

On the Nature of Nibbāna

by
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
of
Burma



Translated by
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Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organisation
Mahāsi Translation Committee, Rangoon

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First printed and published in the Socialist
Republic of the Union of Burma
July 1981

Latest Edition
Edited by
Bhikkhu Pesala
September 2021
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Contents

Editor's Preface.....	vii
Foreword.....	viii

Part I

Introduction.....	1
What Is Nibbāna?.....	2
Ratana Sutta Paritta.....	4
Calling A Halt to Kamma.....	5
Purification of Mind.....	6
Purification of View.....	6
Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality.....	7
Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away.....	7
Arahantship Through Almsgiving.....	8
Arahantship Through Insight Meditation.....	9
No Yearning for Death Nor for Life.....	9
Rebirth is Dependent on Craving.....	11
No Craving Means No Rebirth.....	11
Like A Flame Extinguished.....	12
The Meaning of Nibbāna.....	13
The Meaning of Peace.....	15
The Cycle of Defilements.....	15
The Cycle of Actions.....	15
The Cycle of Results.....	18
How to Escape from the Three Cycles.....	19
Annihilation of Existence.....	21
The Sammasa Sutta.....	21
Like the Stump of a Palm Tree.....	22
Nibbāna Is Happiness.....	23
True Bliss.....	24
Different Stages of Jhānic Bliss.....	25

Part II

Mental Formations and Nibbāna.....	27
1. Arising and Non-arising.....	27
2. Occurrence and Non-occurrence.....	28
3. Having Signs and Signless.....	29
4. Accumulation and Non-accumulation.....	32
5. Rebirth-linking and Absence of Rebirth-linking.....	36
The Three Burdens.....	37
1. The Burden of Defilements.....	37
2. The Burden of Actions.....	37
3. The Burden of the Aggregates.....	38

Discarding All Burdens.....	39
The Fetter of Existence.....	39
Five Sense Faculties.....	40
Cessation of Lust.....	40
Nibbāna Without Remainder.....	41
Two Noteworthy Verses.....	42
Part III	
The Story of Bāhiya Dāruciya.....	44
The Bāhiya Sutta.....	45
How Bāhiya Dāruciya Met the Buddha.....	46
Just See As You See It.....	47
Bāhiya Becomes An Arahant.....	50
The Eye and Visual Perception.....	51
The Ear and Auditory Perception.....	52
The Nose and Olfactory Perception.....	52
The Tongue and Gustatory Perception.....	52
The Body and Tactile Perception.....	53
The Mind and Perception of Ideas.....	53
Cessation of the Senses is Nibbāna.....	54
Fixing the Mind on Nibbāna.....	54
The Right Method of Practice.....	55
Knowledge of Disgust.....	57
Part IV	
Respectful Attention.....	58
The Attentiveness of A Female Spirit.....	59
About the Nature of Nibbāna.....	60
Nibbāna is Real.....	61
No Primary Elements in Nibbāna.....	61
Matter Is Non-existent in Nibbāna.....	62
Absence of Formless Consciousness.....	63
Absence of Mind and Matter in Nibbāna.....	64
Nibbāna Is beyond All Realms.....	65
Attributes of Nibbāna.....	65
Nibbāna Has No Mass.....	65
Nibbāna Is Deathless and Birthless.....	66
Nibbāna Has No Abode.....	66
No Occurrence of Mind and Matter.....	66
Nibbāna Offers No Sense-objects.....	66
The End of the World.....	67
The Rohitassa Sutta.....	67
Suffering Ends With the End of the World.....	67
The Four Noble Truths Reside in the Body.....	68

The Universe Is within.....	69
Meditating on the Four Elements.....	70
An Easy Method of Meditation.....	71
Suffering and Its Cause Manifest During Ideation.....	74
Discovery of Nibbāna Where the Universe Ends.....	76
No Foothold.....	78

Part V

The Cessation of Craving.....	79
Let Me Think About It	80
Loath to Earn Merit for Nibbāna.....	80
Maung Kāla.....	80
Excels A Deva or Brahma.....	83
Excels the King of Brahmas.....	84
Beings in Sensual Realms Dislike A Brahmā's Life.....	84
Beings in the Realms of Form Dislike the Absence of Form.....	85
Craving Has No Affinity for Nibbāna.....	85
The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering	86
The Four Substrata of Existence.....	87
Cessation As Expounded in the Kevaṭṭa Sutta.....	88
About Supernormal Powers.....	90
Psychic Powers.....	90
The Power of Mind Reading.....	92
The Power of Instruction.....	93
Where Do the Four Elements Cease?.....	93

Part VI

The Peace of Nibbāna is Real.....	96
The Story of Mahāpajāpati Gotamī.....	96
Cousin Nanda and Son Rāhula.....	100
Parinibbāna of Suddhodana.....	100
Admission of Women into the Saṅgha.....	100
Venerable Ānanda Intervened.....	101
Permission Granted.....	102
The Parinibbāna of Gotamī Therī.....	102
Gotamī Therī's Tribute to the Buddha.....	104
Obeisance to the Saṅgha.....	107
Gotamī Therī Comforts Venerable Ānanda.....	108
Supernormal Feats of Gotamī Therī.....	109
The Last Request.....	110
Final Words of Advice.....	111
In Praise of Nibbāna.....	111
The Buddha's Exhortation.....	113
Index.....	115

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Venerable Sayādaw's discourses were addressed to meditators practising intensively at Mahāsi Sāsana Yeikthā, in Rangoon. They contain many Pāli words which, though familiar to those who have heard regular discourses, may not be so familiar to others. I have prepared this edition bearing in mind that it will be read by many who may be unfamiliar with Pāli terms. In this book especially, the Sayādaw uses many Abhidhamma terms. I have given the Pāli (in parenthesis), at least the first time the term is used, and in some cases I have used the Pāli term for the sake of brevity, such as *jhāna* for the state of deep concentration usually translated as "absorption."

The translation "suffering" is a very unsatisfactory translation for the Pāli term "*dukkha*." Although the term does embrace all kinds of obvious suffering like physical pain, mental sorrow, and grief, it means much more. Even pleasure and joy are *dukkha*, because they are subject to instability, must be striven for, and are the cause of grief when they change. The term "*dukkha*" has been translated as "unsatisfactoriness" in most places.

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

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

This latest edition fixes broken links, and adds some references.

Please feel free to print out copies for your own use, or for free distribution, but do not host the PDF file on your own web site, nor link to it directly. Post a link to the appropriate page on my web site so that readers can see the book in context, and obtain the most recent edition.

If you spot any errors, please let me know.

Bhikkhu Pesala

September 2021

FOREWORD

This book of Dhamma concerning nibbāna namely, “On the Nature of Nibbāna” embraces the basic method of practical insight meditation and also how the peace of nibbāna is achieved while practising insight meditation. Wherever the Pāli text and Commentaries are difficult to understand, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has given precise and clear explanation. He offers lucid instructions to those meditators following a wrong path with erroneous views to enable them to tread on the Right Path. To cite an example, the Sayādaw has clearly instructed that if, at the beginning of the exercise in meditation when every phenomenon that takes place at the six sense-doors cannot possibly be noted, one of the more obvious bodily behaviours should be noted first, e.g., while walking, the act of walking and manoeuvring of limbs should first be observed and noted; as also in respect of other bodily actions. The most obvious physical phenomenon — the rising and falling of the abdomen — is emphasized for the meditator, to note. When concentration gains momentum all other phenomena occurring at the six sense-doors may be noted.

In this series of discourses the concept of nibbāna has been fully elucidated beginning from the attainment of the stage of *sa-upādisesanibbāna* up to the final destination of *anupādisesanibbāna* arrived at by death called ‘*parinibbāna*.’ Further explanation given is, “Buddha has taught that with the achievement of the stage of Arahantship when defilements have ceased to exist, the remnant of material aggregates, still remains and that this state is known as *sa-upādisesa*. After the demise or ‘*parinibbāna*’ of an Arahant, both the remnant of physical aggregates and defilements cease to exist and all matter, mind, and mental formations become extinct. This complete cessation and extinction is known as *anupādisesanibbāna*.”

Here, as in all his discourses or articles on Dhamma, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw makes a dual exposition of the theoretical aspect of the Dhamma based on scriptures (*pariyatti*), and the practical aspect of insight meditation exercises (*paṭipatti*), thereby affording meditators a comprehensive knowledge of the Dhamma. Mention has also been made of the burden of the five aggregates of attachment and the burden of unwholesome Dhamma (*abhisankhāra*), and the method of throwing down the burdens to escape all sufferings arising from craving, with rebirth ensuing.

The Venerable Sayādaw has made it clear in plain language that new existence is the resultant effect of wholesome and unwholesome kamma, merits and demerits. Past actions or previous activities are known as kamma; their results are called *vipāka* in Pāḷi. The new existence that has arisen causes the formation of the mental and physical aggregates, which brings forth defilements. Defilements of all forms generate kamma. The kamma of the past has created the conditions of the present, while the kamma of the present is creating the conditions that will exist in the future. As long as this kammic force exists there is rebirth. To get rid of defilements, kamma, and the resultant effects, efforts should be made to practise generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*) with special emphasis on the insight type of meditation exercise to eventually gain Path and Fruition knowledge, and nibbāna. On attaining the Path and Fruition of Arahantship, all kamma with its results would cease.

In so far as the doctrine of nibbāna is concerned, the Buddha has taught us that nibbāna is a state which is the natural and inevitable result of the extinction of cravings. Among the forms of craving that must be rooted out, is the longing for continued separate existence in this life and hereafter.

There are a number of current views according to different schools of thought concerning nibbāna. Some probably think that nibbāna is a celestial palace; an abode of tremendous dimensions, a big city or a radiance of a spectacular dazzling light. Some hold the view that it is a state in which the individual soul is completely absorbed in the universal soul, *etc.* These are all wishful thinking arising out of ignorance.

Venerable Nāgasena, the great Buddhist philosopher, compares nibbāna to a lotus flower and concludes by saying: "If you ask, how nibbāna is to be known, I say it is to be known by freedom from distress and danger, by confidence, by peace, by calm, by bliss, by happiness, by delicacy, by purity by freshness." (Milinda Pañha)

"Sire, nibbāna is. It is cognisable by mind thus purified, lofty, straight, without obstructions, without temporal desires. There is nibbāna; but it is not possible to show by colour or configuration."

Nibbāna, after all, aims at making our life serene by extinguishing all forms of craving. The very idea of nibbāna is the state of mind coexistent with this serenity. It is in the Buddhist conception of nibbāna that we have the most complete analysis of the Universe. No real peace and happiness is possible unless a man is free from the selfish desire and egoism caused by the threefold craving. It is the way out of this craving the attainment of eternal peace that is taught by the Buddhist doctrine of nibbāna as the supreme destiny awaiting all humanity.

The first and the last word on nibbāna was said by Nāgasena in one phrase: “nibbāna is!” For no discussion with the finite mind will enable one to cognise the infinite. It cannot be conceived; it can only be experienced.

It is hoped that after going through this book thoroughly, one will find what nibbāna means without any ambiguity. The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has explained it in unequivocal terms which may be summarised as: nibbāna is eternal peace. It is brought about by attaining the Path of Arahantship that can be acquired by following the right path through the actual practice of insight meditation. All traces of defilements, kamma, and effects of kamma are completely obliterated and eradicated when one attains nibbāna. With this accomplishment a state is reached whereby all cravings cease on the attainment of *parinibbāna*. This is the end of all suffering.

May you all happy and enlightened
Min Swe
Secretary
Buddhasāsana Nuggaha Organization

On the Nature of Nibbāna

Nibbāna Paṭisaṃyutta Kathā

Part I

*Delivered on the 8th waxing of Tawthalin, 1326 B.E.¹
14th September 1964*

Introduction

Towards the end of my discourse on the Cūḷavedalla Sutta last week, I made references to the catechism of Visākha the millionaire, and [Dhammadinnā Theri](#), the Arahant *bhikkhuṇī*. “What,” asked the former, “is the sensation of pleasure like?” The latter answered: “It is like the sensation of pain.”

Pleasure and pain are diametrically opposed to each other; but what the *bhikkhuṇī* wished to impress upon Visākha is that they are the same kinds of phenomena. The following questions and answers followed:

Q What is the sensation of indifference to pleasure and pain like?

A It is like ignorance.

What pleasure and pain arise either in the body or in the mind it is easily cognisable, but indifference cannot be easily felt. For instance, greed and anger can be known at once as soon as they assert themselves, but when ignorance is at work it does not reveal itself clearly. Thus indifference is very much like ignorance in its manifestation.

Q What is ignorance like?

A It is like knowledge.

Knowledge, here, means the knowledge of the Path possessed by the Worthy Ones, while ignorance means covering up of that knowledge. The former recognises the Four Noble Truths and reveals them to all, while the latter, not knowing them, tries to hide them. Knowledge, here, is thesis and ignorance its antithesis.

¹ The Burmese Era began in year 638 of the Christian Era. It follows a lunar calendar with the New Year beginning in April (ed).

Q What is knowledge?

A It is deliverance.

Deliverance (*vimutti*) signifies the Fruition of the Path. In fact, the Path (*magga*) and its Fruition (*phala*) are identical, because they are different aspects of the same fulfilment. Fruition is the beneficial result of the realisation of the Path achieved by the Noble Ones. It is recurrent. So knowledge and deliverance are synonymous.

Q What, then, is deliverance like?

A It is like nibbāna

When one is absorbed in the Fruition of the Path, one is in perfect peace. Nibbāna is therefore equated with the Fruition of the Path.

Q What, then, is nibbāna like?

At this stage of the question, Dhammadinnā chastised Visākha. “You have gone too far,” she said, “You have failed to stop where you should stop. According to Buddha’s teaching, nibbāna is the highest. Morality, concentration, and wisdom end in nibbāna. They cannot go beyond it. So, you should not have asked what nibbāna is like. If you are not satisfied with my explanation, you may refer the matter to Buddha himself.”

Visākha at once wended his way to Buddha and told the latter how he posed the questions and how he got the answers. “If I were asked,” the Buddha said, “I would have answered your questions in the same way as Dhammadinnā answered.” He praised her.

That is where my discourse ended. At that time I thought of giving you a discourse on nibbāna as well, but lack of time prevented me from doing so. Only today can I manage to deliver this course for your benefit.

WHAT IS NIBBĀNA?

Nibbāna means extinction or annihilation. What is extinguished or annihilated? The cycle of suffering in the realm of defilement (*kilesa vaṭṭa*), of action (*kamma vaṭṭa*), and the result of action (*vipāka vaṭṭa*) is extinguished or annihilated. The realm of defilement encompasses ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), and attachment (*upādāna*). The realm of action includes both meritorious and demeritorious deeds that

contribute to the emergence of the endless cycle of rebirths. The realm of the result of action, usually called *vipāka*, relates to the consequences of actions, good or bad. Every action produces a resultant of mind, matter, six sense-bases, feeling *etc.* Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking are all manifestations of the result of action.

Failure to gain insight knowledge, which recognises the real nature of existence, when one sees or hears something, is ignorance. When one declares that one sees or hears something, one does so with the wrong notion that it is actually one's ego that sees or hears, but, in fact, there is no ego. This wrong notion deludes one into believing that things are permanent, pleasing, or satisfactory. It thus gives rise to craving, which, as it intensifies, develops into attachment. This is how defilement builds up its own empire.

As soon as attachment to sense-objects develops, efforts must be made to satisfy the desire for those sense-objects. Then volitional activities (*saṅkhāra*) would start operating. In the present context they may be called kamma-formations, for they are responsible for forming or shaping actions. When, as a result of such formations, death takes place in the course of existence, it is inevitably followed by rebirth, for rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*) arises following de cease-consciousness (*cuti-citta*). Death is followed by becoming. In other words, a new life begins. This, it may be said, is a resultant of kamma formations, which repeatedly bring forth consciousness, mind and matter, six sense-bases, contract, feeling, *etc.* Dependent, on the cycle of results, there arises the cycle of defilements; and dependent on the cycle of defilements, there arises the cycle of actions. The revolution of these three cycles is incessant throughout the endless cycle of existence. It is only when insight knowledge is applied to the practice of noting the phenomena of arising and passing away of the aggregates that Path-consciousness develops and nibbāna is brought near. At this stage, ignorance, with its faithful attendant, defilement, is annihilated. In the absence of defilement, no fresh actions or kammās can be formed. Any residual kamma that happens to exist after the annihilation of defilement will be rendered inoperative or ineffective. For a Worthy One, an Arahant, no new life is formed after his de cease-consciousness. There is now a complete severance of the fetter of existence which signifies

annihilation in sight of nibbāna. Hence, the definition of nibbāna runs thus:

“Nibbāti vattadukkhāṃ etthāti nibbānaṃ; nibbāti vattadukkhāṃ etasmiṃ adhiḡateti va nibbānaṃ.”

“In nibbāna, the cycle of suffering comes to a peaceful end. Hence cessation of suffering is nibbāna.”

In other words, when the Path of Arahantship is reached, the cycle of suffering ceases. Nibbāna is thus the peace established with the annihilation of suffering. For the sake of brevity, please note only this — nibbāna is synonymous with absolute peace. Annihilation brings about complete elimination of the cycles of defilement, action, and the results of action. The Commentaries say that the state of peace (*santi*) is a characteristic of nibbāna. When this cooling occurs the embers of suffering are extinguished. What is to be noted with diligence is the complete annihilation of the three cycles of defilement, action, and result of action, which all go to create mind and matter, volitional activities, *etc.*

In the Ratana Sutta, annihilation is described as quenching the flames. “*Nibbanti dhīrā yathāyaṃ padīpo,*” runs the relevant verse in Pāli. With men of wisdom like Arahants, all becoming is extinguished in the same manner as light is put out. Their old karmas having come to exhaustion, no new karmas that create fresh becoming can arise. The flame of existence is thus extinguished.

Ratana Sutta Paritta

The relevant stanza in the [Ratana Sutta](#) of the Suttanipāta says:

*“Khīṇaṃ purāṇaṃ navaṃ natthi sambhavaṃ,
Virattacittāyatike bhavaṣmiṃ,
Te khīṇa-bijā aviruḷhicchandā,
Nibbanti dhīrā yathāyaṃ padīpo.” (Sn v 238)*

An Arahant eliminates defilements with the extermination of all traces of them through the Path achieved by virtue of insight knowledge gained with the practice of insight meditation by noting the arising and passing away of mind and matter that appear at the six sense-doors. Once freed from their shackles, the Arahant commits no evil whatsoever, although Arahants continue to perform actions

that normally produce merits. An Arahant does good in a number of ways. For instance, teaching the Dhamma, or listening attentively to others teaching it. An Arahant regularly pays homage to the Buddha and senior monks, gives away surplus food and robes to those in need, and practises morality, concentration, and insight meditation with devotion. However, as an Arahant has no defilements, these meritorious deeds are ineffective and produce no kamma. All the good that the Arahant does produces no results. In the absence of new kamma, no new existence arises for one who has completed the path.

I notice that some misinformed laymen misinterpret the texts and teach their followers that one should not perform meritorious deeds, because Arahants usually don't. If such teachings are given credence, people practising what they teach would not be acquiring any merit; instead, they would be doing things that will lead them to the lower realms. They may purposely avoid doing good. That may not do them any harm, because that avoidance produces no reactions. However, once they give way to evil deeds, the tendency would be to indulge in them without qualms or remorse, having been instigated by greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and wrong views. Evil actions would inevitably result in equally evil results, in which case they will gain admittance to lower realms after death.

Calling A Halt to Kamma

If you really want to call a halt to new actions arising on the passing away of the old, you must practise insight meditation with a view to realising the Path and its Fruition. I will tell you how to practise it.

First you must perfect yourself in the observance of morality. Fortified with morality, you must acquire skill in gaining concentration to perfect your meditation. If one practises absorption (*jhāna*), it is well and good; for with *jhāna* as a stepping stone one can strive for meditation with ease. Even if you cannot achieve *jhāna*, you can practise the exercise of watching the six sense-doors, noting the arising and passing away of mind and matter, in accordance with the instructions contained in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

After all, this noting itself is the practice of insight meditation. Before you are able to take note of all that is happening at the six sense-doors, you should, at the beginning, note any physical movement that is easily

noticeable. For instance, if you are walking, begin the practice with noting the phenomenon of walking. If you are sitting be aware of your posture of sitting. Begin with the physical movement which is, as I have said, easily knowable. We advise the meditators to note the rising and falling of the abdomen as they breathe in and out. While noting its movement your mind may wander. You may think about this and that, or you may imagine things. Note this thinking or imagining. You may feel tired — note this tiredness. You may feel hot or painful as you exert — note the arising and passing away of these sensations. Note the phenomenon of seeing as you see, or hearing as you hear. When you experience pleasurable sensations, note them also.

Purification of Mind

At the beginning of insight practice, your power of concentration may be weak, so your mind goes off at a tangent. When your mind wanders, note its wandering. As you repeatedly note phenomena, your power of concentration will get stronger, and your mind, unable to get away from the object that you are noting, will be at one with it. At times you may imagine things. Note this at once and eventually you will get familiar with the process of thinking. As soon as you are aware of this process, stop thinking about it and bring your mind to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Now you will come to realise that your mind noting the object at the present moment has been preceded by your mind doing similarly in the past, and that it is being followed by your mind which will be doing similarly at the next moment. As it is all the time wholly occupied with the act of noting the object, it will get purified, and this is called **purification of mind** (*citta visuddhi*).

Purification of View

When the mind is thus made pure, it will be clear, being able to recognise sense-objects distinctly. This clarity brings one to the realisation that the noting mind is distinct from the sense-objects that are being noted. After repeated exercises, a meditator will arrive at the conclusion that there are only two things in this entire process of noting — the knowing mind and the object known. At this stage, knowledge regarding the true nature of phenomena through analysis of the aggregates into mind and matter, which means **analytical knowledge of body and mind** (*nāmarūpapariccheda*)

ñāṇa) has been developed. Once this knowledge becomes mature, purification of view (*diṭṭhi visuddhi*) is achieved.

Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality

As one's view has thus been purified, as one continues insight meditation noting the phenomena of arising and passing away of mind and matter, one will be able to discern the cause and condition for mentality and materiality. This discernment is **knowledge by discerning conditionality** (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*). This knowledge purges all doubts; and this stage is called purification by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhāvitarāṇa visuddhi*). If one continues further with one's meditation, one will note that objects of observation arise anew again and again to disappear soon after appearance.

Noting all this, one will be able to discern the three phases of phenomena, namely, the arising phase, the static or developing phase, and the dissolving phase. This is to say that the thing happening now was conditioned in the past, and will likewise be conditioned in the future. This stage of knowledge investigates the aggregates as composites; and the result of such investigation will invariably be the revelation that what appears and disappears is impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*). This is called **knowledge of comprehension** (*sammasana ñāṇa*).

Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away

As the meditator continues to note and reflect on the rise and fall of the five aggregates through the six sense-doors, mindfulness gains strength and he or she becomes aware of the rise and fall instantly. Thereby he or she establishes joy (*pīti*) and tranquility (*passaddhi*). This is called **knowledge of arising and passing away** (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*).

Further reflection would reveal the hollow nature of conditioned things with the disappearance of their form and substance. Both the knowing mind and the object known dissolve as quickly as they present themselves. This is known as **knowledge of dissolution** (*bhaṅga ñāṇa*).

Application of knowledge of dissolution gives rise to the establishment of **awareness of fearfulness** (*bhayatupaṭṭhāna ñāṇa*), which regards all dissolving things with fear or repugnance. Consequently it will lead to the development of **knowledge of equanimity about formations**

(*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), which regards all formations as neither repugnant nor pleasurable. As this wisdom grows by continued practice of insight meditation the knowing mind gets absorbed in the annihilation of all mind, matter, and mental formations. The realisation of this knowledge is the realisation of the Noble Path and its Fruition. The moment this stage is reached, be it only for once, a meditator becomes a Stream-winner. With this, all past actions come to an end; and so no new evil actions that can drag him or her down to lower realms would arise. If a Stream-winner continues to practise insight meditation, developing insight knowledge beginning with knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*), he or she will realise the Noble Path and its Fruition of a Once-returned (*sakadāgāmi*).

Continuing the practice of insight meditation a Once-returned moves up to the next stage as a Non-returned (*anāgāmi*), preparing for nibbāna. All past actions that could have led to the world of the senses come to an end and no new actions that would send him or her to the lower realms can arise. Here it may be asked whether wholesome karmas appertaining to the domain of sensual pleasures (*kāmāvacara*) may not arise. No doubt such good actions occur; but since they are not accompanied by craving for sensual pleasures, becoming in the sensual world (*kāmabhava*), cannot recur. Then the question arises whether good actions cannot produce results. By virtue of the fact that actions must produce results, they will without doubt continue to do so; but the results in this case would be the Path and its Fruition. This can be known from the story of Uggā.

Arahantship Through Almsgiving

Uggā,¹ a rich man, once gave almsfood to the Buddha and his disciples, saying that he was doing this with a view to getting what he considered to be the most cherished reward. At the time of practising that almsgiving, he was already a Non-returned; and so naturally, the most cherished reward he had in mind would be the Path and its Fruition of Arahantship, the next stage that a Non-returned aspires to. When he died, he was reborn as a *brahma* in the plane of *Suddhāvāsa*. Not long afterwards he gained the Path and its Fruition and became an Arahant, a worthy one.

¹ Uggā of Hatthigāma and Uggā of Vesālī were both Non-returneds, and both attained Arahantship in the celestial realms (ed.)

Remembering the Buddha, he came down to earth to pay homage to the Teacher. "How now!" asked Buddha, "Have you realised what you cherished most?" The *brahma* replied, "Yes, I have." This shows that a Non-returner can realise the Path as a result of wholesome kamma performed in his life time in the world of the senses.

Arahantship Through Insight Meditation

Although it has been said that Arahantship can be achieved through almsgiving, it must be borne in mind that it does not come naturally or automatically without the practice of insight meditation. A Non-returner must meditate with a view to realising the Path and Fruition of an Arahant. If he does so he will attain nibbāna. Once an Arahant, all defilements such as ignorance and craving are annihilated. All his past actions cease. At this stage, he may practise charity, morality, insight meditation, *etc.*, as is his wont, but all these good actions, in the absence of defilements, produce no results. We then say that all his actions become ineffective.

Ordinary people have a great attachment to the world they live in. They want an existence untroubled by old age, disease, and death. However, they are subject to the law of mortality, so they die. Yet, when they die they desire to be reborn in another world which is better than the one that they left behind. Even Stream-winners and Once-returners cannot get rid of this attachment altogether. For instance, Non-returners aspire to get to the realms of form or the formless realm. That is why they are reborn in those realms after they have left this world. With Arahants, there is no longing or craving for existence.

No Yearning for Death Nor for Life

The following verse is usually uttered by Arahants in their triumph.

“Nābhinandāmi maraṇaṃ, nābhinandāmi jīvitaṃ.

Kālaṅca paṭikaṅkhāmi, sampajāno patissato’ti.” (Theragāthā)

“I yearn neither for death nor for life; but I bide my time waiting for death just as a worker waits for pay-day.”

Unbelievers cast aspersions on nibbāna by suggesting that those who speak about it are themselves doubtful about its reality. “A man doing good,” they argue, “is said to be able to go to the abode

of *devas* or realise nibbāna after his demise. If that were so, would it not be better for those men of virtue to kill themselves so that they achieve heavenly bliss as quickly as possible? However, the fact is that no one dares give up his life for future happiness. This shows that no one actually believes what he himself teaches.”

