a home where parents and children live happily in an atmosphere of good-will and harmony. We should refuse to harbour these two defilements after wise reflection, remove them through mindfulness, deny them an outlet by noting all psychophysical phenomena arising from the senses, and root them out through the noble path.

According to the Commentaries, envy and meanness are eradicated at the first stage of the path. In my discourse I have described ego-belief, doubt, attachment to rites and ceremonies, envy and meanness as the five fetters that a meditator casts off at Stream-winning. However, the Suttanta Piṭaka only refers to the conquest of ego-belief, doubt, and attachment to rites and ceremonies.

The Aṅguttaranikāya mentions four pairs of defilements that are harmful to meditators under training. These are anger and malice, ingratitude and rivalry, envy and meanness, hypocrisy and deceit. The Commentary explains the Pāli text as implying that these defilements rule out the possibility of any advance to a higher stage in the case of the seven kinds of noble disciples.

As for the ordinary person, he or she will not make a start on the spiritual path if beset with these defilements. On the authority of the Pāli text and the Commentary it is to be assumed that the Stream-

winner, who is one of the seven kinds of noble disciples, will not make any progress if he or she harbours envy and meanness. In other words, it means that he or she is not yet free from envy and meanness.

However, it is hard to draw any definite conclusions. Among the seven noble disciples are the four meditators at the moment of the attainment of the holy path. At that moment they cannot have anger, malice, or other defilements; and it is hard to discount the possibility of their higher attainments. In particular, the meditator who has attained Arahantship will never revert to a lower stage. The Commentary also includes the four meditators in the category of seven disciples under training.

Moreover, envy, hypocrisy, deceit, *etc.*, are so base that there can be no room for them in the minds of the noble ones. The Commentaries describe them as defilements that are eradicated at the first stage. We may assume then that a Stream-winner is free from these six defilements. If we are not free from them, we should practise mindfulness until freedom is attained. Now we will describe the other remaining fetters.

### Hypocrisy (30)

Hypocrisy (*sātheyya*) is the tendency to simulate and boast of virtues or qualities that one does not possess. One may pretend to have moral purity, scholarship, and experience in mental development, without having these qualities. The noble ones do not make such pretensions—they do not brag about their attainments because they are straightforward. The worst kind of hypocrisy is to make pretensions to psychic-powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance, recall of past lives and unusual transcendental experience. The bhikkhu who is guilty of this offence ceases to be a member of the Saṅgha. For the layman, too, it is the most serious of all kinds of falsehood to pretend to have psychic-power or transcendent knowledge.

It is vital to be free from hypocrisy. Ancient scholars translated *sātheyya* as “cunning.” This is a good translation, but one who cheats is also said to be cunning. The word is not as precise and appropriate as “hypocrisy,” which lays stress on the pretentiousness and empty boasting associated with “*sātheyya*,” so I have translated it as “hypocrisy.” Sincerity and freedom from hypocrisy are vital to the practice of meditation. Hence sincerity is described as an element of effort.

## Elements of Effort

There are five elements of effort:-

1. One must have faith in the supreme enlightenment of the Buddha. One must believe that the Buddha's teaching was based on his omniscience. Nowadays it is necessary for the meditator to have faith in meditation teachers as well as in the method of meditation. Without faith there will be no effort. Faith in the Buddha is essential to effort.

2. One must be healthy and free from disease because only the healthy meditator can exert all-out, strenuous effort regardless of physical strain and discomfort. The zealous meditator need not bother about minor physical afflictions for he is likely to overcome them while meditating. Some even attain the path and fruition through meditating on their death-bed. Nevertheless an intensive and lifelong effort presupposes good health and the meditator should seek it.

3. One must not pretend to have a quality that one does not have and one should admit one's defects instead of concealing them. The meditator should make a clean breast of his or her state of mind to the teacher or to fellow meditators. A meditator's relationship to a teacher is like that of a patient to a doctor. A doctor can cure the patient only if the patient reveals his or her symptoms truthfully. Likewise, a teacher can give the right instructions only if the meditator reports his or her true experiences. The teacher cannot help if the meditator does not give an accurate account, or fails to admit defects such as dozing off during meditation. Sincerity without any pretence or concealment is the basis of effort. It is an antidote to hypocrisy.

4. The meditator must apply his energy with steadfastness and intensity in his effort to overcome defilement and establish wholesome states of consciousness. He must exert energy regardless of whatever may happen to his physical body. He should resolve to persist in his effort even if, as a result, his flesh and blood wither away, leaving only the skin, sinews, and bones. Here the withering away of flesh and blood is one factor while residue of skin, sinews, and bones constitute the other three factors of energy. Hence the energy that the meditator needs is called four-factored energy (*caturāṅgavīriya*).

5. The meditator must have the insight-knowledge of the arising and passing away of mind and matter. You cannot have this insight before taking up meditation, or at an early stage. Strenuous effort

may ensure it within a week, one percent of the meditators may attain it within three or four days. It may take some meditators ten or fifteen days to attain it because of their low intelligence or inadequate effort. Some do not have it even after a month because of other defects. In any event the insight usually dawns on the energetic meditator within a week on the average. It makes the meditator ecstatic as he is then full of joy, faith, vigilance, and zeal for further effort. Moreover, the meditator who attains this insight is bound to become a noble one in a few more days if he or she continues to strive.

Thus the five elements of effort are faith, health, sincerity, energy, and insight. These five qualities are essential to success in meditation and the attainment of unusual experience in this life. The meditator may initially possess faith, health, and sincerity, but for some meditators faith and sincerity get an impetus with the attainment of concentration. Real effort depends on the meditator's energy.

Wholehearted exertion of energy brings about insight into arising and passing away in a few days. The state of consciousness accompanying this insight is marked by visions of light, ecstasy, and joy pervading the whole body. The meditator feels very comfortable, happy in both body and mind. While seated or walking, the body appears to be in the air above the floor and in some cases it actually is. The attention is very keen. The meditator appears to remember everything without much effort. The intellect is quickly aware of every phase of arising and passing away. The meditator is full of energy and determination to go on with the practice of mindfulness to the end. Some who had to leave our centre just after they attained this insight because of unavoidable circumstances are still enthusiastic and they would seize the first opportunity to come back. Most of them do come back and usually complete their training.

### **Need for Serious Effort**

Some meditators lack serious effort because their faith is weak and as a result they do not develop concentration and cannot describe the distinction between mind and matter. Although they practise meditation for one or two months, they do not have any unusual experience and so they are sceptical about the reported experience of other meditators. Their attitude is in tune with the empiricism of modern age, but they should take into account their



failure to meditate seriously. One who is not serious about anything cannot have any unusual experience that it promises.

Moreover, it makes little sense to insist in every case that only seeing is believing. Telescopes make visible objects that one cannot see with the naked eye. We have to believe what some people say about some parts of the world that they have visited, but that will forever remain just geographical names for us. Accounts of man's landing on the moon have to be accepted although it impossible for us to go there.

The nature of spiritual experience is very subtle. One may not have it for want of intellectual basis or of adequate effort. Failure to have the experience may be due to kamma, karmic result (*vipāka*), unwholesome tendencies, or views opposed to the noble path (*ariyapavāda*). However, it can be attributed largely to lack of effort and non-attainment of concentration. The meditators who thus fail to have experience are not more than two percent. This failure is damaging to their already poor faith, so it would have been better if they had never taken up meditation.

Those who meditate seriously are assured of unusual experience. First-hand reports by some meditators are very clear, and such meditators are to be found among monks, men, and women, both young and old. Some are just eleven or twelve years old and have never studied the scriptures. However, their report is explicit, unequivocal, and accords with the Pāli texts. It sounds credible to those who have not had the experience, and it is an inspiration to those who wish to follow their example. If, thus inspired, a meditator practises mindfulness, he will soon attain the knowledge of arising and passing away that leads to the path and its fruition.

### Invitation by the Buddha

“Let a sincere, straightforward person come to me and practise the Dhamma in accordance with my teaching. I assure him of Arahantship at most within seven years or at least within seven days.” Thus the Blessed One boldly invites everyone to give his teaching a trial. In the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta the Buddha even promises that those who receive instruction in the evening and practise will have the unusual experience in the next morning while those who receive instruction in the morning and practise will have the experience in the evening.

True to this teaching, the wise and sincere disciples of the Buddha had the experience. They became Arahants or Non-returners within at most seven years or at least seven days. Those who had the experience within seven years or seven days were, says the Commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, middle class people among the well-instructed disciples (*neyya puggala*). The higher disciples had the experience in one day or one night as proclaimed by the Buddha.

### **Rarity of Enlightenment Within A Week**

As far as we know, nowadays it is very hard to find a disciple who had the transcendent experience in a week, let alone one who had it within a day or a night. Some teachers claim to be able to give such instructions as will ensure unusual insight at one sitting. We welcome their claim if there is any basis for it. Some even say that one can have insight-knowledge merely by listening to their discourse and knowing the truth, thus making further effort unnecessary. This may be gratifying to lazy people. We must not forget, however, the fact that even the Buddha himself enjoined the practice of the Dhamma on well-instructed disciples, who could not have the insight merely by listening to his discourses.

### **The Buddha's First Discourse**

The Buddha's first discourse was the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. The only human beings who heard the discourse were the five ascetics. Only one of the five, Koṇḍañña, attained the first stage and fruition while listening to the Dhamma. The other four did not have the insight so easily. They had to meditate after the end of the discourse in accordance with the Buddha's instructions. Of the four it took Vappa one day, and Bhaddiya two days to attain the first stage. Rāhula, the son of the Buddha started meditating at the age of seven, but he became an Arahant only after ordination at twenty.

Mahā-Moggallāna attained Arahantship after meditating for seven days at the Stream-winning stage while Sāriputta attained it after meditating for fifteen days as a Stream-winner. Ānanda won final liberation three months after the Blessed One's *parinibbāna* by practising walking meditation strenuously for the whole night.

In view of these statements in the scriptures it is safe to assume that listening to a discourse or knowledge by itself does not ensure

insight, that practice is essential to its development. If it were otherwise, the Blessed One would not have urged his disciples to practise the Dhamma. Venerable Ānanda had heard, and was quite familiar with all of the teachings of the Buddha, yet he had to meditate intensively for the whole night to gain final liberation. So it is not just knowledge, but the thorough practice of tranquillity and insight meditation that enables a meditator to overcome defilements and realise nibbāna.

### **Mindfulness While Listening to the Dhamma**

Bhikkhu Koṇḍañña became a Stream-winner while listening to the first discourse. All the five disciples became Arahants while listening to the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. It was a single verse that made the minister Santati an Arahant, and it was also a certain verse that enabled Bhikkhuṇi Paṭācārā to become a Stream-winner.

According to the Commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, those who attained the path and fruition did so after applying one of the four methods of the sutta. The Commentary says: “There are those who attain the noble path and fruition by merely hearing a stanza. However, such an attainment is impossible without contemplation or mindfulness of the body, the feeling, the consciousness, or the mental-object. Those who attain the path and fruition do so and overcome grief and anguish only through the Satipaṭṭhāna way of meditation.”

It is true that the minister Santati and Paṭācārā became an Arahant and a Stream-winner respectively and got over their sufferings after hearing a stanza. However, they attained the noble path only through the practice of mindfulness in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna method. The Commentary leaves in no doubt the paramount importance of Satipaṭṭhāna meditation. There is no scriptural authority for the view that knowledge and understanding suffice to lead a meditator to the path, that there is no need for effort. In fact, this view conflicts with the Buddha’s teaching.

In many discourses the Buddha stressed the need for the development of tranquillity and insight. In the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta the disciple is urged to realise the truth of the noble path. In the Anattalakkhaṇa and other suttas the disciple is exhorted to realise the three characteristics of the five aggregates. The Sāmaññaphala Sutta of the Dīghanikāya and other teachings

stress the need for the development of tranquillity, absorption, attainments (*samāpatti*), and insight-knowledge. In the Sagāthāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya the Buddha says that the development of concentration and insight frees one from the entanglement of craving. The Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta urges the disciple to practise the four kinds of mindfulness. In the Saccasaṃyutta the disciple is exhorted to realise the four noble truths.

Intense exertion of energy as an element of effort is emphasised by the Buddha. “Let there remain only the skin, the sinews, and the bones. Let the flesh and blood wither away. I will persist ceaselessly in my effort until I attain the path and its fruit.” With such affirmation of will, the meditator should exert his effort intensely.<sup>1</sup> In the Mahāgosiṅga Sutta<sup>2</sup> of the Majjhimanikāya, the Buddha advises the disciples to meditate after affirming his will not to change his cross-legged sitting posture until he is liberated from defilements.

