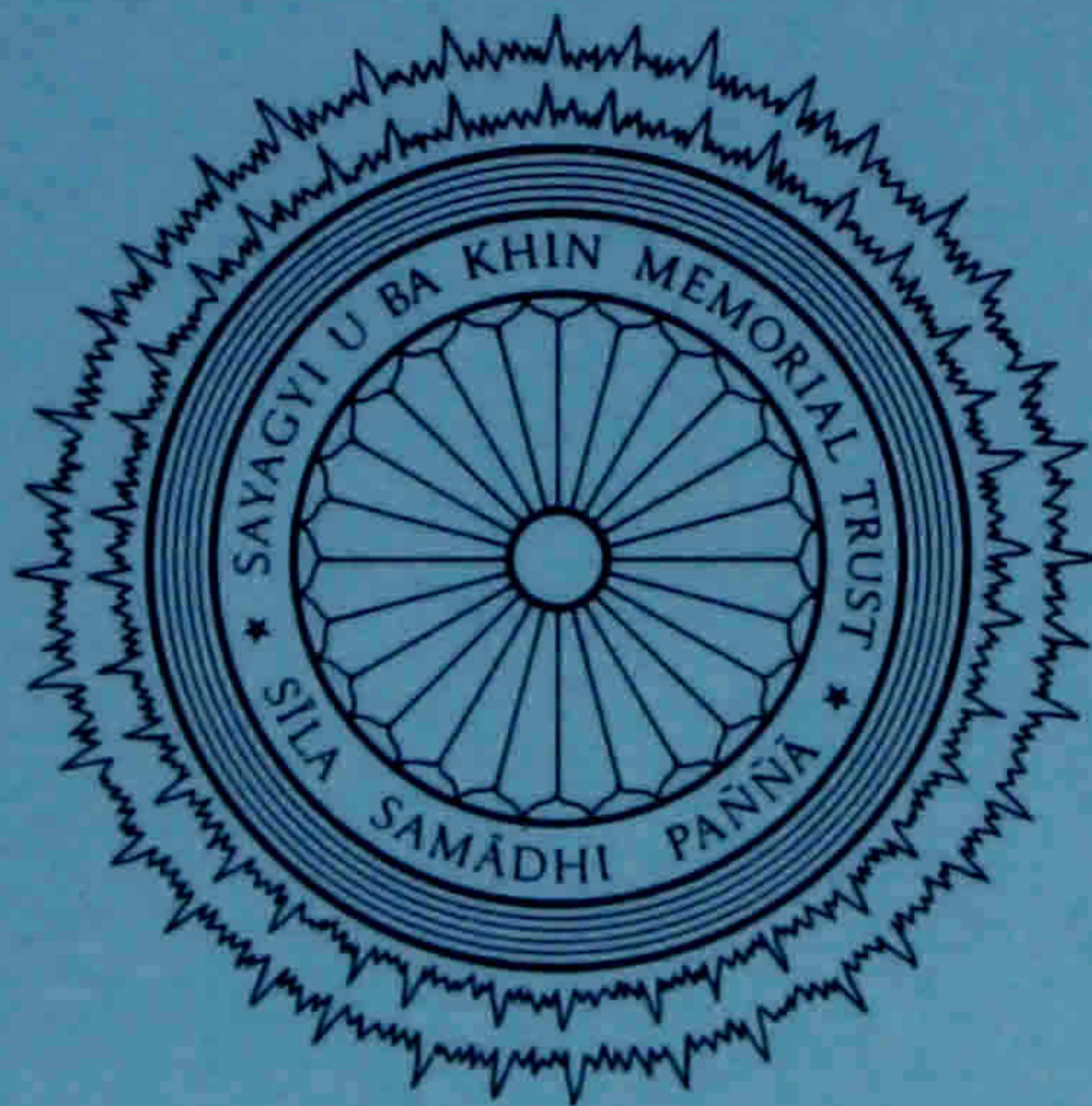


BUDDHISM AS A WAY OF LIFE AND OTHER ESSAYS



BY
SAYAGYI U CHIT TIN

ASSISTED BY
WILLIAM PRUITT, PH.D.

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SAYAGYI U CHIT TIN

assisted by
William Pruitt, Ph.D.

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*Dedicated to our esteemed Teacher,
Sayagyi U Ba Khin (Thray Sithu)*

Abbreviations:

A	Anguttara-nikāya
ANV	<i>The Discourse of the All-Embracing Net of Views</i> , trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi
BD	<i>The Book of the Discipline</i> (trans. of Vin)
BL	<i>Buddhist Legends</i> (trans. of Dhp-a)
Bv	Buddhavaṃsa
Bv-a	Commentary on Bv (Madhuratthavilāsinī)
CB	<i>Chronicle of Buddha</i>
CPD	<i>A Critical Pāli Dictionary</i> (Copenhagen)
CSM	<i>The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning</i> (trans. of Bv-a)
D	Dīgha-nikāya
D-ṭ	Sub-commentary on D (Līnatthapakāsinī)
DB	<i>Dialogues of the Buddha</i> . (trans. of D by T.W. Rhys Davids, 4th ed., 1977)
Dhp	Dhammapada
Dhp-a	Commentary on Dhp
DPPN	<i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names</i>
Expos	<i>The Expositor</i> (trans. of Atthasālinī)
GD	<i>The Group of Discourses</i> (also published under the title <i>The Rhinoceros Horn</i>)
GD II	<i>The Group of Discourses II</i>
GS	<i>Gradual Sayings</i> (trans. of A)
Illus	<i>The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning</i> (trans. of Pj I)
It	Itivuttaka
Ja	Jātakatṭhakathā
JS	Jātaka Stories
KS	<i>Kindred Sayings</i> (trans. of S)
M	Majjhima-nikāya
MA II	<i>Minor Anthologies II</i> (Udāna: <i>Verses of Uplift</i> , Iti- vuttaka: <i>As It Was Said</i>)
MB	Mahābuddhavaṃsa by Ashin Vicittacārābhavaṃsa (Rangoon, 1960)

Mil	Milinda-pañha
MLS	<i>Middle Length Sayings</i> (trans. of M by I.B. Horner, 1977)
Mp	Manorathapūraṇī (commentary on A)
MQ	<i>Milinda's Questions</i>
Path	<i>The Path of Purification</i> (trans. of Vism by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, 3rd ed., 1975)
Pj I	Paramatthajotikā Part I
QKM	<i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> (Rhys Davids, trans. of Mil)
S	Saṃyutta-nikāya
Sn	Sutta-nipāta
Sp	Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (commentary on Vin)
Spk	Sāratthappakāsinī (commentary on S)
Sv	Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (commentary on D)
THIH	<i>Thus Have I Heard, the Long Discourses of the Buddha</i> (trans. of D by Maurice Walshe, London: Wisdom Publications, 1987)
Vin	Vinaya-piṭaka
Vism	Visuddhimagga (<i>The Path of Purification</i>)

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INTRODUCTION

အမှန်တရားထင်ရှာရမည်။
TRUTH MUST TRIUMPH!

These words were on a sign in the Dhamma Hall of the International Meditation Centre, Yangon, and were a constant reminder to the disciples of Sayagyi U Ba Khin that no matter how difficult it might be to follow the Buddha-Dhamma, the effort to put into practice the Teachings of the Buddha would make it possible to overcome all obstacles.

Mother Sayamagyi and Sayagyi U Chit Tin have fulfilled Sayagyi U Ba Khin's wish that the meditation technique he taught with such success at IMC-Yangon be spread all over the world. They have guided us in establishing International Meditation Centres in the United Kingdom; Western Australia; New South Wales, Australia; the United States of America; and Austria. Groups in many other countries regularly hold meditation courses as well. The things that have been accomplished with our Teachers' help have been truly miraculous, and we are very happy to be able to include the publication of this collection of Sayagyi U Chit Tin's articles and talks as part of the ways in which our groups around the world will mark the fortieth anniversary of Mother Sayamagyi's first meditation course with Sayagyi U Ba Khin.

Roger Newton, President
The Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust, U.K.

BUDDHISM AS A WAY OF LIFE

The Buddha taught the way to the release from suffering, the way to Nibbāna which is beyond the here and now, beyond the world of space and time. He had to discover the way first, without anyone to teach him. The Buddha hesitated to teach after he Awakened to the nature of all conditioned existence and experienced the unconditioned state of Nibbāna. He saw how difficult it would be for people to understand what he could teach them. He saw that if his words fell on deaf ears he would needlessly create difficulties for himself.

Fortunately, he was asked to teach, and realizing that there were those capable of putting into practice his Teachings and reaching the goal, he spent the rest of his life helping all who made a sincere request to be taught.

To those who were not ready to attain the highest goal, the Buddha taught as much as they could understand. He realized that if they prepared themselves, they would be able to go further in the future.

I would like to explain some of the fundamentals, dividing my talk into three parts: *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (virtuous conduct), and *bhāvanā* (training the mind).

First of all, let us consider these three steps as a progression. *Dāna*, generosity, is the easiest of the three to practise. Even immoral people can be generous. If we consider what it means to be a moral, good person, we will find that once we have put to one side the kinds of actions to be avoided, what remains is giving, being generous.

For some people, this is as much as can be expected. Someone who is unable to refrain from wrong actions cannot make progress in this life toward reaching the goal of

Nibbāna. But if people are generous, they may at some future time encounter more favourable circumstances which will enable them to work correctly. This is because the conditioned world is subject to the forces of cause and effect. Actions done in the present will give results in the future when circumstances are right, and these results will be in harmony with the cause. A good action will give a good result. A bad action will give a bad result. We will come back to this subject after we have considered the next two steps.

Sīla or virtuous conduct includes all actions which result from refraining from doing evil. In Buddhism, a person's actions are divided into three types: bodily actions, speech, and mental actions. There are a basic set of five precepts that summarize the types of bodily actions and speech that are to be avoided at all costs. Control over mental actions comes under the third step.

The five moral precepts are called *pañca-sīla* in Pāli, the language of the Theravāda Buddhist Canon. We will find similar rules in most of the world's religions. The bodily actions to be avoided include refraining from killing, refraining from taking what is not given, refraining from sexual misconduct, and refraining from taking intoxicants and drugs. As for speech, we must refrain from telling lies. These are the five precepts which must be kept at all times if we wish to make any progress on the path to true happiness.

There are many more precepts and rules which are helpful to those making a sincere effort, but we will look at those when we consider other aspects of these three steps of generosity, moral conduct, and training the mind.

The third step of *bhāvanā*, training the mind, can be divided into two aspects: We can train our minds to gain temporary purity through learning to concentrate and we can train our minds to attain lasting purity through developing insight,

that is to say, through gaining knowledge of the truth by our own experience.

These three steps are not to be practised one after the other, however. They are interdependent. Practising generosity will assure us of encountering favourable circumstances under which we will be able to lead moral lives and develop our minds. Generosity will also help us to be less rigid in our thinking. It will help us to wish for wellbeing, both for ourselves and for others. Moral conduct will also assure us of favourable circumstances and will make it possible for us to calm our minds, concentrate properly, and thereby observe the true nature of the conditioned world objectively. The better concentrated we are and the more we understand concerning the true nature of reality, the more we will be inclined to be generous and to lead moral lives. If we cannot control our minds, it will be impossible to control our actions and speech.

In his commentary on the *Basket of Conduct* (Cariyā-piṭaka), Venerable Dhammapāla describes how we can best make gifts.¹ Dhammapāla is explaining how a Bodhisatta, who is working to become a teaching Buddha, fulfills the ten perfections (*pāramī*). We may not be able to live up to such an example, but it can serve as an inspiration to us.

Dhammapāla describes many ways in which we can give and all of them mean benefiting others. We may give up our own happiness, belongings, body, and life for others. We may dispel their fears, and we may instruct them in the Doctrine, the Dhamma. In other words, we can give material things, fearlessness, or the Doctrine.

Material gifts can be either external things or ourselves. External material gifts include food, drink, clothes, vehicles,

¹ A long extract of this commentary is translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as "A Treatise on the Pāramis," *The All-Embracing Net of Views* (Kandy: Buddhist Publ. Soc., 1978, pp. 254-330).

etc. We should give whatever is needed to anyone in need, whether we are asked or not. We should give generously and adequately, without expecting anything in return. If there is not enough for all, we should distribute equally what we can afford to give. We should not give anything that will result in affliction such as weapons, poisons, and intoxicants, or amusements which are harmful and lead to negligence. And we should not give unsuitable food and drink to someone who is sick, even if he asks for it. Nor should we give more than a suitable amount.

We should give appropriate gifts without causing pain to anyone, and without desiring gain, honour, and fame, or expecting something in return. Our aspiration in giving should be Awakening to the Truth. We should not despise either the gift or the person we give to. We should give with care and with a serene mind, full of compassion. We should give believing in the law of cause and effect and not because of belief in superstitious omens. We should not require those we give to, to pay homage to us. We should give with kind words and a smile, not with harsh words and a frown. If we develop greed for something because of its antiquity or because we are personally attached to it, we should look for an appropriate recipient and give it away.

A Bodhisatta is able to give away his own wife and children, but only when they are willing to go, and only to those who are not cruel. Similarly, he will not give up his kingdom to someone bent on harming the citizens, but only to righteous men.

The Bodhisatta will also go into servitude, sacrifice his own limbs and even give his own life. He will give of himself only when it is for the welfare of the recipient, however.

We can give fearlessness by giving protection when others are frightened. Through moral conduct, we refrain from

injuring others and that is part of the gift of fearlessness. So we can see how difficult it is to separate the different steps.

Giving the Doctrine means giving an undistorted discourse on the Doctrine which is given with an undefiled mind. This means instruction which conduces to good in the present life, in the life to come and to ultimate deliverance.

The best way to make a gift is to make a gift with a trained mind. The donor should bear in mind the impermanence of the receiver, of the gift, and of himself. And this should be done before, during, and after the gift is made. This is the way in which our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin instructed us to make gifts. Obviously, giving in this way will only be possible after a certain degree of control over the mind has been accomplished. If we can make gifts in this way, we will accomplish many things all at the same time. As we give, our minds will be free from greed which means we will be overcoming desire (*lobha*). A virtuous act like this also means there will be absence of hate (*dosa*), and through the awareness of impermanence (*anicca*) we overcome delusion (*moha*). In other words, this way of giving overcomes the three roots of unwholesome acts. Such gifts unite generosity (*dāna*), moral conduct (*sīla*), and the two types of mental training (*bhāvanā*): concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*paññā*).

Now let us look in more detail at moral conduct. The five moral precepts that we have already mentioned must be kept at all times for there to be a moral base, but many more precepts can be added to these. As we make progress in working for the goal we will develop our ability to observe additional moral precepts, and we will also develop a desire to do so. For those who are able to renounce the life of a layman and become a bhikkhu (monk) there are 227 rules that must be followed. But I would like here to confine my remarks to the precepts kept by laymen.

Buddhist laymen often take on eight precepts on special days, called Uposatha days or Observance days. These days, in Buddhist countries where the calendar is based on the lunar month, correspond to the different phases of the moon (the new moon, full moon, and the quarter moons) and are roughly equivalent to Sunday in the Western calendar. On these days, laymen often spend time at the monasteries, giving food to the Bhikkhus and listening to talks on the Doctrine taught by the Buddha. But the eight precepts can be undertaken at any time. The five precepts are incorporated in the eight precepts, with the difference that one observes total abstinence from sexual activity. The three additional precepts are to refrain from eating after midday, to refrain from dancing, singing, playing music, etc.; and not using high and lofty seats and beds. The eight precepts are especially important as progress is made in controlling the mind. They help to curtail pride and to reduce our attachment to the pleasures of the senses. Some laymen keep ten precepts at times, but the ten precepts are especially appropriate for novices (*sāmaṇera*). The main difference between the eight precepts and the ten precepts is that one who keeps the ten precepts does not handle money. This, of course, could be very difficult for a layman, and should only be undertaken when it is possible to reasonably avoid handling money.

I would like to explain in greater detail another set of eight precepts which is called virtuous conduct with right livelihood as the eighth kind (*ajīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla*). This set of eight precepts is the initial stage of the life of purity consisting in the Path, according to the Venerable Ashin Buddhaghosa.¹ These eight precepts include three precepts for moral physical

¹*Path*, chap. 1, ¶27. See also the discussion by Ledi Sayadaw, *The Requisites of Enlightenment (The Wheel, n° 171/174, pp. 25, 85)*.

actions: (1) to abstain from killing, (2) to abstain from stealing, (3) to abstain from indulging in sexual misconduct and from taking intoxicants; four moral verbal actions: (4) to abstain from lying, (5) to abstain from malicious speech, (6) to abstain from harsh speech, and (7) to abstain from gossiping; and finally, (8) right livelihood.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin taught his students in meditation to follow these eight precepts with right livelihood as the eighth. In these precepts, the importance of right speech is made very clear. They are explained by the Buddha in a discourse given to the people of the town of Sālā:¹

In this case, householders, a certain one, abandoning lying speech is restrained from lying speech. When he is cited and asked as a witness before a council or company or amid his relations or amid a guild or amid a royal family, and is told: “Now, good man, say what you know.” If he does not know, he says, “I do not know”; if he knows, he says, “I know”; if he has not seen, he says, “I did not see,” if he has seen, he says, “I saw.” Thus his speech does not come to be intentional lying either for his own sake or for that of another or for the sake of some material gain or other. Abandoning slanderous speech, he is restrained from slanderous speech. Having heard something at one place, he is not one for repeating it elsewhere for (causing) variance among those people, or having heard something elsewhere he is not one to repeat it to these people for (causing) variance among these people. In this way he is a reconciler of those who are at variance and one who combines those who are friends. Concord is his pleasure, concord his

¹The Sāleyyaka-sutta, M n° 40 (MLS I 347). We use the translation by Miss Horner here.

delight, concord his joy, concord is the motive of his speech. Abandoning harsh speech, he is restrained from harsh speech. Whatever speech is gentle, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, going to the heart, urbane, pleasant to the multitude—such speech does he utter. Abandoning frivolous chatter, he is restrained from frivolous chatter. He is one who speaks at a right time, who speaks in accordance with fact, who speaks about the goal, who speaks about the Doctrine, who speaks about discipline. He utters speech that is worth treasuring, with similes at a right time, purposeful, connected with the goal.

I think that everyone will appreciate how difficult it is to live up to these instructions. How often do we “speak before we think”? It is not really a matter of not thinking, for everything we say passes through the mind first. What we mean when we say, “I wasn’t thinking,” is that we were not in control of our thoughts. If we were able to be fully aware of our thoughts, then it would be relatively easy to control which thoughts we allow to be translated into speech or into actions. So you can see that the key to moral conduct is training the mind.

We said earlier that *bhāvanā* is divided into two steps. The first step is training the mind to remain concentrated. This is known as *samādhi* in Pāli. The Buddha taught many different techniques for developing right concentration, but I will only mention one of these, *Ānāpāna*, mindfulness of breathing. This is the technique taught in Buddhist meditation courses in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. The second step is known as *Vipassanā*, insight meditation.

In a speech given in 1952, Sayagyi U Ba Khin said, “*Samādhi*, as I see it, is the common ground on which all religionists work for their respective goal.” He then goes on to quote from Hindu, Moslem and Christian texts which speak of

working to achieve Divine Light. He points out that it is a common belief that it is extremely difficult to get even a glimpse of the light in meditation and that courses of meditation are only for those who have renounced the world. "Our experiments, however, show," he says, "that under the proper guide, the inner peace and purity of the mind with light can be secured by one and all irrespective of their religion or creed ... We have developed a technique whereby we are able to help a sincere worker to experience a state of purity of mind in the course of a few days." He also gave a word of caution, saying that while there should be no difficulty for a normal student who is sincere, some people do encounter difficulties. But even they can succeed if they possess sincerity of purpose, complete submission to the teacher, and strong determination and effort to get the desired result.

I would like to point out that the purity of mind gained through *samādhi* is not lasting, and that students who for one reason or another are not able to aim at the highest goal of Nibbāna will not be able to go beyond this limited degree of inner peace and purity of mind. This may be the case, for example, for someone who practises Buddhist meditation while still holding on to their own religion. This is not a criticism of such people. Sayagyi U Ba Khin was always ready to help people attain as much peace and tranquillity as they could. This is consistent with the manner in which the Buddha taught.

A group of laymen, the Kālāmas, once asked the Buddha how to know what to believe.¹ They said that teachers of various doctrines (Dhammas) explained their beliefs and found fault with the doctrines of others. In answering them, the

¹See the Kesaputtiya-sutta (GS I, pp. 170-178); also translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, pp. 175-178 (the translation used here).

Buddha gave them an approach to use to help decide what to believe. He told them they should not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or legends, they should not believe something simply because it was written in the scriptures, nor should they use conjecture or logic, weighing evidence or because a point of view appealed to them. Moreover, they should not rely on someone else's reasoning, nor should they accept something simply because their teacher told them that it is so. All these reasons for believing something should be put to one side.

Then the Buddha told the Kālāmas how to know what to believe. When they knew by their own experience that a belief is unprofitable, that it should be criticised, that a belief is condemned by the wise, that it is a belief that will cause harm and suffering if it is accepted and put into practice, then that belief should be rejected. And the Buddha then pointed out that when a person is overcome by lust or hate or delusion he will kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, and get others to do the same. Would this be unprofitable, censured by the wise, and would this lead to harm and suffering?, he asked. The laymen agreed that it would. Next, the Buddha asked if the opposite would not be true if there were absence of lust and hate and delusion in a person, and the laymen agreed.

The Buddha realized that the Kālāmas were not ready to work for the highest goal, and so he taught them the four *brahma-vihāras*, the Divine Dwellings, which consist in sending to all thoughts of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). This type of mental training, the Buddha pointed out, would lead to happiness no matter what beliefs a person holds.

The Buddha gave a similar discourse to another layman named Bhaddiya.¹ The setting of this talk is a little different. The Kālāmas had heard the Buddha praised very highly. But Bhaddiya had heard that the Buddha was like a juggler who used a trick to entice followers to believe what he taught. The Buddha told Bhaddiya that he should apply the same criteria that he had outlined for the Kālāmas. In addition to lust, hate and delusion, he adds violence to the thoughts that cause people to lose control over their minds and commit immoral acts.

Bhaddiya was so impressed by what the Buddha taught him, he decided to become a follower of the Buddha. But the Buddha cautioned him. “Did I say to you, ‘Come, Bhaddiya, be my follower; I will be your teacher’?” Bhaddiya answered, no. The Buddha pointed out that his detractors had falsely accused him of using a trick. Bhaddiya said that he wished all his relatives and everyone else as well could be attracted to this teaching as it would be for their profit and happiness for a long time.

The commentary states that after listening to the Buddha's discourse, Bhaddiya was able to attain the first stage of Awakening, also known as Enlightenment. This is because he was ready to understand in great depth what the Buddha said. Not all of us, however, are as well prepared as that. We need to work more, using the techniques taught by the Buddha that enable us to train our minds. This is the purpose of the meditation courses taught in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. In ten days, a serious student is able to make progress in developing concentration through the technique of Ānāpāna meditation which consists in being mindful of breathing. Once there is enough concentration to calm the mind and keep it fixed

¹GS II 200ff.

where it is placed, the student can begin to develop insight through Vipassanā. The technique taught by the Buddha which Sayagyi U Ba Khin used consists in being aware of the various sensations in the body and appreciating the fact that they are constantly changing, *anicca*. Systematic observation of the sensations is combined with developing an equanimous attitude, which means that the student is neither elated by pleasant sensations nor dejected by unpleasant sensations. When this is achieved, it is possible to observe reality objectively and that leads to insight and understanding.

It is during the first type of meditation—concentration (*ānāpāna-sati*)—that it is possible to experience the Divine Light described in other religions. This light is the natural result of a purified mind. Experience has shown us that this purification through concentration is very delicate and easily upset. But it can be achieved and maintained if the right conditions are present. This means working in a quiet place under the guidance of a competent teacher. The purity gained through insight is more durable. Indeed, when a certain stage of insight is reached, a person is no longer liable to falling by the wayside.

We wish to encourage all to practise these teachings at any and every level. If a person is so immoral that he can only practise generosity, then we encourage him to do so. But we fervently hope that everyone will be at the very least inspired to lead virtuous lives. If students are only interested in developing good concentration in order to purify their minds, then we encourage them to begin as soon as possible. We hope, of course, that as many people as possible will be ready to go further, to begin the deep purification that results from developing insight.

SOME ASPECTS OF HOW SAYAGYI U BA KHIN BEGAN HIS MISSION

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was a lay teacher of Vipassanā meditation who died in 1971. For thirty years he gave the pure, practical Buddha-Dhamma to students who came to him in Myanmar (Burma). His first students from Myanmar were taught in 1941, and after 1952, people came from all over the world to his newly established International Meditation Centre in Yangon (Rangoon).

He spent his entire long working life as a civil servant, primarily in the Accounts Department of the Government of Burma. U Ba Khin was a clerk in that office when he first learned Vipassanā from his teacher, Saya Thet-Gyi. He became the first Burmese Accountant General of his country following World War II and independence from Great Britain.

When U Ba Khin taught his first meditation students, the only facility available was his office in the evening after working hours. He later arranged that one of the rooms in the suite allotted to the Accountant General become a meditation room, saved exclusively for the purpose. In the initial stages, almost all of Sayagyi's students were members of his staff.

In the early 1950's, he was able to begin construction of the pagoda and Dhamma hall, which were the core of the International Meditation Centre, on a small hill in suburban Yangon. Over the past forty years, I.M.C. has slowly expanded to the point where its meditation cells and

dormitories can now accommodate more than a hundred students for ten-day courses.

Although most of his students were Buddhists from Myanmar, Sayagyi U Ba Khin saw his mission as having worldwide scope from the very beginning. Even when he first began teaching people in his Accountant General's office, there was an international aspect as most of the members of his staff were men whose families came from India as Myanmar and India had been closely linked parts of the British Empire. For the same reason, English was one of the administrative languages; and Sayagyi spoke excellent English. This common language made it easy for him to teach those foreigners who were very eager to experience the "Nibbanic Peace Within."

From studying the religious texts of Hindus, Moslems and Christians, Sayagyi found that all these religions urge their followers to develop concentration (*samādhi*). Hindus work to see "the Light which is in the form of a flaming lamp ... lustrous like the clearly shining morning sun." In the Koran of the Moslems, God is said to guide men to the divine light. In Christian texts too, striving for light has an important place. The Book of Matthew speaks of the "body full of light," and Roman Catholic priests meditate in order to attain the light. In his lectures, *What Buddhism Is*, Sayagyi said, "This mental reflex of light denotes the purity of mind within, and the purity of mind forms the essence of religious life, whether one is a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Moslem. Indeed, 'Purity of mind' is the greatest common denominator of all religions. Love which alone is a means for the unity of mankind must be supreme and it cannot be so unless the mind is transcendently pure."

In a talk given in 1952, Sayagyi said, "The common belief is that it is an extremely difficult affair even to get a glimpse of the light in meditation and that courses of meditation are

mainly only for men who have renounced the world. Our experiments, however, showed that, under the proper guide, the inner peace and purity of mind with light can be secured by one and all irrespective of their religion or creed."

"We have developed a technique," he went on, "whereby we are able to help a sincere worker to experience a state of purity of mind in the course of a few days." "We will be all too glad," he said, "to give to (sincere people) the necessary help without interfering with their own religious faith."

He did not claim that this was possible for everyone, however. "While for the normal type of student there should be no difficulty whatsoever," Sayagyi said, "we are somewhat concerned for ... such persons as (i) those who are associated with the spiritual forces of the lower order, either on their own initiative or through the influence of others, and (ii) those who are in the tight grip of craving (*taṇhā*), pride (*māṇa*), or wrong view (*diṭṭhi*)." But even for such people "there is a possibility of success, if there is sincerity of purpose, complete submission to the teacher, and strong determination and effort to get the desired result."

1. Teaching Non-Buddhists

Many people accepted Sayagyi's invitation and found that what he promised did happen to them. To illustrate this let us quote from letters written to him by two Deputy Accountants General of Indian origin.

Mr. A.N. David, a leader of the Christian community in Yangon wrote on Sept. 24, 1954, after he had returned to India:

I was fortunate in being selected by you to undergo instructions about purifying my mind through a course of meditation, to achieve the most valuable gift of realizing peace within myself.

Your supreme desire to teach us the method of attaining the purity of mind and to secure peace through your system of meditation, which does not affect my religious beliefs, enabled me to realize also:

- (1) the truth of ever-changing existence,
- (2) to secure inward peace through meditation constantly when contaminated in my daily life with the evil forces of this world.

We can see from this letter that Sayagyi did not ask a student to become a Buddhist before teaching him how to purify the mind. What was important was his sincerity of purpose. Such a pupil, Sayagyi was willing to teach anywhere, even in his own office, sitting on tables to meditate, if need be.

One is reminded of the way the Buddha often gave graduated discourses when teaching. He began by speaking on generosity, living a moral life, and practising the Four Divine Dwellings of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, aimed at gaining happiness in the worlds of men, Devas and Brahmās (development of these traits can also serve to prepare one to make the attempt to gain the ultimate happiness, Nibbāna).

If he saw that his audience was ready, the Buddha then taught them how to concentrate. It is during this *sam dhi* stage, which can also be reached in other religions, that one may perceive light. In other religions, the light is often identified with a supreme god and seeing it is considered the ultimate attainment.

In teaching the Dhamma, if the Buddha perceived that his listeners had become fully prepared, he would go beyond *samādhi*. He would then teach them the final step which is unique to Buddhism, how to attain wisdom, Nibbāna.

The following letter written to Sayagyi by Mr. Muthia (the second Deputy Accountant General, a leading Hindu of Yangon), on May 20, 1949, shows how he taught people as much as they were prepared to learn, much as the Buddha did.

I pen these few lines with grateful thanks for your guidance in the matter of spiritual life by showing me the *divine light* ... I was always aware of one fact, viz. that when the spiritual knowledge is translated into practice mankind can see before the mind's eye the divine light. This I would say was always theoretical and no one has yet told me that light was seen and that the same could be shown to others.

Wherever I went, right from Hardwar (near the Himalayas which I visited in October, 1942) to Cape Cormorin (which I visited in January 1949, while on pilgrimage), I have heard only harangues on philosophy, divinity and metaphysics but never a word about showing the divine light ...

Before approaching you for the enlightenment, I questioned myself, so many times, whether I was really worthy of it and whether I would succeed. But I was emboldened when I learnt from you that you have for your disciples men even of lesser attainments than myself. I therefore took courage to apply to you and was shown the light. The day on which I had the good fortune to perceive the light will ever be remembered with grateful feelings of the highest magnitude.

I feel that constant and more strenuous endeavours are necessary on my part to realise the good effects of the light and I am sure I shall be making good progress in the course of time.

2. Teaching Buddhists from Other Countries

Among Sayagyi's foreign students were Buddhists from other countries, such as Mr. J.V. Amersfoort from the Netherlands and Mr H.L.B. Rajapaksa from Sri Lanka. Mr. Amersfoort's story provides a good example of how Sayagyi taught his students in accordance with their ability to progress. He did not insist on following a strict schedule. When circumstances made it necessary, he would be very flexible. Mr. Amersfoort had only a short time in Myanmar, so when Sayagyi saw the rapid progress he made in his concentration, he had him begin work on insight on the second day of meditation. In a statement written on December 22, 1952, Mr. Amersfoort described his experiences:

Being a Buddhist for about eighteen years ... I must and wish to state with all my heart, that I never experienced or even heard about the meditation as is being done under the direction of Guru Sithu U Ba Khin.

I came to Rangoon on a business trip for seven days only, but managed with the help of said Guru to reach *samādhī* and *vipassanā* in this short time, which I myself (and nobody else) would have believed possible.

After only two preliminary meditation lessons of half an hour each, I saw the light clearly within me: meaning, that the mind becomes powerful and bright, freed from disturbances, pure and serene. The technique is rather simple, concentration on the breath leading to one-pointedness; but the Guru can better inform you about that. After some developed meditation on Saturday night (Dec. 20 1952), Vipassanā was started at 10 o'clock in the morning of Sunday, Dec. 21st. I concentrated on the burning in my body—concentrated in other words on *dukkha* (suffering)—felt the burning inside till I felt

myself almost burning like steam on the surface of water. Then I had to concentrate on the total heat, total suffering on the central part of my body until the suffering grew even unbearable. At the last moment when I felt myself about dying, it was as if my heart was pulled out of my body and at the same moment—wanting eagerly to be freed from *dukkha*—with a sudden but a small flash of light I was out of it and felt a refreshing coolness and delight, which words cannot describe. It is an escape and a refuge from all daily troubles, too great to be understood, when not experienced. And the great bliss is that every one can achieve this state; provided he has a pure mind at least for the time of concentration, has the right intentions, attentiveness and concentration, and anyhow tries to live as pure a life as possible.

Another necessity is that he has no fear whatsoever and a complete faith in his Guru. I hope with all my heart that Guru U Ba Khin will have many followers and disciples in the near future, who can be helped by him as much as I have been.

