

Practices Evoking Friendship

and

The Seven Reflections

by

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

of

Burma



Translated by

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Bhikkhu Pesala
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Contents

Editor's Foreword.....	iv
Preface.....	v
Practices Evoking Friendship.....	1
Introduction to the Sutta	1
Six Practices Evoking Friendship.....	2
1. Loving-kindness in Deeds.....	3
2. Loving-kindness in Speech.....	4
3. Loving-kindness in Thought.....	5
4. Liberality.....	6
5. Practicing Morality of the Noble Ones.....	8
The Story of Silavimamsana	10
Vice Has Nowhere to Hide	10
6. The Right-view of the Noble Ones.....	11
The Wrong Way	11
True Cessation of Suffering	13
The Goal Is Only Reached through Practice.....	13
How to Gain Higher Knowledge.....	14
The Story of Sūrambaṭṭha.....	16
The Seven Reflections	19
The First Reflection.....	19
Examples of Arisen Defilements.....	20
Sensual Desires.....	22
Ill-will.....	22
Sloth and Torpor	23
Restlessness and Remorse.....	23
Doubt.....	24
Stream-winners Can Remove the Hindrances.....	25
The Second Reflection.....	25
The Third Reflection.....	27
The Fourth Reflection	28
The Fifth Reflection.....	29
The Sixth Reflection.....	30
The Seventh Reflection.....	31

Editor's Foreword

As with my other editions of the translated works of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have removed many of the Pāli words for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the technical terms.

Originally published with “To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path,” these two talks were delivered over a period of four days in April 1952. The talks were translated into English by U Htin Fatt and published in Rangoon in 1980. The talk on “[To Nibbāna via the Noble Eightfold Path](#)” was delivered nearly twenty years later, and was also translated by U Htin Fatt. These two talks had no other connection other than having the same translator, so I declined to combine them when I published this longer talk.

This online edition may still have some defects, but I hope it is good enough to be useful. As my time permits, I will gradually improve it.

If you find any errors, please let me know.

Bhikkhu Pesala
September 2021

Preface

This is the Sayādaw's discourse on "*Saraṇīyā Dhammā*." It teaches both the monks and laity the way to live in peace, to respect and love each other. The Buddha's exhortation in this sutta is to strictly observe morality, and to practice loving-kindness in thoughts, words, and deeds. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the essential virtues of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) to acquire merit and bring about harmony among nations and all mankind. It urges us to subdue anger, to shun ill-will and jealousy, and to share our property, as far as possible, whenever the opportunity arises, so that love is reciprocated and harmonious relationships are established. The Buddhist way of life is an intense process of purifying one's speech, actions, and thoughts. It is a path of self-development and purification.

In elucidating this noble teaching, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw expresses in detail that, inasmuch as people have insatiable desires, they are apt to pursue their ambitions, blindly whirling around the cycle of existence, and thus are twisted and torn between the spokes of trouble, misery, and suffering. The happiness of sensual pleasures derived sporadically in this life are as ephemeral as occasional flashes of lightning in the darkness. The fundamental point stressed is to seek for true happiness and gain complete freedom from all suffering. The method revealed to us by the Buddha is, in essence, to follow the true path through the practice of insight meditation, which will eventually lead to cessation of suffering.

The second discourse relates to the Mahāpaccavekkhaṇā Dhammā originally set forth in the Kosambiya Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya (Sutta 48, M.i.321). It is an elaboration of the wisdom of the Noble Path. It explains the seven principles relating to self examination in the application of the noble knowledge to liberation from suffering. In particular, a Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*) may make a self-analysis, if possible in a quiet place conducive to concentration. The mental attitude and behaviour exhibited by a Stream-winner is candidly explained. A Stream-winner will never suppress the sense of conscience in anything he or she does, and being more or less constantly aware of the true nature of things, will exercise mindfulness to the exclusion of detrimental thoughts and actions. A meditator who makes a determined effort to restrict the range of thoughts of the fickle mind, can gain mindfulness, which in turn will help to bring the mind by

to one-pointedness. When this is achieved, the mind becomes free from the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). A meditator may thus conduct a self-appraisal to see whether his or her mental and physical conduct falls in line with the qualifications of a Stream-winner.

As Buddhists, we are aware that in all living beings, the craving for life results in three unwholesome manifestations. The root causes of evil are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), which constantly assail the mind. Since this teaching is profound, an ordinary layperson, may find it difficult to grasp fully if lacking practical experience of insight meditation.

However, being endowed with an adequate knowledge of the Dhamma, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw is able to explain it with clarity, thereby illuminating the essence of the Dhamma that would ordinarily have remained obscure. This teaching should therefore prove to be of immense value to meditators and those taking a keen interest in the deeper aspects of the Buddhist philosophy.

May all beings be happy!
Min Swe, Secretary,
BSNO, September 1980

Practices Evoking Friendship

This first of two discourses, delivered at Mayantabin Ward, over consecutive days in April, 1952 relates to the practices that evoke friendship (*sāraṇīyā dhammā*) as expounded in the Kosambiya Sutta of the first book of the Majjhimanikāya. The *sāraṇīyā dhammā* alone are dealt with in the Saṅgīti Sutta of the Dīghanikāya as well as in the Sāmagāma Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya. The Chakkanipāta of the Aṅguttaranikāya contains the Dutiyasāraṇīya Sutta. “*Sāraṇīyā*” means that which stimulates one’s memory. One who practises it is always remembered. It is beneficial for both monks and laity.

Introduction to the Sutta

I will introduce this Sutta to you in the words of the Enlightened One:

“Monks! These six things perpetuate the memory of one practising them in companions. It instils loving-kindness in the minds of those living together, inspires respect and veneration for one another, and promotes harmony. It therefore eliminates discord and is conducive to the establishment of unity and solidarity in a community.”

If one is accomplished in these practices that evoke friendship, one will be remembered with affection by one’s associates, companions, and friends. Since one practices love for others, one will be loved by them in turn, consequently earning respect. Is respect not cherished by all? One who is not treated with due respect, will surely be offended. However, it must be borne in mind that, if one wants respect, one must be worthy of it. The responsibility for earning respect rests with oneself, for if one does not behave in a way to be worthy of it, who will ever respect anyone?

The absence of controversy lays the foundations for unity. Friendship eliminates the tendency to disagree, so it is conducive to establishing a united community. If we are of one mind, all divisive activities will cease. In a family there are at least two members, while there may be three or more in other cases. It is imperative that members of a family live in harmony. The way to achieve this is to practise the things that evoke friendship. When families live in harmony, the entire village will live in unity. Eventually, the whole town, the whole country and the whole world

will achieve unity and live in peace. So the virtues of friendship are not confined to one section of humanity. They are universal irrespective of differences in nationality or religion among mankind.

Six Practices Evoking Friendship

I will first enumerate the six practices that evoke friendship and lead to unity. As you may know, there are three aspects to loving-kindness (*mettā*), kind thoughts, kind speech, and kind deeds. These three aspects constitute the first three practices evoking friendship. The other three, are liberality, morality, and wisdom. These six practices can bless mankind with harmony.

All intentional actions are kamma, which embraces both wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) volitions. When we say prayers we ask to be forgiven for whatever we may have done wrong, either in thought, word, or deed. This equates to the admission of our faults. When we pray, we must not only pray for forgiveness. We should also pray for the rewards of wholesome and moral deeds that we perform. Volitional activities in thought, speech, or deed, free from greed and anger, but promoting loving-kindness, are devoid of all faults. They deserve merit. Acquire it by wishing your neighbour happiness, speaking of happiness for him and doing things that bring him happiness.

All sentient beings desire happiness and do not want suffering. If you wish them well-being and happiness, their desires will be fulfilled. Then they will feel that you have brought them under the cool shade of a tree. So, whatever you do, do it with loving-kindness, whatever you say, speak with loving-kindness and whatever you think, think with loving-kindness for the sake of happiness for others. When mankind is pervaded with that spirit of loving-kindness, the three aspects of loving-kindness will be accomplished. They are indeed three practices that evoke friendship.