On the eve of the full-moon of May, the day on which he attained Enlightenment, the Blessed One sat fortified by such a resolution and strove the whole night; then he attained the knowledge of former lives (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*) in the first part of the night, the divine-eye (*dibbacakkhu*) in the middle part of the night, and in the third part of the night he reflected on dependent origination and the arising and passing away of the aggregates, developing insight-knowledge. He perfected his insight by various kinds of mindfulness, e.g., the material septad (*rūpasattaka*),<sup>3</sup> the immaterial septad (*nāmasattaka*), as mentioned in the Visuddhimagga. Then after passing through the four stages of the noble path and their fruitions he became the Buddha. It was on the basis of his experience that Buddha urged his disciples to strive hard for Arahantship at one sitting.

Thus the Buddha’s insistence on strenuous effort in many suttas gives the lie to the view that knowledge by itself ensures transcendent insight, that no effort is needed. Do not let your teacher’s verdict or assurance make you complacent. You should examine yourself to see whether your experience brings about the extinction of defilements.

<sup>1</sup> Dasabala Sutta, S.ii.27, and Upaṇṇāta Sutta, A.i.50.    <sup>2</sup> M.i.219.

<sup>3</sup> I found a reference to *rūpasattaka* at Vism. 618 in the chapter on knowledge of what is the path and what is not the path, and *arūpasattaka* at Vism. 626, but no reference to *nāmasattaka*. I suspect that the immaterial septad is what the Sayādaw was referring to. I think that here it is enough to say that the Bodhisatta gained a thorough comprehension of mind and matter. (Editor’s note)

I have been giving instructions in meditation for thirty-two years. To my knowledge those who can fully recount their spiritual experience in a week are hard to come by. Most of them can do so only after twenty or thirty days or even after three or four months. However, those who follow my instructions and practise steadfastly usually report their experiences after a month. I now urge the meditators to regard a month or just over a month as the norm for the period required for the successful practice of meditation. It will not do to think, as some people do, that one month is too short a period for practising meditation. The Buddha promised Non-returning or Arahantship to those who followed his advice and so to say that it is impossible to gain insight after a month is to deprecate the Buddha's teaching and to discourage the meditators.

### **Right Method, Sincerity, and Diligence**

What is important is that the meditators should follow the method that is in accordance with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and other teachings. He must be free from hypocrisy and deceit, he should be sincere and candid, and he should follow the instructions according to the Buddha's teaching. The meditator practises mindfulness constantly as instructed and reports his experience to the teacher. The teachers note the meditator's progress and his account of contact with *nibbāna* on the level of a noble one. They urge the meditator to continue his practice. When they consider his progress satisfactory, they tell him about the stages in the development of insight-knowledge, the path and its fruition. Then the meditator assesses his progress on the basis of what he learns from us and determines the stage he has attained.

We do not pass judgment on his attainment, but let him judge for himself. Yet some people criticise us, thinking that we give a verdict, but this is a misapprehension. Some look askance at our non-commitment, wondering why the teacher should not be able to specify the stage of a meditator's progress. However, our non-committal attitude is in keeping with the Buddhist tradition in that apart from the Buddha even the Venerable *Sāriputta* did not declare any meditator to be a Stream-winner, a Non-returner, or an Arahant.

Furthermore, a meditation teacher is like a physician. In olden days physicians did not have any instrument to test the physical condition of a patient. They had to diagnose the disease by examining the

patient's condition, feeling his pulse and listening to what he said. If the patient did not speak the truth, the physician went astray. Likewise, if the meditator does not report accurately, the teacher may be mistaken in his judgment. So the practising meditator should be free from pretence and hypocrisy, and forthright in reporting his experience. It is best for the teacher to note all that the meditator says, tell him about the stages of insight, and then let him judge for himself.

### **Deceitfulness (31)**

Deceitfulness (*māyā*) is the tendency to hide one's faults to deceive others. I made allusions to deceit when I talked about hypocrisy. Some seek to cover their moral lapses behind a facade of talk on the dangers of immorality and the blessings of a moral life, which is designed to deceive others. The aim of some who practise austerities (*dhutaṅga*) and meditation is not to enhance their prestige, but to cover their moral laxity. This is not hypocrisy, but deceit. It is deceitfulness on the part of some workers to idle away their time and then to work hard in the presence of their superior, or to submit biased reports. It is deceit to speak to a person as if one is interested in his welfare while covertly saying or doing things that are harmful to him. It is deceit to tell a teacher that one follows his instruction when in fact one does not. In brief, all attempts to hide one's faults are deceit.

It is a defilement that you should try to overcome. If you have it, you must confess it to your teacher or your fellow-meditators. According to the Commentary, the meditator overcomes deceit and hypocrisy at the stage of Stream-winning. Since they are defilements, there is no room for them in the mind of the noble ones.

### **Disrespect (32)**

Those who have excessive pride usually do not have respect for a person who is worthy of respect. If one does not pay respect to, make room for, or give way to a worthy person; it is a sign of pride and arrogance. A worthy person here means a grandfather, a grandmother, a father, a mother, a teacher or any other aged person. It may also mean a person whose moral and spiritual life is much higher than yours. According to the Buddha's teaching in the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, those who lack respect for a worthy person are reborn in hell after death, and on return to the human world are reborn in the lower

classes; while respect for a worthy person leads to the celestial realms and to rebirth as human beings in noble families.

### Over-estimation (33)

Pride (*māna*) means having a high opinion of oneself and a low opinion of others. Over-estimation (*atimāna*) is excessive pride. Pride is totally extinct only in the Arahant and so it is a defilement that few bhikkhus and meditators can overcome. Excessive pride of some people is an obstacle to their social relations and prosperity. Few people wish to have any relation with a conceited person. His friends and followers gradually dwindle, his superiors dislike him and at last he becomes isolated.

Among religious teachers, too, there are some who harbour excessive pride. Their sayings and writings clearly betray their conceit. They commit indiscretions and excesses in speaking and writing. A conceited teacher tends to belittle others and portray himself as peerless in respect of moral purity and learning. Although he may be a Sayādaw who is fully qualified in every respect, he will not prosper and have much success in life. His books may be remarkable, but few people will esteem them highly.

The best thing is to be humble. However, the difficulty is that a proud man is usually unconscious of his pride. His pride may be beyond control in spite of other people's advice. On the other hand, he may impute pride to those who do not agree with him. As a result, he finds it hard to have cordial relations with others. Such an experience should make him aware of his excessive pride and help him to control it.

### The Elder Sāriputta's Humility

The humility of the Elder Sāriputta is exemplary. With the Buddha's permission Sāriputta and Moggallāna once set out to visit towns and villages. Seeing Sāriputta accompanied by many monks, a certain bhikkhu became envious and just to obstruct their journey he reported to the Blessed One that Sāriputta bumped against him, but went on his way without making an apology. In fact, he made this charge just because of an accidental brush with the end of the elder's robe.

Thereupon the Buddha summoned Sāriputta and in the assembly of the Saṅgha the Blessed One asked him about the monk's allegation.

Sāriputta's reply was as follows: "A bhikkhu who is unmindful of his physical body may bump against his fellow-bhikkhu and go on his way without an apology. However, I regard myself as the earth," *etc.* What the elder meant is this: many things, both clean and unclean are thrown onto the earth, but the earth accepts everything without complaint or revulsion. Likewise, whatever others may say or do, he accepts it with equanimity. Similarly, he regards himself as water, fire, or air. Just as these elements remain unaffected by dirty things, so also he tolerates whatever others may say or do to him. Again, he regarded himself as a low-caste young man or woman. Caste is very important in India. A low-caste Caṇḍāla must not touch a high-caste brahmin. When a Caṇḍāla goes into the village of brahmins, he has to announce his coming by beating with a stick, thereby warning the villagers against physical contact with him. Sāriputta says that he has the kind of humility that characterises the Caṇḍāla's way of life. Again, a bull with broken horns does not molest any living being and is gentle. He regards himself as like that bull. He loathes his body just as a young man or woman who has bathed and adorned himself would loathe a dead dog or snake hanging round his or her neck. He sees this body as a burden that he has to bear, as a burden that is like a pot of animal fat that is leaking through many holes. Then the accusing monk was stricken with conscience and he apologised to Sāriputta for his unfounded allegation. The latter forgave him and even told him not to take his reply amiss.

We should emulate the Elder Sāriputta's example as far as possible. Even if we cannot overcome pride, we should try to overcome over-estimation. Pride is of two kinds: pride arising from possession of certain qualities such as intelligence, knowledge, moral character, *etc.*, and pride due to delusion regarding a quality that one does not possess, as when one wrongly considers oneself to be intelligent or noble. Ordinary persons are not free from these two kinds of pride. We should seek to eradicate the pride due to delusion. Over-estimation is removed at the stage of Stream-winning, but the meditator is not yet free from pride regarding the possession of genuine virtues. All pride is removed only on the attainment of Arahantship.

### **Stubbornness (34)**

Docility is one of the qualities that the Buddha enjoined on his followers because it helps to lessen defilements. Many people are



far from docile. They do not care for the advice of their teachers and superiors. Some children disobey their parents, some pupils disobey their teachers, some disobey their superiors or leaders and some ignore the advice of their friends. Arrogant, strong-willed, and impulsive, they are notorious for their intractability.

Charges of stubbornness against some persons stem from ill-will and so they are not to blame for their attitude of mind. It is important to heed rational advice motivated by love and compassion. Moreover, we should follow the teaching that tells us not to oppress others. A person who disregards sound advice is difficult to speak to (*dubbaca*). The bhikkhu who was especially notorious in this respect in the time of the Buddha was Channa.

Bhikkhu Channa was not an ordinary person. He was Prince Siddhattha's attendant who accompanied the Bodhisatta when the latter set out to become an ascetic. Later on he joined the Saṅgha. He did not live in accordance with the Vinaya rules and so he was taken to task by his fellow-monks. However, he would not accept their admonition. He retorted that he was not an ordinary bhikkhu, that he was the personal attendant of the Bodhisatta when he renounced the world, that he went along with the prince as far as the bank of the Anomā river and that he served the needs of the prince at that time. As the veteran follower of the Buddha, he would not heed the advice of upstarts like Sāriputta and Moggallāna.

This led the Buddha to lay down a rule and what the rule says about admonition to a fellow-monk in the Saṅgha is very remarkable. If a monk turns out to be wilful and disobedient when he is reasonably admonished by his fellow-monks, they should say to him thus: "Venerable sir, do not regard yourself as above the admonition of your fellow-monks. Consider yourself to be in need of admonition. Admonish other monks if necessary. Other monks will admonish you on occasion. Mutual admonition will contribute to the prosperity of the Buddhadhamma."

However, Bhikkhu Channa remained intractable, so he did not attain enlightenment until after the Buddha passed away. After the Blessed One's *parinibbāna* the Saṅgha imposed the penalty called *brahmadanda* on him as instructed by the Buddha. The penalty told the bhikkhus to let Channa say what he liked and to avoid admonishing or speaking to him. The penalty brought Channa to his senses. He realised how social

ostracism would be disastrous for him. He ceased to be arrogant, practised the Dhamma faithfully and at last became an Arahant.

### **Docility is Essential to Moral Progress**

Among laymen and in the Saṅgha, docility is vital to good manners and moral welfare. If we resent admonition and do not speak to one another, we will remain barbarous like animals and make no moral progress. Once, when some bhikkhus were about to spend the Rains at a certain place in Kosala country, they vowed to avoid speaking to one another so that there might be no friction and disharmony among them. At the end of the Rains they went and paid respect to the Buddha. They told the Blessed One that they had fared well during the Rains because of their vow of silence. On hearing this the Blessed One blamed them, saying "You say you fared well when in fact you did not. To live together without speaking to one another is the way of life among animals such as sheep or goats. It is the life-style of non-believers, of enemies living together." Then the Buddha laid down a rule for bhikkhus forbidding the practice of silence.

The vow of silence that is undertaken by some meditators nowadays needs consideration. It is not advisable to commit oneself to total silence while under the vow. It is better to avoid talking on worldly or unimportant matters. The meditator should make exceptions and occasionally talk on matters that concern the Dhamma or that are vital to his interests. Such talk may be conducive to his material and spiritual welfare.

Those who live together should talk to one another. What a person says should be considered seriously and accepted if appropriate. We must welcome criticism that points out our mistakes and defects. This is more important for the meditator. He should change his behaviour or life-style in the light of what fellow meditators say. Needless to say, he should pay special attention to the advice of his teacher. Hence the Buddha's emphasis on the need for docility that contributes to the unity and prosperity of any society.