Sayagyi wrote some explanatory remarks about Mr. Amersfoort's statement that give some definite indications of his approach in teaching. He taught Mr. Amersfoort in the Meditation Chamber in his office. First he discussed the method to be followed. Mr. Amersfoort was in full agreement that the three steps of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* of the Eightfold Noble Path laid down by the Buddha in his first discourse should be strictly and diligently adhered to. There should be the prescribed minimum standard of morality, the power of concentration should be developed to one-pointedness of mind, and insight should be gained into the ultimate realities of nature within oneself. "I have no reason to doubt the moral

qualities of Mr. Amersfoort,” Sayagyi wrote, “who has impressed me very much on first contact. Accordingly, I put him straight away on a course of *Ānāpāna-sati*.”

Sayagyi’s remarks confirm that Mr. Amersfoort made very rapid progress. “In just a few hours of solid work,” he wrote, “he was able to develop his power of concentration to one-pointedness. In fact, by the time I needed him for the change of the course of training to Vipassanā, he could keep the light (*patibhāga-nimitta*) before his mind’s eye for quite a long time and had begun to play with it.”

The next day, just after ten A.M., Mr. Amersfoort began developing insight (Vipassanā), and was able to examine and feel the radiation, vibration and friction caused by the whirling movement of an infinite number of the smallest units of material existence (*kalāpas*). “Mr. Amersfoort got the thread of it almost instantaneously,” Sayagyi wrote, “and in a few minutes he began to have a sharp sense of feeling of the radiation, then of vibration and then again of the friction of the electronic units within, which spread like wild fire to all parts of the body in the course of just one half hour.”

Sayagyi had him examine his body temperature and that of others in the room to show him that what was happening was not due to anything like a body fever, but because of his acute awareness of the change (*anicca*) taking place in his body. Sayagyi explained that the predominating factor of *tejo* (radiation, or literally, fire) in a *kalāpa* resulted in a burning sensation; the non-stop replacement of disappearing *kalāpas* through a continuous influx of food property (nutriment) resulted in vibrations; the breakdown and replacement of the *kalāpas*, both individually and collectively, resulted in friction.

Just before noon, Mr. Amersfoort felt the heat of radiation very intensely and saw sparks of light emitting from all over the body. Sayagyi had him view these sparks as subject to

change and they were eliminated. Later, Sayagyi explained to him that the sparks were one of the imperfections of insight. If allowed to remain for long, rapturous happiness (*pīti*) would creep in and sidetrack the meditator. As Mr. Amersfoort continued after a short break for lunch, Sayagyi gave him further instructions concerning what he was experiencing and told him to transmit his thought to the end of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*), to long for it. At 4:16 P.M., Mr. Amersfoort intimated that he was suddenly relieved of the burning heat by a stream of coolness which was most refreshing. Sayagyi expressed his approval and five minutes later checked to be sure of Mr. Amersfoort's achievement. "I was not satisfied with that as yet," Sayagyi wrote. "I wanted to be double sure. So I made him go into that state again for another fifteen minutes." Throughout his teaching career, Sayagyi was always careful to double check results and never jump to conclusions.

In concluding his remarks on Mr. Amersfoort's report, Sayagyi made it clear that his teaching is strictly based on the canonical texts and commentaries. He mentions that the course followed by Mr. Amersfoort was in accord with the fundamental requirements of the *Ānāpāna-sati Sutta*,¹ the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,² and the *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*).

Not everyone can progress as rapidly as Mr. Amersfoort. As Sayagyi wrote, "I should say he is a man of no small *pāramī* (perfections or merit acquired in past lives)."

Pāramīs are one factor, but one's age is also relevant to one's rate of progress in meditation. The older one is, the more difficult it is to put forth the necessary effort. This was

¹MLS III 121-129.

²THIH, pp. 335-350, DB II 327-346.

the case with another foreign Buddhist, Mr. H.L.B. Rajapaksa, Station Master of Maho Junction for the Ceylon Government Railway. When he came to Yangon to meditate with Sayagyi, the International Meditation Centre had been built, and he was able to follow the more usual programme of spending five days developing his concentration before moving on to insight. We can see from the report Mr. Rajapaksa wrote of his experience that he began by taking the eight precepts and the triple refuge and by asking for protection and guidance from the teacher.

Due to his age, he had difficulty sitting cross-legged. He says he stuck to the course nonetheless because of the greatness of Sayagyi's loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Mr. Rajapaksa says that after eight days of meditation, he was able to be relieved of all disagreeable feelings (*dukkha-vedanā*), and he returned to Sri Lanka pleased with the progress he had made. Later, after completing a full ten-day meditation course from Nov. 19-29, 1954, he was permitted to return on the following day.

In Buddhist fashion, Mr. Rajapaksa wrote in the conclusion of his note to the teacher:

May the Devas protect my Guru and his band of cheerful companions and this centre be an example to the whole Buddhist world for charitable service on behalf of the Noble Teachings of Buddha and for gaining practical experience.

May you all enjoy good health and good luck by the grace of the Triple Gem.

3. Conclusion

Sayagyi U Ba Khin, like the Buddha himself, taught his students as much as they were prepared to learn. However, only the disciples who practised the entire Noble Eightfold

Path of *sīla*, *samādhī*, and *paññā*, and came to deeply comprehend the Four Noble Truths, got the full benefit of his instruction. These people could experience the “Nibbanic Peace Within” and assure themselves of liberation from *saṃsarā*.

THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST MEDITATION AS TAUGHT BY SAYAGYI U BA KHIN

“Strictly speaking, Buddhism is a system of philosophy coordinated with a code of morality, physical and mental. The goal in view is the extinction of suffering and death.”

This definition was given by my teacher, Sayagyi Ū Ba Khin, in a series of lectures entitled *What Buddhism Is*. In these lectures, he laid great emphasis on the fact that theoretical knowledge is not sufficient. We must discover for ourselves the truth of the Buddha’s teachings. Sayagyi points out that the Buddha taught that the human body is composed of *kalāpas*, which correspond to the subatomic particles being studied by scientists today. Studying these particles from the outside is one thing, but experiencing the perpetual change inside our own bodies is something else again. “What will be the repercussion on the mental attitude of the man who introspectively sees that his own body is mere energy and vibration?” Sayagyi asked.

In his answer, he said that by realizing the perpetual change within, a person would understand the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha: the Truth of Suffering. Strange as it may seem, experiencing the conditioned world as suffering does not make life miserable. On the contrary, once sensual pleasures are seen as they really are, they will no longer be clung to. Sensual pleasures do not last for long and cannot be controlled.

“Pleasure born of sensuality,” Sayagyi pointed out, “is nothing compared with the *pīti* (or rapture) born of the inner peace of mind which can be secured through a process of Buddhist meditation.”

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was a layman in Myanmar (Burma) who was able to lead a busy professional life and at the same time progress in his practice of the Buddha’s teachings and teach others to do the same. After its independence in 1948, he became the Accountant General of Myanmar. A few years later, in 1951, a Vipassanā Association was founded in his office where a number of people had begun to meditate under his guidance. This association founded the International Meditation Centre in Yangon (Rangoon) where many foreigners came to meditate. Before he died in 1971, Sayagyi U Ba Khin instructed a number of his students outside Myanmar to teach others what they had learned.

Eventually, this led to the founding of the International Meditation Centre in the United Kingdom in 1979 and to many associations in countries all around the world. The English Centre is run by the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust which invited my wife and me to take up residence there. So, Heddington is now the headquarters for this tradition throughout the world. Through the hard work and sacrifices of dedicated meditation students from all over the world, the Centre is now able to offer two ten-day meditation courses each month and a number of related activities. In the last few years, many Regional Teachers have undergone training at the Centre and begun to hold courses in their own countries. Other meditation centres have been started in Western Australia, Eastern Australia, the United States, Austria, and groups working under our guidance exist in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, and Switzerland.

Students who are at the Centre on a long-term basis and students who live near the Centre participate in study groups which help them to deepen their understanding of Buddhism. The emphasis in these study groups is on Buddhist texts which help the students put the Teachings into practice. There is also an informal class for children.

The English Centre has a publication series. All of Sayagyi U Ba Khin's publications in English have been gathered into one book. Two booklets about his life have been published. Other publications include a booklet on the coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya, the discourses written by me to be used on ten-day meditation courses, five booklets on the ten perfections, two booklets brought out in connection with the first two International Conferences in the Tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, several editions of a booklet on the Pagoda of the Light of the Dhamma, a collection of discourses by Venerable Webu Sayadaw, and booklets on specific Buddhist topics.

The Centre is open to all who sincerely wish to give Buddhist meditation a fair trial. Sayagyi U Ba Khin taught people from many different backgrounds and adherents of the major world religions. The many letters of gratitude from these students are an indication that everyone can benefit from this technique to train the mind. This is because the first steps in Buddhist meditation are compatible with other religions. Even those who are not ready to work for the highest goal of total release from all suffering can find a certain measure of peace of mind through what is taught at the Centre.

I would like to give you a brief introduction to this technique. The Buddha taught several types of meditation, adapting the technique to the temperament and conditions of the student. The technique taught at the Centre, following in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, is particularly appropriate for laypeople who still lead active lives.

We respect the traditional approach and begin each ten-day course with formal statements, in Pāḷi, the language of the earliest Buddhist texts. These statements are a sort of contract which the students agree to follow during the period of training in order to derive the maximum benefit from it. The students take refuge in the Buddha or the Awakened One, the Dhamma or the Teachings of the Buddha, and the Saṅgha or the Community of those who practise the Teachings. In the texts, the Buddha is said to be like a good guide, the Dhamma is like a good path leading to a land of safety, and the Sangha is like those who enter the path and reach the land of safety.

Next, the students undertake the keeping of the moral code. The five precepts, which new students follow, include moral concepts common to most religions. These include refraining from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct (which means total celibacy at the Centre), from lying, and from the use of intoxicants. Old students take an additional three precepts, for a total of eight precepts. They are: abstinence from eating food after midday, from partaking in shows or other entertainments and the use of items to beautify the person, and abstinence from the use of high or luxurious seats. These five or eight rules are the basis of all that follows, for a person who is immoral will find his mind is agitated and it will be impossible to control it.

Next, the students surrender to the Buddha and teacher. The Buddhist commentator, Ashin Buddhaghosa, points out in his important work on Buddhist meditation, *The Path of Purification*¹, that this step is important because otherwise, the student will not respond to correction; it will be difficult for the teacher to speak to him, he will not follow the teacher's advice and will do as he pleases. If, on the other hand, the student has dedicated himself to the Buddha and the teacher during the

¹Chapter III, §§123-129.

period of training, the teacher will be able to help him make progress in controlling his mind and eventually to experience Ultimate Truth.

Finally, the students request the teacher to instruct them in a meditation subject. Being sincere is important, as Ashin Buddhaghosa points out. It means that the student is working to overcome greed, hatred and delusion, and that he is ready to renounce momentary sensual pleasures, undertake the seclusion from the everyday world that is necessary if the mind is to be calmed down, and he is ready to relinquish his desire to remain caught up in the vicious circle of the world of cause and effect.

I have already mentioned the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha, the fact that everything in the conditioned world is suffering. Even momentary pleasures are unsatisfactory because they do not last. The Second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering, which the Buddha said is craving. The Third Noble Truth is the fact that there is a way out of this suffering—craving can be stopped. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path leading to this end of suffering, and the teachings at the Centre are based on this Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three parts: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The taking of the precepts at the beginning establishes the students in the three aspects of morality: right speech, right action and right livelihood. Another convention at the Centre is that the students refrain from talking except when it is absolutely necessary. This is in accordance with the practice of the monks during the time of the Buddha and in its highest development can be the Noble Silence of the mind when all discursive thinking has stopped. Our goal, however, is not to stop our thoughts. We are working to develop our

concentration to the point where we can move on to the contemplation of the reality of our conditioned existence. So, by not talking, the students need not worry about whether their speech is correct or not. And distractions are reduced to a minimum.

During the first part of the course, the students build on this foundation of morality by working to control their minds. This is the second part of the Noble Eightfold Path: Concentration. Three steps of the Path are included: right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The technique used is mindfulness of the breath. The students are taught to sit with their back and head erect, to fix the attention below the nose above the upper lip, and to be aware of each in-breath and each out-breath. At the beginning, it is helpful to breathe slightly harder to help the mind settle down, but aside from this intentional breathing, there is no conscious changing of the normal breath. With practice, the students are able to feel the touch of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.

The technique of mindfulness of breathing—called *Ānāpāna* in Pāli—is easy to explain. But it is very difficult to do. The mind is used to wandering wherever it pleases, and it usually takes some time for a student to learn how to bring it back quickly when outside distractions pull it away or when thoughts make it wander. This is why it is so important to work under proper guidance.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin saw that after a few days, students were able to develop their concentration to a point where they could move on to the last part of the Noble Eightfold Path: Wisdom. This part includes two steps: right view and right contemplation. Wisdom is developed through *Vipassanā* Meditation, that is to say, through developing insight.

The Buddha taught that conditioned phenomena have three underlying characteristics. These are impermanence (*anicca*),

suffering (*dukkha*), and lack of a controlling self (*anattā*). They are like three legs holding up a stool, if any one is removed, the stool falls down. If a meditator can fully understand any one of these three characteristics, the other two will be understood as well, and there will no longer be any wrong view or ignorance.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin found that working to understand impermanence is especially appropriate for laymen, and of the many ways in which impermanence can be understood, the best was through bodily sensations. This is because the physical sensations in the body are very easy to appreciate in comparison to the very subtle impact of stimuli on the other senses. So the students spend the major part of a ten-day course systematically passing the attention through the body, being aware of whatever sensation arises in a given part. At the same time, they strive to maintain a balanced mind. Their task is to observe how the sensations arise and pass away, without reacting negatively to an unpleasant sensation or clinging to a pleasant sensation. This equanimity is the key to success. Without it, no progress can be made.

My wife and I have been privileged to carry on Sayagyi's work. And we find that students today are discovering that Ānāpāna and Vipassanā Meditation are of great benefit to them. Let me quote from a student who draws attention to how better concentration and a proper appreciation of impermanence can help a person lead a more meaningful and happier life. He writes:

When I took my first meditation course over ten years ago, I knew that I had found what I had been looking for. Vipassanā Meditation is something more than a therapy that would make me feel better for a brief period. It is something that I can continue using for the rest of my life, continually growing in my

understanding of a seemingly meaningless world, and becoming stronger and stronger with regards to my ability to lead a moral life. The longer I practise these teachings of the Buddha, the better I am at improving my own life and helping those around me.

Like many people in the West, I had been upset about injustice in the world for a long time. I was also aware that there was very little I could do to combat this injustice. As I strive to control my mind, I learn to understand it better. It does not want to stay still. It has a strong tendency to take pleasure in immoral actions. It is very clever in finding ways to excuse and justify wrong speech and wrong actions.

I know that I am not alone. I can see all around me people whose words and deeds show me that their minds function in the same way. It is not surprising that there is so much injustice in the world. Personal experience over the years has proved to me that if I am not able to live up to what I know to be right, I will not be able to help other people do so. I must be able to practise what I preach.

At times I have found it difficult to keep up my meditation. And I have seen how easy it is at those times to become confused. At such times, my mind is not sharp and I play with the idea of doing things I know to be against my own interest. But once I get back on the path and keep up my practice, the cobwebs in my mind are swept away. When I am able to think clearly, it becomes easier to lead a good life.

Better concentration has been a great help in my life. I am able to work better and more efficiently and this leaves me the time needed for regular meditation in my day-to-day life.

A very down-to-earth example of how my meditation has helped me is how I have learned to cope with a noisy neighbour. My neighbour likes to play music very loudly. At first, I reacted very negatively. I would call her up and protest angrily. The more I complained, the louder the music. I looked into the possibility of taking legal action. It soon became clear that this would be difficult, even though I was in the right.

One day, a friend mentioned that he used ear plugs because of the loud traffic noise where he lived. I realized I could do the same for the loud music, but it seemed unfair that I should have to take such precautions. I suppose I wanted to prove to my neighbour that I was in the right. I wanted to reinforce my pride. Finally I faced up to what was happening to me. I was generating a great deal of hatred and anything that would reduce that would be for my own good. Because of my anger, I was agitated, both mentally and physically. I was making myself very unhappy. Since then, I have had a reasonable discussion with my neighbour, I regularly use my ear plugs, and the situation has greatly improved.

So we can see that Buddhist Meditation can be of benefit to all and the benefits can extend to all aspects of one's life. It is our fervent wish that you will all be freed from suffering and experience for yourselves the Nibbanic peace within.

May you all be happy,

May you all be established in *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*,

May you all be Fully Enlightened!

LEADING VIRTUOUS LIVES AS LAYMEN*

Ashin Mahā-Buddhaghosa discusses virtue (*sīla*) in great detail in the first chapter of *The Path of Purification* (Visuddhimagga). He discusses in particular the virtue of the Saṅgha. The Saṅgha is of great importance as it will keep the Teachings of the Buddha alive. On one level, by Saṅgha is meant the Community of Bhikkhus that maintains the purity of the Dhamma in the sense of preserving the texts containing the Buddha's discourses (the Suttas), the rules for the bhikkhus (the Vinaya), and the analysis of mind and matter that is the highest expression of the Teachings in the most accurate language (the Abhidhamma); and in the sense of putting into practice those Teachings. On another level, the word "Saṅgha" refers to all those who have attained one of the four levels of enlightenment: Sotāpanna, Sakadāgamī, Anāgāmī, Arahāt. In this sense, laymen are included.

Ashin Mahā-Buddhaghosa refers specifically to the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha in most of his discussion. This is because on the human level the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha is very important in keeping the Buddha's Teachings alive. When he goes into detail on how the rules for the Community of Bhikkhus are to be respected, this does not concern laymen except in so far as they will be more helpful in supporting the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha if they know the rules. But when Ashin Buddhaghosa discusses

* First published in *The Maha Bodhi*, Vol. 92, n° 7-9 (July-Sept. 1984), pp. 104-110 and *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. III, n° 4 (1984), pp. 33-41.

how the bhikkhus are to develop in virtue, these instructions can be very beneficial to laymen also.

Ashin Buddhaghosa, for example, cites a discourse given by the Buddha on the dangers of immoral actions. In the discourse the Buddha is addressing the bhikkhus but the same dangers exist for laymen as well.¹

The Buddha described in seven vivid images the dangers of a bhikkhu breaking his virtue and, as an unvirtuous man accepting and using the requisites given by laymen. The unvirtuous man, he said, is evil-natured, of unclear or suspect habits, secretive about his actions, claims to be an ascetic but is not, claims to lead a life of purity but does not, is rotten within, lecherous and full of corruption.

(1) It would be better for a bhikkhu to embrace a burning fire that might burn him to death and cause great suffering but not lead to rebirth in a state of woe than to sit down or lie down with a woman, which results in the indulgence of the five cords of sense-desires.

(2) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to have a strong horse-hair rope twisted so tightly around his legs that it cut through to the marrow of the bone than to consent to letting laymen pay homage to him.

(3) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to be wounded in the breast by a sharp spear tempered in oil than to consent to the reverential salutation of laymen.

(4) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to be wrapped in a red-hot iron sheet than to accept robes given in faith by laymen.

(5) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to have his mouth prized open with red-hot iron tongs and that a red-hot ball be put in his mouth and burn through his lips, mouth,

¹GS III 185f.

tongue, throat, belly and pass out below carrying with it his bowels and entrails than to use almsfood given in faith by laymen.

(6) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to be seated or laid on a red-hot iron bed or iron chair than to use a bed or chair given in faith by laymen.

(7) It would be better for an unvirtuous bhikkhu to be plunged upside down into a red-hot cauldron than to use a dwelling given in faith by laymen.

Ashin Buddhaghosa ends his chapter on virtue in *The Path of Purification* with a list of the advantages of maintaining virtue. The bhikkhu with immaculate virtue gives pleasure and inspires trust in wearing his robes and carrying his bowl. He need never fear self-reproach. He shines like the sun and moon. The colour of his body is pleasing to the Devas—and even more so the perfume of his virtue, for the perfume of virtue is greater than all other perfumes as it spreads unchecked in all directions. Deeds, no matter how small, done for a virtuous man bear great fruit. None of the intoxicants can plague him here and now, and he digs out the root of suffering in future lives. If he wishes perfection among men or Devas, it is not difficult for him to attain it. But once his virtue is perfected, he seeks only the perfection of Nibbāna.

“The mind of one who understands thus,” Ashin Buddhaghosa says, “shudders at failure in virtue and reaches out towards the perfecting of virtue. So virtue should be cleansed with all care, seeing this danger of failure in virtue and this benefit of the perfection of virtue.”¹

¹This discussion is an extract from *The Perfection of Virtue*, Dhamma-dāna Series 4 of the publications by the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust, U.K.

We will see through first-hand experience that if we are not firm in our resolution to avoid situations that lead to breaking *sīla*, then we will encounter situations that overpower us. As the English saying goes, “He who hesitates is lost.” Even though, at times, we may be able to force ourselves to do the right thing, many times we could have avoided the situation entirely. If we associate with people who are going to tempt us, prod us to do things such as killing, stealing, lying, drinking, committing adultery, etc., we will be less likely to be able to avoid such actions. If we frequent places where such people are found, we are more likely to come under their influence. It is useless to pretend we can save such people or that we are there with them so that our good influence will guide them. There are already many difficult situations that cannot be avoided. As the results of actions done in past lives mature in this life, we will find ourselves unavoidably thrown into situations where there will be strong temptations. It is sufficient to confront these situations and use all our energy and determination to do the right thing then. We do not need to put ourselves in such situations on purpose.

This is why, on the one hand, the Buddha said associating with the Noble Friend is the whole of the life of the Dhamma, but, on the other hand, he laid much emphasis on the advantages of the life of solitude. A Noble Friend who will help us grow in the Dhamma is not always available. If we cannot be with such persons, we are better off alone. Even alone, if we practise the Buddha’s teachings, we will not feel lonely, for at such times we are close to the Buddha, the best of all friends.

There are three levels of effort to make: effort with regard to physical actions, with regard to verbal actions, and with regard to mental actions.

Here are some examples of making an effort with regard to physical actions. Let us take *not killing* as an example. If our

self-control is not very highly developed, we may not even notice our anger until we are on the point of killing. We may be sitting very still, meditating, when a mosquito lands on our hand and starts to bite. We feel the pain and our reaction is so fast, our level of awareness so dull, we do not notice we are about to do a wrong action till our hand is raised, ready to kill the insect. If we *do* become aware at that moment of what we are about to do, we can restrain ourselves.

But there are better ways of dealing with such situations. If we reflect before we begin to meditate and realise that there are mosquitoes around and that if we do not take precautions we will probably be bitten by one, then we can look for a place that is protected; inside a mosquito net, perhaps. Or we can look for something to protect us; we can cover up the exposed parts of our body. Or, if this is not possible, we can prepare ourselves for the moment the mosquito will come and resolve that we will not kill it. It can help to review what we have learned of the Buddha's Teachings; that we have gone through countless lives in which we have killed and have suffered for killing. If we are to escape from this vicious circle, we must put an end to killing. No amount of physical discomfort in this life can equal one moment of the suffering that will result in future lives if we do not stop killing now.

Once, during our teacher's time, the Venerable Abhidhaja Mahāratṭha Guru Masoyein Sayadaw, Senior Abbot of Burma and President of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgayanā, the Sixth Buddhist Synod, visited the shrine room of the Accountant General's Office, Yangon, on the occasion of a *swoon-kway* (inviting for a meal) hosted by Sayagyi U Ba Khin and his disciples. The *swoon-kway* was, in fact, the *dāna* from two Indian students, Messrs. Venkataraman and Natarajan, who became Buddhists after meditating under Sayagyi. On this occasion, the Venerable Sayadaw was accompanied by an attendant who

happened to notice Mr. Venkataraman in a state of deep meditation with rigid body and tight limbs, and who asked whether the latter would move if someone were to prick his body with a pin. To which Sayagyi replied, “Sir, we wouldn’t attempt it, being afraid of Ariyārūpa-antarāya if he is an Ariya.¹ But one thing I’m very sure of, that he could sit without moving in this hall at night with no covers on the body, just as he sits during the day. He can enter into this state at will for a predetermined period of time. Here, at the back of this building, there is a Hindu hotel which is very filthy. Workers throw all the rubbish and dirty water out the back where thousands of mosquitoes thrive and come up at night when students are sitting in the hall. It is a real hardship for the students, but Mr. Venkataraman can enter into states at will and can remain in one posture for three hours without moving.”²

In later years, Sayagyi liked to recount this event, and he added some other details to the story. He told us that Mr. Venkataraman’s father-in-law died in India in the late 1950s

¹*Ariyārūpa-antarāya* can be translated “endangering or causing harm to an Ariya.” See pp. 14ff. in the biography of U Ba Khin by U Ko Lay. Also see “Men Seeking God” by C.P. Mayhew, MP, Great Britain; his Buddhist programme was televised by the BBC on the night of March 5, 1954 for half an hour. The then Chief Accounting Officer, Myanmar (Burmese) Embassy, London, reported to Sayagyi, in his letter dated April 5, 1954: “As a film it was excellent. However the time allowed was only 30 minutes (as for other religions) and I must say he could touch only the barest outline of Buddhism. The majority of Burmese residents in London saw the programme and were very impressed.”

²Abhidhaja Mahāratṭha Guru Masoyein Sayadaw took great interest in the work of Sayagyi’s teaching meditation to Westerners and visited IMC-Yangon several times. When he visited in 1960, he saw the many letters of appreciation written by Western students regarding the practice of the Buddha-Dhamma and the fruits gained by coming to the centre, and he told Sayagyi that when these appreciations and experiences described by the students were published in the Maynarm language (Burmese) he would write an introduction, which he subsequently did.

and he and his wife had to travel by boat to Calcutta. As he suffered from high blood pressure, Mr. Venkataraman had to be careful of his health and he usually got seasick on such journeys. So Sayagyi explained to him how he could overcome sea-sickness by going into deep meditation for three hours. Three times in succession, after a full and hearty meal and with the knowledge of his wife, he did this and the method worked.

When Sayagyi met Venerable Webu Sayadaw in 1941, while visiting the Sayadaw at his centre in Kyaukse, he reported that the venerable monk came out of the door of his hut followed by a swarm of mosquitoes. Sayagyi's attendant, a railway assistant station manager, wondered how the Sayadaw could meditate inside his room with all the mosquitoes. At least meditation could help one to forbear such disturbances.¹

¹Webu Sayadaw was reputed to be an Arahant. He learned the scriptures under the above mentioned Sayadaw in Mandalay and then retired to the forest to practise meditation. He was given up for lost and his family was not able to trace him until he was seen in a forest near Kyaukse, forty miles south of Mandalay at a place popularly known as Webula Hill. He then took up residence at that place after the lay disciples in the vicinity built him meditation huts. Later on, they built him a meditation centre with many monasteries. He became known as Webu Sayadaw. Later his father came to visit him and asked him to return to his birth place, Ingyinbin village, where he afterwards founded another meditation centre.

In his earlier years, after he had learned the scriptures, he resided for a time in Shwebo, where another story of some interest occurred. The presiding monk in this place was older than Webu Sayadaw and for some time had been occupying himself with the question of who would be the best monk to take his place as the presiding abbot of his monastery. This monk, who also practised meditation, was impressed with Webu Sayadaw's behaviour and his scrupulous observance of the Vinaya rules. The old monk decided to hand over the monastery to Webu Sayadaw and retire into the forest to practise meditation more effectively. But the day after he made that decision the abbot was approached by Webu Sayadaw early in the morning and the latter requested permission to leave the monastery and retire into the forest himself. "Well, monk (*avuso*)," the

Now let us look at an example of wrong speech. Perhaps out of ignorance, when talking to other people, we speak in favour of killing mosquitoes. We may say something like, "I can't stand being bitten by mosquitoes. Just the sound of them buzzing around is enough to drive me crazy." In speaking in this way we are admitting our lack of control, implying that we will not try to learn how to control ourselves, and we will be encouraging the taking of life. What we say may be used by the other person to feel justified in killing mosquitoes himself. And the more we speak in this manner, the less inclined we will be to make the right effort ourselves.

abbot replied, "you are quicker than I to decide to retire into the forest. What can I say? Please help yourself. May you gain the Deathless."

After he founded the centres at Kyaukse and Ingyinbin-tawya, Webu Sayadaw was approached by the lay disciples of Shwebo, sixty miles north of Mandalay, who asked him to honour them by taking up residence in their city, as he had spent his early days there. The Sayadaw agreed and founded a third large meditation centre at Aung Mye Yeikthar in Shwebo. He customarily spent four months at each of the three places mentioned, but he always spent the rainy retreats at Kyaukse. After Mahāpavāraṇā, the full moon day of Thadingyut, his period of residence at Kyaukse ended and he would leave for Shwebo to reside and teach meditation there for the next four months. Then he would go to his birthplace, Ingyinbin-tawya village, another twenty-five miles north of Shwebo, where he spent the last quarter of the year teaching lay disciples and monks who came from all over the country.

In 1953, he was invited by Sayagyi U Ba Khin to give blessings and preach the Dhamma at IMC, 31a Inya Myaing Road, and he came with some monks and some of his relatives, both nuns and laymen to reside for seven days in June before the Buddhist lent. Beginning in 1954, the following year, he was invited annually by the lay disciples of Yangon and Lower Myanmar to visit the capital and many other cities of Lower Myanmar. He became very famous as he was already reputedly an Arahāt. He was also well-known for the simplicity of his Dhamma teaching, which could be understood by ordinary laymen and laywomen and which, in fact, appealed to everyone who heard it. See pp. 213ff. in the biography of U Ba Khin by U Ko Lay.

Right effort for thoughts is the hardest of all. We must have the highest level of concentration for this. But if we train ourselves to recognize as soon as possible the wrong thoughts that precede killing the better we will be able to avoid such actions. Whenever we begin to think of mosquitoes, we will tend to have negative thoughts if there is no control. But if we can recognize this as it happens, then we can begin to train ourselves to come back to the breath below the nostrils and the touch of the air coming in and out. Or, if this doesn't work, we can remind ourselves of the Buddha's Teachings, as we mentioned before.

The greatest aid in our daily lives will be learning to control the senses. This means exercising as much control as possible over the things we pay attention to. The more we control what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think, the better we will be able to lead moral lives. This in turn will help us to concentrate better and appreciate *anicca* more fully. It will mean that our lives will be happier.

We should do our best to control our senses the way those who have attained at least the first stage of enlightenment do. In the Burmese commentary on the *pāramīs*, the importance of being mindful is pointed out.¹ Killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, taking intoxicants and lying are all actions which lead to the lower planes of existence. Those who are Ariyas, who have reached at least the state of Stream-winner, never do such acts. Even if their lives are threatened they will not do such acts for they have eliminated the root of the tendency (*anusaya*) to do immoral acts. Observing the five precepts, which means abstaining from such acts, is necessary for all those who become Buddhists.

¹See *The Perfection of Virtue*, "Virtue as two kinds (a)," pp. 11-14.

A layperson such as Mother Visākhā, who was a Stream-winner, may have lawful sexual relations, eat after noon, dance and sing, etc., and use high and lofty seats and beds. But we should not take this to mean it is possible to indulge in such behaviour indiscriminately. To do so would mean that we would do so more and more and cultivate wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). Ariyas do not use material things soliciting sense desire (*vatthu-kāma*) in the same way an ordinary person does. In the commentary to the Aṅguttara-nikāya (*The Book of the Gradual Sayings*), it is said that the Ariyan disciple approaches agreeable formations (*saṅkhāra*) like a clean brahman who seeks safety in a dung heap from an elephant in rut. For the Ariya, the burning fever (of desire) is subdued, calmed. Ordinary people, on the other hand, generally enjoy sensual pleasures with wrong view.

The quicker we are able to turn away from things which provoke unwholesome reactions and actions, the better off we will be. In the world today, we are constantly surrounded by sights and sounds, etc., which encourage us to react in an unwholesome manner. Advertising can serve as a good example. On the most direct level, we may be encouraged by advertisements to kill. This would include ads which tell us to buy a certain insect spray in order to kill insects or a poison to put on plants in the garden. In more subtle ways, ads which romanticize hunting and fishing or being a soldier are an encouragement to killing higher forms of life, including human beings. Even when people think they are acting out of compassion for other people's suffering by advocating euthanasia, they are encouraging killing. The Buddha pointed out that trying to predict where a person who dies or is killed will be reborn is like trying to predict exactly where a stick that we throw up in the air will land. We cannot say that we have reduced anyone's suffering through ending his life.

The more we give attention to such advertisements the more our thoughts will be filled with the idea of killing. We will not be able to lead a normal life as laypeople and avoid all contact with such ads. But we can give them as little attention as possible. We can turn away from them whenever possible.