Here, such harsh critics are working on wrong premises. An Arahant has no desire for the so-called happiness in the next existence after his *parinibbāna*. In fact, he desires neither death nor life. In that respect he is likened to a wage-earner as mentioned in the verse. A wage-earner works not because he loves his job. The only reason he works is that he is afraid to be out of a job. If he is jobless where can he find the means for feeding and clothing himself? So he is careful to keep himself employed, looking forward, however, to his pay-day. In the same manner an Arahant has no affection either for death or for life. He merely awaits the time of *parinibbāna*, annihilation of his five aggregates, for, it is only when he achieves it that he will be able to throw down the burden.

Arahants consider the five aggregates of matter, perception, sensation, mental formations, and consciousness as a heavy burden. This body has to be cared for and nurtured, clothed and fed. It has to be fed not only with food, but also with objects that appeal to its senses. It has to be constantly toned up with mindfulness of the four postures of walking, sitting, standing and lying down. It has to breathe to live. In fact, it has to be given constant attention for its welfare. To the Arahants all such undertakings are burdensome.

Speaking only about an Arahant’s last existence (preceding the attainment of *parinibbāna*), he or she acquires the burden of aggregates from the time rebirth-linking consciousness arose on being conceived in his or her mother’s womb. From that time onwards volitional activities begin operating, out of which mind and matter evolve without a break. Rebirth is produced by kamma and defilements inherited from the past. Viewed from the present existence an Arahant is just a product of the past aggregates formed as a result of previous kamma and defilements. The further one delves into the past in this manner, the more one discovers the same phenomenon of incessant arising of the aggregates. Thus one may never know when “becoming” begins. Consider which comes first, the egg or the hen; the mango seed or the mango tree. The hen lays eggs from which

are hatched chickens which grow up to be hens; and this process goes on *ad infinitum*, and one never knows which is the progenitor. The same may be applied to the case of the mango tree and its seed.

Perhaps, one may be able to put forward the view that the hen and the tree are primeval, existing at the very beginning of the world, but where the aggregates of mind and matter are considered, you can never know their beginning. Having borne the burden of the aggregates from time immemorial, an Arahant cherishes only one aspiration — to throw down the burden of the aggregates from his shoulders when the time for *parinibbāna* arrives.

Ordinary people under the domination of defilements have to accept the burden beginning from the moment that decease consciousness links up with birth-consciousness, time and time again throughout the cycle of rebirths. The burden gains weight and becomes heavier as the cycle progresses. With Arahants, as they have no craving for future existence, the seed of desire withers and no new becoming can arise. So the burden is relieved. This is their ultimate goal.

Rebirth is Dependent on Craving

Obsessed with craving, all beings have a strong attachment to their present existence. If death can be dispensed with, they would like to live eternally. If that is not possible, they would prefer starting a new life in the literal sense. So they can hardly accept the idea of no rebirth. Thus, for them, kamma renews their aggregates with birth-consciousness after decease-consciousness has run its course. Having no craving for a new existence, an Arahant desires cessation of his aggregates. Desire for a new life is craving, but desire for cessation is functional will (*kiriyaicchanda*), and is functional consciousness.¹

Please note the difference between craving (*taṇhā*), and will (*chanda*). Craving is active, will is passive; the one for existence, the other for the cessation of the cycle of existence.

No Craving Means No Rebirth

With Arahants, in the absence of craving, the seed of kamma consciousness that activates, withers away and dies. Action, moral and immoral is like the soil; action-producing consciousness is like

¹ Good deeds of the Buddhas and Arahants are called functional because kamma is not accumulated by them as they transcend good or evil.

the water and manure. When a man is about to die, he recollects his actions, good or bad, that he has done in his life-time. Again, he may see visions or hear sounds associated with his deeds. He is seeing the sign of his actions (*kamma-nimitta*). In some cases the dying man has visions of signs and symbols that forecast his destiny after his demise. This is the sign of destiny (*gati-nimitta*).

Here, let me add a footnote to elaborate the meaning of kamma-consciousness. It is synonymous with *abhisāṅkhāravīññāṇa*, which asserts itself at the dying moment as death-impulsion (*maraṇāsāññā javana*), with its complement of moral or immoral action. It is not impotent like functional consciousness (*kiriya-citta*). It is active, and so it takes in the sense-objects perceived at the time of death and causes the emergence of rebirth-linking consciousness after death. This is in accordance with the Pāḷi text, which says: "Dependent on formations, consciousness arises." Kamma-consciousness has no place for Arahants who, nearing *parinibbāna*, have only functional consciousness, which is not able to produce any result. When decease-consciousness arises at their *parinibbāna*, no rebirth-linking consciousness, no mind, and no matter can arise again. Thus it may be said that no becoming arises because the seed of kamma-consciousness is absent or impotent.

For Those Learned in the Abhidhamma

When an Arahant is about to achieve *parinibbāna*, he is not troubled by *kamma*, *kamma-nimitta*, or *gatinimitta*. Activating consciousness also fails to operate, and so no results of kamma can bear fruit. Only ineffective functional consciousness associated with his insight meditation come into play. Beyond them there is nothing but decease-consciousness pertaining to *parinibbāna*, on the achievement of which the seed of action becomes impotent. Thus there is the complete annihilation of existence.

Like A Flame Extinguished

At one time, at the behest of the Buddha, Venerable Ānanda recited the Ratana Sutta as he went around the city of Vesāli. During the recital the flame of an oil-lamp that was burning went out because the oil had been totally consumed and the wick completely burnt. "Just as this flame is extinguished," observed Venerable

Ānanda, “all conditioned things have been extinguished (in an Arahant).” The flame is dependent on the wick and the oil. If the oil-lamp is refilled with a fresh supply of oil and refitted with a new wick, the flame will continue to give light. When a flame is observed closely, it will be seen that the combustion is continuously supported by the burning oil that is sucked up by the wick. Casual observers notice the whole phenomenon as one continuous process. In the same way, the aggregates, generated by action, mind, climate, and nutriment are continually renewed, now arising and now passing away. If you want to know this nature, keep note of whatever appears at your six sense-doors as you see, hear, feel or know a sense-object. You will notice that a phenomenon occurs and at once ceases just as it has occurred. When mindfulness gains strength, you will realise the instant passing away of all phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.* To ordinary people these phenomena are continuous. So the aggregates are likened to a flame.

As the cessation of the aggregates is likened to a flame being extinguished, people who are obsessed with the idea of self usually think and say that an Arahant as an individual has disappeared. In point of fact an individual has no basis of reality. What we describe, in conventional language, as an individual is, after all, a compound of materiality and mentality that manifest themselves. With Arahants, these compound things become extinct. Cessation does not mean the disappearance of the individual.

If one is fixated on the belief that the individual disappears, then he will be guilty of the wrong view of annihilationism (*uccheda-dit̥hi*). There is, as I have said, no individual. There is only a succession of mental and physical phenomena arising and dissolving. An Arahant is an epitome of that successive phenomena of arising and dissolution. Beyond the aggregates, there is no individual. So, with Arahants, cessation means the extinction of the successive rise and fall of the aggregates. It is with this extinction in mind that Venerable Ānanda made a reference to a flame that was extinguished.

THE MEANING OF NIBBĀNA

The word *nibbanti*, meaning extinction, occurs in the Ratana Sutta. Etymologically, it is derived from *ni*, a negative prefix, and *va*, meaning

craving. It denotes the annihilation of the flames of lust, hatred, and ignorance which are the root causes of suffering. The texts say: *“nibbāti vaṭṭadukkhaṃ ettati nibbānaṃ.”* It means where the cycle of suffering ceases, there is nibbāna. At the sight of nibbāna, on the realisation of the Path and its Fruition as a result of insight meditation, defilements like craving and ignorance become extinct, thereby giving no opportunity for actions and results of actions to arise in the form of consciousness, mind and matter, six bases, contact, sensations, *etc.* New becoming does not occur. This is the extinction of the cycle of defilements, the cycle of actions, and the cycle of results. Here, in this definition, the special quality of nibbāna is used metaphorically for the location of nibbāna, but in fact, nibbāna has no location.

The texts also say:¹ *“nibbāti vaṭṭadukkhaṃ etasmim̐ adhigateti vā nibbānaṃ,”* which means; when nibbāna is attained, the cycle of suffering is annihilated. Here it emphasises that the Path and its Fruition are instrumental in bringing about the cessation of suffering. So nibbāna may also be described as the instrument by which cessation of suffering is achieved, but this is also said in a figurative sense.

The most important point to note is that the nature of nibbāna is the annihilation of all defilements. With the end of the cycle of defilements, no new becoming arises, and all is quiescence.

Let me coin an aphorism for easy recollection.

“Nibbāna is where the cycle of suffering ceases. Nibbāna is instrumental in bringing about the cessation of the cycle of suffering. The very nature of nibbāna is the cessation of cycle of suffering.”

For an insight meditator, defilements become inert only for a moment during the practice of insight meditation. They cannot be totally uprooted. Total elimination is possible only with the realisation of the Noble Path, resulting in Path-consciousness flowing into the stream of annihilation.

Nibbāna is figuratively shown as the abode of cessation of all suffering brought about by defilements. Its nature is also described metaphorically as the very element of quiescence, the result of cessation of suffering. In actuality, nibbāna is the very nature of

¹ I was unable to find either this quotation or the preceding one (ed.)

the annihilation of all the three cycles of suffering. Its characteristic, according to the Commentaries, is peace and calm (*santi*).

The Meaning of Peace

Peace (*santi*) also means extinction of all cycles of suffering. Its nature or characteristic is serenity. As all sufferings have been annihilated absolute peace reigns supreme in nibbāna. I think this much is clear by now, but for a better understanding, I shall elaborate the nature of cycles (*vaṭṭa*).

The Cycle of Defilements

The cycle of defilements (*kilesa vaṭṭa*), according to the Law of Dependent Origination, is set into motion by ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), and attachment (*upādāna*). The incessant arising of conditioned things like mind and matter at the six sense-doors is considered as unsatisfactory because of their transient nature. It brings about nothing but suffering. This realism of the nature of existence is obscured by the machinations of craving; and so the truth remains clouded and not properly understood. This deviation from truth is ignorance. Sensual pleasures derived from pleasurable sights and sounds and enjoyable ideas are all suffering; but ignorance accepts them as happiness. A person under this delusion thinks to himself, "I exist. He exists. This existence is everlasting." The sense-objects he observes appear to him as good and wholesome, appealing to his aesthetic taste. Now that he takes them as wholesome and beautiful, he craves for them; and this craving goads him on to the satisfaction of his desires for them, which, in consequence, produces attachment. His volitional efforts to achieve the objects of his desires lead him to volitional activities and becoming (*kammabhava*), as a result of actions, moral or immoral.

The Cycle of Actions

When the three primary defilements of ignorance, craving, and attachment are taken into account, their secondary derivatives like anger (*dosa*), pride (*māna*), and wrong-view (*diṭṭhi*), must also be considered. Prompted by craving, greed (*lobha*), asserts itself. Encouraged by greed, an individual makes the utmost exertion to get what is desired by every means at his or her disposal. When dissatisfied,

anger arises. Unrestrained, he or she scrambles for the object of desire, playing havoc with the life and property of others. Such actions are accompanied by delusion (*moha*)—another form of ignorance, which goes along with unwholesome deeds (*akusala*). So, when one feels angry or greedy, delusion is always there to aggravate the situation.

Then consider pride. It makes one think highly of oneself. As it brooks no equals, it strives after supremacy. Proud people, obsessed with wrong views, assert that they are always in the right; and with this attitude they work for the perpetuation of their wrong ideologies either by persuasion or by aggressive propaganda. All of these actions stem from the cycle of defilements which brings into play the cycle of actions.

Murder, thieving, and lying are all immoral actions; while giving alms and practising morality are virtues. Ordinary people and even holy persons, barring the Arahants, are subject to the working of the cycle of defilements, so their deeds may be either meritorious or demeritorious. When these volitions during the performance of deeds are conjoined with greed, anger, and delusion, unwholesome karmas will produce bad results or demerits. Where these three main defilements are absent, wholesome karmas, or merits, are achieved. Evil deeds point the way to lower realms, while good deeds lead to the realms of men, *devas* and *brahmas*. Ordinarily, goodness brings about longevity, robust health, and material prosperity. If one wishes, one can even aspire to the Path and its Fruition, and ultimately to nibbāna, through the performance of wholesome deeds. If one wants to avoid being reborn in lower realms, and being troubled by bad results, one must avoid killing, stealing, *etc.* If one wants to be born into the realms of men, *devas*, and *brahmas*, and ultimately to tread the Path and attain nibbāna, one must practise charity, morality, and mental development. One who aspires to the Path and its Fruition, and ultimately nibbāna, must practise insight meditation.

Do Not Associate With Fools

Nowadays some people who have wrong understanding of the Dhamma teach their wrong views saying that those desiring to end all suffering with no recurrence of rebirths should not practise charity, morality, and mental development, for all these good deeds stem from the cycle of actions, which is conditioned by the cycle of

defilements: ignorance, craving, and attachment. This cycle of actions, in turn, also brings about rebirth-linking consciousness, mind, matter, six sense-bases, contact, feeling, *etc.* That being so, it is pointless to do wholesome deeds.

Such a line of reasoning creates deterioration in the minds of people of low intelligence. Taken in by this kind of teaching, they stop doing good, practising charity, observing precepts, developing loving-kindness, and last, but not least, stop performing devotional exercises at pagodas and monasteries. It is said that they are beset by feelings of remorse for having done some good deeds such as alms-giving! For such people, all merits that they would have accumulated for the performance of good deeds will be thrown to the wind, but demerits will surely accumulate, with the inevitable result that they will go to hell. They will not be able to resist greed, and so they will not hesitate to think, speak, and do evil whenever they make any exertion for the satisfaction of their desires. They will also barely be able to restrain their anger, which arises on their failure to satisfy their desires. Wholesome consciousness bent on doing good, and unwholesome consciousness bent on doing evil, cannot arise simultaneously; they appear one after the other. When walking, the left foot is raised while the right foot stands firmly touching the ground. When the right foot is raised, the left foot stands firm. Both feet do not go up or down simultaneously. The two types of consciousness behave in the same way. While good actions are operating, bad actions remain dormant. Good deeds are invariably the result of voluntary effort, while bad deeds hardly require any special volition. They arise spontaneously obeying the dictates of greed, anger, and the like. Even when one is practising Dhamma to suppress them, they appear at the slightest opportunity. It is thus inevitable that when one abandons wholesome deeds, unwholesomeness is sure to gain in abundance. The way to the lower realms is wide open for an evil-doer. All things considered, it is because of the wrong views entertained by his mentor that the pupil goes astray. It is in regard to such misguiding instructors that the Buddha advises in the [Maṅgala Sutta](#): “*asevanā ca bālānaṃ*” — do not associate with fools.

The Cycle of Results

Actions, moral or immoral, produce consequences, good or bad. So the cycle of actions brings about the cycle of results (*vipāka vaṭṭa*). To escape from this cycle, one should practise charity, morality, and mental development, especially mental culture through insight meditation, which will ultimately lead one to the Path of Arahantship. Then rebirth ceases giving no opportunity for the arising of new “becoming,” or new mind and matter. Thus the cycle of results may be defined as the recurrence of aggregates or conditioned things, as a result of actions, moral or immoral.

The Pāli word “*vaṭṭa*” simply means going round in circles. The cycle of defilements resolves into the cycle of actions, which, in its turn, resolves into the cycle of results, and in this way they revolve in a circle that has no beginning or end. No one can stop this wheel. Regarding the nature of actions and their results, it may be easy for an individual to desist from doing good, but he will be utterly unable to resist evil. If you fail to accomplish moral actions, you can be sure that immoral actions will get the better of you. Kamma results produced by meritorious deeds will be highly beneficial to you, for they can send you to the abode of human beings and *devas*, but demerits accumulated by evil actions forced upon you by defilements will surely drag you down to hell. If your kamma is favourable, you may have the opportunity to associate with men of wisdom and virtue, but if bad kamma is at work, you will become a co-traveller with evil companions, and you may continue to commit evil deeds throughout your life. In one’s life, one may have done millions of things, but at death there is only one action that produces rebirth, rendering remaining actions ineffective as one departs from this world.

However, these residual kammās are retributive, and once one goes down to the lower realms, one would suffer there for aeons. If one becomes a hungry ghost (*peta*), one will forever go hungry and thirsty, or one may be burnt alive, or subjected to injuries inflicted by swords or other lethal weapons. One may weep and wail for such sufferings. If one is reborn as an animal, a worm, an insect, a buffalo, a bullock, a horse, or an elephant, one will face untold miseries, for in the animal world, the strong victimize the weak who, in the end,

would become a meal for the former. I am recounting these examples to let you know what happens to people acquiring demerits.

Even when favourable kammās are at work and one is reborn a man, one cannot escape old age, disease, and death, which cause grief, lamentation, *etc.*, which are all suffering. If one is unfortunate, one may live in poverty in one's new existence, or one may be victimized by the strong, or one may be tempted to commit evil. Then, as a result of such evil actions, one may again go down to lower realms when one dies. If luck would have it, one may be reborn in heaven, but in heaven too, one may become sad, instead of being glad, as one feels that one's desires are not totally fulfilled. Even as a *deva*, one may become dejected with thoughts of death. If, even as a *deva*, one forgets the Dhamma in the pursuit of sensual pleasures, one may also go down to lower realms on one's decease from the world of *devas*.

There is no way to escape from these three cycles of suffering unless one practises the Eightfold Noble Path taught as the Middle Way by the Buddha in the [Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta](#). This practice entails the development of morality, concentration, and wisdom, which are the main objectives of mental culture that I spoke of earlier in this discourse when I emphasised insight meditation. The meditators of this Sāsana Yeikthā are familiar with Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā, which prescribes methods of noting the arising and dissolution of mind and matter as well as sense-bases, contact, feeling, *etc.*, which are conditioned by the cycle of results in the present existence.

HOW TO ESCAPE FROM THE THREE CYCLES

Let me elaborate on this practice of insight meditation. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking are the function of the six groups of consciousness, namely, eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch, and mind consciousness. Consciousness is invariably accompanied by its concomitants, which fall into the category of mentality. The seat of the sense-organs, the body, is, of course, materiality. When the eye, the object and the sense-base meet, contact occurs, and feeling arises. These five in the cycle of resultants — mentality, materiality, sense-base, contact, and feeling — belong to the present moment, since they are taking place daily. If they are not contemplated with insight knowledge, craving develops in accordance with the kind of feelings created, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Craving

begets attachment. Not being able to note the five resultants as they really are is ignorance, which, together with craving and attachment, constitutes the cycle of defilements. This gives birth to the cycle of actions, which in its turn produces the cycle of results. To prevent the first cycle, that of defilements, from arising, the workings of the cycle of results must be observed and noted with the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, when knowledge of the absolute reality of conditioned things will dispel all defilements. In the absence of ignorance, craving cannot arise; and in the absence of craving, attachment withers away. Then the cycle of actions ceases to operate, being unable to bring about results. In this manner all the three cycles subside.

Here I would like to quote the following extract from the Loka Sutta of the Nidānavagga Saṃyutta (S.ii.73):

“Katamo ca, bhikkhave, lokassa samudayo? Cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññānaṃ. Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā; taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ; upādānapaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā jarāmaṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanas-supāyāsā sambhavanti. Ayaṃ kho, bhikkhave, lokassa samudayo.”

“What, monks, is the origin of this world? Dependent on eye and form, visual consciousness arises. The meeting of the three — eye, form, and consciousness — produce contact. Through contact, feeling arises; through feeling, craving; through craving, attachment; through attachment, becoming; through becoming, birth. Birth brings about old age and death attended by sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. This, monks, is how the mass of suffering called the world comes into being.”

Thus from the act of seeing, genesis, or the origin of life, and its cycle of suffering set the whirling of endless births and rebirths in motion. The eye grasps at its object, and vision arises producing a sense of feeling corresponding to what it sees. If this phenomenon is not analysed with insight knowledge for a proper appraisal of the nature of things, craving will wreak havoc with your life as you exert for the fulfilment of desires by all means. Then actions produce rebirths that bring the miseries of old age and death. This

applies with due alteration of details to other sense-bases. In this way the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*) revolves endlessly.

Annihilation of Existence

How can this cycle of *saṃsāra* be cut off? I will tell you about the annihilation of the cycle of existence based on the same discourse:

“Katamo ca, bhikkhave, lokassa atthaṅgamo? Cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ. Tinnaṃ saṅgati phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādānanirodho; upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. Ayaṃ kho, bhikkhave, lokassa atthaṅgamo.”

“What, monks, is the annihilation of the world? Dependent on the eye and form, visual consciousness arises. The meeting of the three — eye, form, and consciousness — produce contact. Through contact, feeling arises, and through feeling, craving. That craving is totally annihilated (by the Path of the Worthy Ones) leaving no residue. When craving ceases, attachment ceases; when attachment ceases, becoming ceases; when becoming ceases, birth ceases; when birth ceases, old age and death cannot arise. Then sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are destroyed. In this way, the cycle of suffering comes to an end. This, monks, is how the mass of suffering called the world is annihilated.”

From the act of seeing, feeling arises; and when this feeling is properly observed and noted through insight meditation, all the three cycles of suffering will be annihilated. For further understanding of the subject I will quote the Sammasa Sutta of the same Nidāna Saṃyutta.

The Sammasa Sutta

“Yepi hi keci, bhikkhave, etarahi samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā yaṃ loke piyarūpaṃ sātārūpaṃ taṃ niccato passanti sukhato passanti attato passanti ārogyato passanti khemato passanti. Te taṇhaṃ vadḍhenti. Ye taṇhaṃ vadḍhenti te

upadhiṃ vaḍḍhenti. Ye upadhiṃ vaḍḍhenti te dukkhaṃ vaḍḍhenti. Ye dukkhaṃ vaḍḍhenti te na parimuccanti jātiyā jarāya maraṇena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi, na parimuccanti dukkhasmāti vadāmi.”

“Presently, monks, there are some monks or Brahmins who reflect that what appears to be agreeable or delightful is after all impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, to be regarded as a disease, and therefore, as abhorrent. They abandon craving, and consequently the substrata of being, and finally eliminate all suffering. They are then released from the hold of rebirth with its attendants sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. I say unto you that in this way they are liberated from suffering.”

According to this discourse, if one sees a form and reflects on its phenomenon in the light of the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, craving will be eliminated at the very instant insight knowledge arises; and then all the three cycles of suffering will be halted. That particular moment of realisation is the moment of truth. It is the momentary cessation (*tadaṅga-nibbāna*) of all three cycles of suffering caused by defilement, action, and result.

Like the Stump of a Palm Tree

As insight knowledge is developed and when the Path and its Fruition are realised, all defilements are exterminated. Then kamma ceases to operate and no actions are renewed. So after the decease consciousness has taken place, the cycle of aggregates comes to a halt.

This is called *anupādisesanibbāna*, that is, nibbāna without the substratum of existence remaining. It means that the aggregates and passions have been totally discarded. It is true that, by the time of the realisation of the Path, total cessation has already been effected, but it is not as obvious as when *parinibbāna* occurs. When a palm-tree breaks into two, the upper trunk falls to the ground, leaving the lower stump erect. This stump gives the illusion that the tree is intact and alive. When it rots and falls to the ground, the entire tree disappears. An Arahant is like that stump. He has abandoned aggregates and passions by the time he realises the Path. However, the old aggregates remain with him; and so the cessation is not intelligible. With the

attainment of *parinibbāna*, he disappears totally just as the stump does. Earlier I gave you the verse recited by Venerable Ānanda about the extinction of the aggregates being like a flame extinguished. All these allegories describe how the aggregates cease.

Having banished all defilements, no mental suffering arises, but as the body has not yet been discarded, the Arahant may experience physical discomforts, which may be construed as physical suffering. Formations continue to give their results in material form, and, thus suffering relating to the Arahant's body is still there. However, when nibbāna is achieved, peace is with him with its concomitant, coolness.

Nibbāna Is Happiness

Venerable Sāriputta used to exult, saying, "Brethren! Verily, nibbāna is happiness! Verily, nibbāna is happiness! Venerable Udāyī was not satisfied with this statement, and so he asked, "Where in the world will this happiness be, when in nibbāna one has neither feelings nor passions?"

Yes, indeed, there is no feeling in nibbāna. Then where can happiness be? The elder Udāyī rushed in where angels fear to tread, because he was foolish. He was nicknamed *Lāḷudāyī* — *lāḷu* being a term for jester.

"Indeed," replied Venerable Sāriputta, "in nibbāna there is neither feeling nor passion, and this absence itself is happiness."

There are two kinds of happiness, sensual and non-sensual. When six sense-objects supply satisfaction or pleasure, it is called *vedayita sukha*, happiness derived from the senses. In the sensual world, the five pleasures of the sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are regarded as the best. People do not like to be deprived of them. Those who like chewing betel or smoking are not well-disposed to living in an environment where these pleasures are denied. Gluttons do not like to be born in the world of *brahmas* where eating is absolutely unnecessary. In that world there is no differentiation of the sexes. Absence of sexuality makes the five constituents of sensual pleasures superfluous, but sensuous persons do not like that absence. Where ignorance and craving predominate, nibbāna is unwanted, for it lacks sensual pleasure. Lāḷudāyī was one of those not liking nibbāna. Venerable Sāriputta had to admonish him saying

that absence of feeling itself is nibbāna. Peace and happiness not derived from sensual pleasures constitute *avedayita sukha*.

True Bliss

True bliss is *santi sukha*, bliss of peace and serenity. You may think that sensual pleasures give you happiness, but that is not true happiness. Such pleasures are merely like the satisfaction that a smoker derives from smoking. They are also like the pleasures of a man suffering from itches who feels that scratching gives him the sensations of pleasure.

Suppose you were made to enjoy the pleasures of the sights of men and women, handsome and pretty, or beautiful paintings without a break for a space of one minute or one second, for one month or one year. Can you bear it? Suppose you are asked to listen to good music all day long, or all month, or all year round. Could you do it? If you are consuming delicacies, can you continue to enjoy them day in and day out? Can you enjoy pleasurable contacts indefinitely? If such pleasures were to be enjoyed without any rest or sleep, you will surely get bored in the end. Is not sleep a moment of peace that brings true happiness without the interference of sense-objects?

One who is familiar with only sensual pleasures think highly of them. Enjoyment is the highest goal. In the Buddha's time a doctrine was current among heretics to the effect that suffering could be exterminated during the present state of existence without the extinction of existence. Followers of that doctrine were known as *ditṭhadhamma-vādi*. They used to teach: "Enjoy all kinds of sensual pleasures wherever available. This is the ultimate good." This is mentioned in Brahmajāla Sutta. Those who know only *jhānic* or Brahmanic bliss to the exclusion of other kinds of happiness, praise it to the skies. In fact, Baka Brahma told the Buddha that Brahmanic bliss was the most enjoyable.

One would like to think that the kind of food and drink obtainable in cities and towns appear to be more delicious than that available in villages. In the same way people would like to think that *jhānic* bliss is better than sensual pleasures. In fact, the kind of bliss attained through the Path and its Fruition is better than *jhānic* bliss. Going a step further, the bliss of nibbāna is better than the bliss of the Path and its Fruition.

First *jhānic* bliss is better than happiness derived from sensual pleasures. Regarding *jhānic* bliss, Venerable Sāriputta commented as follows, first pointing out the nature of sensual pleasures: a visible object gives rise to eye-consciousness, an audible object to ear-consciousness, an olfactory-object to nose-consciousness, a taste-object to tongue-consciousness and a tangible object to touch-consciousness. All these objects of the senses appeal to the mind, generate sense of love or affection, produce sensuality and incite lust. They all go to make the five constituents of sensual pleasures. In the world of the senses those who has the opportunity to enjoy these five constituents feel that they have attained happiness.