Besides these three, there are, as I have said, liberality, morality, and wisdom. I use the term, liberality (*cāga*), for sharing although the Sutta does not explicitly employ this term. It merely says that one must share with others practising morality what one earns by lawful means. I hold that this spirit of charity to encourage morality denotes liberality (*cāga*). Adding this to morality (*sīla*), and wisdom (*paññā*), we have three practices. With the three kammās mentioned

above, these total six. The last two relate to the practice of meditation, one being the morality practised by the Nobles Ones (*ariya sila*), and the other the wisdom of the Noble Ones (*ariya paññā*). Of those two, the fundamental requirement for the practice of insight is wisdom, which being too subtle for ordinary people, I will not elaborate at length, but I will deal with the others in detail as they are basic for the practices that evoke friendship.

1. Loving-kindness in Deeds

Regarding putting loving-kindness into practice, the Buddha makes this exhortation;

“Monks! Let your deeds testify to the spirit of loving-kindness with which you wish happiness for your companions who live with you, in each other’s presence, or apart from you in each other’s absence.”

Here mention is made of companions of monks practising the Dhamma together because this discourse was first taught to the monks. It can also be practised with advantage by lay people living together. If, with a spirit of service, you do good to those in your company, that will be putting loving-kindness into practice. You may start practising it in the first instance with your near and dear ones, such as your wife, your children, your parents, your relatives, your pupils, and your friends. When you do so, make it a point to avoid anger which invariably causes disaffection that brings disharmony even among your own kith and kin. In all organizational work, it is this ill-will that usually sows the seed of discord.

In practising loving-kindness, even the outward behaviour of the well-wisher should reveal his or her good intention for the happiness of others, whether they are near and dear ones, or mere acquaintances living far away. One should help them all with a spirit of service before oneself. If one finds a person carrying a heavy load, one should lighten it. Finding a sick man, one should nurse him back to health by massaging him (which is the Burmese way of tending the sick and the aged). When one walks on the floor on which someone is sleeping, one should tread lightly so as not to disturb them.

These small acts of kindness go a long way towards making others happy. Let me tell you how a person can practice loving-kindness

towards those living far away and out of sight. Perhaps they might have left the place, leaving their personal belongings; or they might have gone leaving their jobs unfinished. In that case, one should act as a custodian of their property and look after it. One should also try to bring their unfinished jobs to completion. If one helps them with this practical application of loving-kindness, one will always be remembered even though one may be out of their sight.

One who helps others will be loved and respected. Where there is love there can be no cause for quarrels and disputes. So, whether they are living apart or not, they will feel that they are together. In this way unity is achieved among people known to one another. They are united by bonds of love and compassion. Love usually brings compassion, and so I have purposely added this quality to loving-kindness.

Do people like to have their good name and reputation forgotten? I think not. Do they not like to be loved and respected? Of course, they do. Do they want to be quarrelling among themselves creating divisions? I don't think so. People usually like to be sociable and live together in harmony.

If one wants to establish an undivided society, one must practise loving-kindness that makes unity a reality. At home, even in one's relationship with one's spouse, one should never say anything in anger, not even scowling. Smiles give joy for one's spouse who will always return love and respect. One would regard one's spouse as dutiful and magnanimous. Where love begets love, the entire household is happy. If loving-kindness begins at home among families there is also unity among their neighbours.

2. Loving-kindness in Speech

Regarding speech imbued with the spirit of loving-kindness, the Buddha has this to say:

“Again, monks, when you communicate with your companions, speak in the language of loving-kindness, whether they are with you together, or whether they live apart in far away places.”

Loving-kindness in speech means speaking with the intention to serve the welfare and happiness of others whether they are in

one's presence or absence. When a person has something to say, let him say it with sweet and gentle words, wishing for the welfare and happiness of the person spoken to. Even when one finds occasion to chastise one's companions, let one not speak in anger. One should wait for one's anger to subside and then say what one has to say persuasively. Among numerous people living together, it will not be easy to find everyone perfect. If one notices any defects in others, let one draw their attention to them, using gentle words that would remind them of their faults, which they would correct voluntarily in their own way. Occasionally, one comes across people finding fault with their companions. In that case one should speak in defence of the person criticised. Sometimes critics might be maligning one's friend behind his or her back. Here, too, one must be able to say something in one's friend's defence.

I am bringing up this point because I think it important. There are some among us who pretend to wish well of others although they do harm behind their backs. Sincere friends always speak in the interest of their companions. They usually come to the aid of those who are unable to say or do things for themselves. Where there is discord they patch up the differences.

They prevent their comrades from indulging in fruitless undertakings. Here it cannot be over emphasized that all words intended for the good of others should be sweet and gentle to the ear. If one practises loving-kindness in speech in the way that I have described, one will forever be remembered by others who will have nothing but praises for one's wholesome speech motivated by loving-kindness.

3. Loving-kindness in Thought

Regarding thought that instils loving-kindness in the minds of all fellow beings, the Buddha has this to say:

“Again, monks, when you think about your companions, think in terms of loving-kindness — wishing for their happiness whether they are with you or far away.”

When we send loving-kindness to our companions we mentally recite: “May they be free from danger (*averā hontu*)! May they be free from anxiety (*abyāpajjhā hontu*)! May they be free from suffering (*anīghā hontu*)! May they be well and happy (*sukhī attānaṃ*)

parithirantu!)” This is loving-kindness in thought. When we express this sentiment about others, we must be absolutely sincere. Verbally saying, “May they be happy,” but wishing ill of others cannot be the kamma of loving-kindness in thought. Loving-kindness should be well-developed in the mind. Whenever you have something to say or do, you should be mindful of wishing happiness for others. You will then be fondly remembered. When people love one another there will be no disagreements, and unity will be realised.

I have laid down the following as a motto for all to remember:

“Behaviour based on the practice of loving-kindness in deed, word, and thought will be remembered.”

Where love, compassion and respect pervade human society, there one will find lasting unity. These three kammās — the practical application of loving-kindness in thought, word and deed — are essential in building unity and promoting welfare among people. They are not hard to practise, and every home should take up loving-kindness as a way of life which then will extend to every school or monastery and every village or town so that the whole world remains established in unity and happiness. I urge you to work for it with determination. Now I will deal with the remaining practices that evoke friendship, firstly with liberality (*cāga*).

4. Liberality

Regarding liberality the Buddha had this to say:

“This, monks, is another thing evoking friendship. Whatever monks lawfully obtain, even the food collected in their almsbowls, they share with their virtuous companions in the holy life.”

This how the Buddha explained liberality. Acquiring money or property through the practice of astrology or medical treatment is a wrong livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*) for monks. It is improper for monks to make a living by any such means. They must not obtain anything for their own use in that way. Other monks who strictly observe the monastic discipline, when offered such property, will decline it. All requisites obtained in accordance with the Vinaya rules are allowable both for the monk who receives them and for the other monks with whom he shares whatever he obtains lawfully.

When he receives alms from lay supporters, he should regard them as the property of the community, and share them with others. It will be improper even to think that they are his own and that, therefore, he can dispense with them in whatever way he likes.

A monk practising liberality usually obtains food offered by supporters for fulfilling his monastic duties, such as walking for alms, teaching the Dhamma, observing the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) for the elimination of mental defilements, *etc.* In turn, he offers it first to those monks who practise morality. Next, he shares it with monks who are sick, or with guest-monks, or with newly ordained monks not yet fully conversant with the monk's way of life. If any food remains, he shares it with the remaining monks in order of seniority. If however, the food is consumed, and more of is required, he makes another round for alms and distributes them in the same way. What food is left after this distribution, he consumes for himself. As the text explicitly states that this practice applies to monks fulfilling morality, it is not imperative to share it with those not fulfilling it.

This practice may be difficult to fulfil, for among the monks there are some who are inconsiderate. The Commentaries, therefore, have this to say:

“This practice by which a monk eats only after offering it to others, is difficult to fulfil, unless it is done in a community of experienced and considerate monks.”

“How long will it take to fulfil this practice? Usually twelve years. In one case cited in the Commentary, a monk failed to fulfil its requirement on the last day of the twelve-year vow because a wilful monk ate the share of food the donor had reserved for himself.”

A monk who wishes to fulfil the vow of liberality must keep it for twelve years without a break, and there must be no occasion when he regrets his acts of charity. If he can strictly keep this vow, he will gain merit. For instance, when he walks for alms he will get the best of everything. The Commentaries cite many instances of the fruition of liberality. Long ago, a monk who practised it unflinchingly was unaffected by famine. Celestial beings offered him food, and so his bowl was always full. However much he shared it with others it never got depleted.

I have to admit that I would not be able to practise liberality to the extent that I have just explained because it is so difficult. However, I will tell you what ordinary men can do.

