

Uttamapurisa Dīpanī

Manual on the Greatest of Mankind

Mahāthera Ledi Sayādaw
Aggamahāpandita, D.Litt.

Translated by U Tin U (Myaung)

PREFACE

The Uttamapurisa Dīpanī was translated by U Tin U in 1983 when it was entrusted with Mr. S. S. Davidson of England to get it published. Mr. Davidson had the manuscript typed out and started editing it with the assistance of Mrs. Iggle denn. Since they were both in their eighties and were living at two different towns, their work did not proceed as well as they wished. Meanwhile, Mr. J. P. Ross took the manuscript from the translator and sought the help of Bhikkhu Pesala in England who managed to get the book published by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, under the title of "A Manual of the Excellent Man". In recounting the publication, Bhikkhu Pesala says, inter alia, thus:

"... in 1991 James Patrick Stewart Ross, an American Buddhist, ... gave me a stack of computed disks on which were more than thirty voluminous works by various authors. Many of them were by the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw. Mr. Ross had spent many years collecting works by famous Myanmar Sayadaws and had made heroic efforts to get English translation made ...

" During the following years ... I edited the Uttamapurisa Dīpanī and the Dāna Dīpanī ... but it was not until 1997 that I met Mr. Ross again in Myanmar. Meanwhile I had had some correspondence with Bhikkhu Bodhi of the Buddhist Publication Society, and he agreed that the Uttamapurisa Dīpanī was worth publishing."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Ross was acquainted with Bhikkhu Bodhi at that time through the help of Daw Mi Mi Win of Bangkok.

"I hope it will now be easier for the non-Buddhist or new Buddhist to appreciate the Sayadaw's inspiring teaching, ..."

Tin U (Myaung) .

OUR THREE MAIN NATIONAL CAUSES

Non-disintegration of the union	Our cause
Non-disintegration of national solidarity	Our cause
Consolidation of national sovereignty	Our cause

PEOPLE'S DESIRE

- Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views.
- Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation.
- Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State.
- Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.

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Manual on the Greatest of Mankind

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Veneration to the Exalted One, the Homrage-worthy,
the Perfectly Self-Enlightened

PREAMBLE

I shall answer concisely the nine questions posed by Maung Thaw, Office Clerk of the Inspector of Schools, Mandalay, according to the canonical text and the commentaries on it, giving my conclusions on doctrinal points.

Chapter One

The petition sent from Mandalay by Maung Thaw on the tenth waxing day of Tabaung, 1261 Burmese Era (1899) contained nine questions. Maung Thaw's first question relates to the following:

1. Regarding the five aspirants: (i) a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha (*Sammāsambuddha*), (ii) a Solitary Buddha (*Pacceka-buddha*), (iii) a Chief Disciple (*Aggassāvaka*), (iv) a Great Disciple (*Mahāsāvaka*), and (v) an Ordinary Disciple (*Pakatisāvaka*), how does the aspirant fulfil the perfections (*pāramī*) to achieve his respective goal?

2. May I know the definition, nature and significance of the ten perfections with particular reference to an aspirant to Supreme Enlightenment or Buddhahood?

THE PERFECTIONS DEFINED

In answer to the first question, regarding the definition, nature, and significance of the perfections, there are these ten perfections .

*“Dānaṃ sīlaṇca nekkhammaṃ
Paññā vīriya khantica
Saccā dhiṭṭhāna mettāca
Upekkhāpāramīdasa.”*

1) Giving (*dānā*), 2) Morality (*sīla*) 3) Renunciation (*nekkhamma*), 4) Wisdom (*paññā*, 5) Diligence (*vīriya*), 6) Patience (*khanti*), 7) Truthfulness (*sacca*), 8) Resolve (*adhiṭṭhāna*), 9) Loving Kindness (*mettā*) and 10) Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The Nature of the Perfections

The nature of the perfections will be shown by their characteristic (*lakkhana*), function (*rasa*), manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*) and proximate cause (*padaṭṭhānam*). The ten perfections are described in the *Cariyapitaka Aṭṭhakathā* and *Sīlakkhandhaṭṭaka*.

1. *Pariccāgalakkhaṇaṃ dānaṃ,*
Deyyadhamma lobha viddhamsanarasam.
Anāsatti paccupaṭṭhānam,
Pariccajītabba vatthu padaṭṭhānam.

Dāna — It has the characteristic of giving; its function is to destroy attachment to things by giving them away; it is manifested by non-attachment to things given away; its proximate cause is something in hand that would serve as a gift.

2. *Sīlanalakkhaṇam sīlam,*
Dussīlya viddhamsanarasam.
Soceyya paccupaṭṭhānam,
Hiri-ottappa padaṭṭhānam.

Sīla — It has the characteristic of preserving good bodily and verbal actions; its function is to destroy unwholesome or unruly actions; it is manifested as the purity of actions; its proximate causes are moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*).

3. *Kāmato bhavatoca, nikkhamanalakkhaṇaṃ
nekkhammaṃ,
Kāmaabhavādīnavavibhāvanarasam.
Tasseva vimukhabhāva paccupaṭṭhānam,
Samvega padaṭṭhānam.*

Nekkhammaṃ — Its characteristic is renouncing sensuality and thereby gaining release from becoming; its function is to reveal the perils of sensuality and rebirth in a fresh existence; it is manifested in avoidance of sensual desires; its proximate cause is dread of the perils of sensuality through far-sighted trepidation and knowledge arising with the dread of misconduct.

4. *Yathā sabhāva paṭivedhalakkhaṇā paññā,
Visayobhāsanarasā.
Asammoha paccupaṭṭhānā,
Samādhi padaṭṭhānā.*

Paññā — It has the characteristic of seeing things penetratingly in their true nature; its function is to shed light on all objects of sense; it is manifested in non-bewilderment; its proximate cause is concentration.

5. *Ussāhalakkhaṇam viriyam,
Upatthambhanarasam.
Asamsidana paccupaṭṭhānam,
Samvega padaṭṭhānam.*

Vīriyam — Its characteristic is diligence; its function is to brace one up; its manifestation is undauntedness; its proximate cause is a sense of urgency arising from far-sighted trepidation of birth, decay, sickness, death and all attendant ills.

6. *Khamanalakkhaṇā khanti,
Itthāniṭṭha sahanarasā.
Adhi vāsana paccupaṭṭhānā,
Yathābhūta dassana padaṭṭhānā*

Khanti — It has the characteristic of forbearance; its function is not to be moved by likes or dislikes; it is manifested in forbearance in the face of the gravest provocation; its proximate cause is seeing things as they really are.

7. *Avisaṃvādanalakkhaṇaṃ saccam,
Yathāvavibhāvanarasam,
Sāduṭā paccupaṭṭhānam,
Soracca padaṭṭhānam*

Saccam — It has the characteristic of not misleading others by one's utterance; its function is to ascertain the truth as one sees or knows; it is manifested in sweet and agreeable speech; its proximate cause is a sympathetic tenderness towards all.

8. *Bodhisambhāresu avaṭṭhāna lakkhaṇaṃ*
adhiṭṭhānaṃ,
Tesaṃ paṭipakkhābhibhavana rasam,
Tattha acalatā paccupaṭṭhānaṃ,
Bodhisambhāra padaṭṭhānaṃ

Adhiṭṭhānaṃ — It has the characteristic of resolve in undertaking meritorious deeds for fulfilment of the perfections; its function is to overcome all opposition and obstacles that lie in one's long path; it is manifested as firmness in one's stand; its proximate cause lies in those very meritorious deeds, such as generosity, when one is practising for perfections.

9. *Hitākārappavatti lakkhaṇā mettā,*
Hitūpasam hāra rasā.
Sommābhāva paccupaṭṭhānā,
Tattānaṃ manāpabhāva dassana padaṭṭhānā,

Mettā — It has the characteristic of promoting the welfare of others; its function is being solicitous of others' welfare; it is manifested in a helpful attitude; its proximate cause is seeing only the good of others.

10. *Majjhattākārappavatti lakkhaṇāupekkhā,*
Sama bhāvadassana rasā.
Paṭighānunaṃ vūpasama paccupaṭṭhānā,
Kamassakatā paccavekkhaṇā padaṭṭhānā.

Upekkhā — It has the characteristic of equanimity in the face of praise and blame; its function is to neutralise one's emotions; it is manifested in impartiality; its proximate cause is the reflective knowledge of one's own past actions.

Dependent and Non-dependent Perfections

The ten perfections can be classed as either dependent or non-dependent. Dependent perfections may be either dependent on craving or dependent on wrong views.

Something carried out with a desire for a glorified future existence is said to be done dependent on craving. Something carried out in the mistaken belief that purification of defilements is achieved through morality or virtuous conduct is said to be done dependent on wrong views. A deed of merit done with a desire for existence in a higher plane or glorified existence is dependent on craving and is not development of perfections. In this connection, wishing for human existence to fulfil the perfections, as in the cases of the bodhisattas Campeyya and Saṅkapāla, the two Nāga Kings, cannot be called dependent.

Some people think, "The practice of charity and observing morality or taking up the life of an ascetic, are sufficient in themselves for the removal of defilements; no further practice exists." They regard their view as perfect. They acquire merit sometimes, but they totally disregard the need for insight knowledge leading to the path and its

fruition. Their merit is dependent on wrong views and does not count as a fulfilment of perfections. Theirs is the type of merit sought after by fakirs. These two kinds of dependent merits keep one trapped in the cycle of re-birth. They are not called perfections.

Two Classes of Non-dependent Merits

"There is such a thing as supramundane merit, there is also mundane merit which serves as a seed for supramundane merit."

Since Maung Thaw's question relates to merit that contributes to the perfections, supramundane merit need not be discussed; only non-dependent mundane types of merit or mundane merit as the basis for the supramundane need to be discussed here.

Only volitional activities such as giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, diligence, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving-kindness and equanimity carried out with a pure mind and not bent towards a higher or glorified existence in the hereafter, and not inspired by mistaken views, but aimed squarely at the 'yonder shore' of enlightenment, as detached as the open sky, are merits that amount to fulfilling the perfections.

These days it is quite common to hear such prayers as: "May we attain nibbāna; for such time as we might not have attained nibbāna, for that time may we be . . ." and so on and so forth, such are the prayers the donor makes

at his offering ceremony, aspiring for ever higher and more magnificent existences, and a grand vista of worldly attainments in words every bit as pompous as the head of the Saṅgha uses when he administers the prayers during the water-pouring ceremony. The result is that the word nibbāna is heard as a mere faint sound drowned by a welter of mundane wishes. Furthermore, it is that mundane aspect of the prayers that would seem to appeal to most. For we have such a splendid range of those wishing words, and what eloquence! In fact it was to discourage that sort of 'catscratching' merit acquiring that the emphatic article 'eva' (only) is used in the passage we have just referred to above: *tasseva* = *tassa* + *eva* (that only is). Only that kind of mundane merit is what the Buddha approves of.

Q Would you regard those deeds where the donor wishes for nibbāna, together with other mundane attainments, as meritorious deeds?

A Yes. However, I would say that those types of merit do not help quicken the time to enlightenment.

Let me illustrate with a few cases in point.

In the dark ages (i.e. where the Buddha's teaching had fallen silent) before the coming of Vipassī Buddha there lived two brothers who were sugar-cane planters. The younger of them was to become Jotika, the celebrated rich man. They offered sugar-cane juice to a Solitary Buddha. The elder brother, in making his wishes for the merit that would accrue to him for the gift, said, "May

I know the Dhamma that the Solitary Buddha has known." The younger brother also said the same thing, and something more. He added his wishes for a higher and glorified existence, those two common mundane wishes. The elder brother saw enlightenment at the earliest encounter with a Buddha, in this case Vipassī. As for the younger brother, because his desire was not 'nibbāna specific', but went off at a tangent, he missed his chance for enlightenment under the teachings of Vipassī Buddha. He attained release from the defilements of existence only under the teaching of Gotama Buddha, after having missed the teachings of six Buddhas.

The moral of the story is this: when some meritorious deed is being done, do not let craving for future well-being enter your mind. If you allow it, your wishes are bound to become your shackles. For the greater your well-being, the stronger tends to be your craving, with the result that you find yourself dilly-dallying when the opportunity for enlightenment comes. If you aspire for a purely supramundane merit unencumbered by mundane wishes then you will be able to forsake worldly glories when you hear the Dhamma. So, Maung Thaw, you should remember that whereas you may aspire for human existence in the future it should only be for the opportunity of fulfilling the perfections, which are required for enlightenment. However, don't ever let your wishes wander away to mundane attainments or well-being.

There is also the story of Puṇṇa, a householder servant of Meṇḍaka the rich man, who had such attachment to existence as his master's trusted servant that, when he wished for the result of the merit he derived from his offering to a Solitary Buddha: he opted for service under his good master in the future existences! Of course his wish was fulfilled, he became his master's servant throughout their remaining existences together.

When Cūḷa Subhaddā, the consort of the King of Elephants (the bodhisatta) wished for the merit she would acquire from an offering of fruits to a Solitary Buddha she sought revenge on her husband for an imagined slight she suffered at his hands. Her desire was fulfilled in her next existence as a human queen when she successfully plotted the death of her husband of the previous existence. This spiteful deed sent her down to hell.

Kusa, the bodhisatta, and his consort, Pabhāvatī, both made offerings to a Solitary Buddha in one of their past existences. They had to go through a series of mishaps together because they made discordant wishes.

These are only some of the many instances of the life stories of misdirected aspiration while performing a deed of merit. Such stories abound in the *jātakas* and in history and folklore. A lot depends on one's mentor too. In the life story of Vidhura, the wise counsellor, we find that of four rich men who offered food to four recluses of supernormal attainments in *jhānic* powers one became a Nāga and one a Garuda, one became a great king and

one became Sakka (King of Heaven). This is because the first two were given bad counsel from their respective teachers. So, one must take great care in choosing a mentor; bad counsel can bring bitter consequences for one's actions quite undeservedly.

Low, Medium and Superior Grades of Merit

To each of the ten meritorious practices such as giving, morality, renunciation, etc., there can be three grades; i.e. low, medium and superior. A deed undertaken out of desire for fame is low one, undertaken with desire for the fruits of merit is moderate, one, undertaken with the clear understanding that it is following the custom of the Noble Ones is superior.

Of the above three grades the first is done for vanity, all for show. It hardly brings any merit that could result in future well-being, let alone fulfilling any perfections. The second is merit motivated. Usually it is done with discrimination since the donor selects the most worthy or meritorious recipient whenever possible so as to gain the greatest merit. This kind of deed brings ample results in the mundane spheres, but still, it does not amount to fulfilling a perfection. The third case is when one sets the mind on the deed alone, not on its consequences. The donor is guided by a true sense of charity. In fact, one is prepared to share any possession with others for one has no attachment to possessions. One rightly follows the

practice of the Noble Ones. One does not choose to whom to give. Let anyone come, whether good, bad, or average, one would make some kind of gift. This kind of giving is following the custom of the Noble Ones. It is truly a practice for the perfection of giving. The same spirit of considering the deed alone, and not its rewards, governs the remaining perfections such as morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, etc.

Another criterion goes as follows:

Virtue observed out of craving for higher existence and material well-being is inferior; virtue observed for one's own release is moderate; virtue observed to liberate all beings, which is the perfection of virtue, is superior.

Release from the cycle of rebirth, and release from the mundane attainments of higher and glorified existences mean the same thing. The second grade is regarded as inferior because it falls short of being a practice for perfections. Observance for the sake of one's own release is the perfection practised by the Solitary Buddhas and ordinary disciples. Observance for the liberation of all beings is the perfection practised by Perfectly Enlightened Buddhas.

THE PERFECTIONS EXPLAINED

I shall now explain the meaning of each of the ten perfections:

1. *Dānaṃ* — Giving, making a gift or offering. Sharing one's wealth unstintingly with virtuous disciples of

the Buddha is called the practice of sharing or common ownership. The bodhisatta's practice of making gifts to anyone, virtuous, unvirtuous or moderately virtuous, has already been mentioned. It means that anyone who calls at one's door for alms receives them. Herein, virtuous disciples' means special people who certainly deserve the enjoyment of one's wealth and who should share the knowledge of the Dhamma. With respect to such good people, sharing should take the form of respectful offering after careful preparation.

2. *Sīla* — There are two kinds of morality; avoidance of the three bodily misdeeds and the four verbal misdeeds (*vāṛittasīla*); and cultivating virtuous habits (*cārittasīla*). The latter means paying respect (*apacāyana*) to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, as well as to parents, teachers, and those senior in age, status or morality; or helping anyone with a meritorious deed as if it were one's own undertaking (*veyyāvacca*).

3. *Nekkhamma* — Renunciation is undertaken with a strong volition of non-greed, hence it is a meritorious deed. Even if a householder strives for dispelling greed by bringing to mind the repulsiveness of the body or the loathsomeness of food, it amounts to renunciation, which is meritorious. If one is able to do more, one may go to a solitary retreat for the same purpose. If one can go a step further one may become a recluse or, still better, a bhikkhu. Even better, one may take up the practice of concentration and gain the first *jhāna*. Better still, one may develop

insight to attain the path of non-returning. All these are the meritorious deeds of renunciation.

4. *Paññā* — Wisdom is of two kinds, mundane and supramundane. Learning the *Tipiṭaka* and teaching it to others, undertaken with the object of fulfilling the perfection of wisdom, is supramundane. Teaching others the harmless sciences of astrology, incantations, verse recitation, medicine, science; or the arts, such as mechanics, mathematics, painting, sculpture, metalwork, masonry, goldsmithery or ironmongery, or honest methods of trade and agriculture; and all such blameless vocations are mundane. All these three categories, if imparted to others in a noble spirit as 'perfection directed' acts, constitute the practice of the perfection of wisdom.

5. *Vīriya* — Diligence is supreme if it conforms to the four right exertions. Besides this, exerting one's utmost strength with a pure motive to help others, whether one is capable or not, also amounts to the perfection of energy.

6. *Khanti* — Patience is tolerating others and bearing unpleasant experiences such as cold and heat. The Buddha says, "Bearing the severity of cold, or bearing the severity of heat, thus one has patience." The Buddha goes on to explain patience in various other ways. The underlying quality of patience is placidity in the face of internal or external unpleasant experiences coupled with fortitude. A man of patience does not allow anyone or anything to "put the grit in the machine, come wind, come foul

weather." He goes about his meritorious routine, not with hedonistic indifference, but with an imperturbable heart, devoid of anger. The presence of such a tolerant frame of mind constitutes patience.

7. *Sacca* — Truthfulness means avoidance of untruth and falsehood under all circumstances.

8. *Adhiṭṭhāna* — Resolve is the firmness of one's stand after one has committed oneself to something, whether expressed or not.

9. *Mettā* — Loving-kindness means wishing others well, with a heart filled with goodwill towards any being that one comes across.

10. *Upekkhā* — Equanimity is the quality of being strictly impartial to both well-wishers and adversaries alike. One does not behave partially towards one's benefactors. Neither does one harbour any resentment towards one's detractors. This evenness of attitude towards both the kind and the unkind is the essence of equanimity.

Here are a few similes to drive home the import of the perfections. Patience and equanimity are the mainstay for the perfections. Only when one has set oneself up in these two can one expect to fulfil the rest. Just as a newborn infant cannot survive without the care of its parents, the task of fulfilling the remaining eight perfections can only succeed under the constant care of patience and equanimity. Patience may be likened to the mother and equanimity to the father.

Presuming that patience and equanimity are present and that under their benign influence the rest of the meritorious actions are forthcoming, if there is an absence of renunciation these good deeds will not properly become perfections. Lacking the guidance of renunciation one is liable to be overcome by attachment to the merit to be derived from them and yearn for mundane benefits. Then the meritorious deeds merely prolong rebirth because they are dependent on existence. They do not then qualify as perfections. Therefore, if patience and equanimity are the parents, renunciation should be called the family doctor who takes care of the child's health.

To employ a different simile: all vegetation depends on soil and water for its survival; both must be favourable. Similarly, patience provides the favourable soil, and equanimity the favourable water, for the remaining perfections.

There is a slight difference in the significance of the term equanimity in the context of the four divine abiding (*brahmāvihāra*) and in the present context. The former signifies an indifference to the welfare of all beings (not the same as being disinterested). The latter connotes evenness of mind with regard to one who worships you and one who condemns or persecutes you and, further, being able to seek the welfare of both.

How the Perfections are Practised Together

In one of the innumerable existences of the bodhisatta, he was born as a monkey chieftain. A brahmin lost his way in the forest and fell into a chasm that was as deep as the height of a hundred men. Seeing his plight, the bodhisatta took pity on him and exerted himself to rescue him. Eventually, the brahmin was carried up onto safe ground. The bodhisatta was, by then, quite exhausted so he fell asleep, unsuspectingly, on the brahmin's lap. The brahmin thought to himself, "I've earned nothing today. My wife is going to be upset when I get home. What a nice idea if I were to bring home monkey flesh. How pleased my wife would be!" Satisfied with his 'bright idea', the brahmin took up a stone lying nearby and dealt a blow to the monkey's head. It was such a vicious blow that blood gushed out of the wound in all directions. Stupefied, and covered in blood, the bodhisatta leapt up into a tree. He could not believe that such a thing could happen "Oh, there are such people in this world." Then the thought came to his mind: how to lead the man home safely, for the forest was full of leopards, tigers and all sorts of dangerous animals. He said to the brahmin, "Now you should be starting for home. I must show you the way out of this forest, but I can't trust you. You can follow the trail of my blood as I jump from tree to tree." So, in this way the brahmin got home safely.

In this *Jātaka* story it will be seen that loving-kindness was the first of the ten perfections that the bodhisatta practised. When he saw the plight of the brahmin he took pity on him as his own son and started thinking of how to save him. Assessing the situation and thinking out a plan to take the brahmin out from the chasm was wisdom. Executing the plan at great risk to himself, and using all his strength, was the practice of energy. In bearing the deadly injury that had broken his skull without getting angry, he exercised great patience, without which he would have left the ungrateful man, thereby rendering all his efforts of no avail. Not allowing himself to be overcome by anger for such a wicked deed is the practice of equanimity. Had he not been firm in the practice of equanimity, he might have left off there, and the heartless brahmin would not have survived long. Indeed it was the two principal perfections of patience and equanimity that saw through the whole undertaking.

Saving the brahmin from such a deep chasm at the risk of his life amounted to sacrifice of his life or generosity. Again, saving the brahmin's life was the gift of life. Not even uttering a curse, and never raising his hand to strike back, constituted morality. In doing this noble deed the bodhisatta never thought about the merit he would again. This was renunciation, the ability to forsake all forms of existence. For attachment to a better life hereafter is generally strong enough to spoil the perfection of renunciation. By not going back on his word to save the brahmin,

the bodhisatta accomplished truthfulness — not very easy to keep under the circumstances. Lastly, carrying out his commitment without wavering in spite of the shocking treatment by the brahmin, was resolve. This was how the bodhisatta successfully practised the ten perfections in one and the same undertaking.

As regards your particular interest in the aspiration to Buddhahood, this is a fairly wide subject. The detailed process of laying the foundation for the aspiration to, and the fulfilment of, Perfect Enlightenment is dealt with in the scriptures in fifteen catechisms. Only a brief account will be given here. For a wider knowledge on it, please see the *Cariyapitaka* commentary and the *Silakkhandha* subcommentary.

The Three Grades of Perfections

I shall now outline the ten kinds of ordinary perfections, the ten kinds of higher perfections and the ten kinds of supreme perfections.

All external objects such as wife and children, animate and inanimate things, belonging to a person, are the objects through which the ten ordinary perfections are fulfilled. One's own limbs or head or any organ of the body are the objects through which the ten higher perfections are fulfilled. One's own life (being sacrificed) is the object through which ten supreme perfections are fulfilled.

Of those three categories of objects, such undertaking as would amount to forsaking the first category are called ordinary perfections; forsaking the second, higher perfections and forsaking the third, i.e one's own life, supreme perfections.

One who can fulfil only the first ten attains the Enlightenment of a Noble Disciple. One who can fulfil only the first ten and the second ten attains the Enlightenment of a Solitary Buddha. One who can fulfil all the three, ranging over thirty in all, attains Supreme Self-Enlightenment.

The Three Types of Disciple's Enlightenment

There are three classes of enlightenment of a Noble Disciple: (i) an Ordinary Noble Disciple's (ii) a Great Disciple's and (iii) a Chief Disciple's.

By fulfilling the first ten perfections for a period of one aeon and a hundred thousand world cycles, one can attain the enlightenment of a Chief Disciple. By a Chief Disciple is meant the Buddha's two principal Noble Disciples like the Venerables Sāriputta and Moggallāna in the case of Buddha Gotama.

By fulfilling the same perfections for a hundred thousand world cycles one can attain the enlightenment of a Great Disciple. By a Great Disciple is meant the distinguished noble ones, numbering eighty in the case of Buddha Gotama.

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Kaba-Aye, Yangon.

There is no mention of the period for maturity of an ordinary Noble Disciple. One has to infer it from statements in the commentaries. For example, in a commentary on the Arahant's supernormal power of recollection of former existences, an ordinary Noble One is said to be able to reflect on past existences ranging from a hundred to a thousand world cycles. This has generally been taken as the maturity period for an ordinary Noble Disciple.

Once, a frog was accidentally killed while listening with rapt attention to the mellifluous voice of the Buddha teaching. He was reborn as a *deva* from the merit of listening attentively to the Dhamma (even though he did not understand its meaning). Immediately, he came to pay homage to the Buddha, listened to his discourse, and gained Stream-winning. In his next existence he became an Arahant.¹ From this story we can see that there are just a few forms of existence in which a disciple's enlightenment is attained.

Regarding the Chief and Great Disciples, the periods for maturity stated earlier refer only to the periods that took place after these Noble Ones had already attained that stage where an aspirant receives formal recognition by a living Buddha who predicts when, where and under what circumstances he will attain which type of enlightenment. This is called 'receiving the word' (*vyākaraṇam*).

¹. See *Vessantara Jātaka*, No. 547

The scriptures are silent on the duration for fulfilling the perfections prior to such 'recognition' or 'assurance'. The interval between the arising of any two Buddhas is beyond reckoning. It may be a number of world-cycles. A Noble Disciple (as the term signifies) can arise only when a Buddha arises and/or his Teaching is extant. So one should note that those durations mentioned above refer only to those Noble Ones who encountered Gotama Buddha.

As to the types of Noble Disciples: in the commentary on the *Sutta Nipāta* three are mentioned: (i) one who depends on confidence for his enlightenment, (ii) one who depends on diligence, and (iii) one who depends on wisdom.

The Three Types of Solitary Enlightenment

Similarly, *Pacceka-bodhi* is also of three types. The commentaries say that the enlightenment of a Solitary Buddha is attained after fulfilling the ten perfections and the ten higher perfections for a period of two aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles.

The Three Types of Perfect Enlightenment

The Perfect Enlightenment of a Buddha is also of these same three types, which are also called: (i) *Ugghāṭitaññūbodhi*, (ii) *Vipañcitaññūbodhi*, and (iii) *Neyyabodhi*

respectively.

A Buddha who depends on wisdom for his enlightenment, after receiving the recognition or assurance, has to fulfil the ten perfections, the ten higher perfections and the ten supreme perfections for a period of four aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles to attain Buddhahood; a Buddha who depends on diligence, must fulfil the perfections in eight aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles; a Buddha who depends on confidence, must fulfil the perfections in sixteen aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles.

This is what has been recorded in the ancient commentaries. However, there is a variety of views on the subject of the different maturity periods for the three types of Buddhas. They are found in later works such as *Apadāna Aṭṭhakathā* and sub-commentaries such as *Sotattakī*, *Tathāgatuppatti*, *Mahāvamsaṭṭikā*, etc.

On this controversial subject an analogy given by the commentator on the *Sutta Nipāta* is worth noting. He says that trees and plants require a certain time before they can flower or bear fruit. Trees like the tamarind or the jack-fruit tree will not mature to blossom or bear fruit in one, two, three years, however carefully one nurtures them, even by watering a hundred times a day. Similarly, with the fulfilment for the prerequisites of maturity for Buddhahood. Let one give daily offerings on the scale of King Vessantara¹ to fulfil the perfections, one cannot attain any

¹. See *Vessantara Jātaka*, No. 547

premature Buddhahood. The periods for maturity necessarily vary for each of the three types of Buddhas (see *Sutta Nipāta Aṭṭhakathā*).

The Noblest Aspiration

What is meant by the Noblest Aspiration should be understood. The foundation (*mūla*), condition (*paccaya*) and the root-cause (*hetu*) of the Noblest Aspiration should be understood.. *Mahābodhi* should be understood. The foundation, condition and root-cause of *Mahābodhi* should be understood. What is meant by 'The Noblest Aspiration?' It is the verbal as well as mental undertaking that the bodhisatta had made at some point of time aeons before he took up the perfections.