On the practice of the first *jhāna*, sensual pleasures are abandoned. One who gains *jhāna* gets absorbed in the *jhāna* factors of initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), joy (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*), and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). The course of the first *jhānic* rapture and happiness flows continuously without interruption, unlike the earthly joys of the senses that arise by fits and starts. In the sensual world one may feel happy at one moment and sad at another, but the thrill of *jhānic* bliss continues without interruption for some length of time. If, during the period of concentrating on *jhānic* bliss, a meditator happens to recall sensual pleasures enjoyed previously, he or she will be remorseful, suffering mental pain which may be likened to the pain of an old wound receiving a fresh blow. It means that to a meditator absorbed in *jhāna*, the very memory of the pleasures of the senses is enough to generate abhorrence and fear. He or she looks forward to the attainment of nibbāna where no feeling arises.

Different Stages of Jhānic Bliss

When one gets absorbed in the second *jhāna* after the first, rapture and joy gain momentum merging into one-pointedness, which prevails throughout without any impediment for one or two hours at a stretch. If, by chance, the first *jhāna* consciousness arises during initial and sustained application, the meditator concentrating on second *jhāna* would feel painful at the thought of that consciousness as much as one feels painful when a fresh blow is given to an old wound. These remarks apply also to those achieving the third and fourth *jhānas* recalling lesser *jhānas* during their concentration.

If may be shown here that happiness derived from the first *jhāna* far transcends that derived from sensual pleasures, that derived from the second *jhāna* far transcends that derived from the first, that derived from the third far transcends that derived from the second, and that derived from the fourth far transcends that derived from the third. Compared to such *jhānic* happiness, the joy of formless *jhāna* is far superior to that enjoyed in the other four ordinary *jhāna* states. The four formless *jhānas* are: absorption in the infinity of space (*ākāśānañcāyatana*), absorption in the infinity of consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*), absorption in nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*), and absorption in neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). Each *jhāna* is better than the other, but even in the highest formless *jhāna*, namely absorption in neither-perception-nor-non-perception, extremely subtle sensations can arise. So nibbāna where all sensations cease far transcends that which can be encountered in the highest formless *jhāna*.

Nibbāna is thus more sublime and nobler than *jhāna* bliss. Insight meditators know that the rapture and joy experienced at the stage of equanimity about formations far excels those experienced at the stage of knowledge of rising and passing. When the Fruition of the Path is accomplished, rapture and joy experienced are paramount. Hence we say *avedayita sukha* far excels *vedayita sukha*.

Those who cannot practise insight meditation or *jhāna* may be able to appreciate the different grades of happiness now enumerated and come to the conclusion that *santi sukha* is paramount. They may also realise that in the realm of Buddhism, there are far higher ideals that we cannot easily fathom, and this may serve as an impetus to strive after the development of faith in the Dhamma.

The teachings of all the Buddhas say that nibbāna is paramount. It is the cessation of all feelings. In the absence of feeling, peace and calm reign supreme. All suffering relating to old age, disease, death and dissolution cease. As it is deathless, its bliss is indestructible. Thus it is the highest bliss.

I will close with a résumé of what I have said. Nibbāna is where the cycle of suffering ceases. It is also the instrument by which this cessation is brought about. It is the state of annihilation of the cycle of suffering. Ignorance, craving and attachment constitute the cycle of defilements. Actions perpetrated according to the dictates of the

cycle of defilements constitute the cycle of actions, moral or immoral. The aggregates that arise at rebirth as a result of meritorious or demeritorious deeds constitute the cycle of results.

Happiness derived from contact with the six sense-objects is called *vedayita sukha*. Peace and calm associated with the absence of sensations arising out of six sense-objects is called *avedayita sukha*.

It is not always opportune to hear a discourse on nibbāna. For the teacher, too, opportunities to deliver such a discourse are few and far between. In his lifetime the Buddha often taught about the nature of nibbāna. This fact is recorded in the Udāna Pāḷi text and on the next occasion I shall have something to say about it.

May all who have listened to this discourse enjoy the bliss of nibbāna, which far transcends *vedayita sukha*, having realised the Path and its Fruition in a short space of time.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part II

*Delivered on the full moon day of Tawthalin, 1326 B.E.
21st September 1964*

Last week, in my discourse on nibbāna, I defined it as the cessation of the three cycles of suffering. Today, I shall attempt at differentiating mental formations¹ (*saṅkhārā*) from nibbāna according to the Pāḷi text of the Paṭisambhidāmagga.

MENTAL FORMATIONS AND NIBBĀNA

1. Arising and Non-arising

The text says: “*Uppādo saṅkhāra; anuppādo nibbānaṃ.*” It means that arising is mental formations, and non-rising is nibbāna.

Meditators know inwardly that every conditioned thing comes up afresh every time it dissolves. As knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) develops, the meditator becomes aware of a state that is beyond the phenomena of arising and passing

¹ *Saṅkhāra* is a multi-significant term, ordinarily referring to all mental states. It has been variously translated as volitional or conditioning activities, mental formations, or kamma formations. Here it is applied to all conditioned things which are subject to change. (Translator)

away. It means that it has gone beyond formations to come nearer to nibbāna. Mental formations are diametrically opposed to nibbāna, and the two are incompatible. If one exists, the other disappears. Where there is no arising, there is nibbāna; and conversely where there is arising, there is no nibbāna. One can see no light in the darkness, and no darkness in the light.

With sentient beings, mind and matter renew their states at the time of conception. It happens in this way, Immediately after rebirth-consciousness, passive or life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga*) arises. It is from this moment of arising that material phenomena arising from the mind spring up. This process continues, and mind and matter come into being in succession in accordance with the types of consciousness appropriate to the objects perceived. For instance, mind-consciousness occurs when one thinks of an object, and touch consciousness when one touches it; and through such consciousness is conditioned mentality-materiality or psycho-physical phenomena (*nāmarūpa*). This “becoming” flows throughout life, after birth has taken place. When this life has run its course, it is renewed in the next existence and this goes on *ad infinitum*. In other words, mental formations influenced jointly by wholesome or unwholesome types of consciousness (*kamma*), mind (*citta*), climate (*utu*), and nutriment (*āhāra*), are called “*saṅkhārā*,” which can be perceived by insight knowledge.

After repeated meditation exercises, a meditator will experience that consciousness flows on without prompting like a stream into the region of not being. That moment of realisation of cessation is the bliss of nibbāna, which is known through the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition.

2. Occurrence and Non-occurrence

The text says: “*Pavattaṃ saṅkhāra; āpavattaṃ nibbānaṃ.*” It means: occurrence is mental formations, and non-occurrence is nibbāna. *Pavatti* strictly means a course of existence between rebirth-consciousness and decease-consciousness.

Mind and matter are constantly formed through the process of arising and passing away and they flow like a stream. When an object of mind or an object of sense enters this stream, other types of consciousness, such as mind-consciousness or touch-conscious-

ness occur, as stated before, appropriate to the objects perceived. Conditioned things are formed in this way and life-continuum goes on like a running stream. That being so, ordinary people think that the continuous mass of mind and matter exists without suffering any change. They think that their bodies that they see now at the present moment are the same as that existed when they were young. From such notions arises attachment to self and to the idea of permanence of self. Owing to this attachment realities are not appreciated. When they experience the onset of pleasurable sensations assailing their minds, they mistake them for happiness. Not being able to grasp the ultimate truths about mind and matter, they are led to believe in permanence, happiness, and self.

Through insight the meditator knows the process of formation and dissolution of conditioned things, so his or her conviction in impermanence stands firm. The meditator also realises that what is impermanent is unsatisfactory, and what is unsatisfactory is suffering. The meditator sees no "I" in any phenomenon. As the meditator notes the arising and passing away of mind and matter, he or she perceives that this cycle of formation and dissolution is endless. What the meditator thus sees with the aid of insight meditation is occurrence. Concentrating on it incessantly, the meditator arrives at knowledge of equanimity about formations (*sañkhārupekkhāñāṇa*), when the mind is inclined to the element of peace where the stream of mind and matter ceases to flow. As nothing occurs at this stage, it is called non-occurrence. That moment when this knowledge matures through the consciousness of the Path and its Fruition is the moment of truth when the meditator becomes at one with nibbāna.

3. Having Signs and Signless

The text says: "*Nimittaṃ sañkhāra; animittaṃ nibbānaṃ.*" It means: the presence of signs (of conditioned things or sentient existence) is mental formations; and absence of those signs is nibbāna. In other words, nibbāna is signless. Those not experienced in insight meditation believe that visible objects have definite shapes or dimensions. Even the meditator thinks so at the beginning of the practice. In accordance with the principles of Satipaṭṭhāna, the meditator may be noting "walking" when walking, but cannot shake

off the awareness that, in the process of walking, his or her leg is being lifted and that his or her body is moving. He or she feels the sensation of movement of his or her body. Similarly when noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, the meditator is always conscious of the shape and form of the abdomen. It means that he or she is aware of the signs of the presence of conditioned things, which are subject to change. These signs are mental formations.

However, when the meditator attains a higher stage of insight knowledge, he or she is only aware of the element of motion, which arises and then disappears. He or she now gains the conviction that all is impermanent. In this way the meditator arrives at knowledge of dissolution.

Signlessness Felt through Knowledge of Dissolution

The Visuddhimagga¹ has this to say:

“Nāṇe tikkhe vahante saṅkhāresu lahuṃ upaṭṭhahantesu uppādaṃ vā ṭhitiṃ vā pavattaṃ vā nimittaṃ vā na sampāpuṇāti. Khayaṃvayabhedanirodheyaṃ sati santiṭṭhati.”²

“Once his knowledge works keenly, and formation quickly become apparent, he no longer extends his mindfulness to their arising or presence or occurrence or sign but brings it to bear only on their cessation as destruction, fall and break-up.”³

When the meditator’s knowledge is rendered sharp with the practice of meditation, the act of noting and recognizing the object under observation is quickened so much that when becoming aware of formations, mindfulness only extends to the cessation of phenomena. It happens in this way: each thought-moment of consciousness has three instants — arising or genesis (*uppādi*) as the beginning, stasis or development (*ṭhiti*) as the middle, and cessation or dissolution (*bhaṅga*) as the end of the phenomenon.

Before the practice of insight meditation, the meditator is not conscious of these three instants of thought-moments. To the

¹ In the Bhaṅgānupassanāñānakathā, Paṭipadāñānadassanavisuddhiniddeso (ed.)

² Vism. 641.

³ This translation is by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli in his edition: “The Path of Purification,” published by R. Semage, Colombo 1956.

beginner, all forms, concepts, and signs indicate that every phenomenon occurs as a continuous chain of events. The meditator thinks that events flow like a stream without a break. When the first stage of insight, starts to develop, namely, analytical knowledge of body and mind (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*), which is knowledge arrived at by dissecting mind and body into their ultimate parts, notions of continuity dwindle to a certain extent. When knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*) is developed, the meditator gains the knowledge of the arising and ceasing of past, present, and future events as arising, development, and dissolution. Even then they seem durable since they are concatenated. When the knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*) is realised, the meditator is aware of the beginning and end of the thought-moment, but the actual occurrence, the middle state, is not apparent.

When knowledge of dissolution is realised, the signs of mental formations relating to arising and development subside, leaving only dissolution or cessation for the meditator to notice. However, it does not mean that the meditator is now in sight of nibbāna. He or she is just able to recognise mental formations with the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. It is only when the knowledge of equanimity about formations arises, that the meditator is able to cultivate indifference to all signs that indicate formations, namely, arising, development, and cessation. Finally, when the meditator reflects with knowledge of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), on the Path and its Fruition, passions already destroyed, passions to be further destroyed, and nibbāna, then he or she arrives at the ultimate stage where all signs of mental formations disappear.

Characteristics, Function, and Manifestation

The Commentaries describe nibbāna by its characteristics, function, and manifestation. The characteristic of nibbāna is peace, its function is deathlessness, and its manifestation signlessness. Insight into signlessness can be achieved only through the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition aided by the knowledge of reviewing. As Noble Ones reflect on the Path and its Fruition, the absence of form, conventional concept and sign becomes apparent.

Nibbāna is Formless

In the Milinda Pañha, Venerable Nāgasena tells King Milinda that there is nothing that can be equated with nibbāna. It has no shape or form, no size, and no dimension. It cannot be perceived by reasoning, or by disputation, or by metaphorical presentation. It is beyond compare. It is neither white nor black, bright nor dark, big nor small. Nibbāna is the cessation of the three cycles of defilement, action, and results.

Writing in 1943, I said in my book “Insight Meditation” by way of introduction: “Nibbāna is not a mansion or a palace. It is not a city. It is not light. There is no luminescence in nibbāna. It has no element of lucidity and coolness. Mansions, places, cities, light, luminescence, lucidity, and coolness are not unconditioned (*asañkhata*) or ultimate realities (*paramattha*).”

I wrote that piece objectively without intending to impugn anything to anyone. Later I found a book that represents nibbāna as an expanse of luminosity. Readers might think that I was criticising the writer of that book, but no! I wrote without any knowledge of it. I repeat the words of Milinda Pañha when I say that nibbāna is formless. A meditator concentrating on it with the knowledges of equanimity, adaptation, and maturity (*gotrabhū ñāṇa*) with nibbāna as its object, will get lost in the stream of consciousness that acknowledges the cessation of all formations. At this stage, both the noting mind and the object noted appear to be dissolving.

4. Accumulation and Non-accumulation

The text says: “*Āyūhanā sañkhāra; anāyūhanā nibbānaṃ.*” It means accumulation (of actions) is mental formation and non-accumulation is nibbāna. The grammatical connotation of “*āyūhanā*” is “constructing or assembling.” As in constructing a house, where the builder assembles materials in an appropriate order, efforts to accumulate actions constitute mental formations. Where such efforts are absent, there you will find nibbāna.

As the function of mental formations is to accumulate, its characteristic is formation, which may be either passive or active. Where formation is conditioned by the four composite factors of the so-called being, namely, kamma, mind, climate, and nutriment,

it is passive. Mind and matter are subject to these four factors. It is with reference to this mind and matter that we say all formations are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. *Cetasikā* is the concomitants of consciousness, and it is also called the aggregate of mental formations. When it operates to cause mental, verbal, or physical conduct, the characteristic of formations is said to be active. Volition (*cetanā*) is one of the mental concomitants. It produces results, either good or bad, in conformity with the mental, verbal, and physical actions performed meritoriously or demeritoriously. Wholesome or unwholesome kammās arise in this way, and it is this kamma that is active formations that cause the renewal of existence after the old aggregates have passed away. Where volition fails to occur, no new mind and matter arise.

However, as shown previously, in the absence of defilements, actions become mainly functional and ineffective. Defilements are eliminated when the Path and its Fruition are reached through insight meditation. Freed from the influence of defilements, past kammās are rendered impotent, and they are utterly unable to bring about the formation of a new existence. With Arahants, all aggregates cease together with all passions; and this state is known as *anupādisesanibbāna*.

Kamma Does Not Cease Without Exertion

It has been suggested that non-accumulation is the opposite of exerting to accumulate actions that bring about kamma formations. If this is not seen in its proper light, it may be misinterpreted that one should make no effort to accumulate actions. What is meant here is that in the absence of defilements, actions cannot accumulate, and meritorious deeds thus appear to be superfluous with reference to Arahants. You should not run away with the idea that if you do nothing, there will be no kammic force, and thus no result. That may be possible, but it is impracticable. Certain teachers misinterpret the text and say, "All efforts lead to suffering. Making no effort is cessation, and is, therefore, nibbāna. Almsgiving, practising morality, and mental development are superfluous. Keep the mind inert. This leads to nibbāna." In 1952, when I came to Rangoon, I heard such teachings over the radio. They might please those who have no inclination to exert in the practice of the Dhamma. Such teachings are contrary to what the Buddha taught. In the *Tiṭṭaka*

it says that all evil should be shunned and that charity, morality, and mental development must be practised. Nowhere has it been said that wholesome deeds should not be done! Without the accumulation of wholesome deeds, bad kamma can never be avoided.

The flesh is prone to evil, doing good needs faith, willingness, and effort. It is difficult to achieve. To accomplish it is like going against the tide. Evil, however, can be easily done, for to commit it no special effort is necessary. It occurs naturally. Thus we say that an evil-doer drifts with the tide.

When law and prudence intervene, evil actions, are checked to a certain extent. For ordinary ordinary people, there are only two things to choose — to do wholesome kamma, or to do unwholesome kamma. For as long as good deeds remain undone, evil will predominate. If, for every hundred minutes, ninety minutes are devoted to the execution of evil by unwholesome consciousness, there will be only ten minutes left for wholesome consciousness to perform its function. If these ten minutes of are abandoned, evil will get the better of you for the full one hundred minutes.

A person who does not practise mental discipline has no way of knowing how to restrain evil. In the face of various objects that give pleasure to the senses, how can an ordinary person control his or her mind not to get attached to sensual pleasures? He will forever be pleased with whatever desirable objects he or she sees or hears.

A family man barely exercises restraint in the fulfilment of his family's desires, and will go any lengths to realise them. A single man, without the ties of marriage, will also be unable to resist the temptation of pleasurable sense-objects. Since he has all the privileges of enjoying what is there to be enjoyed, he would not care to control his passions of greed, anger, and ignorance. He is sure to vent his anger if he encounters any objects that he regards as undesirable. There is a story of an uncle and a nephew regarding mind-control. The young man used to say, "Leave the mind alone, by giving it free rein, it can keep out defilements of its own accord." The uncle got fed up with his wisecracks and gave his nephew a slap on the cheek. When asked why, the uncle explained that he was testing the truth of the statement made. The young man, needless to say, became very angry. Anger can be

discarded only when Arahantship is attained through the practice of insight meditation.

In the Buddha's time, Venerable Sāriputta was known for his equanimity. He was never angry. A brahmin, not believing in the elder's conquest of passions, came up to him from behind and gave him a blow. Venerable Sāriputta, however, moved on unperturbed. Then only did the brahmin realise his mistake, and apologise. An Arahant possesses equanimity through the extermination of all passions like anger, *etc.*, with the practice of insight meditation which brings forth path-knowledge.

When you see disgusting things can you control your mind so that you do not feel revolted, sad, dejected, or troubled? Without the practice of insight meditation you can never know how to control the mind.

Where wholesome kamma is lacking, unwholesome kamma dominates. Where wholesome kamma is not practised, unwholesome kamma prevails. If one practises charity, morality, and mental development, one can be reborn in the fortunate realms of men or *devas*, even though one may not have aspired to the Path and its Fruition. In the latter predicament of not having been able to realise the Path, if one practises mental development wherever one is reborn, one can in the end find the path. However, if one neglects doing good deeds, unable to accumulate merit, one's bad actions will lead to results appropriate to what one has done, and one will suffer for them. One may even go to lower realms. Hence instructions not to practise good must be viewed with dread. That is why I always urge everyone to do meritorious deeds. Let me repeat here that non-accumulation does not mean to shun meritorious deeds. It only means that one abandons wholesome or unwholesome kamma that gives rise to rebirth-consciousness. Good deeds help to develop knowledge of dissolving things as fearful, knowledge of fearful things as baneful, and knowledge of baneful things as disgusting.

Arahants Never Abandon Wholesome Kamma

Being free from all defilements like greed, anger, and ignorance, Arahants never commit evil deeds. That is obvious. Questions may arise, however, whether they accumulate merits by their practice of charity, morality, concentration, insight meditation, loving-kindness, paying homage to the Buddha, and so forth. Since

defilements are absent, such good deeds produce no results. You may recall that in the *namakāra* devotional verse, the Buddha is described as having renounced both wholesome and unwholesome karmas for he has eliminated the cycles of defilement and action. Arahants can also eliminate them. However, unlike the Buddha they cannot do away with impressions (*vāsanā*) of the past good or bad actions that remain on the mind. Here, in the devotional verse, renunciation of wholesome karmas means that actions are rendered ineffective because defilements have been exterminated by means of Path-consciousness. For ordinary people, moral or immoral actions, both past and present, produce results in the form of rebirth-linking. In this way sentient beings pass through innumerable existence. For as long as aggregates continue to arise, suffering is endless.

5. Rebirth-linking and Absence of Rebirth-linking

Of this rebirth-linking, the Paṭisambhidāmagga has this to say: “*Paṭisandhi saṅkhārā; appaṭisandhi nibbānaṃ.*” It means rebirth-linking is formations; absence of rebirth-linking is nibbāna. Rebirth-linking is so called because it links across the gap separating the end of the former existence from the beginning of the next existence. Past existence becomes linked with the present *ad infinitum* for as long as the law of kamma is working. This linking brings about life in lower realms, in the hungry ghost realm, in the animal realm, or, for that matter in other realms as well. To be born again and again in the abodes of suffering just mentioned is terrible. Unless one gains Arahantship, one will be lost in the cycle of existence. Even Stream-winners will have to go for seven rounds in the sphere of the senses. A Once-returner has two existences to go. A Non-returner will be in the Pure Abodes where he is destined to attain Arahantship. Others will remain in the realm of defilements that paves the way to endless rebirths. As I have said, for Arahants all the three cycles of action, defilement, and result cease. This is the absence of rebirth-linking (*appaṭisandhi*)— a characteristic of nibbāna. Thus it may be said that nibbāna is unborn.

Those who have developed the knowledges of fearfulness, danger, and disgust, usually become disenchanting with the cycle of suffering, having realised the truth through Path-consciousness.

Looking forward to nibbāna, they practise insight meditation to eliminate defilements and tread the Path. This is the realisation of nibbāna itself; but as the substrata of existence have not yet been discarded, it is called *sa-upādisesa* nibbāna in contrast to *anupādisesanibbāna*, where no aggregates remain after uprooting all passions.

THE THREE BURDENS

We are all carrying heavy burdens — the burden of defilements, the burden of actions, and the burden of the aggregates.

1. The Burden of Defilements

Defilements (*kilesa*) embraces passions such as greed, anger, and ignorance. It imposes a heavy burden, a burden of evil deeds, for man is liable to commit murder, theft, *etc.*, at the dictates of passion, and evil deeds cause suffering.

2. The Burden of Actions

Accumulation of actions, moral or immoral, performed by an individual, is *ābhisaṅkhāra*, which is another name for kamma formations. It is also a heavy burden. When actions performed are evil, they lead the evil-doer to realms of suffering like hell. When an individual is reborn in happy conditions, as in heaven, as a result of moral actions, he will still be troubled with old age, disease, and death. Whether he is satisfied with his kamma-results or not, he cannot get away from these three undesirable conditions. So he carries his burden of actions, willy-nilly, unable to avoid the cycle of suffering. Even when he is reborn a man, he may be so reborn in wretched poverty, afflicted with disease, and troubled with ill-health. Even though he may have good kamma-results awaiting him, he may not have the opportunity to enjoy these results if bad kamma overtakes him afterwards. He will, as usual, be forced to endure misery. In real life, it may be possible for him to avoid punishment for his crimes. If he has a good lawyer to plead for him, he may come out of the case an innocent man. In extenuating circumstances, he may bribe for his freedom. Then, there is amnesty to save him. However, with kamma there is no escape from the law of retribution.

It may lie dormant for aeons in the cycles of existence, but when it an opportunity occurs for it to bear fruit, it will make its presence felt. The burden of actions and results is thus very heavy!

There is only one way to abandon the burden of actions, and that is to practise insight meditation. If one attains the stage of Stream-winning, all unprofitable actions cease, and one can never go down to the lower realms. If one attains Arahantship, all burdens will be lifted from one's shoulders, and no new "becoming" will arise, but before an Arahant attains *parinibbāna*, the past kammās can give their effects. It is said that even Buddhas cannot evade the results of kamma, which are inherited, as it were, from former existences.

3. The Burden of the Aggregates

Because of the burden of actions, the burden of aggregates has to be carried from one existence to the next. New aggregates arise as a consequence of the past old aggregates. They are very active, constantly moving about walking, sitting, standing, or lying down. They have to be fed, cleansed, and clothed. They like pleasure, and so they have to be appeased with objects that give them pleasurable sensations. In an attempt to fulfil their desires, they are compelled to do things that are sinful. When a crime is committed, it affects only the environment that surrounds the criminal, and that is the end of it. However, when an immoral act is committed, it worries the sinner throughout the endless cycles of existence. To escape from them he will have to accumulate good actions with the development of good perception, good formation, and good consciousness. When one gets old, one feels the heavy burden. He learns that it has to be carried not for one brief moment, but for one's entire life, and throughout *saṃsāra*, without any respite, without any limit of weight, distance, or time. I have told you elsewhere about the cycles of defilement, actions, and results. In essence, these three cycles have a bearing on the three burdens that I am talking about.

To sum up, all defilements like greed, anger, and ignorance constitute the burden of defilements, all moral or immoral actions constitute the burden of actions, and the five aggregates constitute the burden of aggregates.

DISCARDING ALL BURDENS

Since Arahants have eliminated all defilements through Path-consciousness, they succeed in laying down the burden of defilements; and that being so, their past karmas are rendered ineffective after their *parinibbāna*. That is past karmas can no longer create new “becoming” for them. However, during their lifetime, they continue to give results. The Commentaries say that the Buddha was affluent in his day because of his past good karmas. However, he was accused of being immoral by Sundarī, the female ascetic, because his past karma was giving its results at that time. [Venerable Sīvali](#) always received bountiful alms, because he was generous in giving alms in his previous existences. [Venerable Losakatissa](#) had to endure great poverty because of his past karma of niggardliness.

The Fetter of Existence

Arahants are often described as holy men with no burden on their shoulders. Their accomplishment is the realisation of the fruits of the Path. With them the fetter of existence has been severed. In modern parlance we use the expression: breaking the chains. However, with Arahants it is more than breaking the chains of human bondage. The bondage of human passion that ties man to the endless cycle of existence, is entirely cut off by an Arahant. Freed from this chain of existence, it is no longer necessary for them to be born anew. A man negligent of the Dhamma fails to break the chain of existence, which could, at one time or another, drag him down to the four lower realms if his karma is bad. Hence the Dhammapada says, “A worldling negligent of the Dhamma makes four lower realms his permanent residence.”

Men live in their own houses. If circumstances compel them to visit other people’s houses, they might stay there for a while as guests and return to their own houses. In the same way, when their permanent address is hell, they might, once in a while, pay a visit to higher planes of existence to come back to their rightful place. Sometimes, people born unto this world as men or women go up to the *brahma* realms by virtue of their wholesome karmas, but

the fetter of sensual existence drags them down to the human abode. So they die as *brahmas* to be reborn as men or women in this world.

When a tether is short the bullock cannot roam about beyond what the tether allows. In the same way a man tethered by a fetter to the narrow confines of existence cannot go beyond those confines. When his fetter of existence allows him to roam about only in the form sphere or formless sphere, he will never be able to go beyond the limits to approach nibbāna. Hence he continues to live in misery, suffering, old age, ill-health, and death. However, Arahants know that they have cut off the fetter of existence once and for all.