You can practise charity among your own community by sharing with others what you earn by lawful means. Whether you practise it at home, in monasteries, or in schools, it will be conducive to the cultivation of love and respect among your community. One who shares what he or she has will be remembered by others even after having gone to live elsewhere. In a society where the spirit of charity is dominant, there will be no cause for quarrels and disputes, and consequently it will remain harmonious and united. Then happiness will prevail. You must have come across benevolent donors giving money and property, not only for religious and social purposes, but also for disaster relief. Such acts of kindness are appreciated by humanity; and the donors live in the thoughts of the rest of mankind. When love and respect prevail among donors and recipients alike, discord will be eliminated and unity established. Where there is unity, there is happiness.

So please remember this aphorism:

“Acts of charity live forever in human memory, generating love and respect among mankind, thus laying the foundations for the unity of the whole world.”

5. Practicing Morality of the Noble Ones

Regarding the practice of morality in the way of the Noble Ones, the Buddha’s advice is as follows:

“This, monks, is another thing evoking friendship. Morality should be complete without any violation. It should be like a piece of cloth not frayed at the edges, nor with holes in the middle, nor variegated in colour, nor stained in patches.”

Do not be egoistical in the observance of morality, thinking that you alone are moral. It must be observed with the attentiveness of momentary (*khaṇika*), proximate (*upacāra*), and ecstatic concentration (*appanā samādhi*). If you practise in this way you will be on a par with your companions regarding accomplishment in morality, whether they are in your presence or not.”

What is meant by such terms as “Not frayed at the edges,” *etc*? When lay persons take the precepts there should be no violation of the undertaking to abide by the five precepts. For instance, the first undertaking not to kill should never be violated. So also the last undertaking not to take intoxicants should be implicitly observed. Monks must also observe the monastic discipline without breaking the first or last of the rules. If, for any reason the first or last vows were broken, one’s morality would be like a cloth frayed at the edges. If the middle vow is broken, the cloth would appear as rifled with holes. If violation occurs in two or three rules in a set of undertakings, the cloth would appear to be in various colours. If one rule is broken here and another there, the cloth would look stained. All moralities will remain pure, untainted and unbroken.

With the Noble Ones, whether they are lay persons or monks, morality remains absolutely pure. This purity is maintained both in the presence of others and in solitude. It does not need to be maintained through willpower, but occurs naturally. The purity of morality is in the very nature of the Noble Ones. It is not affected by the presence or absence of others. To equate oneself with those Noble Ones, one must have attained Stream-winning. The morality of a Stream-winner remains pure without making special efforts. If that Stream-winner happens to be a monk, even when he transgresses voluntarily, he will be absolved from guilt. His *sila* would be of the some kind and quality with that of his fellow-monks whether in their company or not. Such an individual whose morality approaches that of a Noble One will not only be remembered by others, but also loved and respected. There will be no cause for conflicts. Everyone will live happily and harmoniously.

So the Buddha said:

“When one’s morality becomes pure like that of the Noble Ones, whether one remains in their company or not, one will be remembered, loved, and respected by others, and the community will be sociable, harmonious, and united.”

This practice evoking friendship is mentioned in the *Kosambiya Sutta* taught by the Buddha in connection with a dispute that arose among the monks of Kosambi who disagreed over a question of morality. The Buddha wished for the monks to realise the need for living together in harmony without creating divisions. Unity can

be achieved only through fulfilling the morality of the Noble Ones, which may prove difficult for lay persons. Observance of the five precepts is also the morality approved of by the Noble Ones. If they are well-observed with all sincerity, they are also conducive to generating love, respect, harmony and unity. In this discourse, the phrase “in their presence or in their absence,” are used often. The purport of these words is a reminder that wrong-doing cannot be hidden. You may think that no one can see you, but celestial beings can see you doing evil deeds. Even if no one can see you, you will see your own wrong-doing. Such deeds that you have done will enter your consciousness as you approach death. That there is no hiding place for misdeeds has been shown in the [Silavimamsana Jātaka](#).

The Story of Silavimamsana

In one of his past existences Venerable Sāriputta was a professor with five hundred disciples. He had a beautiful and intelligent daughter. He wanted to marry her to a man of good morality. So he called his pupils to his side and said: “I have a daughter who is beautiful, wise, and accomplished. I want to give her away in marriage to any one of you who is deserving. My daughter needs jewellery to adorn herself with on the occasion of her marriage. If any of you can bring it here without the knowledge of anyone, I will marry her to him.”

Vying with one another, the disciples brought all kinds of jewellery and gave them to the professor. However, one disciple, who was the Bodhisatta, did not bring anything. So the professor asked him why he did not steal. The disciple replied:

“You told us to steal so that no one can know. Even though no one sees me stealing, I am fully aware of myself actually stealing, so I failed to find how a crime can be committed without anyone’s knowledge. Therefore, I have not brought any stolen property.”

At this, the professor realised that his pupil, the Bodhisatta, was a man of morality and gave his daughter to him.

Vice Has Nowhere to Hide

When you commit an evil deed in secret, although no one sees you committing it, you know that you have committed it. You may not admit it, but you would be thinking, “I did it!” When you approach death, the evil that you have done pricks your conscience.

If you die with an attachment to the evil that you have done, you will certainly go down to the lower realms. If you believe in kamma and its resultants, you should abstain from committing evil in thought, word, or deed. If you practice morality sincerely without violating any precept, you will gain the trust of those with whom you live. They will always love and respect you. This is how to establish harmony and solidarity in the company that you keep.

6. The Right-view of the Noble Ones

Regarding the right-view or wisdom of the Noble Ones, the Buddha's advice is as follows:

“Monks, another thing evoking friendship is the noble right-view. It prevents one from doing evil. A Noble One who possesses it, does things in the right way according to its dictates, so will be delivered from all suffering. If a monk establishes himself in this noble right-view, he will be remembered by others whether they are living in his presence or not.”

In the Buddha's teaching there is the noble and supramundane knowledge about the four paths and fruitions, which in essence mean the same thing, the only difference being that the former denote the causes while the latter are the effects. The knowledge of the four paths eliminates all mental defilements and delivers one from the round of rebirths. They are collectively known as leading views (*niyyānikā ditṭhi*), because they lead to deliverance from suffering. One who is endowed with this knowledge will be liberated from all kinds of suffering. There are two ways of bringing about the cessation of suffering, the wrong way and the right way. Following the wrong way one gets only a temporary relief from suffering. If one adopts the right course, one can get rid of it once and for all.

The Wrong Way

When you bend your arms or legs for a long time, you feel stiff. Then you straighten them out and relax. After some time, you again feel stiff and you try to get relief by bending them again. Likewise, you feel stiff if you sit for a long time, and you get relief if you stand up. In all these physical activities you get a temporary relief as you change your posture. When you feel hot, if you use a fan or take a

bath, you get temporary relief, but later you feel hot again. If you relieve discomfort in this way, the relief will only be temporarily.

Hunger is appeased when food is taken, but after some time you feel hungry again. So you have to take food two or three times a day. Sometimes even this will not be enough, then you may eat four or five times. All sentient beings, men or animals, wander in search of food when they are hungry, but their hunger is never appeased. They have to search for food throughout their lives.

Therefore, the Buddha said that hunger is the most virulent disease (*jighacchā parama rogā*).¹ There is medicine for each of the diseases. If the prescribed medicine is taken, the disease is cured. However, this is not the case with hunger. As soon as you were born, you had to be fed with your mother's milk, yet your hunger was not appeased. You go on feeding yourself daily with food, and yet you get hungry when the time comes. You suffer hunger throughout this existence. You will do so in your next existence. So the appeasement of hunger does not mean the permanent cessation of suffering.

If the results of your past deeds are bad, you may be of low status and poor during the present existence. You may even be famished, being stricken with poverty. You may be afflicted with all kinds of diseases. If, becoming repentant, you do wholesome deeds that earn merit in the future, you will be liberated from suffering that you are encountering in this life. If reborn in the human realm, you will be of noble status, or you may be reborn in celestial realms. However, the effects of wholesome deeds do not last forever. When they are exhausted, you may be reborn again to a life of great suffering. The attainment of human or divine happiness due to meritorious deeds and the practice of morality is impermanent. Peace and happiness gained in this way is not eternal peace.