We are less likely to find encouragement to steal in advertisements in magazines, on the radio or on television. But more and more novels and movies today represent the heroes as being able to steal and get away with it. This may be justified in the film by depicting the hero as a sort of Robin Hood who steals from the rich and gives to the poor, but even that is not often the case. The hero steals to make himself rich. We can usually get a general idea in advance of the subject matter of a book or movie before we read it or go to see it. So, it should be easy to avoid exposure to such immoral propaganda.

One of the major themes of advertising is sexual indulgence. This powerful force is used by businesses to sell almost any product: cars, newspapers, cigarettes, alcohol, perfumes, jewelry, etc. Almost any product can be directly or indirectly associated with physical attractiveness. Our eyes will be constantly coming into contact with images which will arouse our sexual desires. The songs we hear will rarely have any other theme than sensual love with all the attachment, craving and suffering that it involves.

Advertisements will also set us a very bad example when it comes to right speech. Exaggeration is the rule rather than the exception. Implications which are not directly stated, and so can be excused as not being direct lies, get across the message the seller wants us to believe. If we use a certain product, we will be beautiful, stay young, etc.

Among the biggest advertisers are the makers of alcohol. Even though doctors tell us that alcoholism is one of the

leading diseases of mankind, very little is done to combat this disease when compared with the efforts made to encourage taking intoxicants. Even if we think that we are immune to temptation, exposing ourselves unnecessarily to the attractive image presented of taking alcohol will subtly break down our resolve or at the very least create tensions in us.

All these examples appeal to the six senses. Even when we are not in contact with such advertisements, we will find our thoughts turning to them. The better our ability to be conscious of the fact that the mind is indulging in unwholesome thoughts, the better we will be able to detach ourselves from them. We will be able to dismiss such thoughts and come back to the in-breath, the out-breath and the touch of the air below the nose.

We must make a conscious effort to minimize our exposure to all the encouragement around us to lead immoral lives. We can be more selective in the sorts of newspapers and magazines we read, in the books we read, the television programmes we watch and the movies we go to. We can avoid going to places where such temptations are found and we can avoid being with people who encourage us to break any of the precepts. This does not mean becoming sanctimonious or “holier than thou.” We have friends and family for whom we are responsible. For them we can make every effort to be a good friend—one who sets a good example and who encourages others to do good. But in situations where we are not responsible for other people, it is best to remember that in the ultimate sense each individual is responsible for his own actions. It is better to go our own way than to interfere and provoke ill will and agitation in ourselves and in others. On the other hand, we may find ourselves confronted with a situation we cannot avoid when we would be compromising the

Dhamma if we did not speak out clearly and firmly. In such cases, we must stand steadfast.

We will sometimes find ourselves in situations where it seems impossible to avoid breaking one of the precepts. Even a Bodhisatta may decide to do such actions as going to war to protect the citizens of his country. Such decisions are very difficult to make, and we must be very clear and able to think correctly if we are to make a wise decision. Whatever we do we must never excuse ourselves, thinking that a good action can cancel out an immoral action. No matter how justified an immoral action may seem, it will result in future suffering. The Buddha said that even if we are being tortured to death, if we feel ill will towards those who are torturing us, we will suffer for it.

Studying the teachings of the Buddha can help us to avoid finding excuses for ourselves and help us to take responsibility for all our actions. The better we understand the Dhamma, the better we will be able to learn from our mistakes. We will stop blaming other people or circumstances for our wrong actions.

Bhikkhus, what is right effort? Bhikkhus, with regard to this the bhikkhu makes a resolution and an effort, mobilizes energy, concentrates and vigorously applies his mind in order that evil and inappropriate mental processes that have not yet arisen may not be produced. He makes a resolution and an effort, mobilizes energy, concentrates and vigorously applies his mind in order to expel evil and inappropriate mental processes that have already arisen. He makes a resolution and an effort, mobilizes energy, concentrates and vigorously applies his mind in order that skilful mental processes that have not yet arisen may be produced. He makes a resolution and an effort, mobilizes energy, concentrates and vigorously applies his mind in order that skilful mental

processes that have already arisen may be stabilized, gain clarity, reach full growth, development and completeness.

Dīgha-nikāya (II 312)¹

¹DB II, p. 344. Our translation is based on Rune E.A. Johansson's *Pali Buddhist Texts* (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 2nd ed., 1977), pp. 84f. We prefer “vigorously applies” rather than “forces” for *paggaṇ-hāti*.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS LIFE

*Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu, jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā
Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno puññāni kayirātha
sukkhāvahānī.¹*

*Yo 'dha kāyena saññamo vācāya uda cetasā taṃ tassa
Petassa sukhāya hoti yaṃ jīvamāno pakarto puññaṃ.*

Life comes to an end; a lifetime is insignificant.
There is no protection for one who arrives at old age.
Seeing this fear of death, one should do meritorious
actions leading to happiness.

Whoever restrains body, speech, and mind here (in
this life), whoever while living performs a meritorious
action, for that person there is happiness after death.

Anguttara-nikāya I 155

*Ādittasmim agārasmim yaṃ nīharati bhājanam
Taṃ tassa hoti atthaya no ca yaṃ tattha dayhati.
Evam ādīpito loko jarāya maraṇena ca.
Nīhareth' eva dānena, dinnam hoti sunīhatam.²*

¹These lines are also found in S I 3, 54 (KS I 3f, 79.).

²These lines are also found in Ja III 471 [JS III 281, the last line in Ja is:
nīhareth' eva dānena dinnam hi hoti nībhatam] and S I 31 (KS I 42).

*Yo 'dha kāyena saññāmo vācāya uda cetasā taṃ tassa
Petassa sukhāya hoti yaṃ jīvamāno pakarto
puññaṃ.*

Any vessel taken out of a burning house, *that* is useful to the one (who saves it), *not* what is burnt there. Even so, the world is ablaze with old age and death. One should take out through generosity; whatever is given, *that* is well taken out.

Whoever restrains body, speech, and mind here (in this life), whoever while living performs a meritorious action, for that person there is happiness after death.

Anguttara-nikāya I 156

The verses quoted above were spoken by the Buddha to brahmans who came to ask his advice. On two separate occasions, decrepit old brahmans who had attained the venerable age of a hundred and twenty years went to see the Buddha. Both the first pair and the second pair of brahmans made the same request. They pointed out how old they were and said that they had not done virtuous deeds or good deeds, they had not made themselves a refuge from the fearful. Then they asked the Buddha to instruct them and give them advice that would be beneficial for them and bring them happiness for a long time to come.

The Buddha did not reproach the Brahmans for waiting until they were so close to death before thinking of their future. While it is true that the best time to start to strive for true happiness is when we are young and healthy, they could not return to the past, and feelings of guilt would only have reinforced negative feelings. The Buddha simply confirmed that they were indeed very old. Then he told the first two

brahmans that life comes to an end through old age, sickness, and death, so they should practise restraint of body, speech, and mind. In that way, they would have protection, a shelter, an island (of safety), a refuge, and support in a future life. And he concluded these instructions with the first set of stanzas given above.

For the other two brahmans, the Buddha pointed out that the world is burning with old age, sickness, and death. So they too should restrain themselves in body, speech, and mind in order to find a refuge in the next life. And he concluded his talk with the second set of stanzas given above.

When the old brahmans went to the Buddha, they addressed him as “friend Gotama,” an indication that they were not his followers yet. Ashin Buddhaghosa says that when they announced themselves they said “We are brahmans” to make clear that they did not belong to the other three castes.¹ They were no doubt proud of their position in society. They were aware, however, that high social status would not be of help to them after they died. They had probably heard of the Buddha from other people and knew that he taught people how to find a refuge.

The Buddha always suited what he taught to the people who requested he teach them. He was able to see their potential and teach as much of his Doctrine as they were able to understand and put into practice. So we see that for these two pairs of brahmans, the Buddha talked of old age and death, the fear of death and how to act when faced with the approach of death. For the first two brahmans, he says that life leads on to old age and death. Ashin Buddhaghosa says it is like a cowherd leading a herd of cattle. Then the Buddha tells them

¹For his commentary on the verses, see Mp II 255f.; Spk I 22f., 255f.; and Ja III 471.

that the fear of dying should motivate everyone to do meritorious deeds. This is summed up as consisting of restraint in physical, verbal, and mental actions. Ashin Buddhaghosa says this means the Buddha established the brahmans in the five precepts for the remainder of their lives.

For the other two brahmans, the Buddha emphasized the painful side of the conditioned world by pointing out how it is burning with old age and death. Ashin Buddhaghosa says this should be taken to stand for the eleven types of fire associated with the conditioned world. These fires were specified by the Buddha in the Fire Sermon.¹ Everything is burning, the Buddha said, with the fires of lust, hatred, and delusion, with the fires of birth, old age, and death, and with the fires of grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation, and despair. For the brahmans, the Buddha stresses how it is important to be generous if we are to have future happiness.

On another occasion, a Deva came to the Buddha, who was at the Jetavana monastery, when the night was nearly over.² The Deva recited the first stanza quoted above, but the Buddha took up the stanza and changed the last line:

*Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu, jarūpanītassa na santi
tāṇā
Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno lokāmisam pajahe
santipekkho.*

Life comes to an end; a lifetime is insignificant. There is no protection for one who arrives at old age. Seeing this fear of death and having given up the lures of the world, one should be intent on tranquillity.

¹Vin I 33f. (BD IV 45f.).

²S I 3 (KS I 3f.).

The Deva was no doubt able to aim higher than future lives in the higher realms, so the Buddha takes the teaching further here than he did for the brahmans. Ashin Buddhaghosa points out the deeper meaning in the words of the poem. In explaining the words “a lifetime is insignificant,” he quotes the Buddha’s words to a group of bhikkhus that a person who lives for a long time only lives a hundred years or a little longer.¹ But this is speaking of a lifetime in general terms. In the ultimate sense, Buddhaghosa points out, we only last for one mind moment.² Just as a chariot wheel touches the ground at only one point on its circumference when it rolls or stands still, the lifetime of a living being is only a single conscious moment. We can say a person existed during a past conscious moment, but not that he still exists or will exist in the future. We can say a person will live in a future conscious moment, but not that he existed in the past or exists in the present. We can say a person exists during the present conscious moment, but not that he existed in the past or will exist in the future.

Ashin Buddhaghosa goes on to say that the Deva could develop the *jhānas* in order to be reborn in one of the Brahmā worlds. There, he could live for anywhere from one to sixty-four world cycles. But the Buddha’s answer to the Deva points out that aspiring to that does not lead out from continued existence. The ultimate goal must be to give up the lures of the world in order to be intent on tranquillity—the unceasing tranquillity named Nibbāna.

The brahmans were no doubt not ready yet to work for the attainment of Nibbāna for the Buddha gives them instructions on how to be reborn in the higher realms. The Deva, however,

¹S I 108 (KS I 135).

²The discussion on this point in the commentary is also found in *Vism (Path)*, Chapter VIII, ¶ 39.

could aim for the tranquillity of Nibbāna, so the Buddha encouraged him to aim higher.

Those of us who practise the development of insight are working for the highest goal of Nibbāna. But not all of us will be able to attain it in this lifetime. It is therefore important that we do as many meritorious actions as possible so that in future lives we will be reborn in favourable conditions for continuing to practise the Buddha-Dhamma. If we are reborn in any of the lower worlds, it will be extremely difficult to escape from them. We can also learn a lesson here on how to encourage people around us. Not everyone we know will be inclined to practise true Buddhist meditation. But almost everyone accepts the importance of striving to lead moral lives and doing meritorious actions. We can encourage them in this, in hopes that in a future life they will be ready to strive for Nibbāna.

**THE TWO GUARDIANS OF THE WORLD:
A Sense of Shame, a Fear of Blame (*hiri-ottappa*)***

*Hirīnisedho puriso koci lokasmi vijjati
Yo niddaṃ apabodheti asso bhadro kasāṃ iva.*

*Aso yathā bhadro kasāniviṭṭho
ātāpino saṃvegino bhavātha.
Saddhāya sīlena ca viriyena ca
samāminā dhammavinicchayena ca
Sampannavijjācaraṇā patissatā
jatissatha dukkhaṃ idaṃ anappakaṃ.*

Whoever is restrained in this world by a sense of shame, that person wakes up from sleep like a thoroughbred horse (woken) by a whip.

Be zealous, with a sense of urgency, like a thoroughbred horse touched by a whip. Mindful (*patissatā*), endowed with (right) knowledge and conduct, give up this mass of suffering (*dukkha*) through faith (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), energy (*viriya*), concentration (*samādhi*), and discerning the Doctrine.

Dhammapada, vv. 143, 144

* Published in *The Middle Way*, Vol. 65, n° 3 (Nov. 1990), pp. 155-159.

In the discourse entitled “The Lion’s Roar on the Turning of the Wheel,”¹ the Buddha told an assembly of bhikkhus about how the world declines due to immorality. He explained that seven Universal Monarchs, Daḷhanemi and his successors, lived according to the true doctrine of the Dhamma. But eventually there was a king who did not ask his predecessor to give him advice on how to govern. He ruled according to his own opinion, and the people were not as prosperous as before.

This king was advised not to use his own ideas but to govern according to the noble tradition of kings of the past. He accepted the advice he was given, but he was not generous. As a result, poverty became widespread. This led to theft. When the king had a thief’s head cut off, thieves began to use arms and kill their victims. As immorality grew, the people did not live as long as before and they were uglier.

A succession of generations gradually became more and more immoral and lived for shorter and shorter lengths of time. People began to use slander and to tell lies. Ugly people began to covet those who were still beautiful and adultery became common. Abusive speech and idle talk were widespread. Next, wrong beliefs increased. Then incest, greed, and deviant practices grew. People no longer had respect for their parents, their civic leaders, or their religious leaders. At this point, the human life span had decreased from eighty thousand years to one hundred years. This was the life span during the Buddha’s time according to the Pāli texts. Eventually, the Buddha told the bhikkhus, the human life span will decrease to ten years. Even the word “morality” will disappear.

¹DB III 59-76; THIH, pp. 395-405.

At that time, people will live in promiscuity, like goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals. Members of the same family will look on each other just as a hunter who is ready to kill his prey. There will finally be a period of seven days when there will be wanton slaughter. Those who survive will eventually realize that it is wrong to act in this way, and they will make an effort to stop killing each other. Gradually, morality will be established again. People will live longer and longer, and they will begin to be handsome again.

We can see that this description refers to the decline in the Dhamma taught by Buddha Gotama, for he goes on to describe how the time will come in the future when the conditions will be right for the coming of the next Buddha, Ariya Metteyya.

If we look at the world today, we can say that there are many indications of just such a decline in morality. It is, of course, possible to point to bad conditions in the past, but there are signs that the very basis of moral civilization is threatened today. We have only to pick up a newspaper or magazine, or to see the latest movie or television show, to discover that the moral values we used to find taught are missing. It is considered old-fashioned to have a clear, moral message in a story. What were once seen as moral restraints are now put down as being censorship. Freedom of expression has become more sacred than a sane society. As a result, we see images that are designed to arouse strong sensual desires. We have stories with immoral characters who go unpunished. The violence we see in films has become more and more realistic, more and more prevalent, but people who claim to be experts say that all this is not harmful to children. If we look at the latest news, we see reports of child abuse, drug abuse, and crimes in cities where people act more and more like wild animals. Problems such as racism seem to get

worse. Government figures are more concerned with winning votes than with governing. Support for abortion and euthanasia has grown. Some religious leaders seem ready to do almost anything to accommodate their followers while others resort to fanaticism.

Those of us who practise the Teachings of the Buddha do not need experts to tell us what effect all this has on humanity. We have only to observe in ourselves to see that what is presented to us as entertainment and as news is harmful. We know that if greed or lust or hatred are stirred up in our minds then we will be more likely to act according to these roots of bad actions. It is obvious to us that we must make a major effort to lead moral lives if there is to be any hope for us and for humanity.

The Buddha taught that there are two Guardians of the World: a sense of shame and the fear of blame (*hiri-ottappa*). It is important that we understand correctly what these two guardians are. They are mental qualities that make it possible to act in a moral, responsible way. They do not mean that we indulge in feelings of guilt and worry about what we have done in the past. It is important to recognize past mistakes for what they are and to make amends whenever possible for any harm we have done to others or pain we may have caused them. But we do not dwell on past mistakes, whether they be our own or other people's.¹

The Buddha said that a sense of shame and the fear of blame are two bright states that protect the world.² When they no longer exist, the very lowest stage of human existence is

¹If we have done especially bad deeds, however, we may not be able to shake off feelings of guilt. See GS I 44, where the Buddha talks of immoral acts that "sear" and "burn" whenever they are remembered.

²*Op. cit.*, p. 46; MA II 141f.

reached, the stage when people are as promiscuous as goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals.

It is important, then, that we understand these two guardians correctly. Having a sense of shame means that we refrain from doing evil because we do not want to harm ourselves. It is because we wish to preserve our self-respect that we develop a sense of shame. Fearing blame is more a question of avoiding doing evil deeds because of others. We wish to be respected by others, so we develop the fear of blame.

Ashin Buddhaghosa explains the guardians of the world in considerable detail,¹ and we will base our discussion on what he says. The proximate cause for both guardians is virtue: being pure in bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions. Only when all three are present does virtue arise and persist.

Having a sense of shame means that a person abhors evil and shrinks from doing wrong actions. It is subjective in origin and its characteristic is respectful obedience. Ashin Buddhaghosa gives the illustration of two sets of four causes for the arising of a sense of shame. The first four are considering our (1) birth, (2) age, (3) heroism, and (4) wide experience. We should say to ourselves whenever we are tempted to do an evil action: (1) "This is not worthy of a person of (good) birth; it is the type of action done by inferior people." (2) "This is the way children act; it is not worthy of a mature person like me." (3) "An evil action of this sort is only for those who are weak; a person who is strong and courageous like me should not do this." (4) "An evil action like this is only done by blind fools, not by wise people like me. I have gained wisdom, I have wide experience, I should not do this." The second group

¹See especially *Path* Ch. 1 §§22, 88; Ch. 14 §142; *Expos* pp. 164-167, 198.

of four includes: refraining from doing evil out of consideration of (1) our high birth (as above), (2) the dignity of our Teacher, (3) the greatness of our inheritance, and (4) the honour of our companions.

If we are following the Teachings of the Buddha, we should not do anything that could reflect badly on him, his Doctrine, or on those who are striving to progress on the right path and who are helping to keep the Buddha-Dhamma alive. In our day-to-day lives, many people among our families, friends, and fellow workers know that we practise Buddhist meditation. If we do not live up to the principles laid down by the Buddha, we may be responsible not only for our own downfall, but we may put obstacles in the way of others.

Ashin Buddhaghosa makes it clear that what is included here is also a sense of modesty. A sense of shame is similar to the sort of modesty involved in covering our private parts, or it is like the shame we would feel if a person worthy of our respect should come along as we are answering the call of nature.

The fear of blame has an external cause. Its characteristic is viewing a fault with timidity and fear. It is by nature a sense of dread, meaning that we dread the possibility of being reborn in the lowest planes of suffering. We are afraid of being blamed by any of the four assemblies: the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha, the Bhikkhunī-Saṅgha, an assembly of laymen, or an assembly of laywomen. We also realize how big the world is and that there are bhikkhus and laypeople who have developed the supernatural powers. These people can read other people's minds. There are also devas who can read people's thoughts, and because we do not want these highly developed people or

these Devas to see us indulging in evil, unprofitable thoughts, we strive to develop pure thoughts and actions.¹

The fear of blame has four causes: (1) accusing oneself, (2) being accused by others, (3) (fear of) punishment, (4) (fear of) an evil destiny. In other words, we will be afraid of doing something that we know we will reproach ourselves for later, or something that others will criticize. We will avoid actions that we might be punished for in this life, or actions that will lead to future lives of suffering.

Ashin Buddhaghosa gives the illustration of two iron balls. One is cold and covered with excrement. The other is burning hot. A wise man will not catch the iron ball that is cold because he does not want to be covered in dung. He will not catch the one that is hot because he is afraid of being burnt. Avoiding the cold iron ball is like not doing wrong out of an internal sense of shame. Not grasping the hot iron ball is like not doing evil because we are afraid of suffering in the lowest planes.

Keeping these two guardians of the world present in our lives can be very difficult. When we are surrounded by a world that encourages us to act as we wish without worrying about the results, we may find our faith wavering. The guardians are two of the Seven Noble Treasures (*ariya-dhanāni*):

(1) faith, (2) virtue, (3) a sense of shame, (4) the fear of blame, (5) learning (*suta*), (6) renunciation (*cāga*), and (7) wisdom;

and two of the seven powers (*balāni*):

¹See GS I 130-133.

(1) faith, (2) energy, (3) a sense of shame, (4) the fear of blame, (5) mindfulness, (6) concentration, (7) wisdom.¹

So we will need to work on all these qualities if we are to stay on the right path. We will need to keep up our meditation practice and deepen our knowledge and understanding of the Buddha's Teachings.

It will also be very difficult not to waver if we are surrounded by people who encourage us to do evil. That is why it is so important to spend as much time as possible with friends who, like ourselves, are working for the goal of Nibbāna. It will not be easy. This is stated quite clearly in two verses of the Dhammapada (vv. 244, 245):

Life is easy for a person who is shameless, as bold as a crow, obtrusive, pushy, reckless, and whose life is impure.

But life is difficult for a person who has a sense of shame, who constantly seeks purity, who does not cling, who is not reckless, who understands the life of purity.

We must guard against allowing the dark states of shamelessness (*ahirika*) or recklessness (*anottappa*) taking hold of our minds and determining our actions. To do this, we will need to work to overcome the four mental factors that are present in all immoral types of consciousness:

(1) delusion (*moha*), (2) shamelessness, (3) recklessness, and (4) restlessness (*uddhacca*).²

¹THIH, pp. 501, 502. It is as part of the seven powers that Ashin Buddhaghosa discusses these in *Illus*.

²See *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 97.

And we will work to eliminate qualities that are the opposite of the Noble Treasures, the seven wrong practices (*asaddhammā*):

(1) lack of faith, (2) lack of a sense of shame, (3) lack of fear of blame, (4) little learning, (5) being slack (*kusīto*), (6) being unmindful (*muṭṭhassati*), and (7) lack of wisdom.¹

If we avoid the seven wrong practices and develop the seven Noble Treasures, we will go beyond having just a sense of shame and fear of blame. We will develop the Middle Path that eliminates the root of greed by avoiding the extreme of indulging in sense pleasures, that eliminates the root of aversion by avoiding the extreme of exhausting oneself, and that eliminates ignorance by leading to wisdom. If we stay on this Path, one day we will no longer have to struggle, for we will attain the goal and become perfectly liberated from all this suffering.

¹THIH, p. 502.

THE TRIPLE REFUGE (*ti-saraṇa*)

Very many people, spurred on by fear, go for refuge to mountains and forests, to shrines of trees and parks.

Truly, this is not a refuge of safety. This is not the ultimate refuge. Approaching this refuge does not deliver a person from all miseries.

But whoever has gone to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha for refuge, that person realizes the Four Noble Truths: (1) misery, (2) the arising of misery, (3) the overcoming of misery, and (4) the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of misery.

Truly, this is a refuge of safety. This is the ultimate refuge. Approaching this refuge does deliver a person from all miseries.

Dhammapada, vv. 188-192

These verses show us the importance of taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Ashin Buddhaghosa points out that the Buddha instructed the bhikkhus to use the Triple Refuge as a formula for ordination.¹ This was soon after the Buddha began teaching, when he sent out the first sixty disciples to teach the Dhamma. The Buddha gave the statement that has ever since been the traditional way for both laypeople and members of the Saṅgha to affirm their

¹See Pj I 14 (*Illus*, p. 5). He refers to Vin I 20-22 (BD IV 28-30).

trust in the Triple Gem (*ti-ratana*). Ashin Buddhaghosa says that this is the pathway by which Devas and human beings enter the Buddha's Dispensation (*Sāsana*).¹ The statement given by the Buddha is to be repeated three times:

Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

I go to the Buddha for refuge.

Dhammam saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

I go to the Dhamma for refuge.

Saṅgham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

Each refuge in the repetitions is preceded by "*dutiyampi*" (for the second time) and "*tatiyampi*" (for the third time).

In a discourse to the layman Kūṭadanta,² the Buddha shows how taking the Triple Refuge can lead to realizing the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha explains what the greatest sacrifices are in order to show the brahman Kūṭadanta that traditional sacrifices involving killing living creatures are not beneficial. First, the Buddha says, there is the sacrifice that does not involve killing. Greater than this is giving to ascetics. Then comes giving shelter to the Saṅgha of the four quarters. Next, there is taking the Triple Refuge with a pure mind. This is followed by keeping the moral precepts. Finally, the last two steps are attaining the highest states of concentration (the *jhānas*), followed by developing insight and achieving the highest goal, the cessation of all suffering.

Kūṭadanta, like many other laypeople who were taught by the Buddha, gained confidence in the Buddha through listening to this exposition of the Doctrine and took the Triple

¹*Illus*, p. 5.

²D I 127-149 (THIH, pp. 133-141; DB I 173-185).

Refuge.¹ The accounts of how laypeople during the time of the Buddha were led to take refuge show that pronouncing the Triple Refuge is not like a charm or magic formula. It is only after they have confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha as a refuge that they declare themselves disciples of the Buddha. They preface their taking of the Triple Refuge by affirming their delight in the Teachings:

Wonderful, venerable Gotama, wonderful, venerable Gotama. Just as, venerable Gotama, one might set upright what has been overturned, or uncover that which has been covered, or point out the way to one who has gone astray, or bring an oil-lamp into the darkness, so that those with eyes might see shapes, in the same way the Doctrine has been declared by the venerable Gotama in manifold ways.²

Ashin Buddhaghosa gives a detailed explanation of the Triple Refuge in at least two of his commentaries.³ Our remarks here are based on these texts and on Ashin Buddhaghosa's discussion of the Triple Gem in the *Visuddhimagga*.⁴

The first refuge is the Buddha. It would be impossible to describe all the special qualities of a Teaching Buddha, but

¹This sentence is left out in the translation in THIH (p. 140). Cf. DB I 184. Kūṭadanta and certain other lay people who heard the Buddha in person took refuge in "the venerable Gotama" (see, for example, A I 56 [GS I 51], Sn, pp. 15, 24f. [GD pp. 12, 22]).

²We quote the translation by K.R. Norman, GD, p. 13.

³*Illus*, pp. 4-16, and the commentary on the *Bhayabherava-sutta* (sutta n° 4 of M), which is translated by Nyanaponika Thera in "The Threefold Refuge" (*Wheel* n° 76). See also, Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Going for Refuge, Taking the Precepts," *Wheel* n° 282-284.

⁴*Path* Chapter VII ¶¶2-100.

they are summarized as follows in a brief statement found in many texts in the Pāli canon:

The Blessed One is worthy (*araham*), perfectly [self-] awakened (*sammā-sam-buddho*), endowed with knowledge and right conduct (*viijā-carāṇa-sam-panno*), one who has arrived at happiness (*sugato*), the knower of worlds (*loka-vidū*), the incomparable trainer of people [ready] to be trained (*anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi*), the teacher of Devas and human beings (*satthā deva-manussānam*), the Awakened One (*Buddha*), the Blessed One (*Bhagavā*).

This description of the Buddha attracted many to come hear him teach, to ask him questions. By listening to the Buddha and observing him, they were able to gain confidence in his attainments.

When we take refuge in the Buddha, we refer to Buddha Gotama, whose Teachings are still alive today. But the qualities possessed by Buddha Gotama are the same for all Buddhas. So, in a larger sense, we find protection in the fact that it is possible for an individual to acquire these qualities. For those of us who become followers of the Buddha, there are several qualities that stand out:¹ the Awakened One (Buddha) was able to discover the Four Noble Truths without anyone to teach him. He discovered the way on his own and was able to eradicate all his taints (*āsavas*) and to reach a state that was permanently free of all defilements (*kilesas*), that is to say, he was no longer under the sway of sensual desires (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), or delusion (*moha*).

It is especially important to us that he was able to teach the way that he had discovered to others. Those who are ready to

¹These are the ones given by Ashin Buddhaghosa in *Illus*, pp. 6f.

follow the Teachings of the Buddha will be able to follow the same way and attain the end of all suffering. But no disciple will ever be able to match the Buddha's achievements. As the Buddha said to his attendant, Ven. Ānanda, "It is because I am a good friend that living beings subject to birth are freed from birth, that beings subject to old age are freed from old age, that beings subject to disease are freed from disease, that beings subject to death are freed from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair."¹

This brings us to the second refuge, the Dhamma. This word has many different meanings in Pāli, so it is important that we understand its restricted meaning when we say we take refuge in the Dhamma. The qualities of the Dhamma are summarized in the following statement:

The Dhamma is well taught (*svākkhāto*) by the Blessed One. It is instantaneous (*sandiṭṭhiko*), immediate (*akāliko*), inviting to come and see (*ehi-passiko*), leading on [to Nibbāna] (*opanayiko*) to be experienced by the wise—each for himself (*paccatam veditabbo viññūhi*).

Ashin Buddhaghosa says that the first of these qualities (the Dhamma is well taught by the Blessed One) refers to both the Teachings found in the canon and to the supramundane Dhamma. The other qualities all refer to the supramundane Dhamma.² He says that when we take refuge in the

¹KS I 114.

²*Path*, Chapter VII, ¶69.

Dhamma, we refer to the fading of sensual desires, which is the Path.¹

The Path that leads to the end of suffering can only be known during periods when a Teaching Buddha discovers it and teaches it to others. So we refer to this refuge as the Buddha-Dhamma: the Doctrine taught by the Buddhas. The doctrines (*dhammā*) taught in other religions may enable people to attain transitory happiness, but only following the Doctrine of a Buddha will lead to ultimate, permanent happiness. This Doctrine is the only one that can be a true refuge—the Doctrine that enables us to realize that all conditioned states are suffering; that wrong desires are the cause of this suffering; that the unconditioned state of Nibbāna offers an alternative to continued suffering; and that by following the Path that includes developing in morality, concentration, and understanding we can attain Nibbāna.

The third refuge is the Saṅgha. The qualities of the Saṅgha are described as follows:

The Order of disciples of the Blessed One has entered on the good way (*supaṭi-panno Bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*); it has entered the straight way (*uju-paṭi-panno*); it has entered the true way (*ñāya-paṭi-panno*)—that is to say, the four pairs of people, the eight (types of) people [*i.e.*, those who have attained the Paths and Fruition States of the four levels of Awakening: the Stream-winner, the Once-Returner,

¹*Illus*, p. 13. Ashin Buddhaghosa says that some say it means the Path, Fruition State, and Nibbāna. Cf. “Threefold Refuge,” p. 2: “... the Dhamma (meant in the formula of Refuge) is the (Supramundane) Noble Path as well as Nibbāna. Besides, it is the attainment of the Noble Fruition (of the Stream-Enterer, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Saint), and also the Dhamma of Learning (laid down in the Scriptures; *pariyatti-dhamma*).”

the Non-Returner, and the Noble One]. The order of disciples of the Blessed One is worthy of offerings (*āhuneyyo*), worthy of hospitality (*pāhuneyyo*), worthy of gifts (*dakkhiṇeyyo*), worthy of respect (*añjalikariṇīyo*);¹ it is an incomparable field of merit for the world (*anuttaram puñṇakkhettaṃ lokassa*).

When we take refuge in the Saṅgha, we refer to those who have followed the Teachings of the Buddha and who have discovered Nibbāna for themselves. They are the example that shows us we too can aspire to true happiness. Through giving to and paying respects to the members of the Saṅgha, we will be able to acquire great merit and this merit will help us to strive for the goal. The Saṅgha is also important to us as it preserves the Teachings of the Buddha.

The term Saṅgha is also used to refer to those who have ordained in the Order established by the Buddha. Many of these individuals have not attained Nibbāna, so we do not take refuge in any of the qualities such individuals may possess that are in conflict with the Teachings of the Buddha.

Now let us look more closely at what is meant by “going for refuge.”² We are seeking refuge from suffering. Such a refuge will combat suffering. It will enable us to calm our anxiety, free ourselves from future lives full of suffering, and attain the state that is permanently free of suffering. When we become aware that the Triple Gem exists and gain confidence in it, we will be motivated to go to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha for refuge.

Ashin Buddhaghosa speaks of two types of refuge that depend on how far the individual taking refuge has come in the development of the Path to Nibbāna: (1) The Supra-

¹Paying respect by raising the hands with the palms joined.

²See *Illus*, pp. 8f. and “Threecfold Refuge,” pp. 2-7.

mundane Refuge is taken by those who have experienced Nibbāna. All blemishes are eliminated from their taking refuge, and it is free of all defilements. (2) The Mundane Refuge is taken by ordinary people (*puthujjanas*). They gain only a temporary repression of any blemishes associated with their refuge. The Supramundane Refuge leads to the Fruition States, the destruction of suffering. The Mundane Refuge leads to rebirth in good worlds and to obtaining possessions and enjoyment. It will be defiled if it is associated with ignorance, doubt, and wrong views—which will mean that it will be without great brightness or radiating influence.