It was made in these terms:

"As a man who knows his own strength, what use is there in getting to the 'yonder shore' (*nibbāna*) alone? I will attain to Supreme Wisdom and then convey men and *devas* to the yonder shore. "

That was the pledge that sent the ten thousand universes reeling and echoing in applause. That was the bodhisatta's earnest wish. For he earnestly aspired to Supreme Enlightenment thus:

"Knowing the Truth, I will let others know it. Freeing myself from the world, I will free others. Having crossed over, I will

enable others to cross."

This fervent and most daring aspiration is called The Noblest Aspiration (*Mahābhivhāra*).

Eight Factors that Make the Noblest Aspiration Opportune

For the noblest aspiration to materialise, eight factors or favourable conditions must be present:

"Manussattam liṅgasampatti, hetu satthāradassanam.

Pabbajjāguṇasampatti, adhikāroca chandatā.

*Aṭṭhadhamma samodhānā, abhinihāro samijjhati."*¹

1. The aspirant must be a human being (*manussattam*).
2. He must be a man, categorically (*liṅgasampatti*).
3. His spiritual maturity must be sufficient to attain Arahantship if he chose to (root-condition, *hetu*).
4. He must have met a living Buddha as his teacher (*satthāradassanam*).
5. He must have taken up the life of a recluse or a monk (*pabbajjā*).
6. He must have certain attainments to supernormal powers through concentration (*guṇasampatti*).
7. He must have made the utmost homage (*adhik-*

¹. *Aṭṭhas ālin ī; Buddhavaṃsa.*

āro) to the 'Three Gems', while making his wish for Buddhahood.

8. He must have a most ardent will to become a Buddha (*chandata*).

On all these eight factors being present the noblest aspiration materialises. Herein root-condition means the four *paccayas* and the four *hetu* which will be explained a little later.

Adhikāro means making offering including his own life.

Chanda means a burning desire amounting to will or resolve, a preparedness for any eventualities. For example, supposing the entire universe was covered with sharp-pointed spikes, and supposing it is quite certain that by traversing this whole perilous stretch of the universe one would attain Buddhahood at once, the bodhisatta would never have wavered a moment to cross it. Or, (as another illustration goes) suppose this universe was filled with glowing charcoal, the bodhisatta would not have wavered.

There are the illustrations given in the commentaries. In the commentary on the *Khadira ngāra Jātaka*, it is further said that, if the bodhisatta were to actually make the effort to cross, those steel spikes would have turned into a vast stretch of rubies (in respectful recognition of the bodhisatta's sincerity and resolve), and likewise, the burning charcoal would have turned into a sea of lotus flowers.

Of those eight opportune factors, the ardent wish of a Solitary Buddha is attended by three factors: (i) Meeting with a living Buddha, (ii) Making the utmost reverence and declaring the wish for Solitary Buddhahood, and (iii) The will to become a Solitary Buddha.

For the enlightenment of a disciple three factors are needed: (i) Meeting with a Solitary Buddha or an Arahant, (ii) Making the utmost reverence while making the wish for the enlightenment of a disciple, and (iii) The will to become an Arahant.

The Two Root-conditions

Among the eight factors, the third factor, *hetu*, means that a bodhisatta aspiring to Buddhahood must have the spiritual maturity. He must have developed the ten perfections so that, if he had chosen, he would have attained Solitary Buddhahood or Arahantship at the time when he wished for Buddhahood in the presence of the living Buddha who was to give him 'the assurance'. Further, he must then possess these two qualifications as necessary conditions:

1. *Karuṇāsampatti* — great compassion,
2. *Upāya Kosallasampatti* — skilful means.

Only when these two are present will a bodhisatta be duly recognised as such by the Buddha from whom he is to receive the assurance. By great compassion, is meant an exceptionally great kindness and compassion towards others that takes precedence over his own life. Skilful

means is the genius that is equal to the task at hand whenever he undertakes to help others. Literally, it is the special attainment of aptitude in strategy. These two are the conditions for the (now specific) undertaking of the perfections that will suffice for the declaration of the wish for Buddhahood.

The Four Conditions

There are four further conditions (*paccaya*), also called the four stages of maturity (*Buddhabhūmi*) necessary to qualify as a bodhisatta.

1. *Ussāha* — exceptional energy.
2. *Ummaṅga* — a keen intellect.
3. *Avaṭṭhāna* — steadfastness of purpose.
4. *Hitacariyā* — compassion, a loving-kindness for others, even outweighing one's own welfare.

The Four Attainments

1. *Upanissayasampatti* is the presence of perfections sufficient for Arahantship or Solitary Buddhahood at the time of the assurance.
2. *Karuṇajjhāsayasampatti* is the endowment of a compassionate heart or universal loving-kindness.
3. *Avihaññasampatti* is a natural disposition for helping others. It is the abiding disposition that never tires in fulfilling the perfections. A luxurious life in the celestial realms is boring to a bodhisatta

because it does not offer any opportunity to fulfil the perfections, particularly in serving others. Literally, *avihañña* means 'never being vexed'. It also implies 'spiritedness'. The duration necessary to mature the perfections ranges from four aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles to sixteen aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles yet the spirit of a bodhisatta is such that he feels he is going to get matured the next day. In other words, he is already anticipating Buddhahood that is forthcoming only at the end of such staggering periods. No duration is too long for him to wait.

4. *Kalyāṇamittasampatti* is care and respect in attending to the wise in all his existences, whether human or celestial.

The Natural Inclinations of a Bodhisatta

A bodhisatta is further endowed with six natural inclinations:

1. Inclination to non-greed; a bodhisatta is in the habit of seeing the danger in greed.
2. Inclination to non-hatred; a bodhisatta is in the habit of seeing the danger in hatred or anger.
3. Inclination to non-delusion; a bodhisatta is in the habit of seeing the danger in delusion.
4. Inclination to renunciation; a bodhisatta is in the habit of seeing the danger in sensuality.

5. Inclination to seclusion: a bodhisatta as in the habit of seeing the danger in socialising.
6. Inclination to escape from the cycle of rebirth: a bodhisatta is in the habit of seeing the danger in all forms of existence.

The Significance of the Natural Inclinations

Just as the pith makes a tree durable, the six inclinations make a bodhisatta durable or steadfast. One in whom these six inclinations are present, even though living in a sensuous world, is like a water-container made of dried gourd which has no mouth, immersed in deep water. A person lacking them is like an earthen waterpot with a wide mouth immersed in deep water. In this world, even among lay persons, there are certain people in whom these six inclinations are present. They resemble the water-gourd immersed in deep water. On the other hand, there are certain people, even among bhikkhus, who lack these six inclinations. They resemble the wide-mouthed waterpot immersed in shallow water. The sensuous world of persons is like deep water; the favourable facilities that the bhikkhus enjoy, such as secure monasteries, well-made furniture, fine utensils and nutritious food, etc., are like shallow water.

1. One who has no inclination to non-greed, does not like to listen to talk on dispelling greed. For them, a trifling thing worth a few pennies oppresses them with the heaviness of a mountain. To those having a

strong inclination to non-greed, the glories of a Universal Monarch are not worth a straw.

2. One who has no inclination to non-hatred, does not like to listen to advice on dispelling anger. The slightest provocation will make their blood boil, just like a spark falling on dry grass or leaves. However, those firm in their inclination to non-hatred, even if they have been angered by gross injury or injustice involving life or property, any ill-feeling leaves them after a short while, just as a fire brand that falls on a stack of green timber does not start a fire.

3. One who has no inclination to non-delusion, does not like to listen to talk on wisdom. They cannot see even a glimmer of the light of the Dhamma, which has the luminosity of eighty-four thousand candle-power, so to speak. They are shrouded in the greatest darkness of delusion regarding the real nature of the five aggregates of existence and the phenomena of mind and matter. Living in darkness, they die in darkness and let one existence after another go to rack and ruin. The darkness of their delusion is just like congenital blindness. How could one born blind ever see light even if eighty-four thousand suns were to shine together?

4. One who has no inclination to renunciation, does not like to listen to talk on the advantages of renouncing worldly life. Their attachment to the fruit of meritorious deeds such as giving, virtue, or keeping the eight precepts, prevents those deeds from becoming perfec-

tions. Attachment corrupts them just like a fungus that spoils the choicest seeds set apart for cultivation; or like the viruses, locusts and other pests that render a well-planted field infertile.

5. One who has no inclination to seclusion, does not like to listen to advice on seeking a solitary life in the forest. They are unable to tear themselves away from society for a quiet moment alone. Desire for companionship always pulls them into shallow friendships and it ensures that they remain there, like wardens guarding a prisoner.

6. One who has no inclination to escape from the cycle of rebirth does not like to listen to advice on the emptiness of life. They are under the serfdom of attachment to existence. That attachment does not allow them to aspire after higher practice of the Dhamma leading to Path Knowledge. Instead, it keeps them satisfied with parochial interests such as throwing lavish feasts, building pagodas, or donating monasteries and rest-houses. They are content with keeping the precepts, or merely remaining as devout laity with virtue, or recluses with virtue, or bhikkhus with virtue, or with some shallow achievement like teaching the scriptures, or lecturing on the Dhamma, or writing books. These are only merits that hold them fast to the world, the wholesome kamma that prolongs existence. It is like the British Raj, which allowed their colonial subjects to enter freely into small businesses, but would not tolerate any dealing with weapons of any description, for fear of rebellion.

Herein, two kinds of attachment to existence should be known: yearning for some better existence hereafter, and a fond clinging to the present existence. The present existence offers a precious chance to attain nibbāna. The *Tipitaka* is full of practical instructions to show the way to attain nibbāna. It is only because so-called Buddhists are enamoured of the present existence, and are pampering their little bodies, that they fight shy of the stringent discipline that gaining enlightenment demands. It's a pity that they are not able to gain even some concentration that recluses of ancient times gained without the benefit of the Buddha's teaching.

The Four Special Characteristics of a Bodhisatta

I shall now deal with the four special characteristics of a bodhisatta that distinguish him from a future Solitary Buddha. They are glaringly obvious as if they were garlands around his neck.

1. *Indriya* — the five moral qualities — unshakable confidence (*saddhā*), indefatigable diligence (*vīriya*), unwavering mindfulness (*sati*), steadfast concentration (*samādhi*) and unerring wisdom (*paññā*). This is the first special characteristic that distinguishes a bodhisatta.

2. *Paṭipatti* — the practice — A bodhisatta is always out to help others and places the welfare of others before his own. He never expects any return for the ef-

forts he is making, or for those already made towards other's welfare. Nor will he care to mention them, whether in his beneficiary's presence or not. Even if the beneficiary "bites the hand that feeds", a bodhisatta never turns back from any good deed. This holds true even where his life is in imminent danger. This is the bodhisatta's sense of wishing well for the present. With regard to merits accruing for the future from his present noble deeds in giving or in cultivating virtue, etc. a bodhisatta sets his sights higher than the solitary attainment of nibbāna, but only aims at the supreme enlightenment whereby he will be able to show the way to nibbāna. This is a bodhisatta's practice for the hereafter. This twofold practice also distinguishes a bodhisatta.

3. *Kosalla* — proficiency — This is manifested in sound reasoning (*cintāmayāñāṇa*) and presence of mind (*taṅkhaṇupattināṇa*) that never fail him. The future disciples or Solitary Buddhas also have these two intellectual qualities to a certain degree. However, they are liable to err occasionally. In the case of the bodhisatta, these two qualities are unerring. Such is the proficiency of a bodhisatta that makes him unique among other aspirants to enlightenment.

4. *Ajjhāsaya* — inclination — The texts treat this subject quite comprehensively with reference to the perfections but I shall describe it only briefly. Regarding giving, for example, a bodhisatta is very happy in making gifts. Whenever he has something to offer and a recipient

is not available, he feels impatient. Whenever he gives, he gives it with a light heart, and takes proper care in doing so. No amount of gifts that he has made would satisfy his zeal for giving. Whenever anybody asks anything of him, he does not judge him by class or creed, but always complies gladly. In doing so, he never thinks of his own needs, but tries to satisfy the other's needs only. Refer to the *Buddhavaṃsa* on this, particularly the passage beginning: "*Yathāpi kumbho sampuṇṇo*"¹ In that passage from the chapter on the perfection of generosity, 'inclination' is described thus:

"As when one overturns a large cooking pot filled with oil or butter-milk to empty it, not a drop or even the dregs remain, but runs out of the pot, so also when a bodhisatta make an offering . . . Whether he is a filthy blockhead of a labourer with bovine instincts, or a drunkard, or, better than them, a man who has taken refuge in the 'Triple Gem', or one who keeps the five precepts; or in short, whether he is good, average or bad, let him come for alms at any time, the bodhisatta never judges what type of fellow he is, or whether it is worth giving him

¹. See passage 118 on page 16 of the PTS edition under '*Dīpaṅkarabhuv-aṃso*', page 315 of the Burmese *Chaṭṭhasaṅgītipiṭakam* under '*Sumedha-patthanākathā*' or page 481 of Vol.33 of the new Thai '*Dayyaratṭhassa Saṅgītipiṭakaam*'. For a translation into English please see § 118-120 on page 20 of '*Sacred Books of the Buddhist*', Vol. XXI

so much or anything at all; but never discriminating, never hesitating, [he gives freely]."

Of the different classes of beggars ranging from wretched to excellent the bodhisatta never bothers to size up a person who calls at the door for some help or alms. The amount of alms he gives is also not dependent on the class of beggar. This kind of completely indiscriminate offering is another characteristic of a bodhisatta.

In respect of the nine remaining perfections, this example on giving should be applied with due alteration of the details. Those not conversant with Pāli can get the essence of what the text says from the passage quoted above.

These days there are some who wish for Buddhahood, and wisdom-oriented Buddhahood at that, even though their conduct barely qualifies them to become ordinary disciples. What characterises them is the bold banner of craving-dependent deeds, which cry out for public recognition and yearn for glorious results hereafter.

"Who ever does a thing for nothing?" these people are apt to protest, "to expect good results out of a good deed is only natural." But remember, a thing done without expecting future rewards brings a greater reward than is imagined. More significantly, it amounts to the real practice of perfections essential for enlightenment. A meritorious deed wishing for good results brings relatively limited results and does not amount to fulfilling perfections. Remember the example of the fungus in seed-grain or pests in a plantation.

Some say that gradual maturity is the more likely process, for supreme enlightenment here and now is not possible. So why should one not store up merit for better existences and greater prosperity? My reply is this.

Small plants thrive just during the rainy season. Only one in a thousand or ten thousand among them might survive the long dry and hot months till the next rainy season sets in. Such a rare plant must be extra robust and hardy to have struck its main root deep enough. Such rare plants obviously need not fear the severity of the climate after having passed three or four rainy seasons.

By the same analogy, to achieve budding perfections is only possible when the Buddha's teaching is still extant. Whatever little perfection is achieved during this opportune period has very little chance of surviving to be developed in the time of the next Buddha. Those sham deeds of merit will certainly lose their potential once the teaching has disappeared. Very few could survive the uncertainties of the intervening dark ages. During those dark ages, right view is lost to humanity and wrong views prevail. One who has acquired only sham deeds of merit falls into wrong views, and so their little potential of merit is soon gone. Imagine the fate of one who repeatedly falls into wrong view for two, three or more existences. This is the unstable nature of the merits of a person who has not struck roots deep down, who has not attained stability. Such perishing of budding merits is the rule with most beings. Innumerable existences have already passed wherein

they acquired some flimsy merits, only to be lost again by the next existence. This process of acquisition and perishing goes on in perpetuity for the overwhelming majority of beings. This is why the idea of 'gradual maturity' does not hold. It would be a great pity if one depends on such a mistaken idea and goes on hoping for the perfections while actually longing for the endless cycle of rebirth.

The four conditions, the four root-causes and the six inclinations are the supports for the declaration of the noblest aspiration and for cultivating the higher perfections.

On declaring the noblest aspiration and receiving the assurance of future Buddhahood, the bodhisatta at once becomes endowed with the four powers (*bala*), the four marvellous attributes (*acchariya*), the two skills in strategy regarding compassion, the four stages of maturity, the six inclinations, etc. However, since what I have said so far should suffice to answer Maung Thaw's question I shall not deal with any further details.



Chapter (Two)

Maung Thaw's second question relates to the following:

1. The definition, characteristics and significance of the Five Aggregates.
2. The definition, characteristics and significance of the Four Truths.
3. A treatment of the five aggregates in terms of the Four Truths.
4. The definition, characteristics and significance of the Noble Eightfold Path and its practical application leading to nibbāna.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF MATERIALITY TO BE PERCEIVED

There are two approaches to the definition, characteristics and *significance* of the five aggregates, namely, the *Suttanta* method and the *Abhidhamma* method.

The *suttanta* method is the Buddha's approach to the Dhamma from the standpoint of the layman. The Buddha gave succinct discourses to provide the ordinary person with a practical method for the cultivation of insight knowledge and thereby attaining the Path Knowledge and its fruition in this very life.

The *Abhidhamma* method, however, offers a profound and exhaustive analytical treatment of all aspects of the Dhamma, with no particular reference to the practice for insight development.

The latter method is actually meant for the Noble Ones for the purpose of sharpening analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidāñāṇa*). It is not suitable as a method of insight training for the ordinary person because it is too subtle. For example, those who have small boats, only ply the river for their livelihood. They should not venture out to the deep ocean. Only if they have ocean-going vessels should they make an ocean voyage.

These days, people take up the holy life not actually intent on gaining Path Knowledge, but merely to acquire merit, purported to gradually mature as perfections. Practice of insight development is not popular. Learning and teaching of scriptures to develop wisdom is the usual practice. So the *Abhidhamma* method is popular. In this treatise, however, I shall employ the *Suttanta* method only.

"Bhikkhus, one who has an earnest desire to understand the true nature of materiality, whether a bhikkhu or a layman, wishing to rid himself of the defilements, who

is in the habit of contemplating materiality from three approaches, and who is proficient in the seven aspects of materiality is, in this Teaching, called accomplished, one who has lived the noble life, a perfect one or an excellent man."

"Bhikkhus, how is a bhikkhu proficient in the seven aspects? Bhikkhus, herein, a bhikkhu discerns¹ the true nature of materiality; he discerns the origin of materiality; he discerns the cessation of materiality; he discerns the practice leading to the cessation of materiality; he discerns the satisfaction of materiality; he discerns the danger of materiality; and he discerns the escape from materiality."

"Bhikkhus, what is materiality? Materiality comprises the four primary elements: extension, cohesion, heat and motion, and the twenty-four material qualities derived from them. Bhikkhus, this is called materiality."

"So long as nutriment arises, materiality arises. Once the nutriment is exhausted, materiality ceases."

"It is the Noble Eightfold Path taught by me, that is the only way, the practice of which leads to the cessation of materiality. And what are the eight constituents? They are: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These eight constitute the Path."

"The pleasure and joy arising dependent on materiality constitute the satisfaction of materiality."

¹. By discerning (*pajānāti*) is meant seeing the thing in its real nature, which means with insight. It is not a mere comprehension by the intellect and the ability to discuss it cogently.

"The transience, unsatisfactoriness and unreliability of materiality, constitute the danger of materiality."

"The avoidance of desire and lust for materiality, constitutes the escape from materiality."

The True Nature of Materiality

1. The four primary elements are the elements of extension, cohesion, heat and motion.
2. The five sense-bases are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body.
3. The five sense-objects are visible form, sound, smell, taste and touch.
4. The two material qualities of sex are femininity and masculinity.
5. The material quality of vitality.
6. The material base of consciousness is the heart-base.
7. The material quality of nutrition.

1. The four Primary Elements

- i. The quality of different degrees of hardness or softness is the element of extension in the ultimate sense; colloquially called the earth element.
- ii. The quality of liquidity or cohesion is the element of cohesion; colloquially called the water element.

- iii. The quality of temperature, hot or cold, is the element of heat; colloquially called the fire element.
- iv. The quality of motion, swelling, inflation, pressure, and support is the element of motion; colloquially called the wind element.

Due to the collective concept (*samūhapaññatti*) people usually conceive the four primary elements as a composite whole rather than in their ultimate sense, which can only be discerned through insight-knowledge. When insight arises, one sees that not the tiniest atom remains which is compact or solid.

The three elements of extension, motion and heat can be felt by touch. Even children know whether a thing is soft or hard. However, they are not able to discern the ultimate sense of what they only superficially recognise as the earth element. They know whether a thing is cold or hot, but they cannot discern the ultimate sense of what they only recognise as the fire element. Similarly they know that something moves, or supports, or is pressed, or swells, but they do not discern the element of motion there. If one is able to penetrate conceptions about the four primary elements and realise their ultimate nature, then one is said to be proficient in materiality, the first aspect of discernment or perception.

2. The Five Sense-bases

The eye, ear, nose and tongue are the sense-bases through which the respective sense-consciousness arises. Body-sensitivity has for its basis the whole body externally and internally. These are kamma-conditioned material qualities or internal sense-bases.

3. The Five Sense-objects

The five sense-objects should need no explanation. Only that of touch may be commented on, as that which pertains to the primary elements of extension, heat and motion. These three primary elements are the tangible sense-objects.

4. The Material Qualities of Sex

- i. The material quality of femininity that governs a person's whole body, distinguishing her as a woman, or the condition of being female.
- ii. The material quality of masculinity that governs a person's whole body, distinguishing him as a man, or the condition of being male.

5. Vitality

The vitality that gives a being its life, or the vitality of the kamma-originated material qualities, pervades the whole body.

6. *The Material Base of Consciousness*

The material base of consciousness or the mind is called the heart-base. It is the source from which kind or unkind thoughts flow.

7. *The Material Quality of Nutrition*

The material quality that nourishes the whole body, and which may be called the sustenance of the four primary elements, is the element of nutrition. The need for all beings in the sensual realms to eat, is the principle underlying this element. It is just like an oil-lamp that needs constant replenishment to be kept alight.¹

Of the eighteen material qualities mentioned above, the four primary elements are like the trunk, the boughs and the branches of a tree; the remaining fourteen, which are called 'derived materially,' are like the leaves, flowers and fruits. When the impermanence of the four primary elements is perceived, the delusion of personality disappears. Derived materiality does not then obstruct perception. That, it should be noted, is why the Buddha speaks of the four great primaries but does not define them. These four primary or essential elements are self-evident.

All materiality comprising animate or inanimate things, may be reduced to atoms that, on further analysis, are included in one of these eighteen species of material

¹. The author notes here, "Pāli terminology makes for heavy reading and usually fails to communicate, so here I shall use only everyday Burmese to explain abstract matters."

qualities. One should contemplate one's own body to gain insight. Once the ultimate sense of materiality in each of the four primary elements is perceived clearly, the infinite materiality of the universe is seen in the same light. Therefore, contemplate persistently on the primary elements.

Derived material phenomena are not so evident for they are interrelated and subtle. Examine what is already evident; do not try to see what is imperceptible. It will only be a waste of effort. Focus your attention on only one of the four primary elements. Once any one of them is perceived well, the remaining three will also become clearly discernible.

The body is a composite of ultimate realities, i.e. of things each having its individual essence. Just as a man with poor sight has to use glasses to read a book, use the Buddha's teaching as an aid to see the ultimate truth that is clearly visible inside your body. Try to see the arising and vanishing that is constantly taking place within you. With sufficient zeal and concentration you should be able to comprehend things quite vividly. I am impressing it on you in a variety of ways because this is an elusive matter.

This first aspect needs to be properly perceived whereby the primary elements become clear to you in their ultimate sense, without confusing them with the collective concept. One cannot stress this too strongly because the remaining aspects will not be discerned unless you have the first one well and truly within your grasp.

So, spare no pains to perceive it in the first place.

The Origin and Cessation of Materiality

These are the second and third aspects to be perceived. Constant arising is called '*samudaya*'. Cessation or vanishing, is called '*nirodho*'. *Samudaya* is used in two senses: in the first sense it refers to the constant arising of phenomena from conception to the moment of death, in a given existence. The second sense refers to the arising of another existence when the present one ends.

Nirodha is also used in two senses: the constant cessation of phenomena from conception to the moment of death in a given existence; and the cessation of all phenomena, once and for all, when one attains nibbāna where there is no more fresh existence, and one escapes from the cycle of rebirth. This is also called *nibbāna nirodha*.

Nutriment (*āhāra*) is the sustenance of existence. It is of two kinds: physical nutriment and mental nutriment. Physical nutriment is the material quality of nutrition. Mental nutriment means contact, volition and consciousness.

The past kamma that accompanies one throughout the cycle of rebirth is comparable to a field; the rebirth-consciousness is like the seed-grain; the craving that accompanies kamma is like the fertility of the soil — "*Kammaṃ khettaṃ, viññāṇaṃ bījaṃ, taṇhā sineho*".

In the above quotation, kamma is the mental nutriment of volition; rebirth-consciousness is the nutriment of

consciousness. It is the latter which provides the seed for a new existence at the moment of rebirth, giving rise to a new material aggregate, i.e., the body.

In lighting a candle, light appears as soon as the flame is lit. Similarly, at the moment of rebirth, the aggregate of materiality appears the instant that rebirth-consciousness arises. The earliest appearance of materiality is like the germination of the seed. Our fullgrown bodies are the natural development from rebirth-consciousness like the seed that has germinated and grown into a tree. It should be understood that germination can occur only where there is rebirth-consciousness. If rebirth-consciousness does not arise when a person dies with the exhaustion of the past kamma there is no germination. That is what is meant by the Buddha's words:

"When nutrition arises, materiality arises.
When nutrition is exhausted, materiality
ceases."

This is the explanation of the second uses of *samudaya*, meaning the phenomenon of incessant rebirth of new aggregates of materiality. Similarly with *nirodha*, the cessation of rebirth, the total release from the cycle of rebirths. This second sense of the arising and cessation is quite obvious. This is not vital for the development of insight knowledge. What is relevant here is the constant arising and cessation taking place right now from the moment of conception or birth to the moment of death.

Here is a simile:

Let us suppose that a man-size flame is set alight that is meant to last a hundred years. Imagine the amount of fuel oil that must be supplied every day and night. The life of the flame depends on the fuel. The flame can remain the size of a man only when the lamp is full. It tends to become smaller as the fuel falls. When the oil is used up, the flame goes out. Imagine the amount of fuel consumed by the lamp each day from its first day of being lit. Visualise the daily refuelling. Then consider how the flame gets renewed because the fuel is being replenished. See how the flame exhausts itself due to the exhaustion of the fuel that has kept it alight. Try to distinguish a rejuvenated flame, after refuelling, from the flame that has exhausted itself, having consumed all the fuel. Suppose the new fuel is coloured, and that it takes on the same colour as the fuel. For a certain period white fuel will produce a white flame. Then as the white fuel is used up, if red fuel is fed into the lamp, the colour of the flame will turn from white to red. Again, with yellow fuel, the flame turns yellow, and so on. Thus compare the old and the new in the same flame.

Preconceived notions about what the eye sees obstruct perception. Expel these preconceptions with insight. Even in an ordinary flame (not distinguished by colour) constant change is observable if one looks closely. Every motion represents change, change from the old to the new. As the new arises, the old vanishes. The arising

of the new must be understood as the vanishing of the old, which is *nirodha*.

The temperature-originated materiality that is the body, which will remain when a person dies, is just like the lamp and the wick in our simile. The kamma-originated materiality, the consciousness-originated materiality and the nutriment-originated materiality, which combine to give the illusion of a person, is like the man-size flame. The daily food intake is like the daily refuelling. Our body gets the calories we need to sustain the body from the food we take. As the food gets digested the finer materiality in our body gets reduced. When food intake is discontinued and nutrition is exhausted, the finer materiality as well as the kamma-originated materiality that constitute the body, cease to function. All the different physical phenomena that constitute the body are totally dependent on nutrition. The exhaustion of nutrition from the previous meal and the cessation of the older materiality go together, just as they had arisen together. The arising of nutrition from a later meal and the arising of the new materiality also coincide.

If you consider all the living beings on this great earth and visualise their enormous struggle for food, you will realise the startling rate at which materiality changes in all living things. Then the manner in which one sustains oneself from the moment of birth, seeking to extend one's life with food, will become evident. As one can visualise the changing colours of the flame after refuelling with dif-

ferent fuel, try to visualise the exhaustion of the nutriment from a fresh meal with the consequent changes in materiality. Focus on the changes that are taking place from moment to moment. The arising of fresh cells and fresh material qualities as you take in new food, when new nutrition arises, and the feeling of well-being experienced, like the gathering of clouds within yourself, is the appearance of a new lease of life, called *samudaya*. The gradual dwindling away of vigour after about five or six hours, when the nutriment has been consumed, is called *nirodha*. So the Buddha said, "When nutrition arises, materiality arises; when nutrition ceases, materiality ceases."

The Practice Leading to the Cessation Materiality

The knowledge that has perceived the first, second and third aspects of materiality is called mundane right view, which develops into supramundane right view or Path Knowledge after application.