If you lead a moral life, practising meditation to reach the first, second, third, and fourth stages of absorption, you will be transported to the realms of form (*rūpaloka*), or to the formless realms (*arūpaloka*). You will remain in ecstasy for the duration of many world systems. If you reach the highest realm of neither perception nor non-perception, you will remain there for the duration of 84,000 aeons in ecstasy. However, when your kamma comes to an end, you will again be reborn in this world to enjoy life or to suffer its

¹ [Dhammapada v 203](#).

miseries. If you happen to commit evil deeds while leading the life of a human, your unwholesome and immoral acts would drag you down to the four lower realms.

Therefore, although charity and morality can lead one to the abode of the Brahmā gods, such attainments do not give eternal peace.

True Cessation of Suffering

What, then, is the true cessation of suffering? Suffering ceases only when one realises nibbāna through treading the Noble Eightfold Path. If one attains to the lowest stage of a Stream-winner, one will never go down to the four lower realms where suffering is rife. A Stream-winner may be reborn seven times in the human or celestial realms, and at the last existence, will become an Arahant before attaining final cessation (*parinibbāna*). A Once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*) has only two more existences, first as a human being, then as a divine being, before attaining final cessation. A Non-returner (*anāgāmi*) never returns to this world. He or she may be reborn in the realms of form or the formless realms, where final cessation is attained.

In such cases we use the term, “Attained final cessation,” which means that mental and physical phenomena do not arise again, therefore all suffering and unsatisfactoriness connected with them ceases altogether. There will be no phenomena to become old, to get sick, or to die. There is no cause for anxiety and fear regarding old age, sickness, and death. One knows no pain or sorrow. All unsatisfactoriness relating to the body or mind is eliminated. Nothing arises, therefore, there is complete peace. According to the Buddha, knowledge relating to the Noble Path transports one to a stage where all suffering or unsatisfactoriness ceases. However, it must always be borne in mind that the Noble Path offers liberation only to those who actually practise it.

The Goal Is Only Reached through Practice

A vehicle takes its passengers to their destination while those who stand beside it are left behind. The Noble Path is like that vehicle. If you ride in it, you will be conveyed to your destination, but if you merely stand by it, you will be left behind. Those who wish to be liberated from all suffering should ride on that vehicle. That is to say

they should use any knowledge gained for practical purposes. The most important task for those born during this Buddha's dispensation is to practise the Dhamma leading to nibbāna, where all suffering ceases. The least that one should do is try to attain Stream-winning, the first stage in the liberation from suffering in the four lower realms. To be worthy of this Buddha's dispensation into which you are born, you should strive for liberation from suffering. Enjoyment of life in the mundane realms of human and celestial beings is not an end in itself. This can be attained through the practice of charity, morality, and meditation. Merits can be gained by the practice of these three virtues during the Buddha's dispensation or at other times. They are just ordinary meritorious deeds, with which you should not remain satisfied. Although you are a disciple of the Buddha, if you are still destined to descend to the four lower realms in a future existence, what will it avail you? I urge you to strive to reach beyond mundane wholesome deeds to attain the knowledge of liberation from suffering to avoid descending to the lower realms again. Valuable jewels are not available to a common man. This Dhamma relating to the knowledge that I am speaking of is a precious gem not easily acquired by ordinary individuals. It is only for those endowed with perfections (*pāramī*) through the exercise of cardinal virtues. If you do not yet have perfections, try and acquire them by the continual practice of those virtues. We are showing you how to do that.

How to Gain Higher Knowledge

It may be asked whether to gain this knowledge one must begin with the implementation of the Noble Path. One should not begin with it at once. There is the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), which is the precursor to the Noble Path. The preliminary path is developed by practising insight meditation (*vipassanā*). In practising this kind of meditation, you first observe the arising of mental and physical phenomena at the six sense-doors. Observe and note them arising at every moment. When you see an object, note as "Seeing." When you hear, or smell, or taste, or touch, or think in relation to an object note those phenomena as: "Hearing," "Smelling," "Tasting," "Touching," or "Thinking." Beginners may not be able to note and observe all such phenomena in detail on every occasion, so they should begin noting what is most obvious. When

one walks, one can feel the element of motion (*vāyo dhātu*). Then one should take note of "Walking." In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta it states, "When you go, know that you go, when you stand, know that you stand, when you sit, know that you sit, and when you lie down, know that you lie down." You must note the function of the element of motion such as going, standing, sitting, and lying down.

The majority of meditators practising insight meditation start with the sitting posture. The meditator first takes note of the entire body while sitting. One should also notice that while one sits, one is also breathing, and as one breathes in and out, the abdomen rises or falls in consonance with this activity of breathing. Whatever position one assumes, one is conscious of what the body is doing. So we direct meditators to note the rising and falling of the abdomen while sitting. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta directs that such bodily actions may be noted. It does not mean, however, that a meditator should note only these two movements of the rising and falling of the abdomen. While noting them, something might come to mind. For instance, one might notice stiffness in the body, or one might feel hot or painful. These are feelings, which one might also note. When one stretches or bends the limbs to relieve stiffness, one might have noted this stretching or bending. The meditator is urged to note all mental and physical behaviour as it occurs; and when nothing special is happening, one just notes the rising and falling of the abdomen.

As the meditator continues noting in this way, he or she will come to distinguish between mind and matter, see the relationship between them, and the causes and effects of their arising and passing away. The sense-object and the knowing mind appear as one takes note of them, then they disappear. That is to say, their activities arise and then cease. It then dawns upon the meditator that arising and passing away show their characteristic of impermanence (*anicca*). What is impermanent is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). Things just happen naturally. As one gains experience in this exercise, one will be able to note all phenomena as they occur. Finally, one comes to realise not only impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, but also the characteristic of not-self (*anatta*). Thus one gains knowledge of the Noble Path and realises nibbāna. At this stage the three characteristics that one realises remain firmly impressed on the mind whether in the act of noting or reflecting on what has been noted. All Noble Ones possess

this knowledge of the Path. A meditator who gains it is on a par with the Noble Ones. His or her conviction regarding the three characteristics remains firm whether in their presence or dwelling alone. In this connection, the Buddha says: “When one attains knowledge of the Noble Path one is said to be living on a par with the Noble Ones who are endowed with it, whether one lives with them or alone.”

Such a meditator will forever live in the memory of others and will also be loved and respected. In this way he or she is surrounded by harmony and solidarity.

The Buddha taught these six practices evoking friendship in the *Sāmagāma Sutta*¹ on an occasion when factions arose among the followers of Nigaṇṭha Nāpūtta, one of the leaders of the heretics, after his demise. It was Venerable Ānanda who first expressed his anxiety to the Buddha about the possibility of discord arising in the Saṅgha in the same way as it arose among Nigaṇṭha’s followers as a result of their ideological differences. The Buddha, therefore, explained about the origin of such controversies, and taught the six practices evoking friendship, which are virtues that would keep the Saṅgha united and harmonious. The last of the six lays emphasis on the Noble Path knowledge (*ariyamagga ñāṇa*). If the monks living together are unanimous in their views about the analytical knowledge of the arising and passing away of mind and matter, and are firmly convinced regarding the three characteristics, there can be no controversy regarding this wisdom. If, in spite of all this, controversy arises it may be because one or both of the disputants is not a Noble One. True Noble Ones will be of one mind regarding their knowledge about mind and matter, and the three characteristics, which will remain unshaken.

The Story of Sūrambaṭṭha

In the time of the Buddha there was a man named **Sūrambaṭṭha** who worshipped the heretics. The Buddha saw that he would see the light of dhamma if he had the chance to teach him. So, one day he visited his house for alms. The follower of the heretics had no adoration for the Buddha, but since the Enlightened One was a great man, he could not help but offer him food. By way of thanksgiving for this gift of alms, the Buddha a discourse, in the course of which the donor saw the Dhamma and became a Stream-winner.

¹ M.ii. 251.

At this Māra thought: “This Sūrambaṭṭha belongs to our party, but today the Buddha has gone to his house. Perhaps he might have been converted. I will investigate.” Thinking thus he disguised himself as the Buddha and went to Sūrambaṭṭha. Māra was infamous for his wiles. He practised his cunning on those whom he considered to be of low intellect. For example, he would approach a nun when she was alone and say, “There is no nibbāna that brings liberation. What does it profit you to remain in solitude? Even the great monks fail to realise the Dhamma. With your woman’s wit, how can you see the light?” In this way he tried to demoralise womenfolk. However, fortunately, the nuns were all Arahants and could not be hoodwinked.