Ashin Buddhaghosa explains that taking the Triple Refuge can be done in several ways:¹

(1) The best known way to take refuge is to use the three statements we gave in the first paragraph. The first disciples to take this refuge were Tapassu and Bhalluka, who took refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma shortly after the Buddha attained Awakening. At that time, the Saṅgha had not yet been established.

(2) A person can take refuge by assuming the status of a pupil. The leading disciple Ven. Mahā-Kassapa is the example of someone who took refuge in this way.²

(3) A person can take refuge by paying homage. The example given by Ashin Buddhaghosa is the layman Brahmāyu.³

¹*Illus*, p. 9; “Threefold Refuge,” pp. 4-8. Four types of taking refuge for ordinary people are given in “Threefold Refuge.” Five ways of taking refuge are mentioned in *Illus*: four correspond to those in “Threefold Refuge,” and the fifth is the Supramundane Refuge taken by *Ariyas*. We combine these two lists in our discussion here.

²See KS II 148.

³See MLS II 326.

(4) Refuge may be taken by devoting oneself to the Triple Gem, just as a meditator devotes himself to his meditation subject.¹

(5) Those who become Noble Ones (*Ariyas*) attain the Supramundane Refuge by cutting off their imperfections.

Taking refuge will be broken for ordinary people when they die, but this breaking is blameless and does not bring bad results. On the other hand, breaking the taking of the Triple Refuge during one's life is very serious. This is broken whenever a person goes for refuge to a teacher outside the Buddha's Dispensation or when a person is disrespectful to the Triple Gem. Those who are Noble Ones will never break with their refuge. But ordinary people, through ignorance, doubt, and wrong knowledge about the special qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, are susceptible to breaking their refuge.

Once a person has taken refuge in the Triple Gem, including the Saṅgha in its ultimate sense, refuge will not be broken by paying respects to the Saṅgha that includes ordinary persons (the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha, the Bhikkhunī-Saṅgha, the Saṅgha headed by the Buddha, a chapter of the Saṅgha, or even one person who has ordained in the Buddha's Saṅgha). There are other circumstances when it is also possible to pay respects without breaking the Triple Refuge. If a person pays respects to a relative while bearing in mind, "He is my kinsman," the Triple Refuge is not broken, even if that relative belongs to another religion. Or a person can pay respects out of fear to someone like a king, thinking, "If honour is not paid to the one who is honoured by the whole country, he will harm me." Finally, a person can pay respects to someone

¹See *Path*, chapter III ¶¶123ff.

who has taught him some science, art, or craft, if that person is honoured in his capacity as a teacher.¹

Taking the Triple Refuge can be of great benefit. In two discourses to the layman Mahānāma,² the Buddha says that those who attain unwavering faith in the Triple Gem by reaching one of the four stages of Awakening are assured of release from suffering. But even those who are not Noble Ones and whose faith may not be absolute can escape from rebirth in the lower planes of suffering. Two types of individuals are mentioned: (1) those who possess the five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, and who approve of the Buddha's Teachings by having developed insight; (2) those who possess the five faculties and who have faith in and affection for the Buddha.

We can see from these texts that it is very important to combine taking refuge with practising the Teachings of the Buddha. This will mean making the effort to acquire the faculties that enable us to wake up from the long sleep of ignorance that has brought us so much suffering.

Ashin Buddhaghosa points out the advantages of recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha.³ These give us a vivid picture of the benefits to be gained by taking refuge:

When a bhikkhu is devoted to this recollection of the Buddha (or the Dhamma, or the Saṅgha), he is respectful and deferential towards the Master. (He thinks, "I never in the past met a master who taught a doctrine that led onwards thus, who possessed this

¹"Threefold Refuge," pp. 7f.

²KS V 323-329.

³*Path*, chapter VII ¶¶67, 88, 100.

talent, nor do I now see any such master other than the Blessed One.” Seeing the Dhamma’s special qualities in this way, he is respectful and deferential towards the Master... He is respectful and deferential towards the Saṅgha.) He attains fullness of faith, mindfulness, understanding, and merit. He has much happiness and gladness. He comes to feel as if he were living in the Master’s presence (or in the presence of the Dhamma or of the Saṅgha).

When the recollection of the Buddha’s special qualities (or of the Dhamma’s special qualities) dwells in his body, it becomes as worthy of veneration as a shrine room, (or as worthy of respect as an Uposatha house where the Saṅgha has met when he recollects the special qualities of the Saṅgha). His mind tends towards the plane of the Buddhas (or towards the realization of the peerless Dhamma, or towards attaining the Saṅgha’s special qualities).

When he encounters an opportunity for transgression, he has awareness of conscience and shame as vivid as though he were face to face with the Master (or the Saṅgha, or he has such awareness through recollecting the well-regulated aspect of the Dhamma). And if he penetrates no higher, he is at least headed for a happy destiny.

Our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin was a devout Buddhist. He laid great emphasis on the Triple Gem. When he taught meditation, he always used the traditional approach laid down in the Pāli canon and commentaries. Those who carry on the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin today follow his example. Meditation students begin by taking the Triple Refuge, taking the moral precepts, surrendering to the Buddha and teacher for protection and guidance (a second

form of taking refuge), and by requesting that they be taught. As Sayagyi pointed out, “Whoever is desirous of undergoing a course of training in Buddhist Meditation must go along the Noble Eightfold Path.”¹ So, like him, we base our courses on the three steps in the Noble Eightfold Path of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

The Buddha pointed out to the wandering ascetic Nigrodha that he did not teach the Path to Nibbāna in order to attract disciples.² He did not ask others to renounce their teacher, their rules, their way of life, or what they considered to be good or bad. The Buddha said that he taught others to understand what is unwholesome and how to abandon that. In this spirit, Sayagyi U Ba Khin invited people from all sorts of backgrounds to give true Buddhist meditation a fair trial so they could discover for themselves whether it led to lasting happiness or not. Just as in the Buddha’s time, people today can learn from their own experience the truth of the Buddha-Dhamma. It often takes time. But we have seen a great number of people who try Buddhist meditation and gradually, after reaching a certain degree of understanding, come to consider themselves Buddhists. There have also been many who did not come to think of themselves as Buddhists but who found Buddhist meditation of great help to them. Sayagyi U Ba Khin invited sincere students to progress as far as possible on the Path, even if they could not come to understand the more profound aspects included under wisdom (*paññā*)—but he always laid great emphasis on the fact that the goal of true Buddhist meditation is Nibbāna, the end of continued rebirth, the end of suffering.

¹*Dhamma Texts by Sayagyi U Ba Khin*, p. 57.

²DB III 51f.; THIH, pp. 393f.

RIGHT MOTIVATION AND RIGHT ACTION

Whoever goes astray from the Doctrine through desire, hatred, fear, or ignorance has his reputation ruined like the waning moon.

Whoever does not go astray from the Doctrine through desire, hatred, fear, or ignorance has his reputation enhanced, like the moon when it grows full.

Dīgha-nikāya III 182

Aṅguttara-nikāya II 18f.

Vinaya-piṭaka V 168f.

Those who are unrestrained with regard to sensual desires, who are unrighteous and who revere injustice, who act through desire, hatred, and fear—they are called “a blemish to the assembly.”

Thus said the recluse (the Buddha) who knows.

Therefore, those who are good men, worthy of praise, fixed in the Doctrine, do no evil. They do not act through desire, hatred, or fear. They are called the best of the assembly.

Thus said the recluse (the Buddha) who knows.

Aṅguttara-nikāya II 19

These verses are found in several discourses given by the Buddha to the bhikkhus and in a discourse given to the layman Sigālaka.¹ They are given in connection with the four

¹D sutta n° 31.

categories of following the wrong way (*agati-gamana*).¹ If a person's actions are motivated by desire (*chanda*), hatred (*dosa*), fear (*bhayā*), and ignorance (*moha*), the Buddha said, that will lead to rebirth in hell.² If these are avoided, it will lead to rebirth in a heavenly world.³

According to the *Nettipakaraṇa*,⁴ these four bad motivations arise through the three roots of bad volitional actions: going the wrong way through desire is rooted in greed (*lobha*), the root for hatred is hatred itself (*dosa*), and fear and ignorance are both rooted in ignorance (*moha*). There are several other words used as synonyms for greed: sensual desire (*rāga*) and craving (*taṇhā*). These terms encompass all sorts of desire, but in our list of five wrong motivations, the term *chanda* refers especially to the desire to accumulate tangible goods. Ashin Buddhaghosa defines five types of *chanda*:⁵

- (1) desire to search (*pariyesanā-chanda*),
- (2) desire to acquire (*paṭilābhi-chanda*),
- (3) desire to enjoy (*paribhoga-chanda*),
- (4) desire to store up (*sannidhi-chanda*),
- (5) desire to give (*vissajjana-chanda*).

When desire leads to dissatisfaction, a person will zealously search for, acquire, and enjoy objects of sound, smell, taste, and touch. He or she will search for, acquire, and enjoy riches. Hoarding riches will lead to distress. And here, the

¹For a discussion of the translation of *agati-gamana*, see *Peta-Stories*, p. 174, note 3.

²A II 19 (GS II 19).

³*Ibid.* and D III 181 (THIH, p. 462).

⁴See *The Guide*, p. 68.

⁵Sv III 228.

desire to give is not motivated by generosity. Riches are given away to others by a person who thinks, “They will protect me, they will guard me, they will be attached to me, they will attend on me.”

The four categories of following the wrong way are explained in the Vinaya-piṭaka with reference to the qualities that should be possessed by a bhikkhu who speaks to the Saṅgha when there is conflict.¹ “Following the wrong way through desire”² means a bhikkhu distorts the Doctrine in eighteen ways because he feels sorry for³ or wants to protect his preceptor, his teacher, the person who shares his cell, his pupil, a fellow-preceptor, a fellow-teacher, a friend, a companion, or a relative.

The eighteen ways of distorting the Doctrine can be summarized as follows:⁴ a person confuses the Doctrine with what is not the Doctrine, he confuses the discipline with what is not the discipline; he confuses what was said or what was not said by the Buddha, what the Buddha practised or did not practise, what the Buddha laid down or did not lay down; he confuses what is an offence and what is not an offence or what is and what is not a serious offence, offences that can be put behind⁵ and those that cannot,⁶ and he confuses very serious offences with those that are not so serious.

¹BD VI 271ff.

²Miss Horner translates *chanda* by “partiality.”

³*Anukampā*, usually translated “compassion.”

⁴See BD IV 506.

⁵*Anavasesa*, literally: “without remainder.”

⁶If a bhikkhu is guilty of breaking one of the first four rules of the Pātimokkha, for example, he must return to lay life and cannot return to the Saṅgha.

A person who acts this way through desire is working against people's welfare and happiness. He is not working for the goal. Such actions lead to woe and anguish for Devas and all humanity. Such a person is "done for, destroyed, he looks after self, is blameworthy and is to be blamed by learned men, and he sets up much demerit."¹

Obviously, we should all avoid distorting the Doctrine taught by the Buddha. Many of these eighteen points refer to those who are members of the Saṅgha—all the points referring to offences. Members of the lay community can adapt the Buddha's instructions about these by understanding correctly the Teachings concerning leading moral lives. In that way, they will be able to recognize the actions they must avoid at all times through following the five precepts. They will also learn how to go further in observing morality as we will see below.

Not distorting the Doctrine or the Discipline is important for laypeople too. If we are to present the Buddha's Teachings correctly we must study them in theory as well as put them into practice.

These eighteen points are also important in connection with the other three wrong ways that should not be followed. Each of the three wrong motivations can lead an individual to distort the Buddha's Teachings.

Hatred can arise due to nine causes of resentment (*āghata*): we may bear resentment because we say to ourselves that another person has done, is doing, or will do harm to us; or we say another person has done, is doing, or will do harm to those we like; or we say another person has done, is doing, or will do good to someone we dislike. These nine causes lead to animosity, anger, and to being overwhelmed by anger.²

¹BD VI 272.

²BD VI 272. A tenth cause of resentment is given at GS V 102: "one is groundlessly annoyed." Ashin Buddhaghosa explains this to mean "anger

Ignorance leads to following the wrong way through the three roots of evil actions: a person who is impassioned will follow the wrong way because of sensual desires, a person who is corrupt will follow it because of hatred, and a person who is confused will follow it because of ignorance. Such a person is defiled through wrong view. Being confused, bewildered, and overwhelmed by ignorance, such a person will distort the Teachings of the Buddha.

Fear leads to following the wrong way when a person thinks that someone who is harsh and cruel will create a danger to the holy life (*brahmacariya*) or to life, through bad conduct, or through the thicket (of adopting extreme views or wrong views), or through power (such as depending on bhikkhus who are powerful and well-known).¹ Terrified by this fear, a person will distort the Teachings of the Buddha.

In the commentary on the Dīgha-nikāya, Ashin Buddhaghosa gives more examples of how the wrong way is followed through desire, hatred, ignorance, or fear. Desire or affection (*pema*) can lead to a person taking possession of things he does not own by saying to himself, “This is my friend, this is my companion, this is my relation, this is a present he gives to me.”

Hatred can lead to dispossessing the rightful owner of what he has when a person thinks, “He is hostile towards me,” or when a person is looking for revenge or is angry.

without reason; for example, someone gets angry saying ‘it rains too much,’ ‘it does not rain,’ ‘the sun shines too much,’ ‘it does not shine’; gets angry when the wind blows, when it does not blow, gets angry at being unable to sweep away the Bodhi leaves, at being unable to put on his robe; he gets angry with the wind, in slipping he gets angry with a tree-stump...” (*Expos*, p. 472), The nine types above, he says, are to be divided into being harmful or beneficial by thought, word, and deed. This is because they concern people. The tenth type is not divided in this way.

¹The words in parentheses are from the commentary, Sv VII 1368.

Ignorance can lead to a person taking what he does not own by saying this or that through stupidity or foolishness.

A person may take what is not his because he is frightened and thinks, "He could harm me in evil ways," or "He is the king's favourite."

Finally, one of these wrong ways will influence a person when he is distributing something. Excessive affection will lead to giving more to someone when the giver thinks, "This is my companion," or "This is my devoted friend." Hatred will lead to giving less because the giver thinks, "He is hostile to me." The foolish man may sometimes give too much and sometimes give too little because he does not know better. Or the giver may be frightened and give more, thinking, "He could harm me by taking this from me."

These four types of wrong motivation are constantly mentioned as qualities to be avoided by bhikkhus who take on responsibilities in the Saṅgha. Five qualities are usually mentioned: the absence of following the wrong way through desire, hatred, ignorance, or fear, and understanding what is involved in the job they are responsible for. The bhikkhu who is the meal-distributor, for example, must understand what has and what has not been distributed.¹

The Buddha told Ven. Upāli, who was foremost among the bhikkhus in the Rules of Discipline, that bhikkhus who were

¹GS II 19, BD V 247. Other duties, mentioned at GS III 199 and BD IV 400-403, V 247-249, include those of the bhikkhus who accept robe-material, guard the storeroom, distribute robe-material, keep robe-material, distribute (voting) tickets, assign lodgings, distribute conje (raw sugar), or fruit, or solid food, dispose of trifles (scissors, sandals, etc.), receive lower robes, accept outer robes, accept bowls, superintend the monastery attendants, or superintend the novices. These qualities are also mentioned in connection with a bhikkhu who speaks before the Saṅgha (BD VI 300), a bhikkhu who is agreed upon for a referendum (BD VI 319), and a bhikkhu who is to settle a legal question (BD VI 321).

responsible for these various duties would be destined for the Niraya Hell if they were guilty of following the wrong way through desire, hatred, fear, and ignorance. Avoiding these would lead to the celestial worlds.¹

Those who are fully awakened, Arahats, are incapable of doing nine types of immoral acts:² killing, stealing, telling a deliberate lie, storing up goods for sensual pleasure as they did when they were laymen, or going the wrong way through desire, hatred, ignorance, or fear. We can surmise from this statement that until we reach full awakening, we will have to be constantly on guard against letting the four types of going the wrong way influence our actions.

In the *Nettipakaraṇa*,³ the four wrong ways are said to be the unskilful roots (*akusala-mūla*) of the ten unskilful ways of acting (*akusala-kamma-pathā*). These ten are either intentional actions—physical and verbal acts—or mental actions. There are three bad physical actions (*kāya-duccarita*): killing (*pāṇātipāta*), stealing (*adinnādāna*), and sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchacārā*). There are four bad verbal actions (*vacī-duccarita*): lying (*musavāda*), malicious talks (*pisuṇa-vaca*), harsh speech (*pharusa-vācā*), and frivolous chatter (*samphappalāpa*). There are three bad mental actions (*mano-duccarita*): coveting other people's property (*abhijjha*), malevolent thoughts (*vyāpāda*), and holding wrong beliefs (*miccha-diṭṭhi*).

Hatred (*dosa*) leads to killing, stealing, and harsh speech. Greed (*lobha*) leads to stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. Ignorance (*moha*) leads to frivolous chatter. Greed leads to coveting other people's property. Hatred leads to malevolent

¹BD VI 327.

²D III 133 (THIHd, p. 435), GS IV 246.

³*The Guide*, p. 67.

thoughts. Wrong beliefs are the wrong path (*miccha-magga*, the opposite of the Noble Eightfold Path).

More details of these ten unskilful ways of acting and of the opposite ten skilful ways of acting are found in several discourses in the Pāli canon.¹ Especially of interest is the explanation of skilful and unskilful speech and mental actions.

Lying refers especially to being a bad witness. This will be the case if a person says he heard or saw something that he did not hear or see, or if a person says he did not hear or see something he did hear or see. Intentional lying is done either for one's own benefit, for someone else's benefit, and for some material gain. Refraining from lying is opposed to all of this.

Malicious talk means that a person repeats what he has heard in order to divide other people. He sows discord among people who were in harmony and aggravates discord when it already exists. He takes pleasure in discord, delights in it, it is his joy and motivates his speech. The person who abandons malicious speech does not repeat what he has heard to sow discord. He reconciles those who are divided and unites his friends. He takes pleasure in harmony, delights in it, it is his joy and motivates his speech.

Harsh speech is rough, hard, severe on others, abusive of others, bordering on wrath, and is not conducive to concentration. The opposite is speech that is gentle, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, going to the heart, urbane, and pleasant to the multitude.

Frivolous chatter results when a person speaks at a wrong time, saying things that do not conform to the facts—his speech is not about the goal, it is about what is not the Doctrine or discipline. It is not worth treasuring. It is spoken

¹MLS I 58, 344-349, III 94-104; GS V 176-180.

at the wrong time and so it is incongruous, has no purpose, and is not connected with the goal. By abandoning frivolous chatter, a person speaks at the right time, in accordance with fact, about the goal, about the Doctrine and discipline. His speech is worth treasuring, with timely similes that are purposeful and connected with the goal.

Covetous thought means coveting other people's property, thinking, "O may I have what this other person has!" The opposite, of course, is to give up such coveting.

Malevolent thoughts occur when a person is corrupt in mind and purpose. They are thoughts such as, "Let beings be killed or slaughtered or annihilated or destroyed, or may they not exist at all." The opposite means thoughts such as, "May beings be friendly, peaceful, secure, happy, may they be protected."

Wrong view is basically not believing that volitional actions lead to results and not believing that there are those who live righteously, who explain this world and the world beyond, having realized them through their own higher knowledge (*abhiññā*) (in other words, denying the existence of Buddhas, according to the commentary). Right view is the belief that volitional actions, whether good or bad, will give results. Some of the actions mentioned are making gifts, making offerings, making sacrifices, honouring one's father and mother. Through right view a person recognizes that this world and the world beyond exist and that there are beings of spontaneous birth. One also accepts that there are recluses and brahmans who live righteously and who proclaim this world and the world beyond, having realized them through their higher knowledge.

One of the discourses that mentions the ten skilful and ten unskilful types of conduct gives us more details on how to

develop correctly.¹ In this discourse concerning “what is to be followed and what is not to be followed,” the Buddha gave a short discourse that was explained in detail by the chief disciple Sāriputta. It is clear from Ven. Sāriputta’s explanation that a useful way to judge whether our actions are good or bad is to examine whether unskilful states of mind are multiplied and skilful states of mind diminished or whether the opposite is the case. We can apply this by noting whether our actions, speech, and thoughts are accompanied by craving, hatred, or ignorance. If we find they are present, we do not need to examine further. No matter how easy it might be to justify our actions, if one or more of these three bad roots are present, we can be sure those are actions that we should not be doing or saying or dwelling on in our thoughts.

Mother Sayamagyi has pointed out that we must be extra careful to work to eliminate the four wrong motivations that lead to following the wrong way. If we break one of the five precepts we will certainly suffer for that, but if we follow the wrong way through desire, hatred, fear, or ignorance, this will lead to rebirth in the lower planes of existence—and it is extremely difficult to escape from these planes of suffering. So we must all work constantly to eliminate unskilful states of mind and to develop skilful states of mind. It can be done.

¹MLS III 94-104.

THE WARNING OF THE DEVA-MESSENGERS

If young men, warned by Deva messengers, are indolent,
For a long time they grieve—men going to lowly assemblies.

But those who here are truly men, when warned by Deva-messengers

Are never indolent in the Noble Dhamma;

Seeing peril in grasping, in the origin of birth and dying,

They are freed without grasping through the destruction
of birth and dying.

These, attaining security, happy, here and now perfectly
allayed,

Outstripping all hatred and fear, pass beyond all anguish.

The Middle Length Sayings III 230

These verses are found in a discourse given by the Buddha when he was residing in the Jetavana grove in the monastery given by Anāthapiṇḍika.¹ The Buddha begins his discourse by saying that with his divine sight he has been able to see where beings are reborn after they die, just as someone standing in between two houses could see people entering and leaving the houses. Beings who do good deeds are born on the human plane. This is the result of the following sorts of good actions: observing the three kinds of right conduct: physical, verbal, and mental; not scoffing at Noble Beings; and believing in the law of cause and effect. Beings who do not follow these sorts

¹MLS III 223-230. A shorter version of this discourse (with three of the five messengers mentioned) is found in GS I 121-125. For the poem, we use the translation in MLS by I.B. Horner.

of good actions are reborn as animals or in the lower realms of suffering including the Niraya Hell.

When a being is reborn in the Niraya Hell that being is seized by the guardians there and taken to Yama, the king of death. The guardians present the being to Yama, saying, "Sire, this person doesn't respect his mother or his father. He doesn't pay honour to recluses or brahmans. He doesn't pay respect to his family's elders."

Then Yama examines that person, asking him about whether he saw the five Deva-messengers. Although the person denies ever having seen these messengers, when Yama explains what the Deva-messengers are, the person admits that he saw them: (1) the fact that beings are born, (2) old age, (3) sickness, (4) people being punished for their misdeeds, and (5) death.

Yama points out that when a person sees a baby lying on its back, having fallen in its own excrement, he should reflect that he too is subject to birth.

When a person sees an old woman or old man, who is around eighty to a hundred years old, who is crooked, bent, leaning on a stick, palsied, miserable, no longer young, with broken teeth, thin hair, stumbling, wrinkled and discoloured skin, then that person should reflect on the fact that he too is subject to old age.

When a person sees a woman or a man who is ill, suffering, very sick, who has fallen over in their own excrement and only able to get up when aided by others, only able to get out of bed when aided by others, then that person should reflect on the fact that he too is subject to sickness.

When a person sees a thief or someone who has committed a crime being arrested and punished, then that person should reflect on the fact that evil deeds are punished here and now—how much more will the evil person suffer in future lives.

When a person sees a woman or a man who has been dead for up to three days and observes how the corpse is swollen, discoloured, and decomposing, then that person should reflect that he too is subject to death.

Yama asks the person who is brought to him why, after seeing these Deva-messengers, he did not decide that he should do good physical, verbal, and mental deeds. Each time, the person replies that he was too lazy. Then Yama says that he will have to suffer the consequences of being lazy and not doing good deeds. "This is your evil deed," he points out. "It was not done by your mother or father, or by your brother or sister; it was not done by your friends and acquaintances or by your close or distant relatives; it was not done by recluses or brahmans or by deities. This evil deed was done by you. You yourself will experience the result."

Then Yama is silent. The guardians of the Niraya Hell take the person they brought before the king of death and subject him to the great suffering of the lowest of the hells. These sufferings include unimaginably great suffering due to physical torture, hunger, and thirst. The person there is subjected to the fivefold pinion torture:¹ red-hot stakes are driven through both hands, both feet, and through the chest. Then the person is scraped with adzes and razors. Next, he is attached to a chariot and driven over burning ground. This is followed by being pushed up and down a burning mountain of glowing cinders. Then the person is plunged head down into a burning cauldron where he is boiled. When he rises to the surface with the scum in the cauldron, he goes across the surface.

From these tortures, the person goes to the Great Niraya Hell, which has four walls of iron, a roof of iron, and a floor of glowing hot iron. Flames cross this hell from all directions.

¹For the full description, see MLS III 212f.

After a long period of time, one of the four gates in one of the walls to the North, South, East, or West will open, and the person suffering there will run towards the door. As he runs, his flesh, hide, tendons, bones, and the marrow of his bones burn and his eyes are filled with smoke.

Then the person goes to the Great Filth Hell, where needle-mouthed creatures cut away his skin, hide, flesh, tendons, bones, and the marrow of his bones, and to the Great Ember Hell. These are followed by the Forest of Silk-Cotton Trees, where there are trees that are a league high with burning thorns that are a finger-breadth long. The guardians of hell make the person suffering there climb up and down these trees. Then he goes to the Sword-Leafed Forest, where leaves on the trees are stirred by the wind there, and as they move, they cut off the sufferers feet, hands, ears, and nose. After this forest, he falls into the River of Caustic Water, where he is carried about by the water.

The guardians of hell haul him out with a fish-hook and ask him how he is. "I'm hungry!" he says. Then they pry open his mouth with a burning iron spike and push a glowing copper pellet into his mouth. His lips, mouth, throat, and chest are burned by that pellet, which passes out through his bowels and intestines. Then he says, "I'm thirsty!" And his mouth is pried open with a burning iron spike again, and glowing hot copper and bronze is sprinkled in, causing suffering similar to the copper pellet.

Seeing all this suffering, the Buddha said, Yama once thought to himself, "Those who do evil deeds in the world are subjected to a variety of punishments like these. O that I might acquire human status. O that a Tathāgatha might arise in the world, a Perfected One, a Fully Self-Awakened One. O that I might attend on that Lord, that he might teach me the Doctrine, that I might understand that Lord's Doctrine."

Then the Buddha said that he is not telling the bhikkhus something he heard from a recluse or a brahman—he is explaining what he knew for himself, what he saw himself, what he discerned himself. And he concluded his discourse with the verses we quoted at the beginning.

Ashin Buddhaghosa says in his commentary on the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*¹ that the term “Deva messengers” can be interpreted as (1) “the messengers of [the Deva who is the King of] Death (*Maccu*),”² (2) “the messengers of the Devas,” or (3) “the messengers for the Devas through purity [*i.e.*, those who are called Devas because of their purity, Arahats (including Buddhas)].”³ In the first case, the messengers of old age, sickness, and a corpse are the basis for establishing a sense of urgency in people (*samvega-janaṭṭha*). It is as if these signs urge people on, saying, “Here, you have come into the presence of [the King of] Death.”

In the second case, these signs should have the effect on a person that seeing a Deva in all his finery standing in the sky would have if the Deva said, “You will die in a week’s time.” A message such as this would be believed. So too, when a person sees old age, sickness, or a corpse it is as if they were urging that person on, saying, “You, too, are subject to this same phenomenon.” Even though a person cannot see future results, seeing these sights should serve as a prediction.

¹Mp II 227.

²*Maccu* usually refers to Māra, but the name can also be used, as here, to designate Yama.

³In Pāli, there are three types of devas: (1) devas by convention (*sammuti-devā*) such as kings and princes; (2) devas by birth (*upapatti-devā*) such as the devas of the deva realms, or earth devas, etc.; and (3) devas by purity (*visuddhi-devā*), Arahats (including Buddhas). See *Vimāna Stories*, p. 23 and *Illus*, p. 133.

In the third case, Ashin Buddhaghosa mentions only Bodhisattas who are to become Buddhas in that very life as being Devas through purity: “All the Bodhisattas, having seen old age, sickness, death, and one who has gone forth, feeling a sense of urgency, leave (the household life) and become one who has gone forth.”

This discourse can serve as a very timely warning to us all. The scene that the Buddha describes in which a person reborn in hell is taken to the king of death, Yama, might seem at first to be a sort of last judgement. If we look closely, however, we will see that Yama is not a judge who decides on punishments to be dealt out to evil doers. His rôle is rather one of making the person in hell realize that it is his own past deeds that have caused him to be reborn there. The five Deva messengers are always present in the world. They are, in fact, part and parcel of the functioning of the conditioned world we live in. We ignore them at our own peril. Or, if we try to reason them away, denying the law of cause and effect, we will still be subjected to the workings of this law. As the Buddha said, denying that we will reap the rewards of our volitional actions—both good and bad—is the most dangerous of all wrong beliefs because this will lead to irresponsible behaviour and to the lowest hell.

Another important point to remember is that hell is not a place where beings suffer for eternity. This is hinted at when the Buddha describes Yama’s aspiration to be born as a human during a Buddha Sāsana in order to understand the Dhamma. It is no doubt Yama who makes this aspiration rather than the beings suffering in hell because their pain is so great they cannot think of anything else. Yama, however, is only the deity who presides over hell, so he can observe how the beings suffer for their past deeds and look for a way out.

We, too, can heed the Buddha's warning. The descriptions of the various hells should not add to our fears and anxieties but should serve rather to spur us on to strive to escape from continued birth, old age, sickness, suffering, and death. Like the Bodhisatta, who gives up wordly pleasures after he sees an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a bhikkhu, we can feel a sense of urgency as we observe the reality of life around us and reflect on the results of evil deeds as outlined by the Buddha.

What we have to do is very simple: we must do good deeds; good deeds through bodily actions, good deeds through what we say, good deeds through what we think. This is very simple, but anyone who has made an effort to do good knows how difficult it is. This is why we need as much help as we can find. Our best help, of course, will be found in the Buddha's Teachings. We will strive to develop generosity in all our actions. We will follow the moral precepts at all times. We will develop our control over our minds through learning how to concentrate. We will deepen our direct understanding of the reality of the conditioned world through developing insight. And we will not neglect the many things that help us to accomplish these tasks: associating with good friends who have the same goals and who encourage us, studying the Buddha's Teachings so that our theoretical understanding can enable us to advance in what we know through personal experience.

As Sayagyi U Ba Khin pointed out:¹ "... it is the practice of the Teachings which really counts. The Buddha therefore pointed out, 'The Path must be trod by each individual; Buddhas do but point the Way.'"

¹*What Buddhism Is*, p. 12.

FLOODS OF MERIT

*Mahodadhiṃ aparimitaṃ mahāsaraṃ
bahubheravaṃ ratanaḡaṇanam ālayaṃ
Najjo yathā naragaṇasaṅghasevitā¹
puthū savanti upayanti sāgaraṃ*

*Evam naraṃ annadapānavatthadaṃ
seyyānisajjattharaṇassa dāyakaṃ
Puñṇassa dhārā upayanti paṇḍitaṃ
najjo yathā vārivahā va sāgaraṃ.*

Just as various rivers serve communities of groups of men as they flow on and go to the ocean, the immeasurable great ocean, the great lake, which is very terrible, the receptacle of a multitude of gems, so too, for the man giving food, drink and clothes, for the donor of bed, seat, and covers—torrents of merit like the rivers carrying water to the ocean go to that wise man.

Anguttara-nikāya II 55, III 52f.;
Saṃyutta-nikāya V 343

This poem concludes three discourses in which the Buddha explained how laypeople can acquire “floods of merit” (*puñṇābhisandā*) (a, c, h).² This same term is also used in several other discourses where various lists of actions to be

¹A III 52 has *maccha-gaṇa-* (“groups of fish”) with *naragaṇa-* as variant reading.

²References to texts are as follows:

a: GS II 63f. (A II 54-56)	f: KS V 337 (S V 391f.)
b: GS II 65f. (A II 56f.)	g: KS V 337 (S V 392)
c: GS III 42-44 (A III 51)	h: KS V 342 (S V 399-400)
d: GS IV 167-169 (A IV 245f.)	i: KS V 343f. (S V 401)
e: KS V 336 (S V 391)	j: KS V 344 (S V 402)

practised are given (b, d, e, f, g, i, j). In most of these discourses, the lists include four actions.

Although the discourses are taught to bhikkhus, the lesson is for laypeople, as it mainly concerns how laypeople can make merit by supporting the Saṅgha. For two of the discourses (a, e), it is stated that they were given by the Buddha when he was residing at Sāvatti—and it is probable that some or all of the others were given there as well.