Right thought, the indispensable associate of right view, is also of two types: mundane right thought and right thought as Path Knowledge. In our example above, the visualisation of the process of change is the function of right view. What brings forth this visualisation is right thought. Only when right thought prevails, can right view occur at all. The changes taking place within the body every moment, the incessant arising and vanishing of materiality that come to the mind's eye of a meditator, is due to the

presence of right view. Bringing right view into focus is the function of right thought.

How Does Right Thought Function?

It focuses one's attention on the unsatisfactory facts of life. The immensity of the need for food in all living things; the need for regular food intake, not less than twice a day; how one feels when one is full, when one begins to feel hungry, and when one starves. It lets one ponder, for example, on the hypothetical consequences of a great famine on this continent of Asia — how soon this whole continent would be turned into a vast graveyard. These are the kind of thoughts that are called right thought.

If one contemplates where constant changes are taking place in one's body, even during a single sitting one may come to discern the arising and vanishing of physical phenomena. At the start of a sitting, nothing in particular is felt, for the body is at ease. After a while, slight heat is often felt either in the legs or another part of the body, then you may feel the heat intensify; then you might feel numb, then a tingling sensation, then discomfort in the leg, etc. Such changes, which are bound to occur, can readily be observed.

By closely observing the phenomena within oneself, the continuous arising of new materiality is perceived, like the gathering of clouds. Then at once, the disappear-

ance of those, same phenomena is perceived, like clouds being wafted away by the wind. This is the function of right view. The focusing of attention on directly observable phenomena is the function of right thought. It is only with the appropriate application by right thought that right view can clearly discern the true nature of phenomena. In fact, such perception can occur in any posture for, whether you notice it or not, phenomena arise and vanish all of the time.

Once right view and right thought become developed and get established as supramundane insight, three factors mature that have the power to remove all bodily and verbal misconduct, for which the latent tendency has accumulated from the past. These three factors are right speech, right action and right livelihood. Then, right effort means zeal in one's undertaking. It also goes by the name of '*āttāppa*', which means 'that which harasses the defilements'. Another name for right effort is *sammappadhāna*. It has three aspects: *ārambha*, *nikkama* and *parakkama*. *Ārambha* is promptitude and exertion. *Nikkama* is alertness that does not tolerate sloth, torpor and indolence. *Parakkama* is vigour that never allows one to slacken in one's right efforts. It is due to the lack of this kind of effort that people do not attain to *jhāna* and Path Knowledge.

Right mindfulness means the constant awareness that does not allow the mind to stray away from the object of contemplation even for a fraction off a second. Right concentration is steadiness of the mind that does slip off its

object of contemplation.

These latter six constituents of the Path are also each of two types, mundane and supramundane. Here, we are concerned only with the supramundane factors.

Those eight factors are the Truth of the Path. Of those eight, right speech, right action and right livelihood appear automatically once a meditator has achieved insight. The aim of insight meditation is to perceive the real nature of one's body in the ultimate sense, which dispels delusion. To develop insight knowledge, one needs right mindfulness, right effort, right concentration and right thought. With these four factors as the locomotive, right view is ready for the inward journey. The right track for the journey is just a fathom in length: the height of an average human. The journey one makes is the close observation of phenomena taking place within one's body — from head to foot, and then from foot to head — during which, concept will gradually yield to perception. By doggedly pursuing this perception, one can, with sufficient diligence, knock at the door of nibbāna in seven day's time. If not in seven days, it might take one month, or one year, or two, three, or up to seven years. This is explicitly mentioned at various places in the texts. Remember *samudaya* and *nirodha* in their second meanings: i.e. the total cessation of the five aggregates and rebirth, is the *nirodha* which is nibbāna. This is the supramundane *nirodha*.

The Satisfaction of Materiality

“Whatever pleasure and joy arises dependent on materiality, this is the satisfaction (*assāda*) of materiality.”

In the fifth aspect requiring proficiency in materiality, by the term '*assāda*' the text means the pleasure one can enjoy in the favourable planes of existence: wealthy human existence, the six celestial realms, or the *brahmā* realms. It means the physical well-being, pleasure and joy that can be experienced in those existences. Here we shall confine the explanation to the human existence.

When some agreeable visible object, such as a beautiful shape or colour, comes into contact with the eye, seeing occurs and a pleasant feeling coupled with joy arises. Just as ants are greatly fond of honey or treacle, sentient beings are greatly fond of two things, pleasure and joy. Just as moths are enamoured of the light of a flame, beings are enamoured of pleasure and joy. This is the pleasant aspect of materiality, i.e. the delight in the eye and some visible object.

In the same way, when some agreeable sound comes into contact with the ear, hearing occurs, and a pleasant feeling coupled with joy arises. When some agreeable taste comes into contact with the tongue, tasting occurs and a pleasant feeling coupled with joy arises. When something agreeable to the touch comes into contact with the body, every part of which is sensitive to touch, touching occurs and a pleasant feeling coupled with joy arises.

The mind may be likened to the crystal-clear water that oozes from a spring, for it manifests itself from the heart-base in pristine purity. It is capable of taking all the six senses as its object. So when some agreeable object such as a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or idea come into its range, either apprehension or comprehension occurs and a pleasant feeling coupled with joy arises. However, since we are currently discussing the aggregate of materiality, the mind will not be dealt with here.

The Danger of Materiality

"Whatever pain or change occurs dependent on materiality, this is the danger (*ādīṇavo*) of materiality." In the sixth aspect requiring proficiency in materiality, the transient nature of the aggregate of materiality will be evident if insight is developed that perceives the burden of seeking nutrition, the arising and cessation taking place in one's body — as in the analogy of the man-sized flame. The daily struggle for earning a living, the constant care the body needs, the arduous acquisition of wealth, are painful, and these activities take place on account of this body. When this truth is perceived by insight knowledge, that is right view.

Liability to disease and death, liability to all sorts of external hazards such as fire, drowning, venomous snakes, wild beasts, evil spirits, or liability to accidents that might cause injury or death — all these are the manifestations of

the changeable nature of materiality. They are quite obvious to one with right view. This is the sixth aspect.

I shall now illustrate the fifth and sixth aspects. The British administrative authorities, in their campaign to get rid of stray dogs, used poisoned meat, which was thrown about wherever stray dogs mostly collect. The dogs, being enticed by the flavour and rich taste of the bait, rushed for it, little suspecting any danger. The result is obvious. Herein, the enticing flavour and rich taste are the satisfaction of the poisoned meat; the hidden poison in the meat is its danger. This is an illustration of how pleasure lures the unwary and how danger besets them. In this case the real culprits are the four external enemies: the colour, the smell, the taste and the poison in the meat, together with the four internal enemies: the eye, the nose, the tongue and craving. Poison alone would not have caused the death of the dogs unless it was hidden in the meat. Poison hidden inside a lump of clay would be no danger because it lacks attraction. If the dogs had no eye, no nose, no tongue and no craving, the bait could not have endangered them either. It is only because the external and the internal agencies worked together that the dogs succumbed to them.

Let's take another example, the example of the baited hook in fishing. You should understand on proper reflection that the materiality constituting yourself, your family and all material objects such as food, shelter, clothing, are in reality like baited hooks. The pleasure and joy

arising from craving for all those things are just like the attractions of the bait. It is because you have lustfully snatched them and taken them to be your own property, that you are subjected to the poisonous influence of those possessions, being harassed daily. In fact, all those possessions are impermanent, unsatisfactory and unreliable materiality, fraught with evil consequences.

How does impermanence oppress you every day?

How does unsatisfactoriness oppress you every day?

How does unreliability oppress you every day?

Impermanence is the accomplice of death. It is like an ogre or a forest fire that consumes everything. It consumes one's food from one's mother's milk, until the last drop of water at the moment of death. It also consumes the fresh cells and all forms of materiality, namely, kamma-originated materiality and consciousness-originated materiality, that are sustained by regular feeding. The ogre that is impermanence devours everything that is fed into our body, leaving nothing. It is just like feeding a huge flame with oil. Try and perceive how, for instance, the nutrition that sustains the eye is all consumed by the ogre that works in the eye. Likewise try and perceive this with respect to the other organs.

To give a further example:

A certain man has a spendthrift wife. He works hard and hands over all his earning to his wife who stays at home squandering it. Give her a hundred, she makes short

shrift of it; give her a thousand, ten thousand, any amount — her desire for spending never gets satiated. Just imagine how a man would feel with a wife who enslaves him and causes his ruin. The ogre of impermanence that lurks within us, likewise oppresses us everywhere. Suffering also oppresses us in the same manner. The way that unreliability oppresses us is only too evident.

The Escape from Materiality

“Whatever is the abandonment of desire and lust for materiality, this is the escape (*nissaraṇam*) from materiality.”

In the seventh aspect requiring proficiency in materiality, the Buddha points to the escape, here and now, from the clutches of materiality, when the insight knowledge of right view has arisen in one who perceives the pleasures as well as the dangers of materiality, those twin accomplices which have been oppressing us continuously from the beginningless round of births.

The truth of the origin of suffering is craving, which is manifested in desire and lust for the body. How do desire and lust cling to one's body? One believes, “This is my body; this is my hand, my leg, my head, my eye, and so on.” Furthermore, when the eye sees something, one believes, “I see it.” Likewise one believes, “I hear it”, “I smell it”, “I taste it” or “I touch it”. The cessation of craving, which is the origin of all suffering, is the escape from

materiality.

It is only when craving is present that new aggregates of materiality arise after one's death. If craving is extinguished here and now, no fresh materiality will arise after death. This will then be the last death, for there is no materiality or no 'body' to suffer another death. That is how one escapes from the aggregate of materiality or the clutches of materiality. This should now be quite clear.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF FEELING TO BE PERCEIVED

The remaining aggregates will only be explained in brief.

The True Nature of Feeling

"O bhikkhus, there are six kinds of feeling: feeling originating in eye-contact, feeling originating in ear-contact, feeling originating in nose-contact, feeling originating in tongue-contact, feeling originating in body-contact and feeling originating in mind-contact. When, on seeing a visible object, one feels sad, neutral or joyous, this is feeling originating in eye-contact. Similarly, on hearing a sound, smelling an odour, savouring a taste, touching some tangible object . . . When the contact is felt in the mind and a feeling of joy arises, that feeling is called feeling originating in mind-contact."

If something causes a pleasant feeling, you call it 'good'; if it causes an unpleasant feeling you call it 'bad'. These are the criteria by which the world judges things, animate or inanimate; and you value those things accordingly. So we set a value on visible objects depending on the degree of pleasure they give to the eye. The greater the pleasure, the higher the value. Similarly with the other sense-objects. Remember the great fondness of ants for honey or treacle that we illustrated in our discussion on the aggregate of materiality.

The Origin and Cessation of Feeling

When some visible object, such as a shape or colour, comes into contact with the eye, a continuous stream of feelings brought about by such contact arises. These feelings are called 'feelings originating in eye contact'. When the visible object disappears from sight the feelings cease immediately. The arising of the feelings in the eye is called the origin of the feeling originating in eye-contact. The ceasing of those feelings is called the cessation of the feeling originating in eye contact. If you want to experience the feeling again you have to look at the object again. The moment the contact between the object and the eye is re-established, the feelings in the eye arise again. The moment the eye does not focus on the object, those feelings cease.

Likewise, when some sound is produced and comes into contact with the ear, a continuous stream of feelings arises in the ear, called 'feelings originating in ear-contact'. When the sound disappears those feelings cease at once. If the feeling is to arise again, the sound must be repeated. The same with a smell, when it is produced and comes into contact with the nose 'feelings originating in nose-contact' arise in the nose. When the smell disappears, the feelings cease. Again, when certain tastes like sweet or sour are placed on the tongue, 'feelings originating in tongue-contact' arises at the tongue. The moment those tastes disappear, then the feelings cease. When hard or soft, hot or cold, stiff or flaccid objects, come into contact with the body, whether internally or externally, 'feeling originating in body-contact' arise, wherever the contact is made. When the contact disappears the feelings cease totally. When some idea is in contact with the mind, 'feelings originating in mind contact' arise. When the mind stops thinking of the idea the feeling ceases at once.

The above six kinds of feeling are being experienced at their respective sense-bases all of the time. However, those lacking in right view take them not just as feelings, but as "I see it", "I hear it", etc. This is the tenacious, mistaken view of the whole thing called 'personality-belief' or 'ego belief' (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). When pleasant feelings arise, the average deluded person thinks, "I feel fine". When unpleasant feeling arise, the thinks, "I feel depressed." Thus the ego is always assumed to exist

with respect to all feelings that arise and vanish at the six sense-bases.

Just as the microbes infesting a sore can only be observed through a microscope, so too only through insight knowledge can one clearly observe the six kinds of feeling arising and vanishing in rapid succession at their respective sense-bases. All the six kinds of feelings arise due to contact.

From Contact Arises Feeling

When a sense-object meets its corresponding sense-base, the mind adverts to the object. That is what is meant by contact. Only when the mind adverts well does apprehension arise; and only when the sense-object is apprehended does feeling arise. Since the feeling arises from contact, it is called "feeling originating in contact." It is like saying, "Jack, son of Richard" for clearer identification. Since feeling has contact as its origin, when contact disappears, feeling ceases.

"When contact arises, feeling arises. When contact ceases feeling ceases," it is said here too.

The Practice Leading to the Cessation of Feeling

What has been said with reference to materiality applies here too. Herein, right view means insight knowledge of the aggregate of feeling. It also means penetrating

knowledge of the aggregate of feeling.

The Satisfaction and Danger of Feeling

It was said above that the pleasant feeling, which causes pleasure and joy, is the enjoyment of materiality. With materiality, feeling is the agency that brings pleasure and joy. With feeling itself, now as the principle as well as the agent, the enjoyment has double significance. Hence, the danger that lurks in feeling is also far greater than with materiality as it has a more immediate effect.

The feeling of enjoyment of an object occurs at its relevant sense-base only while the object and the sense-base are in contact. With the disappearance of the object at its relevant door the feeling vanishes instantly. So we feel a pleasant taste only while it is on the tongue or palate, and the moment we swallow it, the feeling is no more. In fact, the feeling is lost even at the upper end of the tongue itself. This transience is observable in the feelings connected with all six senses. Therefore, contemplate hard to perceive the constant oppression that feeling subjects you to due to its transience, its changeability and consequent unsatisfactoriness.

The Escape from Feeling

The means of escape is within you. The feelings that arise in you can never be dangerous if you are not

enamoured by them. When the craving for feeling ceases, the danger is simply not there at all. To one who does not care for gold or silver the dangers associated with them do not arise. In other words, a penniless man need have no danger from thieves. It is only if one is greatly pleased with his property that the dangers to that property worry him. If he does not cling to the property, but is quite detached from it, the property in itself is not dangerous. In short, his detached attitude or nonattachment to the feelings as they arise is the escape from feeling.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF PERCEPTION TO BE PERCEIVED

The text for the aggregate of perception does not differ much from that for the aggregate of feeling, in most places; one has only to substitute the word '*saññā*' for '*vedanā*'. In the definition it goes as perception of visual object, perception of sound, perception of smell, perception of taste, perception of touch, and perception of ideas.

From early infancy, one has learnt to recognise and memorise things. Beginning from "That's Mum," "That's Dad", "That's Teddy", to all the things that a child takes notice of — the time of day, the directions — the process of noting and remembering things with their names is what is meant by perception. Perceptions, of course, go together with the six sense-objects. A visual object can only be recognised and memorised by the eye, a sound

only by the ear, and so on. Perception then widens to abstract ideas, skills, knowledge, beliefs, etc., according to one's upbringing, race, tradition, culture, and according to the plane of one's existence. The first five kinds of perceptions should need no further explanation.

Dhamma saññā is the conception that perceives the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body (as the sense-base), the mind (i.e. concepts of good or bad, etc.); the sensations or feelings, concepts or perceptions in general, volition or will, applied thought, sustained thought, effort, desire; greed, anger, pride or conceit; confidence, wisdom; killing as misconduct, stealing as misconduct, lying as misconduct; giving as meritorious deed, virtue as meritorious deed, wisdom or attainment of proficiency in insight training; and so forth. These and a myriad other perceptions, are recognised and remembered. They are not taught but learnt from one's natural environment and imbued by culture and tradition. One born in a virtuous family is likely to acquire perceptions about virtuous things. One born in a hunter's or fisherman's family is likely to acquire perceptions about wicked things. Thus perceptions can have an infinite range. Contemplate diligently to gain insight into perception as a separate kind of element in itself, within yourself and in others.

When people say, "I remember" or "I know", they are usually just instances of a deluded belief in the existence of a person or a self when, in fact, there is no such thing at all. The truth is that there are only phenom-

ena, arising and vanishing due to relevant conditions. For example, a leprous man can never see the carrier germs infecting the sores on his body. With the aid of a microscope a doctor can let him see the germs, every arising and decaying. Then he should realise, perhaps to his consternation, that the sores are not his but in fact the habitat of the germs only. Similarly, when you gain insight knowledge, you can see empirically that there is no self, but just perceptions originating at the six sense-bases. Only then do you perceive rightly, which is insight knowledge. What you have all along recognised and remembered as "my eye" is merely the material quality of sense cognition. What you thought was, "I see" is just feeling originating in eye contact. What you thought was "my seeing" is but the perception of form or colour. Try to realise the truth of the other perceptions likewise. Then you will realise that it is a play of the six perceptions on your mind deluded by your own ignorant bias, into thinking and believing firmly — that all those are your acts of knowing and remembering.

The remaining six aspects in the aggregate of perception will be discussed later on together with our discussion on the aggregate of consciousness.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF MENTAL FORMATIONS TO BE PERCEIVED

Rūpasañcetanā means the volition that motivates the functioning of material phenomena. So for the six

mental formations we have six volitions. The Buddha mentions volition in this context because it is the leading factor, though there are many other mental formations such as contact (*phassa*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), attention (*manasikāra*), initial application (*vitakka*), sustained application (*vicāra*), energy (*viññāya*), joy (*pīti*), will (*chanda*), greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), pride (*māna*), envy (*issā*), meanness (*macchariya*), worry (*kukkucca*), sloth (*thina*), torpor (*middha*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), confidence (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), moral shame (*hiri*), moral dread (*ottappa*) or wisdom (*paññā*).

The Analogy of the Train

In a locomotive the steam motivates the engine whose constituent parts function together and drive the locomotive. The engine starts functioning due to steam-power and it goes on functioning due to the presence of steam-power. All the parts of the engine are motivated simultaneously so that they work in harmony, with the capacity to pull the train at good speed for long distances.

This body is like the train. The heart-base is like the boiler of the engine. The volition is like the steam-power, which activates the constituent parts of the engine. As volition arises, it motivates the various parts of the body through the material quality that is the element of motion. This motivating power is astonishingly powerful; it

moves very rapidly and motivates all the limbs of the body in the required manner. It is just like the train being pulled along the track by steam-power. This is how volition drives bodily actions.

The volition working behind speech may be compared to the whistle that the boiler occasionally produces. The volition working in the mind may be likened to the steam generated by the boiler.

Volition associated with greed directs its motivating force onto the bodily, verbal and mental functioning of the body so that actions arise, which manifest greed. In the same way, volition associated with hatred or anger motivates the functioning of the body, and bodily and verbal expressions, as well as a mental attitude of anger are the result. Other volitions, such as initial application, sustained application or energy, also motivate the bodily, verbal and mental functions, resulting in one's applying the mind to a mind-object (*vitakka*), or fixing the mind onto a mind-object (*vicāra*); or putting effort into a task (*vīriya*). Similarly, it should be understood that all wholesome or unwholesome deeds, speech and thoughts have the corresponding volitions activating them. For instance, an act of confidence is motivated by *saddhā*; when one is mindful, *sati* is the underlying force, and so on.

Those who do not understand the element of volition have conceit due to personality-belief. Self-view is firmly entrenched in them. All their bodily movements are taken as their own actions: "I sit", "I stand", "I speak", "I

do this", etc. All mental activities are taken as their own: "I think", "I have an idea", "I remember", "I know", etc. The truth is that all our bodily, verbal and mental activities are mere expressions of the volitions behind them, each actuated by an appropriate volition like the steam-power that motivates the locomotive. That is why, in the aggregate of mental formations, the element of volition is singled out by the Buddha from a number of other mental concomitants.

Examples of Attachment to Personality-belief

"I feel happy"; "I feel miserable"; "I am delighted"; "I feel sorry" are delusions about *vedanā*.

"I know", "I remember" is delusion about *saññā*.

"I have concentration" is delusion about *ekaggatā*.

"I apply my mind" is delusion about *manasikāra*.

"I direct my thought to some mental-object" is delusion about *vitakka*.

"I keep my thought steadfastly on some mental-object" is delusion about *vicāra*.

"I make an effort" is delusion about *vīriya*.

"I feel glad" is delusion about *pīti*.

"I want to do this, to see this, to hear this, to go there, to come, to say, to know, to get, to take" are delusions about *chanda*.

"I love him, I adore him, I want it, I am very fond of it" are delusions about *lobha*.

"I hate it, I can't stand that fellow, I am angry, I hold a grudge against him" are delusions about *dosa*.

"I do not understand, I am confused" are delusions about *moha*.

"I had the (wrong) view" are delusions about *diṭṭhi*.

"I won't give in, I want to excel, I am superior to him, I am equal to him, I can compete with him" are delusions about *māna*.

"I feel envious" is delusion about *issā*.

"I am stingy, I don't want to share this" are delusions about *macchariya*.

"I feel lazy" is delusion about *thina-middha*.

"I can't make up my mind on it" is delusion about *vicikicchā*.

"I revere him, I believe its truth" are delusions about *saddhā*.

"I am not being forgetful" is delusion about *sati*.

"I understand" is delusion about *paññā*.

"I am ashamed to do evil, I dread it" is delusion about *hiri* and *ottappa*.

"I kill" is delusion about self view in the volition behind the misconduct of killing.

"I steal, I rob" are delusions about the volition behind the misconduct of taking another's property without it being given.

"I make offering, I make a gift" are delusions about

the volition behind *dāna*, giving.

All those deeds, words and thoughts are egocentric. Apparently good or bad, the delusion of a self in them renders them all unwholesome. They are the underwriters for a passage to hell. They are stumbling blocks to insight knowledge. They are detrimental to one's realisation of nibbāna. They belong to this side of the ocean of rebirths. Release from those beliefs means nibbāna, the yonder shore of saṃsāra. Attachment to the deluded 'I' in all actions is what draws you into the floods of saṃsāra. Abandonment of attachment to personality-belief means to cross over the great ocean of saṃsāra.

These are just a random list of personality-belief, the darkest type of wrong view that drags one down to the deepest hell (*avīci*), deludes the average person.

Since volition is the key factor behind any action, if one can discard attachment to the non-existent self in respect of volition, personality-belief becomes extinct. If personality-belief in volition can be eradicated from one's psyche, other mental factors can never again be associated with the deluded self. That is why the Buddha highlighted volition in describing the aggregate of mental formations. The remaining mental formations glibly referred to among the generality of Buddhists, should be understood in the same way.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS TO BE PERCEIVED

When someone wishes to see the moon, he focuses his eyes on the moon. The moon's image is then reflected onto a sensitive material quality, which is the eye-base. The same principle holds in respect of other clear, smooth surfaces like glass or water where the image of the moon is reflected. In the ultimate sense, the occurrence of the reflection at the eye-base has a terrific impact comparable to a bolt of lightning. This impact on the sensitivity of the eye arouses an instantaneous succession of consciousness at the eye-base called 'eye-consciousness'. When the viewer turns away from the moon, the image disappears, and with it the eye-consciousness also disappears. Then the viewer says he does not see the moon. What is called 'seeing' is in truth the eye-consciousness. 'Not seeing' is nothing but the disappearance of this eye-consciousness. Although images are reflected onto clear, smooth surfaces like glass or water, no consciousness arises because the materiality there is of the type originating in physical change. It is merely a base capable of receiving the image, called 'appearance-base' (*vaṇṇa*).

When you look into a mirror your face appears in the mirror; when your face turns away that image is no longer in the mirror. You simply say you saw it there, and now you don't see it there. However, there is little chance of your realising the truth that it is only eye-consciousness

arising and vanishing. This is the exposition of eye-consciousness.

By the same principle, when a sound comes into contact with the ear-base, a tremendous impact, like a clap of thunder, is felt on the sensitivity of the ear. At that instant a rapid succession of units of ear-consciousness arise at the ear-base. The moment the sound disappears, consciousness ceases. You would simply say that you heard it, and now you don't hear it, but the truth about the phenomena of ear-consciousness is rarely realised.

When an external material phenomena of smell comes into contact with the nose, the sensitive base for smell, nose-consciousness arises in incessant succession. When the smell disappears the consciousness also disappears instantly. People say, "I smelled it", "I cannot smell it now." Little do they realise that it is only the phenomena of nose-consciousness.

When some tasty morsel is placed on the tongue, tongue-consciousness arises at the tongue-base. When the object of taste leaves the tongue-base, the consciousness disappears. "I tasted it", "I cannot taste it now", people would say, little realising the arising and vanishing of tongue-consciousness.

When the elements of extension, heat or motion come into contact with the body, tactile consciousness arises at that point. When the external object disappears, tactile consciousness disappears. If some cold water or a cool breeze touches one's back, the whole back becomes

the sense-base and tactile consciousness arises there. We then say, "My back feels cold." When the water or breeze disappears, the consciousness ceases, and we say there is no cold feeling there. We do not realise that it is the arising and cessation of tactile consciousness. When we stay in the sun we feel hot and stuffy throughout our whole body but we rarely realise it as the arising of tactile consciousness. Bodily-feelings are also felt from time to time in the head, chest, stomach, and so on. We know it aches when there is a sensation of stiffness; we know it tingles when a limb is numb, we know it is painful, cool, hot, tired, and so on. However, more likely than not, we do not realise those feelings as the arising of tactile consciousness. Remember here too, the analogy of using a microscope to view a leprous sore.

There is an ever-present process called the 'element of apprehension' (*manodhātu*) depending on the heart-base, which is so pure as to be lustrous. The mind-base is a functional state of subconsciousness (*bhavaṅga*). When a visual object comes into contact with the eye, the impact is simultaneously felt at the mind-base as well. So when one is looking at the moon, the image of the moon appears at both the eye-base and the mind-base simultaneously. When the viewer turns away from the moon, the image on the eye disappears instantly, but the image on the mind-base does not disappear at once, it disappears rather slowly. So too, when sounds appear at the ear-base, they simultaneously make an impact at the mind-base

too. Similarly, smells, tastes and tactile objects, while making their impacts on the respective sense-bases, also make their impressions on the mind.

Imagine a piece of glass, the shape and size of a man. Imagine a crystal ball set inside the human-shaped glass block. All sorts of external objects — houses and trees, mountains and woods, men and animals, and the sun, the moon and the stars — will be reflected onto the glass block and the crystal ball inside there simultaneously. You could see for instance, the image of the sun on the glass block as well as on the crystal ball. This is to help visualise the phenomenon of mind-base.

The above is the detailed explanation of how the five sense-objects appear at the respective sense-bases, while making their impression on the mind-base at the same time.

Apart from those five sense-objects entering through the five sense-bases, the mind-base is also capable of infinite objects of the mind just by application of thought. These mind objects are purely mental. Whereas the five sense-objects must present themselves at their respective sense-doors to make their impressions, the mind-objects need not actually exist. Whatever has been seen, heard, felt or experienced, can make its impression on the mind at the mind-base. The mind-base has an infinite range of capacities differing from one being to another. So the mind-bases of a Buddha, Solitary Buddha, Chief Disciple, Senior Disciple or an Ordinary Disciple, vary widely in

their range. So too for beings born with three wholesome roots, with two wholesome roots, or without wholesome root: human beings, earthbound *devas*, *Cātummahārājika devas*, *Tāvātimsa devas* and the higher *devas*, and the *brahmās*; the purity and capacities vary enormously between each abode.

The mind-base of the Buddha is incomparably pure and glowing. It is capable of being conscious of all things about the infinite universes, of infinite range of kammic forces, of infinite number of beings, of infinite range of conditioned things, and infinite phenomena. The sublime Dhamma as the Four Noble Truths can become a conscious object only of those born with three wholesome roots, which implies a certain requisite maturity by way of wholesome deeds in the past existences, or perfections.

The Origin and Cessation of the Four Mental Aggregates

I shall now give a brief exposition on the four mental aggregates; feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

The Buddha declared that the first three of those aggregates originate in contact. The aggregate of consciousness originates in mind and matter. The significance of this will be explained here. Although the aggregate of consciousness is mentioned last in the Buddha's exposition on the five aggregates, it is in many ways the most impor-

tant of the four mental aggregates. For the Buddha said:

"All mental states have mind as their forerunner.

Mind is their chief and they are mind-made." (*Dhp*
v. 1)

Again, he said,

"Mind is the lord of the six sense-doors."