Here, allow me to digress. These days there are some who try to demoralise others with their erroneous views. They assert that the four foundations of mindfulness is an exercise not able to be practised by ordinary individuals, but is meant only for the Noble Ones. Others say, “Stream-winning cannot be realised by practice. It is sufficient that one knows the Dhamma by listening to it. One can become a Stream-winner simply by listening to the teaching.” Others say, “By merely noting that you are going, standing, sitting, bending, straightening, expanding, contracting, *etc.*, you cannot realise the Dhamma. Such people belong to the army of Māra. In other words, they are possessed by Māra personified in mental defilements such as ignorance, wrong-views, pride, *etc.* The worst are those who assert that one should not practise the Dhamma, since those who practise it will get farther from nibbāna, because nibbāna can be attained only when the mind is kept at rest. Such people are catering to the wishes of the malevolent Māra.

As I was saying, Māra went to Sūrambaṭṭha disguised as the Buddha, intending to deceive him. Sūrambaṭṭha was initially bewildered because he thought that the Buddha had returned as soon as he had left. He asked the impersonator why he had come back. Māra then told him, “I came back because I told you that the five aggregates are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, but some of the aggregates are permanent, stable, and eternal.”

Then Sūrambaṭṭha thought to himself, “These words are highly irresponsible! It is not in the nature of the Buddhas to make glib statements without proper reflection. I have, heard people say that

Māra is antagonistic towards the Buddha." When he asked Māra point-blank if he was Māra, he had to confess that he was. He rebuffed the evil one saying, "Let a hundred or a thousand Māras come to test my faith in Gotama the Buddha, it will remain unshaken. The Buddha has said that all mind, matter, and volitional activities are subject to change, and they are therefore impermanent. As I have realised the truth of this Dhamma, I will have nothing to do with you. Get out!" In this way he showed his implicit faith in the law of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. To any whose knowledge of the Noble Path is weak, that the Buddha wanted to make a correction to what he stated before would be regarded as acceptable.

These days many among us have returned from foreign countries. Some went there as Buddhist missionaries. Among them some deviated in their views. It is because they were not firm in their conviction about Path knowledge. Without the realisation of this knowledge, recognition of the three characteristics cannot be held as fully established. At times it may fade out totally, in future existences, even if not in the present existence. Burmese people as they earn merit, may be reborn in foreign lands. Then they will be conditioned by the ideologies of their parents and relatives native to those lands. In that case, their realisation of the Dhamma may not be as strong as when they had the benefit of the knowledge of the Path in their previous existence.

So we must strive for wisdom which can be equated with that attained by the Noble Ones. As we note mind and matter as they occur, and as the three characteristics become self-evident to us, we reach the stage of Noble path wisdom, which paves the way to nibbāna. When this knowledge is realised we will become endowed with the morality of the Noble Ones, having practised loving-kindness in thought, word, and deed. This is why among the practices evoking friendship, knowledge of the Path is regarded as the noblest.

May you all be able to fulfil the practices evoking friendship so that you will always be remembered by your compatriots. May you all live in harmony unruffled by discord, and achieve unity. May you all be healthy in body and happy in mind. May you all realise wisdom relating to the path and its fruition in a short space of time and realise nibbāna.

The Seven Reflections

This is the continuation of the discourse delivered at Mayantabin by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw for three consecutive nights beginning on the 14th waning of Tagu, 1314 M.E. (April 1952).

The subject of tonight's discourse is the seven reflections expounded in the Kosambiya Sutta.¹ It is an elaboration of the knowledge of the Noble Path, which is the last of the components of the practices evoking friendship that I discussed last night.

Let me introduce this subject with the following question posed by the Buddha:

“There is, monks, the knowledge of the Noble Path that leads to Stream-winning. How does this knowledge pave the way for one practising for the cessation of suffering?”

The seven reflections seek to explain the seven principles relating to self-examination in the application of the noble knowledge leading to liberation from suffering.

The First Reflection

“Monks! Here,² a monk repairs to a forest, seeking shelter under a tree, or in a solitary place, and reflects thus: “Possessed by defilements, my mind may be under their influence, in which case, I will neither perceive nor know the nature of the phenomena of arising and passing away of mind and matter. So I must examine myself to see if the mental defilements still remain.” So saying, he reflects repeatedly.

Ordinary individuals (*puthujjana*) are usually unable to note the arising and passing away of phenomena as they are dominated by defilements surging in their hearts. However, a Stream-winner meditating in the solitude of a forest, either under a tree or within a monastic dwelling, will be able to perceive the arising and passing away of all conditioned things, because he or she is absolutely free from cares and anxiety that pollute the mind. Now what are the defilements that spoil the minds of ordinary individuals? They are

¹ M.i.323, where the Pāli word used is “*Paṭisañcikkhati*,” not “*Mahāpaccavekkhaṇa*,” as used in the original edition of this book. This perhaps refers to [Knowledge of reviewing](#) (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), which follows after attaining the Path and its Fruition. Here, I have translated “*paṭisañcikkhati*” as “reflection” (ed.)

² Here (*idha*), means in the Buddha's teaching.

sensuality, ill-will, *etc.* To a beginner in insight meditation, desire, anger, *etc.*, might arise while noting the in-breathing and out-breathing, or the rising and falling of the abdomen when practising insight meditation. Such interferences indicate arisen defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesā*). Only Stream-winners can expel them.

Examples of Arisen Defilements

“Monks! If a monk is subject to the onslaught of sensual desires, he is possessed by arisen defilements.”

While a monk is noting, in the course of meditation, the rising and falling of the abdomen, or sitting, or touching and object, but at the same time is thinking of sensual pleasures to which he has become attached, he is being victimised by arisen defilements. He must note this attachment and eliminate it at once. If he fails to do, he will not be able to perceive the realities of the nature of mind and matter that arise only to pass away.

“Monks! If a monk has hatred or animosity arising in his mind, he is possessed by arisen defilements.”

As a monk is noting the rising and falling of his abdomen, ill-will might arise within his mind. Then he must realise that he is being victimised by arising defilements. Note this ill-will as it occurs and eliminate it. If he cannot, he will fail in the realisation of the nature of the phenomena of arising and passing away of mind and matter.

“Monks! If a monk has doubts troubling his mind, he is possessed by arisen defilements.”

While a monk is noting the psycho-physical phenomena as described above, he might entertain doubts as to whether this task of noting as an exercise for meditation really contributes to the development of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). He now falls prey to arisen defilements. He must note how his doubts arise and eliminate them. If he cannot, he will fail to realise the nature of the psycho-physical phenomena. What I am saying concerns ordinary individuals. With Stream-winners doubts usually get resolved of their own accord without voluntary efforts. So one need not trouble oneself with noting and eliminating them. However, here I purposely refer to them as I want to fully enumerate all the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) in the way of liberation.

“Monks! If a monk speculates about the present existence and other existences as well, that is to say, now and hereafter, he is obsessed by arisen defilements.”

Who creates this universe? Who creates mankind? Does life come into being without any cause? Is there a self (*atta*) or not? If one speculates about such things as well as about the present life, one may be considered as generating wrong-views and fostering doubts. Those ideas usually assail the minds of ordinary individuals. After departing from this life where will I be reborn? What will I be then? If I continue to exist hereafter, how would I fare in the next existence? Common people would contemplate about the hereafter in this way. With Stream-winners there would never arise any such speculations that engender doubts and wrong-views. It is not usual for people to think about life in villages, towns, and countries that can be met with in this world, or even go further to speculate about the life and world of divine beings, or even of hell or lower realms.

These are the workings of a restless mind. Such speculations might arise when a meditator is practising meditation. They are a result of restlessness (*uddhacca*). They also belong to the turbulent type of defilements. Note such wandering of the mind and eliminate it to realise the nature of conditioned things that arise and pass away.

“Monks! If a monk enters into a dispute, picks a quarrel, gets involved in controversies, or maligns others with harsh words, he is under the influence of arisen defilements.”

Whether a monk enters into a dispute only in imagination or in real life while noting sense-objects, he is possessed by arisen defilements. If he imagines himself quarrelling he must note this fact and eliminate it. If he fails to do so, he will not realise the true nature of the psycho-physical phenomena. If he wounds other’s sensibilities with harsh words, he will be guilty of an offence to be confessed (*pācittiya*). His morality would then become defiled. If he fails to establish purity of morality, he will not be able to attain correct views when he will be denied knowledge of the true nature of the arising and passing away of phenomena. Therefore, those who are practising the Dhamma should never engage in disputes or quarrels.