### **Evil Friends (35)**

*Pāpamitta* means an evil friend. Here, friend is to be understood in the sense of a person whom one regards as a teacher. Evil companionship means dependence on an evil teacher. A good friend

(*kalyāṇamitta*) is dependable in the role of a teacher, so a good friend is a skilful teacher. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, a book of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, differentiates a good friend from an evil friend as follows:

An evil friend has no faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. He does not believe in kamma. He has no moral integrity. He is fond of sensual pleasures even though he may be giving profound lessons in meditation. He has little knowledge of the Buddha's teaching; nor has he any experience in real tranquillity and wisdom. You must beware of those who tell you not to follow the wrong teacher when they, in fact, have little knowledge. Furthermore, the evil friend is full of envy. He fears lest his followers should have faith in other teachers. He has no transcendent knowledge such as insight into the arising and passing away of all phenomena.

One who lacks faith, morality, knowledge, and wisdom; and is envious of others is an evil friend. We may associate with such a person in business or worldly affairs, but he should be given a wide berth as a teacher for spiritual guidance. Since he lacks faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, his words and behaviour will undermine our own faith. He does not accept the law of kamma and his cynicism is infectious. Teaching the futility of a moral life, he avoids no evil and does no good. His disciples follow suit, resulting in their moral decline.

One who relies on an immoral teacher is misled morally. One who relies on an alcoholic teacher tends to become an alcoholic. An ignorant teacher has no respect for knowledge. Because of his ignorance, he does not have a high regard for learned persons. When he is criticised for statements that do not agree with the scriptures, he cannot argue persuasively and then he is apt to belittle the sacred books. He would have us believe that either the books or the learned persons are wrong. His disciples accept his views and they tend to scoff at the scholars and ancient writings. This is a terrible misdeed.

The jealous teacher prevents his disciples from giving alms elsewhere. Nor does he let them hear and practise the true teaching. The teacher who lacks genuine insight cannot help his disciples to develop it. He is likely to misrepresent the truth and create misunderstanding. One who has faith in such a teacher will never attain the right path. He tends to speak ill of those who point out the right path.

The evil teachers in the lifetime of the Buddha were Purāṇa Kassapa and five other leaders of religions. Those who followed their

teachings did not have the opportunity to see the Buddha. Some disparaged the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, thereby committing unwholesome kamma. Devadatta is also described as an evil teacher in the Commentary. Those who followed Devadatta suffered terribly.

### **The Story of Ajātasattu and Devadatta**

Prince Ajātasattu was a follower of Devadatta. Devadatta said to the prince, “In ancient times people lived for a long time, so, although princes became kings only after the death of their fathers, they still had a long time to indulge in royal pleasures. Nowadays people do not live long, so by the time you succeed your father, you will be old, and will have only a few years left to reign. Why not kill your father now and become king?” Acting on the advice of his evil teacher, the prince imprisoned his father, starved him, and finally had his heels cut with a razor, covered with salt, and heated. The king died and Ajātasattu had to bear the grave karmic burden for the murder of his father. Later he became repentant and went to see the Buddha. The Blessed One gave a discourse on the advantages of a bhikkhu’s life — the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*.<sup>1</sup> If not for his parricide, the king would have attained Stream-winning after hearing the discourse. As it was, the heinous crime against his father caused an obstruction. After his death he was reborn in the Lohakumbhi hell. Ajātasattu suffered this calamity, because of his faith in an evil teacher.

### **Devadatta’s Demands**

Devadatta planned a schism after consultation with his three followers. He went to the Buddha with three monks and requested the Blessed One to lay down five rules of conduct for the bhikkhus. These rules were:

1. All bhikkhus should live permanently in the forest. If they lived in villages they should be declared guilty of an offence.
2. They should eat only the food that they obtained by begging. They were to be declared guilty if they accepted the food offered by a layman who had invited them.
3. They should dwell at the foot of trees. If they took shelter, they were to be declared guilty.

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<sup>1</sup> Di.47.

4. They should wear only cast-off rags. They were to be declared guilty if they accepted robes offered by the laymen.
5. They should be vegetarians. Those who ate fish or meat were to be declared guilty.

It is not improper for bhikkhus to follow any of these rules. However, if these were prescribed by the Buddha, it would be hard for them to abide by all the rules. During the first year of the Buddha's ministry the bhikkhus lived only in forest retreats. They ate only what they got by begging and spent their time at the foot of trees. However, seeing that it would be difficult for some of them to live so austere in the future, the Blessed One made these ascetic practices voluntary. Monks were permitted to dwell at the foot of trees except during the four months of the rainy season. It was not improper for them to eat meat provided they did not see, hear, or suspect that an animal had been killed expressly for their meals. The Buddha permitted the monks to choose some ascetic practices as they saw fit, so he turned down Devadatta's proposals.

Taking advantage of the Buddha's disagreement with him, Devadatta requested the Saṅgha to express their opinion by votes on his proposals that, he said, were conducive to the lessening of desire. The ignorant young monks of Vajjī state supported him. He took five hundred monks with him to Gayāsisa. In compliance with the wish of the Buddha, the Elders Sāriputta and Moggallāna went there to enlighten the misguided monks.

When they arrived there, Devadatta was teaching the young monks. On seeing the two Elders, he said to his disciples, "Look! The two chief disciples of Samaṇa Gotama like my teaching so much that they are coming to me." Then Kokālika, one of his followers warned him, "These two monks have evil wishes. They follow the dictates of evil wishes. Do not be intimate with them." Kokālika was projecting on to the two elders the evil wishes that he held as the follower of the evil-minded Devadatta. It was like a lunatic calling others lunatics.

Despite this warning, Devadatta welcomed the two chief disciples because he thought that he had won them over to his teaching. He offered them seats, but they sat elsewhere. He talked far into the night and then told Sāriputta to give a talk since the monks were not yet sleepy, and he needed to take a rest. He lay down with his right shoulder on the robe. He was imitating what

the Buddha usually said and did on similar occasions. The Buddha did not fall asleep when he lay down to rest. He used to express approval of the disciple's discourse when it came to an end. However, Devadatta was unmindful and he fell asleep at once.

Sāriputta pointed out what was passing in the minds of the monks and told them to practise self-restraint. Moggallāna performed miracles and taught the Dhamma. The talks must have been very interesting for while listening, those five hundred monks attained Stream-winning. With the two chief disciples they all went back to Rājagaha where the Buddha was residing.

Kokālika was furious and he woke Devadatta by kicking him in the chest. "Now all your disciples are gone," he shouted at his teacher. "Didn't I tell you that Sāriputta and Moggallāna are evil-minded, that you should not trust them?"

Kokālika's words need consideration. As the follower of the evil-minded Devadatta, he imputed evil motives to the pure and noble minded monks, Sāriputta and Moggallāna. This shows that he was infected by the evil mind of his teacher. He wronged noble persons verbally because he had relied on an evil-minded teacher. You should avoid an evil friend, one who is envious and lacks faith, morality, knowledge, and wisdom.

### A Good Friend

On the other hand, a good friend has the opposite attributes. He has faith, moral integrity, knowledge, a generous heart, and wisdom. The best teacher and friend in the world is the Buddha. To rely on the Buddha is to rely on the best of teachers. Although the Buddha has attained *parinibbāna*, those who hear his teaching and revere his memory have the best teacher to rely on. In the lifetime of the Buddha, Sāriputta and Moggallāna ranked as second best teachers, Mahākassapa Anuruddha, *etc.*, as third best teachers. Later on the real Arahants, Non-returners, Once-returners, and Stream-winners are the best teachers in that order. Virtuous ordinary persons with faith rank below them as skilful teachers.

Nowadays it is hard to identify an Arahant or a noble one who has really attained the various stages of the path. Only the genuine and well-informed noble ones can assess the spiritual attainment of a person. If, as an ordinary student, one wants to find out a good

friend or teacher, one must apply the criteria of the Dhammasaṅgani Pāli text that we have mentioned — faith, morality, knowledge, a generous heart, and wisdom.

The good friend or teacher must have faith. He pays homage to the Buddha wholeheartedly and reverentially. Some people say that an Arahant need not pay such homage. However, according to the Commentary, an Arahant devoutly worshipped the great relic-shrine (*Mahācetiya*). The good friend or teacher also has faith in and respect for the Dhamma and Saṅgha. He believes in kamma, avoids unwholesome deeds, and does wholesome deeds. He urges others to be morally good like him. He has knowledge. He must be well-equipped with worldly knowledge if he is to be a skilful teacher in worldly life. The bhikkhus who do not meditate should have enough knowledge to teach their pupils such things as reading and writing without violating the Vinaya rules.

Some bhikkhus are well-versed in Pāli literature, but are poor in writing. They do badly even in spelling and their writing is likely to lower their estimation in the eyes of school teachers. Of course, the primary knowledge that a bhikkhu should seek is knowledge of the Dhamma. It is up to the meditation teacher to have two kinds of knowledge, that is, knowledge of the scriptures, and knowledge based on practice and experience. If the teacher is thus intellectually well-equipped, the disciple with inadequate knowledge can attain true insight by practising meditation according to the teacher's instructions.

It is easy to know the marks of a generous heart. A generous teacher gives away everything that he does not need to his disciples and fellow beings. Wisdom is what a good teacher gets by learning, contemplation, and the practice of meditation. The teacher must have insight-knowledge such as insight into the arising and passing away of all phenomena.

A teacher's talk clearly shows whether or not he has insight-knowledge. It is hard for an ordinary man to identify such knowledge. A well-read man may be in a better position to do so, but still it is not easy for a man without experience to recognise it. He may misunderstand what a teacher says on the basis of his experience or he may mistake purely academic knowledge for reality. More difficult to understand are insights associated with the path and fruition as well as knowledge of reviewing. We should regard a person as a good teacher if he has faith,

knowledge, *etc.*, and describes the nature of insight-knowledge on the basis of experience in accordance with the Tipitaka.

The Visuddhimagga describes a good meditation teacher as an affable person. He endears himself to others by virtue of his moral integrity, good-will, and loving-kindness that motivates his speech and actions. He must be worthy of respect. He will have this attribute if he has morality, tranquillity, and wisdom. He must be worthy of loving-kindness suffused by others. It is easy to suffuse loving-kindness to one who has good moral character and is inspired by loving-kindness in his speech and actions.

He must know how to teach and discipline other persons. If a disciple has defects and faults, the teacher must not connive at them, but must reprove him. This is an important qualification of a good teacher. His indifference on matters that call for reproof is harmful to the disciple's interest. He must be able to face criticism. Whatever the age of his critic, if the criticism is justified, he should welcome it and act accordingly, as in the case of the Elder Sāriputta who accepted the advice of a young novice.

On one occasion Sāriputta was so busy that his robe was slipping down. The way he wore the robe was out of keeping with the Vinaya rules, but since he had no desire to violate them, he was not guilty of any offence. Seeing his robe slipping, the young novice drew his attention to it. Sāriputta took the reminder in good grace, adjusted his robe and even asked, "Would this do, friend?"

A good teacher must be able to speak on profound subjects such as the aggregates, the sense-bases, the elements, the truths, Dependent Origination, insight and so forth. Unless the teacher is able to talk on these subjects, the disciple will not have the opportunity to practise meditation effectively despite his desire to do so.

He does not urge the disciple to do improper things. Some tell their disciples to do unwholesome things for their selfish ends. If the disciple acts on the instruction of such teachers, he usually comes to grief. If he speaks improperly, he is at the very least in for censure. If he commits a crime, he is punished for it. If he does unwholesome deeds, he is likely to be reborn in one of the four lower realms after death. So the teacher should not encourage disciples to do improper things.

These then are the essential qualifications of a good meditation teacher mentioned in the Visuddhimagga. These qualifications are



implicit in the five qualities: faith, morality, *etc.*, suggested in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Thus affability and the quality of deserving the loving-kindness of others presuppose morality. Respectability is the attribute of those who have morality, knowledge, and wisdom, and so are the ability to discipline others and the ability to accept advice. The ability to talk on profound subjects is based on knowledge and wisdom. Thus the qualities of a good teacher according to the Visuddhimagga and Dhammasaṅgaṇī are basically the same.

### Heedlessness (36)

I have often talked about heedlessness (*pamāda*). We are apt to be heedless in practical matters as well as in spiritual affairs. We put something down somewhere and lose it because we forget to take it when we leave. We lose articles that we forget to keep with us while travelling by car, train, or ship. We suffer financially or otherwise when we neglect to do certain things. Such heedlessness in daily life is harmful. Negligence in alms-giving, morality, *etc.*, is heedlessness in spiritual matters. Such heedlessness is explained in the Khuddakavattu-vibhaṅga as follows:—“What is the nature of heedlessness? It means lack of restraint in regard to unwholesome deeds, unwholesome speech, unwholesome thoughts, and five sensual objects.”