So consciousness is the premier among the four, or in other words, it is the leader of the other three, or the lord of those three. When we say a sense-object appears on the sense-base, this appearance is brought about by consciousness only.

Let us take an analogy here. Say there is sense-object in the form of a 'juice-bearing root'. The root is first received by consciousness. Contact crushes it and strains it. When the juice is produced and strained, feeling savours it, feeling pleasant or unpleasant, and perception notes how it tastes — good or bad. Then, on getting the information, good or bad as the case may be, volition starts motivating the respective organs of the body to function, expressing itself in bodily and verbally action, and in framing the mind, thus leading to mental formation's part in the mental process.

So contact is the key factor for feeling, perception and mental formations. However, it is not the key factor for consciousness, which is the leader of them all. Yet consciousness cannot function without feeling, perception and mental formations. That is why the Buddha says that the arising and cessation of consciousness is dependent on

mental properties. If consciousness may be likened to a flame, feeling, perception and mental formations are like the light of the flame. When the flame goes out, the three die a natural death, instantly. If the flame arises again, the three reappear together. If the arising and cessation of consciousness can be understood, the arising and cessation of the trio can readily be understood. Hence the arising and cessation of consciousness will be explained further.

The Arising and Cessation of Subconsciousness

When a person is asleep, his mind is in a state of subconsciousness. This very faint state of mind is always present in a living being, hovering around the heart-base like clear water oozing from a spring. It is an inert state of mind below the threshold of consciousness. So it is not capable of motivating the sense organs to function either in bodily, verbal or mental action. It cannot advert to mental objects. The heart-base is an offshoot of the four primary material elements. Its life and health depend totally on the vitality and health of materiality, because the four primary elements are themselves dependent on the nutriment of the body. Subconsciousness persists as long as the heart-base lasts. When the heart-base ceases to exist subconsciousness also ceases. For example, a rainbow is seen due to the presence of rain clouds. Once the rain clouds are

wafted away by the wind, the rainbow cannot remain. To take another example, a powerful *deva*, by his magical power, causes a highly-combustible material to form into a string as he runs along with it, letting the string burn as he runs. The fireworks would last only as the combustible string lasts, and no longer.

If you reckon how long it lasts, say, in an hour, millions and millions of material phenomena would have perished. Just as the *deva's* string is made to appear afresh along with him, so too, as long as fresh materiality in the form of the heart-base continues to arise, the subconsciousness also arises from it; and just as the string is consumed by the fire, so also the heart-base is decaying all the time and with it the subconsciousness too is decaying. The arising of fresh subconsciousness is called the arising of consciousness; and the cessation of subconsciousness is called the cessation of consciousness.

The arising and vanishing of subconsciousness can be perceived when contemplation is exercised along with the materiality of the heart-base. It is too abstract to discern by consciousness alone. Lacking practical means of observing the phenomena, one is apt to rationalise, referring to this or that text, but rationalising is not conducive to insight knowledge. It is not training in insight at all.

The Origin and Cessation of Consciousness

I shall now explain how the process of consciousness arises in the six sense-bases.

When we look at the moon, the image of the moon appears simultaneously at the eye-base and mind-base. The sense-object which is the image of the moon here, rudely invades the eye-base with terrific force like the sparking when a steel hammer strikes the flint in a lighter, and makes its impact there, like a bolt of lightning. Eye-consciousness arises in the eye at that instant. Similarly the terrific impression of the image of the moon appears at the heart-base, and mind-consciousness is bestirred with a dazzling intensity, not unlike the lightning that flashes in the rain clouds. At that moment of consciousness the subconsciousness disappears. Eye-consciousness taking place at the eye-base, and mind-consciousness, with its dazzling flashes of reaction to the contact, occurring at the heart-base, thereby completes the function of receiving the impression of the moon. This goes on for as long as the contact between the eye and the moon lasts. As soon as the viewer turns away, all those units of consciousness disappear. The uninformed person is deluded into thinking that he sees the moon whereas it is only the occurrence of flashes of consciousness in the eye and the mind that take place. Personality-belief clings to a delusive 'I' based on the occurrence of consciousness.

In much the same way as darkness reasserts itself on a rainy night when a flash of lighting disappears, consciousness ceases and the inert state of the subconscious mind reasserts itself at the heartbase, the moment the moon gets out of the eye. The 'not seeing' is noticed by the average person who, being an uninformed person, thinks, "I do not see the moon now." Personality-belief makes him think so, of course. For had there been a 'person' who had seen the moon earlier, that person should have died along with the cessation of seeing. This is the delusion that dominates an uninformed person.

The Noble Ones, being possessed of right view, see the truth as it is. As contact occurs between the eye and the moon, transient moments of consciousness occur that have the sense-cognition of the material object called the moon. This transient consciousness occurs with dazzling flashes inside the body, like the flashes of lightning. These conscious moments are as fleeting as the flashes of lightning in their disappearance too. This is how the undeluded ones see it.

In the example of lightning, clouds are not lightning, nor is lightning the clouds. Cloud is cloud, lightning is lightning. With a clashing of clouds, lightning occurs for just that instant, a fleeting moment. The lightning thus produced does not go back into the clouds. Nor does it go anywhere. It simply disappears. Try to extend this analogy to understand consciousness of all the six kinds.

“Like the occurrence of lightning in the sky, all things mind or matter, occur in flashes, as conditions arise for such occurrence; and quick as lightning, they are gone.” (*Visuddhimagga*)

During a momentary blinking of the eye, seeing is interrupted momentarily. This is a practical example showing the discontinuity of eye-consciousness. Seeing and not seeing are quite evident. Just remember the analogy: lightning is lightning, cloud is cloud. Regard the process of consciousness as the same kind of phenomenon as the occurrence of lightning. Try to understand the instant of its arising, and the instant of its cessation.

By day, visible objects are everywhere within the awareness of the eye-base so we are easily deluded into thinking that we see them continuously. However, if you are attentive, you will be able to recognise the cessation of consciousness in seeing one object as your attention is turned to another.

The same process of sense-cognition takes place at the ear-base, the nose-base, the tongue-base and the body-base too.

While various sounds come within the range of the ear, their impact is felt at the ear-base and the mind-base where flashes of consciousness arise, only to stop altogether the moment the sound vanishes. Then the transient flashes of consciousness vanish and die. This process of arising and cessation constitute ear-consciousness.

Except during sleep, sense contacts are always occurring at the five sense-bases. None of them makes its impression concurrently with another. At any given moment, the dominant sense prevails to arouse consciousness. Not one remains even for a moment — each one that has arisen ceases instantly. This characteristic of consciousness will become clear if you contemplate properly.

THE ORIGIN AND CESSATION OF MIND-CONSCIOUSNESS

The subject of volitional mind-consciousness is very profound. The flashes of consciousness are highly transient, and arise independent of the five sense-organs. Here, only the basics will be explained. Consciousness that has been aroused by external sense-objects through the five sense-doors flashes onto the mind which merely takes cognizance of it. Those flashes of consciousness function in the same way as flashes of lightning that let one see the lay of the land in the dark, and then, just momentarily. So too with the sense-consciousness that arises from contact between objects and the sense-bases. They are merely recognised as such and such, that is all. By themselves, they cannot activate the body, but merely let the mind know that a certain thing is this shape or colour, or this kind of sound, smell, taste or touch, and so on.

It is only mind-consciousness, arising at the mind-base, that is capable of motivating the various body organs

as well as the mind itself, with the tremendous force of a gale or a clap of thunder. It activates the relevant organs to appropriate actions of the body, of speech, or to the appropriate frame of mind. Then the mind would be capable of dwelling on myriads of mind-objects in the abstract. This is generally called "thinking".

Volition is the power that causes every action like the steam in a locomotive, steamer or electricity generating station. The heart-base is the power-station from where arteries and veins branch out over the whole body. Just as a power-station transmits electricity throughout the country along a network of cables, the heart-base generates material qualities of motion in the various body organs whenever the impulsion arises there. The organs respond to the impulse immediately. Whenever a finger-tip or a small toe is hurt the heart-base 'knows' it at once.

These similes are just aids to visualising the complex psychophysical process, the underlying principle is the main point. If one sees materiality, but the principle of elements occurring from a given set of conditions or causes is missed, one is apt to cling to a delusive personality-belief, which will then predominate.

You should reject personality-belief in the face of the truth. Do not let yourself be deluded by the wrong view that there is such a thing as a person, and that 'I' exist; that such and such are my concerns, such are my doings, etc. See the basic fact of mind and matter in everything within and around you. Try to visualise the

interplay of material and mental phenomena whenever any action takes place in you, from the usually unnoticed blinking of the eyelids to explosions of fury (if this ever happens!) If you are vigilant you can perceive the astonishing feats that are nothing but the ultimate facts of existence, the incessant, conditioned occurrence of mere phenomena, quite independently of you or your wishes.

Apparently, this body seems quite solid, substantial and unchanging. Its unreliability escapes one's attention. We are apt to think a thing is not changing under two circumstances: when change is so rapid that we cannot normally notice it, or when the thing does not change by its very nature. When you look at the blackness of space you never think it undergoes any change at all. The fact is that space does not change, for it is not a changeable phenomenon.¹

All mind and matter, on the other hand, changes billions of times within a blink of one's eye and we do not even notice that whole period of eye-blinking for it seems so rapid to us.

The fact is, this body does change, and changes at a staggering rate beyond normal comprehension. This rapidity creates the illusion of continuity, an inborn concept strengthened by nature. If sustained thinking in the right way can be constantly trained on the arising and cessation of phenomena in and around you, you will come

¹. *Akāsī* means the element of space, which is unchanging.

to understand change and the unreliable nature of all phenomena.

Let me illustrate. Imagine a water tank the size of man, filled with water and placed upright. Think about the mass of still water in the tank. Imagine pulling the tank to incline towards you just slightly say, for half an inch at the top. You will see the water being disturbed and the whole mass of it being inclined towards you. Next, imagine pushing the tank in the opposite direction, when the water will incline away from you. Even if you just shake the tank very lightly or tap it, you would notice that the water is disturbed. There is no solidity, no unchangeable mass of water at all. Apply this illustration to the mind and matter that constitute your body, and understand their unreliability.

So, mind and matter are mere processes, there is no substance in them, not the tiniest atom that is solid or stable. That is why they are liable to change like the water in the tank. This is by way of illustrating the transient nature of things, the rapidity of change.

Now, I will illustrate the rapidity of action or motion. As you rise from bed, your conscious mind impels the whole physical framework to move in the direction of your impulsion the element of motion originating in the mind. Once that element comes into play due to your impulsion, the previous posture of lying, which is merely a temporary condition, ceases instantly, the sinews and muscles of that lying posture die out there and then.

Try to visualise the change from the lying posture to the newly-arisen sitting-posture. The change is too rapid for the undeveloped mind to comprehend — not to speak of seeing it with the eye. It is only through insight that it can be comprehended. Even with insight you will not be able to catch up with the rapidity of the change of phenomena, not even one thousandth of its speed. The ordinary human faculties are only rapid enough to enable man to move about on earth through the functioning of the element of motion that controls bodily movement. They cannot enable him to fly.

The volition of one possessed of supernormal powers through attainment of concentration is so rapid as to master the forces of the element of motion that is capable of keeping the body in the air. One who has attained uplifting joy (*ubbegā pīṭi*), can also float in the air like a piece of fluff or a cloud. In both cases volition has attained supernormal dimensions. By supernormal dimensions is meant the power that can 'will' the forces of the element of motion to come into play in a predominant manner. Of the four primary elements, only the elements of extension and cohesion have weight. In a human body these two elements together weigh about fifty or sixty kilos. When the impulsion consciousness arises, through supernormal faculty or through attainment of uplifting joy, the element of motion, called up by will, lifts the whole body so that a state of virtual weightlessness is achieved without effort. The body can float away as lightly as a balloon takes to

the air. However, a balloon's flight is very slow compared to *jhānic* flight. This is mentioned here to give some idea of the power of impulsion, the inherent quality of the element c' motion, and the rapidity of change in material phenomena.

"Through the pervasion of impulsion, which is the element of motion originating in the mind, this body goes, stands or sits."

The element of motion may be compared to the blast of air rushing out of the barrel of a gun when it is fired. It pervades throughout the various organs of the body when volition to execute a certain motion impels the mind. The material quality of motion arises at those parts of the body and the desired movements occur. It may also be compared to the steam that rushes out of the boiler in a steam engine, providing the motive power to the crank shaft.

Impulsion and its Functions

I shall now explain the function of impulsion (*javana*). The boiler of a locomotive is like the heart-base, the steam-power is like impulsion, but whereas the steam-power pushes once at a stroke, impulsion functions in seven successive moments. Impulsion is a conscious process of tremendous rapidity. Its seven strokes bestir material phenomena in the body like a mine exploding in the water. However, unlike the water being bestirred violently,

impulsion is under the control of volition, helped by the specific material qualities of expression (*viññatti-nūpa*). Hence the movement of the body organs are deliberate, co-ordinated and orderly. Impulsion occurs billions of times within a blinking of the eyes. There are various kinds of elements of motion involved in any bodily movement. Take walking, for instance. As a man walks, at every step, various elements of motion function throughout the body. It is impulsion that gives the necessary initiative to these qualities of the various elements of motion, and it is through its amazing swiftness that such initiation as well as co-ordination of all bodily functions are effected.

When impulsion sends the message to lift the head, the previous materiality in the head dies out to give way to the new materiality. For example, a firework explodes when ignited. At the instant, the previously cool powder of the firework is replaced by fiery matter. The actual process of change from cold to fierce heat starts from the spot where ignition occurs and spreads throughout the firework. When the element of heat undergoes change, all material qualities in association with it change too. So, the elements of extension and motion change, together with all other material qualities of colour, smell, taste and nutritive essence that perish when the cold element perishes. In the ultimate sense the fiery hot material element and the whole materiality in the firework arise afresh where the cold materiality has ceased to exist.

People say that a person dies when the concept of continuity ceases, i.e. their physical death is observable. In the ultimate sense, however, new psycho-physical phenomena arise only after the old phenomena have perished, which is death. This constant perishing of phenomena is also referred to as cessation (*nirodha*) or dissolution (*bhaṅga*). It is only when one discerns the ultimate truth of this cessation of phenomena, that one gains insight. Though one has mastered the seven books of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, or is a teacher on the ultimate truths for the whole life, if one has not gained discernment through insight one is just a learned man, not a wise man yet, for one has not empirically understood the *Abhidhamma*. Unless one has understood the perishing of phenomena and the cessation of phenomena through direct knowledge, a lifelong habit of teaching about impermanence, suffering and not-self is of no avail.

I will now elucidate the arising and cessation of consciousness flashing around the heart-base and activating the whole body. Again, the analogy of the train is useful. The incessant puffing of the steam-engine, its pushing and its exhaustion, stroke after stroke, is evident on listening to it working. Hence it is helpful in visualising the process of the arising and cessation of phenomena. Lightning is another useful example. The heart-base is like the clouds, consciousness is like the flashes of lightning that occur in series of three or four, and then disappear instantly.

The steam-engine analogy helps particularly in the visualisation of bodily movements, from one posture to another, down to the smallest movement of the blinking of the eyelids, and the activating of consciousness that is constantly arising and ceasing. Not only bodily movement, but verbal and mental activities also come within the same scope.

The example of lightning helps in the visualisation of the sparks of consciousness that make sense-cognition at the six sense-bases clear. The intensity of the sparks inside the body, their arising and cessation are comparable to lightning. The consciousness at the seven strokes of impulsion might be inconceivably rapid, so instead of following the text literally, for practical purposes, we can understand each impulsion as if occurring only once for a blink of the eye. This would be easier to comprehend.

In the case of lightning, both its arising and cessation are evident to the eye. However, the arising and cessation of impulsion, with intervening moments of sub-consciousness is not self-evident. One tends to think that the sparks are uninterrupted, because the arising and cessation of consciousness takes place so rapidly. Actually, the arising of the impulsions is interrupted by inert moments of subconsciousness when the impulsion ceases. No practical example is ready at hand to illustrate this intermitten phenomena. One has to infer it from the fact of noting different mental objects at (supposedly) the same moment. Even while taking a step, various things

come to mind. As each new idea enters the mind, the previous object of our attention is dead and gone. Each object is only coexistent with its impulsion. So if we consider the diverse thoughts that our mind wanders to while walking, we can see that the fleeting diversions represent moments of interrupted impulsion. Consider also the process of speaking. With each syllable that is uttered, there arises (at least) one impulsion that ceases with the uttering of the next syllable. Similarly, with the consciousness at the mind-base, each thought arises only on the cessation of a previous one.

The Origin and Cessation of Feeling, Perception and Mental Formations

At each step we make, or on seeing or hearing something, pleasure or displeasure arises in us, which is feeling. Each feeling arises and ceases, and a fresh feeling arises and ceases. Then also the perceptions of 'that is what is seen', or 'that is what is heard', and so on, arise and cease. Then fresh perceptions arise and cease again. What is perceived at the left step vanishes with the advancing of the right step, and so on. Bodily, verbal or mental activities are taking place all the time, showing the arising and cessation of different volitions at each moment.

The arising and cessation of applied thoughts,
The arising and cessation of effort,
The arising and cessation of pleasure and smiles,

The arising and cessation of desire to do something,

The arising and cessation of lust, passion,

The arising and cessation of anger or hatred,

The arising and cessation of conceit,

The arising and cessation of confidence, etc.

Such volitions are always observable. Without right view, however, the observation leads only to erroneous inferences of personality-belief. With the insight of right view, every observation enhances the knowledge gained already. The arising of those phenomena is called *samudaya*, their cessation is called *nirodha*.

As for the practice leading to cessation of the aggregates, what has been said with respect to materiality applies here too.

THE SATISFACTION AND DANGER OF THE FOUR MENTAL AGGREGATES

I shall now explain the satisfaction and danger of the four mental aggregates: feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

The Satisfaction and Danger of Feeling

In getting what one wants, or in finding what one is looking for, or in experiencing what one longs for, one is pleased, and the pleasure and joy derived from such

experience is the satisfaction of feeling. The impermanence, the unpleasantness or unsatisfactoriness, and the unreliability of all four mental aggregates is its danger.

The example of the poisoned meat given to illustrate the satisfaction and danger of materiality is relevant here too. Viewed from the aspect of the present golden opportunity of the Buddha's Teaching, the happy-go-lucky attitude of the multitude who are missing this opportunity of saving themselves from the cycle of rebirth, and more especially from the four lower realms, is a common instance of the satisfaction and danger of the four mental aggregates. Imprisoned in the filthy confines of the prison of sensuality, those uninformed people are forever oppressed by their own greed, ill-will and delusion and a stubborn attachment to personality-belief, thus they have booked their passage to the remotest depths of hell.

The dangers of the aggregates of materiality and mentality are both characterised by transience, unsatisfactoriness and unreliability, but the transience of the latter is far more rapid. This fact should be clear from our discussions above on the arising and cessation of these phenomena.

I shall now elucidate the oppression caused by the transience of feeling. All people have, at one time or another, been born in the sensual realms of the human and celestial realms, as well as in the *brahmā* realms. There, they enjoyed the best of sensual pleasures, and the gloy of the *brahmā* realms, However, being subject to death

which ruthlessly consumes every conditioned existence without leaving any trace, no one ever collects previous enjoyments. Such is the transient character of feeling. In the present too, they are forever pursuing sensual pleasures, which cause them only suffering. This yearning for pleasurable feeling is only too likely to continue for innumerable rebirths, thus they are enslaving themselves to the transience of those pleasures. This is how people are forever oppressed by the transient character of feeling.

How, then, does the aggregate of feeling oppress sentient beings with suffering? Herein, suffering has these aspects, namely:

1. *Dukkha dukkha* — the suffering of physical and mental pain,
2. *Sankhāra dukkha* — the suffering of conditioned states,
3. *Vipariṇāma dukkha* — the suffering of changeability or unreliability. The first aspect is too obvious to need elucidation.

Whatever pleasant feeling one may be enjoying at present is not obtained as a favour by any external power. It is only because one has taken the trouble to acquire merit through giving, virtue or concentration that pleasant resultants are enjoyed in this existence. Those meritorious deeds in previous lives have conditioned the present state of well-being. Even when favourable circumstances prevail in the present life, the enjoyment of pleasure still has to be contrived, for pleasure is not built into your system. All

too often pleasurable feeling eludes you even while you are supposed to be having some fun. This is because only when the pleasant feelings come into contact with your six sense-bases, can you actually feel them. Therefore pleasurable feelings are highly volatile and ephemeral, and hence unsatisfactory. This is the suffering of conditioned states.

Again, to what extent can you keep your wealth intact? It is in the nature of diminishing, deteriorating. It can be destroyed in no time if circumstances so conspire. Even if your wealth stays with you, what about your health and ability to enjoy it? If you should go blind now, what use is there in the greatest show on earth for you? It is the same with all your senses. In any case you are going to leave all your wealth behind when you die. So you wish for continued enjoyment in future existences. You try to perpetuate pleasure through acquiring merit. You perform acts of merit — giving charity, keeping precepts, cultivating concentration for calm. All of these actions are efforts aimed at maintaining pleasure in perpetuity. So even a bhikkhu makes efforts just to perpetuate the suffering of rebirth, not to speak of a lay person keeping the precepts. Making a living is also full of trouble. Hankering after the heart's desire is full of trouble. The trouble is compounded if one uses improper means for getting what one wants. Misdeeds open gates of hell for one who resorts to them. These then are the hazards of feeling.

The Satisfaction and Danger of Perception

The enjoyment of perception is particularly great. How is it great? Perception bestows one with certain aptitudes and propensities. It may enable one to become highly skilled, even to become a genius, but this accomplishment may well be one's undoing because one is apt to be highly conceited. Perception fills one with preconceived ideas and biases. Puffed up with success, one is led into believing that one possesses the world when, in fact, one is possessed by the world. The satisfaction of perception pushes one down into the quagmire of sensuality, from where one sinks to the depths of hell.

The danger of perception lies in its transience. It is only when some agreeable thing is happening that the perception of well-being can be felt. Otherwise the perception of enjoyment is not available. Sense-objects are never stable, they do not please one constantly. Therein lies the danger of perception. For detailed arguments, what has been said about feeling applies here too.

The Satisfaction and Danger of Mental Formations

I shall now dwell on the satisfaction and danger in the aggregate of mental formations. When you see a visible object it may be either agreeable or disagreeable to you. This is 'feeling originating in eye-contact'. When you hear a sound it may either be agreeable or disagreeable to

you. This is 'feeling originating in ear-contact'. Similarly, smell causes 'feeling originating in nose-contact' taste causes 'feeling originating in tongue-contact', touch causes 'feeling originating in body-contact', and thought causes 'feeling originating in mind contact'. Personality-belief takes all those phenomena as 'I', but right view realises that they are merely phenomena.

It is only when same agreeable object contacts one of six sense-bases that pleasant feeling can arise. Only then can pleasant perception arise. The moment contact is broken, the pleasant feeling and the pleasant perception cease and perish. It is quite observable how you feel pleasure or displeasure at a certain contact at any of the sense-bases. Observe them then, and you should be able to see through their pleasant aspect together with their dangers.

So, in the ultimate sense, everyone is hankering after contact for which they have a fancy, some agreeable contact at the six sense-bases, which they regard as pleasant. The world includes humans as well as animals.

The Analogy of the Robot

Let me illustrate the arising and cessation of the aggregate of mental-formations. Imagine a robot the size of man contrived by the supernormal powers of a man who has, through concentration, mastered the super-knowledge regarding phenomena. By means of his alchemy he

has fitted up his robot with the six sensitive-bases that repond to specially contrived mirrors, one for each sense-door. So when the mirror for the eye is focused onto the eyes of the robot, the robot's sensitivity at its eye-door and at its heart-base rect to it, simultaneously. The mechanism that controls the parts reponds in harmony. In this way the robot stands, sits, or walks like a man. When the special mirror is withdrawn, the motion of the robot abruptly stops. For the motive force within the robot, available only through contact with the mirror that is outside the robot, is dead when the necessary contact is broken. The robot is now a piece of hardware only. The same experiment with the remaining five sense-doors can be imagined.

From the analogy of the alchemist's robot we should understand these facts. If the mirror were focused on the robot for the whole day, the robot would keep moving like a man the whole day. The robot has no life, and neither has the mirror. The reaction aroused within the robot's body, on contact with the mirror at the appropriate sense-bases, is a distinct, separate phenomenon. It does not belong to the robot, nor does it belong to the mirror. The robot's eye-door cannot produce the sensitivity by itself, neither can the mirror by itself. Both are dead things with certain qualities only. The mechanical contrivance of the robot is like the material phenomena in us. The mirrors are like the six external sense-objects. The sensitivity that is being activated within the robot is like the four mental aggregates.

In cultivating insight for right view, forget the person, or even the human shape. Concentrate only on the phenomena that rise and fall. Focus on the elements that find expression in the body.

Phenomena arise and cease due to a given set of circumstances or conditions. When those conditions cease to exist the phenomena also cease.

When conditions prevail for the arising of desire, desire arises at the heart-base. This replaces all the previous physical phenomena in the body. All mental and physical phenomena including the materiality originating in kamma, temperature, nutrition and consciousness all undergo a change as a result of the arising of desire.

Imagine a mine exploding in a pond and the violent impact caused to the water. Apply the underlying principle of the explosive and the water, when some strong emotion arises. It is not easy to do fruitfully, but that is the way. Strive hard, success depends on three factors: the example has to be appropriate, the mental and physical phenomena must be observed as they really are (unbiased by perceptions of personality or shape), and the experience must be strong enough to be observed. For instance, when strong passion arises, its arising may be observed from a detached observer's view, and the example of the mine explosion brought to bear upon it.

As greed arises, the expression on a person's face can be noticed by a careful observer. The expression is the

manifestation of the new materiality that has arisen in that person. In other words, the mental phenomenon (of greed) can be inferred from the physical expression. If one reflects on one's own mind, the arising of a new frame of mind caused by some emotion, like greed for instance, is only too evident. Then when the object of greed has been enjoyed (say, a delicious meal has been eaten), or when the object disappears, or if one reflects on the disgusting nature of the object, the greed vanishes as the ebbing of the tide in a narrow creek. The vanishing of the volition of greed is then quite evident. This is how greed, a mental formation, arises within a person on certain occasions and how it ceases.

A warning here: do not mix up the phenomena with the personality. Focus on greed as a distinct phenomenon, not as belonging to a person. When any one of the volitions is seen through, the other volitions can be understood. All volitions arise and cease in much the same way — conceit, malice, covetousness, for instance — as and when the necessary conditions prevail. It is observable when one's spirits rise and one is ready to exert — the arising of the volition of energy, and the cessation later. So also gladness, its arising and cessation. The arising and cessation of the desire to do something, such as, "I want to go." "I don't want to go", "I want to do this", "I don't want to do it now", etc. The pure volitions like confidence, generosity or mindfulness, and the acts of charity, virtue or meditation expressing those volitions, can also be

observed.

Whenever the arising and cessation of one distinct volition is closely observed within oneself, contemplate on the fresh arisings and cessations of the aggregate of materiality.

Remember the tank of water. Also remember the explosion in the pond. These analogies must be clear to you. The process of arising and cessation taking place in all phenomena must be clear too. The cessation of a certain element is called its impermanence. When the psycho-physical phenomena in the body undergo a change, it is cessation and death. Try to visualise that death taking place in you every moment. Never despair if you are not successful in your effort. You have to strive until you gain the right view.

As for the practice leading to the cessation of the mental aggregates, the approach does not differ much from what was said regarding the aggregate of materiality. One contemplates the aggregate of materiality to gain right view about physical phenomena. One should contemplate the mental aggregates to gain right view regarding mental phenomena. The remaining factors of the Eightfold Path pave the way to right view, which is crucial.

THE DANGER OF IMPERMANENCE IN THE FIVE AGGREGATES

The satisfaction, as well as the dangers, that lie in the aggregates of materiality, feeling and perception have been discussed above. It is the dangers characterised by impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and unreliability that are crucial for a clear understanding. Skill in the two aspects of arising and cessation of phenomena are the proper approach to the understanding of the dangers lurking in all the aggregates of existence. Of the three forms of danger, that of impermanence is the key because once that is grasped the other two characteristics, unsatisfactoriness and unreliability, will become evident. So I shall dwell further on impermanence, which underlies the truth of the cessation of all conditioned phenomena.

Among the eleven fires that constantly burn all mental and physical phenomena, the fire of death, which is actually the abiding danger of death, is subtle. It cannot be seen with the physical eye. Its heat is not tangible. Yet it burns inexorably within us and consumes all mental and physical phenomena, which is obvious. This fire is far more pervasive and enduring than any conflagration on earth. It extends as far as the innumerable universes and it endures as long as the cycle of rebirths.

I shall expand on the analogy of the flame and the fuel. The flame in the shape of the human body is a composite of eight kinds of inseparable material qualities.