These examples seek to show the kind of obstructions that stand in the way of establishing concentration (*samādhi*) or attentiveness,

and purity of mind (*citta-visuddhi*). They must first be removed. Now I will explain how to remove them.

Sensual Desires

When a meditator is concentrating on an earth-device (*kaṣiṇa*), or mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna*), or noting the postures of sitting, standing, bending, stretching, bending, *etc.*, in accordance with the instructions in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the mind might wander. It might travel to the office or work-place. It might get into an imaginary conversation with someone. It might be thinking about plans about some future activity. All these desires relating to the senses are called the hindrance of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), which has been referred to in the Sutta as sensuality (*kāmarāga*). When such sensual desires are let loose, how can a meditator concentrate on the earth-device, mindfulness of breathing, or noting the postures of sitting, standing, walking *etc.*? Contemplating such desires are an impediment to the development of tranquillity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*), so one should avoid thinking of them. If they arise, note them arising. After repeated noting, once, twice, or thrice, they will disappear. Then revert to the original meditation object, the rising and falling of the abdomen, if one is practising this exercise.

Sensual desires are likened to debts. When one is indebted, one has to show deference to the creditor. One has to tolerate the creditor's chastisement, and do whatever they ask. In the case of husband and wife who love each other, one has to take special care to avoid obstructing the wishes of the other, in case disaffection might develop between them. This is deference in the highest degree. So when desires arise in your mind while you are meditating, regard them as debts you have contracted, and don't let yourself run into them.

Ill-will

The other hindrance is ill-will. It is like a disease. When you are suffering from it you cannot enjoy life and the luxuries it offers. When you are gravely sick, all your senses are impaired. You won't find any taste in what you eat. When there is singing and dancing around a patient grumbling with pain and exhaustion, how can he enjoy them? A man will be all smiles to his friends when he has not yet been seized with anger; but when he becomes angry, he cannot be pleasant to them. Even when friends offer advice for his

own good, he will not appreciate it. When two people quarrel, one who tries to reconcile them is often misunderstood. Both parties think that the mediator is siding with the opposition. Then ill-will grows. It is contagious like a disease. If a disease is contagious, nobody would like to be near the sick person.

Even though you may not be practising insight meditation, it will profit you to avoid anger. When it cannot be controlled, animosity develops among your friends and members of your family. When it arises during the meditation, contemplate it, note it and then expel it. If you take medicine when you have a headache, your headache will be removed. In the same way, when you have anger and take the medicine of noting it, it will immediately disappear.

Say what you have to say only when your anger has subsided. Then you will be saying it kindly in which case friendship will grow. Suppress this disease of anger and ill-will.

Sloth and Torpor

When one is disinclined to meditate or to perform meritorious deeds, one is said to be suffering from sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*). When a man gets imprisoned, he is denied the opportunity to enjoy entertainments going on outside the prison. A man suffering from sloth and torpor is like a man in prison. He is denied the opportunity to enjoy the Dhamma. A lazy person will not sit to meditate, nor attend any meetings where religious discourses are given. If someone talks about it, a lazy person will not appreciate it. He or she is a prisoner to laziness. If you are seized by sloth and torpor while meditating, regard yourself as being imprisoned. Try to eliminate sloth and torpor by noting them arising.

Restlessness and Remorse

Restlessness (*uddhacca*) and remorse (*kukkucca*) manifest as wavering of the mind and anxiety. When obsessed with it one lives in fear of one's own guilt. This sentiment is likened to a slave, who has to do at his master's bidding. A slave has to live wherever he or she is told to. He or she has to eat whatever is given by his or her master. A slave has no chance to do things as he wishes for his or her self-improvement. All children born to a slave also become slaves, and there can be no escape for them. Slaves have no fundamental human rights. One who is obsessed with restlessness

and remorse is a veritable slave. These mental defilements are hindrances to the realisation of concentration and insight. A meditator should note their arising and eliminate them.

Doubt

Now I will deal with sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*). It does not relate to ordinary affairs. Someone going to market may doubt if the road leads to the market. Due to a lapse of memory, one may forget the name a person that one meets. Such doubts have nothing to do with the hindrances that I am talking about. They are not hindrances that bring about demerits. The doubts that I am talking about are real impediments in the way of the realisation in the practice of concentration and insight. One doubts if it is true that absorption can be gained merely by observing the earth-device or by noting in-breathing and out-breathing. If one entertain such doubts while practising concentration and meditation one can never gain concentration, let alone insight. As one is noting the arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena, one might wonder if insight can be attained in that way, whether what teacher's instructions are correct, or whether such efforts can lead to the realisation of the Path and its Fruition.

In that event one should note this as "doubt," and eliminate it. A person who is in doubt like someone at a road junction unable to decide which road to take. A traveller was carrying a load of money and running to escape the robbers who were trying to waylay him. As he got to a place where the road forked, he wondered which way would be the best to take. As he was vacillating, he was caught, robbed, and killed by the robbers.

A meditator who doubts while noting the nature of the conditioned phenomena is like that indecisive man. Because of doubts, delusion arises; and because of delusion, unwholesome mental states; and because of them, unwholesome acts may be done. Because of such unwholesome kamma one will be reborn, and that means that one will again get old, become sick and meet with death. So you must expel doubt, which is an obstacle to the maturing of insight.

When these five hindrances are absent, the mind that notes conditioned phenomena remain pure, which is purity of mind (*citta-visuddhi*). One who has attained purity of mind can clearly note mental and physical phenomena, and know their relationships and the causes that bring them about. An ordinary

individual cannot grasp the true nature of these phenomena because of the five hindrances.

Stream-winners Can Remove the Hindrances

A Stream-winner removes doubt with the help of the knowledge of the Noble Path. Care and anxiety are absent. Practising insight meditation in solitude, he or she is able to shake off all hindrances. The clear mind is able to note each and every arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena.

That the Noble Ones have conquered the hindrances is shown by the Buddha as follows:

“A Stream-winner, meditating in solitude, will conclude: “Formerly I did not know the nature of conditioned things correctly because of the mental hindrances. Now that I have removed them, I have established myself in the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.”

This reflection by a Stream-winner contemplating in solitude the phenomena of conditioned thing is done in the absence of hindrances. Knowledge obtained by such a self-examination is called the first reflection and is supramundane, not known by ordinary persons.

This means that the knowledge is related to the Noble Path and resides in the minds of the Noble Ones. If, after this self-examination, one is convinced that one has attained this knowledge, one can safely assume that one has become a Stream-winner. Those who regard themselves as having reached that stage should examine themselves to ascertain whether they are freed from the clutches of the arisen defilements when they are noting in solitude all phenomena that occur at the six sense-doors. When they find that their mind is free of all five hindrances, they may feel certain that they have reached that stage. However, if they find out that their minds still linger over many imagined objects of their desires, they may regard themselves as having failed the test.

The Second Reflection

“Monks! There is another method of reflection. A noble disciple investigates repeatedly in this way: “I have been striving with this knowledge, developing it and applying it repeatedly. Thus I have come to a state of mind free of all hindrances and delivered from defilements.”

In a Stream-winner's mind there the view relating to mind and matter being subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self are firmly established, thereby enabling him or her to perceive the nature of nibbāna with the support of the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition. So he or she is now able to see if he or she has gained concentration, by which all obstructions to deliverance from defilements are extirpated. These defilements are both coarse and subtle. Ordinarily, all coarse impurities are eliminated leaving no residue. However, one has to be very careful with the subtle latent defilements (*anusaya kilesā*), which also have to be expelled. In this connection the Buddha declared thus: "A Stream-winner who examines himself or herself will conclude: 'I have strived with this knowledge, developed it and applied it repeatedly. I have mastered concentration, which has eliminated defilements. I have come to the stage of deliverance from defilements.'"

A Stream-winner can establish concentration by expelling restlessness regarding sensual pleasures. Ordinary individuals are not free from the influence of such subtle defilements, so they cannot gain insight into the nature of mind and matter. They assume that there dwells in this body a living self or soul. Even if they are acquainted with the teachings about not-self, they cannot get away from the idea of a living self or soul. They say, "I think, therefore I exist." To a Stream-winner, however, life is just a manifestation of mind and matter, or in other words psycho-physical phenomena. There is nothing that can be called a self or soul. When one concentrates on mind and matter, one will realise that the compound of consciousness and corporeality is not "I." This realisation expels personality-view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*)—the erroneous view of the existence of a self.