Lack of restraint in regard to misdeeds is a kind of heedlessness. By misdeeds we mean taking life, stealing, and illicit sex. When you think of killing or when you are killing, you give free rein to your desire to kill. At that moment you forget that you should avoid killing. The same may be said of other two kinds of misdeeds — stealing and illicit sex.

Lack of restraint in respect of the four kinds of wrong speech also means heedlessness. It means forgetting the fact that one should avoid lying, slander, abuse, and idle chatter. Hence it is a kind of heedlessness. So too is lack of restraint regarding unwholesome thoughts, such as the intention to obtain another man’s property unlawfully, the desire to kill, or scepticism about the law of kamma. It means forgetting the fact that it is good to have no desire for other people’s property, to cultivate good-will, and to have confidence in the law of cause and effect. These are the worst of all kinds of heedlessness, because a person who entertains such thoughts is bent on unwholesome deeds and completely blind to moral and spiritual values.

## **Heedlessness and Sexual Desire**

Another kind of heedlessness is wantonness regarding the five sensual objects. Sensual objects are objects of desire. They form the basis of mutual attraction between men and women. The objects of men's desire are largely to be found in women and vice versa. These objects are form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Material goods such as gold, silver, houses, vehicles, clothing, which one needs to fulfil one's sensual desires, are included with sensual objects.

Uncontrolled thoughts about sensual objects, uncontrolled desire for them, and uncontrolled enjoyment of them mean heedlessness. It is like having no control over cattle that are let loose on grazing ground. If you give a free rein to sensual desires instead of restraining them by mental development, you will certainly neglect to do wholesome deeds. Such obsession with sensual desire may be regarded as ordinary heedlessness in that it is not as serious as the heedlessness that leads to misdeeds.

Those who do not develop their minds are constantly suffused with heedlessness. From the moment that they wake up in the morning, they think of sensual objects, and obsessive desires dominate them the whole day. They never tire of sensual objects. They delight in thinking of them and suspend their sensual thoughts only when they fall asleep. They may think of sensual objects for the whole day, the whole night, the whole year — it may even be their life-long preoccupation. Heedlessness makes them unmindful of the realities that lie within. To give vent to desire without restraint is heedlessness in respect of wholesome deeds.

Heedlessness is a kind of unconsciousness, but not like that due to falling from a high place, drowning, or affliction with a disease. It is total unmindfulness while one goes about, eats, or indulges in pleasure. To give vent to desire in unwholesome deeds, speech, or thoughts is heedlessness at its worst. Obsession with sensual objects is less serious. Then there is another kind of heedlessness that is subtle and mild.

## **Forgetting to Do Good**

It is also heedlessness to forget to develop or cultivate wholesome deeds sincerely, constantly, and diligently. Wholesome deeds means, in brief, alms-giving, morality, and mental development. One must devote oneself to them sincerely and appropriately. Alms

should be given on certain occasions to the best of one's ability. Commitment to the five precepts should be life-long, and one should observe the eight precepts or other disciplines whenever possible. The mind should be developed to the best of one's ability. This is to be done seriously and steadfastly. Half-hearted practice means lack of sincerity and unmindfulness of many things.

The wholesome states essential to mental development are the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), the four right efforts (*sammappadhāna*), the four ways to power (*iddhipāda*), the five controlling faculties (*indriya*), the five mental powers (*bala*), the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), and the eight factors of the noble path (*maggāṅga*). The meditator should develop these wholesome qualities sincerely and seriously.

To note every bodily activity such as walking, sitting, lying down, *etc.*, whenever it occurs is to contemplate the body. To note cramp, heat, *etc.*, is to contemplate feelings; to note thoughts and imaginations that arise is to contemplate the states of consciousness; while to note the acts of hearing, seeing, *etc.*, is to contemplate mind-objects. To attend meticulously to everything that arises, and to be aware of it, means careful application of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness lead to the four right efforts and the cultivation of the other requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*). Therefore, to note the abdominal rising and falling and so forth thoroughly is to cultivate wholesome states thoroughly. Any unmindfulness is lack of diligence, which means heedlessness.

Moreover, if you do the noting by fits and starts instead of doing it steadfastly, you will be unmindful occasionally, and all such unmindfulness is heedlessness. To note for only one or two hours means heedlessness for the rest of the day. In that case the development of concentration is arrested and it will be hard to develop insight-knowledge properly.

Again, if you relax your effort or if your enthusiasm wanes, you tend to become heedless. If, in the course of your meditation practice, you give up owing to lack of progress, ill-health, or for any other reason, you cease to be mindful and free from heedlessness. This kind of heedlessness is obvious in the case of many people. Some never think of taking up meditation. Some even prevent others from meditating. Such people are steeped in heedlessness throughout their lives. To

tell others to give up meditating is heedlessness at its worst. Some monks do not meditate even though they have joined the Saṅgha with the object of practising meditation. Yet instead of meditating themselves they discourage others from doing so. This is the most serious heedlessness. To summarise, it is heedlessness if a person fails to cultivate wholesome qualities seriously, ceaselessly, and wholeheartedly.

The opposite of heedlessness is diligence or heedfulness (*appamāda*). It is heedfulness to avoid wrong deeds, wrong speech, and to lead a good life. It is heedfulness to deny wrong thoughts an outlet through concentration and insight-knowledge, to divert the mind from sensual objects through mental development, or to overcome sensual thoughts through mindfulness. It is heedfulness to give alms or to think of giving alms or doing other wholesome deeds. The best heedfulness is to note and be aware of everything that arises from the six senses.

Heedfulness is applied to daily life by meditators who are practising mindfulness at this centre. Their commitment to moral precepts makes them free from unwholesome deeds and speech. Constant mindfulness excludes unwholesome thoughts and keeps the mind away from sensual objects. If the mind occasionally goes astray, it is promptly noted and checked. Since the meditator is always noting the mental images that arise, there can be no sensual, retrospective thoughts. This means that mindfulness is being developed through sincere, constant, steadfast, and unfaltering practice. Their cultivation of heedfulness is excellent and truly gratifying to their teachers.

### **The Practice of Heedfulness**

“Work out your own salvation with heedfulness.” Thus the Buddha exhorted his disciples every day. It was his last advice before his *parinibbāna*. The substance of his advice is that the disciple should exert effort to achieve Arahantship, which is the goal of a bhikkhu’s life. Attainment of the goal leads the Arahant to reflect, “What should be done has been done (*kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ*).” It is not easy to attain Arahantship. The meditator needs help or means for the accomplishment just as a man needs tools or instruments to carry out a job. To help his disciples achieve the goal of Arahantship, the Buddha pointed out heedfulness as the best tool for the purpose.

By means of heedfulness the disciple should devote himself to morality, concentration, and wisdom until Arahantship is won.

### The Last Words of the Buddha

I refer to the instrumental nature of *"appamādena"* in relation to the subject because the way that most people understand the last words of the Buddha is not in accordance with the explanation given in the Commentaries. They believe that the Buddha's last advice was: "Keep yourselves fully mindful." This interpretation is fairly plausible, but it does not bring into focus what is to be accomplished by the disciples. The Commentary to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta elaborates thus:

**"Sati-avippavāseṇa sabbakiccāni sampādeyyātha."** The Pāli sentence contains the object **"sabbakiccāni,"** which means "all purposes, all matters." Hence the verbs **sampādeṭṭha** and **sampādeyyātha** should be transitive verbs rather than objectless or intransitive verbs. **"Appamādena"** means "by means of heedfulness," and as it is used in conjunction with a transitive verb, it is to be understood not in the sense of an object but in the sense of a means for achieving the object. So the Pāli passage in the Commentary may be translated as "By means of mindfulness (*appamāda*) you should accomplish all the tasks (*sabbakiccāni*) relating to morality, etc." The Buddha's final advice means that one should do with mindfulness all that is to be done in connection with morality, concentration, and wisdom. The same interpretation applies to the words *"Appamādena sampādeṭṭha"* when recited by a bhikkhu who administers the precepts.

### The Last Teaching

The last saying of the Buddha on the eve of his *parinibbāna* contains the words *"vayadhammā saṅkhārā."* It means that all phenomena are subject to decay and are not dependable; that mind and matter are impermanent and always passing away; that everything will come to an end eventually and that we should therefore practise morality, concentration, and wisdom thoroughly. Consider, for example, a house you have built. In spite of its solidity as a new house, it will surely disintegrate in time, and before its final dissolution it will decay gradually. A house that is expected to last a hundred years decays one per cent every year and it decays proportionately for every period of time down to a second.

We usually do not usually speak of periods of less than a second, but according to the scriptures, there are many thought-moments in a second during which dissolution takes place ceaselessly. Just like a well-built house, a man's body is also subject to the law of impermanence. It is apparently robust at the age of sixteen or twenty. He is then attached to his body and mind, confident of his strength and virility, and self-assured about his knowledge, understanding, and skill. He considers himself immune to destruction, but in fact mind and matter do not endure even for the blink of an eye. Even when he is sleeping, eating or working, all psychophysical phenomena arise and pass away ceaselessly. This can be realised by the meditators who practise constant mindfulness. It is not an experience beyond the reach of the average man. Some say that it is impossible to have such an experience nowadays, but this is a misconception due to lack of sustained practice. Because of this ceaseless dissolution, even a man who lives a hundred years eventually becomes a corpse. Hence the insubstantiality of life and the Buddha's emphasis on the need for the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom, on which we should rely for liberation.

Meditators who note all phenomena at every moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, are being mindful in accordance with the Buddha's final advice. As concentration develops, insight arises into the only two phenomena of existence — matter that is known, and mind that knows, which is analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*). Then the meditator reflects on the three characteristics of all existence (*sammasana-ñāṇa*). This is followed by insight into the knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbava-ñāṇa*). At this stage the meditator sees light, has ecstasy, and believes that his insight is complete. However, it is not and after that he finds both the mind and matter vanishing (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*).

Then constant mindfulness leads to knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*), knowledge of misery (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*), knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcitukamyata-ñāṇa*), knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassana-ñāṇa*) and knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). Still it does not suffice to bring the meditator to the ultimate goal. When insight is developed, adaptation knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), and maturity knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*) arise, followed

by the path and fruition knowledge of Stream-winning. The meditator must, however, continue the practice whereupon knowledge of arising and passing away and other kinds of insight-knowledge occur again in the same order until he attains the stage of Once-returning and its fruition. Still he must keep on with the practice and repeat the same process of development to reach the stage of Non-returning. Then continued practice and repetition of the same spiritual journey will bring him to Arahantship. Only then does the disciple attain full liberation in accordance with the last advice of the Buddha.

While others may be forgetful, absorbed in sensual objects and divorced from wholesome deeds, let us avoid heedlessness, overcome unwholesome deeds through morality, removing the heedlessness of unwholesome thoughts and sensual objects through mental development. Heedfulness is central to Buddhism. Indeed, according to the Commentaries, it is the epitome of the Buddha's teaching during his forty-five-year ministry.

### Scepticism (37)

It is not faith or confidence (*saddhā*) to hold a view that is not sound and reasonable. Confidence refers only to acceptance of right views about the true Buddha, the true Dhamma, the true Saṅgha, and the law of kamma. The belief in kamma is the right view based on confidence. In the exegesis of the Triple Refuge (*tisaraṇa*) the Commentaries describe it as the view that is rooted in confidence.

Like the belief in kamma, the belief in the true Buddha, the true Dhamma and the true Saṅgha is a matter of faith. Every religion has a God or supreme teacher, a doctrine revealed or taught by the founder, and disciples who follow the doctrine. How are we to know whether they are genuine or not? The answer is that a true Buddha must have nine attributes. One of the attributes is "*Arahant*," which means freedom from hatred, ignorance, and other defilements. As such it suffices to reveal the genuineness of the teacher. It is said that the so-called God or Creator wants human beings to revere and worship him and punishes those who fail to do so. This shows his craving for power and ill-will. However, the Buddha teaches that we will fare according to our kamma, that wholesome deeds will produce beneficial results, and unwholesome deeds will produce harmful results. He does not say that worshippers will be saved and non-worshippers

punished. There is no sign of greed or ill-will in his teaching. He only exhorts his disciples to free themselves from such defilements.