Five Sense Faculties

The Arahants are praiseworthy due to their achievement in exterminating the biases (*āsava*) and defilements. (In ordinary people biases rise to the surface as defilements as soon as an opportunity occurs). Like all sentient beings, Arahants possess sense faculties because the sense-bases exist in their physical bodies. As these sense-bases remain unimpaired, they can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the sense-objects and differentiate which among them is good or bad. In matters of the five sense faculties, they are like ordinary human beings because they cannot as yet do away with feeling. They know what suffering and happiness are like, but, since they have discarded all defilements such as anger, they do not feel unhappy, although, of course, they may recognise physical discomfort as such. Conditioned by seasonal changes, they may feel hot or cold. They may feel fit or unfit according to their health. When objects of sense are not pleasing they may feel awkward physically, but mentally they are indifferent. They have virtually no interest in pleasure or pain. No greed, anger, nor ignorance arise in them on account of the pleasurable sensations created by sense-objects.

Cessation of Lust

In the Arahant, lust (*rāga*) has ceased arising and so have anger and ignorance. The Arahant sees, eye-consciousness arises, and is known, but the Arahant has no feelings of lust, anger, or ignorance. All passions are spent. This cessation of passion is *sa-upādisesa nibbāna*, annihilation of the flames of lust, anger, and ignorance with the substrata of being remaining.

Once the Path is realised an Arahant enjoys *sa-upādisesa nibbāna* until attaining *parinibbāna*. He or she is absolutely happy in that state because all suffering caused by the cycle of defilements has been discarded. However, the body — the aggregates — still remains, and this may be for one or two thousand cycles in the case of those who realised the Path while in the plane of the *brahmas*. This is good in a way, because in that world physical suffering and unpleasant objects are non-existent. However, for those who realise the Path in this human world, they will have to endure the ills to which the flesh is an heir. For instance, the drudgery of making daily rounds for food, washing the face or taking a bath daily, *etc.* In this way an Arahant has to carry the burden of the aggregates in spite of having no attachment to them.

Venerable **Bākula**, who gained pre-eminence as the healthiest among the Buddha's disciples, lived to be a hundred and sixty, becoming an Arahant at the age of eighty and attained *parinibbāna* eighty years later. That means that he carried the burden of his aggregates for a hundred and sixty years, becoming liberated from the shackles of the aggregates as well as human passions only after *parinibbāna*. However, he neither wished for long life nor for death. I told you last week that an Arahant neither yearns for life nor for death although he eagerly awaits *parinibbāna*.

Nibbāna Without Remainder

Nibbāna without remainder (*anupādisesa-nibbāna*) is the annihilation of passions together with the aggregates. Thus it has been expounded in the Itivuttaka. It says it is the attainment by a noble *bhikkhu* who is worthy of respect and homage earned by virtue of his abandonment of biases and defilements, having practised all there is to be practised, having accomplished all there is to be accomplished, having laid down the burden of aggregates, having cut off the fetter of existence, having been emancipated though knowledge fully-acquired, having rejected feeling as not delightful, and finally, having gained peace and tranquility during his life-time.

The important point to note here is that feeling ceases with the *parinibbāna* of the Arahant. For ordinary people, and even for trained meditators, it cannot be discarded. They are wont to accept it as delightful, and thus attachment to it arises in them. Being attached to feeling, they take it on even at the moment of decess-

consciousness. It thus flows on as the arising of rebirth-linking consciousness. Consequently new becoming arises. However, for the Arahant the cessation of feeling has been initiated in his life-time. It may be remembered that an analogy has been drawn from the dying out of a flame with regard to that cessation. This dying out started in his life-time. Since feeling has thus been quenched, there is no opportunity for becoming to arise again after the Arahant's *parinibbāna*.

What has been said about feeling applies with due alteration of details to perception, mental formations, and consciousness, which all cease as feeling ceases. Together with matter, they constitute aggregates depending on which results come into being. With the negation of aggregates and results, annihilation is finally accomplished by the Arahant without the substrata of existence remaining.

Two Noteworthy Verses

Regarding the two elements of nibbāna, there are two verses from the Itivuttaka,¹ which are worthy of note.

*“Dve imā cakkhumatā pakāsitā,
nibbānadhātū anissitena tādinā.
Ekā hi dhātu idha diṭṭhadhammikā,
sa-upādisesā bhavanettisaṅkhayā.
Anupādisesā pana samparāyikā,
yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso.”*

*“Ye etadaññāya padaṃ asaṅkhatam,
vimuttacittā bhavanettisaṅkhayā.
Te dhammasārādhigamā khaye ratā,
pahaṃsu te sabbabhavāni tādino'ti.”*

“Without dependence (on wrong views created by craving), in full possession of equanimity (towards sense-objects, pleasant or unpleasant), and in exercise of the eye of wisdom, the Buddha has clearly shown the two elements of nibbāna. One element, *sa-upādisesa nibbāna*, is the cessation of defilements with the substrata of existence remaining, and it is quite apparent here and now. It signifies the severance of the fetter of existence.”

¹ Nibbānadhātu Sutta, Iti v 44.

Anupādisesa-nibbāna becomes apparent only after *parinibbāna*. In this element, annihilation of becoming is complete. Knowing these two elements as Unformed or Uncreated by virtue of Path-consciousness, the Arahants are emancipated from becoming. Having realised the essence of the Dhamma, and having achieved equanimity towards all sense-objects, good or bad, they delight in the extinction of formations.

In my last discourse, *anupādisesa nibbāna* was shown as an abode where the element of peace resides. This is said figuratively, for it has no location. Neither is it a cause nor an effect. In the Commentaries, *sa-upādisesa nibbāna* is shown as the destruction and absence of lust, without indicating any location, cause, or effect. It will not be strictly correct to say that the Path and its Fruition inclining towards nibbāna is the cause, and the cessation of defilements in the two elements is the effect. It may also be noted that Peace to which the Path and its Fruition are inclined is ordinary nibbāna and the two elements now under review are extraordinary nibbāna. Both of them are one and the same, and both possess the attribute of peace (*santi*), one of the characteristics of nibbāna.

Nibbāna is timeless, and so it will be equally improper to ask if the Path, at the moment of cessation of defilements, inclines towards nibbāna in the very course of its establishment, that is, in the present time or whether it looks forward to the future nibbāna with its annihilation of aggregates after the Arahant's *parinibbāna*. Here, nibbāna is beyond the concept of time.

Consider latent tendencies that contribute to the formation of lust, anger, and ignorance. Ordinary people possess them in abundance. They arise when conditions are favourable. They cannot be assigned to the past, present, or future. Since they are timeless, their cessation is also timeless. Consider also the phenomenon of cessation. It is neither an event, nor an arising. One cannot say that it arose, or it is arising, or it will arise. It has no relationship to time. Strictly speaking, we do not say that cessation has completed. It occurs with the moment that Path-consciousness occurs. When defilements cease, the aggregates dependent on them, lose the opportunity to arise. The phenomenon in this instance is timeless. So it is pointless to ask whether Path-consciousness inclines to the present or to the future.

Where the cycle of genesis (*uppāda*), stasis (*ṭhiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*), is operating, the best Dhamma is meditation on the Fruition of the Path. When the absolute is arrived at with the disappearance of these three instants of the thought moment, nibbāna is realised. It is the highest stage. When Arahants arose from the meditation of nibbāna during the attainment of the fruits of the Paths, they used to express their delight as follows:

*“Susukhaṃ vata nibbānaṃ, sammāsambuddhadesitaṃ.
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ, yattha dukkhaṃ nirujjhatī’ti.”*

“All sufferings are exterminated in nibbāna where there is no sorrow, no passion, and no danger. Blissful indeed is nibbāna shown by the Fully Enlightened One.”

Arahants are thus inclined towards this blissful state of *anupādisesa nibbāna* where all matter, mind, and mental formations become extinct. Since they do away with the cycle of suffering, no becoming arises.

May all who listened respectfully to this discourse on nibbāna attain it in a short space of time through the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part III

*Delivered on the 8th waning day of Tawthalin, 1326 B.E.
29th September 1964*

THE STORY OF BĀHIYA DĀRUCĪRIYA

Having explained the two elements of nibbāna, I shall resume this discourse with the verse of exultation (*udāna*) uttered by the Buddha when the Arahant *Bāhiya Dārucīriya* attained *anupādisesa-nibbāna*.

The Bāhiya Sutta

*“Yattha āpo ca pathavi, tejo vāyo na gādhati.
Na tattha sukkā jotanti, ādicco nappakāsati.
Na tattha candimā bhāti, tamo tattha na vijjati.*

*“Yadā ca attanāvedī, muni monena brāhmaṇo.
Atha rūpā arūpā ca, sukhadukkhā pamuccatī’ti.” (Udāna 10)*

“In the realm of nibbāna, there are no primary elements of earth, water, fire, or air, There no star twinkles, no sun shines, and no moon glows. Yet, no darkness is found there.”

“A sage comes to know nibbāna by his own effort as he gets enlightened through acquiring the knowledge of the Path, and ultimately becomes an Arahant. He is then liberated from matter and non-matter, from happiness and misery.”

Dependent on the four primary elements of earth (solidity), water (fluidity), fire (temperature) and air (motion), matter arises causing attachment to sense-objects like forms and sounds. When those elements become extinct, matter dissolves into nothingness. It is absent in nibbāna. Where there is no matter there can be no light or darkness.

I have repeatedly stressed the point that nibbāna has no foothold anywhere, because it is impossible to locate the cessation of mind and matter. In one Sutta it expressly states that nibbāna has no abode. In another it mentions that in this one-fathom long body the Four Truths have been proclaimed. The Abhidhamma, however, says that nibbāna is extraneous to the body. You will find the explanation later when I deal with internal (subjective) and external (objective) sense-bases or faculties. Matter exists in Form Spheres, and mind in Formless Spheres, but *parinibbāna* delivers an Arahant from the dominance of mind and matter. So we speak of the *parinibbāna* of Bāhiya Dārucīriya as deliverance from the cycle of suffering.

How Bāhiya Dāruciriya Met the Buddha

In the time of the Buddha, a merchant by the name of Bāhiya sailed the oceans for trading. He was successful in all his previous ventures, but on the last occasion, his ship was wrecked. All the other sailors and men were drowned and he alone saved himself. He was washed to the shores of Suppāraka. Having been tossed about in the sea, he lost all his clothes. When he got to the dry land, he made for himself a girdle of leaves stitched together with small sticks. He took a begging bowl from a shrine, and with it he went round the village for alms-food. By the girdle he wore, the residents of the place mistook him for an Arahant and offered him food and clothing. Bāhiya thought to himself that if he donned the clothes offered him, public esteem towards him as an Arahant would be shattered. So he stuck to his girdle for a dress. The people continued to revere him as an Arahant, and, as such, his fame spread far and wide. In the course of time, he himself came to believe that he really was an Arahant.

At that time there was a *brahma*, a Non-returner, who knew Bāhiya from previous lives. He came down to earth and, approaching Bāhiya, telling him directly that he was no Arahant and that he was not practising any Dhamma worthy of an Arahant. “Bāhiya!” the *brahma* said, “you were one of seven of us who practised the Dhamma during the time of Buddha Kassapa. I was the eldest of the seven, and am now reborn in the world of *brahmas*. Formerly, your faith in the Dhamma was so strong that when offered food by an Arahant you refused it lest it would hamper your realisation of the Dhamma. Now you have become an imposter, well-pleased with what little affluence you have achieved through deception. You are no Arahant, possessing no moral qualities that belong to an Arahant.”

On hearing this, Bāhiya was greatly ashamed and requested the *brahma* to guide him to the presence of an Arahant, if there were one. The latter told him that the Buddha, a true Arahant, was residing at that time in the Jetavana monastery at Sāvātthi.

Bāhiya went to the monastery as directed, but when he arrived the Buddha was not there, having gone to town for alms. He at once followed the Buddha to where he was, and when he met the Blessed One, he requested him to teach. His request was refused, for the

time and occasion were inappropriate. However, Bāhiya insisted and made the request three times. The Buddha finally complied with his request and gave him the following advice, which has been incorporated into the Bāhiya Sutta.

Just See As You See It

“Tasmātiha te, Bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ — ‘Diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati’ti. Evañhi te, Bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ.”

“Bāhiya, since you insist, I now urge you to practise this: when you see, just see it; when you hear, just hear it; when you know, just know it; and when you think, just think it.”

You too, should practise this way of cognising each phenomenon just as it occurs. This is the insight method known as *“diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ”* (just see as you see it, and nothing more). There are six sense-doors though which six sense-bases perceive their respective six sense-objects. Here, for the sake of brevity, only four examples of sense perception were given.

When a person sees an object, he or she does not stop there. He or she does not just see it. He or she goes further, and lets the mind dwell on things incidental to the act of seeing, for instance, on the shape and form of the thing seen, considering whether it is desirable or repugnant, and reacting with feelings of pain or pleasure according to the nature of the object. Naturally, he or she is pleased when it gives pleasure, but when seeing what is considered to be ugly, he or she becomes not only disconcerted, but also disgusted and angry. Even when he or she is indifferent to it, the fact remains that ego has arisen. “I see it,” he or she thinks; and that “I” appears permanent.

If one just sees it and notes that one has seen it, without ruminating on the nature of the subject that sees it, the object that is seen, and the incidents of seeing, that would be merely just seeing. However, to see a thing and stop at seeing it is not easy to do. If one fails to recognise only the act of seeing for the sake of seeing, one cannot help taking cognizance of the individual or the thing seen,

thinking whether he, she, or it is agreeable or not. If one likes what one sees, affection will grow, and if it is disagreeable, ill-will will gnaw at the heart. Even if one is indifferent to whomever one sees, one will already have cultivated the idea of individuality and permanence of that individual. One will find it difficult to break away from this notion of ego. It is only through the practice of insight meditation that one will rightly know how to see only what one sees and nothing more.

Without practising insight meditation, it will not be possible for a lay person to stop short at hearing when hearing, at smelling when smelling, at tasting when tasting, and at touching when touching. The most difficult thing to achieve is to stop at thinking as one thinks, so it is advised that one notes continually the phenomena as they occur. In the beginning it is almost impossible to note all the phenomena of seeing, hearing *etc.*, so begin with one particular phenomenon as you practise meditation.

In the teaching of Satipaṭṭhāna, it says that one should note walking as one walks. This is watching the phenomenon of movement, the working of the element of motion. When you stand up, note that you are standing up; when you sit down, note that you are sitting down. During such moments you may experience some tangible things happening in your body. Note them. We recommend that you to watch the rising and falling of the abdomen as you take up meditation. As you are observing the rising and falling of the abdomen in conformity with the method of meditation practice, your mind may wander, and you will start thinking this and that. Note what you are thinking about. At times, as you meditate, you may feel tired, hot, stuffy, or painful. Note these sensations too. As you feel tired, you may improve your posture. Note every movement that you make as you seek comfort. As you are meditating you may hear extraneous sounds, which must also be noted as they arise. In brief, you must note your own behaviour, both physical and mental, together with sensations that you feel. When there is nothing in particular to note, concentrate your mind on your abdomen as in the beginning.

As concentration develops you will find that when you see, seeing is established momentarily just to dissolve in the next moment. The same can be said of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. As you note the act of hearing, both the sound and the

perception of the sound disappear. When you feel pain, both the affliction causing pain and the painful feeling disappear. You concentrate on seeing, noting inwardly what you know as seeing.

Subsequently, seeing, noting, and knowing get dissolved. Then knowledge will arise that what arises passes away, and thus that the phenomenon of seeing is impermanent. This knowledge of the transitory nature of things is knowledge of impermanence. What arises only to get dissolved is not satisfactory; so this phenomenon is, after all, suffering. This knowledge of the realisation of the truth relating to suffering is *dukkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*. Furthermore, knowledge of the realisation of the not-self nature of things (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*), is also developed as you get convinced that it is in the nature of things just to happen of their own accord.

Bāhiya, being endowed with perfections (*pāramī*), gained insight as he listened to what the Buddha taught. When he saw an object, he noted just what he saw and did nothing more. As he watched the phenomenon as it occurred, nothing arose in his mind beyond the fact that he saw. He did not, as he watched the phenomenon, think to himself, “I see it. This is my self who is seeing it.” As his mind got freed from attachment, egoistic pride, and wrong views, together with the notion of self, were dispelled.

The Buddha further told him:

*“Tato tvam, Bāhiya, nevidha na huram na ubhayamantarena.
Esevanto dukkhassā”ti.*

“Bāhiya! When no attachment occurs as you see, neither this world nor other worlds will be with you. The fact that existence is thus negated delivers you from the cycle of suffering. In that state you reach the ultimate — nibbāna.”

Once bereft of attachment, egoistic pride, and wrong views, all defilements cease. Where defilements are absent, existence itself, whether in the present or in the future, may be said to have become extinct. Not becoming means the end of suffering, which is *anupādisesa nibbāna*.

Here, the Commentary to the Udāna elaborates. There are six pairs of faculties, sense bases, consisting of six sense-organs, namely, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, grouped as internal, and six

sense-objects, namely, form, sound, odour, taste, contact and ideas, grouped as external. When one gets detached from such defilements as attachment and the like through the development of insight knowledge, one also gets detached from both the internal (subjective) and external (objective) sense-bases. You or your “self” no longer abide in the mind-door, sense-object and consciousness. This cessation of the functions of these sense-bases is nibbāna itself.

This agrees with the actual experience of the meditator. In the early stages of the practice, the meditator has to bend the mind on the mind door, sense-object, and consciousness to note the arising and passing away of mind and matter. All the time he or she is aware of the rise and fall of aggregates. When insight knowledge matures, the mind flows, as it were, into the cessation of all phenomena of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing, when the meditator is said to come face to face with nibbāna.

Bāhiya Becomes An Arahant

While Bāhiya was listening to the teaching of the Buddha, he became an Arahant. When the Enlightened One resumed his alms-round, Bāhiya went in search of clothing discarded by others so that they could be made into a monk’s robe, for he intended to get ordained. Unfortunately, a cow protecting her calves attacked him. He died on the spot. When the Buddha returned to his monastery, he found the body of the Arahant, Bāhiya. He arranged for it to be cremated in a fitting manner and told his disciples to erect a pagoda (*cetiya*) in his memory.

The monks at the monastery asked the Buddha where Bāhiya was reborn. The Buddha replied that he had become an Arahant before he died, and that he had thus attained *parinibbāna*, uttering the verse cited earlier with reference to nibbāna where four primary elements are non-existent.

The Commentaries say that Bāhiya died as he was gored by a cow who was a woman in one of its previous existences. He wronged the woman, robbing and raping her; and she died swearing vengeance on him. She was reborn an ogress many times, and he, as a man to be killed by her. Thus he died many deaths at the hands of the ogress. His unwholesome deeds followed him like a shadow, causing untold miseries, often in the lower realms. It was all as a result of his bad

kamma. Had he not attained Arahantship after meeting the Buddha, he would have continued to suffer from his evil deeds. However, now, although his death was caused by a cow in the way described, all suffering ceased for him on his attainment of nibbāna where no aggregates arise. The Buddha thus regarded his death as a triumph. He honoured Bāhiya as pre-eminent among his disciples in the matter of gaining higher knowledge in the shortest possible time.

THE EYE AND VISUAL PERCEPTION

In the Kāmaguṇa Sutta of the Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta it says:

“Tasmātiha, bhikkhave, se āyatane veditabbe yattha cakkhu ca nirujjhati, rūpasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

“Monks! You should cultivate knowledge of the mind-base bent on nibbāna, where the eye and the sense-object perceived by the eye, cease together. This cessation (of the origin of visual perception) is nibbāna itself.”

Thus said the Buddha regarding the cessation of the pair of sense faculties, the sense-organ and the sense-object. This is how nibbāna is realised through meditating on the phenomenon of seeing. When a meditator is mindful of the rising and falling of the abdomen, or the physical postures of sitting or standing, or the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, during meditation, he or she will become aware of the process of dissolution. If so, knowledge of dissolution develops. From the point of view of the subject who sees, there is absolutely nothing about which to say, “It is I,” or “I exist.” From the point of view of the object that is seen, there is nothing to show, “It is a thing, it is an individual.” Thus one cannot find anything worthy of attachment. As this fact is being contemplated, the meditator attains the knowledge of equanimity about formations, through bare awareness of the states of the mind, body, and of mental formations. Eventually the meditator will become aware of the cessation of all aggregates.

When this stage is reached, one might even feel that all matter in the body has disappeared. That is why it is said: *“Cakkhu ca nirujjhati,”* which means that the organ of seeing ceases (to function). On meditating further, you will notice that the form, the mind, and the perception, all relating to the phenomenon of

seeing, have been swept away to non-entity. The relevant phrase is “*rūpasaññā ca nirujjhati*,” meaning that the visual perception of form ceases (to arise). This all denotes cessation of the sense-base and the sense-object. Once this pair of faculties ceases, nibbāna may be said to be in sight.

The Ear and Auditory Perception

“Yattha sotañca nirujjhati, saddasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

“In nibbāna the organ of hearing ceases and so does auditory perception. Be it noted that this cessation of the faculties of the sense organ and sense-object relating to hearing is nibbāna.”

As knowledge of equanimity about formations develops, when you hear a sound, you happen to note it; and as soon as you have noted it, you become aware of the dissolution of the aggregates of mind, matter, and mental formations. At this stage you feel that your whole body, with its organs of hearing, disappears altogether. It is as if you do not hear the sense-object, and thus that you are not cognisant of it.

The Nose and Olfactory Perception

“Yattha ghānañca nirujjhati, gandhasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

In nibbāna the organ of smelling ceases, and so does olfactory perception. Be it noted that this cessation of the faculties of the sense organ and the sense-object relating to odour is nibbāna.

As knowledge of equanimity about formations develops, you will sense the smell as you get it. As you go on contemplating it, a stage will be reached when you become aware of the cessation of mind, matter, and mental formations. The entire process of olfactory perception seems to disappear altogether as you note it.

The Tongue and Gustatory Perception

“Yattha jivhā ca nirujjhati, rasasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

“In nibbāna the organ of tasting ceases, and so does gustatory perception. Be it noted that this cessation of the faculties of the sense organ and sense-object relating to taste is nibbāna.”

As knowledge of equanimity about formations develops, the meditator may note the taste of the food he is eating; and from this he proceeds to the stage when he realises how the aggregates of mind, matter, and mental formations cease.

The Commentaries mention innumerable instances of monks attaining Arahantship as they meditated on the taste of the rice-gruel that they were taking. As they took it with mindfulness, they were aware of the passing away of the aggregates of mind, matter, and mental formations.

The Body and Tactile Perception

“Yattha kāyo ca nirujjhati, phoṭṭhabbasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

“In nibbāna the body possessing the sense of touch ceases, and so does tactile perception. Be it noted that this cessation of the faculties of the body and bodily impressions is nibbāna.”

For a meditator, the body is the sense-object, which has to be watched most of the time. As knowledge of equanimity about formations develops, as you are noting the body that gives tactile perception, you become aware of the dissolution of mind, matter, and mental formations, and the act of noting the phenomenon disappears altogether.

The Mind and Perception of Ideas

“Yattha mano ca nirujjhati, dhammasaññā ca nirujjhati, se āyatane veditabbe.”

“In nibbāna the mind together with perception of ideas ceases. Be it noted that this cessation of the faculties of mind-base and mind-object is nibbāna.”

This is the discovery of nibbāna through the perception of the mind. Possibly, this discovery may be the most frequent. As knowledge of equanimity about formations develops, gross sense-objects disappear and subtler ones taking their place, as a meditator notes the arising and passing away of the phenomenon. He or she sees the whole body vanish with only perception remaining. For, while noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, the rising and falling disappear, and the meditator becomes aware only of the fact that he or she is perceiving the rising and falling. Concentrating on this, mind, matter, and mental formations cease. This awareness of cessation is nibbāna.

CESSATION OF THE SENSES IS NIBBĀNA

To sum up, the cessation of senses is nibbāna. In the Commentary on the Pañcattaya Sutta,¹ the negation of the six pairs of sense faculties has been shown as nibbāna. Venerable Ānanda confirmed this by saying that according to the Buddha, nibbāna means the cessation of the six organs of sense and six sense-bases meaning, of course, the cessation of their operations. Dependent on the internal faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind notions of ego-entity arise, and then we say that, this is an individual, this is a man, and this is a woman. When these egoistical ideas are dispelled, peace is established with the cessation of suffering relating to aging and death. The cessation of external sense faculties of form, sound, odour, taste, contact, and ideas are only secondary to the extermination of suffering, but as they are the adjuncts of the internal sense faculties, it is only when they cease that others follow suit. Negation of these pairs of faculties is nibbāna.

Fixing the Mind on Nibbāna

In the Questions of King Milinda (Milinda Pañha), there is a passage dealing with directing attention to nibbāna:

“Tassa taṃ cittaṃ aparāparaṃ manasikaroto pavattaṃ samatikkamitvā appavattaṃ okkamati, appavattam-anupatto, mahārāja, sammāpaṭipanno ‘Nibbānaṃ sacchikarotī’ti vuccatīti.”

¹ “The Five and Three,” Majjhimanikāya, Uparipañāsa, Sutta 102.

“The meditator who, fixes his mind repeatedly (on a mind-object) crosses the stream of occurrence over to the state of non-occurrence. O king! If he, who has thus arrived at the state of non-occurrence, practises in the right way, he may be said to have come face to face with nibbāna.”

As the meditator becomes aware of the dissolution of things as he or she observes their rise and fall, a sense of disgust assails him or her and the meditator begins to develop the desire to abandon them. Mind and matter arise and pass away, flowing as an endless stream. Concentrating on this flow, the meditator just perceives it automatically, not going beyond this perceptive stage. Later he or she becomes indifferent to it, because, by now, the knowledge of equanimity about formations has developed. Concentrating further on the phenomenon, the meditator discovers that the perceiving mind and the perceived object cease together. This is the transition from occurrence to non-occurrence. You may recall what I said earlier in relation to nibbāna: what occurs is formations, and what does not occur is nibbāna.

The Right Method of Practice

Venerable Nāgasena enjoined King Milinda to practise in the right way which is explained here.

Anyone aspiring to nibbāna must first achieve purification of morality (*sīla-visuddhi*). A layman must at least observe the five precepts or **morality with right-livelihood as the eighth** (*ājīvaṭṭhamaka sīla*). Right speech can be developed through abstaining from tale-bearing, harsh speech, and frivolous chatter. Right Action is accomplished through abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Right Livelihood means following a harmless livelihood. Having achieved this, purification of mind (*citta-visuddhi*) must be gained through concentration or absorptions (*jhāna*). If one has sufficient perfections, one may gain the first, second, third, and fourth *jhānas* successively. On the attainment of *jhāna* the hindrances will be removed. The hindrances are sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt. After attaining *jhāna*, the meditator must practise insight meditation.

Even when a meditator cannot aspire to *jhāna*, he or she must strive to gain access-concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*). If he or she cannot yet gain this, he or she should begin by concentrating on the four primary elements, the eighteen material qualities of matter, the twelve internal and external sense-bases, the five aggregates, or at least the two aspects of mind and matter. The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta says that the meditator should concentrate on the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air, on sensations, on mind, *etc.* The text says, “When you go, know that you go.” In this way you note in order to know that you are standing when you stand and that you are sitting when you sit. Then the mind will not wander. It gets fixed to the object noted. Then you should know that you have achieved purification of mind when all hindrances get removed. This stage is called “*vipassanā khaṇika samādhi*,” a kind of mindfulness established momentarily, which is as on a par with access concentration. In brief, purification of mind means a state of mind unhampered by ignoble conduct and defilements.