The Buddha speaks of the floods of merit as being floods of good (*kusalābhisandā*), bringing happiness, connected with the heavenly worlds, resulting in happiness, leading to a heavenly world, leading to one's own welfare, to what is pleasant, pleasing, beneficial, beautiful, agreeable (a, b, c, d). He says it would be difficult to measure the floods of merit: they would be as hard to measure as the amount of water in the ocean. Just as it would be difficult to say there are so many pails of water, so many hundreds of pails of water, so many thousands of pails, or so many hundreds of thousands of pails of water in the ocean, it is also difficult to say how much the floods of merit are. They are to be considered to be an incalculable, immeasurable, mighty mass of merit (a, c, h, j, k). In one discourse, the Buddha adds that it is also as difficult as trying to measure the water of the five great rivers in India that flow together: the Ganges, Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhū, and Mahī (i).

Two of the lists of floods of merit consist in giving requisites to bhikkhus (a, c).¹ The first list groups them under four headings while the second list divides one type of requisite into two parts. The requisites in the first list are: robes

¹These are discussed in *Points of Controversy*, pp. 202f., where it is pointed out that the Theravāda view on making gifts is that the merit is not made to grow the more the gift is used by the person it is given to (*i.e.*, there must be mental volition for there to be merit).

(*cīvara*), alms food (*piṇḍapāta*), bed and chairs (*senāsana*), and medicine for the sick (*gilāna-paccaya-bhesajja*). The second list subdivides “bed and chairs”—a term that is often used to mean “lodging”—into: dwelling (*vihāra*) and couch and chair (*mañcapīṭha*).

The Buddha says that these requisites should be offered to a particular type of bhikkhu: one who uses the requisites in order to attain and dwell with boundless mental concentration (*ceto-samādhi*). Ashin Buddhaghosa explains in his commentary on this passage that this means concentration on the Fruition State of Arahatsip.¹ This gives boundless floods of merit, he says, because the layman making the gift can acquire boundless merit through his mental state as he says to himself, “The robe I gave was used by one who is free of taints.”

We may be disappointed in considering this list of floods of merit, as it is not easy to encounter an Arahats today. In fact, some people consider that there are no more Arahats on the human plane. But we can still give requisites to the Saṅgha keeping in mind the Ariya Saṅgha (the Noble Community Disciples), and in that way, no matter how little has been attained by the individual bhikkhu or group of bhikkhus to whom we give, our gift will still be made to those who attained the highest goal.²

Most of the lists of four floods of merit have as the first three items unwavering confidence in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha (b, d, e, f, g, h, i, j). This means a disciple has unwavering confidence that the Blessed One is an Arahats, a fully-awakened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and (right) conduct, the Perfect One, the knower of the worlds, the incomparable trainer of men to be tamed, the

¹Mp III 92.

²See *The Perfection of Generosity* (Dhammadāna Series 3), p. 43.

Teacher of Devas and men, Awakened, and blessed.¹ He has unwavering confidence that the Dhamma is well-proclaimed by the Blessed One; it is visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be comprehended by the wise each one for himself. He has unwavering confidence in the Saṅgha as being well-directed, of upright conduct, on the right path, on the perfect path, as being made up of the four pairs of persons—the eight kinds of humans;² it is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of veneration—an unsurpassed field of merit in the world.

The fourth item in three discourses (b, e, h) is that the disciple is possessed of the virtue pleasing to the Noble Ones (*ariyakanta sīla*); virtue that is unbroken, without defect, unspotted, without deficiency, liberating, uncorrupted, and conducive to concentration.³ These four floods of merit are also known as the Path to the Devas,⁴ and they are the qualities of a Stream-winner,⁵ of one who is bound for Awakening.⁶

In one discourse (d), the virtuous conduct of the disciple possessing floods of merit is spelled out as consisting of the five precepts: not taking life, not stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct, not lying, and abstaining from taking

¹For these qualities of the Triple Gem we follow more or less closely the translation of “The Mirror of the Dhamma” (D II 93f.) by M. Walshe in THIH, p. 241.

²This means those who have attained one of the four Paths or four Fruition States.

³This is also included in the “Mirror of the Dhamma.”

⁴KS V 337f.

⁵KS V 345 and in “The Mirror of the Dhamma.”

⁶KS V, 345.

intoxicants and drugs that are the basis of carelessness.¹ These, the Buddha said, are five gifts, five great gifts that come from former times, that are of long standing, known through tradition, ancient, not confused now, just as they were not confused in the past, not impure, nor will they become impure, and they are not condemned by wise recluses and brahmans. Through observing the five precepts, the Noble disciple gives to innumerable beings freedom from fear (*abhaya*), freedom from hatred (*avera*), and freedom from injury (*avyāpajjha*). Acting in this way, he too partakes of freedom from fear, hatred, and injury.

In two discourses (f, i), the fourth flood of merit added to confidence in the Triple Gem is that the Noble disciple who lives the life of a householder is free from the stain of avarice.² He is freely generous, open-handed; he delights in relinquishing, is open to requests, and rejoices in sharing. Ashin Buddhaghosa, in *The Path of Purification*, explains *freely generous* to mean “liberally generous.” *Open-handed* means “with hands that are purified,” that is to say, with hands that are always washed in order to give gifts carefully with one’s own hands. *Delighting in relinquishing* means giving up (what is given). *Open to requests* (*yācayoga*) means accustomed to being asked because he gives whatever others ask for. Another reading for this term is *devoted to sacrificing* (*yājayoga*). *Rejoicing in sharing* means the donor thinks, “I give gifts and I share what is to be used by myself, and I rejoice in both.”

Finally, two discourses (g, j) give confidence in the Triple Gem with the fourth flood of merit being progress in practis-

¹This passage is discussed in *Points of Controversy* pp. 198ff.

²These terms are commented on by Ashin Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, Chapter VII ¶¶111f. We follow more or less closely Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s translation in *Path*.

ing insight. The disciple who has this fourth flood of merit is possessed of wisdom (*paññavā*) and the full understanding of what makes for arising and passing away, the Noble penetration that leads to the complete destruction of all misery.

From these various lists of floods of merit, we can see that they include all the aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path in its three divisions of Virtue (*sīla*), Concentration (*samādhi*), and Wisdom (*paññā*). We should develop in generosity, not only in giving material gifts but also in giving the protection and security to other beings that will be the result of observing the five precepts at all times. We must be able to control our minds if we are to be truly generous when we make gifts. And mental control will be essential if we are to be able to attain insight into how all conditioned things come into being and disappear. The task before us is not easy, but the rewards are more than worth the sacrifices we must make if we are to follow the Teachings of the Buddha.

THE STORY OF PACCEKA BUDDHA MĀTAṄGA

*Rāgañ ca dosañ ca pahāya moham
Sandalayitvāna¹ saṃyojanāni
Asantasam jīvitasamkhayamhi
Eko care khaggavisāṇakappo.*

Leaving behind passion, hatred, and delusion,
having torn the fetters apart, not trembling at (the
time of) the complete destruction of life,² one
should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn.

Sutta-nipāta, v. 74³

This *gāthā* (verse) was uttered by Arahats, including the Buddha, on four separate occasions. It was first uttered by the Solitary Buddha Mātaṅga and was only heard by him. Then, following the tradition of previous Paccekasambuddhas (perfectly awakened solitary Buddhas), he spoke the verse again at the Nandamūlaka mountain slope in the Himalayas. Later, during the lifetime of Buddha Gotama, when Venerable

¹PTS edition: *sandālayitvā*.

²“... the dissolution of life [= the complete destruction of life] means passing away, the breaking up of the mind; and not being frightened by this dissolution of life because of the fact that [the speaker] has eliminated the desire for life, in this way up till then having shown to himself the sphere of Nibbāna with a residue of substratum, at the end of the verse he passed away into the sphere of Nibbāna without a residue of substratum.” Sn-a 129,12. We use the translation by Ria Kloppenborg, *The Paccekabuddha* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 124, n. 163.

³We use the translation by K.R. Norman, GD.

Ānanda requested him, the Lord himself gave this verse. Finally, at the First Council (*Saṅgāyanā*), which was held three months after the Great Demise (*Mahāparinibbāna*) of the Buddha, five hundred Arahats were present as Saṅgītikārakas (recensionists of the Buddha's Teachings), and Ashin Ānanda spoke this verse in answer to a question posed by the Pucchaka (questioner) and convener of the Council, Ashin Mahā-Kassapa. It has been recited many times since then, notably at all the Councils up through the Sixth Buddhist Council (or Synod) in Myanmar. At those Councils, the verse was spoken in the presence of the Saṅgītikārakas.

Pacceka Buddha Mātāṅga first spoke this verse as a solemn utterance (*udāna*) when he was filled with great joy (*pīti*) after attaining the knowledge of solitary awakening (*pacceka-bodhi-ñāṇa*). His *pīti* was so great that this verse occurred to him spontaneously.

There is an ancient tradition in India of people turning their backs on life as a householder and taking up the life of an ascetic, carrying an alms bowl for their food and retiring to the forest, especially to the Himalayas in northern India. There, they follow their creed and adopt ascetic practices. This can happen whether the Teachings of a Buddha are available or not. If this is done during a period outside a Buddha-sāsana, ascetics who possess the right perfections (*pāramī*) can attain the highest knowledge (*ñāṇa*), the Path and Fruition State of Arahatship (*arahatta-magga, arahatta-phala*). They accomplish this through understanding the Four Noble Truths, just as Fully Awakened Ones (or Teaching Buddhas, *Sammāsambuddhas*) do. They are called Solitary Buddhas or Non-Teaching Buddhas (*pacceka-buddhas*). The difference between the two types of Buddhas is that *Sammāsambuddhas* have developed their *pāramīs* over a longer period of time.

Everyone who is to reach Arahātship must develop the *pāramīs* for a certain time. The shortest time required is for a disciple of a Teaching Buddha who attains Arahātship but no more. “Great” disciples (*mahā-sāvakas*) and the two leading disciples (*agga-sāvakas*) of a Teaching Buddha must work longer. Pacceka Buddhas work longer still. For Teaching Buddhas, there are four levels of developing the *pāramīs*. Our teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, gave a table of these periods in his booklet *The Real Values of True Buddhist Meditation*:¹

1. For Teaching Buddhas (*Sammāsambuddhas*):
 - (a) a Viriyādhika Buddha (one who has effort as the predominating factor): 16 incalculables of world-cycles (*asaṅkheyya*, a unit followed by 140 ciphers) plus 1000,000 world-cycles (*kappa*),
 - (b) a Saddhādhika Buddha (with faith as the predominating factor): 8 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles,
 - (c) a Paññādhika Buddha (with wisdom as the predominating factor): 4 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
2. For Pacceka Buddhas: 2 incalculables of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
3. For an Agga-sāvaka (a leading disciple of a Teaching Buddha): 1 incalculable of world-cycles plus 100,000 world-cycles.
4. For a Mahā-sāvaka (a great disciple of a Teaching Buddha): 100,000 world-cycles.
5. For an Arahāt: 100 to 1,000 world-cycles.

¹See *Dhamma Texts* (Dhamma Texts Series 1, revised ed., 1991), pp. 60f. See also *The Coming Buddha Ariya Metteyya* (Dhammadāna Series 7, 1988), pp. 1-4 (references to Pāli commentaries are given in the notes).

Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga¹ was the last Pacceka Buddha to appear before the Teaching Buddha Gotama. The residents of Rājagaha who offered him alms food each day could not have known all the details of the attainments he had accomplished. They only saw peace and serenity in his face. That was sufficient for them to want to pay respects to him and offer him the best food they had before they ate themselves.

Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga resided in a cave in the Paṇḍava foothill near Rājagaha. From there, he went on his alms rounds to Rājagaha and the surrounding villages, one after the other. His boundless compassion and boudness *mettā* led him to make alms rounds regularly through the residential areas of Rājagaha for the benefit and gain of many. Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga, like all Solitary Buddhas and Teaching Buddhas, had realized the Four Noble Truths on his own, without a teacher to show him the way. Pacceka Buddhas, however, do not develop the perfections for a long enough period to be able to teach others the Path to Awakening, so he was not able to lead others to the truth he had realized.

Pacceka Buddhas enjoy the attainment of the Fruition State (*phala-sammapatti*) at times and at other times they enter the attainment of cessation or suppression (*nirodha*). Even though they are in the world, there will be no knowledge in the human world of the Paths and Fruition States. This is because they will only live when there is no Buddha-sāsana.

One day, Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga came out of the cessation state (*nirodha*) and on regaining the use of his senses he heard Deva voices saying, “Sir, sir, a future Buddha has been

¹Details concerning Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga are taken from a text in the Myanmar language by Ashin Wunnasiri, a Pāli scholar of Myanmar. The text was published in *Dhammaramsī Buddhist Magazine*, n° 15, March 1991.

born in the world.” These Devas had come to the human world to worship, venerate, and honour the Bodhisatta.

Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga had the ability to see into the future (*anāgataṃsa-ñāṇa*). If he had used this ability before going into the cessation state, he would have realized that twenty-nine years later to the day, the future Teaching Buddha, now born as the Bodhisatta Siddhattha, would come to the very spot where he was. Like him, Siddhattha would go on alms round in the city of Rājagaha and would return to that very place to eat the morning alms food given by the same residents of Rājagaha and the surrounding villages who gave to him.

The day that the Bodhisatta Siddhattha was born there were thirt-two marvels in the world. Summer was over and the rains would soon come. With the thirty-two marvels, trees bore flowers out of season, etc., and the Himalayas were very beautiful. Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga did not see all this because he had entered the cessation state for seven days; all his senses were suppressed and sealed, and his body would be rigid until the predetermined period was over.

When he heard the voices of the Devas, Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga reflected, “A Bodhisatta has been born. He will be the future Buddha. *Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu*.” He saw that the worlds of the Devas, Brahmās, and humans were filled with joy. Then he used his supernormal mental powers (*abhiññā*) to see when his own life would come to an end. He found that he would attain Parinibbāna that same day. So he went through the air to the mountain named Mahāpapāta, a mountain in the Himalayas where all Pacceka Buddhas attain Parinibbāna.

The Burmese commentator describes the scene as follows: Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga realized that he was the last of the Pacceka Buddhas before the Sammāsambuddha Gotama appeared in the world. He saw that he would no longer be in

the world when the future Buddha came, so he directed his thoughts towards the destruction of his own life. Then he left the cave where he had resided for many years with the support of the residents of Rājagaha. He had no attachment to his supporters or to his cave. Going through the air, he passed over Rājagaha, which is surrounded by five mountains; he went over all of Magadha, headed for the north into the Himalayas. He went past seven mountain ranges to the Gandhamādana mountain range where the Nandamūlaka (or Nandamu) mountain slope is found. On that slope there are three caves: the golden cave (Suvaṇṇa-guhā), the ruby (or jewel) cave (Maṇi-guhā), and the silver cave (Rajata-guhā). Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga chose the ruby cave in the middle where the Mañjūsaka Deva tree grows at the entrance. There, he descended from the air, keeping in mind, “All conditioned states are transient, impermanent, *anicca, anicca, anicca* ...,” as he saw the withered flowers of the Mañjūsaka tree that had fallen all around it like a huge carpet.

Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga remembered that this was the place where in the past all the Pacceka Buddhas living in the world assembled on full-moon days and new-moon days. At such times, they enjoyed the attainment of the Fruition State (*phala-sammapatti*) or of cessation (*nirodha-sammapatti*) together. When a new Pacceka Buddha came, he would take the last of the prepared seats because the Pacceka Buddhas were seated according to seniority. When the predetermined period of going into states was up, the eldest of the Pacceka Buddhas would ask the newly arrived Pacceka Buddha to explain how he attained solitary knowledge (*pacceka-ñāṇa*) and he would explain how he did so and would repeat the solemn utterance (*udāna*) he made on attaining full awakening.

When Pacceka Buddha Mātaṅga appeared in the world, there were no other Pacceka Buddhas, but he kept the tradition

by coming to this place and speaking his verse alone. This was the second time that he spoke that verse. When he came back after learning about the birth of the future Teaching Buddha, he had come for the last time. It was time for him to follow in the footsteps of the previous Pacceka Buddhas. Although the actual footsteps had disappeared due to the wind, rain, and snow, they were still clear to him in his mind, and he followed the footsteps and approached a large, flat rock. He took the string of bones mixed with fragments of worn pieces of yellow robe of the Pacceka Buddha who had entered complete extinction before him and threw them into the near-by precipice.¹ Then he lay down on the flat rock.

As a Pacceka Buddha, Mātaṅga had eliminated all craving. He had no craving for continued existence (*bhava*). He had no craving for anything. Whatever he did was in accordance with what should be done. There was no reaction in him as he always possessed functional consciousness (*kiriya-citta*), states of consciousness that do not give future results. There would be no more birth for him. When the light of a candle is extinguished, it disappears with no trace. We cannot say it has gone here or there. The same is true when the Pacceka Buddhas pass away into the sphere of Nibbāna without a residue of substratum. They pass away after entering the concentration of the fire element (*tejo-dhātu-samādhi*). In this way, their bodies are consumed by fire.

¹Ria Kloppenborg's statement (*op. cit.*, p. 56) that Mātaṅga went to Mount Mahāpapāta "the mountain from which *paccekabuddhas* can enter final *nibbāna* by throwing themselves down from the rock" seems inaccurate. It is the bones of the last Pacceka Buddha to enter final Nibbāna that are thrown down from the rock. According to Sn-a 128f., it is at this moment that he repeated his solemn utterance.

THE PERSON THE BUDDHA WOULD NOT ADMONISH

At one time, in a conversation with a horse-trainer named Kesi, the Buddha asked him how he trained his horses.¹ Kesi² replied that he used mildness, harshness, and a combination of the two.³ Next, the Buddha asked what Kesi did with a horse that would not submit to his training. “I destroy him,” Kesi answered, explaining that he did not wish for such a horse to be a discredit to his teacher’s clan.

Then Kesi remarked that the Buddha was the unsurpassed trainer of men. How did he train men?

The Buddha replied that he too used mildness, harshness and a combination of the two. By mildness, the Buddha explained that he meant training through good conduct of body, speech and thought with the good results of each, leading on to rebirth as a Deva or a human being. By harshness the Buddha meant showing bad conduct of the body, speech and thought and the results of each, leading on to rebirth as an animal or a wandering ghost (*peta*). The combination of the two was also possible.

We can infer from this that some people only need to be shown the positive way of acting and the good that results,

¹GS II 116-118.

²F.L. Woodward translates the name by “with a mane.”

³Woodward quotes the commentary as saying “proper regard, good food, sweet water, gentle speech” are examples of mild training and “hobbling, bridling, goading, whipping, harsh speech” are examples of harsh training.

some only need to see the results of bad actions, while others need to see both sides before they submit to training.

Kesi asked the Buddha what he would do if someone did not submit to any of these methods. “In such a case, Kesi, I destroy him,” the Buddha replied. Kesi was understandably surprised by this answer. It was one thing for him, a mere horse trainer, to destroy a recalcitrant horse, but for the Buddha to destroy someone was unthinkable. “But surely the Blessed One does not take life!” he exclaimed.

“Kesi,” the Buddha replied, “it is true that taking life does not become a Tathāgata (Buddha). Yet, if the man to be trained does not submit to the training by mildness, by harshness or both together, then the Tathāgata does not think it worthwhile to admonish that man, nor do his wise companions in leading the holy life (*brahmacariya*) think it worthwhile to admonish that man. This, Kesi, is destruction for a man in the noble discipline: when both the Tathāgata and his companions in leading the holy life do not think it worthwhile to admonish him.”

The method mentioned here can be taken as part of the first step involving the motivation for a person ready for training. It is necessary to have the right view that volitional actions will give future results, that other planes of existence actually exist and that our good or bad acts will lead to birth in a good or bad plane respectively. If this is true, then a person will be motivated to work for a good existence at the very least. This matter of right belief is so important it is the subject of the first discourse in the Sutta Piṭaka.

The Buddha does not mention to Kesi that working for a good existence is not enough, that the goal should be the ending of all future births. This is probably because Kesi was not ready at that time to aim at the highest goal. An illustration of how the Buddha initially motivated some people to work for

a good existence is found in his discourse to the Kālāmas¹ and also in the way he taught his half-brother Nanda.² Nanda became a bhikkhu just after being married and soon began to long to return to lay life. The Buddha showed him the pleasures of the Deva worlds to help him get rid of his longing for the pleasures of the human world, knowing that as he worked to attain temporary pleasures Nanda would be able to go beyond them and attain Nibbāna. This can serve as an example of training with mildness.

In a very different case the Buddha used the harsh training. An actor name Tālapuṭa had been told that through entertaining people he would be reborn in the world of the laughing devas.³ When he sought to confirm this by asking the Buddha, the Buddha at first remained silent. This shows that the Buddha was careful not to tell people something if it would only serve to upset and depress them. Tālapuṭa had to ask three times before the Buddha explained that an actor who provoked immoral thoughts in his audience would be reborn in a lower realm. And this knowledge motivated Tālapuṭa to become a bhikkhu and work for true happiness.

In many places it is made clear that the Buddha only taught those who would follow his instructions, but that he also gave people every chance to see the error of their ways. A good example is the case of the quarreling bhikkhus of Kosambī⁴. Due to a misunderstanding concerning the rules, two factions of bhikkhus refused to listen to the advice of the Buddha. It was only when he saw that he could not resolve the conflict

¹GS I 170-175.

²For the story of Ven. Nanda, see BL I 217-225.

³S IV 305f. (KS IV 214-216).

⁴See BD IV 483-513, for the complete account. The story is also given by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha* (BPS), pp. 109-119.

that the Buddha left the bhikkhus. When they finally came to their senses, the Buddha advised the bhikkhus with him and the lay followers who asked how to act towards the two factions: they should continue to act correctly towards both sides, but not get involved in the dispute. The conflict was eventually resolved when the bhikkhu who had broken one of the minor rules confessed his fault. But it is important to note that both sides in the argument were guilty of wrong speech in their quarreling and they almost lost contact with the Buddha because of that. They were almost destroyed. As Ven. Sāriputta said, a bhikkhu who lacks respect for the Teacher cannot have respect for the Dhamma and Saṅgha.¹

The Buddha is described as having compassion and loving kindness for all living beings. Even Devadatta, who had tried to kill the Buddha, realized at the end of his life that the Buddha had not cherished so much as the tip of a hair's hatred towards him.² If this is so, how could the Buddha turn his back on someone? We have all probably seen cases of people in difficulty who refuse to see the solution to their problem. We may have tried to help them, only to find that all our efforts were in vain. Instead of helping the other person, we might find ourselves being dragged down by them. If we realize that we are unable to help someone, then we would do better to avoid them entirely, just as the Buddha left the bhikkhus of Kosambī. The best response to someone who only wants to quarrel or stir up trouble is silence. We cannot help someone who is not ready to help himself. This is what the Buddha meant when he said that he only showed the way. He could not enlighten anyone else. But if they were ready to

¹GS IV 81.

²BL I 239.

follow his instructions, he could show them the way to reach Nibbāna by their own efforts.

It is not always easy for us to know whether we can be helpful or not to another person. A Buddha can see better than anyone else the potential a person has. Some indications of the qualities a person who can be helped will possess can be obtained from the description of the dedicated student of meditation in the *Visuddhimagga*:¹ if he dedicates himself to the teacher, he will be responsive to correction, he will not go about as he likes, he will be easy to speak to and will live only in dependence on the teacher. If the bhikkhus at Kosambī had had this sort of attitude, they would have stopped their quarreling the first time the Buddha corrected them.

At times, of course, a person can only learn by his own mistakes. A good example of such a person was Ven. Meghiya, who was one of the Buddha's attendants before Ven. Ānanda. He insisted on meditating in a grove where he was unable to make progress.² But realizing his mistake, he approached the Buddha and asked him about it. The result was that the Buddha gave him very thorough instructions for his meditation, and Meghiya was finally able to make progress. If we are aware that we have gone down the wrong path, then we should come back before it is too late. If we encounter others who have fallen into error, but who sincerely wish to begin again, and work properly, then, like the Buddha, we should welcome the opportunity to help them if we can.

The Buddha explains very plainly, "This, Kesi, is destruction for a man in the discipline of the Ariyan—when both the Tathāgata and his fellows in the higher life think it not worth while to admonish him!"

¹*Path*, Chapter III, §126.

²GS IV 234-237.

When our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin was living and teaching at the International Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar, there were many occasions when he would train by mildness with sweet and gentle speech, and good food, and also by harshness with firm, strong words—sometimes very stern words—and also by both mildness and harshness. At such times we were at a loss to understand but always knew that his loving-kindness was so great that he could not help but follow in the foot-steps of the Buddha.

“Destroyed indeed is a person by the Teacher when he would not admonish the unfortunate person!”

So those who wish to lead a higher life should submit to the admonition of our teachers who are wise and who with much loving-kindness show us the Right Path, the Path to Liberation.

Hence, let all beware!

INEVITABLE SUFFERING AND THE HOPE OF NIBBĀNA

1. People With a Fixed Destiny

The Buddha taught that there are two types of people with a fixed destiny (*niyata-pubbala*). Those who attain at least the first stage of Awakening are assured of eventually attaining release from all suffering. They are called Noble Persons, Ariyas. The second category of people with a fixed destiny includes those who will be unable to attain release during their present life or during their next life. This second category is for those who have either committed one or more of the five actions which have an immediate result [in the next life] (*ānantarika-kamma*), and for those who hold a fixed wrong view (*niyata-micchā-ditṭhi*).

Let us examine this second category in more detail, because a correct understanding of the dangers in wrong beliefs and wrong actions can serve to inspire us to work for the goal of release from all suffering. We shall also see that, even though people in the second category cannot avoid great suffering, they are not in a hopeless situation.

The five actions which inevitably result in great suffering in the next life are: 1) killing one's father, 2) killing one's mother, 3) killing an Arahant, that is to say, a person who has reached the highest stage of Awakening and who will have no future rebirths, 4) spilling the blood of a Buddha through an evil motive, and 5) causing a division in the Saṅgha, the

Order of Bhikkhus which keeps alive the Teachings of the Buddha.¹

It is very unlikely that any of us have committed one of these actions in this life. People who kill their parents are very rare. We are not very likely to know an Arahāt. The Buddha has attained Pari-nibbāna. And the Buddha explained to the Venerable Upāli that only a fully ordained Bhikkhu can cause a schism in the Saṅgha.² The Buddha said that even in the case of such a Bhikkhu, he must consciously work against the Teachings, knowing that he is maintaining what is not the Buddha's Teachings—or at least have some doubts about whether creating a schism in the Saṅgha is against the Teachings. If a Bhikkhu is sincerely mistaken concerning the Teachings, he is not certain of rebirth in the lower realms, nor is he incurable.

Fixed wrong views may seem less terrible than these five crimes. We may look on them as merely ideas. But in Buddhism, ideas are given their correct value. It is ideas and beliefs that lead to actions. A deep-seated belief will lead to many wrong actions. Some wrong beliefs are less serious than others, for they contain a grain of truth. The beliefs which make it impossible to obtain birth in the higher planes in the next life and thereby cut off the possibility of obtaining release from suffering are very serious indeed.

We can sum up the worst types of wrong belief with the phrase, "There is not." "The wrong view that there is not" is the direct translation of the Pali term *natthika-diṭṭhi*. This term is usually translated into English by "nihilism." The Buddha explained this type of wrong belief to the laymen of Sālā. It

¹See, for example, A III 146f. (GS III 112).

²Vin II 204-206 (BD V 286-289)

includes the following beliefs:¹ that no good can come from giving or from making sacrifices; that good and evil actions have no future results; that this world and the next world are an illusion; that serving one's mother and father gives no good results; that no beings are born spontaneously; that no one in this world is living correctly and that none are able to teach others about this world and the next world having understood them through their own higher wisdom. Finally,² this wrong belief holds that when a person dies, he is annihilated; both wise men and fools are destroyed by death and after death they no longer exist.

The Buddha then explained to the laymen of Sālā that some people hold the wrong view that [good or bad] actions do not exist (*akiriya-diṭṭhi*). They maintain that no matter what a person does or encourages others to do, there is neither evil nor merit. A person can kill, mutilate, threaten and torture; they can have others do all this. They can cause grief and torment by stealing, committing adultery, and lying. In this wrong view, no evil is done. And this wrong view believes no merit comes from giving, encouraging others to give, from taming and restraining oneself or from speaking the truth.

The third type of wrong belief explained by the Buddha is the wrong view of no cause (*ahetu-diṭṭhi*). Those who hold wrong view say that beings are defiled or purified without cause or reason. They say that creatures experience pleasure and pain in an arbitrary way. They do not believe that making right or wrong efforts cause future pleasure or pain.

The Buddha emphasizes for each of these three wrong views that they are dangerous because they lead to immoral

¹The following details are a paraphrase of M I 401f. (MLS II 70f.)

²These details are added to the above in Ven. Ānanda's discourse to the ascetic Sandata (M I 515 [MLS II 194])

living. Those who are convinced of these wrong beliefs will commit wrong actions of body, speech, and thought. They lead to being condemned by intelligent people here and now and in the future, and they lead to rebirth in the lower realms of suffering including the lowest of the hells, the Niraya Hell.

The commentaries¹ point out that the destiny of a person who holds one or more of these three wrong beliefs is only fixed for one rebirth. But due to habit, he will tend to approve of the same beliefs in future lives. This makes it almost impossible for him to transcend continued rebirths.

An important point is made concerning fixed destiny. Unwholesome mental states are weak compared to wholesome ones. This can be seen from the fact that for Ariyas, it is impossible to fall back into the lower realms of suffering. Those who are Stream-winners will have at the most only seven new lives in the higher realms before they attain complete liberation. No matter how bad unwholesome mental states or actions are, there is always the possibility of eventually obtaining release. The results of evil deeds are never final.

2. The Story of Devadatta and Ajātasattu

The fact that these types of wrong belief are more serious than the five crimes can be illustrated by the stories of two persons who committed one or more of these crimes during the time of the Buddha. They are Devadatta and Ajātasattu.

Devadatta was the cousin and brother-in-law of the Buddha. He was one of a group of six Khattiyans who went forth together with their barber, Upāli. This group included several of the foremost disciples: Bhaddiya, Anuruddha,

¹See the translation of the commentary and sub-commentaries to a similar passage in the Dīgha-nikāya in *The Wheel*, n° 98/99, pp. 24-28.

Bhagu, Kimbila and Ānanda. Ānanda attained Stream-entry and the others all became Arahats. But Devadatta only attained the mental powers (*iddhi*) which can be achieved through concentration.¹

As a result of their attainments, Devadatta's companions received many offerings from the laypeople. Devadatta became jealous, thinking that since he came from the same clan and had ordained with the others, he should be as highly honoured as they were.² He decided he would win favour with a layman in order to win gain and honour. He realized that King Bimbisāra was a Stream-winner whose confidence in the Buddha could not be shaken. King Kosala was also a firm believer. So Devadatta decided to try Prince Ajātasattu, Bimbisāra's son.

Devadatta went to Ajātasattu, and through his powers, assumed the form of a boy with snakes coiled around him. This frightened the prince and impressed him. After that, he made many offerings to Devadatta. This made Devadatta proud. He became obsessed with gains, honour and fame and thought to himself, "I will lead the Saṅgha." As soon as he thought this, he lost his mental powers.

Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna's attendant, Kakudha, had died and been reborn as a Deva. He told Mahā-Moggallāna about Devadatta's idea that he would lead the Saṅgha. When Mahā-Moggallāna informed the Buddha, the Buddha told him to be careful in his speech; that Devadatta would betray himself on his own. The Buddha pointed out that a teacher does not need to be protected by his disciples if he is pure in morality, in livelihood, in teaching the Dhamma, in exposition and in

¹See Dhp-a I 38 (BL I 234)

²For Devadatta's story down to the schism in the Saṅgha, see Vin II 184-206 (BD V 259-289). Some details are added from Dhp-a I 38-143 (BL I 234-238).

knowledge and vision. The Buddha himself was such a teacher. Only teachers who are impure in any of these aspects need and expect protection.

A group of Bhikkhus told the Buddha of the great offerings Ajātasattu made to Devadatta. The Buddha warned them not to envy Devadatta, for gains, honour and fame would bring about Devadatta's downfall.

As the Buddha said, Devadatta betrayed himself. He was so deluded, he went to the Buddha when he was teaching a great number of people including the king and three times requested to lead the Saṅgha. The Buddha replied, "I would not hand the Saṅgha over to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. How could I hand it over to you, a wretched person to be vomited like spittle?"

This firm refusal upset Devadatta, who, for the first time, felt malice towards the Buddha.

The Buddha had the Saṅgha carry out a formal Act of Information against Devadatta, informing the laypeople of Rājagaha that Devadatta's nature had been of one kind in the past, but that now it was of another kind. From that time on, whatever he did by gesture and vocally had nothing to do with the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Saṅgha. The Buddha had the Saṅgha charge Venerable Sāriputta with the task of informing the people of Rājagaha. Sāriputta pointed out that he had spoken in the past in praise of Devadatta in that very city. The Buddha asked Sāriputta if what he had said in the past had been true. When the chief disciple said yes, the Buddha said that what he was to say now would be equally true.