However, not all the eight can be called fire. Visible form characterised by colour is the material element called *vaṇṇa*, it is not fire. The primary element of extension (the earth element) provides the basis for the fire, but is not in itself fire. What holds the materiality together is the element of cohesion, but it is not fire. The motion of the flame is the element of motion, it is not fire. The smell of any object is the quality of odour (*gandha*), it is not fire. The taste of any object is the quality of taste (*rasa*), it is not fire. The nutrition in any object is the quality of nutritive essence (*oja*), it is not fire. The element of fire is a separate phenomenon, it can be felt by touch. Most Buddhists are familiar with the above eight material elements. However, very few understand that each is a distinct phenomenon. It is important to understand them as such.

So, of the eight inseparable material qualities, only one is the phenomenon called fire, the other seven constitute its fuel. The fire is sustained by those seven kinds of fuel. As one contemplates hard on physical phenomena, the startlingly rapid succession of fresh materiality that appears is the phenomenon called arising. Wherever new materiality arises, the old materiality has been consumed. Thus all materiality that has arisen a moment ago, vanishes. This vanishing is the phenomenon of death which must not be confused with the phenomenon of burning. It is the function of fire to burn, but the function of death is to vanish after having arisen. The primary element of heat, which has the specific quality of burning, consumes or

burns up the other seven material qualities which always occur together. The 'fire of death' (metaphorically) consumes not only its conascent seven material qualities, but also consumes the primary element of heat. The element of heat has the 'burning' quality, as distinct from the phenomenon of death which has the 'vanishing' quality. This distinction is stressed here.

An Illustration

The human body is like the flame. All material elements from the smallest atom to the great earth itself are flames. The tiniest amoeba in the body of an *Akaniṭṭha* *Brahmā* are flames. The flames are governed by the element of heat. All objects, animate or inanimate, are governed by the phenomenon of death, or the 'fire' of death. In the flame (whether big or small) seven of the eight kinds of inseparable materiality are the fuel that is constantly being consumed by the element of fire, the eighth quality. All materiality, animate or inanimate is fuel to the fire of death. The bodies of all beings, all vegetation, all material objects, are virtually burning cinders, blazing flames, or smelting ovens of the fire of death. All of them are the fires of the element of heat too, one of the four factors that sustain materiality, but the element of heat has the quality of variation in temperature. So this quality is the underlying phenomenon in all changes in temperature. The whole body is both cold and hot inside. The cold is

conducive to cold materiality; the heat is conducive to hot materiality. The nutrition derived from our daily meals is the fuel for the element of heat inside our body. So long as there is nutriment in the stomach, the element of heat is kept burning inside the body, causing fresh materiality to arise.

Bodily movement causes a faster arising of fresh materiality. If one observes mindfully, (the prerequisite for knowledge) as one walks, one can perceive the materiality within the whole body being powerfully agitated, (like lightning or an explosion) and fresh materiality arising with startlingly rapidity. No sooner has fresh materiality arisen, then its cessation follows. This rising and cessation can be felt if one focuses attention on the body while walking. The successive fresh elements of materiality are ephemeral — they arise while walking is taking place. Focus your attention on the moving body to visualise the phenomena at the point of rising, and at the point of falling. Every fresh arising of materiality takes place only where the previous materiality has vanished. In other bodily movements and postures, the same phenomena can be observed. What people describe as “My back is stiff”, or “My legs are tired”, etc., are the manifestations of the transient materiality rapidly undergoing change. Old materiality is constantly perishing where fresh materiality is arising.

Changes in the body due to food, change of season, illness, or cuts and bruises, are superficially noticed by everybody, but, lacking insight, most people just

think, "My body hurts" or "I feel ill", etc. The personal identification of phenomena with a vague 'I' always predominates for the average person. This persistent belief has the dire potential of pushing one down to hell.

It is only through gaining right view that this liability to fall into the fires of hell can be prevented. Right view must be cultivated because personality-view is inherent in most people. It is, so to speak, built into their very system. It can, however, be rooted out with due diligence. When a house is on fire, the owner will be careful to see that every flame is put out. He will not rest until he has extinguished the last trace of fire. A little remnant of fire can flare up at any time, and will consume the house. In the same way, if you want to do away with all danger of hell, you need to be diligent, always checking to see the personality-belief does not linger in you, either in regard to physical phenomena or mental phenomena taking place within your body. Through repeated moments of right view insight will develop, which is the only effective weapon against personality-belief.

The Analogy of the Fire-worshipper

Personality-belief is not just ordinary wrong view, it is the gravest wrong view. There is, for instance, the wrong view of fire-worship. When a boy is born, the fire-worshipper's parents kindle a fire for the child. For sixteen years the fire is kept alive by the parents by regular refuel-

ing with ghee or butter. When he is sixteen, the parents ask their son whether he will remain as a layman or become a recluse and take up the practice that will lead him to the *brahmā* realm. If the boy chooses to become a recluse the parents hand over the sacrificial fire to him. The recluse then takes upon himself the duty of feeding the fire with the best ghee or butter. The purer the fuel, the more meritorious is the fire-sacrifice. He takes the sacrificial fire wherever he goes, He keeps the flame alight all the time throughout his life. By this dutiful sacrifice he earns merit that is said to deserve rebirth in the *brahmā* world. A fire-worshipper is virtually a slave to his sacrificial fire. For as long as he lives, may be a hundred years or more, his servitude persists. For as long as his wrong belief in the virtue of the fire sacrifice persists, he will serve the fire dutifully. This is of course a case of *saṅkhāra dukkha*, the tyranny of conditioned states. It is in the nature of fire to consume whatever fuel it can lay hold of. Searching for fuel to keep the fire alive therefore is a never-ending serfdom, eternal suffering.

The analogy of the fire-worshipper is this: All beings who have strong attachment to 'self', which is but the five aggregates, exhaust themselves to maintain their lives, but they are only feeding the fire that consumes from within. The fire of death is kept alive, consuming fresh materiality and mentality, being sustained by regular feeding.

All Beings are Fuel to the Fire of Death

Human existence is fuel for the fire of human death. *Deva's* existence is fuel for the fire of a *deva's* death. *Brahmā's* existence is fuel for the fire of a *brahmā's* death. Almsgiving performed with the object of acquiring merit for these forms of existence is merely trouble taken to feed the fires of these existences. It virtually means cultivating the fields where these fires are to thrive. Keeping the precepts to acquire merit — five or eight or ten precepts, as the case may be — is merely cultivating the field to reap a good crop of fires. Similarly, developing concentration or the four divine abidings, is merely cultivating the field of fires. In the beginningless cycle of rebirths, every being has done infinite deeds of giving, and has reaped the results of infinite existences as human beings or as *devas*. All of those existences have been consumed by the fire of death. Not a particle of ash remains. In each of these existences, the nurturing of one's life, from the time one could look after oneself until death, is just feeding the fire of death. Nothing remains at the time of death. There is no fundamental difference between such subsistence and maintaining the sacrificial fire of the fire-worshipping brahmin.

This analogy is given to drive home the truth of impermanence of all materiality, the danger that besets all living beings.

Try to Understand the Phenomenon of Death

In spite of the inevitability of death, most people usually ignore it. You should meditate to realise the omnipresence of death. Try to visualise the ceaseless burning of the fire of death in all the four postures: standing, sitting, walking and lying down.

All the merits acquired in the past through giving, or virtue, or meditation for calm, if they were aimed at prolonging existence, are futile. The acquisition of merit now aimed at prolonging existence in the future will lead to the same fate. The burdensome tasks that one undertakes to support one's present existence are no different either. All these efforts merely serve as fuel of death. This is to impress upon you the futility of all human efforts, however meritorious, that are aimed at the continuation of existence.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The five aggregates, being truly impermanent, are unsatisfactory. This is the Noble Truth of Suffering. Attachment to the five aggregates as one's own property, or one's own self, and the craving for existence and rebirth, is the origin of suffering. This is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering. The liberation from craving, which is the same as the escape from the five aggregates, is the

Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. The Eightfold Noble Path beginning with right view, is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.



Chapter Three

The third question relates to nibbāna — its nature, the real happiness and peace that its attainment holds, and the development of recollection of the tranquillity of nibbāna (*upasamānussati*).

THE ELEMENT OF DELIVERANCE

Regarding your request about the way for development of recollection on the tranquillity of nibbāna, it is an exercise which properly belongs to the Noble Ones only, who have realised nibbāna, and experienced its peace. So it is not a relevant meditation practice for you, Maung Thaw. You have not realised nibbāna yourself. The peace of nibbāna is understood only on its realisation. What it would mean to those who have realised it, is therefore conjecture, and conjecture is not mental development (*bhāvanā*). I believe you have a certain degree of peace pertaining to nibbāna, but it is only temporary. It is not yet a distinct element to be reflected on by way of mental

development. It is shrouded by defilements at both ends, i.e., before and after it. However, a recollection of the peace of nibbāna, even conjecturally, is highly worthwhile. So I shall give a reply that should help you to conjecture on the right lines.

We have seen how realisation of the dangers of the five aggregates means the cessation of craving, which is the origin of all ill. That is the nature of peace (*santi*) which is nibbāna. It is also the escape from the five aggregates of existence.

The analogy of the fire-worshipper illustrates the folly of uninformed people who fail to grasp the perils of impermanence and death — the two great fires that consume all forms of existence. There is such a thing as the quelling of those two fires, which is peace. If you fail to see death as a distinct phenomenon, it is impossible to understand what is meant by escape from existence, the element of deliverance. It is only when sufficient insight is gained into the real nature of death as a phenomenon, that the significance of deliverance can be realised.

In all the beginningless round of rebirths there is never any such a thing as a person or a self; there are only elements and their phenomena.

If you watch the waters of a river and contemplate well, you will understand how the cold element (which is only an aspect of the element of heat) merges with other material qualities and flows on, always changing. In the

eternal cycle of rebirth there is only an endless stream of phenomena, the five aggregates of existence, incessantly flowing like the waters of a river, and no person or self ever exists. As long as the fertile element of craving, the origin of all existence, prevails in the five aggregates, this cycle of rebirth will go on without end, and no escape is in sight.

When right view arises and realises the true nature of existence, supramundane insight knowledge extinguishes craving instantly. This extinction of craving is the element of deliverance. Distinguish between death and deliverance. Death is the voracious fire that consumes all materiality and mentality. Deliverance is the coolness, the calm, the peace that allays and quenches the fire of death. This element of deliverance is unique since it is not dependent on, or associated with any other element for its existence. Just as the sky cannot be burnt by any fire, or destroyed by water or by any other means, so also the element of deliverance, being extremely subtle, is not affected by the fires of birth, decay, death, passion, greed, or delusion. It is the fire-exit or escape from the eleven fires¹ that constantly burn all beings who have not realised it. Since there

¹. The eleven fires' are: (i) attachment (*rāga*), (ii) hatred, anger or ill-will (*dosa*), (iii) delusion (*moha*), (iv) birth (*jāti*), (v) aging or decay (*jarā*), (vi) death (*maraṇam*), (vii) grief (*soka*), (viii) lamentation (*parideva*), (ix) physical pain (*dukkha*), (x) sorrow or mental pain (*domanassa*), and (xi) despair (*upāyāsa*).

is no birth, there is no beginning to it. It cannot be identified or counted. Being deathless, there is no end to it.

“This phenomenon of deliverance is intelligible only by supramundane insight, it is indefinable, it is infinite, its luminosity surpasses the sun at its brightest.” (*Brahmanimantana Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*)

In the above quotation, “intelligible only by supramundane insight” connotes the peace that is perceived through attainment to supramundane knowledge. The reality of death and other fires such as passion, anger, delusion, birth, aging, etc., has been properly understood, and the moment it is understood, its antithesis of calm, tranquillity or peace is realised.

“Indefinable” means that it cannot be said when it began, or when it ends, or when it arises, or when it does not arise. It cannot be referred to as where it exists, or at which point it is present. It cannot be identified as, “This is the peace of such and such as Buddha, of such and such a Solitary Buddha or such and such an Arahant.” It cannot be classified as superior or inferior, such as, “The peace of a Buddha excels that of other Arahants”, etc. Put in another way, the peace of the Buddha and that of Khujjuttara, the maid servant who became an Arahant, cannot be distinguished.

“Infinite” means the peace realised by the Arahants throughout saṃsāra cannot be arranged as to which came first.

“Luminous” means that in all the three mundane realms mentioned above, the fire of death glows fiercely. Throughout saṃsāra, for innumerable world cycles, countless existences have been devoured by this fire. At the present moment of existence it is still burning voraciously. For the indefinite future too, this fire will go on burning, consuming all phenomena that arise. The fear of death is universal. Such is the intensity of the fire of death. In the supramundane sphere, the Dhamma shines that is called the element of deliverance or release. Remember the radiant peace attained by innumerable Buddhas, Solitary Buddhas, Chief Disciples and Disciples. This is a brief attempt at describing nibbāna which actually defies description.

THE TRUE PEACE OF NIBBĀNA

Regarding your query as to how a person attaining nibbāna finds peace, the answer is that nibbāna, is not found by any person. This is simply because nibbāna is, whereas a person or a self is not.

“Only phenomena, and no being or life exists.”

It is extremely important in discussing nibbāna not to confuse actuality with concept. The average person, i.e., one who has not gained insight knowledge, is full of preconceived notions, ideas and ideologies and is apt to be led astray by them. One’s own ideas of peace tend to dominate. For instance, there is the solidity of the body. If one fails to see the material quality of extension, which is

manifested as solidity or support, one will simply think that it is the solidity of one's own body. So one is still an uninformed person. One is in no position to understand real peace, for real peace does not belong to a person. It is never one's own peace or the peace that one enjoys. Similarly, the elements of cohesion, heat, motion, greed, anger, etc., need to come to one's true knowledge in the ultimate sense, if one is to understand nibbāna.

Aging and death are common to all. If one thinks that one has grown old, or that one must die one day, that is just common mundane knowledge. Because of the dreadful, erroneous 'I' concept, one loathes aging as happening to one's person. One fears death only because one holds tenaciously onto existence, which one calls one's life. Overwhelmed by this craving for existence, one fails to understand death as a distinct phenomenon. Unless one knows it as a such, one is an uninformed person incapable of understanding nibbāna. One can talk accurately about nibbāna only when one has discarded personality-belief and gained the right view into elements and phenomena.

The flux of phenomena, ever perpetuating the cycle of rebirth, is just a series of arising and cessation, birth and death, that occur billions of times within a blink of the eyes. The process is incessant and inexorable. Since the twin root causes of ignorance and craving are present, this incessant perishing of gross phenomena takes place, consumed by the eleven fires within oneself. At death, the process continues as a fresh existence in one of the

three realms, accompanied by the eleven fires. When ignorance and craving are extinguished, then the aggregates of mind and matter in that existence do not continue as a fresh existence. The extinction of the eleven fires is the escape from the clutches of death. Whereas the compounded existence of elements is conventionally called a being, when the 'being' has realised the element of deliverance or peace, that element itself may perhaps be called the one who has attained nibbāna (*parinibbāna*).

Just because saṃsāra is infinite, one should not have any concept of time regarding nibbāna. Again, just because innumerable Buddhas, Solitary Buddhas, and Noble Disciples have entered *parinibbāna*, one should not associate nibbāna with numbers.

The idea of the endless cycle of rebirth pertains only to mental and material phenomena that are subject to the process of arising and cessation, or momentary births and deaths. Don't let the lengthy process linger in your mind when you consider nibbāna. For nibbāna is not a concept, whereas time is just a concept. Saṃsāra is infinite, immeasurable which are its faults nibbāna is free from these faults. On the other hand, this Element of Escape from Saṃsāra is infinite and immeasurable. The existences of the innumerable Buddhas, Solitary Buddhas and Arahants, who before *parinibbāna* had been involved in the selfsame saṃsāra, are not to be confused with nibbāna. Do not think of nibbāna with regard to any known references such as the transient world. For example, as a

train moves along, trees at a distances seem to be moving along with it, but in fact the tress are stationary. Similarly, saṃsāra changes, moves on like the train, but nibbāna is motionless like the distant trees. The reflection of the moon at its zenith would appear in every tray of water if trays were placed in every house in Asia. The number of moons reflected in the trays has nothing to do with the actual moon. The reflections are like those who have passed on to nibbāna, the dhamma that is nibbāna is like the moon.

This, then, is a short explanation about nibbāna or deliverance, with particular emphasis on the fact that nibbāna is not for any "person" to enter. This is the answer to the third question. Plenty of treatises on nibbāna have been written by learned scholars. Here, only a resume has been given on this vast subject.



Chapter Four

The fourth question asks about the way that would lead an ignorant or uninformed person (*andhoputhujjana*) on to be an informed or virtuous person (*kalyāṇaputhujjana*).

TWO TYPES OF PERSON

“The Buddha, the kinsman of the sun, speaks of two types of person: the uninformed person and the informed person.” (*Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā*)

The Uninformed Person

“One who has no scriptural learning, being without knowledge of the aggregates, the elements, the sense-bases, the four truths, dependent origination, the foundations of mindfulness, etc., or the interpretation and discrimination thereof that can prevent the personality-belief arising, is an uninformed person.” (*Mūlapaṇṇāsa Aṭṭhakathā*)

The Informed and Virtuous Person

"One who is learned regarding the five aggregates of existence, the twelve sense-bases, the eighteen elements, in the original Pāli. One is able to interpret it correctly. One is able to discriminate each of the items contained in the said teachings by means of examples, illustrations, anecdotes, etc., and has therefore gained a thorough knowledge of those teachings."

"Likewise, one who has gained a thorough knowledge of the twelve links of dependent origination, the four foundations of mindfulness, the five controlling faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment and the eight factors of the Noble Path, is called a learned or virtuous person. Such knowledge is a characteristic of a virtuous person."

One who lacks this eye of the Dhamma, even a ruler of the celestial worlds with the divine eye, is called an uninformed person. One who is proficient in the seven aspects in the five aggregates (discussed above) qualifies as an informed person. How?

Proficiency in the first aspect is thorough knowledge in the four primary elements, the five aggregates, and the twelve sense-bases.

Proficiency in the second and third aspects — the arising and cessation of phenomena, thus, "Owing to the arising of nutriment, materiality arises; owing to the cessation or exhaustion of nutriment, materiality ceases. Owing

to the arising of contact, feeling arises; owing to the cessation of contact, feeling ceases" covers part of the Law of Dependent Origination.

Proficiency in the fourth aspect, i.e., the Eightfold Noble Path, covers the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment, the threefold training of higher virtue, higher concentration and higher understanding, the ten perfections, and the Four Noble Truths.

Of the eight factors of the Noble Path, right view and right thought are called higher understanding; right speech, right action and right livelihood are called higher virtue; right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration are called higher concentration.

As for the ten perfections: giving, virtue, patience and truthfulness constitute higher virtue; renunciation is the right thought as to the dangerous and disgusting nature of sensuous life, loving-kindness is right thought in the form of non-malice; resolve and equanimity are in full accord with right concentration; knowledge or wisdom means right view and diligence is right effort. This is how the ten perfections are included in the virtuous person's knowledge. A virtuous person is also called a Lesser Streamwinner (*esūlasotāpanna*).

If the virtuous person can develop knowledge to the supramundane level by gaining insight into the seven aspects, he or she is bound to become a fullyfledged Streamwinner. One can then advance in the attainment of the Path Knowledges until one becomes an Arahant. All of these are possible here and now.



Chapter Five

The fifth request is a question of assimilation. "Since the Buddha said that nothing falls outside the scope of the four Noble Truths, and that nothing cannot be employed as a fruitful subject for contemplation, would the Venerable Sayādaw kindly give us a guide to the practical application of the Dhamma so that whatever meritorious action we might do, we can be mindful of the four Noble Truths and the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self, so that the action would fulfil the threefold training, cultivate the ten perfections and at the same time enable us to bear in mind the dependent origination and the twenty-four conditional relations? "

HOW TO BE MINDFUL OF THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, ETC. WHILE DOING A MERITORIOUS DEED

I shall now explain briefly how a single utterance of *Buddham saraṇam gacchāmi* — "I go to the Buddha as

my refuge", is an act of merit that encompasses the four Noble Truths, the three characteristics of existence, the fulfilment of the threefold training and the cultivation of the ten perfections, being mindful of dependent origination and the twenty-four conditional relations.

In uttering the words "*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*", by the time you have uttered the last syllable 'mi', a great moral consciousness, accompanied by joy and connected with knowledge has arisen. This impulsion is good kamma of the highest class accompanied by three good root-conditions: non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. The impulsion lasts for seven thought-moments. Each of the seven thought-moments comprises the four mental aggregates of feeling, mental formations, perception and consciousness. The impulsion from that produces material quality of sound audible to the ear as "*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*." Thus we see how the five aggregates arise. There is also the material phenomena present at the heart-base, the source of the impulsive mental activities pervading the whole body.

As to mindfulness of the Four Noble Truths: By the time the last syllable 'mi' has been uttered, the five aggregates are being consumed by the ever-present fire of death, which is the truth of suffering. Remember the dangerous or evil aspect of all the five aggregates.

The nutriment that has been producing the aggregate of materiality during the utterance is the truth of the origin of materiality. The contact arisen from the mental

object of the Buddha's noble attributes is the origin of the arising of feeling, perception and mental formations, the truth of cause in respect of the mental aggregates. The three mental aggregates, together with the heart-base are the truth of the origin of consciousness.

At the moment that the recollection of the Buddha arises in you, the three basic evils of passion, malice and delusion are destroyed, which is the truth of cessation, or momentary bliss.

The five factors of the Eightfold Noble Path, namely, right view, right thought, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, involved in impulsion is mindfulness of the Eightfold Noble Path.

This is how the Four Noble Truths are realised in a single utterance while recollecting the Buddha.

The Three Characteristics of Existence

Remember our previous example of the robot. Herein, the mind-object, the Buddha's attributes, is like the mirror. This mirror is focused on the heart-base of the robot which instantly receives the mental object and apperceives it. Seven thought-moments of impulsion flash out from the heart-base — seven highly-charged mental activities that cause verbal action to arise through its motive power, comparable to the agitated waters when a mine explodes in a pond, or like the whistling of the steamer.

The example of the agitated water is analogous to materiality being agitated. However, the rapidity of impulsion is so inconceivable that no adequate example can be given. The power of impulsion over all materiality in your body must be perceived in every activity. As long as this is not clearly perceived, the danger of hell remains. If you really dread the fires of hell it is well to cultivate insight to perceive the change of materiality caused by volition or impulsion.

The example of the water tank better illustrates the rapidity of change in physical phenomena as volition arises. The transience of materiality, the decaying and the fresh arising within the whole body, may not be vivid enough even by means of that analogy.

So let's take yet another example. Imagine a life-size doll made of cotton-wool. Soak it in spirit and burn it. Observe how quickly the cotton-wool changes from one end to the other. The changes within the body may not be as clearly noticeable as in the burning doll, being many times faster. Don't despair, though. When a flame is kindled in a dark room, the darkness in the entire room vanishes the instant that light arises, and the light fills the whole room simultaneously.

In this example, light is new materiality originating in the flame. It arises so swiftly that one cannot follow it with the eye. You only know it has arisen by seeing the lighted room. So too, you cannot physically observe the cessation of darkness; you can only know that it has ceased.

The change of materiality within your body is the same. Its rapidity need not be a barrier to your understanding. The fact of change is inescapable to your vigilant consciousness, and can be known. That is the nature of insight. The rapidity of the change of mind and matter is not even known by the consciousness of the Noble Disciples. Only the Buddhas can trace it. As for disciples, the abandonment of the obdurate personality-belief through insight into the impermanence of mind and matter, is sufficient for enlightenment.

As soon as the utterance of "*Buddham saraṇam gacchāmi*" has ended, the flashes of impulsion vanish in the heart-base so that all materiality actuated by that impulsion ceases. Just as when a flame is extinguished in a dark room, all the light suddenly disappears. When the thought of the Buddha vanishes together with its concomitant mental activities, other forms of consciousness, depending on the mind-object, take over. This is also observable.

The knowledge that understands the cessation of the four mental aggregates and the materiality dependent on them, is called knowledge of impermanence. The cessation of phenomena must be discerned. Merely saying, 'impermanent', 'impermanent', is not insight, nor is it mental development. Once the truth of impermanence is grasped, the painful fact that all mental and physical phenomena merely feed the fires of death will be clearly realised. Then the relevance of the analogy of the fire-worshipper will be fully appreciated. When the perpetual

arising and cessation of all phenomena within oneself by the fire of death is clearly perceived, the illusion of 'I' will fall away. You will then understand that the phenomena are never you or yourself. The characteristic of *anatta* is discerned only in this manner. If lack of a self is not perceived, all talk of *anatta* is fruitless. It is not knowledge; it is not insight; it is not practice for mental development.

The Threefold Training

Of the threefold training the volition that impels one to utter the words, "*Buddham saraṇam gacchāmi*" belongs to higher virtue because it is a virtuous act motivated by a conscious undertaking to abstain from the four kinds of immoral speech. That volition comprises right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, the three factors of higher concentration. Right view and right thought in uttering the words constitute higher understanding.

The Ten Perfections

Understand the practice of the perfections in the manner of the Noble Eightfold Path discussed above.

Dependent Origination

The second aspect discussed with reference to the virtuous person is, in essence, Dependent Origination.

Nutriments arising, materiality arises. Contact arising, feeling arises, perception arising, mental formations arise, mind and matter arising, consciousness arises. Tracing the cause in this way by analysing the results is the Buddha's method of teaching called Dependent Origination.

As to the twenty-four types of conditional relations, I shall not give a reply here for these reasons: (i) it is probably too abstract for you, Maung Thaw, (ii) it is not useful for insight-training; (iii) it is purely for the finer discriminations to be exercised by those who have attained to the Path Knowledge. When you have digested the present answers, you may ask for it later.



Chapter Six

The sixth request pertains to the Buddha's victory over the five Māras; the definition, characteristics and significance of the five Māras; and the difference between the body of Prince Siddhattha, the bodhisatta, and that of the Buddha. Here are my answers:

THE FIVE MĀRAS

1. *Devaputta*, the celestial villain of the sixth *devaloka*, the 'Tempter' and the embodiment of evil;
2. *Kilesas*, the ten defilements;
3. *Abhisankhāra*, kamma or volitional action;
4. *Khandha*, continued existence;
5. *Maccu*, death.

By '*Māra*' is meant 'the killer'. The world is ravaged by five killers. The first one is the evil *deva* whose abode is in Vasavatī Devaloka. His hordes are not only in his celestial abode, but spread all over, including the human abode.

Buddha's Victory Over Māra

Many people adhere to wrong beliefs. To escape from such a perverse world one has to face opposition from such people. Seeing the bodhisatta seated on the throne of victory, with the firm resolve¹ to remain until he won enlightenment, Māra could not leave him unopposed. He had to make a last ditch effort to foil him, for he had failed many times. He mustered all his forces and attacked the bodhisatta. He roused gales that toppled mountain tops, he employed all his means of destruction, but to no avail. His forces spent, he approached the Buddha and made false claims to the throne of victory, not actually wanting it, but merely to harass the Buddha.

The Buddha told him that the throne of victory arose from the accumulation of his perfections fulfilled, but what perfections had Māra practised? Māra referred to his followers in witness of his right. The Buddha was alone then, since all the celestial beings had fled. So the Buddha touched the earth to bear witness to the deeds of giving he had practised when he had poured the ceremonial water onto the earth. At that instant the great earth trembled and the skies rumbled, sending Māra and his impressive

1. (i) let my skin remain, let my sinews remain, let my bones remain, let my bloody dry up, (ii) let the earth turn upside down, (iii) let tens of thousands of thunderbolts strike my head, (iv) let this Uruvela Forest catch fire and be reduced to cinder, I will not rise till I win Enlightenment.

army helter-skelter. Then Māra accepted defeat and returned to his celestial abode.

Victory Over Defilements and Volitional Actions

On attaining the Path Knowledge of Arahantship the Buddha gained a victory over all the defilements. The volitional actions that manifest only in association with the defilements also died a natural death. Volitional actions, good or bad, are called '*abhisā nkhāra*,' one of the five 'killers'. These actions do not germinate as fresh becoming when deprived of craving, for once the craving for existence is gone, kamma loses its potential to reproduce, just like boiled grains. With the exhaustion of greed, hatred and delusion, all immoral actions cease absolutely. All moral actions do not have kammic force in them and remain inoperative (*kiriya*). This is how victory over defilements and volitional action were won by the Buddha.

What remained was the five aggregates, which were the result of kamma done before the defilements were extinguished, and psycho-physical phenomena due to the four causes¹ prior to enlightenment, but free from defilements since then. The existence of the five aggregates presupposes the results of past actions, both good and bad. This occurrence of results continued until the moment of the Buddha's passing away. Since the five

¹. Kamma, consciousness, temperature and nutriment.

aggregates still existed after his enlightenment, the effects of past kamma were felt. In other words, because the kammic forces of the past still remained, the five aggregates persisted. The existence of the Buddha's five aggregates allowed the release of the multitude from suffering.