As for the teaching, it can be tested by experience. It must possess six attributes, one of which is the quality of being realised or experienced (*sanditṭhika*). We can know whether a teaching is true or false on the basis of personal experience. Other religions do not tell us what their followers can experience — all their teachings have to be accepted on blind faith. However, the Buddha's teaching lends itself to empirical investigation. Spiritual experience is attained in a few weeks if you practise according to our instructions, and you will have extraordinary insight if the practice extends to five or six weeks.

The Saṅgha, too, is genuine if it has nine attributes such as well-trained (*suppatipanna*). Of course every religion recognises the importance of training, but we must distinguish good training from bad training. Good training results in freedom from ill-will, greed, and other defilements. Such a training is not often found in non-Buddhist teachings. The non-Buddhist systems do not help us to root out the defilements, whereas the Buddhist training ensures their total extinction. The Saṅgha is committed to this training.

Faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha is immensely beneficial. Owing to lack of such faith, some people do not do wholesome deeds and some even do unwholesome deeds. Then there are those who reject kamma and the idea of a future life. They do not avoid unwholesome deeds and they do not do much good. Because of their scepticism,<sup>1</sup> their few wholesome deeds that stem from love or compassion are outweighed by unwholesome deeds. They have almost nothing to rely on for their welfare after death. On the other hand, men of faith avoid evil and do good as far as possible, so they make spiritual progress and are assured of a fortunate afterlife.

### Shamelessness (38) & Recklessness (39)

Shame and dread are what we experience in daily life. However, it is not moral shame to feel unhappy for lack of fashionable clothes or prestige. Shame (*hiri*) means the shame associated with wrongdoing. Likewise, dread (*ottappa*) means fear of wrongdoing. Lack of moral shame or conscience is called shamelessness (*ahirika*) and lack

<sup>1</sup> *Assaddhata* is opposed to faith or confidence. It is not merely doubt or indecision, which any normal person would have, but a complete lack of faith where one should have it. I think scepticism the best translation. (Editor's note)



of fear in regard to wrong-doing is called recklessness (*anottappa*). Lack of shame and lack of dread go together, but these two moral defects differ in quality. Just as a person does not want to get dirty after taking a bath, so too a good man does not want his conscience to be defiled by unwholesome deeds. However, it is dread to dread the consequences of an unwholesome deed. To put it another way, shame makes a man reluctant to do unwholesome deeds because it leads him to reflect: "Only cowards, fools, and low class people do unwholesome deeds. As a man of noble family, wise, good, and courageous, I should do no unwholesome deeds." It is dread that makes a man afraid of public opinion and unwilling to do unwholesome deeds.

A bhikkhu, a meditator, or a good man motivated by shame will avoid unwholesome deeds because of his sense of self-respect. He may also do so out of regard for society, or for fear of being censured by deities, if not by people who are aware of his misdeeds.

Thus we shrink from doing unwholesome deeds when our moral conscience makes it abhorrent to us, or when its immediate and post-mortem consequences make us afraid. It is when we are devoid of shame and dread that we tend to do unwholesome deeds, in other words, unwholesome deeds are rooted in the absence of these two moral deterrents. Man's moral progress is due to them and were it not for them mankind would sink to the moral level of wild animals. Hence the name given to them: Guardians of the World (*lokapāla-dhamma*).

## Nescience (40)

According to the Buddha, poverty or lack of knowledge is also a defect, which we should remove to lessen defilements. Knowledge is of two kinds, one that we acquire by hearing (*āgamasuta*) and one that we acquire by independent understanding (*adigamasuta*). While many people may remain ignorant, we should seek knowledge.

Some kinds of knowledge are relevant to worldly affairs while others bear on our spiritual life. Both worldly and spiritual knowledge are beneficial. Worldly knowledge is beneficial and so the more, the better. Some are ill-informed on worldly matters. Their knowledge is confined to their locality; they have never been elsewhere. Such ignorance will do them no good for, when they have to visit distant places, they do not know what to do. One should seek as much worldly knowledge as possible.

However, what we should emphasise is spiritual knowledge. Some people have little knowledge about the Buddha-dhamma. Some have never heard of the Buddha, let alone know anything about his teaching. There are many such people all over the world. Even in Burma, the Dhamma is entirely foreign to those living in border areas. There are teachers in some villages, but serious discourses are hard to come by. The talks deal largely with almsgiving, morality, death, and funerals.

The way that they teach is not comprehensive, but perfunctory. It is little more than what is required by tradition for the happy or unhappy occasions in life. Here is a sample of their discourses: *“bujjhatīti buddha yo bhagavā ... the Blessed One is called the Buddha because he clearly realised the four noble truths. On one occasion the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana vihāra in the city of Sāvatti. At that time...”* and so on. The teacher usually speaks in an authoritative tone. He seldom tells the people exactly what attitude they should have when giving alms or what thoughts they should cultivate when keeping the Sabbath. In some places such instructions have not yet come to the notice of the people who still regard the traditional discourses as the only teachings of the Buddha. Talks on insight meditation are very rare among them.

The instructions for insight meditation given by some teachers are hardly precise and comprehensive. They do not ensure concentration, insight, or success in meditation. Some instructions lack the authority of scriptures. By and large people are ignorant of insight meditation and it is up to the meditators to fulfil their spiritual needs. Through talks by well-informed teachers they can increase their knowledge gradually. They should also study authoritative books and consult learned teachers about matters that they do not understand. Nowadays there are Burmese translations of Pāli texts that can give you a thorough knowledge of the Dhamma. However, the sentence construction is archaic and so you may need the help of a teacher in your study.

### **Complete Knowledge in One Stanza**

The extent of knowledge that the meditator should have is explained by the Commentary when it describes a well-informed meditator as one who understands only a single stanza, but lives in

accordance with it. A thorough understanding of even a single stanza means complete knowledge. Of course, if one understands more, so much the better. However, it is necessary to practise rightly what we understand. You may be well-versed in scriptures, but your knowledge counts for little unless you live up to it and practise morality, concentration, and wisdom. Practice is of paramount importance in religious life. Even a knowledge of morality is useless if you do not apply it to daily life. It is superfluous, and you are no better than one who knows little about moral values. There is, for example, the story of two bhikkhus in the Commentary on the Dhammapada.

In the time of the Buddha two friends in Sāvatti joined the Saṅgha. After learning the Vinaya rules for five years, they were told by the Buddha that it was up to a bhikkhu to do one of two things — the practice of insight meditation or the study and teaching of the Dhamma. One of the monks chose to meditate as he was too old to learn the Dhamma. Under the guidance of the Buddha, he went to a forest abode, meditated and finally became an Arahant. The other monk studied the Dhamma, taught here and there, and gave discourses to five hundred bhikkhus.

A large number of monks went to the forest retreat, meditated and after attaining Arahantship, they took leave of the elderly bhikkhus to go and see the Buddha. The aged bhikkhu told them to pay respects on his behalf to the Buddha and his disciples as well as to his friend, the teacher of the Dhamma. They did so and the Dhamma teacher was struck by the number of bhikkhus who claimed to be the disciples of his friend. He did not have a high opinion of his friend. He wondered why the forest-dwelling monk who had never studied the Dhamma had so many disciples. He decided to question the forest-bhikkhu when he came to the city.

Later, the forest-bhikkhu came to see the Buddha. He left his bowl and robes with the Dhamma teacher and went to see the Buddha. After paying respects to the Buddha, he came back to his friend. The Dhamma teacher had prepared some questions to test the forest-dweller. The Buddha, having divined his intention, came to the meeting to forestall any attempt on his part to harass the forest-dwelling Arahant with irrelevant questions, for such an attempt was fraught with serious karmic consequences. The Buddha asked the Dhamma teacher about the absorptions, attainment, and mind and matter. The monk could

not answer the questions. He was baffled when he was questioned about the path of Stream-winning. However, the question did not present any difficulty to the forest-bhikkhu. The Buddha asked them about the other three higher paths, the Dhamma teacher was again baffled, but the forest-bhikkhu answered all questions.

### **Like A Cowherd**

The Buddha praised the forest-bhikkhu, but not the Dhamma teacher. This, of course, did not please the latter's disciples. Thereupon the Buddha declared:

“Although a learned person may teach the Dhamma bearing on the welfare of human beings, if he does not practise it, he is not free from defilements; he does not attain any stage of the path. He is like a cowherd who makes his living by counting and guarding the cattle of others.” (*Dhp v 19*)

The cowherd has to look after the cattle and hand them over to their owner. He gets only money for his job, he does not get milk from the cows, which is consumed by the owner. Likewise, the monk who teaches the Dhamma is attended on and offered food by his followers for his service.

Without practice he cannot enjoy the fruits of the Dhamma such as absorption, insight, the path and fruition. The fruits of the Dhamma are meant only for those who, having heard it from a learned monk, practise it just as milk is consumed only by the owner of the cows.

If a person teaches about the five moral precepts, but does not practise them, he may be respected as a teacher, but he will not benefit by them. Only those who apply them to daily life will enjoy the fruits of morality in this life and hereafter. Likewise, the fruits of higher teachings can be enjoyed only by those who practise tranquillity and insight. Of course the practice must be correct. The meditator who takes up meditation seriously may not be able to talk much about the Dhamma, but he is assured of the fruits of the noble path and the extinction of defilements and suffering. Hence the Buddha's emphasis on the need for practice:

“A person may be able to talk only a little about the Dhamma, but if he practises morality, concentration, and wisdom in accordance with the Dhamma, he realises the truth, over-

comes craving, hatred, and ignorance, and having no attachment to this or the other world, his mind is fully liberated and he is one who has eradicated defilements.”  
(Dhp v 20)

This is the translation of the Pāli text in support of the statement in the Commentary that a single stanza that is heard, remembered, and practised will benefit us and that it may mean complete knowledge. Again in the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta the Buddha says that a spirit of inquiry contributes to knowledge and wholesome deeds, speech, and thought in this life. One who has an inquiring mind is likely to attain the celestial realm after death, and to be reborn as a highly intelligent human being.

We should seek knowledge through investigation. “If you do not know, inquire; if it is not clean, cleanse it,” as the Burmese saying goes. It is up to you to inquire if you do not know the methods of meditation, or if you do not clearly grasp something about the Dhamma, or if the study of scriptures leaves you confused. The meditation teachers help even those who do not inquire from them. The meditator may be ignorant at the outset, but he can gain a lot of knowledge under the guidance of a teacher. You should not think that the practice of insight meditation is impossible without a knowledge of aggregates, sense-bases, and so forth. Every day the meditation teachers tell the meditators all that they should know while examining them about their progress.

Moreover, while meditating, the meditator has unusual insights. Thus the meditators at this centre gain both the knowledge imparted by the teacher and the knowledge based on experience.

## Laziness (41)

A man may be lazy in worldly affairs or in his religious life. By and large the two kinds of laziness go together. The latter kind of laziness makes a man reluctant to do good, to hear the Dhamma, to study scriptures or to meditate. We should overcome such laziness and exert unstinting and strenuous effort.

There are four kinds of right effort (*sammappadhāna*): 1) the effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome deeds, words, and thoughts that one has not yet committed, 2) the effort to avoid the repetition of unwholesome deeds that one has committed, 3) the effort to cultivate

wholesome deeds, words, and thoughts that have not yet arisen, and 4) the effort to perpetuate and develop the good that one has done.

We should avoid the defilements that we see or hear of in others, but that have not yet occurred to us. We should see that an unwholesome deed that has occurred is not repeated, and we should do the good that we have not yet done, especially try to gain insight that we have not yet gained. Lastly, we should maintain and develop the good that we have done; in particular the tranquillity and insight that we have already gained.

Meditation involves all four kinds of right effort. If you do not restrain your senses you will be beset by old and new defilements. Every moment of mindfulness means the effort to forestall both evils; it means also the effort to develop new insights as well as the effort to increase and perfect the insights that have already occurred.

Some lazy people do not wish to give alms personally and so they tell others to do so on their behalf. This alms-giving by proxy does not benefit them *karmically* as much as possible. Some lazy Buddhists do not wish to make devotions at the Buddha-shrine, listen to the Dhamma, study the scriptures, or meditate. Even if they do meditate, they do not exert much effort. They do so only half-heartedly, and so make little progress. All these deficiencies are due to laziness. They should be energetic and do these things that are essential to their religious life.

### **Absent-mindedness (42)**

Absent-mindedness and heedlessness are basically the same, and so are circumspection and mindfulness, so what we have already said about heedlessness applies equally to absent-mindedness.