Next, Devadatta decided to try to kill the Buddha. He went to Ajātasattu and proposed that the prince kill his father in order to become king. He said he would kill the Buddha and become a Buddha himself. We can see how little Devadatta understood.

Ajātasattu was taken prisoner in the act of trying to kill King Bimbisāra. When his father discovered his son wanted the throne, he stepped down and handed over the kingdom. Devadatta was not satisfied with this, however.¹ He urged the prince to kill his father. But no weapon could injure Bimbisāra. So the prince decided to starve his father. He was put in prison and only the mother of Ajātasattu was allowed to visit him. She took food which she hid in her clothes. This was discovered, so she hid food in her hair. But this was discovered as well and she took what she could hide in her shoes. Her last resort was to smear her body with sweets for the king to lick. Finally, she was forbidden access to the king. But the king continued to live by walking around his cell meditating. The prince then had barbers cut open the king's feet, fill the wounds with salt and vinegar and burn them with hot coals. The king showed no resentment even at this.

A son was born to Ajātasattu and he felt great joy. He realized his father may have felt the same way when he was born. His mother confirmed that this was so, and he sent to have his father released from prison. But it was too late. His father had died that very day.

Devadatta asked for Ajātasattu's aid in killing the Buddha and the prince gave orders to his men to do whatever Devadatta asked. But the man sent to kill the Buddha went rigid and stood still, afraid, anxious, and alarmed when he saw the Buddha. He realized his error and confessed his fault to the Buddha, asking for the Buddha to acknowledge his transgression so that he might restrain himself in the future. The Buddha taught this man the Dhamma. Devadatta had set up a series of men, each group to kill the next in order to cover

¹The story of the death of Bimbisāra is found in Sv I 135ff. See DPPN, "Bimbisāra" (II 286f.).

up his deed. But each group went to look for the others, came to the Buddha and heard the Dhamma.

Devadatta decided he would have to kill the Buddha himself. He threw a big rock down from the Vulture's Peak. But two mountain peaks came together and crushed the rock and only a fragment of it reached the Buddha, wounding his foot.

The Buddha told Devadatta that he had made great demerit by spilling his blood. And he told the Bhikkhus that this was the first action of Devadatta's that would have an immediate result in the next life. So we can see that all the bad things Devadatta had done up to this point could have been overcome if he had mended his ways.

The Bhikkhus were very agitated when they learned of this attempt on the Buddha's life. But the Buddha assured them, as he had Mahā-Moggallāna, that a Buddha cannot be killed and does not need to be protected by his disciples.

Devadatta tried again to kill the Buddha. He had a fierce elephant named Nālāgiri set loose against the Buddha. But the Buddha overcame the elephant with loving kindness. With this event, the laymen learned about Devadatta's attempts on the Buddha's life and their indignation was so great, Prince Ajātasattu was constrained to withdraw his support.

Devadatta then asked for food from the laymen. The Buddha pointed out that it was wrong for the Bhikkhus to solicit food and laid down a rule to prevent such practices. This seems to have been the motivation for Devadatta to create a schism in the Saṅgha. He approached several other Bhikkhus and proposed a plan. They would ask the Buddha to lay down five ascetic rules which they knew in advance he would refuse. In this way, they would appear to be better, for people without a proper understanding of the Dhamma are impressed by strict rules. Even the group of five who

accompanied the Buddha before his Awakening had been of the opinion that the more painful the practice the better it is. So Devadatta requested that the Buddha require all bhikkhus to live in the forest, refuse invitations to meals, wear only robes made of rags, live under trees rather than in buildings and refuse all meat. The Buddha replied that bhikkhus were free to live in the forest if they wished, to eat only food obtained on their alms rounds, and to wear only robes made from rags. But it was a choice to be made. If they preferred, they could live near a village, accept invitations to meals, and accept robes from laymen. Living under a tree was permitted for eight months of the year and fish and meat were pure as long as it was not seen, heard or suspected that the animal had been killed on purpose in order to feed the bhikkhu.

Devadatta was overjoyed at the Buddha's refusal. When he told the people of Rājagaha about the rules, those who were of little faith, not believing in the Buddha, and who were unintelligent were impressed. But those who had the opposite qualities were critical, saying, "How can this Devadatta promote a schism in the Saṅgha?"

The Buddha confronted Devadatta with his actions and asked him if what he heard was true, that Devadatta was promoting a schism in the Saṅgha. Devadatta admitted that he was.

"Enough, Devadatta," the Buddha said, "do not let there be a schism in the Saṅgha, for a schism in the Saṅgha is a serious matter, Devadatta. Whoever, splits a Saṅgha that is united sets up demerit that endures for an æon; he is boiled in hell for an æon. But whoever, Devadatta, unites a Saṅgha that is split, he sets up sublime merit, he rejoices in heaven for an æon."

But Devadatta would not listen. When he saw Venerable Ānanda on his alms round in Rājagaha, he told him that from that time on he would observe the reciting of the rules, the

Pātimokkha, and the carrying out of formal acts of the Saṅgha on his own.

Devadatta was able to win over five hundred newly ordained Bhikkhus who did not understand what they were doing. Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna informed the Buddha of what had happened and he asked them, “Do you not have compassion for these newly ordained bhikkhus?” And he sent them after the bhikkhus. The two chief disciples went to where Devadatta had set himself up in imitation of the Buddha. He was seated, teaching the Dhamma to a large group, and when he saw the chief disciples coming, Devadatta said, “You see, bhikkhus, the Dhamma is well taught by me. Even the chief disciples of the recluse Gotama are coming to me approving of my teachings.” But one of his followers, Kokalika, warned Devadatta not to trust the chief disciples. Devadatta was so deluded, however, he seems to have sincerely believed in what he was doing, and he welcomed Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna.

After teaching far into the night, Devadatta invited Venerable Sāriputta to take over, again in imitation of the Buddha. And Devadatta laid down to rest. He was tired, forgetful and inattentive, so he immediately fell asleep. Both Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna instructed the bhikkhus and opened their eyes to the true Dhamma. And they led the Bhikkhus back to the Buddha. Kokālika woke up Devadatta and told him of what had happened. Devadatta was so upset, he spit up blood.

The Buddha told the Saṅgha that Devadatta was overcome by eight conditions which controlled his mind and which meant he would be reborn in Niraya Hell, staying there for an æon without any hope for a cure. These eight conditions were gain, lack of gain, fame, lack of fame, honours, lack of honours, evil desire and evil friendship. All of these

conditions should be overcome if a person is to reach the end of suffering. The Buddha also spoke of three conditions in the same context, two of them from the above list: evil desire, evil friendship, and stopping midway along the path after gaining special attainments that are of little value. So we can see how dangerous the mental powers can be for someone who has not gained control over his cravings, and how important it is not to overestimate our attainments at any time.

Devadatta became very ill and repented of all he had done. He asked to be led to the Buddha. But his disciples refused at first. Devadatta said, “Do not destroy me. I did bear hatred towards the Buddha, but he has not entertained hatred towards me, not even so much as the tip of a hair.” The Buddha was told of his approach, but said that Devadatta would not succeed in seeing him again. It is said that from the time he requested the Buddha to lay down the five rules, hoping to divide the Saṅgha, Devadatta could no longer come into the Buddha’s presence. Devadatta was being carried on a litter by his disciples, and when he arrived at the monastery where the Buddha was staying, he asked to be let down so that he could bathe. But he sank down into the earth, little by little. Just before his head was swallowed up, he took refuge in the Buddha.¹

Ajātasattu was also filled with remorse.² He feared that the same thing that had happened to Devadatta would happen to him. He was unable to discharge his duties as the king. He could not sleep at night and wandered around trembling. He thought he could see the earth opening before him and the flames of hell coming out. He imagined himself fastened to a

¹For the rest of Devadatta’s story see Dhp-a I 146-149 (BL I 239-242) and the introduction to the Samudda-vāṇija Jātaka (n° 466).

²See the introductions to the Saṅjīva Jātaka (n° 150), the Saṃkicca Jātaka (n° 530), and the Sāmaññaphala Sutta (D I 47-85 [DB I 65-95]).

bed of burning metal with iron lances thrust into his body. He wanted to go to the Buddha to be reconciled to him and to ask his guidance, but his actions had been so serious he was afraid to approach the Buddha.

Ajātasattu's physician was Jīvaka, who was the Buddha's physician as well. So the king decided to use a stratagem to get Jīvaka to take him to the Buddha. One night he exclaimed that it was a beautiful night, a perfect evening for going to see a teacher. He knew that his ministers would encourage him to go see their different teachers. Each minister spoke in praise of different teachers, but Jīvaka, who understood what the king wanted, remained silent as he wanted to be sure that the king desired to see the Buddha. Finally, Ajātasattu asked Jīvaka why he had said nothing. Jīvaka then praised the Buddha, and the king suggested they go to see him.

Jīvaka had said that the Buddha was residing with twelve hundred and fifty bhikkhus, so when they approached his lodgings and not a sound was to be heard, Ajātasattu became nervous, fearful that there was a plot against him. "You are not playing a trick on me, are you Jīvaka? You are not deceiving me and betraying me to my foes, are you?" he said to Jīvaka. "How can there be no sound at all? How can there not be a sneeze or a cough in such a large assembly of bhikkhus?" Jīvaka reassured the king and told him to continue on to the Buddha.

Ajātasattu went to the Buddha and exclaimed that he wished his son Udāyi could be as calm as the assembly of Bhikkhus. Venerable Buddhaghosa comments that the king feared his son might kill him, just as he had killed his father, and therefore wished that Udāyi would become a bhikkhu.¹ This would

¹See Sv I 153.

explain why he then asked the Buddha about the fruits of the life of a bhikkhu.

In his discourse to Ajātasattu, the Buddha questions the king about what he has heard from other teachers, and Ajātasattu describes the many wrong beliefs he has heard and has not been satisfied with. These include the most dangerous kinds of wrong beliefs which we explained at the beginning of our talk. Then the Buddha points out the fruits that can be expected from leading a life based on right view. At the end of the discourse, Ajātasattu took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, and confessed his fault in killing his father. He asked for the Buddha to acknowledge his wrong action in order that he might restrain himself in the future.

After the king left, the Buddha told the bhikkhus that if he had not killed his father, Ajātasattu would have attained Stream-entry through the discourse he had just heard. Ajātasattu missed his chance to become an Ariya, but he associated with the Buddha from then on, listened to other discourses, and through associating with such a virtuous friend his fears were calmed and his feelings of horror disappeared. He became a great supporter of the Dhamma. From this we can see that even though a person may have a fixed destiny in the next life, it does not mean that he cannot grow in the Dhamma. We are told¹ that the Buddha allowed Devadatta to ordain even though he knew what he would do. This was because even if he had remained a layman he would have committed serious crimes, but he would have been unable to accumulate enough merit to obtain release in a future life. As a Bhikkhu, he acquired the necessary merit before his craving got the upper hand. He will suffer for the remainder of

¹For Devadatta see Dhp I 147 (BL I 240); cf. Mil 107-113 (QKM I 162-170). For Ajātasattu see Sv I 237f.

this æon in hell, but after a hundred thousand world cycles, he will become a Pacceka Buddha—that is to say, a Buddha that does not teach others the Path to Nibbāna—and his name will be Aṭṭhissara. Ajātasattu will suffer in the Lohakumbhiya Hell for sixty thousand years, but thanks to the good deeds he did after hearing the Buddha’s discourse, he will afterwards become the Pacceka Buddha Veditavisesa.

3. The Importance of Practising the Dhamma

It is not only those who hold the worst kinds of wrong beliefs or who commit the five worst crimes who are reborn in the realms of suffering. A person is never sure that he has escaped the lower worlds until he becomes an Ariya. The only way to do this is to take advantage of the Teachings of a Buddha whenever this is possible. Being generous and leading a moral life are necessary, but they are not enough. We can never be sure where we will be reborn next as long as we are ordinary beings. And we have seen in the case of Devadatta that even developing our concentration to a very high degree will not release us from suffering. We must in addition develop our insight. If we follow the Path in all its fullness, then we can aspire to release in this life or in the next.

But even those who are Ariyas must continue to follow the Path if they are to avoid unnecessary suffering. In his discourse to Ajātasattu, the Buddha pointed out that one of the fruits of the life of a recluse was developing the divine eye and seeing for oneself that the lower realms of suffering are the destiny of those who are ill-conducted in body, speech and mind, who are revilers of the Ariyas, who hold wrong views and acquire the results of the sort of Kamma that comes from holding wrong views.¹ In illustrating the term “revilers of the

¹D I 82 (DB I 91f.). Quoted in *Vism*, ch. XIII, ¶72.

Ariyas”, Venerable Buddhaghosa gives an interesting example.¹ An elder bhikkhu went on his alms rounds in a village with a young bhikkhu. At the first house they received a spoonful of hot gruel. The elder felt ill and knowing that if he drank the gruel before it grew cold it would help, he did not wait to drink it later. The young bhikkhu was disgusted and remarked, “The old man has let his hunger get the better of him and has done what he should be ashamed to do.” When they returned to the monastery, the Elder asked the bhikkhu if he had any footing in the Dispensation. “Yes, venerable sir,” the bhikkhu answered, “I am a Stream-winner.” “Then friend,” the Elder advised him, “do not try for the higher paths. One whose taints are destroyed has been reviled by you.” The bhikkhu asked for the Elder’s forgiveness and was in this way restored to his former status.

So we see that even an Ariya must be careful of his actions. Insulting an Ariya is very serious, as Buddhaghosa points out. Even if we are not aware of another person’s attainment, if they are an Ariya, we will suffer the consequences. Insulting an Ariya will be an obstacle both to heaven and to the Path. But it is different from the bad deeds or beliefs with fixed destiny as it can be cured, as in the case of the bhikkhu who insulted the Elder. Buddhaghosa says that if one is guilty of insulting an Ariya, even if one is an Ariya oneself, one should go to the Ariya and ask forgiveness. If the Ariya has gone away, one should go to him or send someone to obtain forgiveness. If this is not possible, he should go to his companions and confess his fault and ask that the person insulted forgive him. If one does not know where the person insulted is, one should extend his hands with palms together in the direction the Ariya took when he left and say, “Forgive

¹Vism, Ch XIII, ¶¶84-90.

me.” If the Ariya has died, he should go to the bed where he attained final Nibbāna or to where he was cremated and ask forgiveness.

It is necessary to be constantly vigilant as we walk along the Path to Nibbāna. Even those who have already reached the stage of an Ariya can avoid unnecessary suffering if they are careful in all their deeds, words and thoughts. How much more important this is for those who have not yet had a taste of Nibbāna! The Path to Nibbāna is hard work—but even if it were ten times more difficult, it would be worth making the effort.

4. The Lesson To Be Learned

In conclusion, let us give some verses which help us understand the question of inevitable suffering.¹

He who is not free from impurity, who is lacking in self control and truthfulness, and who puts on the yellow robe—he is not worthy of it.

He who is free from impurity, who is well-established in morals and with self-control and truthfulness—he is indeed worthy of the yellow robe.

Dhammapada vv. 9-10

He who does evil burns here (in this world); he burns after death; he burns in both places. Thinking, “I did evil,” he burns. He burns even more when he goes to a painful existence.

He who does good is joyful here (in this world); he is joyful after death; he is joyful in both places.

¹Verse 17 of the Dhammapada is associated with the story of Devadatta in Dhp-a. The verses from the Udāna and the verse from Jātaka story n° 72 are also mentioned in the commentary as spoken by the Buddha in connection with him.

Thinking, “I did good,” he is joyful. He is even more joyful when he goes to a happy existence.

Dhammapada vv. 17-18

Deeds that are unprofitable and harmful to oneself are easy. But whatever is truly beneficial and profitable, that, indeed, is the hardest thing of all.

Dhammapada v. 165

It is easy for a good man to do good. But it is difficult for an evil man to do good.

It is easy for an evil man to do evil. But it is difficult for a noble man to do evil.

Udāna v. 8

Even if one should give the whole earth to an ungrateful person who is always looking for a loophole, one can never satisfy him.

Jātaka n° 72

Whoever is exceedingly immoral is like the maluva vine that covers a sal tree. He does to himself exactly what his enemy wants.

Dhammapada v. 162

Devadatta spoke the following stanza as the earth swallowed him:

With these bones, with my life, I take refuge in the Buddha—

The best of men, the God of gods, the guide of men fit to be trained, the All-seeing One,

He who is endowed with many auspicious marks.

Dhammapada Commentary I 147

Devadatta's deeds were much worse than Ajātasattu's. He created a schism in the Saṅgha, made attempts on the life of

the Buddha and shed the Buddha's blood. That is why he was swallowed up by the earth and will suffer in the lowest of the hells—the Avīci hell—and it will only be after a hundred thousand world cycles that he will become a Pacceka Buddha. Ajātasattu, who killed his father, was reborn in the Lohakumbhī hell after his death and will suffer there for sixty thousand years. Later, he will reach Nibbāna as a Pacceka Buddha. May we take the stories of Devadatta and Ajātasattu as a warning, and the example of the continued effort of the Ariyas as our inspiration.

THE THREE TRADITIONAL DESTROYERS

*Piyato jāyatī soko piyato jāyatī bhayaṃ
Piyato vip̐pamuttassa natthi soko suto bhayaṃ.
Pemato jāyatī soko pemato jāyatī bhayaṃ
Pemato vip̐pamuttassa natthi soko suto bhayaṃ.
Ratīyā jāyatī soko ratīyā jāyatī bhayaṃ
Ratīyā vip̐pamuttassa natthi soko suto bhayaṃ.
Kāmato jāyatī soko kāmato jāyatī bhayaṃ
Kāmato vip̐pamuttassa natthi soko suto bhayaṃ.
Taṇhāya jāyatī soko taṇhāya jāyatī bhayaṃ
Taṇhāya vip̐pamuttassa natthi soko suto bhayaṃ.*

What is loved gives rise to grief. What is loved gives rise to fear.

There is no grief for one who is released, so how could there be fear?

Affection gives rise to grief. Affection gives rise to fear.

There is no grief for one who is released, so how could there be fear?

Attachment gives rise to grief. Attachment gives rise to fear.

There is no grief for one who is released, so how could there be fear?

Sensual desire gives rise to grief. Sensual desire gives rise to fear.

There is no grief for one who is released, so how
could there be fear?

Craving gives rise to grief. Craving gives rise to fear.

There is no grief for one who is released, so how
could there be fear?

Dhammapada, vv. 212-217

At one time, a wealthy brahman went to see the Buddha in order to ask a question.¹ “Friend Gotama,” he said, “according to the sayings of brahmans who lived long ago—men who were old, who taught other teachers—this world was once very crowded with people. Why does there seem to have been a decrease in the number of people?”

The Buddha answered, “At the present time, brahman, people are infatuated with unrighteous passion (*adhamma-rāga-rattā*), overpowered by inordinate greed (*visama-lobhā-bhi-bhūtā*), overcome by unnatural (desires) (*micchādhamma-paretā*). Because of this, they seize knives and weapons and kill each other. Because of this, the (rain) deva does not send timely rains. Because of this, food is scarce, crops fail, there is famine, and people must live on blades of grass. Because of this, Yakkhas release non-human beings (to attack people). This is why there has been such a decrease in the number of people in the world.”

After hearing the Buddha’s discourse, the brahman took refuge in him.

In this discourse, the Buddha speaks of the three destroyers of the world: war, drought and famine, and pestilence. These three destroyers are also mentioned in a discourse in which the Buddha describes how there is a gradual decline in the human

¹A I 159f. (GS I 141-143).

lifespan until people only live for ten years.¹ The same causes are given in both discourses: people are infatuated with unrighteous passion, overpowered by inordinate greed, and overcome by unnatural desires. In the commentaries, unrighteous passion is defined as incest and unnatural desires are defined as homosexuality.

The Buddha says that these tendencies, which give rise to the traditional destroyers, were already prevalent in his own day. Today, they seem to be even more widespread. In the Western world, there has been a general rejection of traditional moral values—but unfortunately, this has not been accompanied by a healthy re-examination of religious and social teachings. People seem rather to be interested only in finding excuses for satisfying their every desire. They do not believe that wrong actions in this life will lead to suffering in future lives. Once the belief in cause and effect is rejected, then people begin to believe that they can act with impunity.

Not everyone is so blind, of course. We read of efforts to combat child abuse (including incest), of people who question whether blind accumulation of material possessions can lead to happiness, of reactions to the so-called sexual liberation. But many times people who crusade to re-establish moral rules in our society are considered to be old-fashioned. And it is true that some of the crusaders are religious zealots who go to extremes that work against their cause. Some of the effort is being made by government agencies, and the resulting bureaucracy does not make for efficient handling of the many problems involved.

What is needed in the world today is for people to understand that if they will make the effort to lead moral lives, not only will they be rewarded in future lives—an idea that may

¹D sutta n° 26 (THIH, pp. 395-405).

only appeal to people who hold religious beliefs—but their present life will be happier, too. We should make the effort to follow the basic five precepts, which the Buddha pointed out were necessary if the world is to escape from being destroyed—not because he invented these precepts, but because they are part of the natural order of the conditioned world. Anyone who has made an honest effort to do so will know what a difference it can make. Leading a moral life gives much joy and energy. We can free ourselves from the fears and anxieties that accompany immoral actions.

It will not be easy. The world has seen constant wars being waged during the twentieth century. The two World Wars were only the largest of many other wars—some of which are still going on today. We are seeing strange famines in which countries that have bumper crops cannot gather in the food necessary to feed the people, famines in countries with vast stores of food that are not distributed because of the greed of a few people. There is much talk of disruptions in the earth's climate—the greenhouse effect. Some people see evidence that it is already happening. Others claim there is not enough evidence yet. And many governments refuse to take precautionary steps to try and curb the damage that has already been done—damage that will affect many future generations. We can see new diseases appearing—the equivalent in the modern world to the un-human beings set loose by *yakkhas* in the Buddha's discourse. The more modern science tries to find cures, the more difficulties there are to overcome, and the treatments are often so expensive that only a small number of people in the richer countries can benefit. If only a small fraction of the money and effort spent in trying to treat the results were devoted to getting at the root cause, how different the world could be!

We may not be able to feed all the hungry people in the world. We may not be able to find cures for all the diseases in the world. But we can strive to make the world a better place to live in, both for ourselves and for others. The Buddha taught his disciples that through practising the Brahma-vihāras (the Divine Abidings) they could protect themselves and help other beings. We should therefore develop *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity).¹ As Ashin Buddhaghosa says, for each of these four Boundless States (*appamaññā*), we should progressively develop thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity for various people depending on the characteristics of each Abiding.

For *mettā*, we begin with ourselves. If we feel no love for ourselves, we will not be able to feel altruistic love for others. Then we develop thoughts of loving-kindness for others in the following order: someone we like, admire, and respect; someone who is dear to us; someone we feel neutral towards; our enemies. We must at all times strive to avoid feelings of attachment or anger towards others. Loving-kindness is not sentimental. Ashin Buddhaghosa emphasizes especially that for enemies we must avoid all thoughts of anger or resentment in all the four Abidings.

For *karuṇā*, we begin with thoughts of compassion for an unfortunate person. Then we develop these thoughts for other people in the following order: those who are dear to us, a person we feel neutral towards, a hostile person. For *muditā*, thoughts of sympathetic joy (*i.e.*, rejoicing in the success of others) are developed first for a dear companion, then for a

¹The discussion here is based on Ashin Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*, Chapter IX. See also our books *Knowing Anicca and the Way to Nibbāna*, pp. 227-241, and *The Anecdotes of Sayagyi U Ba Khin I*, pp. 59-65.

others) are developed first for a dear companion, then for a neutral person, and finally for an enemy. *Upekkhā* is the most difficult of the four Abidings, for an unperturbed, calm attitude towards others is very hard to maintain. We should begin with thoughts of equanimity for a person we are neutral towards, then move on to a dear person, and then to a hostile person.

Once we have mastered the four Abidings with regards to individuals we know, then we can develop thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity towards all beings everywhere. We can think in terms of all beings in all directions: those in front of us, those behind us, those to our left, those to our right, those above, and those below. Developing thoughts such as these will make us better people and will work for the good of one and all. These Divine Abidings will also help us to put into practice other aspects of the Buddha's Teachings.

For those of us who are fortunate enough to follow the Buddha's Teachings, we will do more than just try to restrain the innate tendencies that push us to act in ways that will bring on the destruction of the world. We will work to eradicate these innate tendencies by developing our concentration and our insight. As Sayagyi U Ba Khin pointed out: ¹

In Buddhism we have the cure for all the mental ills that affect mankind. It is the evil forces of the mind (past and present) that are responsible for the present state of affairs all over the world. By inspiring a strong sense of Buddhism into the minds of the people during the most critical days of Burma some two years ago [written in 1951], we have been able to get over the crisis.

Nowadays, there is dissatisfaction almost everywhere. Dissatisfaction creates ill-feeling. Ill-feeling cre-

¹*What Buddhism Is*, p. 28.

ates hatred. Hatred creates enmity. Enmity creates war. War creates enemies. Enemies create war. War creates enemies and so on. It is now becoming a vicious circle. Why? Certainly because there is lack of proper control over the mind. ... Let us then study the mind and its peculiar characteristics and solve the problem that is now facing the world.

THE FIVE BEST OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN¹

In *The Manual of the Greatest of Men* (Uttama-purisa-dīpanī), Venerable Ledi Sayadaw gives a brief discussion of the five best opportunities that are difficult to obtain (*dullabha*):²

1. Birth as a human being which is difficult to obtain (*manussatta-bhava-dullabha*),³
2. Encountering a Buddha which is difficult to obtain (*Buddhuppada-dullabha*),⁴
3. Obtaining the going forth (as a bhikkhu) which is difficult to obtain (*pabbajita-bhava-dullabha*),⁵
4. Attaining confidence (in the Triple Gem) which is difficult to obtain. (*saddha-sampattiyo-dullabha*),⁶
5. Hearing the True Doctrine which is extremely difficult to obtain (*Saddhamma-savanam atidulla-bha*).⁷

¹First printed in *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. VII, no. 2 (1986), pp. 9-19.

²See Spk I 244, where they are given in a different order.

³Spk: *Dullabho manussata-patilabho*, “the difficult (opportunity) of obtaining human existence.”

⁴Spk: *Dullabho Buddhuppado lokasmim*, “the difficult (opportunity) of the appearance of a Buddha in the world.”

⁵Spk: *Dullabho pabbajja*, “the difficult (opportunity) of going forth.”

⁶Spk: *Dullabha saddha-sampatti*, “the difficult (opportunity) of attaining confidence.”

⁷Spk: *Dullabham saddhammo-savanam*, “the difficult (opportunity) of hearing the True Doctrine.”

These five opportunities are important because it is through them that release from suffering can be attained. Most people aim for lower goals. But even these are hard to obtain, as the Buddha pointed out to the layman Anātha-piṇḍika.¹ The Buddha said that long life, beauty, worldly happiness, honour and rebirth in the heavenly worlds cannot be attained by vows or prayers. They must be earned through the right path, which the commentary says means making merit through generosity, moral living, etc. And the Buddha said that an inclination towards meritorious states is one of the six things whose appearance in the world is difficult.² The highest goal, Nibbāna, will only be obtained if meritorious deeds are done with the intention of attaining the goal.

1. Human Existence

Ledi Sayadaw points out that birth as a human being is important first of all because it means one has escaped from the four lower realms of existence which involve great suffering. But this does not mean that ordinary happiness is the reason human existence is to be desired. If that sort of happiness were important, the Buddha would have mentioned rebirth as a Deva or Brahmā among the rare opportunities. Devas and Brahmās enjoy celestial pleasures in the higher planes of existence which far surpass anything in the human world. Human existence is mentioned because this is the best plane in which one can cultivate good actions and meritorious deeds.

This is not possible in the lower planes of existence because their inhabitants do not have enough intelligence to know how to work or to make progress in understanding, or,

¹See A III 47; GS III 39f.

²*Kusala-dhamma-cchando dullabho lokasmim*. A III 441; GS III 307.

they are in so much pain, they cannot think of anything else. The heavenly worlds are not as favourable as the human world because the pleasures to be experienced there are so great it is difficult to appreciate the Truth of Suffering, and lifetimes are so long, it is difficult to understand impermanence (*anicca*).

We are most fortunate to be human beings, for we can perform innumerable good deeds which will be the basis of many future lives as human beings, Devas or Brahmās if our aim is no higher. If we take advantage of the other opportunities which are ours, we will be able to lay the foundations for attaining the highest goal, or, if we have accumulated the necessary merit in past lives, we will be able to attain that goal in this life.

If we do not perform good deeds, our opportunity will be wasted. Realizing this, we should be able to renounce the pleasures of this world for the sake of future wordly pleasures which will be far greater. Otherwise, we will be like the fool who swaps a precious gem worth an entire kingdom for a small meal.

Buddhist texts give glowing descriptions of the splendour of the Universal Monarch who rules over the entire world. If he merely enjoys the glory of his state, he will lose it all when he dies. But if he appreciates his great opportunity and makes merit by renouncing the world as early as possible, he can be assured of hundreds of thousands of future existences as a Universal Monarch, as well as many lives in the Deva and Brahmā worlds. The Brahmās in the highest planes live for eighty-four thousand great æons (*mahākappa*)¹

¹See the account of the Universal Monarch Mahā-Sudassana, D II 169-198; DB II 199-232.

If we are truly wise and aspire to the supramundane, then we should be even more eager to forsake worldly glory. Human life is the ideal opportunity for working for the true happiness of Nibbāna. If we wish to work for the supramundane as humans, we must possess certain qualities. Two of these are mentioned in another list of six things whose appearance in the world is difficult.¹ The two are: not being deficient with regard to the senses and freedom from being mentally dull, slow-witted and impure. Being intelligent and having a certain degree of purity are especially important. Otherwise we will not be able to understand reality and our concentration will be bad. We may be able to overcome deficiencies in five of our senses. Being blind, for example, will not make it impossible to follow the Buddha's Teachings. But if our mental powers are weak or distorted, this will be a great stumbling block. So this sixth sense of the mind should be whole.

2. The Appearance of a Buddha

The appearance of a Buddha is important because it is only during the period that a Buddha's Teachings are available—a Buddha-Sāsana—that one can work for the supreme goal of Awakening (*bodhi*). During other periods it is possible to lead moral lives, develop great concentration, and acquire great worldly knowledge. But these will only lead to the transitory happiness of life as a human, Deva or Brahmā. And worldly knowledge will not give us insight into reality. The Teachings of a Buddha will not lead to freedom either if we only have a theoretical understanding and do not practise the Teachings and obtain real understanding through direct experience. A person with only a theoretical

¹A III 441; GS III 307 (*pātubhāvo dullabho lokasmim*).

appreciation will not be able to stand firm when the Buddha's Teachings are no longer available, and wrong teachings will win him over. Ledi Sayadaw says that such people of great learning who do not experience the truth themselves will eventually end up like the ordinary individual, content to swim and drift and sink in the floods of continued rebirths. They will continually seek new lives in the sensual worlds, like an old ghost scampering for a crumb around a garbage heap.

Thus, the appearance of a Teaching Buddha in the world is of the greatest significance. At one time, a group of Licchavi laymen were discussing some of the treasures which a Universal Monarch enjoys. The Buddha pointed out to them that they talked of these because they were intent on sensual pleasures and he gave them a list of five treasures whose appearance in the world is difficult to encounter. The first treasure is the appearance of a Tathāgata, Arahāt, Fully Awakened One. Tathāgata is the term by which the Buddha often designated himself.¹

The last three opportunities are dependent on the appearance of a Buddha in the world. Otherwise, the True Doctrine is not heard, which means people cannot gain confidence in it and there is no Saṅgha in which people can ordain.

3. Going Forth (being ordained as a bhikkhu)

Going forth from the life of a layman and becoming a member of the Saṅgha is important because this is the way to practise the Buddha's Teachings full time. This is important

¹A III 168f.; GS III 126f. These five treasures are given in another discourse to the Licchavis at A III 239f.; GS III 174f. The appearance of a Tathāgata is the first of six things whose appearance in the world is difficult to encounter (A III 441; GS III 307). On the term Tathāgata see ANV 331-344.

for the individual because he will be able to take advantage to the fullest of the opportunity of encountering the Teachings of the Buddha. It is important to the world in general because it is the Saṅgha which keeps alive these Teachings after the Buddha attains final Nibbāna.

Ledi Sayadaw points out that hardly one human being in ten million benefits from the Teachings. Of those, not one in ten thousand will become a bhikkhu. During the time of the Buddha, there were millions in the city of Savatthi who attained one of the four paths of Awakening. Among these, only around one hundred thousand were bhikkhus. So we can see how rare this opportunity is.