This is stated in different ways for fear that some might make a wrong interpretation regarding the exhaustion of kammic forces.

Victory over the Five Aggregates

The Buddha's aggregate of psycho-physical phenomena is called the Buddha's aggregates. His *parinibbāna* or moment of decease is called death. These two 'killers' are overcome only on entering nibbāna or at the moment of *parinibbāna*. This is according to the commentaries, "On the throne of victory at the foot of the *bodhi* tree, only the three Māras were vanquished."

A Different Interpretation in the Subcommentary

The author of the subcommentary on the *Dhātukathā* has a different interpretation. He says that all the five Māras were vanquished on attainment of enlightenment. His explanation runs as follows. On the first three Māras, no explanation is needed. On the aggregates and death he says, "For as long as craving, the cause of the five aggregates, is present, fresh arising of the aggregates is bound to follow. Once the truth of the cause has been

realised and craving extinguished, all future existences die out automatically. Along with the extinction of future existences, the liability to death also vanishes altogether." This final extinction of all future aggregates and the accompanying deaths, the author contends, amounts to victory over the aggregates and death, which took place on the Buddha's attaining the Eye of the Dhamma.

With respect to the present aggregates and the present death too, the Buddha had vanquished them there and then because, whereas the aggregates had previously been seen as a person — thereby leading to the unfortunate cycle of rebirth, on attaining enlightenment this delusion was gone, so the aggregates could no longer oppress or 'kill' him. The phenomenon of death was also understood and so death lost its sting. Thereafter, no fear of death remained. No fuel remained for it to consume. Thus death was vanquished too.

Let us make an illustration. A wicked demoness who loved to feed on excrement and putridity possessed a good man. She drove him out of his senses so that the poor man was subject to her will, with the result that he roamed about in cemeteries and such places to feed on excrement and putrefied corpses. After years of subjugation the man was cured of the curse by a magician who brought him back to his senses. With the help of the magician's powers, i.e., by making use of the divine eye in a magic formula, he saw the demoness within him. He could now clearly assess the situation. He had conquered

the demoness, but after many years of co-existence he could not drive her out at once. Besides, he saw some benefit of her presence; he could put her to his use. The extraordinary physical powers she had would be useful for his own purposes. He could perform miracles, harnessing her powers, in the service of mankind.

The analogy is this: The demoness is like the five aggregates. The proper sense of the man is like the non-causative type of good deeds. Cemeteries and such places are like the three realms of existence. The divine eye, the magician's formula, is the Eye of the Dhamma. Continued upkeep of the demoness within is like the continued existence of the Buddha, which could not cease at once because it was his long-cherished wish to help the multitude in their struggle for release from suffering. In fact, the Buddha and the Noble Ones, after attaining Arahantship, are living only for the good of others.

This is how the subcommentary explains the Buddha's victories over the aggregates and death even at the time of his enlightenment.

The Five Māras Defined

1. *Devaputta*: explained above
2. *Kilesa*: The basic defilements are greed, hatred and delusion.
3. *Abhisāṅkhāra*: The ten moral deeds and the ten immoral deeds. It also includes all voli-

tional actions that are dependent on the cycle of rebirth such as giving, virtue, meditation, reverence, sharing one's merits, rejoicing in the merits of others, etc.

4. *Khandhā*: The five aggregates manifested in the existences as humans, *devas*, *brahmās*, etc.
5. *Maccu*: Death, the phenomenon of mortality.

The Nature of the Five Māras

'*Māra*' means 'killer'. It destroys life in the physical sense, and also in the moral sense. The life of living beings means and includes:

- i. the life-faculty (*jīvitindriya*)
- ii. pure or virtuous qualities such as confidence, morality, etc.
- iii. non-causative or non-kammic merits or practice of the ten perfections such as giving, virtue, etc.

The life-faculty means the ability to sustain an existence as water sustains the lotus. The life-faculty sustains the aggregates in each existence. When the life-faculty is destroyed, the aggregates break up and the existence ends, which we call the death of a being. Virtue is the 'life' of a good person. When one's virtue is broken, one's 'life' is destroyed. Though one is physically alive, one is morally dead. Non-causative or non-kammic merit is the very life of a bodhisatta. Until an aspirant to Buddhahood receives

formal recognition and assurance from a living Buddha, the aspiration is still in danger. For the aspirant is still susceptible to wrong views, which are the antithesis of enlightenment. One's life as a bodhisatta is thereby destroyed, and so one reverts to being an ordinary person.

The Significance of the Five Māras

Māra, the Wicked One, is the destroyer of what is virtuous in living beings. Any higher aspirations to supramundane merits are his prime objects of destruction. Hence he is called the 'destroyer'.

The phenomenon of death is the destroyer of the life-faculty. It kills all living beings, hence its name — '*maccu*'.

Defilements such as greed, hatred, delusion, conceit and wrong view, etc., destroy virtue and the aspiration for non-kammic action. Kammic actions such as almsgiving, virtue, etc., that have causative merit, inevitably cause new existences. The aggregates of existence thus produced have death as an inherent factor. Not only is the fire of death inherent, so too are the defilements, the 'killers'. That is why merits and demerits are called *abhisāṅkhāra*, the 'killers'. The five aggregates, being subject to decay, destroy the life-faculty. By harbouring the defilements, they cause the destruction of virtue and the aspiration to non-causative merit. This is how the five Māras kill.

How Defilements Kill

To put it in a different way, take greed, for instance. Greed in a bhikkhu destroys his precepts, his dignity, his nobility. Greed in a laymen destroys his morality, his dignity and his reputation. Again, greed in a bhikkhu destroys the real well-being of a bhikkhu that lies in forsaking worldly interests and possessions. It destroys the attainments in concentration and spiritual powers. Greed in a layman causes undue loss of property, and even loss of life, limbs or sense organs, or premature death. All these evils befall one who succumbs to greed. Similarly with hatred or anger.

In another sense, greed destroys generosity, hatred destroys kindness, delusion destroys wisdom. All the generosity practised over aeons of previous existences can be brought to nothing when one is overwhelmed by greed. Hatred and other defilements are the same. In the present existence too, occasional purity of the mind due to hearing (or reading) the Dhamma is destroyed in no time by greed. It is just like the darkness of night that nullifies all lightning flashes, however frequently they might occur during the night. Understand the evils of hatred and other defilements likewise. This is how the defilements destroy all that is pure and virtuous in living beings.

How the Aggregates Kill

The destructive nature of the five aggregates should be observed within oneself. Try to visualise the destruction of one of the four primary elements in what you call your head. Similarly, observe your eye, ear, nose, cheek, teeth, tongue, mouth and throat, then down into your lungs and heart, etc.

Contemplate the deaths that occur on account of seeking after the pleasures of desirable visible objects. Similarly, consider the deaths caused by the lure of some pleasant sound, scent, taste or touch. All these are how materiality kills.

Consider the deaths originating in one's pursuit of pleasant sensations born of eye-contact . . . pleasant sensations born of mind-contact. All these are how feeling kills.

Consider the deaths due to pursuit of some perception about certain physical phenomena of materiality . . . some perception about some mind-object. These are how perception kills.

Death resulting from pursuing one's faith is the destruction wrought by faith. Death resulting from keeping virtue is the destruction through virtues. Similarly, learning the Dhamma, liberality, acquisition of knowledge, and meditation are all moral volitions that can kill. As for immoral volitions such as greed and hatred, etc., their destructiveness is obvious. All these are how mental forma-

tions kill.

Death due to yearning for eye-consciousness is how eye-consciousness kills . . . yearning for mind-consciousness is how mind-consciousness kills. All these are how consciousness kills. This is a brief explanation of how the four mental aggregates kill.

How Death Kills

Consider this, "How many of my heads have perished over the innumerable round of existences?" How many eyes? How many ears? How many noses? How many tongues? How many hearts and lungs? All of them were materiality that formed the essential part of my existences. "How many kilogrammes of food and drink have I so far consumed in my present existence. How many kilogrammes of matter that make up my head have been consumed in the process of my existence? All that was sustained by nutriment only. How much of the matter that make up my ears, my eyes, my nose, my tongue, my heart and lungs have so far been consumed by death?"

With respect to mental phenomena, consider how many mental phenomena have perished that had arisen at the eye-base? . . . that had arisen at the mind-base? In pondering thus, concentrate on the phenomenon of death, and don't let any personality view creep in. Don't associate your false 'self' with either the phenomena of 'the consumer' or 'the consumed' (the five aggregates).

The Example of the Magic Pill

I shall illustrate the swiftness of change taking place in the five aggregates. Let us say there is a charm in the form of a pill. The pills are coloured white, red, black, etc. On throwing one — say, a white one — accompanied by the appropriate incantation, an apparition the size and weight of a man suddenly appears. It is white through and through. Then, another pill — this time a red one — accompanied by the appropriate incantation, is thrown into the heart-base of the apparition. Suddenly the red colour permeates the whole body of the apparition, beginning from the heart. Wherever red takes over, the previous white vanishes, and no white can be seen. The apparition is now a red apparition. The colour distinction is to help visualise the change that takes place. Concentrate on the merging of the red colour into the white and how the former white disappears even before your mind's eye. This disappearance or disintegration is what is constantly happening within us.

“Though one should live a hundred years not seeing the sublime Dhamma, better is a single day lived by one who sees the sublime Dhamma” (*Dhp.* v 115)

This is an explanation of how death relentlessly kills the life-sustaining materiality, the five aggregates, since each new existence comes into being. If you understand what has been said on the dangerous aspect of the aggregates, you should find no difficulty in understanding the

phenomena of the destructiveness that are the aggregates and death.

As to the difference in the aggregates of the Buddha before and after enlightenment. Before enlightenment, the five aggregates of the bodhisatta contained stains of defilement and putridity of kammic actions. After enlightenment no trace of these stains and putridity remained. The body of one who is still training to become an Arahant, after gaining the three earlier stages of enlightenment along the Noble Path, after death, decomposes and putrefies. The bodies of the Buddha and Arahants after the *parinibbāna* of the aggregates, do not decompose or putrefy. The difference exists even while they are still living.

Although both the Arahant and the Buddha eat the same kind of food as non-arahants, the purity of the aggregates of mind in the former produces materiality born of pure consciousness, which is as pure and clear as sterilised cotton-wool.

The Analogy of Mind-made Gem of the Universal Monarch

When the mind-made gem of the Universal Monarch is placed in a turbid pool, the waters instantly turn crystal-clear. Similarly, the impulsion of the Buddha and the Arahants, being always pure and clear, the aggregates of their bodies are perfectly pure and clean. No foul smell could arise from such materiality.

A king's palace is not worthy of worship while occupied by a king. However, were it to be converted into a temple it would be well worthy of worship and even merit, being a place from which one might ascend to heaven or attain nibbāna.

The body of the bodhisatta is like the king's palace. The body of the Buddha is like the temple where the Buddha is staying. The body before enlightenment only supported the mind of Prince Siddhattha. The body since he went out for meditation is worth worshipping. Therefore his robes were taken and kept in Dussacetī¹ by the *Suddhāvāsa brahmā*. Don't follow the wrong view that says the body is not the Buddha, only great wisdom is Buddha.



1. G.P. Malalasekera's 'Dictionary of *Pāli Proper Names*' lists it as *Dussa Thūpa* (Page 100, Vol. 1)

Chapter Seven

The seventh question was, "I would like to know the method of taking refuge in the Three Gems."

HOW TO PRACTISE THE THREE REFUGES

I am not going to explain in detail about the Three Refuges since they have been well expounded in such books as the '*Saraṇādivinicchaya*', only the main facts will be shown here.

People often think, "If I worship this teaching, it will free me from the lower realms". If these meditations have the merit needed to avoid the lower realms, then they may be called refuges. Some believe that by meditating on this or that teaching it will bring enough merit to avoid the lower realms. This kind of worship cannot bring such merit, it is useless. Those who believe in those teachings are not a refuge and are not worthy of respect. They are also not able to find a refuge. You must understand this while taking refuge.

To give a simile: the purified attributes of virtue, concentration and wisdom are like fertile soil, the Noble Ones possessing those attributes are like a fertile field. Worshipping them is like sowing seed in that field. Here, the volition to worship is the seed. One who is devoid of virtue, concentration or wisdom, and who, therefore, thinks only immoral thoughts, is like dry rocky land. Worshipping one like that is just like sowing seed on barren land. The worshipper's act (however reverential) is of no avail, and brings no merit.

Nevertheless, there are sure ways of earning merit and demerit, modes of conduct that are moral or immoral, and happy destinies or unhappy destinies that have been understood down the ages by the wise (whether bhikkhus, laymen, or brahmins). Wrong believers disregard all these merits and demerits and declare that what is meritorious is demeritorious, or that what is demeritorious is meritorious. One with such views is like a burning rock. One who worships such a teacher is like one who sows seed on a burning rock. Instead of gaining merit, the worshipper will be burned.

Taking refuge is of two kinds: by hearing and by direct knowledge. Taking refuge only through faith in the noble attributes of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha about which one has learned, but without right view, is hearsay. It is so called because the act of taking refuge is not complete in so far as the worshipper has not actually 'seen' the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Saṅgha; he has

not perceived the teaching; he has not been in contact with the teaching. In common parlance, he has not got the message.

Consider the Buddha's admonition to Vakkali, the devoted bhikkhu who spent all his time in worshipful admiration of the Buddha, "Vakkali, he who does not see the Dhamma does not see me." That is why, taking refuge in the Three Gems without empirical knowledge of the Dhamma, i.e., insight into the arising and passing away of phenomena, relies on hearsay only. It is not taking refuge with direct knowledge.

Taking refuge with direct knowledge means imbibing the Buddha's teaching with right view through perceiving the aggregates, the sense-bases and the elements, and their arising and cessation, which alone will destroy the delusion about a self and doubts about the Four Noble Truths. This kind of going for refuge is the real refuge, for the worshipper is actually in contact with the Three Gems.

"One understands suffering, its origin, its cessation and the Eightfold Noble Path that leads to the end of suffering. This, indeed, is a secure refuge, this is the supreme refuge. Taking refuge in this, one gains release from the cycle of rebirth."

(Dhp, vv.191-192)

The above stanzas refer to taking refuge with direct knowledge. With reference to the seven aspects in the five aggregates discussed earlier, each aspect includes

taking refuge based on hearsay and taking refuge with direct knowledge, thus making seven sets.

Let me illustrate the difference between the two. Suppose there are two lepers at advanced stages of the disease. There is also a competent physician who can cure leprosy. One of the lepers lives a hundred days' journey away from the physician. He has never seen the physician but takes his medicine brought to him by travellers. By taking the medicine faithfully and correctly, he is eventually completely cured of leprosy. The other leper lives in the physician's house as a dependant. He does not take the medicine because it is unpleasant to him in smell and taste. He only enjoys the good food that is plentiful at the master's table. The result is obvious; his disease worsens day by day. Of the two lepers, only the one who was cured knows, by direct knowledge, the efficacy of the medicine and the true worth of the physician. The other one does not know the real worth of the physician or the medicine that he administers. He has only knowledge based on hearsay about the physician's greatness and the medicine he dispenses. The analogy is clear enough.

So, one who is training himself to acquire the proficiency in the seven aspects referred to above, does not need to utter the words of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. He does not need to go to a pagoda for worship, for these are mere formalities, and not essential, as he well understands. It is only for those who fail to practise what the Buddha taught that the utter-

ances and the acts of worship are of great importance. These 'hearsay' worshippers may be Buddhists today, but they may change their religion tomorrow. Those who worship with direct knowledge would rather give up their lives than convert to another religion.



Chapter Eight

The eighth question deals with the fundamentals that govern the case of a non-Buddhist who becomes a Buddhist. What beliefs must one abandon to follow the Buddha's teaching?

THE FOUR TYPES OF TRUE BUDDHISTS

One is called a Buddhist if one has the right view about one's volitional actions being one's own real possession that one cannot disown. More specifically, this understanding covers the following ten matters, namely:

1. That giving alms is wholesome kamma, (*atthi dinnam*).
2. That making offerings is wholesome kamma, (*atthi yittha-m*).
3. That giving even trifling gifts and presents is wholesome kamma, (*atthi hutam*).
4. That there are definite and appropriate results from wholesome and unwholesome actions (*atthi*

sukata dukkaṭāṇaṃ kammāṇaṃ phalaṃ vipāko).

5. That there is wholesome kamma in looking after one's mother, and unwholesome kamma in treating her badly (*atthi mātā*).
6. That there is wholesome kamma in looking after one's father, and unwholesome kamma in treating him badly (*atthi pitā*).
7. That there is this human world, (*atthi ayam loko*)
8. That there are also other worlds such as the hell realms and the celestial worlds of *devas* and *Brahmās* (*atthi paro loka*).
9. That there are beings born spontaneously, (*atthi sattā opapātikā*).
10. That there are recluses and brahmins in the world with genuine attainments through right practice who, having realised through direct knowledge the truth regarding this world and the other worlds, make it known to others (*atthi loke samaṇa brāhmaṇā samaggaṭṭhā sammā paṭipannā ye imaṇca lokam paraṇca lokam sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavednti*).

These ten matters are clearly understood by all wise men as being within the scope of their mundane knowledge. Such right view, attainable (even without encountering the Buddha or his teaching) is the basic attainment in one who calls himself a Buddhist.

In the world, any wrong-view or belief can be dispelled by a knowledge of dependent origination. One is liable to fall into an erroneous view only due to lack of this knowledge. It is vital that Buddhists really understand dependent origination and the significance of the factors contained in the discourse on it. One who understands the Law of Dependent Origination may be called a Buddhist of medium attainments. One who has gained insight knowledge into the seven aspects of the five aggregates is a Buddhist of higher attainments, since this right view is based on insight.

One is a 'real' Buddhist, however, only when one has realised the Four Noble Truths. Such a Noble One is a Sotāpanna, a 'Stream-winner.' Why is only a Sotāpanna called a real Buddhist? It is because taking refuge in the Buddha becomes inseparable from consciousness. In other words, there is no danger of a Stream-winner falling into wrong-views. Compare this superior attainment with the attainments of the higher or the medium classes, whose absolute confidence in the Three Gems is assured only for the present existence. As for those with only the basic attainment, their confidence in the Buddha's teaching cannot be called stable because they might change to another religion tomorrow, if the right circumstances arise.

A Stream-winner may be born into a non-Buddhist family, but will not be led into professing another religion, even on pain of instant death. He or she would

rather be burnt alive than forsake his or her firm confidence in the Buddha's teaching. This confidence never falters but grows until he or she attains nibbāna. That firmness of conviction is referred to by the Buddha as follows:

"Bhikkhus, there is no possibility or opportunity for one who has attained right view to indicate another teacher as his or her teacher."

There is another passage that describes a true Buddhist:

"One is a satisfactory Buddhist, if one becomes indignant at being called an adherent of another religion, and is pleased to be called a Buddhist."

In other words, one will be pleased to hear the Buddha's teaching extolled and indignant to hear another religion extolled.



Chapter Nine

The ninth question asks me to provide a definitive stand which a Buddhist should take when confronted by non-Buddhists, i.e. what are the main aspects of the Buddha's teaching that a Buddhist needs to understand and practise?

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

The main aspects of Buddhism are the ones I have mentioned in answer to the fourth question, namely: the five aggregates, the six sense-bases, the elements, dependent origination, the four foundations of mindfulness, etc. These teachings are found only in Buddhism, so a Buddhist worth his salt should be proficient in them.

Other meritorious deeds such as giving, keeping the precepts meditation for concentration using devices (*kasīṇas*), meditation on the boundless states of loving-kindness, etc., are to a great extent, also found in other

religions. These teachings or practices are prevalent at all times in civilised societies. They are universal in the sense that they can be practised at all times, whether or not it is the era of a Buddha. However, they are only mundane, and glorify the civilised world. In other aeons too, such good practices are known. They are practised in universes other than our's. There are human beings and celestial beings in the present world and in other innumerable worlds. There are likewise recluses, monks and brahmins there too. Gotama the Buddha arose in the world-cycle of a hundred-year life-span when the good deeds common even to non-Buddhists were on the wane. In this particular world-cycle¹, the average man is so polluted with defilements that the Buddha had to dwell at great length on the ordinary deeds of merit.

Only during the period of the Buddha's teaching, is there the special advantage of taking the true refuge in the Three Gems, and the fertile field of the Sangha to whom giving can be practised for one's benefit. As regards the teaching, it is only when the Buddha's teaching

¹. World Cycles — Human life spans (*āyukappas*) increase from ten years to an incalculable period (*asaṅkheyya*) and then decrease again to ten years. This period of immense duration is called one intermediate world-cycle (*antarakappa*). A period of sixty-four *antarakappas* is called one incalculable period (*asaṅkheyyakappa*). Four *asaṅkheyyakappas* is called one *mahākappa*. "By the word *kappa* standing alone *mahākappa* is meant." (Childe's Pāli Dictionary on *kappa*).

is still extant that the teachings on the aggregates, etc., can be heard. That is why a good Buddhist ought to know them well. The seven aspects referred to earlier, if understood well, makes a sound Buddhist.

The firm stand that a Buddhist can take and thus meet any criticism in the present existence is the Law of Dependent Origination. The main knowledge that is the safeguard against any other religion either here or hereafter, until one attains nibbāna, is that of the Four Noble Truths.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD

I shall now expand on the Law of Dependent Origination. Herein the following twelve factors should be learnt by heart: 1) ignorance (*avijjā*), 2) volitional activities (*saṅkhārā*) consciousness (*viññāṇa*), 4) psycho-physical phenomena (*nāmarūpa*), 5) the six sense-bases (*saḷayatana*), 6) contact (*phassa*), 7) feeling (*vedanā*), 8) craving (*taṇhā*), 9) attachment (*upādāna*), 10) becoming (*bhava*), 11) birth (*jāti*), 12) aging and death (*jarāmaraṇam*).

1. Ignorance

Ignorance is the opposite of knowledge. It is essentially delusion or error (*moha*). The mind is like the sun

or the moon; knowledge is like sunlight or moonlight. Ignorance is like an eclipse. When the sun is eclipsed there is no sunlight. When the moon is eclipsed there is no moonlight. Likewise, when the mind is shrouded by ignorance, no knowledge can arise.

Ignorance is also like a cataract that makes the eye opaque and eventually causes blindness. Sensual pleasures aggravate the darkness of delusion in just the same way as a wrong diet or strong, pungent smells aggravate a cataract. Ardent practice for proficiency in the seven aspects is like the medicine that can remove the cataract.

Four Kinds of Ignorance

There are four kinds of ignorance: the ignorance that blinds one to the truth of suffering; the ignorance that blinds one to the truth of the cause of suffering; the ignorance that blinds one to the truth of the cessation of suffering and the ignorance that blinds one to the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

Seven Kinds of Ignorance

The ignorance that blinds one to the first aspect in the five aggregates, . . . the ignorance that blinds one to the seventh aspect of the five aggregates. Of the five aggregates that make up our body, the material aggregate is most obvious. Of the material aggregates, the element

of extension is most obvious. You should first try to distinguish the element of extension within your body. In the beginning, a man blinded by a cataract may not be able to see even such a bright object as the sun or the moon. Similarly, you may not see the earth element at first. However, with sustained effort the darkness shrouding the mind gradually gives way. As the darkness of delusion slowly recedes, the mind regains its ability to see. Remember, delusion is not a total stranger: it is your mind in its negative character. The luminous quality of your mind is the original phenomenon, which in a normal sensuous environment, tends to be dominated by darkness. Light means vision of knowledge — when ignorance has been removed you can see the elements of extension in your mind's eye just as plainly as a man with normal eyes can see the sun or the moon.

Having seen the element of extension within your body, then proceed with examining the other elements that constitute the material aggregate. Having thus understood materiality in its true nature, then proceed to understand the four mental aggregates. In this way, the five aggregates will be understood, which means being skilful or proficient in the five aggregates, the first aspect. Ignorance has then given way to knowledge. As you rightly discern the remaining six aspects, notice how the light of knowledge dawns on the mind, and how the veil of ignorance is lifted.

After the seven kinds of ignorance have been dispelled, and knowledge of the seven aspects gained, keep up the practice steadfastly to gain the path knowledge that is right view. Once one is established in Path Knowledge, ignorance is absolutely dispelled, and when ignorance disappears, the remaining eleven factors of dependent origination also become clear. The Four Noble Truths are then simultaneously realised.

How the Four Noble Truths are Realised

Discerning the Truth of Suffering (*dukkha sacca*) in the five aggregates; abandoning the ignorance and craving that are the roots of these ills (*samudaya sacca*); the direct experience of the cessation of twelve links in the chain of dependent origination (*nirodha sacca*); the arising of insight with Path Knowledge (*maggā sacca*) — all these four realisations occur simultaneously. The three trainings reach maturity, the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment are fulfilled; taking refuge in the Three Gems is well established, and the five killers (*māras*) are vanquished. Māra, the evil *deva* of the Paranimmita Vassavati realm, the great destroyer and "Tempter", cannot confound such a Noble One. Let thousands of non-Buddhist teachers confront him, he will never be in doubt about the truth.

This is an exposition to underline the crucial importance of ignorance, the principal factor in dependent origination. Although the whole chain of dependent origi-

nation is finally broken with the conquest of ignorance, the remaining factors will also be dealt with for understanding them more clearly.

2. *Volitional Activities*

All deeds performed with a desire to attain a good life, now and in future existences, are called volitional activities. "All deeds" includes the ten moral deeds and the ten immoral deeds. Immoral deeds are committed out of attachment to the present existence, because of ignorance regarding the true nature of the five aggregates. Moral deeds are committed out of desire for further existence, because of ignorance regarding the same five aggregates.

The Buddha and the Arahants too, perform wholesome actions with even greater fervour than ignorant persons, but having attained Path Knowledge, they have no attachment to the aggregates that form their existence (which is their last.). Therefore, none of their deeds, whether physical, verbal or mental, carry any merit, and are not called *saṅkhāras* because the necessary volitional activity that clings to present well-being or to future existence is absent. The fact that all activities spring from ignorance of the truth is so obvious that even non-Buddhists should be able to comprehend it.

3. *Consciousness*

Consciousness here means rebirth-consciousness, the consciousness that links the previous existence to the present one. It refers to the necessity of the kammic force of previous volitional effort resulting in the initial consciousness of the present.

How the present existence arises from previous kamma can be known only by supernormal knowledge (*abhiññā*). It is unfathomable to one of normal intellect. There are certain recluses, monks and *devas* who know where a being was before the present existence, but even they do not understand the law that underlies kamma. They think it is due to the transmigration of a soul and it is exactly on this point that they go wrong. Among the ten aspects of right view, the tenth refers to this supernormal knowledge.

"There are recluse and brahmins in the world with genuine attainments through practice who, having realised through direct knowledge the truth regarding this world and the other worlds, make it known to others."

Those who lack this right view hold erroneous views on rebirth. Westerners usually lack this right view. Erroneous beliefs of various descriptions began to arise in the world aeons ago when monks and recluses who had acquired the *jhānas* and attained supernormal knowledge

began to disappear. These erroneous beliefs have been spreading since the times when the human life-span was a thousand years, as it is said in the *Cakkavattī sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

Nowadays, modern surgeons and scientists, lacking right view, depend on what the eye can see, and putting sole reliance on phenomena visible with the aid of microscopes, propound theories about life and reproduction. Those possessed of right view, however, even though the subject is not within their province, do not fall into error because they practise along the right path to understand the subject as best as they can. This is true even outside the Buddha's teaching. When the Buddha arose, they learned the Buddha's teaching and gained right view of a higher order.

Right view at the elementary level is bound up with personality-belief. It is only through advanced insight training that personality-belief can be discarded.

This is a note of warning that rebirth or rebirth-consciousness is a really abstruse subject full of pitfalls.

The Relationship of Aggregates throughout Saṃsāra

The relationship between the material and mental aggregates may be summarised here. View the path of the material aggregates and the mental aggregates as belonging to separate courses in a given being, each taking its own

path of development or transition. In the beginningless round of rebirths, the material aggregates break up on the death of the being, but the mental aggregates never break up until the final passing away of an Arahant (*parinibbāna*). The material aggregates have no senses in themselves, nor can they think or apprehend things, which are the functions of the mental aggregates. The mental aggregates do not have any form or substance, not even the tiniest atom, which is the property of the material aggregate.

The Course of the Material Aggregate

Let us see the course that the material aggregate takes. We shall consider two cases, the stream of a river and the nature of a gale.