Absent-mindedness in worldly affairs or in religious life is harmful while mindfulness in both areas of life is beneficial. It never occurs to some rich people to give alms. They are in for an unhappy future after their death because of their deficiency in generosity. Some do not care for morality; they do not observe even the five precepts strictly. They say that they are not yet old, and so lead an easy-going life. However, young people are also mortal and if they die without morality, they are likely to be reborn in the lower realms. We should bear in mind the importance of morality even in the case of young people. Tranquility, insight, and mental development are foreign to

most people. Those who know something about them think that these higher teachings are not meant for their generation. However, if they die young, they are bound to miss valuable religious experience.

Insight meditation is especially important. If a Buddhist does not attain the fruits of insight, his claim to be a Buddhist has served little purpose, for whereas generosity, morality, and tranquillity are found in other religions, insight meditation is the exclusive teaching of the Buddha. It is not easy to practise insight meditation in the right way. Some have the desire to practise it, but they die with their desire unfulfilled because there is no one to guide them.

Some people do not miss the opportunity to meditate. Initially there may be many things that escape their attention. They should note such things and remove them. With the development of insight into momentary arising and passing away of all phenomena, their attention becomes very keen and is focused on every phenomenon that arises. There is nothing that escapes their notice. Through such mindfulness they can finally attain the four stages of the noble path.

The mindfulness that the meditator gains by noting, centres on the sense-objects that are emphasised in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta — the physical body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects. As it says in the sutta, “*Sabbaṃ abhiññeyya* – all ought to be known,” it refers to all psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses. It involves directing the mind to what is seen and being mindful of the fact of seeing. Likewise regarding hearing, smelling, *etc.* The attention is focused on the objects as they arise one after another. If, while noting the rising and falling, you hear or smell something, you may switch your attention to it. There is nothing that escapes your attention or that you overlook. Such very keen mindfulness emerges with the development of the knowledge of arising and passing away. The attention falls spontaneously on the objects, just like birds picking up grains of rice one after another, a state of mind called clear mindfulness (*upaṭṭhitassati*).

### Foolishness (43)

One should practise effacement with the aim of attaining insight. Non-Buddhists are devoid of insight and so are the Buddhists who do not meditate according to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Even those who follow the Satipaṭṭhāna method do not have it if their aim is only to attain tranquillity and absorption.

## Satipaṭṭhāna and Insight Meditation

Some people hold that what the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta teaches is not insight, but concentration since *satipaṭṭhāna* means mindfulness, which is included in the group of concentration, and as such is implicit in right effort and right mindfulness. This view is based on a superficial study of the sutta and over-emphasis on the word “*satipaṭṭhāna*.” In the early part of the sutta it is said, “*Sampajāno ... know truly by analysis,*” and these words surely refer to insight. Later, it says “*samudayavayadhammānupassī ... noting the arising and the cause of dissolution.*” Tranquillity meditation is not concerned with insight into arising and passing away and their causes. It requires the meditator to confine his attention to objects that remain stable.

The sutta also speaks of the state of being free from craving and views (*anissito ca viharati*), and detachment from anything in the world (*na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). Tranquillity meditation has nothing to do with freedom from craving and views, and the non-attachment that are relevant to insight meditation. Even the section on tranquillity, on in-and-out breathing, *etc.*, is designed not merely to develop concentration, but to contribute to insight on the basis of tranquillity. There is no need to comment on the insight meditation section of the sutta. As for mindfulness of feeling, consciousness, and mental-objects, these have nothing to do with tranquillity, but there is no doubt about their importance in insight meditation practice.

## Not Human Knowledge

The meditator should know that he is walking when he is walking. This teaching of the Buddha in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta may be belittled by ignorant people. To them the teaching is not in the least remarkable since the knowledge it refers to is possessed by animals like dogs. To remove such misunderstanding, the Commentary explains the statement and the explanation is not a revision of the Pāli text or an addition to it, but an endorsement that accords with the spirit of the Buddhadhamma. According to the Commentary, it is true that even a dog knows that it is moving when it is moving. However, to know that one is moving in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is diametrically opposed to the consciousness of an animal. Animals, as well as common people who are unmindful, do not know that they are moving at every moment of taking a



step. Nor do they know the successive steps involved in the process that is caused by the desire to move. A man may be momentarily aware of what he is doing, but by and large he is absent-minded, and absorbed in thoughts irrelevant to what he is doing.

Moreover, his consciousness is bound up with his belief in the ego-entity. He believes that his body and mind remain the same irrespective of time and place. He cannot overcome this illusion through ordinary awareness that does not make him mindful. Ordinary awareness may even strengthen the ego-belief. It has nothing to do with the mindfulness that the Buddha emphasised in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

As concentration develops, the meditator who practises mindfulness learns to make a distinction between mind and matter. He differentiates the physical elements of solidity and motion from consciousness; he knows how solidity and motion appear because of the desire to move about, he sees the vanishing of desire and motion at every moment. While walking, he notes and clearly perceives the discontinuity and dissolution in six or more parts at every step that he takes.

### Answers to Three Questions

This clear insight provides answers to three questions: 1) "Who goes? Is there an ego-entity that goes?" 2) "Whose going is it? Is there any agent who does the going?" 3) "Why does the going occur?"

1. There is no ego-entity that goes since it is only a successive arising and passing away of the desire to go, and solidity and motion.

2. There is no subject or agent who does the going.

3. There is only a collection of physical elements: solidity, motion, *etc.* There is no agent that causes the going, other than the desire to go and the successive physical elements.

### Analytical Knowledge of Mind and Matter

The meditator who practises constant mindfulness at every moment of walking develops insight in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Unmindful persons who lack such insight go about with the kind of consciousness characteristic of animals. The distinction between mind and matter never occurs to them. However, the mindful meditator distinguishes between the physical elements of solidity and motion,

and the noting consciousness at every moment of doing something. The emergence of insight into mind and matter depends on constant mindfulness in regard to what one is doing and bodily activity. This insight is called “Analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*).” Introspection is indispensable to its development. It will not suffice to depend on speculation or reflection. To hold that there are only mind and matter — the former comprising eighty-one types of mundane consciousness and fifty-two mental states, and the latter being composed of twenty-eight physical elements — is just conceptual knowledge. It is not independent insight-knowledge.

What are the eighty-one types mundane consciousness? Do they all occur in the mind of an average man? The nine types of *mahaggata vipākacitta* are to be found only in *rūpavacara* and *arūpavacara* Brahmās. *Mahaggata kusala kiriyā* consciousness is the attribute of those who have attained absorption. The *kāmāvacara kiriyā javana* consciousness is found only in Arahants. How can you know these types of consciousness that do not even exist in your mind? Of the twenty-eight physical elements one is femininity (*iṭṭhibhāvarūpa*) that belongs only to women. Can men know this physical element from experience? Is the knowledge born of reflection on the unknowable to be regarded as the knowledge of reality? One will have to concede that it is merely the knowledge of names and concepts applied to ultimate realities. Conceptual knowledge is obviously a far cry from insight into the distinction between mind and matter, the lowest insight that is foreign to those who do not practise mindfulness.

### Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality

Continued practice of mindfulness brings about knowledge by discerning conditionality (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*). As your concentration develops, you become mindful of whatever you do, as well as what happens before you do anything. For example, you feel itchy somewhere as you note the rising and falling of the abdomen. You wish to scratch, you note your desire, the stretching and bending of your hand. In this way you become aware of the causal relation between your mind and the changes in the activities of your body.

Moreover, with mindfulness at the moment of seeing you realise the causes of eye-consciousness: the eye-organ, the visual form, and attention to it. For meditators, such realisation usually begins

with hearing. One comes to realise that hearing depends on the ear-organ, sound, and attention to it. This is more obvious in the case of unpleasant sounds that the meditator cannot ignore.

As the meditator notes the rising and falling, his mind begins to wander elsewhere. If he does not note this inclination, it turns into discursive thinking. Sometimes he notes it and redirects his attention to the rising and falling. Then he knows the cause: unsystematic attention (*ayoniso-manasikāra*) and the systematic attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) that prevents his mind wandering.

At times his mind seems to be empty. Rising and falling are not apparent, the body seems to have vanished and the meditator thinks that there is nothing for him to note. Later he notes every sense-object that arises. He knows that mindfulness occurs because of the object of attention.

Furthermore, he realises that the ceaseless becoming of mind and matter in the present life is conditioned by past kamma. His knowledge is extensive, but here only a few obvious facts will be mentioned. His insight into the causal relation between mind and matter is associated with purity by overcoming doubt (*kañkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*). This insight is born of experience — you cannot gain it by reasoning. According to the Visuddhimagga, it ensures fortunate rebirth and the lower path of Stream-winning. However, the meditator must not remain content with it; he should carry on with his meditation.

### Knowledge by Comprehension

As he continues to practise meditation, the meditator becomes aware of the dissolution of psychophysical phenomena from beginning to end. While noting each phenomenon, his mind wanders, he notes it, and stray thoughts disappear. Formerly he could not follow every thought instantly, but now he attends to it at once, so he knows its origin, its process and its dissolution thoroughly. The thoughts usually vanish when he focuses them, thereby gaining a clear insight into the law of impermanence.

The objects and signs that arise in his mind gradually disappear. Here the mental images such as trees, men, bhikkhu, *etc.*, are concepts, but the consciousness that sees them is real. Consciousness, too, vanishes and he becomes aware of these visions.

As he walks, the meditator finds one stride vanishing before he takes another stride. For each stride, too, the lifting of the foot, putting it forward and dropping it, each of these step appears as a distinct movement. Each is disconnected and so its transitoriness is apparent. The same is true of the abdominal rising and falling. When you thus realise the impermanence of every phenomenon, you have knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*). This insight makes you aware of the unpleasant, painful, conditional and insubstantial nature of all existence. It is called knowledge by comprehension because it makes you reflect again and again on impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, the three marks of existence that you have just discovered. It is the first of the ten kinds of insight knowledge.

### Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away

If you continue to note without reflecting on the three characteristics of existence, your perception and awareness become sharp and fast. Without special effort you become constantly mindful. Whatever happens to the object of attention is also fast and clear. There is only the arising and insight into the arising and vanishing. You do not see anything in between. This insight is knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*).

At this stage your perception and intellect are so sharp that you can follow all of the sense-objects that are arising rapidly. There seems to be nothing that escapes your notice. You see extraordinary light, or become rapturous and jubilant. This experience is the by-product of insight practice. You will not have it if you have not attained this stage, and you cannot have that insight if your practice is incorrect, or if you practise only intermittently. Ceaseless practice day and night barring a few sleeping hours is essential to the attainment of this insight that leads to higher path-knowledge.

The joyful experience resulting from this insight gives rise to firm confidence that in turn ensures rebirth in the higher realms. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* the Buddha says: "All those who have confidence in me are assured of rebirth in the celestial realms." The Commentary explains this canonical passage as follows:

"This saying of the Buddha refers to those who practise insight meditation. These meditators have no fruits of the noble path other than insight practice and confidence. They have only

confidence in the Buddha. While they are striving for insight-knowledge, firm confidence in the Buddha wells up in them, and this confidence leads them to the celestial realms as if taking them by the hand and carrying them there.”

Here the confidence referred to in the Pāli text is the strong confidence that arises as a result of insight. This confidence usually wells up during the momentary flash of lower orders of insight. However, at those stages it is not very obvious. It shows itself clearly with the emergence of knowledge of arising and passing away. According to the Commentary, the meditator who has this kind of confidence is called a Lesser Stream-winner (*cūḷasotāpanna*).

This seems to have been quoted by the Visuddhimagga.

### Knowledge of Dissolution

Continued practice leads to gradual diminishing and final vanishing of light, rapture, joy, and other unusual experiences. The mental events become more distinct and clearer than ever. The phenomena show no sign and vanish rapidly. It seems as if they vanish before the meditator notes them. In noting the rising and falling, *etc.*, the meditator does not have a mental picture of the abdomen, the body, or the leg. The objects of attention do not move from one place to another, but vanish instantly in their own place. The phenomenon that is noted vanishes together with the vanishing consciousness. The realisation of these facts is called knowledge of dissolution (*bhāṅga-ñāṇa*). The meditator attains this insight not by thinking, but by introspective intuition. For example, when he or she notes bending and stretching, he or she does not have an image of the hand nor does he or she picture any of its movement. He or she sees only the vanishing of the noting consciousness and the object of attention as disjointed units. The same may be said of the abdominal rising and falling.

Since the meditator thus sees every object of attention passing away, he or she sees no reason to be attached to anything as permanent, dependable, and substantial. He or she realises the nature of existence, that is, its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. According to the Visuddhimagga, it is only this knowledge of dissolution that enables the meditator to overcome thoroughly the illusions of permanence, pleasantness, and ego-entity in regard to existence.