Ledi Sayadaw also points out that it is possible to ordain and yet squander the opportunity. There are several types of going forth: (1) a person may go forth through wisdom (*paññā-pabbajita*) and work for knowledge; (2) a person may go forth through faith (*saddhā-pabbajita*) and work to fulfil the noble practice; or (3) one may go forth through fear (*bhaya-pabbajita*), desiring the material requisites of alms food, robes, monastic shelter and medicines which bhikkhus enjoy. The last type will miss his opportunity. This last type may also be divided into two: (1) those who go forth through greed (*lobha-pabbajita*), desiring comfort, and (2) those who go forth through delusion (*moha-pabbajita*), desiring shallow things, lacking self-discipline and through a superficial regard for the Teachings.

In Buddhist countries such as Myanmar and Thailand, many men ordain for a short period as a bhikkhu.¹ In this way they do not entirely miss the opportunity of going forth in this life and acquire the foundation for taking fuller advantage in a future life—both for themselves and for those who aid them to become bhikkhus.

We may include here the practice of the Buddha's Teachings. Laypeople who do not ordain can still practice the Teachings and reach the goal of Nibbāna. In the five treasures which the Buddha explained to the Licchavis, the fourth is a person who practises the Doctrine in all its fullness, having encountered the teachings of the Discipline and Doctrine of the Tathāgata or Buddha.² This is the only way in which we can take full advantage of the fact that we are humans in this life, living in a period when the Teachings of a Buddha are still available. The last two opportunities are the basis for this practice.

4. Attaining Confidence

As we have seen, it is possible to attain human birth and yet squander the opportunity. This will especially be true if a person does not take advantage of the appearance of a Buddha and if a person who ordains as a bhikkhu does so for the wrong reasons. So these last two opportunities of attaining confidence or faith and hearing the True Doctrine are of especial importance to us all.

¹In the appendix to MB (Vol. 1, part 2, book 12) it is pointed out that such men are called "Dullabha monks" in Myanmar. Some people misunderstand the expression *dullabha* (with difficulty), thinking it is therefore easier to ordain for life rather than for a short period. In actual fact, if it is rare to become a bhikkhu for a few weeks or months, it is much rarer to have the opportunity to become a bhikkhu for life.

²See Sv 529 and D-ṭ II 165.

There are four types of confidence or faith given in the commentary to a discourse which the Buddha gave to the bhikkhus shortly before his death.¹ He explained what they must keep alive if they were to prosper. The Buddha included in his instructions the following seven conditions of welfare: (1) confidence or faith (*saddhā*), (2) scruples (with regards to doing wrong) (*hirimanā*), (3) moral dread (of doing wrong to others) (*ottāpi*), (4) being firm in energy (*āraddha-viriya*), (5) being of great learning (*bahussuta*), (6) being endowed with mindfulness (*upaṭṭhita-satī*), and (7) possessing wisdom (*paññāvanto*).²

The commentary mentions the following four kinds of confidence:³ (1) confidence through belief (*pasāda-saddhā*), (2) established confidence (*okappanā-saddha*), (3) confidence in one's own destiny (*āgamaniya-saddhā*), and (4) confidence through attainment (*adhigama-saddhā*).

Confidence through belief is belief through repeating the Triple Gem, the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. Ledi Sayadaw explains that this means a superficial high regard and not a deep conviction. Therefore, it is not a firm type of faith. The sub-commentary mentions Mahā-Kappina as an example, though his faith was very strong. He was a king at the time of the Buddha.⁴ He sent out four riders to see if the Triple Gem had appeared in the world. Eventually, traders came to his city from Sāvatti and informed him that the

¹*Tathāgata-ppaveditassa dhamma-vinayassa desitassa viññātassa dhammānu-dhamma-paṭipanno pātubhāvo dullabho lokasmim*. A III 168f., 239f.; GS III 126f., 174f.

²D II 78f; DB II 83.

³Ledi Sayadaw discusses them in a different order than that given in the commentary and we follow his order here.

⁴For his story see Dhp-a II 116-126; BL II 169-176.

Triple Gem had indeed appeared. He immediately set out with a thousand courtiers to find the Buddha and ordain.

Established confidence is believing after having settled on and having put one's trust in the Triple Gem. Ledi Sayadaw defines this as faith which is inspired by the noble attributes of the Triple Gem. It is firm and lasts for one's whole life. After death, however, it vanishes from one's consciousness.

The commentary says that both these types of confidence can be understood in two ways—as being very strong or as leading to more superficial actions. In the second case, one carries out the duties towards a pagoda terrace and Bodhi-tree terrace (such as sweeping), and with regard to a bhikkhu, he carries out all the duties towards his preceptor and teacher.

A stronger conviction, the commentary says, is found in the case of Vakkali.¹ He was so devoted to the Buddha that he wished to be with him all the time. So much so, the Buddha had to reprove him, saying that seeing a mere physical body is of no importance. Seeing the Dhamma is the important thing. "He who sees the Dhamma, sees me," the Buddha told Vakkali. Venerable Buddhaghosa mentions Vakkali as an example of someone whose confidence needed to be brought into balance as it was too strong.²

Confidence in one's own destiny is the confidence of one who is bent on attaining Awakening and becoming an omniscient Buddha who teaches the Path to others.³ The excellence of the Great Bodhisatta is unlimited. He cannot be shaken and has firm determination. His confidence, therefore, is stronger than for those who are preparing either for self-

¹See S III 119ff.; KS III 101-106 and Dhp-a IV 118f; BL IV 262f.

²Vism, Chapter IV, ¶45.

³The commentary gives *Sabbaññu-bodhisatta* which the sub-commentary defines as *Mahā-bodhisatta*.

awakening without teaching, as in the case of Pacceka Bodhisattas, or for attaining Awakening as the disciple of a Teaching Buddha, as in the case of Sāvaka Bodhisattas. Ledi Sayadaw points out that after receiving a sure prediction for becoming a Teaching Buddha from a Buddha, the Great Bodhisatta has unwavering faith in the Triple Gem. This means that he never doubts that merit comes through doing good deeds.

Confidence through attainment is the confidence of Noble individuals, those who have attained the fruition states of the four stages of Awakening. The sub-commentary mentions the layman Sūra-Ambatṭha as an example of this kind of confidence. He is mentioned by the Buddha as foremost among the laymen in his absolute belief.¹ He was a follower of the heretics, but after hearing a discourse by the Buddha, he attained the first stage of Awakening (*Sotāpanna*). Afterwards, Māra, disguised as the Buddha, came to tell him that he had changed his mind. Although he had said that all volitional actions are impermanent, he now thought that only some were impermanent. Sūra-Ambatṭha, through the confidence he acquired on attaining the first Path, saw through the disguise and drove Māra away.²

Ledi Sayadaw points out that of these four types of confidence, attaining even superficial faith or confidence through belief is very rare. There are many people born in Buddhist countries, for example, who do not attain even this first step. A person who acquires established confidence will have greater understanding and will be able to pay respects even to a bhikkhu whose conduct is far from correct, for such a person will bear in mind the attributes of the Noble Saṅgha

¹ A I 25; GS I 23.

² Mp I 215. The story is given in DPPN II 1274.

and direct his respects towards it rather than towards the individual member of the Saṅgha. A person who has confidence in his own destiny will not be able to go a single day without finding an occasion for performing merit. Noble people, Ariyas, who have attained at least one of the fruition states will have the sort of confidence that is a great attainment in itself. They have an abiding faith in the Triple Gem, the importance of observing the five precepts at all times, of doing good deeds, and of practising the factors of Awakening.

Ariyas will look on the world in a different way from ordinary people. Ledi Sayadaw gives the illustration of a person who is seized by epileptic fits whenever he hears exciting music. Once he is cured, no music will cause such fits. Then he will remember what such fits were like: his heart would throb uncontrollably and he would lose consciousness. He is very glad to be cured. When he sees or hears of others having these fits, he will remember his past affliction and feel glad that he is now free of it.

In much the same way, people in the world find many occasions for being afflicted with the arousal of passion, hatred, vanity, delusion, pride, and so forth. An Ariya, seeing this, remembers how he allowed passion or hatred and so on to arise in him before he realized Nibbāna. He knows this will no longer occur, and remembering his past foolishness, he feels very glad to be free.

A person who suffers from epilepsy will be anxious if he sees another person who is having a fit. He will be reminded of his disease and be afraid that sooner or later he will suffer like the person he sees. An ordinary person is also anxious when he sees the misfortunes of other people, misfortunes due to their uncontrolled passion. This is because he knows he is not free of passion. An Ariya, however, has no such

fear. He knows he is free of passion. So he is glad both when he remembers his previous defiled state and when he reflects on his freedom from passion in the present.

Ledi Sayadaw quotes two verses from the Dhammapada which illustrate the attitude of the Ariyas:

*Susukham vata jīvāma āturesu anāturā,
 āturesu manussesu viharāma anāturā.
 Susukham vata jīvāma ussukesu anussukā,
 Ussukesu manussesu viharāma anussukā.*

Dhammapada, vv. 198, 199

We who are free from misery live very happy
 indeed among the miserable; free from misery we
 dwell among men who are miserable.

We who are free from longing live very happy
 indeed among the longing; free from longing we
 dwell among men (full of) longing.

The Ariya observes the multitude around him, painfully accomplishing their daily chores, both in good weather and bad. He sees people who are full of ego, blinded by ignorance, and who are feeding the fires of ageing and death that burn within. Knowing he is free from such imbecility or barrenness, the Ariya is happy. Ordinary people, on the other hand, simply follow the example of the busy life around them.

The world is full of barren activity. Due to their ignorance concerning the future results of their activities based on desire and clinging, people consider that this frenzied activity is progress. In big cities, for example, we can see all kinds of barren activity in the railway terminals, markets, seaports, airports, busy streets, etc., where a babel of voices and cries continually fill the air. All this noise represents misdirected

effort. But its futility is only seen by the wise, the Noble Ones.

A wise ordinary individual will feel worried when he observes people who are miserable or when he sees the suffering of animals or when he considers the extreme misery to be experienced in the lower worlds which we call hells (the *Apāya* realms). He will realize that he too may one day share their lot, for he has been involved in the same barren activities and he has been driven by the same defilements that caused such suffering.

The Ariya will observe the miseries around him and will have compassion for those who are suffering. But knowing that he is free of such a fate, he will feel happy. This must be the reason that one of the Buddha's chief disciples, Mahā-Moggallāna, smiled when he observed the miserable individuals in the ghost realm of the *petas* who were around mount Gijjhakūṭa.¹

We have encountered a period during which the Teachings of a Buddha are available. This is the time to put out the fires within—the fires of ageing and death, of belief in a permanent self, and all the fires that are part of the rounds of existence. This is the time to leave behind human affairs and cares and devote ourselves to the eradication of ignorance (*avijjā*). We have been human beings many times before. This present human existence of ours is not special. We should not cling to it. No matter how rich or how powerful we are, all our riches and all our power are well worth abandoning if we seek Nibbāna. Even life as a Deva or Brahmā is not to be considered as special, for the fires of ageing and death are working within. All the pleasures of the human world and heavenly worlds are sources of the defilements that

¹See S II 254ff.; KS II 169-174.

lead to rebirth. All these pleasures continually decay, crumble and perish. The only task that is worthwhile is the task of rooting out the wrong belief that there is a permanent self, the belief in a personal identity which in fact does not exist. This task must be taken on now, while the opportunity is ours. When our time is up here, the chance will be lost.

A wise ordinary person will observe that precious time is being wasted in the pursuit of the pleasures this hollow existence has to offer. He will think to himself, "I too am still craving, still clinging." He will see that one is never satiated with these pleasures, never satisfied with the glories of the human world or the heavenly worlds.

The Ariya will rejoice in the knowledge that he has freed himself from the craving and clinging that could drag him down to the lower worlds of suffering. We should all work to reach that stage ourselves.

5. Hearing the True Doctrine

The True Doctrine is the Doctrine taught by the Buddha. His Teachings can be summarized as: training in higher virtue (*adhi-sīla-sikkhā*), training in higher consciousness (*adhi-citta-sikkha*), and training in higher wisdom (*adhi-paññā-sikkhā*). The Teachings can also be divided into the categories of learning (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*), and comprehension (*paṭivedha*). Here, learning means theoretical knowledge which can be learned from the texts; practice means following the instructions found in the Teachings; and comprehension means understanding through one's own practice the Four Noble Truths.

We can include with this opportunity of hearing the True Doctrine some other occasions which are described as very difficult to encounter. One of these is rebirth in the region of

the Noble Ones.¹ People of today are very fortunate, for with modern travel and communications, it is possible for almost anyone in the world to hear the Teachings of the Buddha and put them into practice. But it is not inevitable. Two other things are necessary: there must be someone who teaches the Doctrine and one must encounter these Teachings.² As the Buddha said, it can only happen through the rarest chance that the Discipline and Doctrine revealed by a Tathāgata shine forth in the world.³

It is only if we hear the Teachings and are well disposed towards them that we will be able to gain confidence in them and put them into practice.

6. Illustrations of How Difficult It Is to Obtain the Best Opportunities

The Buddha used the illustration of the blind turtle in describing how difficult it is to obtain human existence, for a Teaching Buddha to appear and for the Discipline and Doctrine taught by a Buddha to shine forth in the world.⁴ Suppose the earth were one mass of water, he said, and that a man throws a yoke with a single hole in the water. Winds from all directions blow the yoke around. A blind turtle sticks its head out of the water once every hundred years. Would he put his neck through the hole in the yoke? The bhikkhus listening to the Buddha's discourse said that this could only happen through mere chance (*adhicca*). The commentary says that the yoke must not rot, the sea must not dry up and the turtle must not die. Moreover, the turtle must want to

¹A III 441; GS III 307.

²A III 168f., 239f., 441; GS III 126f., 174f., 307; Dhp v. 182.

³S V 457; KS V 384.

⁴S V 457; KS V 384. See also M III 169; MLS III 214f.

accomplish the task. Similarly, the Buddha said, the rare opportunities are obtained through mere chance.¹

The commentary expands on this illustration, adding as a fourth opportunity the extremely rare chance of being able to attain comprehension of the Four Noble Truths. Imagine a man standing on the edge of the eastern world system being able to throw a yoke over the neck of a blind turtle. This is how difficult it is to obtain human existence. Once he has managed this, imagine that he proceeds to the southern world system and throws a yoke over the head of a blind turtle there. This shows how rare it is to encounter a Buddha. Having achieved these two tasks, the man continues to the western world and does the same thing. This gives an idea of how rare it is to encounter the explanation of a Buddha's Discipline and Doctrine. Finally, the man proceeds to the northern world system to throw the yoke over the neck of a blind turtle there. This is how rare it is to be able to comprehend the Four Noble Truths.

7. The Example of Buddha Gotama

We can also appreciate how rare the five best opportunities are by looking at the example of Buddha Gotama.² First, a person who is intent on Self-Awakening must reach the stage where he is ready to attain the supreme goal through the Teachings of a Buddha.³ Then, he decides to put off his own Awakening in order to become a Teaching Buddha. He makes a firm resolution in the presence of a Buddha who gives him a sure prediction that he will eventually fulfil his

¹Spk III 302.

²Most of this discussion is based on MB, appendix to Vol. 1, part 2, book 12.

³See ANV 326.

aspiration.¹ Then, as a Bodhisatta, he fulfils the ten perfections for a minimum of four incalculables (*asaṅkheyya*) and a hundred thousand great æons (*mahākappa*).² All ten perfections must be constantly practised during this period.³

It would be impossible to calculate the number of lives the Bodhisatta lives during such a long period. Out of them all, the Bodhisatta who became the Buddha Gotama encountered only twenty-four Buddhas. During those twenty-four lives he was not a human being five times. During the nineteen times he encountered Buddhas as a human, he became a bhikkhu only nine times. If human existence, encountering a Buddha, hearing the Dhamma, attaining confidence and ordaining as a bhikkhu were so rare for an individual as highly developed as a Bodhisatta, we can well imagine how difficult these are for ordinary people.

A proper appreciation of how fortunate we are should inspire us to put forth right effort, here and now, in order to gain the maximum benefit from our present life.

¹For the career of the Buddha Gotama see Bv (CB) and Bv-a (CSM).

²See ANV 325.

³Mp I 112.

FOUR WAYS OF PRACTISING THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA

In several discourses, the Buddha speaks of four ways of practising (*paṭipadā*) his Teachings. Two groups of four are given. In the first group, the ways of practising are defined according to whether they are painful (*dukkha*) or pleasant (*sukha*) and to whether the meditator attains knowledge slowly (*dandhābhiññā*) or quickly (*hippābhiññā*).¹ The second group of four ways of practising is a list of four attitudes in the minds of those who practise the Teachings: (1) without endurance (*akkhama*), (2) with endurance (*khama*), (3) with taming (*dama*), (4) with calmness (*sama*).²

For the first group of four ways of practising, the Buddha gave the reasons why a meditator's progress can be (1) painful with slow attainment of knowledge, (2) painful with quick attainment of knowledge, (3) pleasant with slow attainment of knowledge, or (4) pleasant with quick attainment of knowledge. If a person is of the strongly passionate type (*tibba-rāga-jātika*), of the strongly angry type (*tibba-dosa-jātika*), or of the strongly deluded type (*tibba-moha-jātika*), then that person will constantly experience the pain and grief (*domanassa*) that come from passion, anger, and delusion. A person without strong passion, strong hatred, and strong delusion will find the practice pleasant. If the five controlling faculties (*pañcindriya*) of (1) faith (*saddhā*), (2) energy (*viriya*), (3) mindfulness (*sati*), (4) concentration (*samādhi*), and (5) wisdom (*paññā*) are weak, a person will be slow in

¹A II 149-152, 154 (GS II 153-157, 159).

²A II 152f. (GS II 157-159).

attaining that which gives immediate result through destroying the taints (*āsava*).

Ashin Buddhaghosa says in his commentary¹ that a bhikkhu who lacks preparation will find the practice painful and will be slow in acquiring knowledge. A bhikkhu who at one period is free from clinging to the world but who later on grows weary of discerning (1) material existence, (2) immaterial existence, and (3) conditions;² (4) weary of (discerning these in the) three divisions of time (past, present, and future) (*tīsu addhāsu*); (5) weary of (discerning) what is and what is not the path;³ such a bhikkhu will lack preparation. He will grow weary of (trying to) attain insight through (1) contemplating arising, (2) contemplating dissolution, (3) the establishment of fear (concerning all conditioned states),⁴ (4) the contemplation of danger, (5) the contemplation of dispassion, (6) the knowledge of the desire for deliverance, (7) the knowledge of equanimity about formations, (8) the knowledge of adaptation,⁵ (9) and the knowledge of (being of) the lineage.⁶ Thus, he will only attain a mundane path. This mundane path will mean that he will experience pain and a difficult existence for himself; his practice will be painful and he will attain knowledge slowly.

¹Mp III 138-140.

²For a detailed discussion, see *Path*, Chapter XIX *passim*.

³See *Path*, Chapter XX *passim*.

⁴Ashin Buddhaghosa says that this is seeing how fearful formations are in the past, present, and future because they are all headed for destruction, but the meditator does not experience fear as an emotion (*Path*, Chapter XXI ¶¶32f.).

⁵For a detailed discussion of these first eight stages in the knowledge of insight, see *Path*, Chapter XXI *passim*.

⁶See *Path*, Chapter XXII ¶¶1-14.

A bhikkhu who was previously weary of (developing) these five types of knowledge earlier on but who is not weary at a later time of (developing) these nine types of insight knowledge will find his practice painful, but he will attain knowledge quickly. The remaining two types can be understood from the explanation of the first two: not growing weary of the five types of knowledge at an early stage but growing weary of the nine types of insight knowledge later on results in pleasant practice and attaining knowledge slowly. Not growing weary at any stage results in pleasant practice and attaining knowledge quickly.¹

Ashin Buddhaghosa compares the four ways of practising to a man searching for oxen. A man has four oxen who wander off into a large forest. He looks for them in a forest that is full of thorns and thickets. He goes along the path in the forest experiencing difficulty and trouble. He has difficulty and trouble seeing the place in the forest where the oxen are hidden. Or the forest is open and unobstructed but he has difficulty and trouble seeing where the oxen are hidden. Or the forest is open and unobstructed and he quickly sees the oxen.

The four oxen are like the four Noble Paths. The man seeking the oxen is like the meditator (*yogāvacara*). The trouble experienced in going into the forest is like the type of practice that is painful due to the meditator's having previously tired of the (first) five types of knowledge (*ñāṇa*). Having difficulty and trouble seeing the place in the forest where the

¹In *Path* (Chapter III ¶16) Ashin Buddhaghosa says that if a person cultivates what is unsuitable, the practice is painful and knowledge is attained slowly. If he cultivates what is suitable the practice is pleasant and knowledge is attained quickly. If the unsuitable is cultivated in the earlier stage and the suitable is cultivated in the later stage or vice versa, the results will be mixed.

oxen are is like seeing the Noble Paths only later because of becoming weary of (all) nine types of knowledge.¹

In *The Path of Purification*,² Ashin Buddhaghosa says that the practice will be painful if the preparatory tasks of cutting off the impediments, etc., are not carried out. It will be pleasant if they are carried out. The practice will be painful for one who is overwhelmed by craving and for one who has not developed serenity. Attaining knowledge will be slow for one overwhelmed by ignorance or for one who has not developed insight (*vipassanā*), but it will be fast if the opposite is true. If the defilements are strong, the practice will be painful. If they are weak it will be pleasant. If the faculties are weak, attaining knowledge will be slow. If they are strong, it will be quick.

In another discourse the Buddha says that the practice will be painful for a bhikkhu who dwells contemplating the foul aspect of the body, conscious of the repulsiveness of material food, conscious of not delighting in any world, contemplating the impermanence of all formations, conscious of death—in other words, a bhikkhu who is perfectly aware of all this within himself. On the other hand, the bhikkhu who is able to develop the absorption states (*jhāna*) will find the practice pleasant. Attaining knowledge will be slow or fast depending on whether the five powers of the learner (*sekha-bala*) are weak or strong in him. These five powers are: (1) faith, (2) a sense of shame (*hiri*), (3) a fear of blame (*ottappa*), (4) energy, and (5) wisdom.

¹ Ashin Buddhaghosa says that the other points in the analogy can be easily worked out. We can summarize the points as: (1) painful practice is like the forest full of thorn and thickets, (2) pleasant practice is like the open, unobstructed forest, (3) attaining knowledge slowly is like having difficulty and trouble finding the oxen, (4) attaining knowledge quickly is like seeing the oxen quickly.

² Chapter III ¶¶ 16-18.

For the second group of four ways of practising, the Buddha gives analogies in two discourses for the first two ways. In the first discourse the Buddha says that a person who practises without endurance will abuse in return when he is abused, he will make (others) angry in return when he is made angry, and when someone quarrels with him he will quarrel in return. In the second discourse the Buddha says that a person who practises without endurance will not put up with cold, heat, hunger, thirst, contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping animals. He will not be able to bear harsh speech or unpleasant speech. He will not be able to endure repugnant, sharp, rough, acute, painful bodily sensations that arise and that are destructive to the life force. The person with endurance will have the opposite attitude in both cases: he will not abuse others when they abuse him, etc.; he will put up with cold, heat, etc.

In both discourses the last two ways of practising (taming and calming) are described in the same way. By taming we mean that a person¹ guards the six sense-doors. When a visible object is seen by the eye, he does not grasp at its major signs or at its secondary characteristics. Greed and sorrow, evil, unskilled states would overwhelm him if his eye-faculty was unguarded, so he practises with the eye-faculty guarded, protected, and restrained. Similarly, he guards the ear-faculty with respect to sounds, the nose-faculty with respect to odours, the tongue-faculty with regard to flavours, the body-faculty with regard to tangible objects, and the mind-faculty with regard to thoughts.

By calmness we mean that once a sensuous thought, a cruel thought, or an unwholesome, evil mental state has arisen, a

¹In the first discourse the Buddha says "a bhikkhu," but in the second discourse he refers to "a person."

bhikkhu does not allow it to endure. He gives it up, rejects it, calms it down, removes and eradicates it.

We can find many lessons in these two sets of four ways of practising the Buddha's Teachings. The stronger the three roots of wrong volitional actions are in us, the more pain and grief we will experience as we strive to reach the goal of Nibbāna. In the discourses we cite here, the Buddha spoke of passion (*rāga*) which is synonymous with greed (*lobha*). We must do our best to drive out thoughts of greed and passion by developing thoughts free of greed and passion (*alobha*). We must get rid of thoughts of hatred by developing thoughts free of hatred (*adosa*). We must strive to overcome delusion by developing our understanding of the true nature of the world, by working to be free of delusion (*amoha*). By being generous, giving up our attachment to material things, and by turning away from indulging in sensual pleasures, we can overcome our tendency to be greedy and full of passion. By developing loving kindness towards all living beings, we can overcome our tendency to hate. All the efforts we make to lead moral lives will go towards uprooting these harmful tendencies. Through developing our concentration and insight, we will be able to combat our tendency to be deluded.

In the second set of four ways of practising, the Buddha gives many details of how we can weaken and eventually eliminate these three roots that lead to continued suffering. A person should not allow anger to arise, or if it does arise, he should not allow it to remain. Even when other people abuse us, say or do things to make us angry, or quarrel with us, even when others use harsh or unpleasant speech, we should not reply in kind. No matter how much we are provoked, if we give way to the destructive force of hatred, we will be storing up much future suffering for ourselves. We will find it harder in the future to practise the Buddha's Teachings.

We should also avoid feeling angry about being physically uncomfortable. The Buddha mentions both external and internal discomfort. The external discomforts include being too cold or too hot, being hungry or thirsty, being annoyed by flies or mosquitoes, by the wind, the sun, or crawling creatures such as snakes. Internal discomfort includes any physical sensation that can be described as uncomfortable or painful—even those that threaten to kill us. As we make progress in our understanding of reality, we will see better that, in the ultimate sense, we do not have control over the external world or over what goes on inside our bodies. We will have to make a determined effort to endure the unpleasant things in this world. Enduring means being patient—both with others and with ourselves.

Working to tame and calm our minds, the last two ways in the second set, will help us attain the patience we need. If we are careful in restraining our senses, we will control as much as possible our contact with the world around us. The more we avoid sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical objects, and thoughts that tend to arouse greed, hatred, and confusion, the better we will be able to follow the Path taught by the Buddha. We will not be able to live in a cocoon, however. We are bound to encounter things that will put us to the test. The mind is so fast that before we know it an unwholesome thought has arisen. Our minds will be agitated, and as soon as we are aware of this, we must make a determined effort to calm the mind down. We must get rid of the disturbance. The best way to do this, of course, is to use mindfulness of breathing, directing the mind to a neutral object and maintaining it on that object until the disturbance is gone.

The qualities mentioned in connection with the first set of four ways of practising will also be helpful to us. The five controlling faculties and the five powers of the learner have

three things in common: faith, energy, and wisdom. We must have confidence or faith in the Buddha, the Doctrine he taught, and in those who live according to that Doctrine. If we put forth energetic effort and work correctly, we will gain wisdom, which will reinforce our confidence. The other controlling faculties of mindfulness and concentration will be essential if we are to gain any control over our thoughts, words, and deeds. And the powers of the learner, known as a sense of shame and a fear of blame, will be the two strong supports of our moral conduct. The learner is a person who has attained at least the Path of Stream-Entry but not the Fruition State of an Arahant. We may not be that advanced in our practice, but we must constantly work on these two powers if we are ever to attain our goal.

It may well be that we will not attain any of the Paths or Fruitions States in this lifetime. But these discourses given by the Buddha show us how important it is to prepare now to attain them in the future. If we make the right effort in this life but do not attain the goal, then it is because we did not prepare adequately in the past, or, perhaps, we made a vow to wait until a future Buddha's Dispensation. If we did not work as we should have in the past, it is too late to do anything about that now. It is now, in the present, that we must develop patience, live moral lives, work on concentrating the mind, and attain as much understanding as we are capable of. In that way, when all the conditions are right and all the necessary preparations are complete, we will reach our goal.

Even the Buddha's two chief disciples did not attain the highest goal automatically. When Ven. Sāriputta asked Ven. Mahā-Moggallāna which of the four ways of practising led to his gaining release from all the taints, he answered that he reached the final goal through painful practice and through

attaining knowledge quickly.¹ When Ven. Mahā-Moggallāna asked Ven. Sāriputta the same question, he answered that his practice was pleasant and he attained knowledge quickly. Ashin Buddhaghosa gives added details in his commentary,² saying that for Ven. Mahā-Moggallāna the first three Paths were pleasant and that he attained knowledge slowly. For the Path of Arahatsip, however, the practice was painful and he attained knowledge quickly—thus his answer. For Ven. Sāriputta, the first three Paths were pleasant and he attained knowledge slowly, but when it came to the Path of Arahatsip it was pleasant and quick—thus his answer.

Some of the instructions given by the Buddha are more appropriate to bhikkhus than to laypeople. Much as we may wish to prepare for attaining knowledge quickly, it is very difficult for laypeople to develop the *jhānas*. Students of Buddhist meditation as taught by Sayagyi U Ba Khin have found over the years that as long as they have a certain degree of concentration, it is possible to get on with the work of developing understanding.

Contemplating what is foul and unpleasant is another approach that is more appropriate for bhikkhus. Here again, if laypeople can attain a good appreciation of the ever-changing nature (*anicca*) of their own bodies and minds, this will prepare them for attaining their goal.

Every effort will pay dividends. No effort is wasted. It is difficult work, however, and it demands constant vigilance. How quickly a little bad weather can make us angry—to say nothing of trying to deal with an unpleasant, aggressive person. But if we work with regularity, we will make progress. It can be done.

¹A II 154f. (GS II 159f).

²Mp III 142.

THE LIGHT OF THE DHAMMA¹

Kaṇhaṃ dhammaṃ vipphahāya sukkaṃ bhāvētha paṇḍito
Okā anokam āgama viveke yattha dūramaṃ.

Tatrābhiratim iccheyya hitvā kāme akiñcano
Pariyodapeyya attānaṃ cittaṃ lesehi paṇḍito.

Yesam sambodhiyaṅgesu sammā cittaṃ subhāvitaṃ
Ādānapaṭinissagge anupādāya ye ratā
Khīṇāsavā jutimanto te loke parinibbutā.

A wise man should abandon the dark practice and cultivate the bright one after leaving (the sensual pleasures of) home for the homeless (life), (and by living) in seclusion, which is hard to enjoy.

A wise man should wish for delight there, after leaving behind sensual pleasures, possessing nothing; he should purify himself from defilements of the mind.

Those who have thoroughly developed their minds in the factors of Awakening delight in giving up attachment and in not grasping. Free from taints, shining ones, they are perfectly quenched in this world.

Dhammapada, vv. 87-89; Saṃyutta-nikāya V 24;
Aṅguttara-nikāya V 232f.

Light plays an important rôle in the Buddha's Teachings. In his first discourse to the group of five bhikkhus (Pañca-

¹This text was prepared as the opening address on the occasion of the dedication of the Dhamma Yaungchi Ceti at IMC-USA.

vaggiyā) who had followed him when he began his quest for the end of suffering, the Buddha describes how he attained Awakening through thoroughly understanding the Four Noble Truths. He explains that as he mastered each of the Noble Truths, light arose along with vision, knowledge, wisdom, and higher knowledge.¹ After he became a Buddha, he spent several weeks in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree where he attained Self-Awakening.² During the fourth week, he sat in the jewel house provided by the Devas and contemplated the highest doctrine, the Abhidhamma. He contemplated the teachings found in the first six books of the Abhidhamma, but as soon as he came to the doctrine contained in the book of *Conditional Relations* (Paṭṭhāna) his body began to emit six-coloured rays of light. These rays were so bright they spread throughout the entire world-system and went on to illumine an infinite number of world-systems. Such is the power of the knowledge and understanding developed by a Buddha. This light of the Buddha-Dhamma can dispel the darkness of the world. This light of the Buddha-Dhamma is greater than the sunlight we see by day, the moonlight we see at night, or firelight that can burn both day and night.³

That is why Sayagyi U Ba Khin chose the name Dhamma Yaungchi Pagoda—the Pagoda of the Light of the Dhamma—for the Pagoda at the International Meditation Centre in Yangon, Myanmar (Rangoon, Burma). When Pagodas following the same design were built at Centres in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin in Western Australia and in the United Kingdom, the same name was used. Now, with the dedication of the fourth Pagoda of the Light of the Dhamma at the Inter-

¹Vin I 9f.; S V 420ff.

²See *Expos*, pp. 16-18.

³GS II 142f.; KS I 22f., 67.

national Meditation Center, U.S.A., these beacons of light are spread around the globe.