The waters of a river, in flowing from its source to the great oceans are comprised of the primary elements of heat and motion. The water undergoes constant changes in temperature. The cold in the previous material elements of the water causes the material element of cold to arise; the heat in the previous material elements causes the material element of heat to arise. The element of cohesion has the property of weight so that it causes the water level to go down the gradient. The primary element of motion is constantly pushing away the material elements of the water as the fresh material cold or hot elements arise. These can arise only at some distance (not visible to the physical

eye) from the parent material qualities. Being subject to the element of cohesion, the new material elements can arise only at some lower level. This is what we call the flow of the waters in a river (which is in reality the material aggregate with its constituent four primary elements taking their own course under a given set of circumstances).

Now consider a gale. The element of cohesion is not the dominant force as in the case of the river. The element of cohesion only has the power of holding the material phenomena together. Since the gale is not being weighed down like the river water, it does not flow downwards. The element of motion is dominant here. So whether occurring over the ocean or on the land, the motive force can push it at great speeds over the vast area where it occurs. The fresh material phenomena that arise take place only at a certain distance from the parent material phenomena, do not break away from the old. The new materiality arises only dependent upon the old.

The same principle of fresh material phenomena arising at some distance from the old material phenomena applies in the case of lightning. Here the distance is between fresh material phenomenon — i.e. the flash of lightning from the sky above and the earth below, this distance is greater compared to that which takes place in a gale or in the river's current. It all depends on the constituent element of motion: the stronger the element, the greater the distance. This is the way the material aggregate occurs.

The Mental Aggregates

The mental aggregates, when they arise dependent upon certain material aggregates, do not occur away from the latter. Since they do not break up, their occurrence cannot take place away from the material aggregates until the moment when the latter breaks up (at the death of a living being). Among the mental aggregates, volition plays the key role, not unlike the element of heat in the material aggregates. From the viewpoint of conditional relations, it is called 'kamma-relation'. Beliefs such as wrong and right view, and the other mental properties are comparable to the primary element of motion in the material aggregates. Among the conditional relations this is called 'The relationship of means' (*magga paccayo*). Each existence is the result of a volition that has a given effect. The element of heat, for example, has its effects on the proximate material phenomena in a series. This effect can last only for the duration of the existence of the five aggregates as a being. As for volition, once the rebirth consciousness has arisen, its effects can occur for innumerable existences. However, the kammic force may remain dormant for innumerable world-cycles until favourable conditions occur. The results of one's kamma remain as potential both in the mental aggregates and in the material aggre-

gates¹. These kammās are called residual kamma (*kaṭattā-kamma*). It therefore follows that the continuity of mental aggregates is uninterrupted. So one can say, conventionally speaking, that 'the same' mental aggregates prevail, even though hundreds of thousands of world-cycles may pass.

This is an important difference between the mental and material aggregates. No parallel exists in the material aggregate. Only the roughest comparison can be made. Even in the present existence the two are noticeably different. Try to observe this within yourself.

At the breaking up of an existing material aggregate, the mental aggregates take rebirth as a fresh set of aggregates elsewhere. How far away from the old body can consciousness take its rebirth? It depends on the volition (compared to the element of heat) and the other mental concomitants such as right or wrong views, right or wrong thinking, etc. comparable to the functioning of motion (i.e. the relation of means). The text calls them "*Khipanaka Saikhāṇam*" or the volitional actions that have the power of casting out. When the relation of means is strong enough, rebirth consciousness, on the death of the human body, may arise in the highest *brahmā* realm called

¹. *Kaṭattā rūpānam*: when the residual kamma ripens, co-existent material phenomena at rebirth are due to deeds done in a former birth. (*Kaṭattā* = having been done.) [Though the fruits of a tree are not literally 'stored' in the tree, the tree is a potential source of fruits in due season (ed.)]

nevasaññā-nāsaññā or, at the other extreme, it may arise in the deepest hell (*avīci*). Consciousness of the mind-base can apprehend things unhindered by any physical barrier. Mental phenomena are therefore incomparably more powerful than material phenomena.

Being ignorant of the power of mental phenomena, modern thinkers reason based on the material phenomena that they can observe, and deduce theories of life based on such observations. All these theories are nothing but futile exercises in wrong thinking. This is impressed upon you because rebirth-consciousness offers a ready ground for confrontation by other religions.

When one discusses Buddhism with others one ought to be sure what one is saying. One should speak out of conviction acquired by direct knowledge. Reliance on shallow knowledge or texts learnt by rote will only bring discredit to Buddhism.

4. *Psycho-physical Phenomena*

By *nāma* the three mental aggregates of feeling, perception and volitional activities are meant, which are mental concomitants. The mental aggregate of consciousness is supreme in the ultimate sense. Its supremacy has been mentioned earlier. It is the leader (*jeṭṭha*), the chief (*seṭṭha*), pre-eminent (*padhāna*), the principal without which no mental phenomenon can exist (*pamukkha*), governor (*rāja*) of all the six sense-bases.

How the Body and Mind Arise

What a person, due to the acquisition of powerful merits, is reborn in Tāvatiṃsa, the celestial mansion, etc., pertaining to a *deva* of that realm are at once present at his birth. By the same analogy, whenever consciousness arises, feeling, perception, contact, volition, etc., arise simultaneously. The body including the four elements also arises. Since rebirth-consciousness is the dominant factor in the process, it is said that body and mind have consciousness as their origin. In the womb-born type of rebirth the initial arising of material phenomena in the mother's womb is invisible to the naked eye. Just as a tiny seed of the banyan tree grows into a magnificent tree, from the moment of conception an embryo develops gradually into a living being (such as human being, etc.) as follows:

- i. In the first seven days, as embryonic liquid (invisible at first).
- ii. In the second seven days, as a foamy substance.
- iii. In the third seven days, as a clot of blood.
- iv. In the fourth seven days, as a tiny lump of flesh.

Then at the end of the eleventh week, the head and limbs take shape when the four sense-bases of eye, ear, nose and tongue are formed. The two sense-bases of body and mind are there from conception. This is (roughly) how corporeality arises.

Scientific knowledge is limited primarily to what the microscope can reveal. It is therefore beyond the abil-

ity of modern scientists to observe the subtle material phenomena. Based on physiological findings alone, they can only define animal and human faculties.

5. *The Six Sense-bases*

The six sense-bases i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind are called *saḍāyatana*. The first five are included in the material aggregate. The sixth, the mind, is nothing but consciousness. Although the six sense-bases are included in mind and matter, they are given again as the fifth link in the chain of dependent origination due to their importance. They constitute the six main doors in a being like the main gates of a city. They may also be called the six head offices, the six warehouses, the six-ports, or the six railway terminals.

It is through these six ports that the six kinds of steamships travel to the various destinations — the heavenly realms (*sugati*), or the realms of misery (*duggati*). Similarly, it is through these six railway terminals that the six trains set out on their journeys in *saṃsāra*.

The Buddha said, "What, monks, is the arising of the world? Because of eye and visible object, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three; the eye, the visible object and eye-consciousness; constitutes contact. Because of contact, feeling arises. Because of feeling, . . . Thus arises this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, is called the arising of the world."

In the above discourse the Buddha expounds how the six sense-bases condition the six different aggregates and their attendant suffering. If the inhabitants of hell were grouped according to their mode of descent, there would be six groups as follows:

1. Those who travelled there by the eye-base.
2. Those who travelled there by the ear-base.
3. Those who travelled there by the nose-base.
4. Those who travelled there by the tongue-base.
5. Those who travelled there by the body-base.
6. Those who travelled there by the mind-base.

To extend the metaphor: they travelled from those six main terminals, or they set out from those six ports.

The arising of the mental aggregates is quite different from that of the material aggregate. With regard to the material aggregate, a tiny seedling from a banyan tree can grow into a big tree, and from the seeds produced by that tree during its lifetime, thousands of banyan trees can be propagated. With regard to the mental aggregate of volition each kamma produces only one becoming (*bhava*) at a time. Even within one sitting, six volitions can arise out of the six sense-bases, all of which will produce a result at some future time, if not during one's present life. In the next existence, too, since only one of them is going to give its fruit, the rest are held in abeyance until favourable circumstances prevail. They may be likened to trains standing in a station with their engines running, waiting for the

green light. That green light may take aeons to appear, but eventually it will appear, as will the result of volitional action unless one becomes a Stream-winner. As for an uninformed person submerged in immorality, trains to carry him or her to hell are being made ready every day.

How is one destined for such miserable existences? It depends upon the stimulation of the sense-bases. Take the eye-base for instance. Some enticing form that belongs to someone else, appears to view, and the eye-base comes into contact with it, so eye-consciousness arises. It is like the spark that occurs when the hummer strikes the flint in a cigarette lighter. Due to the presence of three factors — visible, object, eye and consciousness — contact arises. Contact is like the hand that grasps the visible object. The moment it grasps, feeling arises. Here, feeling is like a withered lotus coming into contact with cool water. Feeling is enjoyed as pleasant. This causes craving or attachment to arise. Attachment does not let go of that pleasant feeling. No craving arises in the Buddha and Arahants although they know that a thing can invoke pleasure, since they see the danger in being attached to pleasant feeling.

For example, when an unwary person finds a poisonous fruit which looks like the choicest mango, and smell and tastes like it too, he will be enticed by the appearance, smell and taste. However, someone who knows for certain that the fruit is poisonous, far from being enticed, will laugh at it and scorn it in fear. This is how, on seeing

some desirable thing, different reactions arise in one who has defilements in him and one who is free from defilements.

Pleasant feeling or attachment may be likened to the sticky substance used by hunters to trap monkeys. When one is pleased with the object then craving for the pleasant feeling grows, intensifies and becomes rooted in the sense-object. The roots extend deeper and take a firm hold like the roots of a banyan tree clinging to and creeping into decaying brickwork. (How this process of attachment arises will be dealt with later.) The attachment that arises from craving is called 'sensual attachment' (*kāmuṇāḍānam*).

Attachment arises immediately in one who is in the habit of falling into lust. If the object of attachment is one's own property it holds him fast to the round of existences, but does not pull him down to hell. If the object of attachment is the property of another, and one does not covet it, the attachment may not send one down to the hell realms. When, however, one covets another's property, this attachment is unwholesome kamma. Scheming to take another's property is an evil volition that amounts to a mental act of covetousness (*abhijjhā*). It has the potential of pushing one down to hell. It, too, is like a train that will carry one to realms of torture.

Further, if one bears malice against the owner of that property which one craves and clings to, it is the evil volition of ill-will (*vyāpāda*). This also has the potential

to send one down to hell. Again, if one holds the wrong view that harbouring malice is not a serious evil, and that those recluses and wise men who say so are wrong; that there is no such thing as kamma; that malicious thoughts produce no result; that the worse that could happen is that anger could arise in the owner if he comes to know of the ill-will directed against him — that amounts to the evil volition of wrong-view (*micchādiṭṭhi*). This is another train to take one down to hell. Beginning from feasting one's eyes on another's property, a string of other kinds of immoral deeds may also be perpetrated, such as killing, stealing, adultery, lying, slander, abusive speech or idle chatter — all of which provide sure transport to the realms of torture. These immoral volitions that cause one to commit the ten immoral deeds are what is meant by: "Because of attachment, becoming arises."

This is how, from the eye-base alone, one of the six 'railway terminals', trains depart daily for the fiery realms bearing the unwary, uninformed people. The same should be understood in respect of the five other sense-bases and the five other terminals.

It is from the very same terminals that the six trains to the fortunate planes of existence depart. Herein, since I am confining myself to using everyday examples only, the more abstruse matters regarding the consequences that birth entails are not touched upon. From such sense-bases, (terminals in our example) ten trains leave for the four lower planes of existence on account of the immoral ac-

tions committed therein; and ten trains leave for the fortunate planes of existence on account of the moral or virtuous actions. The fortunate realms are the human, *deva* and *brahmā* planes. This is why the six sense-bases are taught as a separate factor although they are already included in consciousness and mind-and-matter.

6-8, Contact, Feeling and Craving

These five factors have already been examined in our discussion on how the ten moral and immoral deeds are based at the six senses using the analogy of the six trains.

9. Attachment

The significance of attachment (*upādāna*) will now be explained. To one who fails to understand things in their true nature, the twelve factors of dependent origination would seem inadequate to describe life. It is said, by the poet, "The world is too much with us." However, in truth, one has to see the world only in the light of these twelve factors. Failure to do so allows delusion to prevail that naturally inclines one to harbour wrong-views and personality-belief.

All the existences of beings in the human world, the higher worlds of the *devas* and the *brahmās*, or the lower worlds of the four miserable planes, arise due to the

causal factors of consciousness and mind-and-matter. This fact must be understood. It is these two factors that bring about what is tangible.

The six sense-bases, contact and feeling are the three factors that manipulate and adorn the tangible bodies of beings. Craving and attachment are the bold banners of the uninformed person signifying the manipulation and adornment (by the three manipulators) on the body. With regard to the banner of attachment there are four kinds:

- i. Sensual attachment (*kāmapādānaṃ*).
- ii. Attachment to wrong-view (*ditṭhupādānaṃ*).
- iii. Attachment to futile practices or rites and rituals (*śīlabbatupādānaṃ*).
- iv. Attachment to personality-belief (*attāvādupādānaṃ*)
 - i. *Kāmapādānaṃ* means tenacious attachment to magnificent existences as a man, *deva* or Sakka, the celestial lord of the Tāvātimsa realm, just as the roots of the banyan tree cling to the crevices in brickwork. It is, in essence, craving. It is comparable to *Balavāmukha* — the awesome whirlpool in the great oceans, the dread of all seafarers. If sucked into the whirlpool of sensual attachment, one is dragged down directly to hell. Most beings are spun around by the powerful whirlpool of sensuality so that even when a Buddha does arise in the world, they miss the rare opportunity to comprehend the Dhamma be-

cause they cling to existence so desperately. They cannot hear the teaching even now, though it is still loud and clear.

Craving that takes pleasure in the six senses and their objects may be likened to the peripheral currents of the great whirlpool, from which one could, with mindful determination, extricate oneself. However, if one advances too far into the currents, the whirlpool will drag one down. All seafarers, once caught in it, are sucked down into the ocean's depths by the whirlpool. Similarly, once attachment has established itself in one's mind, one is inextricably drawn into the saṃsāric current and cast down to the depths of hell.

- ii. *Diṭṭhupādānaṃ* means the confirmed wrong views of sixty-two kinds,¹ the three gross wrong-views,² (*visamahetu diṭṭhi*: *visama* = grossly unjust; *hetu* = root-cause; *diṭṭhi* = view or belief)...

¹. The sixty-two kinds of wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) include eighteen kinds relating to the past and forty-four relating to the future, all are — on personality-belief. Again, seven views hold that the soul is annihilated after death (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) and fifty-five hold that the soul is eternal (*sassata diṭṭhi*) Please see the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*.

². "The Three Gross Wrong-views": they are gross because they either disregard or distort the principle of kamma. Please see *Sammādiṭṭhi Dīpanī* by Ledi Sayādaw, 'Manuals of Buddhism', Rangoon 1981.

- iii. *Silabbatupādānam* means futile practices and rituals held to with religious fervour. The worst type is to believe that if one models one's life on that of an ox or a dog one attains eternal bliss.
- iv. *Attāvādupādānam* is personality-belief, attachment to a sense of 'self', which we have discussed above.

10. *Becoming*

Becoming is understood as a process of kamma as the active side (*kammabhava*), which determines the passive side (*upapattibhava*) of the next existence. The ten moral deeds and the ten immoral deeds are the active side. Moral deeds result in fortunate existences as a wealthy human, *deva* or *brahmā*. Immoral deeds result in rebirth in the four lower planes of miserable existence: the hellish realm, the animal realm, hungry ghosts (*petas*) and fallen gods (*asūrakāyas*). These existences, both high and low, are called *upapattibhava*.

11-12. *Birth, Aging and Death*

Birth (*jāti*) means rebirth or continued existences in the future, as a new set of the five aggregates.

Aging (*jarā*) means the constant decay of phenomena that is manifested as senility. After arising, the five

aggregates decay and perish incessantly. Decay is called *jarā*; perishing is called *Maraṇam*.

SOME DIFFICULT POINTS INZ DEPENDENT ORIGATION

Please commit the twelve links to memory:

“*Avijjā, saṅkhāra, viññāṇa, nāma-rūpa, salāyatana, phassa, vedanā, taṇhā, upādāna, bhava, jāti, jarāmaraṇam*.”

The first two factors — *avijjā* and *saṅkhāra* — are the previous causes that lie at the root of the present existence. In other words, it is our previous deluded actions that have ‘created’ our present existence. Who creates all beings? Ignorance or delusion and volitional activities create them all. There is no other Creator. (Ignorance and volitional activities have already been explained above).

What happens after death? Rebirth follows death. Rebirth is a fresh becoming. The eight intermediate factors from *viññāṇa* to *bhava* belong to the present. That is what is generally called ‘life’ or ‘the world’. The cycle of rebirth is without beginning. In that beginningless cycle, when you consider the present existence, it is just a manifestation of your previous ignorance and volitional activities. As soon as the present life ceases, a fresh rebirth arises. That fresh birth is also another ‘present’ existence. In other words, one existence after another is arising, so there is always a ‘present’ existence as long as ignorance and crav-

ing remain. This, in essence, is the beginningless cycle of rebirth called *samsāra*.

The Buddha taught *Avijjā* and *Sankhāra* to show that there is no other Creator. He taught *jāti* to show that so long as *Taṇhā* and *Upādāna* are present, there is no end to the round of births.

Ignorance and volitional activities cannot arise by themselves. They can arise only when the eight factors such as consciousness are present. So whenever there are ignorance and volitional activities, the eight factors must be in existence. The eight are also only a creation of the previous ignorance and volitional activities. Thus the beginning of *samsāra* cannot be known. This shows that thinking, "There must be a first cause of a being" is mistaken. It also does away with another wrong view; namely, that a being is reborn after its death, or the theory of transmigration of a soul. A fresh birth must always arise as long as craving and attachment are present. By birth is meant the eight factors such as consciousness that are present here and now — generally called the present birth or the present life.

The round of births therefore comes to an end only when craving and attachment are extinguished. Otherwise, there is no end to existence on some plane or another. Craving and attachment do not die out unless one contemplates thoroughly on the seven aspects in the five aggregates by observing them within oneself. It is only

when right view is attained through insight that craving ceases. When craving is extinct, attachment is automatically dead and gone.

The Buddha taught a way that an ordinary person can follow. How does seawater taste? If one tastes a drop of seawater at the seashore one knows that it is salty. One need not taste water from the middle of all the great oceans to know this. In much the same way, the Buddha explains how the eight factors of dependent origination arise through previous ignorance and volitional activities. This shows that dependent origination and the eight factors are knowable. It is enough to understand their past arising. To ask when that previous ignorance began is a query as futile as tasting water from all of the great oceans in order to know if seawater is salty. The previous ignorance and volitional activities arose just because there were those eight factors such as consciousness present in a previous existence. So if one tried to trace back to all previous existences it would be an endless search. More important, it serves no purpose and is not conducive to attaining nibbāna. This is the reason for saying that saṃsāra is without any beginning.

The Dangers of Aging and Death

In all the realms of existence, aging and death are the real perils. All animate or inanimate things that one thinks one possesses (including the body and the mind)

contain the elements of aging and death. Therefore, one is subject to the dangers of fire, water, disease, poisonous or ferocious animals, evil spirits, and so on. One who has epilepsy is in constant danger of having a fit on hearing exciting music. Similarly, the constant danger of aging and death is inherent in all beings. Life-spans are spoken of because death is a sure thing. We say, for example, the *Cātumahārājikā Devas* have a five-hundred year life-span or *Tāvātimsa Devas* have a thousand-year life-span, etc.

It is due to the element of aging and death that we have to busy ourselves with the daily chores of maintaining our existence; or on a spiritual level, with the onerous acquisition of merit through deeds such as giving, virtue, training and cultivating the mind and so on.

In all the planes of existence, aging and death are the only real perils. They are the only fires in the ultimate sense. All the activities of each living being are undertaken just to fuel the fires of aging and death. Every existence ends in decay and death. (A proper presentation of this point should convince any non-Buddhist of these facts).

Q Where do aging and death originate?

A They originate in birth.

Birth implies decay and death. Where there is no birth, decay and death cannot arise. This is a plain fact with which non-Buddhists can readily agree. However, one needs to understand birth in its ultimate sense. The arising of any sensation within us, where it arises, how it feels, what sort of illness it is, what sort of pain, etc., are

'births', as are the varying frames of mind or mental feelings.

Q Where does rebirth originate?

A It originates in productive kamma, both wholesome and unwholesome.

No rebirth can arise unless there is the potential of one's previous deeds to be realised. There is no Creator who creates life other than one's kammic force. This point is profound. It is no easy matter to explain to the satisfaction of all. Even among traditional Buddhists, whatever right view they have is only shallow — direct insight into the elements and phenomena will still be lacking. It is therefore urged that the manner in which the material and mental aggregates function be made thoroughly clear.

The question of birth is the most likely one over which one may fall into wrong views if one happens to live outside of Buddhist tradition and culture. That is why it is crucial to have the right view regarding who can show the truth, having himself known it through training and insight, the tenth aspect of mundane right view.

Q Where does becoming (*kammabhava*) originate?

A It originates in attachment (*upādāna*).

Q Where does attachment originate?

A It originates in craving (*taṇhā*).

Q Where does craving originate?

A It arises from feeling (*vedanā*). These points should be clear to non-Buddhists as well.

Q How do pleasant and unpleasant feelings arise?

A They arise due to contact (*phassa*). This point will not be readily acceptable to non-Buddhists.

It is a controversial question for them. Even among Buddhists, some erroneous beliefs tend to arise on this point. For there are many so-called Buddhists who believe that all internal and external feelings, pleasant or unpleasant, are due to previous kamma alone. "It is as fate (kamma) would have it", they would say, or "If luck is with us we may have something to eat." "It is bad kamma that brought about this misfortune", or "It is through good kamma alone that one prospers," and so on. Such exclusive dependence upon the power of past kamma is wrong. It is a form of wrong view called '*pubbekatahetu-ditṭhi*' or the belief that all is conditioned by past kamma. This is according to the *Suttas* as well as the *Abhidhamma*.

Kamma is like seed-grain; joy or sorrow (pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling) are like the paddy; making an effort is like the fertility of soil; knowledge or skill are like the rain or irrigation water. The same seed-grain yields a good or poor crop depending upon the fertility of the soil, the supply of water, and most of all, the right effort that is exerted at the right time and in the right way. Indeed kamma is highly dependent on present effort. The

presence of the effects of past kamma is no less significant than good soil and good watering of a paddy field. Even the best of seeds, such as the *Abbhantara*¹ fruit's stone, will not thrive in poor soil and in dry conditions. A successful birth can arise only when proper prenatal care is given and arrangements have been made for the birth. Again, present kamma also depends on skill, discretion and prompt effort.

Some people lack knowledge and skill as well as effort. They fall on hard times, too. No wonder, then, that they become poor. They blame fate or previous kamma. They would point to the exceptional cases of those lucky ones who prosper without skill or effort. In fact their knowledge about kamma is scanty and shallow.

As a result of one's previous kamma that has been deficient in wholesome deeds, one may be born ugly, physically deformed or handicapped. Such congenital deficiencies are the result of past kamma which one can do very little to alter. Once born, the matter of upbringing, personal care, working for a living, acquiring wealth and merits, etc., are up to oneself. This is present kamma, which depends primarily on one's own wisdom and effort. One's progress in the world depends very much on present kamma.

¹. The legendary mango of divine taste, a very rare fruit said to grow in the heart of the Himalayan mountains (*Abbhantara* = interior).

Although kamma is related to pleasure and pain it is not the cause of feeling. As the Buddha said, "Because of contact, feeling arises." He did not say, "Because of kamma, feeling arises." Certain other religions do not recognise kamma, which is one extreme of wrong view. However, some Buddhists place the whole of their faith in kamma to the exclusion of effort and prudence. This is the other extreme of wrong view called "*Pubbekatahetu-ditthi*" Those who hold the latter wrong view maintain:

"Whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling one experiences, all that is due to a previous cause."

When a banyan tree seed is planted, its successful sprouting depends on the soil, water supply and seed-grain. Of these three, the seed-grain is most vital; the soil and moisture are only supporting factors. Once germination has taken place, the growth of the tree depends on the soil and moisture only, for the seed-grain has discharged its function, it is no longer needed. This is a practical example. The potential inherent in the genes of the seed determines the size of the tree and its longevity, but this potential can only be realised with the help of soil and water. Only when this help is available, can the potential in the seed be realised to the full. Here, the difference in the species of seeds must be understood. A tree's size and longevity depend on its species. It is the same for grasses and other types of vegetation. In this example, the seed grain is like kamma; the tree is like our body, the soil

is like our due efforts and water is like prudence.

The kamma that one has accumulated from the beginningless past is a unique mixture of good and bad. Skilful effort and prudence will be the dominant factors contributing to progress. One is doing oneself a disservice if one blames kamma for one's failures in life; so too if one blames the lack of perfections for failing to acquire learning, merit and insight in one's religious life. Ponder on this well.

"From contact, feeling arises" will now be explained. It is cold in winter, and cold is unpleasant. Certain teachers maintain that it is cold because God has willed the seasons. This wrong view is called "*Issaranimmāna-ditṭhi*". Those who hold this wrong view maintain:

"Whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling one experiences, all that is due to an Almighty God."

Certain teachers say that there is no cause or condition for what a person experiences. Such a view is also a kind of wrong view called '*Ahetu-ditṭhi*'. Those who hold this view maintain:

"Whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling one experiences, all that is without any cause."

Certain naked ascetics taught that pleasure or pain is the result of past kamma and nothing else. This is also the wrong view called '*Pubbekatahetu-ditṭhi*'. This view is partly true, but it is still a wrong view because it rules out

causes or conditions other than kamma.

The Law of Dependent Origination says,
 "Body consciousness arises dependent on
 the body and a tactile object. The coinci-
 dence of the three is contact, and feeling
 is conditioned by contact."

Cold is felt in the following way according to the Buddha's teaching quoted above. There is the body-base inside you. There is the material element of heat, which can become cold (a quality of the heat element). This serves as the sense-object, the tangible kind that corresponds to the sensitive body-base. As the sense-object (cold) and the sense-base (body) come into contact, tactile consciousness arises throughout the body. These three elements of cold, body-base and tactile consciousness condition the mental factor called contact. This contact causes feeling to arise. In this case, it is the unpleasant feeling of cold and one might say, "Oh, its terribly cold." When one keeps oneself near a fire, the cold feeling vanishes, and a pleasant feeling of warmth arises in its place. How does this new feeling come about? Is it God's will? Or is it purely a matter of kamma?

Similarly, when the external material quality of warmth contacts the sensitive body-base, tactile consciousness arises. Consciousness arises dependent on the body, so it is called tactile consciousness. This, in turn, causes feeling born of body-contact (*kāya-samphassajāvedanā*). The vanishing of the external material quality of cold leads

to the vanishing of that tactile consciousness and feeling produced by the contact with cold. When one moves away from the fireplace, the pleasant feeling of warmth vanishes. The same causal law should be applied here too.

By the same principle, when one feels hot and sweaty in summer one takes a cool shower. The arising of the pleasant cool feeling should be understood in the same way. These examples illustrate the arising of contact in the sensitive body-base and the consequent arising of pleasant or unpleasant feelings. Feelings arising through the other five sense-bases should be understood in the same way.

The causal law is universally applicable. In our illustration, the change from unpleasant to pleasant feeling is caused by one's effort, which is merely present action, though, to a certain extent, it is assignable to kamma. However, such a view cannot help one to dispel personality-belief and doubt.

It is only when contact is understood as being the dependent factor on which feeling arises, that the belief in a 'self' and doubts about the Noble Truths will be dispelled. Otherwise, the fires of hell burn relentlessly within. Previous kamma, of course, has its role here, but it is just a remote cause like the seed that has grown into a tree. What is the most obvious is that the world is a thick forest of desirable and undesirable sense-objects. Since the six sense-doors are always open, how could any individual avoid pleasant and unpleasant feelings or sensations arising?

Present activities may be motivated by greed, anger or delusion; or they may be inspired by confidence and knowledge. They include meritorious deeds such as giving or virtue, which may be for one's own benefit or for the benefit of others. None of them are the effects of previous kamma, but present effort and present undertakings only. From one's own efforts, one experiences all sorts of feelings. Whether doing a moral deed or an immoral deed, when the aforesaid necessary conditions prevail, and appropriate contact arises, and dependent on that particular contact, feeling must arise.

This question of pleasant or unpleasant feelings and how they originate is a thorny problem that troubles those of other religions. Even during the Buddha's time wrong views on this question were prevalent. That is why it has been given such a comprehensive treatment here.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

Every living being naturally seeks safety from trouble, and strives for well-being. All mundane activities are aimed at avoiding discomfort and seeking pleasure in some form or another. No one ever wants to get into trouble. No one does anything knowingly to hurt himself. Everyone wants to enjoy pleasure, and is striving towards that end. Although everyone wants pleasure or happiness and fears pain and sorrow, few know what really ails the world and few know what real happiness is.