A meditator accomplished in purification of mind notes the rise and fall of mind and matter in relation to the three marks of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. He or she reflects: “Matter is not permanent, feeling is not permanent, *etc.*” Then he or she gets bored and disgusted with all mind and matter. When the meditator becomes sincerely detached from mind, matter, and mental formations, craving for them is absent. Becoming weary with life, the meditator gets disgusted with it, abandons all desires, and finally achieves emancipation. Now the path comes to fruition.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga mentions many stages of insight knowledge that should be progressively realised by a meditator. However, those who are loath to practise insight meditation or to encourage others who are practising it, make statements that should never be made. They say, “Now that we know the unsatisfactory nature of formations, practising meditation is unnecessary. If you concentrate on suffering, you will be confronted with suffering. If you let the mind go, all is done. You need not take the trouble of noting it.” Such advice contradicts the doctrine taught by the Buddha. What do these advisors really know? Their knowledge of formations as suffering is superficial. They cannot penetrate to the absolute realities. If they truly realise what suffering is, they are bound to get disgusted with

it and will certainly try to escape it. They assert that they know suffering, but they do not actually regard mind and matter as unsatisfactory. They cannot develop disenchantment, so they do not feel disgusted with conditioned things. They have no desire to abandon them. In fact, they would like to embrace and accept them.

Knowledge of Disgust

Knowledge of baneful things as disgusting is knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*). This sense of disgust is described in the Commentaries with the analogy of a fisherman who catches fish with an open-ended trap. When he thinks that a fish has been caught, he puts his hand into the trap and takes it out. However, he discovers that he has caught a snake with three circular marks around its neck. Realising that he has made the greatest mistake in his life, he gets disgusted with himself and feels repugnant to the poisonous reptile. Three times he waves it over his head and finally flings it away with all his might. Those who regard the aggregates of mind and matter as highly desirable are very much like that fisherman who caught the snake in his hands. Before knowing what he had caught, he was overjoyed, but when he spotted the three circular marks around its neck, he got the fright of his life.

As a meditator notes the rise and fall of aggregates, he or she will be reminded of the three marks of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Applying them to the phenomenon on which he or she is meditating, he or she comes to realise that all conditioned things are baneful and disgusting. No ordinary person regards his or her body or aggregates as like a snake. The mere knowledge of its resemblance to a loathsome creature will not be enough to arouse disgust with his or her own body. He or she must be truly convinced of the reality of human suffering.

It is only when a meditator gains insight into the true nature of mind and matter that he or she regards them as repugnant and considers all attachment as vain and empty. Eventually, he or she develops indifference to the rise and fall of aggregates to arrive at the stage where all formations can be regarded with equanimity. At first, one has to exert to come to this stage, but with continued practice, equanimity arises naturally as one contemplates the rise and fall of phenomena. When you have acquired that knowledge, you feel that you become cognisant of phenomena at once, but are unaffected by them, whether they are agreeable or

not. No attachment arises in your mind when it dwells on pleasurable objects, nor are you disconcerted by disagreeable things. You have developed stoicism like that of Arahants. At this stage of mental development, there may be occasions when your mind would like to roam about leaving the object of concentration behind, but as you gain experience, your mind would refuse to leave the object on which it dwells.

With this right method of meditation, you proceed from knowledge of equanimity about formations to knowledge of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), when you gain adaptive knowledge in preparation for realising the Four Noble Truths. Peace is established once you have discarded occurrence to reach its opposite, non-occurrence. Nibbāna cannot be seen with the physical eye. It can be seen with the mind's eye as the cessation of all phenomena.

As a result of listening to this discourse with respectful attention, may you be able to practise the right way to meditate on the cessation of all suffering caused by the mind-door, sense-objects, and consciousness, becoming liberated from the shackles of the six pairs of sense-faculties, to reach the ultimate stage where the continual flow of mind and matter is halted forever!

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part IV

*Delivered on the 15th waning of Tawthalin, 1326 B.E.
6thE October 1964*

Nibbāna, the cessation of lust and hatred, is the antithesis of defilements. The term, "*saṅkhāra-nirodho*," meaning the end of all formations, is applied to nibbāna. It is thus in direct opposition to formations. When the nature of nibbāna is expounded, it is only fitting that defilements and mental formations should also be explained. Tonight I shall try to explain them.

RESPECTFUL ATTENTION

When the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti, he used to teach his disciples about nibbāna in the evening in the ante-room of his perfumed chamber. About this the scriptures have this to say:

“The monks pricked up their ears while listening to the Dhamma, with a sincere desire to be intellectually benefited, and with such mindfulness and concentration that focus attention only on one object.”

I urge the audience to listen to this discourse in the manner of the monks who paid respectful attention to Buddha’s teaching, all minds concentrating on the Dhamma.

The Attentiveness of A Female Spirit

Once, as the Buddha was teaching, a female spirit (*yakkha*), wandered near the monastery with her offspring in search of food. Although *yakkhas* are classified as deities, their status is very low. They have no proper abode. They are never adequately clothed or fed. **Punabbasumātā** — for that is the name of the female spirit — was accompanied by her daughter Uttarā and her son Punabbasu. When she got to the main gate leading to the monastery, all was quiet. She thought there might be alms-giving and entered the building in the hope of getting something to eat. When she got as far as the altar, she found herself amidst a congregation of monks and laymen listening to the Buddha’s discourse. As he taught in a mellifluous voice, she listened to him with rapt attention, completely enthralled, but her children were so hungry, that they could not remain quiet. “Mother! Give us food!” They cried. “My dears!” Entreated Punabbasumātā, “Please be quiet while the great teacher of gods and men is teaching the Dhamma. He is discussing nibbāna which severs all chains of suffering. My love and devotion to nibbāna have grown in me exceedingly.”

Nibbāna is the cessation of suffering. Thus, when one is afflicted with sorrow and misery, one yearns for nibbāna. That is natural. When a man is in the best of health, he is not interested in medicine. When he is healthy, he does not consider the subject of health as important, but when he gets older and becomes sick, he ruminates on the benefits of health. As he wants to get his sickness cured, he now listens with respectful attention to well-wishers prescribing medicine for him.

In much the same way **Punabbasumātā** listened to the Buddha’s discourse on nibbāna. She might be suffering at this moment from intense hunger, and as she was destitute she had to beg for herself

and her children. Born into this sensual world, she bore children who must needs be looked after. Being subject to untold misery and suffering, she yearned for nibbāna. She told her children that she loved them, but she emphasised that her love and devotion for nibbāna was greater than her maternal love.

“Piyo loke sako putto, piyo loke sako pati.

Tāto piyatarā mayhaṃ, assa dhammassa magganā.” (S.i.210)

“It is the way of the world to love one’s son and to love one’s husband. However, I love searching for the Dhamma more than loving them. Love for my son and husband cannot extricate me from suffering. Only by listening to the Dhamma can I get liberated from the cycle of suffering.”

Devout mothers do generally pay respectful attention to teachings, but they are harassed by their crying children. The children of this female *yakkha* appeared to be docile and obedient. They listened to the Buddha’s discourse respectfully after they had been chastised by their mother.

The Buddha foresaw that both the mother and her son would become Stream-winners after they had heard the Dhamma. So he taught the Four Noble Truths. Punabbasumātā and her son became Stream-winners accordingly. As she became a Stream-winner, her life changed completely. She was forthwith transformed into a decent deity, beautiful, well-clothed, and well-fed. Uttarā, her daughter, was too young to understand the Dhamma; albeit she profited from her mother’s accumulation of merit.

ABOUT THE NATURE OF NIBBĀNA

In the Pāli text of the Udāna the following passage occurs relating what Buddha uttered in triumph in relation to the nature of nibbāna. This utterance has been incorporated into the Canon as the Nibbāna-ṭṭhisammutta udāna.

“Atthi, bhikkhave, tadāyatanaṃ, yattha neva pathavi, na āpo, na tejo, na vāyo, na ākāsañācāyatanaṃ, na viññāṇaṇcāyatanaṃ, na ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ, na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ, nāyaṃ loko, na paraloko, na ubho candimasūriyā.

Tatrāpāhaṃ, bhikkhave, neva āgatiṃ vadāmi, na gatiṃ, na thitiṃ, na cutiṃ, na upapattiṃ; appatiṭṭhaṃ, appavattaṃ, anārammaṇamevetamaṃ. Esevanto dukkhassā”ti. (Udāna v 71)

“Monks! There is that faculty (*āyatana*) that has no elements of earth, water, fire, and air. It is neither the realm of Infinity of Space, nor the realm of Infinity of Consciousness, nor the realm of Nothingness, nor the realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. It is neither this world nor other worlds. No moon nor sun shines there. Here, monks, I say there is no going or coming. It has no foothold or residence. It is deathless, unborn, and unformed. It has no abode. Nothing ever occurs there. It has no sense-objects. It is the end of suffering.”

Nibbāna is Real

Since nibbāna means the cessation of mind, matter, and mental formations, suggestions have often been put forward that it signifies nothing and is thus useless. However, nibbāna is absolute reality, the reality of the nullification of the activities of mind, matter, and mental formations to which the knowledge of the path, fruition, and reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*) is inclined. It is the mind-object to which this knowledge is directed. Buddhas, Arahants, and Noble Ones vouch for the truth of its reality. For the sake of argument, let us say that there is no nibbāna where all the cycles of defilement, actions, and results cease. Then no one in this Universe can find peace. In the absence of nibbāna, defilement will play havoc with our lives to produce action, which will bring about results, which will create conditions for the arising of a new group of aggregates attended by suffering. It is only the Path and its Fruition that can exterminate defilements, and this extermination will bring the cycle of suffering to an end. This cessation of suffering is real. Buddhas and Arahants actually reach this stage, and after their *parinibbāna* all sufferings come to an end.

No Primary Elements in Nibbāna

In nibbāna there are no element of earth or solidity, no element of water or fluidity, no element of fire or thermal energy, and no

element of air or motive force that can usually be met with in the world of the senses, such as the world of men and *devas*, or in the world of Form, such as the world of corporeal *brahmas*, etc. Possessing solidity, men, *devas*, and *brahmas* assume shapes and forms. Cessation means the end of such shapes and forms that possess mass. In the absence of mass, there are no elements of fluidity, thermal energy, and motive force.

Matter Is Non-existent in Nibbāna

In the absence of the four primary elements there can be no derived materiality (*upāda-rūpa*) formed by these four elements, for instance, the eye and the sight, the ear and the sound, etc. Since they are absent there will be no phenomena of seeing, hearing, etc., which occur in the sensual realm as sense-sphere consciousness and in the Form Sphere as form-sphere consciousness.

Consider this: without eyes one cannot see, without ears one cannot hear, without nose one cannot smell, without tongue one cannot taste, and without body one cannot get the sensation of touch. The physical sense bases are the seat of sensation, or the five sense organs that form the bases of consciousness. Devoid of the organs of sense, consciousness cannot arise. In the world of the *brahmas*, only the eye-base (*cakkhu-pasāda*) and ear-base (*sota-pasāda*) exist — nose-base (*ghāna-pasāda*), tongue-base (*jivhā-pasāda*), and body-base (*kāya-pasāda*) being absent. So *brahmas* may possess noses and tongues in rudimentary forms or bodies or masses in great dimensions, but they do not know what smell is, what taste is, or what bodily impression is. However, there is the seat of consciousness usually called the heart-base (*hadaya-vatthu*), in all sentient beings, whether celestial or human. So in these three realms, thought, knowledge, and absorptions can occur.

As I have said, as there are no primary elements in nibbāna, all matter dependent on these four elements are non-existent. Because of the absence of matter, there is no consciousness appertaining to the realm of the senses or to the realm of form — as, for instance, the first *jhānic* consciousness. For brevity's sake I will discuss only about mind (*citta*), but whenever mind is mentioned one must remember it is accompanied by mental concomitants (*cetasikā*). Now the question arises whether in nibbāna there are still extant

consciousness that arises without depending on matter as, for example, formless consciousness.

Absence of Formless Consciousness

Here, the text is also very explicit about the absence of formless sphere consciousness in nibbāna, whether it be consciousness appertaining to the abode of the infinity of space, or to the abode of the infinity of consciousness, or to the abode of nothingness, or to the abode of neither perception nor non-perception. In the realm of the infinity of space, rebirth-linking begins with the advent of consciousness relating to kamma result, mind and mental concomitants. For ordinary people, during the course of existence between rebirth-linking and death, wholesome or unwholesome consciousness, together with their concomitants arise. When such ordinary people are duly trained in the Dhamma they are known as trainees (*sekkha*).

Such trainees may become Arahants when they are reborn in the realm of the infinity of Space. In that case, only wholesome and functional consciousness arise together with their respective concomitants, but matter is absent there. Only mind and mental concomitants — all in a state of flux — are present. In that realm all phenomena are psychical. It just occurs to me that psychic beings need no food, clothing, or shelter, but it is usual for artists to depict this realm and others of the Formless Sphere as having palaces and mansions. However, in nibbāna they will be superfluous, as in nibbāna there is neither mind or matter.

Today non-Buddhists have become highly interested in space, but the space they have in mind is space in the physical sense. They may not be able to assimilate the idea of the existence of the realm of Infinity of Space, but the Buddha clearly differentiates the realm of mind and its constituents together with its state of absorptions from the realm of no-mind where all its concomitants and absorptions are nullified. A meditator who concentrates his or her mind on the rise and fall of the aggregates can aspire to reach the stage of knowledge of equanimity about formations. If he or she reaches that stage, he or she would feel the disappearance of the physical self, experiencing only a stream of consciousness that floats in space. As his or her knowledge progresses, this stream will become clearer

and clearer. Strictly speaking, this is not absorption on infinity of space, but it is an insight akin to that absorption.

From the foregoing it may also be adduced that there is no consciousness and its concomitant appertaining to the realm of infinity of consciousness, and the same may be said of consciousness and its concomitant appertaining to the realm of nothingness, and of neither perception nor non-perception. The highest plane of existence is where perception is so subtle that it can be described as an intermediate stage between perception and non-perception. Equally subtle are contact, feeling, consciousness, and mental formations — concomitants of the mind that can be met with in that realm. In nibbāna such subtleties of the mind are entirely absent.

Those lacking confidence in the Dhamma and unable to realise the attainment of *jhāna* or ecstatic meditation (*samāpatti*), dispute all teachings relating to the realms of existence just described. What such sceptics should do is to practise insight meditation as taught by the Buddha. If they do they will attain *jhāna* that belongs to the realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception, and realise for themselves the difference between the *jhānic* state in the Formless Sphere and nibbāna where such a state becomes redundant. It is futile to reject *jhāna* and nibbāna without any practical investigation.

Absence of Mind and Matter in Nibbāna

In nibbāna there are no such things as mind or mental concomitants, which can be met with in the sense-sphere or form-sphere. It naturally follows that mind and matter that belong to the thirty-one planes of existence are totally absent in nibbāna. However, some would like to propose that after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha and the Arahants, they acquire a special kind of mind and matter in nibbāna. Such an extraordinary way of thinking may appeal to those who cannot do away with self or ego.

With regard to this proposition a learned Sayādaw reasoned that if there is a special kind of mind and matter in nibbāna, there must also be a special kind of rebirth which gives rise to a special kind of old age, disease, and death, which in turn bring about a special kind of sorrow, lamentation, suffering, distress, and despair. When the teachings explicitly say cessation, it will be improper to go

beyond it and formulate an idea of a special kind of existence. Extinction points to nothing other than Nothingness. Nibbāna, which is not involved in mind and matter, cannot be made to get involved either in this world or in other worlds.

Nibbāna Is beyond All Realms

Hence the text says, “*nāyaṃ loko, na paraloko,*” which means “neither in this world nor in other worlds.” In the absence of matter there can be no concept of darkness; and in the absence of the concept of darkness, there can be no concept of light. Hence in nibbāna there is no sun nor moon. Where no new bodies of the aggregates arise there can be no darkness or light. Yet the question might arise whether it is possible for sentient beings to come to nibbāna in the way that beings from the lower realms come to the human world, or beings from the human world come to the world of *devas*. However, in nibbāna there are no such comings. The usual term to describe the realisation of nibbāna is that the Buddhas and Arahants “enter” nibbāna, or specifically, *anupādisesa nibbāna*. This does not mean the arrival of new aggregates, but the cutting off of the flow of mind and matter that causes existence. It is the complete extinction of aggregates; and this extinction is recognised as *anupādisesa nibbāna*. It is not a place where beings make their landing from other planes of existence.

No one goes out or gets transported from nibbāna to other planes of existence either. Beings with wholesome kammās depart this human world for the world of *devas*; and those from heaven might also come down to earth as human beings. Those with unwholesome kammās might prefer going down to the lower realms. In nibbāna there is no such coming and going.

ATTRIBUTES OF NIBBĀNA

Nibbāna Has No Mass

It is often asked whether the Buddhas and Arahants exist as individuals in nibbāna. There is no mass in nibbāna. As it is not built up with a special kind of matter or mind, it cannot be looked upon as a mountain peopled by individuals, standing solidly across the firmament, like heaven or earth.

Nibbāna Is Deathless and Birthless

In the thirty-one planes of existence one is born to die and be reborn to die again. Nibbāna is deathless and birthless. In the world of *devas* and *brahmas*, birth means sudden appearance, and death means sudden disappearance. Nibbāna is the cessation of all aggregates. In such a cessation there is neither appearance nor disappearance.

Nibbāna Has No Abode

Nibbāna has no abode; thus it cannot be located. It is neither here nor there. It is not in the heavens. In the term “*nāmarūpa*,” *nāma* denotes that it embraces nibbāna, but it is, in that context, neither consciousness nor its concomitant. So the three aspects of consciousness — genesis, stasis, and dissolution — are non-existent in nibbāna. It is only figuratively speaking, that nibbāna abides in this one-fathom-long body.

No Occurrence of Mind and Matter

In this body of the aggregates, mind and matter are in a state of continual flux and so we say that they flow like a stream incessantly. A meditator who has realised the knowledge of the rise and fall of conditioned things is aware of mind and matter arising now and passing away the next moment. When he or she has developed the knowledge of equanimity he or she feels that the whole stream of mind and matter stop flowing. This is extinction.

Nibbāna Offers No Sense-objects

In the absence of mind, matter, consciousness, concomitants, *etc.*, There can be no sense-objects, and in the absence of sense-objects no opportunities arise for mental formations to play their part. Nibbāna means the end of suffering. Since there are no primary elements and no mind and matter, everything ceases, and this cessation means eternal peace. All sufferings end.

THE END OF THE WORLD

Nibbāna is not situated anywhere, but, figuratively speaking, it resides inside the body of an Arahant. This is mentioned in the Rohitassa Sutta in the Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāya.¹

When the Buddha was residing in the Jetavana monastery in Sāvathī, a *deva* by the name of Rohitassa, approached him and asked: “Venerable sir! Is it possible for one to go to the end of the world where there is no becoming, no aging, no death, and no rebirth?”

The Rohitassa Sutta

The Buddha answered this question thus:

“Yattha kho, āvuso, na jāyati na jīyati na miyati na cavati na upapajjati, nāhaṃ taṃ gamanena lokassa antaṃ ñāteyyaṃ daṭṭheyyaṃ patteyyanti vadāmi’ti.”

“Friend! I do not say that one can walk to the end of the world where there is no becoming, no aging, no death, and no rebirth. I do not say that by such means the end of the world can be reached, realised, and known.”

Rohitassa was very pleased with this exposition. He was at one time an ascetic possessing supernormal knowledge with which he attempted to seek the end of the world. He walked the universe stepping in one stride from one planet to another for fully a century, but his relentless search bore no fruit. At the end of his mission, he died and was reborn as a *deva* in the same universe which he had traversed far and wide as a powerful ascetic. What he had in mind was, however, the material universe. What Buddha had in mind in answering him was the cycle of suffering caused by the perpetual flux of mind and matter. It is only when this cycle ceases can one reach the end of the world.

Suffering Ends With the End of the World

The Buddha then continued:

¹ S.i.61 and A.iv.45.

“Na kho panāhaṃ, āvuso, appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. Api ca khvāhaṃ, āvuso, imasmiṃyeva byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañca paññapemi lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodha-gāminiñca paṭipadanti.”

“Friend, I do not say that all suffering will cease without reaching the end of the world, but I say¹ that the world lies within this fathom long body, which possesses mind and perception. I also teach the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.”

If one cannot reach the end of the world though physical exertions, one can reach it through applying knowledge of insight. What the Buddha means by “the world” is suffering. One who fails to reach its end through wisdom cannot attain the cessation of suffering. The entire world conditioned by the flux of mind and matter is the world of suffering beyond which lies nibbāna.

The Four Noble Truths Reside in the Body

In this fathom long body the world can be proclaimed. It is all suffering, and so it reveals the truth of suffering. In it there can also be found the cause of suffering, and so it teaches us the truth of the cause of suffering. In it there can be sought emancipation from suffering, and so it also shows us the truth of the cessation of suffering. This cessation can be realised in the body. Thus it shows us the way leading to the cessation of suffering. Hence all these Four Noble Truths can be discovered in the bodies of beings belonging to this universe.

You cannot locate nibbāna. Before entering *parinibbāna*, Arahants still carry the burden of the aggregates, which all cease to arise after their *parinibbāna*. It may be said that this cessation takes place inside the body of the Arahants. Hence we speak conventionally of the existence of nibbāna inside our bodies of the aggregates. According, to the Abhidhamma, however, nibbāna is extraneous to the body. That is why in the Udāna Pāḷi text² it is described as *appatiṭṭhaṃ*, which means “having no place on which to stand.”

¹ In a conventional sense. ² Paṭhamanibbānapaṭisaṃyutta Suttaṃ.

The Universe Is within

The truth of suffering relates to the suffering inherent in the five aggregates of attachment, which arises in the sense-base as reflected by the sense-object which enters the sense-door. When you look at a thing, the eye base receives the image of the eye-object through the eye-door, and the contact established between the base and the object lets you know that you have seen the thing. This phenomenon of seeing is quite obvious. You know that you have eyes and feel that you are in full possession of them. You, as a seer, exist. The object you see is clear and pleasing to your mind. Consider in like manner the remaining phenomena of hearing, tasting, and so on. Whenever each of them arises, attachment to the sense-object under observation is developed. When you see someone, you recognise that someone as man or woman possessing features which appear as agreeable to you. You at once get attached to him or her. Your eye and the eye-object constitute the aggregates of attachment to form or matter.

When you recognise what you see, you should know that consciousness is operating, you now have the aggregate of attachment to consciousness. Having seen the object, feelings pleasurable or otherwise, arise in you. Now you have developed the aggregate of attachment to feeling. You usually note what you see so that you can recall it to mind when occasion demands. Perception has developed in you, and you now have the aggregate of attachment to perception. Then there are the volitional activities that take place in your mind in relation to wholesome or unwholesome deeds that you commit. Such mental states outside the domain of feeling and perception constitute formations to which you get attached. Thus arises the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. Now from this act of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, all the five aggregates of attachment have arisen.

These aggregates are always arising in us, but the arising is so instantaneous that we hardly notice it. We almost always fail to capture the moment when the phenomenon occurs. However, with mindfulness we can note the arising and passing away of the aggregates of attachment to realise the fact that this state of flux is highly unsatisfactory, and that is suffering.

These five aggregates of attachment form this universe. They reveal the truth of suffering. An ordinary individual fails to note seeing just as he or she sees, and is thus unable to grasp the true nature of the phenomenon at the instant it arises. He or she feels that seeing is pleasurable, takes suffering for pleasure, and thus a liking for pleasure develops. This is craving, which becomes intensified as attachment. As he or she makes efforts to fulfil desires to appease the attachment, formations take place. Now mental formations are brought into play. Because of the action of formations, a dying person perceives through the mind-door his or her own actions (*kamma*) signs of actions (*kamma-nimitta*), and signs of destiny (*gati-nimitta*). The mind will incline towards these objects because of attachment. It is like the case of a drowning man, who grasps whatever object comes by. The dying person grasps the mind object. Then decease-consciousness occurs, and as he or she leaves the aggregates behind, this consciousness recedes into the past.

However, as attachment has not been eradicated, the mind-object, derived from the decease-consciousness of the previous existence, influences the rebirth-linking consciousness that has just occurred in this present existence. Thus a new life begins with a new consciousness and this links the past with the present. Thus it is called rebirth-linking consciousness. This consciousness is succeeded by mental contents of the factor of life. Whenever consciousness occurs, its concomitants follow. Then material phenomena that are dependent on them arise. If craving cannot be cut off, these mental and material phenomena continue to arise *ad-infinitum* throughout saṃsāra. Hence, craving is the cause that brings about this universe, and since this universe is a mass of suffering, it holds up the truth of the cause of suffering for all to see.

Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching are all the factors of suffering, and it is on that score that craving becomes the cause. Because of this cause, we like to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch, and suffering arises again. These are the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering.

Meditating on the Four Elements

Consciousness occurs when contact is established between the sense-base and the sense-object. A meditator starts with the practice of concentrating his mind on this phenomenon of con-

sciousness that arises originally from the four essential material properties, namely, solidity (*pathavi*), thermal energy (*tejo*), motive force (*vāyo*), and fluidity (*āpo*). When the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta says, “I know I am going when I go” it is a direction to the meditator to know the element of motion that is brought into play through the contact that excited consciousness. When you are sitting, know that you are sitting, noting the physical tension brought about by the act of sitting. You might then be aware of other physical or mental phenomena taking place in conjunction with the posture that you are assuming. For instance, you might have noticed that as you sit, your feet are touching each other, your hands are interlocking, your clothes are clinging to your body, and so forth. When you observe them with mindfulness you will come to realise the nature of the activities of matter that arise as sense-base and sense-object come into contact with each other.

AN EASY METHOD OF MEDITATION

So that both the young and old can take up meditation, we prescribe what we consider to be an easy course in insight meditation beginning with noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. As you breathe in the abdomen becomes distended, and as you breathe out it subsides. You will experience the motion of the rising and falling of the abdominal wall and recognise it as the activity of the element of motion. You note this. That is to say, you concentrate your mind on the rising and falling of the abdomen with the intellectual appreciation of the nature of the phenomenon. There should be no respite between noting the two consecutive movements. Keep your mind fixed on the start of the rising movement following it till it ends, and switch over to the start of the falling movement till it also ends. If, in the process, you notice that there is some gap after breathing in or after breathing out, you must be mindful that you are sitting (if you sit while meditating).

At times ideas will form in your mind, as you think of something. Or you may have some intention to do this or that. Note all such ideas. Whenever your mind drifts away from the main stream of mindfulness, follow it. Don't let it escape your attention. Continue noting the phenomenon of thinking. Then resume noting the movements of your abdomen. Sometimes you may encounter

sensations, mostly unpleasant, because you feel stiff and tired, or hot and painful as you sit meditating. In that case, note this tiredness and pain, and when such sensations disappear concentrate your attention again on the rising and falling of the abdomen.

To put it briefly, please note the movements of the abdomen, both your physical and psychological behaviour and experience so that there can be no interval in the whole process of meditation during which your mind is kept idle. If you have no special object on which to focus your attention, you keep on noting as usual the rising and falling of your abdomen which is distended and tense at one moment and relaxed and flaccid at the next.

As your power of concentration improves you will notice that each movement of the muscle has many distinct phases of action that may be called incidents and that each incident arises and then disappears. Each appearance or disappearance that occurs in succession is palpable. This observation applies to the mind-object. The noting mind, the subject, also behaves in much the same way as the object, now appearing and now disappearing in quick succession. As your observation gets keener, moment by moment, you recognise every part of the phenomenon that occurs and dissolves, as if each has been set apart from the other to take its own course.