Doubts never arise in the minds of Stream-winners regarding morality compatible with the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. They have relinquished the wrong-view that liberation lies in the observance of religious rites (*śīlabbataparāmāsa*). In this context, rites refer to the practice of according to the belief that all sins will be washed away if one bathes in the Ganges, that all sins are expiated with the blood of sacrificial animals, that the result of evil deeds is neutralised by exercises in austerities that oppress the body, that one reaches heaven by merely worshipping deities and that one can reach nibbāna by merely keeping the mind at ease giving it no

opportunity for moral or spiritual development. A Stream-winner always holds the view that one can never realise nibbāna without developing the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition.

A Stream-winner is, therefore, free from the shackles of personality-view, doubts about the practice of morality, and attachment to rites and rituals. He or she is also free from the powerful forms of greed, anger, and delusion that lead to evil deeds of killing, stealing, *etc.* Subtle defilements occur when one fails to gain the truth of conviction that all is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

The second reflection is, therefore, a self-examination as to whether coarse and subtle forms of defilements have been extirpated through repeated insight meditation with a view to realise the knowledge of the Path leading to nibbāna.

The Third Reflection

There is, monks, another method of reflection. A Stream-winner reflects thus: “I have gained the knowledge relating to the arising and passing away of phenomena at the six sense doors. Outside the Buddha’s teaching, is there any recluse or priest who is similarly accomplished in this knowledge? Then he or she concludes that he or she has truly become accomplished in this knowledge while outside the Buddha’s teaching there have appeared no recluses or priests who are so accomplished.

How can a Stream-winner arrive at this conclusion? In other teachings outside the Buddha’s teaching (*sāsana*), there are no instructions for insight meditation with regard to noting the arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena. They do not highlight the fact that there is no “self,” or that what is taken as self is, in fact, not-self (*anatta*), and just a manifestation of the arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena. They do not reveal the way to nibbāna where all impurities of the mind are cleansed and all suffering and unsatisfactoriness ceases. It is this consideration that leads Stream-winners to conclude that outside the teachings of the Buddha there can be no recluses or priests who realise the true nature of mental and physical phenomena.

Regarding insight meditation, I have dealt with it in detail in my discourse on the practices evoking friendship, citing the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta as an authority. In the Sutta it has been stated that when one

goes one must be aware of “going.” It means that you must note your posture of sitting, standing; lying down, bending, stretching *etc.* All activities of the mind and body must be noted. It may prove difficult for a beginner to note everything, so my instructions relate to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. As you note these you will come to realise the working of the aggregates of attachment (*upādānakkhandhā*). Gradually, you will also come to realise the aggregate of consciousness (*viññānakkhandhā*), the aggregate of feeling (*vedanakkhandhā*), the aggregate of perception (*saññākkhandhā*), and the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandhā*). In the Silavanta Sutta, it has been said that a monk accomplished in morality becomes aware that the five aggregates of clinging are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. This awareness leads to the Fruition of Stream-winning. From this status he progresses to the higher stages of a Once-returned, Non-returned, and Arahant.

On further examination, a Stream-winner will realise that outside the Buddha’s teaching there are none who attains this status. However, even within this teaching, if mindfulness is not practised methodically, no one can get enlightened about conditioned things, realising the three characteristics, *etc.*, and no one can attain the status of a Stream-winner without cultivating mindfulness.

The Fourth Reflection

Monks! There is another method of reflection. “A Stream-winner examines himself thus: ‘A noble one who accomplished in the knowledge of the Noble Path possesses a nature characteristic of his nobility. Have I possessed this nature?’ As he considers this, he comes to the conclusion that he has.

What is this nature belonging to the Noble Ones attaining the status of a Stream-winner? There are certain offences for monks. When any one of them is committed without any intent, it is held to be technical. For instance, a monk is presumed to have committed an offence if he happens to sleep under the same roof in the company of a layman or novice for more than three nights in succession. He may have slept in such company without any intention to do so. Technically he is guilty. When he realises that he has committed a technical offence, he at once atones for his guilt. When an infant accidentally touches fire, he withdraws his hand quickly. In the same

way, when a monk accidentally transgresses, he quickly seeks expiation. Furthermore, he takes special care not to repeat the same transgression. This is in the habitual nature of the Stream-winners.

Among the laity also, there are minor offences that do not send the offender to the lower realms. Ordinarily, the guilty may be absolved from blame. A Stream-winner never commits grave offences of murder, theft, adultery, cheating, taking intoxicants, *etc.* However, as he or she is not yet completely free from avarice and anger, he or she might commit minor offences. If chastised for them by companions, he or she would immediately confess his or her guilt and undertake not to repeat it. This nature of the Stream-winner is unlike that of ordinary individuals. A common person rarely restrains from committing grave offences. When chastised by companions he or she feigns innocence, neither owning up nor promising not to repeat them. Although a Stream-winner, not being totally free from sensual desires, anger, *etc.*, may enjoy pleasures, he or she is fully aware that such enjoyments are unwholesome and are best avoided. Ordinary individuals do not behave like this.

The Fifth Reflection

The fifth reflection is almost the same as the fourth, with only this difference. The fourth relates to the habit of the Stream-winner in confessing their guilt and abstaining from repeating it. Here in this fifth principle of reflection he or she makes it a habit to observe the three trainings in higher morality (*adhisīla*), higher concentration (*adhicitta*), and higher wisdom (*adhipaññā*).

In the congregation, there are many duties for monks to fulfil to support their fellow monks in the pursuit of their religious quest. Although a Stream-winner is hard-pressed by monastic duties, his mind is always intent on the observance of the three trainings. Especially, he is enthusiastic to practise meditation. He is, therefore, likened to a milch-cow, which keeps her whole attention on her newly-born calf, although she cannot help, but munch grass all the while. Regarding this nature of Stream-winners, the Commentaries have this story:

Once upon a time, at Anurādhapura in Sri Lanka, a monk was making repairs to the Mahācetiya ([Mahā Thūpa](#)) with cement and mortar. He went up to a high platform with a view to enjoying

solitude so that he could meditate while doing the repairs. At that time, a fellow-monk approached him just to while away the time with talking, as he had no interest in meditation. The first monk, who was a Noble One, avoided the ordinary monk by moving to another place. However, the latter followed him. The Noble One decided to be frank and told him: “The platform of the Thūpa is very wide. Can you not find another place where you can do the repairs?” Then only, the interfering monk departed. The Noble One could not afford to lose the opportunity to practise meditation.

Laymen have their daily chores more burdensome than the monks. Every one of them is busy earning a living. Then there are many community affairs to attend to. In spite of all this, a Stream-winner who is a householder, never relaxes in the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom. He or she never forgets to note things in the exercise of insight meditation.

The nature of a Noble One is, therefore, never to forget the practice of insight meditation. When one makes a self-appraisal and finds that one has acquired the habit of meditation one can rest assured that one has reached the stage of Stream-winner.

The Sixth Reflection

“Again, monks, a Noble One performs a self-examination in this way: “One who is accomplished in the wisdom of the Noble Ones is endowed with spiritual strength. Am I so endowed?”

Animals like horses and bullocks are endowed with strength; but their strength is physical. There is also the strength of the mind, or moral strength. Fools possess the strength of a fool. They dare to kill, steal, lie, *etc.* Wise men have the strength of wisdom. They possess compassion and loving-kindness towards all beings. They delight in the performance of wholesome deeds. Ordinary individuals also have their own strengths. Noble Ones, however, possess the strength of the Noble Ones. What, then, is the strength of the Noble Ones?

The Buddha has described it as follows: “Monks! When one pays respectful attention to a teacher making an exposition of the Dhamma and Vinaya, as if they are one’s own valuable possession, one may be said to have been endowed with the strength of the Noble Ones.”

The Buddha’s teachings relate to right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) based on *Satipaṭṭhāna* and right exertion (*sammappadhāna*) for the

realisation of the Path and its Fruition. When a teacher expounds these teachings, a pupil must listen with respectful and rapt attention. He must regard the teaching as his own valuable possession. When a trader does business, he takes special care that his business dealings produce no loss. Farmers make special efforts so that not a grain of their produce is wasted. It is because they regard their business or the crops as their material possession, which must be guarded from loss or damage. In the same way, you must regard the Dhamma taught as your spiritual possession, not one of them to be frittered away. While listening to religious discourses, you must note every word or point discussed without diverting your attention to other matters. If you are attentive, you are endowed with the strength of the Noble Ones.