The Real Ill is Aging and Death

The main ill in the world is aging and death. The peril of death and how it destroys all existences has already been discussed at length and illustrated by the examples of the fire-worshipper and the spendthrift wife. Aging paves the way for death. So whatever illustrations we have used concerning death also apply to aging.

I shall illustrate this by another example. Wherever one is born, two hell fires are burning within. One is personality-belief and the other is doubt (about the Four Noble Truths). Aging and death are the agents in the service of the two fires. They destroy one who is attached to existence, as all beings are. When they have completed their mission of destruction and a being breaks up into the constituent aggregates, the two fires of personality-belief and doubt within are what cast him down to hell. The two fires can seize this opportunity only at the breaking up of the five aggregates. The two fires burn within all individuals, even if they are born in one of the six *deva* realms or in the *brahmā* realms.

The Buddha said: "Through not understanding this Law of Dependent Origination, Ānanda, these beings are all confused in their existences, like a spoilt skein, or like a weaver bird's nest, or like dried muñja grass; and they cannot escape from falling into the realms of misery all in disarray."

The Peril of Falling in Disarray

If you ask someone, "Where will you be born after your death?" The reply will probably be "I don't know. It depends on my kamma."

That is true. No one can aim at a particular future existence, it depends on one's kamma. All have to resign themselves to their own kamma. It is just like withered leaves scattered in a strong wind — no one can ever know where they are going to fall. Not only are human beings subject to an uncertain destination, but so too are the *devas* and *brahmās*, up to the *Vehapphala brahmā* realm. All worldlings are in the same boat. They fall in disarray, quite unprepared, to wherever their kamma sends them at their death. Individuals who have passed away from the four formless *brahmā* realms share the same fate. According to the *Nakhāsikhā Sutta* (*Khandha Vagga, Samyuttanikāya*), most of them fall into the four realms of misery.

Let us make an illustration. Suppose there is a magnificent multistoreyed mansion. On the first storey are plenty of pleasure and the life-span is one month. The second storey provides even more pleasures, and the life-span is two months. As we go up the levels the pleasures on offer are greater and the life-spans are longer. Below the great mansion are areas of scrubland full of thorns and sharp-edged rocks. There are enormous holes filled with sewage and excrement. There are wide areas where sharp spikes are standing. Deep crevices and hollows filled with

burning coals lie at the bottom of this place — none falling there could have any chance of escape.

Around the great mansion, prevailing gales blow at every storey. The inhabitants at the first storey are carried away by the prevailing gales at the end of their life-span of one month. Many of them fall onto the thorny scrub land; many fall into the sewage-filled holes; many drop helplessly onto the standing spikes; many fall down to the fiery hollows. The inhabitants of the upper storeys of the grand mansion also share the same fate at the end of their life-span.

The analogy is this: The multi-storeyed mansion is like the human, *deva* and *brahmā* worlds. The terrible terrain below is like the four realms of misery; the prevailing gales are like aging and death.

During life one is obsessed with enjoying whatever pleasures one can gain, quite heedless of death, but when death comes, one loses one's bearings. Through attachment to the notion of a self, one is cast down by kamma and falls in disarray. The same thing happens in the *deva* and *brahmā* realms as well, and this has been happening since the dawn of time. This complete helplessness at death when one's kamma usually casts one down to the four states of misery is called *vinipāta*. This is the law of kamma governing all worldlings.

This peril besets the multitude. Its danger and relentlessness during one's lifetime should be understood from the analogies of the fire-worshipper and the spend-

thrift wife. Aging and death not only destroy but they also send one to hell on account of one's attachment to personality-belief. All beings are subject to the misfortunes of decay and death, and all have the fires of hell burning within them. That is why all existences are simply dreadful — *dukkha*.

The Present Perils of Decay and Death

I shall now explain the perils of decay and death that one is subject to during life. Since one's birth there has not been a single moment, not so much as a single breath, when one was free from the danger of death. Death is lurking from the time a being is born, and it has always been like this. Mortality keeps beings in constant danger, for there are any number of ways to die. For instance, food is not normally poisonous. However, good food can cause an allergic reaction. Though you choose some delicacy to pamper your palate, on eating it you may suddenly become ill and die. Death is capable of countless means to fulfil its mission. Why should good food turn deadly? Why should this happen to anyone? It is simply because there is a disease in beings (aging, in the ultimate sense) that is always faithfully aiding death. This is just one example of how death can overtake us at any moment. If there was no peril of death, one need not fear anything, not even a thunderbolt striking one's head.

All human endeavours such as earning a livelihood, living in organised society, attempts at maintaining law and order, protecting oneself, one's property, etc., are primarily aimed at self-preservation. This, in simple terms, is an attempt to ward off the dangers of death. The danger of death is at the back of one's mind in doing deeds of merit such as giving or virtue. The religious life is also taken up because of an awareness of death's peril. This is an explanation of the perils of aging and death during one's lifetime.

Of all the ills to which people are subject, aging and death are paramount. There is nothing in the world, whether human or celestial, animate or inanimate, that is free from these two agents of destruction. All material or mental phenomena are fraught with aging and death. Knowing this, one may have done innumerable acts of merit in innumerable previous existences as good men, *devas* or *brahmās*, all aimed at escaping the fate of 'falling in disarray'. Yet nothing now remains to protect one from such an ignoble fate. One is still just as vulnerable as ever. Those existences have come and gone. The present existence is a fresh aggregate of the same type of suffering. What a waste! One has to start from scratch again. Why have all your good works come to naught? It is because you do not yet know what *dukkha* is. You have been serving the fires of *dukkha* in doing the well-meant deeds in the hope of escaping from *dukkha*. So you have taken the trouble to perform the meritorious deeds such as giving, virtue,

mental development and training, diligence, concentration, insight knowledge, acquiring skills repeatedly throughout *samsāra*. Your present efforts and meritorious undertakings can also become the fuel that feeds the fires of *dukkha* whose competent helpers are the decay, aging and death within you.

This exhortation is to illustrate the destructive nature of *dukkha*.

Real Happiness

Real happiness is the freedom from the perils of aging and death.

I shall make this clear. The highest form of human happiness is to be a Universal Monarch, but the fires of aging and death burn in him too, as in any other being. He is also enslaved by personality-belief, and is prone to doubts about the Four Noble Truths. These fires are manifested as life-spans. When aging burns up a human existence in ten years, it is said that ten years is the life-span of Man. Understand it in the same way for all life-spans. Life-spans in the *deva* and *brahmā* realms are of the same nature. When the human life-span lasts a hundred years a man's youth is burnt up in thirty-three years; his middle age in another thirty-three years and his old age in the last thirty-three years. Or if the length of a human's life is just thirty years the first decade is consumed by aging in just ten years, the second in the next ten years, and so on.

In the three seasons of the year, the material elements that have existed in the cold season are burnt up in four months; those of the rainy season, in four months; and those of the hot season, in four months, respectively. Of the twelve months in a year, the material elements of the first month are burnt up in thirty days, that of the second month, in thirty days, and so on. Contemplate upon the burning of aging in you, in the same way, down to the shortest time-span you can imagine, down to the blinking of an eye.

From the most fleeting moment to world cycles or aeons, aging is at work without interruption. Underlying it is the ultimate destroyer — death, a more terrifying fire. Aging or decay is very powerful, so you need to understand it. Unless you can perceive decay at work, you have not gained a clear perception of the causal process. You must be able to pin-point the 'culprit' (agent) of the whole scheme. So much for aging or decay. As for death and personality-belief, I have already explained them above.

Vicikicchā or doubt is a close associate of ignorance or delusion (*avijjā*). Doubt is of two kinds: doubt relating to the Dhamma and doubt relating to the soul or self.

The first kind of doubt springs from the ignorance that conceives things such as the aggregates, sense-bases and elements constituting a being. A traveller in unfamiliar terrain, having lost his bearings, thinks that the right way is wrong. He is confused and cannot make up his mind

which is the right way. Due to his ignorance he does not know the earth as the earth element. Doubt makes him vacillate concerning the truth; it also dampens his fervour to continue in the search of truth. This is doubt about the Dhamma.

The second kind of doubt arises from attachment to the notion of a vague 'self' or 'soul'. One unskilled in Dependent Origination is upset when faced with death. One is shocked at the prospect of losing the present life which one believes is one's own. One who holds wrong view dreads that after death his or her 'self' may be lost for ever. One who holds right view (mundane right view only) fears falling into one of the four lower realms. That feeling arises from remorse for immoral deeds or having neglected to do meritorious deeds, or both. It is this feeling that magnifies the fear of death at the last, helpless moment. All this vexation and uncertainty about the future casts beings down into the four miserable states after death.

Personality-belief and doubt oppress a person on his death-bed like a mountain tumbling down upon him. The peril of falling in disarray worries the Universal Monarch as it does other individuals. Even a Universal Monarch is not really happy because he is prone to the same fears and perils as any other being. It should be understood that the five aggregates of a *deva's* existence, Sakka's existence, or a *brahmā's* existence, are all subject to the same fires of aging and death, personality-belief and doubt.

Enjoyment of life is fraught with the perils referred to above, so that at the time of death all the glories of one's existence become meaningless as well as useless. As soon as the five aggregates fall apart, what one has clung to as one's own life perishes and goes. Whether one is a man, a *deva* or a *brahmā*, one possesses nothing. Rebirth may be in the form of a lowly being such as a louse, a flea, a dog or a pig, an earthworm or a leech. For instance, on seeing a pig, which had been a *brahmā* in a previous existence, the Buddha remarked.

"When the roots of a tree are undamaged, but only the trunk is cut off, the tree flourishes again. Even so, when craving is not totally rooted out together with its latent tendencies, this suffering of rebirth, death, etc. arises repeatedly."
(*Dhp.* v.338)

That pig had been a *bhikkhunī* during the time of Kakusandha Buddha. When she attained to the first *jhāna* she was reborn as a *brahmā*. Then she became a human being on her death as a *brahmā*. When her human existence ended she was reborn as a pig. The significant thing to note is that when she was reborn as a pig, it was only a pig's existence with no special attributes for having been a *bhikkhunī* or a *brahmā* in her previous existences.

No pleasure marred with the inherent fire of death is real happiness. In truth it is only suffering. That is why real happiness exists only when aging and death can arise

no more. Then, and only then, is happiness real and true. That happiness is called deliverance or 'release' (*nissaraṇa*) the seventh aspect we have seen earlier on.

The Two Highways

There are two highways. One highway leads to the truth of suffering: the other leads to the truth of happiness.

Consider whether it is a function of knowledge or ignorance that governs the daily activities of most beings. If their activities are undertaken with right view according to the sevenfold proficiency in the seven aspects discussed above, it is a function of knowledge. Knowledge consists in the acquiring of insight into the elements of extension, cohesion, heat and motion. Ignorance consists in the inherent darkness in one's mind that has kept one from perceiving the true nature of the four elements. It is the dense darkness that has been with all beings throughout the beginningless cycles of *samsāra*. All activities done under the spell of that darkness, whether they are the daily chores of existence, or the religious practices of a *bhikkhu*, or deeds of merit such as giving, or haphazard mental development, or learning the scriptures — in short, all undertakings, good or bad, are only acts dominated by ignorance. All actions done with ignorance lead to the truth of suffering. They make the highway to suffering because this road has been laid down under the supervi-

sion of aging and death since the dawn of time.

Ignorance is not something that needs to be cultivated. This veil of darkness has always been inherent in living beings. Knowledge, on the other hand, is something that has to be cultivated. It is possible only through following the Buddha's teaching. This is an uphill task since it entails eradicating ignorance. Knowledge is the highway where aging and death are completely absent. It is the road taken by the Buddhas, Solitary Buddhas and all the Arahants who have ever attained enlightenment. It is the road to deliverance.

This is the exposition of the way leading to the truth of suffering and the way leading to the truth of happiness — the two highways that lead in opposite directions.

Regarding the way of knowledge: contemplating the five aggregates might seem rather heavy going for meditation practice. Penetrative awareness, direct knowledge or insight knowledge into just the five basic elements, namely the elements of extension, cohesion, heat, motion and the mind-element, is sufficient.

Pakkusāti, the king of Taxila (now in modern India) won enlightenment through understanding those five elements plus the element of the void or space (*ākāsa*). The Buddha said, "This being, bhikkhus, is just (an embodiment of) the six elements"

Ākāsa means the element of space. The Buddha indicated the cavities and hollows in man such as the mouth,

the ears and the throat, to illustrate *ākāśa*. If one contemplates the five basic elements and the seven aspects to gain insight into the nature of the body, it is quite possible that insight-knowledge leading to the truth of happiness is within one's reach here and now. This is an exposition on the truth of suffering, the way to the truth of suffering, the truth of happiness and the way to the truth of happiness. This method of exposition, which is the method of Dependent Origination in forward and reverse order, is most helpful for practice.

According to the method taught by the Buddha in the *Dhammacakka Sutta*, the first sermon at the Deer Park, the four truths are shown in this order: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of cessation of suffering and the truth of the Way. Suffering is, as we have seen, the real peril and ill in all forms of existence, which are nothing but the five aggregates. The origin of suffering is nothing but craving. The cessation of suffering is real happiness, ultimate bliss or deathlessness. The Eightfold Noble Path is the highway leading to insight knowledge that we have discussed above. The Eightfold Noble Path has been explained in the section on the fourth aspect of the aggregates. Ignorance and craving being co-existent, when one ceases, the other automatically ceases.

For the purpose of meditation practice, ignorance as the antithesis of knowledge, is shown as the origin of suffering. This helps giving one direct knowledge in meditation.



Chapter Ten

AN EXHORTATION REGARDING THE GREATEST OF OPPORTUNITIES

1. The Great Opportunity of Rebirth as a Human Being

Why is it such a great opportunity to be born as a human being? Is it because as a human being one is free from the miserable states of the lower realms of misery? Is it because human pleasures are really great? No, not at all. If sensual pleasures are regarded as great opportunities, then human pleasures are nothing compared to the celestial pleasures of the heavenly realms. If pleasure were to be the criterion here, the Buddha would have mentioned birth in the heavenly realms as great opportunities. The Buddha did not do so. It should therefore, be understood that by a great opportunity the Buddha did not mean opportunity to enjoy pleasure, but one for doing skilful actions or meritorious deeds.

I shall amplify this statement. Merit may be done in two ways: by working for future well-being as a wealthy man or powerful deity, or by cultivating the mind for enlightenment as one of the three classes of *Bodhi* referred to in Chapter One. The first can be done only in the human world, the second can also be done in the human world. Many aspirants to Buddhahood have, even during the present world cycle, been reborn in the *brahmā* realms repeatedly. They did not, however, live out *brahmā* life-spans there, but willed themselves to terminate their existences as *brahmās* by what is called *adhimutti* death because they were eager to fulfil the perfections in the human realm. When they were reborn as Universal Monarchs too, they renounced the world and practised the perfections.

The point is that human existence is a glorious opportunity for the wise because from one such existence innumerable good deeds can be done that can fructify as good human existences, good *deva* existences and good *brahmā* existences.

I shall elucidate this point. In the human existence the supreme glory is that of a Universal Monarch. If a Universal Monarch were to enjoy the glory of his state to life's end he would lose all his glory at death, and he would have nothing to his credit by way of merit. He would have thus squandered his human existence. If he appreciates this great opportunity of earning merit he will renounce the world as soon as possible and acquire merit

whereby he can be assured of hundreds of thousands of future existences as a Universal Monarch.

He can be assured of more glorious existences as a *deva*, or as Sakka, the Lord of Tāvātimsa, or as *Mahā brahmā*, or as an *Ābhassarā brahmā* with a life-span of eight *Mahākappas*, or as a *Subhakiṇṇa brahmā* with a life-span of sixty-four *Mahākappas*, or as a *Vehapphala brahmā* with a life-span of five-hundred *Mahākappas*, or even as a 'formless' or *Arūpa brahmā* of the 'summit of existence' (*bhavagga*) with a life span of eighty-four thousand *Mahākappas*. These are the possibilities open to any wise one born as a human being in one human existence.

If a Universal Monarch cannot renounce his worldly pomp and splendour, he misses that glorious opportunity to earn the aforesaid future well-being. So anyone born as a human being should be able to renounce worldly pleasures for the sake of future worldly pleasures, which may be far greater than the present ones. If one foregoes the opportunity one would be just like the fool who barter a precious gem worth a kingdom for a meagre meal. Such are the opportunities a person has in the human realm.

As for those really wise ones who aspire to one of the three classes of enlightenment, they should be even more willing to forsake worldly pleasure. Human birth is the ideal opportunity to gain real happiness. Only one's wisdom and discretion is the limit.

"That is why the wise man, seeing clearly the benefits and riding the high tide of

fortune leading to innumerable glorious future existences, should forsake the meagre pleasures of the present."

2. *The Great Opportunity of Meeting the Buddha*

Why is a great opportunity to be alive when a Buddha has arisen, or while a Buddha's teaching is extant? Is it because it offers one the opportunity of acquiring merit through giving, virtue and mental development for one's future well-being? Or is it because it provides the plinth on which the edifice of enlightenment is to be built? Ordinary kammic merits are sought and won at all times whether a Buddha arises or not. In the dark ages of world-cycles wherein no Buddha arises, there are men of virtue doing meritorious deeds. Therefore, the world abounds with *deva's* and *brahm-ās* at those times too. However, the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment are known only when the Buddha's teaching is still extant. That is why encountering a Buddha, or to be living while a Buddha's teaching is extant, is the greatest of opportunities.

Much has been made of certain virtuous people born with a penchant for knowledge, but such mundane wisdom is superficial. It does not develop into supramundane wisdom. It cannot withstand the onslaught of non-Buddhist or wrong beliefs once the Buddha's teaching has disappeared. The once wise man then reverts to being a great person, content to drift and sink in the ocean of

samsāra, ever seeking sensual existences like an old ghost wailing for crumbs around a rubbish heap.

"That is why the wise man, seeing clearly the benefits in maturing the perfections, and recognising the golden opportunity that leads to Enlightenment, should exert in all earnestness after the essential teaching of the Buddha contained in the thirty-seven factors of Enlightenment."

3. *The Great Opportunity of Becoming a Bhikkhu*

There are three types of renunciation of the worldly life for the life of a bhikkhu: *Paññā Pabbajjita*, *Saddhā Pabbajjita* and *Bhayā Pabbajjita*. Of these, the first two types require previous accumulations of merit or perfections. *Bhayā Pabbijjita* means taking up the life of a bhikkhu out of expediency such as to escape royal displeasure, or to seek asylum in sickness, or to take refuge from an enemy, or to avoid the struggles of the worldly life. It will be seen that the teaching of the All-knowing Buddha is the business of the wise. Whether one is a bhikkhu or a layman, the teaching is cherished only among the wise. "Lion's fat collects only in a gold cup", as the saying goes.

The Buddha's teaching is a great opportunity for the *deva* and *brahmās* to gain benefit. Hardly one human being among ten million celestial beings would have benefited, not one among ten thousand of them is a bhikkhu,

the overwhelming majority are lay people. During the Buddha's lifetime, the city of Sāvatti boasted millions of Noble Ones. Among them hardly a hundred thousand might have been bhikkhus. "Being a bhikkhu is a great opportunity", is therefore a statement with reference only to the *Paññā Pabbajjita* and the *Saddhā Pabbajjita* types of renunciation. A *Paññā Pabbajjita* exerts for knowledge; a *Saddhā Pabbajjita* exerts for the Noble Practice; a *Bhayā Pabbajjit* exerts for material possessions permissible for a bhikkhu i.e., the four requisites of alms-food, robes, monastic shelter and medicine. These characteristics testify to what type of bhikkhu one actually is.

*"Paññāpa pabbajjito paññāṃ saddham
saddhā paribbajo, bhayā pabbajjito lābh-
am, anuyuñjanti sāsane."*

Or there can be four types of bhikkhu as follows:

A *Paññā Pabbajjita* exerts for knowledge; a *Saddhā Pabbajjita* exerts for the Noble Practice; a *Lābha Pabbajjit*, exerts for comfort; a *Moha Pabbajjita* exerts for shallow things, lacking self-discipline, due to a superficial regard for the teaching.

*"Paññāpa pabbajjito paññāṃ, saddham
saddhā paribbajo, lobha pabbajjito lobh-
am, moham, mohāparibbajo."*

4. *The Great Opportunity of Having Confidence*

There are four classes of confidence (*saddhā*).

(i) *Pasāda Saddhā*, (ii) *Okappana Saddhā*, (iii) *Āgama Saddhā*, (iv) *Adhigama Saddhā*.

1. *Pasāda Saddhā* is confidence in the Three Gems because the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha are recognised as being worthy of reverence. It is based upon a superficial high regard for the Three Gems and not on a deep conviction, hence it is not a stable type of confidence.
2. *Okappana Saddhā* is confidence inspired by the noble attributes of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha. It comes out of conviction and it endures for a lifetime; but after one's death it vanishes from one's consciousness.
3. *Āgama Saddhā* is the type of confidence acquired by a bodhisatta. After receiving recognition and assurance of future Buddhahood, a bodhisatta has unwavering confidence in the Three Gems which implies an abiding confidence in the merit of good deeds.
4. *Adhigama Saddhā* is the confidence nurtured by the *Ariya* who, having gained Path Knowledge, has realised nibbāna.

Of these four classes, even to be endowed with the first of them is a rare gift. Many who are born in Buddhist lands do not have even this kind of confidence.

One who has the second kind of confidence will be able to revere a bhikkhu whose conduct is far from being correct, knowing the nine attributes of the *Ariya Saṅgha* to which a bhikkhu belongs.

One endowed with *Āgama Saddhā* cannot refrain from performing some sort of perfect merit even for a day.

The Noble Ones who have won attainments in the Path Knowledges, are endowed with a confidence that is a great attainment in itself (*Adhigama*). They have an abiding confidence in the Three Gems, the upkeep of the five precepts, the performance of the ten kinds of meritorious deeds and the practice of the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment.

Confidence is a key factor that determines the extent of one's realisation of nibbāna. For example, an epileptic has a fit when he hears exciting music. When he is cured of the disease no music, however exciting, can cause a fit. He remembers how, when he had the affliction, he used to have fits on such occasions, how his heart would throb, uncontrollably, how he would lose consciousness. Now that he is completely cured he feels very glad. On seeing other epileptics suffer the same painful experience at the sound of exciting music too, he would remember his previous affliction and feel very glad in the knowledge that he is free from it now. When he hears of any cases of fits suffered by other epileptics, he feels very glad that he is free of the disease.

In much the same way, the world is filled with occasions for passion to arise or for hatred, vanity, delusion, pride, etc. to arise. A Noble One, on coming across such an occasion, remembers how in the past; before realising nibbāna, he had let passion, or hatred arise, but knows now that no kind of passion, hatred or vanity can arise.

On seeing or hearing of other people moved by passion a Noble One remembers his or her former foolishness and rejoices in the knowledge that he or she is free from passion. On seeing another epileptic having a fit, an epileptic is reminded of the disease and is afraid that he or she too might suffer like that one day. A wise person is also constantly alert to the possibility of some misfortune whenever he or she sees another person suffering due to unrestrained passion, because he or she is not yet free from passion. A Noble One has no such fears, for he or she knows that passion has been eradicated. Thus a Noble One is glad when reflecting upon his or her previous defiled state well as on the awareness of freedom from passion.

*"Q how happy we are in maintaining our
lives*

*Unafflicted by defilements amidst those
afflicted!*

Amidst people who are afflicted!

We live unafflicted by defilements"

(Dhp.v 198)

On seeing the multitude toiling at their daily chores, in fine weather or foul, full of ego, blinded by ignorance of the true nature of the elements, and merely feeding the fires of aging and death that burn within, a Noble One feels glad to be free from such foolishness or vain endeavours. As for worldlings, they emulate the active life around them. Vain endeavour or 'foolishness' (*balussukha saṅkhārā*) is the sort of eagerness shown by foolish people, who are so blinded by ignorance that they are unable to recognise worthwhile and fruitful endeavours. Vain endeavour is activity caused by ignorance. Again, it is *kammabhava* or productive kamma (i.e. productive of continued existences) committed because of attachment.

All kinds of futile activity can be seen anywhere, in big cities, at railway terminals, at markets, at seaport, at airports, in busy streets, etc., where the babble of voices makes a constant din. All this hubbub is misdirected, but its futility is seen only by the wise and the Noble Ones — to uninformed people it is seen as progress.

*"O how happy we are in maintaining our
lives,*

*Indifferent to sensual pleasures, amidst
those who strive for them.*

*Amidst those striving for sensual pleasures,
We live without striving for them."*

(Dhp. v 199)

A wise person will, on seeing miserable people such as the blind, deaf, dumb, the insane, or wretched

beings such as animals; or on pondering over the worse miseries of the lower realms, feel worried at the thought that one of these days he or she might very well share their lot for he or she has been carrying on the same vain and fruitless activities, prompted by the same defilements.

However, the Noble One while pitying the sufferers, will exult in the knowledge that he or she is free from such a fate. It must have been this kind of exultation in the benign smile of the Venerable Moggallāna on seeing a group of *petas* on Mount Gijjakuṭa. This is how a person who has quelled the passions within feels joy at the prospect of the dreary process of mind-and-matter soon extinguished.

This great opportunity of living in the era of the Buddha's Teaching is the time for quenching the fires within. This is the opportune moment to extinguish the eleven fires that have been burning since time immemorial. It is the time to leave behind human affairs and cares, and to devote oneself to the eradication of ignorance. Human welfare has been enjoyed often enough throughout *samsāra*; this life is not exceptional. Whether one is a billionaire or an emperor, one's riches and prestige are well worth forsaking in the quest for enlightenment. Even if one is a *deva* or a *brahmā*, these exalted existences are of no avail when the fires of aging and death are still burning within. All forms of worldly pleasures, whether kings, *devas* or *brahmās*, are sources of defilements that stimulate the process of rebirth. As such, no pleasure is particularly worth

while, as all are decaying, crumbling and perishing incessantly. The only worthwhile task to set oneself is to root out the perilous wrong view of personality, an illusion that does not actually exist. This task must be taken up at the right time which is NOW. Once the moment is past, the chance is lost!

On seeing such precious time being squandered in the pursuit of the pleasures that this shallow existence has to offer — still craving, still attached, unsatiated, never satisfied with human or celestial glories, a wise person feels remorse, "I too am still craving, still attached." As for the Noble Ones, they exult in the knowledge that they have freed themselves from the craving and attachment that could drag them down to hell. That is why a Noble One feels happy because he or she knows that he or she has no craving and attachment. This is the exposition on how the Noble Ones view life, having realised nibbāna within.

5. The Great Opportunity of Hearing the Dhamma

Saddhamma means *sāsana* or the Buddha's Teaching. The teaching has three main aspects: training for higher virtue, training for higher concentration, and training for higher knowledge or wisdom, which we have seen earlier on. These are referred to as learning (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*) and realisation (*paṭivedha*) in the commentary.

"Since the beginningless round of saṃsāra
my two ears have been filled with human

voices and human speech, or *deva* voices
and *deva* speech, or *brahmā* speech.”

“All worldly talk only fans the fires of defilements — craving, anger, delusion, personality-belief, aging and death — burning within me. Never before have I heard this different kind of speech, that is the teaching exhorting me to extinguish these fires and showing me the way to do it. How opportune it is for me! I will henceforth use my ears for the purpose of listening to this most precious and timely sound before it is too late.”

Thus should you ponder, Maung Thaw.

End of Uttamapurisa Dīpanī

Dated 1262 Burmese Era
the First Waxing of Kason (May 1901)





The Translator

U Tin U, B.A., B.L., D.M.A., D.E.P., retired from public service and volunteered for the Pitaka translation Project launched by the Myanmar Pitaka Association (MPA) in 1981, first as a translator and later as an editor. In 1991 the MPA was voluntarily wound up and its Editorial committee was renamed the Honorary Editorial Committee of the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sāsana (DPPS). U Tin U as an editor is a member of the committee. He was awarded the religious title of **Mahāsaddhamma jotikadhaja** by the State in recognition of his distinguished contribution to the cause of the spreading of the Buddha's Teaching.

He had translated a number of the approved Pali texts for the MPA out of which two books have been published so far, namely, **Khandha Saṃyutta** and **Sagā-thā vagga Saṃyutta**. His other works include:

1. Ledi Sayadaw's **Paṭṭhānuddesa Dīpaṇi** translated into Myanmar from the original Pali.
2. 'The Buddha's Teaching: the Doctrine and the Practice' (the Myanmar version of which was published in 1993).
3. 'The Buddha's Analysis of Mind (being an easier exposition of the 52 **Cetasikas** from the **Abhidhammattha saṅgaha** (the Myanmar version of which was published in 1998).
4. The Great Chronicle of Buddhas by the late Bhaddanta Vicittasārābhivamśa (3 out of 8 books translated by U Tin U)