As the noting mind and the noted mind-object come to pass as if only for the sake of dissolution, it now dawns upon you that they are transient. They are forever in a state of flux. It is their inherent nature to arise and vanish. Such transience is most unsatisfactory. What is unsatisfactory is suffering. Now you have arrived at the knowledge of the truth of suffering. This realisation dispels ignorance, so craving fails to assert itself as your mind-object. As craving is absent, attachment, cannot act as its accomplice. As no attachment occurs, no volitional activities can operate for the satisfaction of desires conjured up by the mind and its object. It means that no actions can be formed, when we say that no formations arise. When formations cease, no rebirth-linking consciousness can take place. So there will be no new birth, that is to say no new aggregates. This indicates the cessation of both suffering and the cause leading to suffering. At that particular instant when you recognise this cessation you realise nibbāna. This may be only for one moment, but that moment is the most precious. Noting and

knowing the phenomena which ultimately leads to the knowledge of cessation, tantamount to worldly realisation of the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Thus it is commonly said that the Four Noble Truths reside in the body of the meditator.

As knowledge of equanimity about formations is achieved, one becomes so absorbed in meditation that one feels one's body, together with its sense of touch and perception, comes to cessation. Hence the text further says:

"In nibbāna this body, together with its sense of touch and the working of faculties, sense-bases, ceases. One must be aware of such cessation."

This, in effect, is the realisation of the peace of nibbāna through the Noble Path. Hence the Commentaries add:

"In this one fathom long body is proclaimed the world, where the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the Noble Eightfold Path can be discovered. Know, my dear friend, that with these words I do not proclaim the reality of the Four Noble Truths in such inanimate objects as grass or wood, but in the body composed of the four primary elements."

The truth of suffering is evident everywhere, but the truth of the cause of suffering can be adduced from the intrinsic nature of all ordinary people who cannot get rid of mental defilements. Before one can tread the path one can search for the cause through introspection of one's own body. The truth of the cessation of the cause is said (conventionally) to be present in the Noble Ones despite the fact that they may have some residues of defilements and aggregates within them.

With Arahants, however, as defilements have been eradicated, cessation is said to have been achieved. The Noble Truth of the Eightfold Path can, of course, be discovered in the body of the Arahant heading for the Path and its Fruition. Here it is meant to show that the peace of nibbāna can be realised only with the total extinction of mind and matter and its concomitants.

Suffering and Its Cause Manifest During Ideation

In the foregoing I have shown how the aggregates of attachment arise through the interaction of sense-bases like the eye, ear, *etc.*, and of sense objects like form, sound, *etc.* Now I shall deal with the interaction between the mind and mind-object — which, in ordinary language, is ideation — that gives rise to aggregates of attachment. Introspection into the nature of ideation will give out the truth relating to suffering and its cause.

As you think, you are aware where the seat of thinking lies. Obviously it lies in your body and in your heart-base. Add to them the mind-object. Depending on these three-factors of the process of ideation, thoughts, intentions, desires, *etc.*, arise. If you fail to note the true nature of this process, you might be led to believe that the entire physical body together with its mind base is your own self.

“Here I am,” you might say to your self, “this body is mine. It is I who am thinking. This is my thought. I am the mind-object. Or, he is the mind-object.” You might formulate such ideas in your head, but in fact the phenomena that arise as you think and try to know what you think are all the aggregates of attachment. These aggregates are all a mass of suffering. Now you see the truth of suffering. These aggregates of attachment may be categorised as follows:

1. At the time of ideation, the mind-base and the body which forms the seat of the mind start operating. They constitute the aggregate of attachment to matter.
2. Then thinking occurs. All thoughts and ideas constitute the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.
3. Then feelings arise, discriminating between pleasure and pain generally. They constitute the aggregate of attachment to feelings.
4. Then perceptions arise noting the mind-object. They constitute the aggregate of attachment to perceptions.
5. Then mental formations occur. They constitute the aggregate of attachment to mental formations.

The last-mentioned aggregate, the products of volition, are extremely conspicuous, you can find them everywhere. When consciousness arises through seeing, hearing, *etc.*, mental formations take place in the form of thoughts and emotions. This is how desire and attachment

for the pleasures of the senses arise. As you see or hear things, you discriminate between good and bad or between wholesome and unwholesome. There will be an affinity for things you consider to be pleasant, but when they are not to your liking, anger, disgust, and loathing assail your mind. This leads you to the growth of egoistical pride that persuades you to formulate wrong views. Then doubts, jealousy, anxiety, and restlessness come trailing behind to trouble you.

On the other hand, it is also possible for you to have developed wholesome thoughts like faith, charity, mindfulness, forbearance, sympathy, kindness, *etc.*, as you think wisely regarding the sense-objects that you observe.

All these tendencies, whether wholesome or otherwise are aggregates of mental formations. When you intend to sit, or stand, or go, or speak, this aggregate of formations is at work. If your volition is wholesome, wholesome kamma is made; if not, then it is unwholesome. The world of these aggregates of attachment to formations is truly the world, and this world is a mass of suffering. Those unaccustomed to the application of insight knowledge to the absolute realities of suffering through meditation develop a wrong sense of exhilaration about their thoughts and ideas, hoping for the better even when they come face to face with misery. They are pleased with the idea of the existence of self. They long for its prosperity, mistaking suffering for happiness. In this way attachment grows in them, and they make all kinds of efforts to satisfy their desires. To appease these desires, they will not hesitate to kill, steal, cheat, or commit all sorts of misdeeds.

Others, however, may do wholesome deeds with a view to accumulating merits for their future lives in the cycle of existence. Formations arise in accordance with the merits or demerits that they achieve. When they are dying, actions, signs of actions, and signs of destiny appear as sense-objects to be perceived by the sense-bases, and depending on what appears in their mind's eye — as we say in ordinary parlance — rebirth linking consciousness is formed in the next new existence where fresh sense-bases and sense-objects interact as before to produce craving and attachment, which all go to make up the same cycle of suffering. For the entire chain of craving, attachment, kamma, and becoming spells nothing but the truth of suffering. It is only when this chain is cut off with

the knowledge of equanimity about formations that the peace of nibbāna can be established. So the Buddha said:

“Where mind and perception with the mind cease, there is cessation of all faculties or sense-bases, and this should be known (by the meditator).”

This cessation is nibbāna. In the text the word “*mana*” is used, but this needs clarification. It has been used to embrace two types of consciousness, namely, life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga*), and apprehending consciousness (*āvajjana*). *Bhavaṅga* is the state of mind that occurs while one is dreaming or half-asleep. It is not as important as apprehending consciousness, which needs to be closely observed so that you become aware of its cessation. In the text the word “*āhammasañña*,” is also used. It means the perception of the sense-object. With regard to this, we usually say mind (*citta*) for easier understanding. So I have rendered this apprehending consciousness simply as mind.

What is meant here is the cessation or the extinction of the mind that takes in the mind-object, the mind that ordinarily knows, and the mind that finally apprehends. This represents the three phases of the mind in operation. Their cessation denotes the complete annihilation of all formations, and therein lies nibbāna. This Dhamma can be realised only with the practice of insight meditation. When the mind is inclined to nibbāna, all forms of consciousness cease, when Path consciousness and Fruition consciousness are realised.

Discovery of Nibbāna Where the Universe Ends

In the third part of this discourse, it has been shown that as we are noting the phenomenon of seeing, both the eye-base and perception of form get dissolved, that as we are noting the phenomenon of hearing, both the ear-base and perception of sound get dissolved, that as we are noting the phenomenon of smelling both the nose-base and perception of smell get dissolved, that as we are noting the phenomenon of tasting, both the tongue-base and perception of taste get dissolved, that as we are noting the phenomenon of touching both the body and perception of touch get dissolved, and that as we are noting ideation, both the mind and perception of ideas get dissolved. To know this dissolution or

cessation of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental perceptions at the six mind-doors denotes the realisation of the truth of cessation of the cause of suffering.

Cessation cannot be realised by just thinking or imagining, but by actual practice of meditating on mind and matter until knowledge of equanimity is achieved. When it is truly realised, conviction that all conditioned things spell suffering will be gained. You will also come to the conclusion that craving for that suffering is suffering itself. When craving is dispelled no new becoming can arise. On attaining Enlightenment the Buddha uttered this verse of triumph expressing exultation over his conquest of craving.

*“Anekajāti saṃsāraṃ, sandhāvissaṃ anibbisaṃ.
Gahakāraṃ gavesanto, dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ.*

*Gahakāraka diṭṭhosi, puna gehaṃ na kāhasi.
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā, gahakūṭaṃ visaṅkhatāṃ.
Visaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ, taṇhānaṃ khayamajjhagā.”*

“I have wandered through the cycle of rebirths seeking, but not finding, the builder of this house (of the aggregates). To be born again and again is suffering. Now, house-builder, you are seen! You will build no house again, your rafters have been pulled down and the ridge-pole dismantled. My mind, gone to the annihilation of all formations, has attained the end of craving.”¹

Needless to say, the house-builder is craving, which builds the house of the aggregates in the cycle of existences, thus bringing forth becoming, the most terrible of all miseries and pain that can be found. If the house-builder is not discovered, he will continue building the house again and again. You may not have any inclination to go down to the lower realms, but craving will insist on your taking up residence in the house he builds there. You will never find him if you fail to gain Enlightenment. The Buddha, before the realisation of this wisdom, had to wander through myriads of rebirths.

It has become a custom with Burmese Buddhists to recite these two verses when pagodas or images are consecrated. It is also not unusual for the laity to recite the Law of Dependent Origination

¹ Dhammapada, verses 153-154.

(*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) in direct and reverse order during that ceremony. This law was contemplated by the Buddha on the seventh day of his Enlightenment. The consecration ceremony is called “*anekazatin*” in Burmese. This practice is not prevalent in Thailand or Sri Lanka.

No Foothold

What is important to note is that nibbāna has no foothold (*appatittha*) It has no location. When we speak of nibbāna as residing within this fathom long body, we mean it metaphorically. This has been emphasised repeatedly. No doubt the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering are actually apparent in the body of any individual. The truth of the path lies latent in the meditator who practises insight meditation to arrive at the Noble Path. The truth of the cessation of suffering, which is nibbāna itself, resides in the body of the Noble Ones who have inclined to the Path and its Fruition. So it may be said that it is always present in the bodies of the Arahants.

However, this does not mean to say that nibbāna exists with the Noble Ones in the strict materialistic sense of the word. In the heart of the Noble Ones all defilements have been exterminated. This extermination has been given a location in a figurative sense, and this has been explicitly mentioned in the Visuddhimagga thus:

“Nibbāna has no location, but when speaking of the cessation of defilements, the place where defilements are situated has to be mentioned. So a location is indicated metaphorically.”

In the usual saying that eyes are lovely and that craving for those lovely eyes are extinguished, you cannot actually locate where such extinguishment takes place. Thus we can only speak figuratively of the place where nibbāna is situated. The Abhidhamma is explicit on this point. It clearly states that nibbāna is extraneous to the body. It is accomplished outside the body. Hence we say that it has no residence, no abode, and location.

As a result of listening respectfully to this discourse on nibbāna, may you attain nibbāna, the end of the world of suffering, through the revelation of the truth of suffering arrived at by the practice of insight meditation.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part V

Delivered on the 8th Waxing day of Thadingyut, 1326 B.E.
14th October 1964

This is the continuation of my previous four discourses on the subject of nibbāna, which has been described as a state of cessation of all formations caused by defilements enabling no new aggregates to arise.

THE CESSATION OF CRAVING

The Pāli word “*vāna*,” from which is derived the word nibbāna, means craving for sensual existence (*kāma bhava*), craving for realms of form (*rūpa bhava*), and craving for formless realms (*arūpa bhava*). It takes delight in both the objects of sense and in thought. It hops from one object to another, whether systematically or unsystematically, in a logical sequence or in reverse order. It moves like a shuttle in weaving. In fact, the original meaning of the word relates to weaving. Past, present, and future existences are woven into a pattern as variegated as human imagination could create. Nibbāna has as its aim the liberation from the clutches of craving. The texts say “*Vānato nikkhantanti nibbānaṃ*” — nibbāna is a departure from craving. Another exegesis says: “*Natthi vanaṃ etthati nibbānaṃ*” — craving is not in nibbāna. All these go to show that craving does not have nibbāna as its objective.

Lust or sensual craving cherishes that sexes should be differentiated. It loves sensual pleasures derived from the senses: eyes, ears, *etc.* It feels bored in the absence of the five strands of sensual pleasures. Craving developed in the realm of form likes the existence of the Form Sphere and that developed in formless realm, likes the existence of the Formless Sphere. Those who are obsessed with craving cannot realise the ills of existence, and so they have no affinity for nibbāna where there is no becoming. People pray for nibbāna, but if told that they would be instantly transported there with all chances for a return to the present existence barred, they would hesitate in the manner of the devotee in the following story.

Let Me Think About It

A lay devotee prayed before the Buddha image that he may reach nibbāna as soon as possible. Hearing his frequent prayers, a practical joker hid himself behind the image and said with a thundering voice, “You have prayed often enough. Today I am sending you to nibbāna.” The aspirant to nibbāna replied, “Well and good! However, let me go back home to consult my wife.” When he got home he related the incident to his wife and sought her advice. “What a lucky man,” she said “Don’t hesitate. Go quickly.” The naïve devotee then asked, “Consider whether you can run the house without me,” she replied, “Go without any misgiving! There’s no need for me to consider.”

The husband retorted, “Even though you won’t consider the propriety, let me consider it.”

It may not be a true story, but it smacks of realism.

Loath to Earn Merit for Nibbāna

Accumulating merits though the practice of insight meditation brings one nearer to nibbāna, but few actually take it up. We usually have to make strenuous efforts to persuade a devotee to meditate. Consider the case of [Queen Khemā](#), the wife of King Bimbisāra. Although he was a devotee, she had never visited Buddha. He had to employ a number of stratagems to prompt her to go to the monastery, but once she was in the presence of Buddha, all was well, and she became an Arahant the moment she had listened to the Dhamma. There is also another story about Kāla, the son of Anāthapiṇḍika. Let us call him Maung Kāla in the Burmese way.

Maung Kāla

Anāthapiṇḍika, the millionaire, heard the news about the Buddha while he was trading at Rājagaha. He visited him and listened to his teaching. At once he became a Stream-winner and invited the Great Teacher to reside at Sāvatti. He bought Prince Jeta’s garden for 180 million, built a monastery costing another 180 million, and held a libation ceremony spending still another 180 million. He donated the monastery to the Buddha and his disciples.

Every day he would feed 500 monks, observing the Uposatha himself and encouraging his household to do likewise. Although he had become a donor of a monastery, his son, Maung Kāla, had no inclination for the Buddha's Dhamma.

There was a reason for him not to have any sense of devotion for the Buddha and the Dhamma, for in those days people followed Purāṇa Kassapa's heretical teachings. There were also many kinds of animists. Some worshipped Brahma as god. Had it not been for the Buddha, Anāthapiṇḍika himself would have been involved with various kinds of religious denominations current before the Buddha's Enlightenment. Maung Kāla might also be a follower of heretical schools of religion. It might not be convenient for him to change from one religion to another.

The father thought about the son's welfare: "My son does not know the Buddha. He cannot appreciate the Dhamma or the Saṅgha. He has no desire to go to the monastery. He has no inclination to listen to the Dhamma. He shuns doing chores for the convenience of the monks. Should he die a heretic he would surely go to Avīci, the lowest of the hell realms. That my son is not a Buddhist is the height of impropriety. If he gets to Avīci while I am still living, it will be worse. Money can change the mind of many. I must send him to the monastery at the risk of indulging in bribery." Thinking thus, the millionaire told his son that he would give him a hundred *kaḥāpaṇas* if he would go to the monastery, and his son accepted the offer.

When he got to the monastery Maung Kāla chose a cosy corner where he slept heartily, for he had no mind to listen to the Dhamma. When he came home, the father fed him well in the belief that his son had kept the Uposatha. Maung Kāla was always after money and so he had his meal only after he had been paid. Next the rich man told him that if only he would listen to the Dhamma and relate just one stanza of it to the father, he would be rewarded with a thousand *kaḥāpaṇas*.

Maung Kāla paid another visit to the monastery and this time he listened carefully to what the Buddha taught. The Teacher knew him well, and he purposely delivered several discourses that the rich man's son could not easily commit to memory. As the stipulation with his father was to retell what Buddha taught even if it be but one verse, he now took special care to understand. Reaching

understanding, his faith developed, and at this opportune moment the Buddha taught him so that he could understand well. Having accumulated perfections in the past, Maung Kāla at once attained to Stream-winning.

Now a Stream-winner, his faith in the Dhamma became steadfast, all doubts and wrong views having been dispelled. On that particular day he did not go home by himself early, but, instead remained behind in the company of the Buddha and his disciples. When they visited the rich man's house for alms, he followed them. On reaching the house he became worried that his father might give the thousand *kahāpaṇas* to him in the presence of the Buddha, for, he did not want it to be known that he went to the monastery with a pecuniary motive. A sense of shame had overtaken him. As usual he took his meals after the Buddha and the monks, but this time he took care not to make himself conspicuous. Nevertheless, Anāthapiṇḍika came to him and paid him the money as promised saying that it was a reward for his son's attendance at the monastery to keep the Uposatha, and listen to the Dhamma. He was greatly embarrassed and refused to accept the money. The father related the whole incident to the Buddha, saying that on this particular day his son had radiated happiness unlike on previous occasions when greed seized him.

The Buddha said, "Your son has become a Stream-winner who is nobler than a universal monarch, a *deva*, or a *brahma*."

A Stream-winner far excels a universal monarch. Almost everyone likes to be a king. Even being a village headman has its appeal. A kingdom is better than a principality. A bigger kingdom is far better. An emperor is more powerful than a feudal Lord. A monarch ruling the entire continent would be far more powerful. If one became a universal monarch, lord of all four continents, what more can be said? Wielding his magic wheel of authority and shining in an aura of virtue, all emperors and kings bow to him. Because of his virtuousness, all his subjects possess affluence, solidarity, and righteousness.

A life of luxury enjoyed by a universal monarch pales into insignificance when compared to the state of peacefulness achieved by a Stream-winner. The monarch's happiness would last only for his lifetime. If he rules the universe with kingly virtues, he may be reborn after his death in heaven, but no one can say for certain

whether he would be destined for nibbāna or for the four lower realms. However, once a devotee becomes a Stream-winner, all doors to the lower realms will be closed for him. Should he or she go to heaven, he or she has only seven more existences, and will be destined for Arahantship subsequently attaining to the state of complete annihilation of the cycles of suffering after *parinibbāna*. The Buddha thus praised Maung Kāla whose life was far better than that of a Universal monarch.

Excels A Deva or Brahma

A Stream-winner is nobler than a *deva* or a *brahma*. There are six celestial planes of existence, of which Cātumahārājikā is the lowest in the order. Even there, *devas* enjoy long lives. A day in that plane is equivalent to fifty years of life on this earth. The span of life of a *deva* in Cātumahārājikā is 500 celestial years, which equals nine million years of our human world. Humans live to be a hundred, in which case a *deva's* life is ninety thousand times longer than human life. They possess not only longevity, but also beauty. They enjoy happiness more than we do. The *devas* of Tāvatiṃsa excel those of Cātumahārājikā. Their span of life is three times longer than that of the residents of the lower plane. Computed to earth-years, their span of life equals thirty-six million years. Longevity of the Yāma *devas* is four times that of Tāvatiṃsa, so the span of life there is 144 million earth-years. Calculating the earth-years in the same way, a Tusita *deva's* longevity is 576 million years, a Nimmānarati *deva's* is 2,304 million years and a Paranimmitavasavatti *deva's* is 9,216 million. Whatever their longevity, they cannot escape from the four lower realms, for when they die, they may be reborn into this human world, fall into bad company, and commit evil deeds. Not being destined for nibbāna despite their supernormal attainments, they cannot get away from the turning of the wheel of existence, and so they will be subject to disease and death. Stream-winners give a wide birth to four woeful states and they have only seven existences to undergo before attaining *parinibbāna*.

The lives of *brahmas* are far nobler and better than those of the *devas*. They are impervious to the wiles of the five constituents of sensual pleasure. They also enjoy peace. Their lives last from one-third of a world-cycle to 84,000 world cycles. Yet when *brahmas* die, they

revert to the world of the senses where, if they happen to commit evil, they could also go down to the lower realms. They are subject to cycles of suffering like aging and death, as they return to the sensual world. For Stream-winners, however, there are no hells awaiting them, and they are destined for nibbāna after seven existences.

Excels the King of Brahmas

If the king of the *brahmas* is just an ordinary being not inclined to the Dhamma, he cannot escape from the four lower realms nor from the cycles of suffering. A Stream-winner has nothing to fear for he has only seven existences to undergo before he attains *parinibbāna* where all sufferings cease.

What I would like to emphasise in the story of Maung Kāla is, firstly, the fact that he had to be coaxed into listening to the Dhamma although he had long gained perfections that prepared him for the state of a Stream-winner, and, secondly, that craving is anathema to nibbāna. One obsessed with craving would not heed any teaching that points the way to nibbāna. I would also like to remind you that once a Stream-winner is within sight of nibbāna, he has but seven existences to go during which he will, as of course, be subjected to miseries and sufferings. In the end, however, he will be an Arahant who can annihilate all defilements.

Beings in Sensual Realms Dislike A Brahmā's Life

Beings in sensuous spheres desire sensual pleasures arising out of differentiation of the sexes. *Brahmas* have no sexual characteristics and so they do not have any desire for sensual pleasures derived from sexual relations. They are very happy in that state, but the lustful have no desire to be sexless *brahmas*. They consider the absence of sexual pleasure as misery. *Brahmas* live without eating. Where there is no need for food, no desire for it can arise; and this in itself should be happiness as lack of necessity for the daily round of food does away with many troubles. However, sensuous beings love gustatory pleasures, and so to them absence of those pleasures means misery. Where contact is absent, no pleasurable tactile sensations can be enjoyed. This can also bring happiness, for it does away with desire. Because of this nature, those entranced in the *jhānic* state of the Form Spheres feel happy.

Sensuous beings regard life in those spheres as unhappy because they are obsessed with sensual pleasures.

Beings in the Realms of Form Dislike the Absence of Form

In Formless Spheres mental phenomena like mind and volition dominate. There are four planes in these spheres, namely, the Plane of the Infinity of Space, the Plane of the Infinity of Consciousness, the Plane of Nothingness and the Plane of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. Those who have perfected themselves in *arūpa jhāna* can get to any one of these four planes where matter is totally absent. They live in the world of ideation where there is no material suffering. Those possessing craving for sensuality and materiality do not like to be reborn in any of the Formless Realms, but the occupants of those planes of formless existence are quite happy with their psychological conditions. They are, however, in a dead end. They are unaware of the appearance of the Buddhas or of their Enlightenment.

Having no material body, they lack sense organs and so are impervious to the teachings. No Buddha can teach them the Dhamma. They live exceedingly long lives for twenty, forty, sixty, or eighty-four thousand world-cycles; but when they pass away they may be reborn in sense-spheres. Ālāra and Udaka, who first taught meditation to the Bodhisatta before he practised austerities, lost an invaluable opportunity to see the light of the Dhamma when the Buddha attained Enlightenment because they happened to be reborn in one of the Formless Realms, which is included in eight kinds of existence remote from the path of deliverance. If one gets to any one of the four Formless Realms as an ordinary individual, one would surely miss the Path. However, if one gets there as a Stream-winner, Once-returner, or Non-returner, by virtue of insight practice, he can attain Arahantship and *parinibbāna*.

CRAVING HAS NO AFFINITY FOR NIBBĀNA

The element of total extinction of the aggregates (*anupādisesa nibbāna*), is not liked by any form of craving — sensual craving, craving for form, or craving for formlessness. The majority who fail to gain conviction in the futility of the aggregates and kamma-formations have no love for that element of nibbāna which leaves behind no substrata of existence. Yesterday, I talked about Lāḷudāyī

who grumbled: “What happiness is there in nibbāna which is devoid of sensations?” To him, nibbāna appeared to be a mass of suffering in the absence of sensations. Unbelievers, who have developed attachment to the aggregates and formations, scoff at the idea of nibbāna, which they regard as the death of all deaths as it means no return to life after death. Their attitude toward nibbāna is due to craving.

I have already suggested that craving cannot take up its residence in nibbāna. Here I may add an observation which says: “*Natthi vānametasmiṃ adhiḡateti nibbānaṃ*” — “When nibbāna is attained, craving goes out of existence.”

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

In the Dhammacakkappavattana Vaggo,¹ the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering is described thus:

“Katamañca, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ? Yo tassāyeva tañhāya asesavirāgaṇirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo — idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ.”

“And, what, monks, is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the utter fading away and cessation of that very craving, the giving it up, the abandoning it, the release from it, and the detachment from it. And this, I say monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.” (U Pe Maung Tin’s translation.)

Here, craving is totally extinguished through developing the Path of Arahantship. In the absence of craving, no actions arise, and consequently no new becoming, no mind, no matter, and no aggregates.

On the fiftieth day after his Enlightenment, the Buddha meditated on the essence of nibbāna which is so subtle that it cannot be easily understood.

¹ Not, as the original translation says, in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, but in the Khandha Sutta — the third Sutta of the same chapter in the Saṃyuttanikāya, just after the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha doesn’t pose the question, but just says: “*Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ.*” (ed.)

“Idampi kho thānaṃ sududdasaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhāra-samatho sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhākkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.”¹

“Verily nibbāna exists where all formations cease, all substrata of existence are abandoned, all desires become extinct, all passions are spent, and the mass of suffering is brought to its end.”

The Four Substrata of Existence

Upadhi is a substratum of existence or the foundation that makes the body the seat of pleasure and pain, or happiness and misery. There are four: the substratum of sensuality (*kāmuṇupadhi*), the substratum of the aggregates (*khandhupadhi*), the substratum of the defilements (*kilesupadhi*), and the substratum of mental formations (*abhisaṅkhārūpadhi*). The substratum of sensuality is the five strands of sensual pleasure. They are the causes of misery, but ordinary people think that they give them happiness or delight.

Khandhupadhi relates to the five aggregates, which bring us suffering. Ordinary people, however, say that they are also sources of happiness. For them to see beautiful sights, to hear pleasant sounds, to smell fragrant odours, to taste delicious food, to feel a soft touch, and to ponder agreeable ideas are all enjoyment, but to Arahants these roots of pleasure are all miserable.

Is it not just to satisfy the demands of pleasure that one works for a living? In one’s daily work one has to be careful to save what one earns, sometimes at the risk of one’s life. As one competes for the attainment of needs and desires, one often quarrels even with friends or siblings. Sometimes when thoughts of possessing property are uppermost, rifts develop even among families. Civil law suits for inheritance come about in this way. The root cause of all such miserable drama in life can be traced to the attachment to the five strands of pleasure. All suffering stems from mind and matter. Where these aggregates do not arise, there is the cessation of suffering. Hence the aggregates are recognised as a substratum of existence.

¹ Vinaya Mahāvaggo, Brahmāyācanakathā (ed.)

Greed, animosity, and delusion are basic defilements. They generate suffering in all cycles of existence. They operate in all realms, whether of *devas*, men, animals, or hungry ghosts, or in hell. As they form a base for suffering to arise, they are known as *kilesupadhi*.

The accumulation of wholesome and unwholesome actions is called *abhisankhāra*. By virtue of generosity, morality, and mental development, one may be reborn in heaven, and then as a *deva* or *brahma* one may think that one's life is the epitome of happiness. People in this world, enjoying the fruits of wholesome actions, also think that they are enjoying happiness. However, Arahants see them all as subject to suffering, for, as the destinies of beings are determined by their actions, they may go down to the lower realms if their *kammas* go awry. Hence formations are held to be *abhisankhārūpadhi*. In *nibbāna* all these four substrata of existence are extinguished.