Here, for the sake of comparison, I must tell you about the strength of ordinary individuals. They regard it as tiresome to listen to religious discourses that are delivered sedately. They want to hear lively talks delivered mellifluously in a sentimental way. They enjoy stories — whether comic or tragic. Jokes are always enjoyed. If you feel it tedious to listen to serious religious discourses, you can know that you have the strength of an ordinary individual.

The Seventh Reflection

This seventh reflection is a variant of the sixth. Here the strength of the Noble Ones is defined as follows: “A listener to the Dhamma and Discipline must try to penetrate their meaning and intent. One must also try to understand how salient points in the Dhamma are arranged. One must listen to religious discourses with joy. If one takes up the Dhamma in this way, one may be regarded as endowed with the strength of the Noble Ones.”

In the Commentaries, joy in listening is emphasised. As the listener fully realises the significance of the Dhamma, he or she is thrilled with joy that permeates the body. We are often told that when a meditator hears us reciting Pāli texts, he or she at once grasps the meaning and understands the arrangements of points for discussion while becoming overwhelmed with joy.

If a Noble One feels joyous and understands the true meaning of what has been taught, he or she may be regarded as possessing the strength of the Noble Ones. This self-appraisal shows that

one has fulfilled the seventh reflection. This realisation is not found in ordinary individuals.

This subject of reflection is conducive to the propagation of knowledge about Buddhist literature. Meditators, well versed in insight meditation, can appreciate the meaning of the scriptural texts better and assimilate the philosophy of mind and matter. A learned man confessed to me that he became truly literate only after the practice of the Dhamma. He thought he knew what he had read, but actually he did not. After the practice of meditation he came to know what he did not previously know. He is not a common man. He is an ex-monk well versed in Buddhist literature — meditation had made him enlightened. A learned monk also told me that one cannot see the light of the Dhamma merely by reading the scriptures. Among the seven factors of enlightenment, one is the enlightenment factor of equanimity (*upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*), which is very difficult to understand unless one can appreciate the mental state of indifference through practical experience. The text says that equanimity has the characteristic of balancing two equal weights. Unless one actually experiences this state of mind, one may not really know what it is about. Only when you have practised meditation and gained the knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*) and knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārūpekkhā-ñāṇa*), can you appreciate what equanimity really means. A meditator can at once recognise equanimity, although he or she is not learned. The same way may be said of the realisation of enlightenment factor of joy (*pīti sambojjhaṅga*). An insight meditator can recognise it at once even though he or she may be illiterate. In fact he or she can differentiate all the nuances of the five kinds of joy,¹ such as minor joy (*khuddikā-pīti*), momentary joy (*khaṇikā-pīti*), flooding joy (*okkantikā-pīti*), uplifting joy (*ubbegā-pīti*), and suffusing joy (*pharaṇā-pīti*). Thus said the learned monk while relating his own experience.

An insight meditator makes a great contribution not only to theory, but also to the practice of the Dhamma. If a learned man, proficient both in theory and practice of the Dhamma teaches it to his disciples, he will be putting theory into practice; and if his disciples practise insight meditation according to his instructions,

¹ Cf. Vism.143. Minor joy causes goose-bumps, momentary joy is like flashes of light, flooding joy is like waves breaking on the seashore, uplifting joy lifts the body into the air, suffusing joy pervades the entire body.

they will easily understand his teachings because they can concentrate well. Eventually there will be the development of character in his pupils. Insight meditation is, therefore, a supporting factor to the advancement of scriptural learning.

Development of joy while listening to a religious discourse is, therefore, a sign showing that the listener has gained the strength of a Noble One. Ordinary people might give the excuse that the teachings are too deep and too difficult to understand and that they prefer romantic tales and sentimental stories related by the teacher in a mellifluous voice. Then only, they say, the lectures generate joy. However, monks should concentrate their efforts on teaching the Dhamma in a sedate way because it is of primary importance for us to disseminate insight knowledge for the attainment of the Path.

“Monks! If you have qualified yourselves in these tests laid down under the seven principles of reflection, you are a Stream-winner.”

Thus said the Buddha. These principles can be understood by a Stream-winner. Anyone who thinks they have reached the stage of a Stream-winner may perform this self-examination by applying these tests. If one can pass them one may rest assured that one has come to an appropriate stage. Even if one fails the test, one will have the advantage of knowing that a Stream-winner in this teaching has reached a very high level, and that, one can also aspire to that stage. So I urge all disciples to strive after that stage.

May all be able to strive after the fulfilment of the qualifications as set out in the seven reflections. May all achieve progress in the practice of the Dhamma and attain the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition so that they can realise nibbāna as speedily as possible.

Index

A

- absorption (*jhāna*), 12, 24
aggregate of consciousness
(*viññāṇakkhandhā*), 28
aggregate of feeling
(*vedanakkhandhā*), 28
aggregate of perception
(*saññākkhandhā*), 28
aggregates of attachment
(*upādānakkhandhā*), 28
arisen defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna-*
kilesā), 20
ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*), 7
attachment to rites and rituals
(*silabbataparāmāsa*), 26, 27

C

- compassion (*karuṇā*), v, 4, 6, 30
concentration (*samādhi*), 21

D

- delusion (*moha*), vi
device (*kaṣiṇa*), 22
doubt (*vicikicchā*), 24

E

- ecstatic concentration (*appanā*
samādhi), 8
element of motion (*vāyo dhātu*), 15
enlightenment factor of
equanimity (*upekkhā*
sambojjhaṅga), 32
enlightenment factor of joy (*pīti*
sambojjhaṅga), 32

F

- final cessation (*parinibbāna*), 13
flooding joy (*okkantikā-pīti*), 32
formless realms (*arūpaloka*), 12

G

- greed (*lobha*), vi

H

- hatred (*dosa*), vi
higher concentration (*adhicitta*), 29
higher morality (*adhisīla*), 29
higher wisdom (*adhipaññā*), 29
hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), vi, 20

I

- impermanence (*anicca*), 15
insight (*vipassanā*), 22
insight knowledge (*vipassanā-*
ñāṇa), 20
insight meditation (*vipassanā*), v,
vi, 14, 15, 20, 23, 25, 27, 30, 32, 33

K

- knowledge of arising and passing
away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), 32
knowledge of equanimity about
formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-*
ñāṇa), 32
Knowledge of reviewing
(*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), 19

L

- latent defilements (*anusaya kilesā*),
26
leading views (*niyyānikā diṭṭhi*), 11
liberality (*cāga*), 2, 6
loving-kindness (*mettā*), v, 2

M

- mental formations
(*saṅkhārakkhandhā*), 28
mindfulness of breathing
(*ānāpāna*), 22

minor joy (*khuddikā-pīti*), 32
 momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), 8
 momentary joy (*khaṇikā-pīti*), 32
 morality (*śīla*), 2

N

noble morality (*ariya śīla*), 3
 Noble Path knowledge
 (*ariyamagga ñāna*), 16
 noble wisdom (*ariya paññā*), 3
 Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), 13
 not-self (*anatta*), 15, 17, 18, 26-28

O

offence to be confessed (*pācittiya*),
 21
 Once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), 13
 ordinary individuals (*puthujjana*),
 19, 31

P

perfections (*pāramī*), 14
 personality-view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*),
 26
 practices that evoke friendship
 (*sāraṇiyā dhammā*), 1-3, 6
 preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), 14
 proximate concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), 8
 purity of mind (*citta-visuddhi*), 22,
 24

R

realms of form (*rūpaloka*), 12
 remorse (*kukkucca*), 23
 restlessness (*uddhacca*), 21, 23
 right exertion (*sammappadhāna*),
 30
 right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), 30

S

self (*atta*), 21
 sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), 22
 sensuality (*kāmarāga*), 22
 sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), 23
 Stream-winner (*śotāpanna*), v, vi, 9,
 13
 suffusing joy (*pharaṇā-pīti*), 32

T

teaching (*sāsana*), 27
 tranquillity (*śamatha*), 22

U

unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), 15, 17, 27,
 28
 unwholesome (*akusala*), 2
 uplifting joy (*ubbeḡā-pīti*), 32

W

wholesome (*kusala*), 2
 wisdom (*paññā*), 2
 wrong livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*), 6