## Knowledges of Fearfulness, Misery, and Disgust

With knowledge of dissolution the meditator is fairly sure of further progress. Continued practice helps him or her to develop further insights. Seeing only dissolution, he or she becomes frightened (*bhaya-ñāṇa*), sees misery (*ādinava-ñāṇa*), and so becomes weary of existence. The ordinary person enjoys life because he or she is blind to its dangers. If one were aware of its ceaseless dissolution, one would become weary and disgusted. This knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*) is important. In the suttas, the Buddha, after pointing out the three characteristics of life, usually says, “The noble disciple becomes weary of his body” and then goes on to say, “Being weary, he is free from attachment and attains path knowledge.” We must assume that the Buddha identifies with this knowledge of disgust all of the preceding insights as well as the others that follow it.

## Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance and Other Insights

Being weary of life, the meditator does not want to cling to body and mind or his existence any longer and he has now the desire to renounce them, which is knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcītukamyata-ñāṇa*). To fulfil his desire, he must continue the practice (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*). As his concentration develops, he is able to ignore all phenomena that arise. Without any effort he remains aware of them with equanimity (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*).

At this stage the meditator exerts effort only initially. Later on without any special effort he is barely aware of all that arise and all that vanish one after another. He or she remains in this state for two or three hours, but does not feel cramps, heat, or pain. His or her posture is unchanged. If he or she has any physical affliction, it does not appear at this time. Some diseases even disappear. With the full development of this insight, there adaptation-knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*) arises and after that the meditator sees nibbāna on the level of the path knowledge and its fruit.

If you wish to see nibbāna or the path and its fruit in this life you should seek insight beginning with analytical knowledge of mind and matter through to knowledge of adaptation. To this end you must note all psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses and see them as they really are. For those who are not mindful, every sense-object that they do not really know means the latency of

ignorance as a defilement. Under fertile circumstances this potential defilement finds an outlet. The seeds of ignorance usually bring the seeds of greed and hatred in their wake, and under fertile conditions the sense-objects are recalled and the fires of craving and ill-will are ignited as a result. Ignorance, craving, and ill-will give rise to wholesome or unwholesome kamma, which in turn leads to rebirth together with old age, death, worry, grief, and suffering in its wake. These fires of life engulf unmindful people and have their origin in seeing, hearing, thinking, and so forth. Thus the Buddha says in the *Āditta Sutta*:<sup>1</sup> “The eye is on fire, visible objects are on fire, etc.”

The fires are totally extinct in the case of the meditators who are mindful of everything that arises from six senses whenever they see, hear, etc., and so they gain insight. We should, therefore, eradicate ignorance through insight into the true nature of mind and matter.

### Dogmatism (44)

Dogmatism (*sanditṭhiparāmāsa*) literally means wrong reflection on one’s view, but it is to be understood in the context of other terms — clinging firmly (*ādhānaggāha*) and difficulty in renouncing one’s view (*duppaṭinissagga*). The three words collectively mean dogmatism. According to the Commentary, the Buddha deals especially with this kind of view because dogmatism is detrimental to spiritual effort on the path. The Buddha says: “Other people believe that theirs is the only right view. They cling fast to their view and it is hard for them to relinquish it. However, we will not be opinionated and cling to our views blindly. We are prepared to renounce it on reasonable grounds. We will adopt the practice that helps to lessen the defilements.”

The Commentary describes dogmatism as the attitude of mind that makes a man strongly attached to his view as the only right view. He will not give up his view even though the Buddha and other enlightened ones try to reason with him. Dogmatism is to be found in daily life, too, but it is not so serious in that it does not pose a threat to spiritual life. For example, there are popular beliefs about the positions of earth, the sun, the moon and other planets as described in ancient writings. These beliefs run counter to the discoveries of modern science. The ancient accounts of the Himalayas and the five major rivers also do not accord with geographical facts. Dogmatism in regard to these

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<sup>1</sup> S.iii.71, similar to the well-known *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*. (Editor’s note)

beliefs is not harmful to spiritual life because they have nothing to do with the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

However, dogmatism concerning the practice of the Dhamma is serious. It makes one blindly attached to a wrong-view. If a man is so dogmatic that he cannot give up the belief in ego-entirety and its continued existence or annihilation after death, he will be hampered in his spiritual progress. One of the wrong-views is the view that rejects kamma and future life. Those who hold fast to this view do not avoid doing unwholesome deeds or do good at the expense of their well-being. Nor will they practise the Dhamma that leads to the path and nibbāna. Another wrong-view is the view that rejects the Buddha and the Arahants who attain unusual insights.

Those who believe firmly in the ego and its eternity assert that the ego exists forever; and that, after surviving the dissolution of the gross physical body, it moves on to another body and continues to exist there. They do not accept the teaching that the mind and matter of the new existence arises as the result of defilement and kamma, that the extinction of defilement and kamma leads to the extinction of mind and matter, which means the total extinction of suffering. Because of their scepticism they do not follow the holy path to the end. Thus this eternalism is an obstacle to spiritual progress. However, since it does not reject kamma and its fruit, it is possible for the virtuous believer to attain the celestial realms. On the other hand those who hold the annihilation view cannot attain the celestial realm because they reject the law of kamma. Their wrong-view rules out the possibility of rebirth as a celestial being or the attainment of the path.

Another obstacle to spiritual progress is attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabbataparāmāsa*) or the obsessive belief that a certain practice or conduct in itself ensures liberation from suffering. It is attachment to rites and rituals to believe that salvation depends entirely on living, eating, and sleeping like animals. The worship of animals is attachment to rites and rituals, and so is worship of the sun, the moon, sea-gods, deities, Brahmās, and so forth. In brief, any practice that has nothing to do with the Four Noble Truths or the Noble Eightfold Path, but that involves acting like animals or worshipping them is attachment to rites and rituals, and to regard it as the way to the end of suffering is attachment to rites and rituals.



Most of the non-Buddhist practices that are intended to bring about the end of suffering and permanent happiness are attachment to rites and rituals. Some believe that they can cleanse themselves of impurities by bathing in the Ganges. Some even thought that the worship of deities, Sakka, or Brahmā will assure them of rebirth in heaven and happiness after death. Some believe that the sacrifice of oxen, goats, or other animals will free them from sins and make them happy. Such practices are a far cry from the effort to realise the Four Noble Truths or to cultivate morality, concentration, and wisdom, and so it is attachment to rites and rituals to regard such practices as a way to salvation. Those who are firmly attached to these beliefs do not follow the Eightfold path and never attain the path knowledge and its fruit.

Religious beliefs are always right in the eyes of their adherents, but they are all wrong from the standpoint of non-believers. However, you cannot charge a man with dogmatism if he seeks truth without being dogmatic. Nowadays some people who are non-Buddhists by birth study Buddhist scriptures and some of them have become Buddhist converts. Some have come to Burma from Europe and America to practise meditation. Some can describe their insights from experience. These Westerners are entirely free from dogmatism.

### **Dogmatism Among Buddhists**

Following the Third Buddhist Council the Kathāvattu appeared, an Abhidhamma book that records the teaching of the Elder Moggalliputtatissa. This book gives an account of different views. Some of these views concern practice, and as such they form a barrier to the spiritual progress of the person who holds them firmly. The belief in the ego is a case in point. Today some people believe that it is not necessary to contemplate the psychophysical phenomena that arise from the six senses and realise their three characteristics. Some say that mere knowledge of the Four Noble Truths means their realisation. Some hold that mere contemplation of nibbāna ensures special insight. Some believe that concentration by itself can make a man attain the path and its fruition although he may not realise the arising and passing away of mind and matter and their three characteristics.

If these views are so deep-rooted that one cannot renounce them, they give rise to dogmatism. Some insist that nowadays it is impossible to attain insight in spite of all efforts to practise

meditation. These sceptics do not practise and so they never attain the path. Some hold that it would be in vain to meditate without first overcoming the ego-belief. We do not accept this view.

Although Burmese Buddhists who wish to meditate may not be entirely free from the ego-belief, they accept the teaching that existence means only mind and matter, that it is subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. They show no sign of dogmatism that may hamper their spiritual effort. When, in the course of meditation, they realise the distinction between mind and matter, the common ego-belief is eradicated. With the emergence of insight, they realise the insubstantiality of life more deeply, until finally they get rid of the ego-illusion through the noble path knowledge.

### **Bhikkhu Sāti and Ego-belief**

If the ego-belief is so deep-rooted that you cannot overcome it, it may endanger your spiritual life as in the case of Bhikkhu Sāti. In the lifetime of the Buddha a monk named Sāti studied the Jātaka stories and concluded that consciousness was the ego or soul. He came to this conclusion on the basis of the identification of the main character in the stories with the Buddha. Thus King Mahājanaka became the Buddha and so did the Nāga King Bhūridatta, the elephant King Saddana and King Vessantara. Certainly the physical body of Mahājanaka or any other Bodhisatta did not pass on to the life of the Buddha nor did his feelings, perceptions, and mental-formations in his previous lives. It is only the consciousness of Mahājanaka, *etc.*, that became the consciousness of the Bodhisatta, Prince Siddhattha, and is embodied in the present Buddha. Reasoning in this way, he concluded that it was consciousness that wandered from one life to another without being subject to destruction.

Sāti's view is mentioned in the Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta<sup>1</sup> of the Majjhimanikāya as follows: "The consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that existed in the previous lives passes on from one life to another. The present consciousness is no other than the consciousness of previous lives. Thus I understand the Blessed One's teaching."

Bhikkhu Sāti identified consciousness with the ego and believed in its immortality. Other bhikkhus told him that was not what the Buddha taught, that an individual's mental process is only a stream of

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<sup>1</sup> M.i.256.

consciousness with the new units constantly replacing the old, that as the process was continuous, King Mahājanaka was identified with the Buddha, and that consciousness being impermanent, it was not the old consciousness that came into existence. However, Bhikkhu Sāti did not give up his view. He stuck to it as the true teaching of the Buddha. As they could not convince him, they reported this matter to the Buddha.

The Buddha summoned Bhikkhu Sāti and questioned him. Bhikkhu Sāti stated his view and the Buddha asked him about his concept of consciousness. Bhikkhu Sāti replied, “Venerable Sir, it is consciousness that speaks and feels. This consciousness fares well or ill in the course of its existence according to its wholesome or unwholesome kamma.”

Then the Buddha said, “Foolish man! When did I ever teach anyone like that? Have I not stated in many ways that consciousness arises from causes? Have I not said that no consciousness arises without a cause? You misunderstand my teaching and misrepresent me to others. You have ruined yourself and accumulated great demerit. Your mistaken view will be detrimental to your interests for a long time.”

Then the Buddha asked the bhikkhus whether Bhikkhu Sāti was likely to attain any spiritual insight. The bhikkhus answered, “No, Lord.” The Buddha then stressed the conditionality of consciousness with examples. The fire that starts with wood is called a wood-fire, that which starts with bamboo is called a bamboo-fire, that which starts with grass is called a grass-fire. Similarly the consciousness conditioned by the eye and the visual form is called eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇa*); that conditioned by the ear and the sound is called ear-consciousness (*sotavīññāṇa*), etc. Thus the Buddha explained how each unit of consciousness is distinct and separate in itself, and how it passes away and is replaced by a new one. However, Bhikkhu Sāti did not give up his ego-belief and he missed the holy path because of his dogmatism.

## Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha

A person may be overly attached not only to the ego-belief, but to other views as well. In the time of the Buddha there was a bhikkhu called Ariṭṭha. He was not an ignorant monk like Bhikkhu Sāti. On the contrary he was well-informed and because of his wide

knowledge he was inclined to criticise the Buddha's teaching. He argued thus: "The Buddha's lay followers lead a married life. They do not avoid sensual pleasures. However, they occasionally listen to the Dhamma, ponder over it, and practise it. Some attain one of the first three stages of the path. Likewise, bhikkhus can enjoy the pleasant colour of their robes, hear pleasant voices, eat delicious food, etc. If they can thus enjoy the five sense-objects, there is no reason why they should not indulge in the pleasure of a woman's beauty, voice, smell, and so forth. In the final analysis, a woman's visual form does not differ from that of a robe, nor is the sense of physical contact with a woman essentially different from the sense of touch afforded by bed or clothing." Reasoning in this way, he insisted that it was proper for a bhikkhu to have sexual pleasure. To put it another way, he challenged the Vinaya rules to the point of declaring that there is nothing to justify the ex-communication of a bhikkhu who had sexual intercourse with a woman.

Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha's argument was somewhat like that of some modern philosophers who say that it is as proper to drink alcohol as it is to drink water since they are both made up of the same liquid element (*āpodhātu*). It is like the argument of those who insist that one who is fully aware of the reality of elements and free from attachment to conventions and concepts should have no more qualms about killing a chicken than about cutting up a gourd inasmuch as both are made up of the same physical elements. Such sophistry is terrifying. It results from an excess of independent thinking and those who rely on such teachers are in for moral disaster.

Other bhikkhus remonstrated with Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, but it was in vain. Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha held fast to his view and so they reported this to the Buddha. The Buddha summoned Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha and said, "When did I teach anyone like that? Haven't I said that any sexual act by a bhikkhu is an obstruction on the path, that all sensual pleasures do more harm than good, that they are like a meatless bone being gnawed by a dog, or a piece of meat that is being fought over by hawks? Yet you misunderstand my teaching and have discredited us in the eyes of the public. Further, you have uprooted yourself and destroyed your foundation." In spite of the Buddha's rejection of his view, Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha stuck to it and made no spiritual progress due to his dogmatism.

## Erroneous Views in Modern Times

Today too, there are misconceptions about the Dhamma. Once a woman said that there was an error in my book. In my book I made it clear that with the development of knowledge of arising and passing away rapturous joy (*pīti-pāmojja*) arises, that although it is not the deathless nibbāna, it is the deathless nibbāna for the meditators who have attained that stage because such meditators will realise the real nibbāna if they continue to practise insight meditation. My statement accords with the Dhammapada and the Commentary's explanation of the verse, which says: "*Amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ* – that rapturous joy is the deathless nibbāna for the meditator who has gained an insight into the arising and passing away of mind and matter." Yet I was accused of having made rapturous joy synonymous with nibbāna. The woman admitted her mistake when her meditation teacher pointed out how my writing accorded with the Tipiṭaka and the Commentaries. Fortunately she was not dogmatic like the bhikkhus Sāti or Ariṭṭha.

Another woman criticised the method of meditation that I recommended in one of my books, which she found unacceptable. She contended that "concentration is possible only if the attention is focused on a single object," that "to attend to whatever one sees, hears, *etc.*, means restlessness." She raised the question whether it would undermine concentration if the meditator, after having emerged from absorption, made himself mindful of everything that arose from the six senses. In fact, my statement was based on the exegesis of the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta as given in the Majjhimanikāya Commentary. However, as my book was a brief description of meditation methods, I did not quote the Pāli text.

There are two kinds of concentration: tranquillity and insight. Of the two, concentration for tranquillity requires the mind to be confined to a single object. If the practice of this concentration involves a *kaṣiṇa* exercise, the meditator must focus the mind on a single object, such as earth, to develop access concentration or absorption. If the method is to reflect on loathsomeness, the mind must also be focused on a single object such as a dead body. When the thirty-two parts of the human body form the object of concentration, the meditator has to concentrate on all the thirty-two parts initially. Only at the later stage does he or she focus on the

well-known parts and ignore the unknown. Finally the meditator confines attention to a single part to attain the two kinds of concentration. Thus it is certainly true that one can develop tranquillity concentration only by attending to a single object.

However, the same cannot be said of concentration for insight. It is possible for some meditators with sharp intelligence to attain the path and its fruition in a moment while being mindful of a single object. However, presumably such meditators are very rare. In the practice of insight meditation you should attend fully to at least mind and matter. As the Buddha says: “*Sabbaṃ abhiññeyyaṃ* ... one should be aware of everything,” the meditator should note all psychophysical phenomena arising from the six senses. A samatha meditator may enter into absorption, note that *jhānic* state, again enter into absorption, note that *jhānic* state, and thus by practising tranquillity and insight meditation alternately, attain the path and its fruition.

Alternatively, the meditator may enter into absorption and note the phenomena arising from six senses. When physically and mentally tired, he or she again enters into absorption. On emerging from absorption, he or she notes everything that arises. Repeating this process, that is, entering into absorption and then practising mindfulness when out of it, the meditator develops insight and attains the path and its fruition. This way of contemplation is described as follows in the Commentary on the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta.

“Thus the Buddha described the duration of insight that was conditioned by the *jhānic* state of the Bodhisatta. Both the concentration and insight in a person may be in an embryonic state. Practising insight he sits for a long time and feels tired. He feels heated in his body, he sweats and his forehead seems to exude vapour and gas. He is mentally tired, too. The meditator then enters into absorption again, and after alleviating his physical and mental fatigue, he feels at ease and practises insight. When, after sitting for a long time, he gets tired again, he repeats as before. Thus absorption is immensely beneficial to the practice of insight.”

This is the way to contemplate the phenomena that are worthy of contemplation after arising from absorption. In the practice of insight you should begin with obvious forms of matter, especially with the four physical elements. Then you have to contemplate the nature of

feeling and consciousness. It is clear from what the Buddha says in the Saṃyuttanikāya — “The meditator knows that the eye is impermanent, that the visual form is impermanent, and that seeing is impermanent, etc.,” — that the meditator should attend to various phenomena at the moment of seeing, and so on. Moreover, the Visuddhimagga and other Commentaries tell us how a meditator attains the path and fruition by contemplating not absorption, but obvious phenomena. In my book I described the post-*jhānic* practice of insight according to the Pāli Commentaries. No doubt, it is not hard to understand if one has a knowledge of Pāli texts and understands something about insight.

The tranquillity that occurs while one contemplates various phenomena is called momentary concentration, the concentration that lasts momentarily during contemplation. No insight is possible without this momentary concentration. The meditator who has no basic *jhānic* experience and relies on insight meditation alone develops insight through momentary concentration and attains the noble path. This concentration for insight is not confined to a single object. The meditator practising it notes all the mental and physical phenomena that arise. However, at the moment of noting, his mind is fixed on the object and free from distraction. This is obvious to the meditator who practises effectively.

Presumably the writer who criticised my book did not understand momentary concentration for insight thoroughly through books or from experience. If she still clings to his view, it is dogmatism that will hamper her spiritual progress.

### The Dogmatism of Bhikkhu Sunakkhatta

In the time of the Buddha there was a Licchavī bhikkhu called Sunakkhatta. He sometimes acted as a personal attendant of the Buddha. After having attained the four absorptions as well as the paranormal power of celestial or divine eye through the practice of tranquillity, he asked the Buddha what he should do to attain the divine ear (*dibbasota*) or the power of hearing all sounds heavenly and human, far and near. Seeing that there was an obstacle to his attainment of the divine ear, the Buddha declined to instruct him. Bhikkhu Sunakkhatta suspected that the Buddha did not reveal the secret because he did not want anyone to have as many psychic powers as he had. This suspicion was a setback to Sunakkhatta's

faith in the Buddha. Moreover, because of his foolishness he did not have a firm conviction. He admired evil practices because he had acquired evil predispositions in previous lives.

One day he was very pleased when he saw the ascetic Korakhattiya living naked and behaving like a dog. Thinking, "This Korakhattiya is a true saint. He eats like a dog without holding the food with his hand. He is a true Arahant without defilements." He adored the naked ascetic. The Buddha divined his thoughts and said, "It is remarkable that a man like you professes to be my disciple." The Buddha went on to predict the fate of the ascetic. "This man Korakhattiya will die of over-eating after seven days. He will be reborn as a jealous god. His corpse will be dumped in the cemetery. If you go and ask the corpse, it will rise up and tell you about his rebirth in the realm of jealous gods."

Bhikkhu Sunakkhatta wished to charge the Buddha with falsehood, so he did his utmost to make the prediction false. However, he had to admit afterwards that everything had happened just as predicted by the Buddha. Still he did not have much faith in the Buddha and continued to be attached to wrong practices. Because of his dogmatism he left the Saṅgha three years later and denied that the Buddha had any transcendent knowledge. Since he failed to practise insight and attain the path, he could not give up his view and remained steeped in dogmatism and unwholesome thoughts.

Today there may be one or two persons like Sunakkhatta among those who came and practised at our centre. Such a person may have been prompted not by confidence, but by other motives to come to the centre. If one does not practise seriously one does not gain any unusual experience. One does not develop concentration fully, let alone insight. He tends to belittle meditation, saying that he does not experience anything extraordinary despite his practice. However, he will cling to erroneous views and so long as he is mired in dogmatism, he will do unwholesome deeds and endanger the spiritual life of those who place their faith to him.

### **Absorption and Purity of Mind**

There is also the view that only absorption makes one mentally pure. In Burma this view prevails only among a few people for it is clearly stated in the Commentaries that purity of mind also depends



on access concentration. Moreover, the Commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta refers to the nineteen sections on bodily postures, *etc.*, excluding in-and-out breathing, *etc.*, as the subjects of meditation that leads to access concentration. Again, according to the Visuddhimagga, of the forty kinds of tranquillity meditation, the one called *catudhātuvavatthāna* is the *dhātumanasikāra kammaṭṭhāna* of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and the meditator who practises pure insight meditation begins with contemplation of the eighteen elements, twelve sense faculties, five aggregates, and mind and matter.

Hence it is clear that the meditator can attain access concentration by contemplating the four physical elements and access or momentary concentration by overcoming the hindrances, and that access concentration leads to purity of mind (*cittavisuddhi*) as well as to the five stages of purity such as purity of view (*diṭṭhivisuddhi*). This is clear from the ancient books. The complete purity of mind and view is borne out by the experience of meditators who practised seriously according to the Satipaṭṭhāna method. To our knowledge such meditators number by the thousands. There is no doubt that access concentration or momentary concentration ensures mental purity. Those who firmly believe that the practice of absorption is vital to gain mental purity will find their spiritual effort futile if they cannot attain absorption, if they have doubts about momentary concentration for insight. Such an extreme view is an obstruction to insight and should be avoided.

### The Dogmatism of Sañcaya

After attaining the Stream-winning stage through a stanza that they learnt from the Elder Assaji, the wandering ascetics Upatissa and Kolita, who were later to become Sāriputta and Moggallāna respectively, decided to go to the Buddha. They invited their teacher Sañcaya to come along with them. Sañcaya declined, saying that as the leader of a sect for a long time, it would not be proper for him to become the disciple of Samaṇa Gotama. On being told that people would desert him in favour of the Buddha, he replied that he did not worry about that since the fools who formed the majority of mankind would still come to him. This is an instance of dogmatism for the sake of offering, attendants, and fame.

Therefore, we should avoid attachment to views that are opposed to the realisation of true Dhamma. Some people believe firmly that

they are indispensable at home, so they do not seek the opportunity to practise meditation, and this means a great spiritual loss for them. In worldly life, too, it will not do to cling blindly to any irrational belief. We should think rationally and change or reject our view if necessary. However, an opinionated person usually does not give up his view despite the rational teaching of sages like the Buddha, so he has to suffer in this life as well as hereafter.

In daily life rigid attachment to a view is detrimental to our welfare. At the very least, a person who denies what others have experienced will be blamed as a dogmatist. Dogmatism in worldly life is not harmful to spiritual life whereas religious dogmatism may be damaging to chances of rebirth in the celestial realms, or spiritual attainment. We should reflect rationally on what wise and learned scholars say and give up old-established, but erroneous views instead of clinging to them blindly.

Now we have dealt with all the defilements that the Buddha spells out in the Sallekha Sutta. The Buddha concludes the discourse by exhorting the disciples to contemplate under a tree or at any other quiet place. According to the Commentary, we should contemplate thirty-eight meditation objects to develop concentration. For the development of insight the meditation objects are the three characteristics of mind and matter, the five aggregates, the twelve bases, *etc.* In brief, we should practise both tranquillity and insight meditation.

Thus the Buddha stressed the need for the practice of tranquillity, so we should not belittle tranquillity meditation. Arahants of the higher order practised insight on the basis of tranquillity. However, contemplation of the five aggregates is for insight and not tranquillity. It is not true to say that mindfulness of bodily postures as suggested in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is the practice of tranquillity. In fact, contemplation of the nature of mind and matter as distinct from the forty meditation objects is pure insight meditation.

Concluding his discourse, the Buddha urged the disciples to contemplate at the foot of a tree or in some quiet retreat. The Buddha has given full instructions for the conquest of defilements. It is up to the disciples to follow them and practise accordingly. They should not forget what to do for their spiritual liberation. Otherwise when it is too late, they will feel unhappy, tormented by regret and remorse.

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- Wrong Mindfulness (*micchāsati*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma
- Wrong Speech (*micchāvācā*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma
- Wrong Thought (*micchāsankappa*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma
- Wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma
- Wrong View (*micchādiṭṭhi*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma
- Wrong View (*micchā-diṭṭhi*), *See* Sallekha Dhamma