Cessation As Expounded in the Kevaṭṭa Sutta

In the Law of Dependent Origination it has been shown that the cessation of ignorance brings about the cessation of formations, and that the cessation of formations brings about the cessation of consciousness, which leads to rebirth-linking and new becoming. Hence, cessation is explained in the Commentaries as synonymous with *nibbāna*. Here, it suffices to say that it is the cessation of, and liberation from, craving and lust. I shall now refer to the Kevaṭṭa Sutta¹ for more explanation.

“Viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbatopabhaṃ.

Ettha āpo ca pathavī, tejo vāyo na gādhati.

“Ettha dīghañca rassañca, aṇuṃ thūlaṃ subhāsubhaṃ.

Ettha nāmañca rūpañca, asesam uparujjhati.”

“One cannot see consciousness. It has no limits. It shines with purity. It has no primary elements like water, earth, fire, and air. It is neither long nor short; it is neither big nor small; it is neither pleasing nor displeasing to the eye. In *nibbāna* all matter that inclines toward the mind ceases totally. Since consciousness is rendered extinct, mind and matter cease altogether”

¹ Dighanikāya, Silakkhandha Vagga, Sutta 11.

Indeed nibbāna cannot be seen with the naked eye; it can be seen only with the eye of wisdom (path-knowledge). It is beyond comparison. It has neither beginning nor end, and neither arising nor dissolution. One cannot say that nibbāna arises here and vanishes there. Where on earth can anyone discover the beginning or end of a phenomenon when formations are totally extinguished?

Nibbāna is of pristine purity. Pollution of mind and matter is possible as defilements like greed, anger, and ignorance defile consciousness. In fact, they can even pollute wholesome actions. However, in nibbāna no such defilements can arise. Hence we say that its purity is bright and clear. This figurative language leads to the description of nibbāna as light. However, light is the result of the contact of a sense-base with a sense-object and indicates materiality. In nibbāna matter is absent; and so to take it as light in a literal sense goes against the teachings of the Buddha.

The word “*sabbatopabhaṇṇi*” in the above passage from the Kevaṭṭa Sutta, has another connotation that emphasises that nibbāna is the destination reachable through the practice of meditation. The Visuddhimagga and the Abhidhamma mention [forty methods](#) of practice, but in the Canonical texts only thirty-eight are shown excluding light device (*āloka kasiṇa*) and space device (*ākāsa kasiṇa*). Literally “*kasiṇa*” means whole and complete. It is an image conceptualised by the meditator as light, which extends everywhere completely without limit. Or, in other words, it is a contemplation device on which a concept is imagined. Hence, *āloka kasiṇa* is usually rendered as “light device,” and *ākāsa kasiṇa* as “space device.” The practice of any one of these objects of meditation can lead the meditator to the realisation of nibbāna. If one wants to go to sea, one can get to it from any point on the coast. If you want to bathe in a lake, you can get to its waters from any point of its perimeter.

Similarly, if you want to reach nibbāna you can take any of the thirty-eight prescribed meditation objects. Of course, you cannot get to your desired destination only through the tranquility method of training in concentration. You must also take up insight meditation after accomplishment in tranquility. Insight meditation alone can lead you to absorption from which stage you can aspire to nibbāna through the realisation of the Path and its Fruition.

Once a young monk entered a forest with a novice in search of vines for a tooth-brush. The novice came across a dead body. At once he contemplated the corpse and attained the first *jhāna*. He meditated on the rise and fall of the aggregates till he reached the second and third stages of the Path. As he was trying for the fourth stage leading to Arahantship, he was hailed from afar by his senior. He rose from *jhāna* and pointed out the corpse to the monk, who, at once practised meditation till he attained to Non-returning. It appears that both the monk and the novice were quite familiar with the methods of insight meditation, and so they became Non-returners. This shows that any of the thirty-eight methods of meditation can lead one to the Path and nibbāna.

ABOUT SUPERNORMAL POWERS

I will now tell you why the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* was taught by the Buddha. At one time Kevaṭṭa approached the Buddha and requested him to allow the monks to exercise supernormal powers (*pāṭihāriya*).

“This city of Nālandā is thriving,” said Kevaṭṭa, “and its citizens are devoted to the Blessed One. Their devotion will become all the more profound if you would appoint a monk to exhibit supernormal powers either fortnightly or monthly.” The Blessed One refused, but Kevaṭṭa repeated his request three times in the fond belief that only through an exhibition of supernormal powers could adherents develop more faith in the Buddha. The Enlightened One, however, foresaw problems resulting from monks using their powers. So he gave a discourse on the three kinds of supernormal powers.

Psychic Powers

Supernormal psychic powers (*iddhividha-abhiññā*) can conjure up many forms. In the texts this is expressed as “being one, he becomes many.” The owner of this knowledge can reproduce his likeness a hundred or a thousand times. He can fly through the air, walk on water, dive into the earth, bring remote things near and send near objects far away.

When the Buddha chastened Aṅgulimāla he conjured up a small plot of ground into a vast expanse, and a fragment of a boulder into a hill. This made the murderer got exhausted as he chased the Buddha to kill him for he had to run a great distance while the latter

just walked. "Monk!" He shouted at last, "Stop as I stop!" and he stopped running. "Aṅgulimāla!" replied the Buddha "I have stopped while you are still running."

Aṅgulimāla was bewildered on hearing the Buddha say that it was he himself who was running while the great monk had stopped, when, in fact, it was the other way round. He sought an explanation, and the Buddha explained: "Aṅgulimāla! I have stopped running through the endless cycles of existence as I have discarded defilements. You cherish the defilements and are still spinning in the whirlpool of saṃsāra." Forthwith Aṅgulimāla saw the light of wisdom and requested admission into the Saṅgha. The Buddha said, "Come monk!" and the murderer became a monk. In this case, proximity was made to appear remote through the exercise of supernormal powers.

Venerable Mahāmoggallāna converted [Kosiya the miser](#), and brought him and his wife to the Jetavana monastery from the village of Sakkhara near Rājagaha by invoking his supernormal powers. He worked the miracle of bringing the gate of the monastery to the door-steps of the rich man's mansion. In this case remoteness was made to appear proximate.

No doubt displaying such supernormal powers contributes to the development of piety; but they can be discredited by unbelievers who might say: "In the country of Gandhāra, there are magicians who can conjure up wondrous forms and images. Your Teacher might be well-versed in that kind of Gandhāran magic." The Buddha questioned Kevaṭṭa in that way, and he admitted that it could happen. This would not be good for the dispensation.

There are other drawbacks with regard to the exhibition of supernormal powers. It would contradict the observance of right livelihood if monks accept gifts donated in consideration of the exercise of those powers with sincere motives. If the use of supernormal powers was allowed, devotees would be more inclined to support those with supernormal powers than ordinary monks practising morality, in which case the precepts kept by the monk with supernormal powers will have been broken. This is considered unwholesome. A monk may have attained Arahantship, but he may not possess supernormal powers. Because of this, a layman's faith and devotion may dwindle. This will affect the prosperity of the

dispensation. If that is the case the monk exhibiting supernormal powers will naturally be held responsible, he will be held to have committed unwholesome deeds, and this will do him no good. After Venerable Piṇḍola used supernormal powers at the suggestion of Venerable Mahāmoggallāna for the acquisition of a sandalwood bowl, the Buddha forbade the display of supernormal powers.

The Power of Mind Reading

The higher knowledge of knowing the thoughts of others — mind reading is *“cetopariya abhiññā.”* To know the minds of others is a supernormal power.

There is the story of Buddha’s conversion of the fire-worshipping ascetics led by [Uruvela Kassapa](#). On one occasion Kassapa invited the Buddha to a feast. The Buddha, however, did not attend the feast on the appointed day, but only on the next day. When asked why, the Buddha said, “Is it not the case that on the day of the feast it occurred to you that it would be better if I did not come as invited, since, if I came and displayed psychic powers, people’s devotion would grow more towards me rather than towards you?” It then occurred to Kassapa that the Buddha was more powerful as he could read other people’s minds. There and then devotion to the Buddha developed in him. Thus he was converted by the Buddha who exercised his powers of mind reading.

Once, the Buddha was walking for alms in the village of Uttarakā with [Sunakkhatta](#), a monk belonging to the Licchavī clan. On the way, the latter saw Korakkhattiya, a heretic doing the “dog-practice” by which he imitated the behaviour of a dog. In a previous existence Sunakkhatta had followed such a practice, so when he saw the ascetic imitating a dog, he felt a sense of affinity for him. The Buddha chastised him, “It is surprising that you call yourself a son of the Sakyan!”¹ Sunakkhatta reacted to this asking the Blessed One why he made such a disparaging remark. “Sunakkhatta,” the Buddha reprimanded him again, “you hold Korakkhattiya in high esteem. Your veneration for this heretic is misplaced.” This is an example of the application of mind reading when the Buddha had occasion to reprimand his disciples.

¹ The *bhikkhus* were known as Sakyaputta, sons of Sakyamuṇi (ed.)

Besides creating wonder, such a way of rebuke may, perhaps, draw more sincere devotees for the faith, but it also has its disadvantages. "Those who are well-deposed to the faith," said Buddha, "may praise this kind of miracle, but unbelievers would say that the Teacher is applying the art of magic practised by those well-versed in the Maṅḍikā mantra." Not to provide any cause for such slander, the Buddha forbade the use of supernormal powers.

The Power of Instruction

In the propagation of the Dhamma the Buddha relied more on his power of instruction (*anusāsani pāṭihāriya*) than on psychic powers. His instructions to his disciples always related to right thinking. His exhortations are mainly concerned with noting and observing phenomena. His teachings encourage doing good and shunning evil. His method of admonition is flawless. Anyone who practises what he teaches may become proficient in the establishment of morality, mindfulness, and wisdom till he realises the Path and its Fruition. Supernormal powers may be the most potent in the art of persuasion, but they cannot render the defilements extinct, which is most important in his teaching. In the Kevaṭṭa Sutta, the Buddha cites the following case of a monk in search of the way to bring about the cessation of the four primary elements.

Where Do the Four Elements Cease?

A monk wanted to know where the four primary elements of earth, fire, water and air cease without leaving any residue. He possessed the higher knowledge of psychic powers, so he went up to the six planes of *devas* in search of an answer. All the *devas* in Cātumahārājā, Tāvātimsa, Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānarati, and Paranimmitavasavattī advised him to approach the Great Brahma to get the solution to his riddle on the four elements. So he went to the Great Brahma and asked him where the extermination of the four elements takes place. "O monk!" Said the Great Brahma, "I am the greatest. I surpass all; none surpasses me; I see all. Everything comes into being as I will it. I am the Lord of the Universe. I create the Earth and its inhabitants. I am the Creator. I am the father of all who come into being now and also of all who will come into being in the future."

The Brahmajāla Sutta discusses the theory of creation. According to it, at the beginning of the world, a *brahma* came into being in the plane of the *brahmas*. He was then alone. As he gained longevity, he felt oppressed with this loneliness and so he thought to himself that it would be great if he could have company. At this juncture some of the people on this earth gained *jhāna* and were reborn in the plane where the Great Brahmā was residing. The new-comers were not as powerful as himself. So he thought that they came into being because he willed them to be. They died in the course of time; but he remained. Thus lesser *brahmas* recognised him as their Creator.

However, the monk was not asking whether or not the Great Brahma was really the Great Brahma who created the Universe. He only wanted to know the place where the four elements meet their end. So he repeated the riddle; and the Great Brahma kept on saying that he was the Creator. As the questioner was persistent, he was at long last obliged to tell him the truth in the absence of all other *brahmas*, for, he did not want to let them know his ignorance and, thereby, lose his prestige as the all-knowing and all-powerful.

“O monk!” He confided, “I do not know anything about the cessation of the elements. You are wrong to have come to me when you have Buddha who can answer your question. Go to him!”

Then the monk approached Buddha and asked: “Venerable Sir! Where do the four primary elements come to cessation without leaving any residue?”

The Buddha likened the monk to a bird flying out from a ship at sea in search of land. Not being able to reach land, it comes back to the ship. “You should not have posed the question in the way that you did,” said the Buddha, “Your question suggests that there is a definite place outside the body where the cessation of the elements occurs. In fact, there is no such place. You should have asked where the four elements lose their footing; that is to say where they lose their existence. Likewise you should have asked where do long and short, great and small, and good and bad, lose their footing. You should also have asked where do mind and matter get totally annihilated leaving no residue. If you ask like this, you will have the answer.”

Then he uttered the verse that begins “*Viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ sabbatopabhaṃ,*” which has been explained extensively

before. In nibbāna, the four elements together with mind and matter have no footing. That is to say, they do not exist.

So far I have expounded the attributes of nibbāna beginning with its state of emancipation from the world of craving to that of cessation of all formations about which, I believe, all that needed to be said has been said.

As you have listened with respectful attention to this discourse on nibbāna, may you be rewarded with attainment of the Path and its Fruition that can lead you to nibbāna where all formations cease as cravings are discarded.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part VI

*Delivered on the full moon day of Thadingyut, 1326 B.E.
21st October 1964*

The celebration of the full moon day of Thadingyut has drawn a large gathering; and so I will tailor my discourse to suit the occasion. The majority of Buddhists in Burma know the life and death of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī Therī, and I shall speak about her today as her biography can reveal some salient points about the nature of nibbāna.

That nibbāna denotes the cessation of defilements, actions, results, and aggregates of mind and matter might well be understood by now after a series of discourses. However, some may go away with the idea that, because cessation is often emphasised, it means nothingness. Actually it is an absolute reality; and if that reality were to be denied there will be nothing left but defilements, actions, results, and aggregates, and no one will be able to get away from this whirling cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*). This cycle can actually be stopped with the diligent practice of the Middle Way. Arahants do away with it after the occurrence of their decease-consciousness following their *parinibbāna*. It shows that the bliss of nibbāna can actually be established. It is commonly held that cancer is incurable,¹ for there is no medicine for it, while there are medicines for other diseases. This shows that remedies are available for a number of diseases notwithstanding the fact that cancer is incurable. In as much as such remedies

¹ Many advances have been made since 1964, but some are still incurable (ed.)

are real, the remedy for the complete cure of the affliction by defilements is real. Once it is cured, the bliss of nibbāna is established.

THE PEACE OF NIBBĀNA IS REAL

The reality of the peace of nibbāna has been shown by the Buddha in the following passage:¹

*“Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam. No cetaṃ, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, nayidha jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha. Yasmaṃ ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyati”*ti.

“The element of peace of the unborn, the uncreated, the uncaused and the unformed does exist. If this element of peace of the unborn. The uncreated, the uncaused and the unformed were absent, there will exist in this world mind and matter that are born, created, caused and formed, in which case there will be no knowing by an individual of how to escape from this saṃsāra.”

Now I shall tell you about the cessation of the cycle of suffering achieved by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī as she attained *anupādisesa parinibbāna*.

THE STORY OF MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ GOTAMĪ

The Buddha’s mother was Mahāmāyā Devī. Her younger sister was [Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī](#). Both were the daughters of King Añjana of Devadaha, near Kapilavatthu. King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu married both sisters. Court astrologers predicted that sons born to these two queens would become universal monarchs.

According to the ancient chronicles (Porāṇā), the normal span of human life was a hundred years. For chronological purposes it is divided into three periods, each period being again divided into three portions of time. It is in the natural order of things for mothers of Bodhisattas to give birth in the last part of the second period of life. Based on that statement I have calculated that Mahā Māyā bore

¹ Tatiyanibbānapaṭisaṃyuttasuttaṃ, Udāna 73.

the son, Prince Siddhattha, when she was past fifty-six. By today's standards this may not be possible, but in those days of longevity it is reasonable to fix the age as I do.

Seven days after giving birth to the Prince, who was destined to become a Buddha she died to be reborn in Tusita as a *deva*. Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, who might have been about fifty-four, succeeded her elder sister as chief queen, and soon she also gave birth to Prince Nanda. She nurtured both her own son and her elder sister's, but she breast-fed her step-son leaving her own son to the care of a wet nurse. For that reason Burmese Buddhists say that the Buddha was highly indebted to his step-mother.

Prince Siddhattha grew to the age of sixteen when he was married to Yasodharā, the daughter of King Suppabuddha of Devadaha. Lolling in the lap of luxury of royalty, he enjoyed life to the full until he became disgusted with it; and at the age of twenty-nine he renounced the world to become a recluse. For six years he practised austerities, which he abandoned in the end, realising that they did not help in the search for Enlightenment. He then adopted the Middle Way, and attained enlightenment on the full moon day of Kason (about May) when he was thirty-five years of age.

After the attainment of Buddhahood, he went to the Deer Park in Isipatana; and on the full moon day of Wāso (about July) he taught the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta to the group of five monks, among whom Koṇḍañña became a Stream-winner on the very first day he heard the Dhamma. The other four followed suit after one, two, three, and four days respectively. On the fifth waning of Wāso, the Buddha taught the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta when all five monks became Arahants. During the first Rains Retreat fifty-five monks headed by Yasa attained Arahantship.

By the end of the first Rains the Buddha had gathered around him sixty Arahants whom he sent all over the country to propagate the Dhamma. He himself converted 1,000 ascetics led by [Uruvela Kassapa](#). They all became Arahants and accompanied the Buddha to Rājagaha. At the first gathering of welcome extended to him by King Bimbisāra and his 110,000 subjects, the Buddha preached the Four Noble Truths. Having realised them, the king built the Veļuvana monastery for the Buddha who took up residence there teaching the Dhamma around Rājagaha and Gijjhakūṭa hill. When

King Suddhodana came to know of this, he sent ten court officials, each with a following of 1,000 to persuade his son, now the Enlightened One, to come to Kapilavatthu. However, none of the emissaries ever returned as they all sought ordination under the wing of the teaching. At last the king sent Kāludāyī explicitly enjoining him to sing an ode to the beauty of summer in sixty stanzas, for it is usually the best season for travel any time anywhere. I give below my own translation of two of the stanzas which can be recited as a devotional practice.

“Trees have shed their leaves and donned a new foliage of flaming red that engulfs the entire forest. It is now time for you O Great Man, to return to your City!”

“The season is neither too cold nor too hot. Fields covered with a carpet of green grass portend abundance that knows no famine. It is now time for you, O Great Sage, to return to your City!”

So on the first waning of Taboung (about March) the Buddha left Rājagaha for Kapilavatthu, a distance of sixty leagues (*yojana*), walking one league a day, and arrived on the full moon day of Kason (about May). All the relatives welcomed him and brought him to the Nigrodhārāma monastery.

The men of the Sākya clan were known for their pride. The Buddha was then only thirty-six, and so the relatives who were older than him were loath to pay homage. They preferred to remain at the back pushing in front their younger brothers, sons, nephews, and grandsons who would worship the Enlightened One. In order that the whole Sākya clan could know the virtues of an Enlightened One, the Buddha performed a feat of supernormal power, creating a huge walkway where he walked as his body spewed fire and water together. On seeing this, King Suddhodana paid homage to his son and thereafter all followed his example. King Suddhodana and Queen Gotamī become Stream-winners.

The next morning, the Buddha, accompanied by 20,000 monks, went round the city of Kapilavatthu for alms. Yasodharā saw this from the window of her palace and reported the matter to the king saying that it was beneath the dignity of a king’s son to go about begging. King Suddhodana was ashamed and rushed out from his

palace to the Buddha and protested, “Why do you put me to shame by going round the city begging? Do you think that I cannot feed you and your 20,000 followers?” The Buddha told his father that it is the practice of all Buddhas to go round for alms in the event that no individual donor had invited them to visit his or her house for an offering of alms. He then uttered this stanza:

*“Uttitṭhe nappamajjeyya, dhammaṃ sucariṭaṃ care.
Dhammacārī sukhaṃ seti, asmiṃ loke paramhi ca.”*

“Do not neglect the practice of standing for alms. Maintain this noble practice. One who practises it abides well in this world and in other worlds.”¹

Having heard this, the king applied his mind to the meaning of this statement, saw the light of the Dhamma, and became a Stream-winner.

The Commentaries point out that development of joy in thinking of the nobility of the Buddha’s virtues can lead one to the attainment of insight into the transient nature of the phenomenon of joy as it arises and passes away. For present day individuals a whole day of meditation is not sufficient for the development of concentration. It may take them a week or so to gain it in order to realise the nature of mind and matter. For King Suddhodana, however, realisation of the Dhamma was immediate because he had perfected himself for such realisation since time immemorial. So when he came to know that the conduct of a recluse required the Buddha and his disciples not to ask for food verbally, but simply to stand in front of the house of a would-be donor, his mind became well-disposed towards the Buddha for such noble conduct. It led him to the development of joy. He meditated on that joy and realised its nature of origination and dissolution. In an instant, insight knowledge matured and he became a Stream-winner.

The king took the bowl from the Buddha’s hands and invited all the monks to his palace where he intended to make a grand offering. Once in the presence of Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī and the courtiers, the Buddha again lauded the virtues of a recluse’s conduct, on hearing which the Buddha’s step-mother also became a Stream-winner.

¹ Dhṛ v 168.

Cousin Nanda and Son Rāhula

The next day the king held a ceremony to install **Prince Nanda**, his son by Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, as Prince Regent, and to mark the occasion he made offerings of alms to the Buddha and his disciples. When it was over, the Buddha gave his alms-bowl to his cousin, Prince Nanda, and returned to the monastery. The latter reluctantly followed him, and Janapadakalyāṇī, his betrothed, entreated him, “Come back soon, dear!”

When he got to the monastery he was asked by the Buddha if he would become a monk. He gave his half-hearted assent out of awe and reverence for the Enlightened One. He was duly admitted to the Saṅgha. A week later, Rāhula, the Buddha’s son, came to the monastery to ask for his inheritance from his father at his mother’s bidding. The Buddha told Venerable Sāriputta to ordain him, and so he became a novice (*sāmaṇera*). Soon after that the Enlightened One gave Suddhodana a discourse on the Mahā Dhammapālā Jātaka, and the latter forthwith attained to the stage of Non-returning.

Leaving Kapilavatthu, the Buddha changed his residence to the village of Anupiya in the Malla kingdom. While he was staying there, Bhaddiya — King of the Sākya — Anuruddha, Ānanda, Bhagu, Kimila and Devadatta, all princes, accompanied by their barber Upāli, came to him and requested that they all be ordained. In that first Rains Retreat, Bhaddiya became an Arahant while Anuruddha attained the Divine Eye, and Venerable Ānanda won the stage of a Stream-winner. Devadatta gained supernormal powers.

Parinibbāna of Suddhodana

The Buddha returned from Anupiya to Rājagaha to spend the second and following Rains Retreats there. While he was spending the fifth Rains at the Kūṭāgārasālā monastery of Mahāvana Forest in Vesālī, King Suddhodana died in his own palace at Kapilavatthu. Before he died he meditated and gained the Path and its Fruition, became an Arahant, and attained *parinibbāna*. The Buddha attended his father’s funeral.

Admission of Women into the Saṅgha

After the *parinibbāna* of King Suddhodana, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī approached the Buddha, seeking permission for women to

gain admittance to the Saṅgha. Three times her request was rejected. This statement is made on the authority of the Commentaries on Therīgāthā: other versions suggest that she sought permission as early as the first Rains Retreat in Kapilavatthu, but the Commentaries are held to be reliable. The story is as follows.

When the Buddha was residing at Kūṭāgārasālā monastery at Vesāli, on return from Kapilavatthu where he attended his father's funeral, 500 princes of both Sākya and Koliya clans, refugees from internecine strife over the dispute regarding the use of the waters of the Rohiṇi river, requested the Buddha for ordination; and they were duly admitted into the Order. Their wives, now without their men, became weary of life and approached Gotamī to request the Buddha to admit women into the Saṅgha as they all wanted to become *bhikkhuni*s. Mahāpajāpati and the 500 princesses shaved their heads, donned yellow robes, and walked the fifty-one leagues to Vesāli, which took two months. They arrived there with swollen feet.

Arriving at the gate of the monastery, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī wept at the thought that if she and the five hundred women failed to get permission for ordination they would be stranded in a foreign land with only shaven heads and yellow robes to their credit.

Venerable Ānanda Intervened

When Venerable Ānanda saw this, he told the Buddha's step-mother to wait a while as he approached the Enlightened One to get permission. As before, the Buddha refused to give permission. Then Venerable Ānanda asked: "Venerable sir! Can women not attain the four Paths and Fruitions if they abide in the Dhamma under the wing of your Teaching?" The Buddha conceded that they could. "Venerable sir!" Venerable Ānanda entreated again, "If that is so, please grant their request to get ordained as *bhikkhuni*s in this dispensation. Mahāpajāpati has done a great service to you, as your nurse and foster-mother. Feeding you with milk from her own breast."

It was usual for women to be ordained as *bhikkhuni*s in the dispensations of previous Buddhas, but the Enlightened One was reluctant to grant the wishes of women easily. He foresaw advantages to his teaching and for female devotees if admission to the Saṅgha was made difficult by strict discipline.

Permission Granted

The Buddha then said: “If, Ānanda, Mahāpajāpati will take upon herself the eight rules of respect (*garudhammā*), let this be her ordination.” So she was ordained on her acceptance of the eight rules of respect. Others, however, were ordained according to the procedural rules that requires *kammaṅgacā*, or a vote by a chapter of monks. Subsequent ordinations lay down the requirement for a first round of votes by *bhikkhuni*s (nuns) followed by a second round by *bhikkhus* (monks).

Henceforth, Mahāpajāpati became known as Gotamī Therī and she soon won Arahantship under the guidance of the Buddha. When Arahants discard all defilements, their actions, even when they are wholesome, are rendered inoperative, unable to bring about any result, such as becoming; and so new actions cease to arise with them. Referring to this fact, we used to say that Arahants deny themselves wholesome kamma or actions that earn merit. This does not mean the abrogation of wholesome deeds, but it emphasises the absence of results that should have accrued from them. Arahants do perform such meritorious duties as doing obeisance to Buddha and the Saṅgha, practice *jhāna* and insight meditation, but these wholesome deeds produce no result.

When Mahāpajāpati became a *bhikkhuni*, she may have been in her ripe old age of ninety-four, while the Buddha was about forty. Her followers, the 500 princesses, deserted by their husbands during the warring period, entered the Saṅgha and later all became Arahants on hearing the discourse given by [Nandaka Thera](#), a former Sākya prince.

The Parinibbāna of Gotamī Therī

When Gotamī Therī had completed twenty-six years of life as a *bhikkhuni*, she reached the age of a hundred and twenty, while the Buddha was then sixty-six. At the time she was residing with her 500 *bhikkhuni*s at a monastery not far from the Kūṭāgārasālā monastery where the Buddha was also residing. One day as she was absorbed in *jhāna* leading to the attainment of Fruition, she came to realise that it was time for her to discard the burden of the aggregates. Her disciples, who were in their sixties or seventies, were also of the same

opinion as their mentor that it was time for them to depart. So they went in a group to the Buddha to inform him that they were going to enter *parinibbāna*. On hearing this sad news, the female disciples of Gotamī Therī broke down and wept. She comforted them:

“Ruditena alaṃ puttā, hāsakāloyamajja vo.”

*“Cīrappabhūti yaṃ mayhaṃ, paṭṭhitam aḷja sījjhate.
Ānandabherikāloyaṃ, kiṃ vo assūhi puttikā.”*

“Weep not, O daughters! This should be a day of rejoicing for you! Long, O daughters, have I aspired for nibbāna; and today my aspirations are to be realised. Now is the time for me to beat the drum of satisfaction and joy. It is of no avail to weep.”¹

It is only natural that women weep when death deprives them of their beloved, but this is not unusual for mortals. What is most important for us, however, is not to get sunk to the lower realms once we leave this world for the next. If, when weighed in the balance, wholesome kammās are found wanting, death will indeed be an occasion for sorrow and despair. However, it affords us a good cause to rejoice if we die with a mind rendered pure by the accumulation of wholesome kammās, in which case, dying is just like moving out from an old house to a new one.

About one thousand aeons ago, when **Padumuttara** Buddha gained Enlightenment, Gotamī Therī was born as the daughter of a minister in royal service. One day, as she attended a religious service presided over by the Buddha, she was inspired by the example of an elderly *bhikkhūṇī* who nursed and brought up the Bodhisatta as a child when his mother died, as she was also the step-mother. Padumuttara conferred upon her the honour of pre-eminence, as the most senior in the service of the dispensation among all the *bhikkhūṇīs*. Gotamī Therī, then a minister’s daughter, considered the life of a Buddha’s mother as the noblest. So she made a wish that she be reborn in a future existence as a step-mother to a Bodhisatta; and her wish came to be fulfilled at the time of Gotama Buddha.

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap2.ii.531.

Now that the end was near, Gotamī Therī left a word of advice for those weeping. “O daughters!” she said, “If you truly love me, abide in the Dhamma so that Buddha’s teaching may last long. He has given us permission to enter the Saṅgha, and I have been happy for this boon, and I believe you too are happy. If that is so, practise the Dhamma happily.”

Gotamī Therī’s Tribute to the Buddha

Having thus comforted her devotees she approached the Buddha and paid him tribute in the following terms.

“Venerable sir!” She said, “I am commonly known as your mother, but from the point of view of the Dhamma, you are, indeed, my father. Under the wing of your teaching I have become a Noble One. I brought you up feeding you with my milk. You brought me up with the milk of your Dhamma. My milk appeased your hunger for a short while. Your Dhamma stamped out the hunger of craving, for eternity.”

So saying, she uttered the following stanzas:

*“Rañño mātā mahesīti, sulabhaṃ nāmamitthinam.
Buddhamātāti yaṃ nāmaṃ, etaṃ paramadullabhaṃ.”*

*“Parinibbātumicchāmi, vihāyemaṃ kalevaram.
Anujānāhi me vīra, dukkhantakara nāyaka.”*

*“Cakkaṅkusadhajākiṅṅe, pāde kamalakomale.
Pasārehi paṇāmaṃ te, karissaṃ puttauttame.”*

“For a woman to be a queen, the mother of a universal monarch, is easy to achieve, but it is extremely difficult to gain the honour of the mother of a Buddha.”

“O Buddha!” Exterminator of suffering! Man of courage!
Lord of this world! Grant me, O Lord, permission to discard this body and enter nibbāna!”

“O my son! Spread out your noble feet, soft as lotus-petals, marked with the sign of the wheel, the hook, and the flag, in order that I can do obeisance.”¹

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap2.ii.532.

Three Verses That Bring Blessings

She also recited the following three verses, which bring blessings to those who pay homage to Buddha in flesh and blood.

*“Nadato parisāyaṃ te, vāditabbapahārino.
Ye te dakkhanti vadanaṃ, dhaññā te narapuṅgava.”*

*“Dīghaṅguli tambanakhe, subhe āyatapaṅhike.
Ye pāde paṇamissanti, tepi dhaññā guṇandhara.”*

*“Madhurāni pahaṅṅhāni, dosagghāni hitāni ca.
Ye te vākyāni suyyanti, tepi dhaññā naruttama.”*

“Lord of all men! When you deliver the Dhamma to the audience, your voice reverberates like the sound of drums. Fortunate and auspicious are those who have seen the lips that produce these sounds in flesh and blood.”

“Possessor of virtue! Fortunate and auspicious are those who bow in clasped hands in homage at your feet, slender-toed, red-nailed and long-heeled.”

“Noblest of all men! Fortunate and auspicious are those who shall hear you speak in a sweet voice, inspiring joy, dispelling human failing and sustaining prosperity.”¹

What Gotamī Therī emphasised in those verses was that although it would be her last chance to see the Buddha face to face, pay homage and hear his Dhamma, those whom she was about to leave behind would have the good fortune to continue to abide with him, revering him and hearing his teachings.

Now that you are hearing the words of Buddha as you listen to this discourse you should rejoice! However, those who in the past were able to hear him teach in flesh and blood are more fortunate than the present audience, for they were twice blessed in that they could hear his voice and at the same time get the benefit of the Dhamma. However, what is most to be rejoiced at is for you to have this opportunity to know and understand what is now being taught by the Buddha’s disciples. If insight knowledge is developed and the Path and Fruition

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap2.ii.533.

are realised, one can at least be a Stream-winner. If one become a Once-returned, a Non-returned, or an Arahant, all the better. So the present audience may comfort themselves with the fact that they are equally fortunate as the disciples in the time of the Buddha.

The verses say that the Buddha's voice is mellifluous. The texts describe it as like the sound that a karavika¹ bird makes. Regarding this, there is the story of Queen [Asandhimittā](#), wife of King Sri Dhammāsoka, who, hearing the voice of this bird, recalled the Buddha's voice with joy on which she fixed her mind and meditated with the result that she became a Stream-winner.

It is also mentioned in the verses that the Buddha's voice gladdens the heart of his hearers. Once a farmer became sorely distressed as his wheat field was flooded. The Buddha compassionately came to him and taught him the Kāma Sutta,² which gladdened the heart, not only of the farmer, but also of his wife, both of whom attained the Path of Stream-winning.

The death of Bimbisāra tormented [Ajātasattu](#), the patricide. The Buddha taught him the Sāmaññaphala Sutta on the benefits of a homeless life. The King regained peace of mind. He could have become a Stream-winner, had not the unwholesome kamma of killing his own father overtaken him.

Lastly, the verses point out that the Buddha's words or teachings dispel all human failings like anger, hatred, and so on. Listening to the Buddha one becomes able to abandon unwholesome actions as one comes to realise one's misdeeds and reform oneself. Mindfulness of the teaching leads one to the practice of insight meditation which wipes out all unwholesome kammās.

[Tambadāṭhika](#) was a murderer, but as he listened to Venerable Sāriputta's discourse, his mind became inclined to insight, and when he died he was reborn in Tusita. Aṅgulimāla was worse than Tambadāṭhika, as he had killed so many innocent victims, but on hearing the Buddha's teaching, he became a monk who later attained Arahantship.

The Buddha's teachings are conducive to prosperity in life. If one practises the Dhamma, merits can be gained here and now, not only in after-life. If the usual practice is supported by insight meditation, it can lead one to the Path.

¹ Burmese karaweik.

² Suttanipāta, Aṭṭhakavaggo, vv 772-777.

Obeisance to the Saṅgha

Gotamī Therī approached the *bhikkhus* including her grandson Rāhula, son Nanda, and nephew Ānanda, and uttered the following two verses tendering her respects to them all:

*“Āsivīsālayasame, rogāvāse kaḷevare.
Nibbindā dukkhasaṅghāṭe, jarāmarāṇagocare.”
“Nānākalimalākiṇṇe, parāyatte nirihake.
Tena nibbātumicchāmi, anumaññatha puttakā.”*

“My son and my grandson! I have grown weary with this corpse of a body which is like the haunt of poisonous snakes, the seat of all disease, the house of suffering, the resort of old age and death, a garbage heap of filth and dirt, always subservient to others and never self-sustaining. I would willingly have this suffering ended. Allow me to have my wish fulfilled.”¹

This body is made up of four primary elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Earth or solidity (*paṭhavi*) denotes hardness or softness of matter and is represented in the body by twenty varieties of physical matter comprising hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, heart, lungs, liver, stomach, intestines, rectum, brain, *etc.* Water or fluidity (*āpo*) is also represented by twelve physiological items such as pus, bile, blood, sweat, fats, tears, urine, and the like. Fire (*tejo*) is represented by four kinds of heat; while air (*vāyo*) comprises six kinds of wind including that which is involved in breathing. For all sentient beings these elements are a source of misery and pain, for when they function abnormally, sickness and death will be the result. Hence they are likened to poisonous snakes.

That this body is the host of all kinds of ailments needs no elaboration. Gotamī expressed her wish to leave this domain of old age, disease, and death.

The thirty-two parts of the body (*koṭṭhāsa*) are always subjected to disease. People abhor them as repulsive, but we should be more concerned with the impurities of the mind rather than those of the physical body. Unwholesome actions beget unwholesome results.

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap2.ii.534.

Arahants do not have to worry about them, but since mental formations are universal to all of us, we must be mindful of the upsurge of defilements that contaminate us like filth and dirt.

We say: “This body is mine,” but is it truly ours? According to the ancients, it is the abode for eighty kinds of parasites. In fact, what we call our body is their home. Insects like flies, mosquitoes and bugs prey on it. Hence we say that it is always subservient to others.

This human body is unable to maintain its own health and welfare. This can best be seen when it is afflicted with disease. It cannot cure itself, and so you, who claim to be the owner, have to call in the doctor. It cannot sustain itself by its own efforts. It always depends on outside factors.

Gotamī Therī Comforts Venerable Ānanda

At the time Gotamī Therī was bidding her farewell, Nanda and Rāhula were already Arahants, and so they were unmoved by the impending death of their mother and grandmother, but Venerable Ānanda was then only a disciple in training for the Path, so he broke down and wept.

*“Hā santiṃ Gotamī yāti, nūna buddhopi nibbutiṃ.
Gacchati na cireneva, aggiriva nirindhano.”*

“Alas! Gotamī is attaining *parinibbāna* where peace reigns supreme. Soon the Buddha will also cease to be, extinguished like a flame as the wick is burnt out.”¹

On hearing Venerable Ānanda lamenting, Gotamī Therī comforted him in the following words.

“Sutasāgaragambhira, buddhopaṭṭhānatappara.”

*“Na yuttaṃ socituṃ putta, hāsakāle upaṭṭhite.
Tayā me saraṇaṃ putta, nibbānaṃ tamupāgataṃ.”*

*“Tayā tāta samajjhittṭho, pabbajjaṃ anujāni no.
Mā putta vimano hohi, saphalo te parissamo.”*

*“Yaṃ na diṭṭhaṃ purāṇehi, titthikācariyehipi.
Taṃ padaṃ sukumārihi, sattavassāhi veditaṃ.”*

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap2.ii.534.

“You Ānanda, who possess knowledge as deep and wide as the ocean, and who have taken upon yourself the task of caring for the Buddha! Be not sad on this occasion for rejoicing. I am taking refuge in nibbāna as your assistance has enabled me to take it.”

“Ānanda, my son! At your request for our benefit, the Buddha has permitted women to be ordained as *bhikkhunīs*. You need not be distressed, for your great efforts will be amply rewarded. Ānanda! Previously no heretics could discover nibbāna in spite of their religious practices. Now even a seven-year-old girl comes to know of it.”¹

In this way Gotamī Therī paid her tribute to Venerable Ānanda for his part in winning the permission of the Buddha for female devotees to enter the Saṅgha. As lay disciples, Gotamī and her followers might have found it hard to become Arahants, but thanks to Venerable Ānanda, they had by now become Arahants, and what is more, many *bhikkhunīs* had gained the opportunity to practise the Dhamma for the realisation of the Path well after the death of Buddha. Outside the domain of Buddhist teaching, before the Buddha’s enlightenment, there were ascetics like Sarabhaṅga, Ālāra, and Udaka who possessed supernormal powers, but they did not know about nibbāna. Yet when lay women had been admitted into the Saṅgha, even a young girl of seven could be familiar with nibbāna. So, Venerable Ānanda had made a great achievement in his life for which he should be happy.

Supernormal Feats of Gotamī Therī

As the time for her *parinibbāna* approached, the Buddha asked Gotamī Therī to exhibit her supernormal powers.

“*Thīnaṃ dhammābhisamaye, ye bālā vimatiṃ gatā.
Tesaṃ diṭṭhippahānatthaṃ, iddhiṃ dassahi Gotamī.*”

“Gotamī! The ignorant are in doubt about the ability of women to gain full comprehension of the Dhamma. In order to dispel this doubt, please exercise your supernormal powers.”²

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.534.

² Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.535.

Heretics were prevalent at the time of the Buddha in spite of his teaching. They refused to accept the fact that lay women practising concentration or meditation leading to the realisation of the Path could gain *jhāna* and higher knowledge. For their enlightenment the Buddha asked Gotamī Therī to exhibit her psychic powers. Previously the Buddha proscribed it to forestall adverse criticism by detractors saying that *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhuniīs* indulged in magic, but now that Gotamī was making her last bow such criticisms would be rendered innocuous by her death.

Then Gotamī Therī worked feats of supernormal power. Being one, she appeared as many; being many, she appeared as one. That is she created many likenesses of herself and reduced those likenesses into one. She flew into the air and dived into the earth. She showed herself in various shapes and forms, in particular assuming the apparition of a universal monarch accompanied by a retinue of courtiers. This exhibition of her supernormal abilities strengthened the faith of believers and won over the hearts of non-believers. This is a general statement. It might be that dogmatism could make some people refuse to believe, even when showed that she could fly.

The Last Request

Having performed supernormal feats at the Buddha's bidding, Gotamī Therī made her last request.

*“Sā vīsavassasatikā, jātiyāhaṃ mahāmune.
Alamettāvatā vīra, nibbāyissāmi nāyaka.”*

“O great sage! I have come to the age of a hundred and twenty years. Let these supernormal feats be enough. Allow me to enter nibbāna where all sufferings cease.”¹

The Buddha gave his assent by remaining silent. Then Gotamī Therī and her five hundred departed for their monastery. The Buddha following them in their last journey. At the gate they all paid their last respects to Buddha.

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.536.

Final Words of Advice

All the *bhikkhuni*s led by Gotamī Therī retired to their respective places and sat kneeling in the fashion of meditators. Female devotees surrounded them, mostly weeping. Taking one of them to her side, and patting her fondly on the head, the eldest of all *bhikkhuni*s gave the following words of advice.

*“Alaṃ puttā visādena, mārapāsānuvattinā.
Aniccaṃ saṅkhaṭaṃ sabbaṃ, viyogantaṃ calācalaṃ.”*

“It is of no avail to weep, O daughters! You should not surrender yourselves to the power of Māra, the defilements. All formations of mind and matter are transient; at long last we have to part with them. Nothing is everlasting.”¹

Then, having sent back the devotees to their residences, Gotamī Therī went into meditation. She attained the first *jhāna*, then the second, the third, and the fourth in due order. Then she came back to the first *jhāna*, in reverse order. Then again she repeated the process from the first and when she attained the fourth *jhāna*, all her aggregates came to cessation just like the blowing out of a flame as both the oil and the wick have been completely consumed. All five hundred *bhikkhuni*s entered nibbāna in the same way.

The remains of Gotamī Therī were cremated. Venerable Ānanda collected the bones and ashes and handed them over in a casket to the Buddha who held it in his hands and paid tribute to his step-mother saying, “Her death is like the breaking of a big bough from a tree. She has crossed the ocean of saṃsāra. Since all defilements have come to an end, all sufferings are annihilated. While living, she was a woman of high intellect besides being the most senior of all the *bhikkhuni*s, she possessed all five higher knowledges. Proficient in the destruction of the biases, she was a perfect *bhikkhuni*.”

In Praise of Nibbāna

The Buddha uttered the following two verses:

*“Ayoghanahatasseva, jalato jātavedassa.
Anupubbūpasantassa, yathā na ñāyate gati.”*

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.540.

*“Evaṃ sammā vimuttānaṃ, kāmabandhohghatāriṇaṃ.
Paññāpetuṃ gati natthi, pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ.”*

“Just as there is no way of knowing where the sparks fly that flash as the sledge-hammer strikes, even so there is no way of knowing the destiny of Arahants as the floods of sensual desire are overcome and peace and tranquility firmly established.”¹

As the blacksmith wields his sledge-hammer on the anvil, sparks flash for a brief moment and die out. There is no way of knowing where they go. The Arahants overcome the rushing tide of the floods of defilements such as sensual desire and the like. In the absence of attachment, actions, signs of actions, and signs of destiny fail to give rise to formation of sense-objects. With insight meditation decrease-consciousness, appertaining to *parinibbāna*, casts off mind and matter which cease to flow with the realisation of the peace of nibbāna. All formative activities come to a standstill. So there is no way of knowing to which of the thirty-one planes of existence the Arahants go. In this analogy, the sparks are impermanent and unreal, and thus non-existent. Similarly, mind and matter, that made up the basis of life before *parinibbāna*, are impermanent, unreal, and non-existent.

Those clinging to the idea of self, might put forward the proposition that the individuality of the Arahants has gone to nothingness, but it must be remembered that there is no individuality. What we commonly call an individual is nothing but a representation of the phenomenon of the rise and fall of aggregates. Depending on this phenomenon, attachment arises, but it is but a mass of suffering. When morality, concentration, and wisdom are correctly practised, the kind of weariness about which Gotamī Therī spoke will be developed. Then the fetter of attachment of mind and matter will be totally cut off. After the decrease-consciousness of the Arahants, all substrata of existence are annihilated. This does not mean nothingness, but it does mean the reality of the total cessation of the cycle of suffering. When no new becoming arises on the cessation of suffering, aging, disease, death and all kinds of miseries that accompany it disappear altogether.

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.543.

One may ask if it will not be far better if we can go to heaven where there is no aging, disease, and death? However, this is just the apex of idealism. This kind of heaven exists only in imagination. Whatever arises gets dissolved. The abodes of *devas* and *brahmas* are heavens, but there you will find mind and matter that are constantly in a state of flux now arising, now passing away. So when their terms of existence expire, they also die!

It is only when the extinction of mind and matter reveals to us the truth of suffering that real happiness can be found. By means of the path and its fruition, craving which is revealed to us as the cause of suffering can be exterminated. Then only will the aggregates cease to arise after the decease-consciousness relating to *parinibbāna*. When they come to cessation *anupādisesa-nibbāna* is achieved.

The Buddha's Exhortation

The Apadāna Pāli text, where the account of Gotamī Therī is given, ends with an exhortation (*uyyojana*) by the Buddha to his disciples:

"Attadīpā tato hotha, satipaṭṭhānagocarā.

Bhāvetvā sattabojjhaṅge, dukkhassantaṃ karissatha."

"Be islands unto yourselves, abiding in the domain of the four foundations of mindfulness as you gain emancipation. Having developed the seven requisites of enlightenment, you will achieve the Path and its Fruition where all sufferings end."¹

Kāyānupassanā is mindfulness of the physical body, *vedanānupassanā* is mindfulness of feelings or sensations, *cittānupassanā* is mindfulness of mind, and *dhammānupassanā* is mindfulness of mental objects. The Buddha exhorted his disciples to practise mindfulness as prescribed in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and to establish themselves in the domain of such contemplation. This is developing an island for them to live in, if these four modes of contemplation are practised they can aspire to the fulfilment of the seven factors that can lead them to supreme knowledge, which paves the way to nibbāna.

¹ Therāpadāna, Ap.ii.543.

Concluding, let me pray for the members of this audience who have listened to this discourse with due respect and attention. May they all attain nibbāna as soon as possible by virtue of their wholesome thoughts and actions in the practice of mindfulness or contemplation in accordance with the rules of Satipaṭṭhāna which can lead them to the realisation of the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*).

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Index

A

- absence of rebirth-linking
(*appaṭisandhi*), 36
absorption (*jhāna*), 5
access-concentration (*upacāra-*
samādhi), 56
actions (*kamma*), 70
air (*vāyo*), 45, 107
analytical knowledge of body
and mind (*nāmarūpa-*
pariccheda-ñāṇa), 6, 31
Anāthapiṇḍika
son of, 80
Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, 97
Ancient Chronicles (*Porāṇā*), 96
anger (*dosa*), 15
annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*),
13
Apadāna, 113
apprehending consciousness
(*āvajjana*), 76
attachment (*upādāna*), 2, 15
awareness of fearfulness
(*bhayatupaṭṭhāna-ñāṇa*), 7

B

- Bāhiya Dārucīriya, 44
Bāhiya Sutta, 45, 47
Bākula, 41
becoming (*kammabhava*), 15
biases (*āsava*), 40
bliss without feeling (*avedayita*
sukha), 27
body-base (*kāya-pasāda*), 62
Brahmajāla Sutta, 24, 94
Buddhist monk (*bhikkhu*), 102
Buddhist nun (*bhikkhuni*), 102

C

- climate (*utu*), 28, 32
concentration (*samādhi*), 2, 5
constructing (*āyūhana*), 32
craving (*taṇhā*), 2, 11, 15
craving for formless realms
(*arūpabhava*), 79
craving for realms of form
(*rūpabhava*), 79
craving for sensual existence
(*kāmbhava*), 79
cycle (*vaṭṭa*)
of actions (*kamma-vaṭṭa*), 2,
16
of defilements (*kilesa-vaṭṭa*),
2, 15, 16
of results (*vipāka-vaṭṭa*), 2, 18
cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*), 21,
91, 95

D

- death-impulsion (*maraṇāsaññā*
javana), 12
decease-consciousness (*cutti-*
citta), 3
defilements (*kilesa*), 37
deliverance (*vimutti*), 2
delusion (*moha*), 16
Dependent Origination
(*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), 15, 78, 88
derived materiality (*upāda-*
rūpa), 62
Dhammacakkappavattana
Sutta, 19, 97
Dhammapada, 99
dissolution (*bhaṅga*), 30, 44, 66

E

ear-base (*sota-pasāda*), 62
 earth (*pathavi*), 45, 71, 107
 ecstatic meditation (*samāpatti*), 64
 eight rules of respect
 (*garudhammā*), 102
 exhortation (*uyyojana*), 113
 extinction of the aggregates
 (*anupādisesa-nibbāna*), 22, 33,
 37, 43, 65, 85, 96, 113
 eye-base (*cakkhu-pasāda*), 62

F

faculty (*āyatana*), 61
 fire (*tejo*), 45, 71, 107
 functional consciousness
 (*kiriya-citta*), 12
 functional will (*kiriya-cchanda*), 11

G

generosity (*dāna*), ix, 33, 88
 genesis (*uppāda*), 30, 44, 66
 greed (*lobha*), 15

H

happiness (*sukha*), 25
 heart-base (*hadaya-vatthu*), 62
 hungry ghost (*peta*), 18, 36, 88

I

ignorance (*avijjā*), 2, 15
 impermanent (*anicca*), 7, 29
 impressions (*vāsanā*), 36
 infinity of consciousness
 (*viññāṇañcāyatana*), 26, 63, 64, 85
 infinity of space (*ākāsānañ-
 cāyatana*), 26, 63, 64, 85
 initial application (*vitakka*), 25
 Itivuttaka, 41, 42

J

joy (*pīti*), 7, 25
 just see as you see it (*diṭṭhe
 diṭṭhamattaṃ*), 47

K

Kāma Sutta, 106
 Kāmaguṇa Sutta, 51
 kamma-formations (*saṅkhārā*),
 3, 33, 37
 Kevaṭṭa Sutta, 88, 90
 knowledge (*ñāṇa*)
 by comprehension
 (*sammasana-ñāṇa*), 7, 31
 by discerning conditionality
 (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*), 7
 of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*),
 58
 of arising and passing away
 (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), 7, 31
 of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), 57
 of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), 7
 of equanimity about
 formations
 (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), 7,
 27, 29
 of fruition (*phala-ñāṇa*), 2, 61
 of impermanence
 (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*), 49
 of maturity (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*), 32
 of not-self (*anattānupassanā-
 ñāṇa*), 49
 of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-
 ñāṇa*), 31, 61
 of suffering
 (*dukkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*), 49
 of the path (*magga-ñāṇa*), 2,
 35, 61

L

league (*yojana*), 98
 life-continuum consciousness
 (*bhavaṅga*), 28, 76
 light device (*āloka kasiṇa*), 89
 Loka Sutta, 20
 lust (*rāga*), 40

M

Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, 5, 56,
 71, 113
 Maṅgala Sutta, 17
 meditation (*bhāvanā*), ix, 33
 mental concomitants (*cetasikā*), 62
 mental formations (*saṅkhārā*),
 10, 27-29, 32
 mind (*citta*), 28, 62, 76
 mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), 28
 momentary cessation (*tadaṅga-*
nibbāna), 22
 morality (*sīla*), ix, 2, 5, 16, 33, 88
 with right-livelihood as the
 eighth (*ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla*), 55

N

neither perception nor non-
 perception (*nevasaññā-nāsaññā-*
yātana), 26, 63, 64, 85
 nibbāna without remainder
 (*anupādisesa-nibbāna*), 41
 no foothold (*appatiṭṭha*), 78
 Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), 8
 nose-base (*ghāna-pasāda*), 62
 nothingness (*ākāraññāyatana*),
 26, 63, 64, 85
 not-self (*anatta*), 7
 novice (*sāmaṇera*), 100
 nutriment (*āhāra*), 13, 28, 32

O

Once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), 8
 one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), 25

P

pagoda (*cetiya*), 50
 Pañcattaya Sutta, 54
 path-knowledge (*magga-ñāṇa*),
 89
 Paṭisambhidāmagga, 36, 56
 peace (*santi*), 4, 15, 43
 perfections (*pāramī*), 49
 power of instruction
 (*anusāsani pāṭihāriya*), 93
 practice (*paṭipatti*), viii
 pride (*māna*), 15
 psychic powers (*iddhividha-*
abhiññā), 90
 Punabbasumātā, 59
 purification
 by overcoming doubt
 (*kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi*), 7
 of mind (*citta-visuddhi*), 6, 55
 of morality (*sīla-visuddhi*), 55
 of view (*diṭṭhi-visuddhi*), 7

Q

Questions of King Milinda
 (*Milinda Pañha*), ix, 32, 54

R

Ratana Sutta, 4, 13
 rebirth-linking consciousness
 (*paṭisandhi-citta*), 3
 Rohitassa Sutta, 67

S

Sāmaññaphala Sutta, 106
 Sammasa Sutta, 21

sensual becoming (*kāmaabhava*), 8
 sensual realm (*kāmāvacara*), 8
 sensualist (*diṭṭhadhammavādi*), 24
 Seven Factors of Enlightenment
 (*bojjaṅga*), 114
 sign of actions (*kamma-nimitta*),
 12, 70
 sign of destiny (*gati-nimitta*), 12,
 70
 space device (*ākāsa kaṣiṇa*), 89
 spirit (*yakkha*), 59
 stasis (*thiti*), 30, 44, 66
 study (*pariyatti*), viii
 substratum (*upadhi*)
 of existence, 87
 of mental formations
 (*abhisankhārūpadhi*), 87
 of sensuality (*kāmupadhi*), 87
 of the aggregates
 (*khandhupadhi*), 87
 of the defilements
 (*kilesupadhi*), 87
 supernatural powers
 (*pāṭihāriya*), 90
 sustained application (*vicāra*),
 25
 Suttanipāta, 4

T

thirty-two parts of the body
 (*koṭṭhāsa*), 107
 tongue-base (*jivhā-pasāda*), 62
 trainee (*sekkha*), 63
 tranquility (*passaddhi*), 7
 true bliss (*santi-sukha*), 24

U

Udāna, 27, 45, 60, 61, 68
 Udāyi, 23
 Uggā, 8
 ultimate realities (*paramattha*),
 32
 unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), 32
 unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), vii, 7,
 15, 22, 29
 unwholesome (*akusala*), 16

V

verse of exultation (*udāna*), 44
 Visuddhimagga, 30, 78, 89
 volition (*cetanā*), 33

W

water (*āpo*), 45, 71, 107
 will (*chanda*), 11
 wisdom (*paññā*), 2
 wrong-view (*diṭṭhi*), 15