These Pagodas are used for teaching and practising the Buddha-Dhamma. People who have tried Buddhist meditation know that the more a person purifies himself or herself the more light there will be. This is especially striking in developing a concentrated mind. As Sayagyi U Ba Khin pointed out, a person who makes “a determined effort to narrow down the range of thoughts of his wavering and unsteady mind” can reach a stage where “the mind becomes freed from hindrances—pure and tranquil, illumined within and without. Outside, it is represented by light, which is just a mental reflex, with the light varying in degrees from that of a star to that of the sun. To be plain, this light which is reflected before the mind’s eye in complete darkness is a manifestation of the purity, tranquillity and serenity of the mind.”¹ Seeing this mental light, however, is not what we mean in Buddhism when we say a person is Enlightened (or Awakened). True Enlightenment or Awakening only comes through using a concentrated mind to gain insight into the true nature of conditioned existence. When we truly “see the light,” so to speak, it will be much more than just a mental reflection before the mind’s eye.

The universe as described by the Buddha includes thirty-one planes of existence. There are four lower worlds below the human plane where there is great suffering. These planes are dark. Above the human world there are six planes in which celestial beings, Devas, enjoy great sensual pleasures. Above that, there are twenty Brahmā planes in which all sensual desires are left behind. The Deva planes and the Brahmā planes are very bright. In between these lower planes and

¹*What Buddhism Is* (1989), pp. 16f.

higher planes is our human plane of existence. The human plane is a mixture of dark and light. It is the best plane for appreciating the true nature of conditioned existence, for while suffering on the human plane can be great, it is still possible to cultivate good thoughts, and while there may be intense pleasures, they are not so constant that a human being forgets the existence of suffering.

Conditions in the human plane vary in different periods: When a Buddha is living in the human plane, that is the period when the attainment of the true happiness of Nibbāna is open to the maximum number of beings. After a Buddha attains final Nibbāna, his Teachings may live on for a period. This is the case for the last Buddha, Gotama, and we are extremely fortunate to be living during a period when the Teachings of a Buddha are available. These Teachings are like a great light dispelling the darkness of our world. The light of the Buddha-Dhamma is infinitely more important than the light of the celestial worlds of the Devas and Brahmās, for the light of the Buddha-Dhamma leads to the complete destruction of all suffering, to Nibbāna.

We should not look on the light of the Dhamma as opposed to the light of the celestial worlds, however. As the Buddha pointed out, the darkness of the lower worlds and the brightness of the higher worlds are produced by the immoral and moral actions that lead to those worlds. If we commit dark deeds they will lead to dark results.¹ The Buddha defined “dark deeds” as being harmful deeds committed by physical, verbal, or mental actions. Dark actions can be summed up as actions done because of shamelessness and recklessness (*ahirika-anottappa*).² If, on the other hand, we do bright

¹MLS II 57f.

²GS I 46.

deeds, we will obtain bright results. “Bright deeds,” the Buddha said, are physical, verbal, or mental actions that are harmless. Bright deeds are summed up by the two types of motivation that protect the world: conscientiousness (or a sense of shame) and a fear of blame (*hiri-ottapa*).¹ But it is also possible to commit deeds that are dark and bright and which will lead to mixed results. We on the human plane are experiencing the results of a mixture of dark and bright deeds, good and bad deeds, done in past lives.²

The Buddha spoke of four types of people with regard to the dark and the bright.³ Some people are born into a dark situation, that is to say, they are poor or physically handicapped. If they do only evil physical, verbal, or mental deeds, then they are headed for another dark existence. If, on the other hand, they do good physical, verbal, or mental actions, they will go to a bright existence. Some people are born into a bright situation, that is to say, they are rich and physically handsome. But if they do evil, they will go to a dark existence; if they do good, they will go to another bright existence.

The highest goal, however, is achieved by actions that are neither dark nor bright, actions that lead to the ending of all renewed existence.⁴ The difference between ordinary good actions and actions that are neither dark nor bright is the mental volition accompanying the acts. If our aspiration is a future human life, or a future life in a celestial world, then our action will be an ordinary good action. If our goal is to attain Nibbāna, however, the action is done in the hope of going

¹*Ibid.*

²Earth Devas and beings in some of the lower realms also experience mixed results.

³KS I 118-121; *Designation of Human Types*, pp. 70-72.

⁴MLS II 57f.

beyond the good and evil of conditioned existence and such an action will be neither dark nor bright.

Venerable Nāgasena gives a vivid description to King Milinda of how brightly the disciples of the Buddha shine once they have reached Nibbāna.¹ The disciples, he says, “shine forth in splendour, illuminating the whole world of Devas and men, brightening it in its heights, in its depths, from horizon to horizon, with a brilliant glory,” for they wear the jewels of right conduct, concentration, knowledge, emancipation, insight (which comes from the assurance of emancipation), and the sevenfold wisdom of the Arahats. The Buddha told his disciples that they would benefit greatly by associating with those who make the Teachings shine, those who bring light.² By this, he meant those who are endowed with virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*paññā*), deliverance (*vimutti*), vision and knowledge of deliverance (*vimutti-ñāṇa-dassana*); those who admonish (*ovādakā*), who are able to instruct (*viññāpakā*), who do instruct (*sandassakā*), who arouse others [to make the effort] (*samādapakā*), who fill others with enthusiasm (*samuttejakā*), who gladden others (*sampahañsakā*), who are competent teachers (*alaṃsamakkā-tāro*), and who are able to see and experience the true Doctrine (*saddhamma-rasa-dassanampaham*).

As we look around the world today we can see more and more darkness. The world needs all the light it can get. It is our fervent hope that this Pagoda of the Light of the Dhamma in the United States together with the other three Pagodas in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin will be able to introduce some of the light the world so desperately needs.

¹QKM II 220-229.

²It 107ff. (MA II 191f.).

CONCERNING NIBBĀNA-DHĀTU

*Samvarattam pahānattam brahmacariyam anītiham
adesayi so bhagavā nibbānoghadhagāminam.
Esa maggo mahantehi anuyāto mahesibhi.
Ye ca tam paṭipajjanti yathā Buddhena desitam
dukkhassantam karissanti satthusāsanakārino.*

The Blessed One has pointed out the holy life, which is not hearsay, which is restraint and abandoning, leading to firm footing in Nibbāna.

This is the path of the great ones, followed by great seers. And whoever follows it in the way taught by the Buddha, whoever follows the Teacher's Doctrine, they will calm all suffering.

Āṅguttara-nikāya II 26; Itivuttaka 28, 29

1. What is *Nibbāna-dhātu*?¹

According to the Pali-English Dictionary of the Pali Text Society, the word *dhātu* has four main meanings: (1) element (as for the four primary elements of earth, fire, water, and air); (2) natural condition, property, disposition; factor, item, principle, form; (3) a humour or affection of the body; and (4) the remains of the body after cremation [relics]. *Nibbāna-dhātu* is

¹These questions were submitted to Saya U Chit Tin by Lim Song Teng. The answer to this first question includes the answer to his last question: Is *Nibbana-dhātu* mentioned in any of the Suttas or in the Abhidhamma?

given under the second meaning and is translated in the dictionary by: “the state of Nibbāna.”¹

In his preface to the translation of the third book of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka² by U Nārada (Mūla Paṭṭhāna Sayadaw), U Thein Nyunt explains some aspects of the meaning of *dhātu* in the usage we will be discussing here:

An element is defined as that which bears its own intrinsic nature. It cannot be split up or transformed into another. The elements are abstract qualities and as such are empty and void of substance, self, soul, I, being, person and life. Except for Nibbāna, which is permanent and unconditioned, the rest of the elements are the ultimate constituents of all things which are said to be animate and inanimate. ...

The elements are not permanently present.³ They arise to exhibit their own characteristic natures and perform their own characteristic functions when the proper conditions are satisfied, and they cease after their span of duration. Thus no being has any control over the arising and ceasing of the elements ... They are entirely dependent on conditions.

For example, when the four conditions: a visible object, the sense of sight, light and attention, are present, the eye-consciousness element arises. ...

¹Translators have given: “the realm of Nibbāna” (KS V 7), “element of nibbāna” (MQ II 146), “conditions of nibbāna (MA II 143), “element of cool” (GS IV 139).

²*Discourse on Elements* (Dhātu-kathā), pp. xxii-xxvii.

³Although U Nārada does not mention it, the Nibbāna element would be an exception to this statement.

[Each of the eight material elements]¹ carries out its own function but does not assist the other elements in carrying out their own functions. However, they are dependent upon one another for their arising in accordance with the co-nascence, mutuality, support, presence and non-disappearance conditions of the Paṭṭhāna. ...

All things said to be animate consist of material and mental elements comprising (1) 28 material qualities ... , (2) 52 mental factors ... , (3) consciousness. Only the appropriate material and mental elements arise together on each occasion. ... Only an Enlightened Buddha perceives each one of them at the same time. Others, who know how to observe them practically, perceive only the predominant element. ...

The elements, being abstract qualities, are empty and void of substance. Since only these elements really exist, no solid, substantial things are to be found outside them. So, in the ultimate sense, there are no such things but only the abstract elements. ...

When the proper conditions are present, the elements arise and carry out their respective functions. There is no *attā*, i.e. no ego-entity, soul, self, or I, that is independent of these elements and controlling them. ...

The elements do not possess the characteristic functions of living beings. They arise and cease within an exceedingly short period of time. ... The elements arise and cease without any movement taking place. ...

In *What Buddhism Is*,² Sayagyi U Ba Khin speaks of *loka-dhātu* and *dhamma-dhātu*. He defines *dhātu* by “nature elements or forces” and says that *loka-dhātu* is “matter (with

¹Earth, heat, wind, water, visibility, odour, taste, and nutriment.

²*Dhamma Texts*, revised ed., pp. 32f.

its nature elements) within the range of the physical plane.” So this is *dhātu* as material elements, and this, Sayagyi points out, is what modern science studies. *Dhamma-dhātu*, he says, “comprises mind, mental properties and some aspects of the nature elements which are not in the physical but in the mental plane.”

In the Pāli canon, *dhamma-dhātu* seems to be used in two ways: (1) to mean “the element of ultimate truth” and (2) to mean “the element of mental states.”¹ The first meaning is found, for example, in the Buddha’s reply to Prince Abhaya, who asked whether the Buddha prepared answers to questions in advance. The Buddha replied that he had fully penetrated the element of ultimate truth (*dhamma-dhātu*) and so he instantaneously knew the answers to questions others asked.²

The second sense is found, for example, in the list of eighteen elements associated with the six senses as enumerated in a discourse the Buddha gave to Ven. Ānanda.³ The eighteen elements are made up of three elements associated with each of the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, physical body, mind): the sense door, the thing sensed, and consciousness of the thing sensed. For example, the eye (one sense door), a visual shape (the thing sensed by the eye), and consciousness of what is seen. For the mind, these three are: the element of mind, the element of mental states (*dhamma-dhātu*), and the element of mental consciousness. In this same discourse, the Buddha gives several different lists of elements. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Ashin Buddhaghosa says that all the elements enumerated in the Suttas and in the *Abhidhamma* can be seen as various aspects of the eighteen elements associated with the

¹See I.B. Horner’s remarks, MLS II 64, n. 1.

²MLS II 63f.

³MLS III 105.

six senses.¹ It is here that we can see the connection between *dhamma-dhātu* and *Nibbāna-dhātu*. Some mental states come under the category of formed elements (*saṅkhata-dhātu*), but one element of the mental states is the unformed element (*asaṅkhata-dhātu*), i.e., Nibbāna.²

In other discourses by the Buddha, we can see how the element of Nibbāna is linked with mental forces. When a bhikkhu asked the Buddha the meaning of the terms “the removal of lust,” “the removal of greed,” “the removal of delusion,” the Buddha replied that these mean the element of Nibbāna (*Nibbāna-dhātu*) and that they indicate the waning of the taints (*āsavaṇaṃ khayō*).³ The commentary says the Buddha is speaking here of Arahatsip. Desire, hatred, and delusion (*rāga, dosa, moha*), of course, are the three roots of wrong actions (*akusala*) that lead to suffering. When they are completely, permanently removed from the mind, then there is the perfect awakening of Arahatsip.

The term *Nibbāna-dhātu* is also used in describing two categories of Arahats: (1) the Arahats who attain the element of Nibbāna with the results of past clinging remaining (*sa-upādi-sesa-nibbāna-dhātu*) and (2) the Arahats who attain the element of Nibbāna without the results of past clinging remaining (*an-upādi-sesa-nibbāna-dhātu*).⁴ As long as an Arahats lives, the results of past clinging will continue to give results,

¹*Path*, Chap. XV, ¶¶25-31.

²*Path*, Chap. XV, ¶31. Mental state is translated there by: “mental-data elements.” See *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, Appendix 2 (pp. 342-344) concerning *asaṅkhata-dhātu* as meaning Nibbāna.

³KS V 7.

⁴See *Path*, Chap. XVI, ¶73; Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, under “Nibbana”; MA II 143; and *The Guide*, p. 26, note 78/2.

but when an Arahant reaches the end of his life, all cause and effect leading to new births will end.

The element of Nibbāna may have an effect on the mental world, but we should not make the mistake of identifying it with anything in the conditioned world. When the Buddha gave a list of wonderful qualities of the Dhamma and Discipline, one quality was that the emptiness or fullness of the element of Nibbāna is not affected even though many bhikkhus attain Nibbāna in the element of Nibbāna without the results of past clinging remaining.¹

2. What are the benefits of soliciting *Nibbāna-dhātu*?

As we have seen, Nibbāna has no cause. It is not subject to change (*anicca*). But it can have an effect on the world of cause and effect we live in. The link between this conditioned world and the realm of Nibbāna is through the mind. The Pāli texts do not specifically mention soliciting *Nibbāna-dhātu*, but we know that the activity of the mind is responsible for what happens to us. If the mind is not trained properly, it will cause us great suffering. If the mind is properly trained, it will lead us to experience the element of Nibbāna and the end of all suffering.

Before we take an action, we think about it. So, if we direct our minds to the final goal, even though it may take us a long time to reach that goal, we will be stirred to make right effort.

The Pāli texts are full of the wonderful qualities of Nibbāna and the happiness to be derived from it. In the poem we quoted at the beginning we see a reference to the holy life (*brahmacariya*) “leading to firm footing in Nibbāna” (*Nibbānoga-dha-gāmina*).² The commentators often associate *firm*

¹BD V 335, GS IV 139.

²In GS II 28 and MA II 136f., this is translated: “the plunge into Nibbana’s stream.” A similar passage is found at S V 218: *Nibbānoga-*

footing (ogadha) with *the act of plunging (ogāha)*.¹ Meditators have described their experience after attaining Nibbāna as a cool stream flowing down through the body. We can see here, perhaps, what effect “plunging into Nibbāna” can have.

We will come back to this question in our answer to the way to solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu*.

3. Who can solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu*?

Anyone can solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu*. Only those who have confidence in the Buddha’s Teachings, however, will be inclined to do so. The key to the answer to this question is once again the mental attitude of the person. An Arahāt has fully experienced Nibbāna and will know without any doubt that it exists and will be tuned to that understanding at all times. In a discourse enumerating the qualities of those who are worthy of gifts (*i.e.*, Arahats), the Buddha says that, among other qualities, they see happiness in Nibbāna; they are conscious of it, aware of it, at all times, continually, without a break, marking it mentally, and fathoming it by wisdom.² Ariyas on the lower three paths will also have full confidence in the existence of *Nibbāna-dhātu*, but the further they have

dham̐ hi brahmaṇa brahmacariyaṃ vussati nibbānaparāyaṇaṃ nibbāna-pariyosānaṃ ti (“Indeed, brahman, the holy life is led to gain firm footing in Nibbāna, with Nibbāna as its goal, with Nibbāna as its end”). The word *Nibbānogattham̐* is translated at KS V 193 by “to plunge in Nibbana.” The commentary is quoted there: *ogadham̐ = Nibb. abbhantaram̐ anupaviṭṭham̐* (“firm footing = entered inside Nibbāna”). The same passage in the same context is found at GS III 156, and is translated: “Rooted in Nibbāna, ... the holy life is lived.” The commentary for *ogadham̐* there is: *Nibbāne patiṭṭham̐* (“its support is in Nibbāna”). See also CPD s.v. *ogadha*.

¹See CPD *ogadha*.

²GS IV 9.

come along in their practice of the Buddha-Dhamma, the better they will be able to “tune in” to the force of *Nibbana-dhātu*.

We should be careful, however, not to imagine we have experienced Nibbāna if we have not. In one discourse the Buddha pointed out how dangerous it is to think, “Nibbāna is mine.”¹ And in a discourse to Māgandiya, the Buddha warned of the danger of imagining Nibbāna to be something other than what it actually is (in Māgandiya’s case, good health).²

The Buddha mentioned directing our thought towards Nibbāna as being among the six advantages that should be seen to help us continuously be aware that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent (*anicca*): (1) we will see all conditioned phenomena as impermanent, (2) we will not delight in this world, (3) our thought will rise above the world, (4) our thought will be inclined towards Nibbāna, (5) we will be eliminating the fetters, and (6) we will follow the path of higher recluseship.

Establishing the thought of Nibbāna and being confident that we will come to know the peace of Nibbāna are among six advantages that the Buddha says will help us to establish the thought that all conditioned phenomena are suffering (*dukkha*) without reserve.³ These six advantages are: (1) we shall keep the thought of Nibbāna present in us in the midst of all phenomena, like a slayer with drawn sword; (2) our minds shall rise above all worlds; (3) we shall become seers at peace in Nibbāna; (4) our latent tendencies [to do evil] will be rooted out; (5) we shall do what should be done; and (6) we shall serve our Teacher with loving service. In another discourse, the reference to “a slayer with drawn sword” is included in

¹MLS I 5f.

²MLS II 188f.

³GS III 309.

relation to establishing mindfulness of the suffering inherent in impermanence.¹ That passage shows that we should see the dangers in the conditioned world as a constant threat. If we can do this, whenever lethargy, indolence, languor, idleness, carelessness, and disregard arise in us, “a lively sense of fear springs up.” This, of course, refers to the sort of fear that gives us a sense of urgency to work for the goal of *Nibbāna*; it does not refer to morbid fear.

From these discourses we can see that if the soliciting of *Nibbāna-dhātu* is to be effective, the person who is doing so should be one who practises the Buddha’s Teachings. For those of us who use knowing *anicca* as the means of developing insight, the better our awareness of impermanence is, the better we will be able to experience the impact of the element of *Nibbāna*. The closer we come to experiencing *Nibbāna* for ourselves, the greater will be the benefits of soliciting *Nibbāna-dhātu*.

4. How does one solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu*?

The answer to the preceding question should make the answer to this question clear. We should work on *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* so that our minds will be as pure as possible and so that we will be able to be aware of the constant change (*anicca*) taking place within our own bodies and mind. If we are able to do that to a fairly good extent, then we will automatically know the changing sensations to be suffering (*dukkha*), and we will have some glimpse of the uncontrollable aspect (*anattā*) of what takes place in our minds and bodies.

The forces associated with *Nibbāna* are always present as they are outside the conditions of time and space. We do not

¹GS IV 29.

need to worry about whether those forces are present. But it is only when the mind is receptive to *Nibbāna-dhātu* that the impact will have an effect on us.

5. Under what circumstances can one solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu*?

In *Knowing Anicca and the Way to Nibbāna* (pp. 105f.) we mentioned the story of Elder Meghiya, who tried to meditate in a mango grove where he had resided as a king in a past life.¹ Because of the bad actions he had done in that past life, distracting thoughts made it impossible for him to make any headway in his meditation. So we can see that it is important to choose the right place if we are to control our minds and develop insight. If we are not able to do that, then we will obviously not be able to direct our minds towards *Nibbāna-dhātu*.

In our day-to-day lives, when we are surrounded by the world with all its distractions, we should be able to solicit *Nibbāna-dhātu* as an aid and protection, but generally speaking, if we wish to dwell on the thought of *Nibbāna-dhātu* as an aid and protection, we should do so in an atmosphere of retreat from the world of sense pleasures. This would mean places where we are able to practise the technique of meditation taught by our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin—a meditation centre, a site where a meditation course is being held, or a place set aside in our homes for meditation. Whenever we have doubts about whether to meditate or not, we can revert to mindfulness of breathing as a way of protecting our minds from outside distractions.

¹GS IV 234-237.

HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR IS DUE Examples to be Followed¹

*Pūjārahe pūjayato Buddhhe yadi va sāvake
Papañcasamatikkante tiṇṇasokapariddave,
Te tādise pūjayato nibbute akutobhaye
Na sakkā puññaṃ saṅkhātum im' ettam' iti kena ci.*

If respects are paid to those worthy of respect: to Buddhas or their disciples, to those who have overcome the hindrances and gone beyond grief and lamentation,

then no one can measure the merit as this much or that much for the person who, in this way, pays respects to those who possess such qualities, who are quenched, who have nothing to fear from any direction.

Dhammapada, vv. 195, 196

We can see from these verses of the Dhammapada that paying respects to Buddhas and their disciples is meritorious beyond all measure. On May 26, 1991, we participated in the dedication of another Dhamma Yaung Chi Ceti, another Light of the Dhamma Pagoda, which will be used in continuing the teaching of the Buddha-Dhamma. During the ceremonies we paid respects in various traditional ways. We gave gifts—offering fruits and flowers, water and lights. We raised our

¹This talk was given on the occasion of the conference held in connection with the opening of the Light of the Dhamma Pagoda at IMC-USA.

joined hands and we bowed down to show our respect for the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and our Teachers. But I would like to look at the best way to pay respects to the Buddhas and their disciples—and by that I mean following their examples. This is the way our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin taught us. When we offered him gifts such as flowers, he accepted them, but then he had us meditate with him so that we put the Buddha's Teachings into practice.

The Buddha singled out four pairs of his disciples as the best examples to be followed: two bhikkhus, two bhikkhunīs, two laymen, and two laywomen. We can learn many useful lessons by looking at the examples set for us by these disciples of the Buddha. In one instance, the Buddha spoke of them as being the measure (*tulā*) and standard (*pamāṇa*) for others to emulate.¹

On other occasions, the Buddha spoke of these four pairs and held them up as examples to be followed in order to avoid the trap of fame, gain, and honour, which is peace free of attachments (*yogakkhema*).² The Buddha urged the bhikkhus to train themselves in this way: “I will renounce fame, gain, and honour that has come to me, and when they come, I will not let them take a lasting hold on me.”

Then he said that a laywoman who has faith should admonish her only son,³ “Be like the householders Citta and Hatthaka of Āḷavī, dear. Do not obtain fame, gain, and honour, dear—you who are one in training, one whose mind

¹GS II 170.

²KS II 159f.; see also KS II 153 for the elided passages.

³GS II 170, n. 3, says the translation in *Kindred Sayings* passages should read “praying, asking for a son,” but as the mother speaks directly to her son and daughter (“dear”), “admonishing” seems to be correct here.

has not attained [release].”¹ If her son ordains in the Bhikkhu-Saṅgha, the mother should admonish him to be like Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna, the Buddha’s two leading disciples among the bhikkhus. A laywoman with faith should admonish her only daughter to be like the laywomen Khujjuttarā and Velukaṇṭakiyā, Nanda’s mother. If her daughter ordains in the Bhikkhunī-Saṅgha, then the mother should tell her to be like Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā, the Buddha’s two leading disciples among the bhikkhunīs.

So all of these leading disciples in the four divisions of the Buddha’s disciples were held up by the Buddha as examples of those who were not led astray by fame, gain, and honour. In the stories concerning them in the Pāli canon and commentaries, we can find many other qualities that they possessed that will be useful models for us in living our own lives.

We are all no doubt well acquainted with the two chief disciples among the bhikkhus: Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna. Ven. Sāriputta was second only to the Buddha in his understanding of the Dhamma. Ven. Mahā-Moggallāna was second only to the Buddha in the special powers.

Khemā was the wife of King Bimbisāra and was very proud of her great beauty.² She was reluctant to go to see the Buddha, but King Bimbisāra praised so highly the beauty, peace, and harmony that reigned in the monastery he had given to the Buddha in the Bamboo Grove that she decided to go. When she arrived at the monastery, the Buddha created the image of a beautiful woman fanning him. When Khemā saw

¹*Sekkam appattamānasam*, cf. Childer’s *Pāli Dictionary* under the word *mānasam*: *appatamānasam sekkam*, “one who has not yet attained Arahātship, who is still a *sekha*.”

²Her story is given in *The Wheel*, n° 292/293, pp. 19-27.

what she took to be a real woman, she decided that maybe the Buddha would not be as critical of physical beauty as she had feared. So she was well disposed to listen to the Buddha's discourse. As she listened, the Buddha had the created woman grow older and older until she finally fell down and died. This, together with the Buddha's discourse, opened Khemā's eyes to the transience of physical beauty, and she was able to attain Arahatsip then and there. As a result, she ordained as a bhikkhunī.

When we look to these disciples as rôle models, we want to be sure that we do so in the proper way. A man should not copy a woman. A woman should not copy a man. Laypeople should not try to act as though they were ordained. If we look at the underlying principles involved in the stories given in the Pāli canon and commentaries, all of us can benefit from the stories about men and woman: laypeople, and those in the Saṅghas.

In this story about Khemā, for example, all of us can work to escape from the illusion that physical beauty can bring happiness. When we feel reluctant to go to practise the Dhamma or to learn the Buddha's Teachings, we can remind ourselves that this reluctance is among the many obstacles to making progress on the Path to Nibbāna. I am sure that many meditators here have had the experience of not wanting to meditate for ten days, or for a weekend, or even for five minutes; then making the effort and receiving great benefit. Afterwards, we wonder why we ever hesitated.

Uppalavaṇṇā was also very lovely. Many kings proposed marriage to her, and to avoid difficulty, her father suggested she ordain. Together with Khemā, she became one of the two chief disciples among the bhikkhunīs. In parallel to Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna, Khemā was chief among the bhikkhunīs for great insight (*mahā-paññā*) and Uppalavaṇṇā

was chief among the bhikkhunīs for the special powers (*iddhi*).

As the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin is a lay tradition, I would like to go into more detail concerning the lay disciples that the Buddha gives as examples to be followed.

The householder Citta was chief among the laymen among those who teach the Dhamma. An entire section of the Saṃyutta-nikāya is devoted to him,¹ and he played a rôle in an incident that led to the Buddha handing down a rule in the Pātimokkha.² In several instances, Citta asks questions of various bhikkhus, but in other cases, he himself was able to clarify the Buddha's Teachings for some bhikkhus.

The story given in the Vinaya-piṭaka is especially instructive to us as laymen. Citta had given a monastery to the Saṅgha in the Wild Mango Grove in Macchikāsaṇḍa. A bhikkhu named Sudhamma resided there. Citta was in the habit of asking for Sudhamma's approval first before he invited members of the Saṅgha for a meal. Then one day, a group of bhikkhus including Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. Mahā-Moggallāna, and many other distinguished bhikkhus came through the region. When Citta went to see them, Ven. Sāriputta gave him a discourse that the commentary says enabled him to attain the stage of a Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*). After the discourse, Citta invited the bhikkhus for a meal the next day. He then went to invite Sudhamma as well, but Sudhamma thought to himself, "He used to ask me first before inviting other bhikkhus for a meal. Citta is corrupted, he's indifferent to me, he is detached from me." As a result, Sudhamma refused the meal. Citta made his request three times, but Sudhamma persisted in his

¹KS IV 190-212.

²BD V 22-30 (the fourth formal act: that of reconciliation). His story is given in *The Wheel*, n° 115, pp. 1-13. We have adapted I.B. Horner's translation of this passage below.

refusal. Finally, Citta thought, “What business is it of mine whether master Sudhamma accepts or not?” And Citta paid his respects and went on his way.

Citta had a sumptuous meal prepared for his guests, and the next morning, Sudhamma began to wonder what was being served, so he went to Citta’s after all and took a seat. Citta paid his respects and sat down at a respectful distance, and Sudhamma said to him, “Householder, you have provided abundant food. But there is one thing missing and that is sesame cake.”

Citta answered Sudhamma with a little story to serve as a hint that what he had said was appropriate neither for a bhikkhu nor for a layman. “Venerable sir,” he said, “though there is abundant treasure to be found in the Buddha’s Teachings, you have only spoken of sesame cake. There were once some merchants who brought back a hen they had bought during their travels. This hen mated with a crow and produced a chick. Whenever the chick wanted to caw like a crow, it went ‘cock-a-doodle-doo.’ Whenever it wanted to crow like a rooster, it went ‘caw, caw.’”

“You are reviling me, householder,” Sudhamma said. “You are abusing me. Keep your residence; I am leaving.”

“Honoured sir,” Citta replied, “I am not reviling and abusing you. Please remain in Macchikāsaṇḍa. The Wild Mango Grove is delightful. I will provide you with the four requisites of robes, alms food, lodgings, and medicine.”

Sudhamma refused, even though Citta insisted three times that he should stay. Finally, Citta asked, “Where are you going, venerable sir?”

“I will go to Sāvattthī to see the Buddha,” Sudhamma said.

“Well then, venerable sir,” Citta said, “tell the Lord everything that was said by you and everything that was said by me. It will not be surprising if you come back here.”

When Sudhamma went to see the Buddha, he did as Citta requested, and the Buddha rebuked him, telling him he was foolish and that he must not jeer at a householder like Citta, who had faith, who was a benefactor and supporter of the Saṅgha. Then the Buddha made a rule that in such cases the offending bhikkhu should ask the layman to forgive him. So Sudhamma did indeed return to Citta's town. The first time he went back, however, he was too embarrassed to apologize to Citta. He returned to Sāvatthī. When his fellow bhikkhus asked if he had apologized, he admitted that he had been too ashamed. This was reported to the Buddha, who instructed the Saṅgha to send a companion bhikkhu with Sudhamma.

Sudhamma returned with a companion bhikkhu and obtained Citta's forgiveness. After that, he conducted himself properly, he was subdued, he mended his ways, and at Sudhamma's request, the Buddha told the bhikkhus how to lift the formal act of reconciliation that had been passed against him.

In a case like this, there are many instructive points to be considered. We may not be members of the Saṅgha, so formal actions of reconciliation will not be passed against us, but we can learn from Sudhamma's mistake. We can strive to always be mindful about what we say to others in order to avoid making remarks that others could find insulting. Insults or sarcastic remarks, even though they may seem insignificant, can be very counter-productive in the Dhamma. We would not wish to be responsible for turning someone away from the Buddha's Teachings.

We can also see that it is important to apologize if we do make the mistake of insulting someone. And if it is difficult for us to make an apology, we can ask our companions in the Dhamma to help us.

There are also indications of how to deal with someone when we are on the receiving end of jeering remarks. Instead of condemning the person speaking to us, we should follow Citta's example and look for an indirect way to call their attention to what they have said. And we should at all times treat them with respect.

One other story about Citta has much to teach us.¹ When Citta was on his deathbed, earth Devas came to him and suggested that he aspire to become a Universal Monarch. Citta replied, "That is something that is impermanent. That is unstable. That will pass and be left behind."

His friends and relatives could not see the Devas and thought that Citta was losing his mind. "Be mindful," they said to him. Then Citta explained why he had said what he did. Hearing his explanation, his friends and relatives requested Citta to instruct them in the right way to act.

Citta replied that they should train themselves in faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, calling to mind the qualities of the Tripe Gem. And he told them to be generous to the righteous, that is to say, to the Saṅgha.

Hatthaka of Ālavī was foremost among those of the laymen who have many followers due to their having developed the four bases of sympathy. On one occasion, when he went to see the Buddha with five hundred lay disciples accompanying him, the Buddha asked how he happened to have so many people with him.² Hatthaka replied that it was through developing those four bases of sympathy: through being generous, through kind speech, through acting for others' welfare, and through treating others as his equal.

¹KS IV 210-212.

²GS IV 147f.

On another occasion,¹ the Buddha told a group of bhikkhus that Hatthaka possessed seven marvellous and wonderful qualities: he had faith, he was virtuous, he was conscientious, he feared blame, he was a good listener, he was generous, and he was wise. One of the bhikkhus reported what the Buddha had said to Hatthaka, who remarked, "I trust there were no laymen present." The bhikkhu replied that no laymen had been present. When the bhikkhu reported Hatthaka's remark to the Buddha, the Buddha added an eighth quality to the list of seven possessed by Hatthaka: he was modest.

Hatthaka became an Anāgāmi before he died and in his next life was reborn in the Aviha Brahmā realm. From there, he went to see the Buddha, who was residing in the monastery given by Anāthapiṇḍika. It seems that he had not done this before, for he sank down and could not stand upright. The Buddha said to him, "Hatthaka, create a more solid body." And Hatthaka followed his instructions. This was necessary because when Brahmās or Devas go to worlds lower than their own, they must create less refined bodies in order to do so.

The Buddha asked Hatthaka if everything was the same as before for him. Hatthaka replied that some things were the same, but some things were different. In his new existence, many Devas came to hear him teach the Dhamma. He was surrounded by many Devas, just as the Buddha was surrounded by many people in the human world.

Then Hatthaka added, "Lord, I never had enough of three things. I died regretting three things. These were: I never had enough of seeing the Blessed One. I never had enough of hearing the true Dhamma. I never had enough of serving the Saṅgha."

¹*Op. cit.*, 147.

So Hatthaka is also an excellent example for us to follow. We can strive to acquire the eight qualities he possessed. We can strive to develop the four bases of sympathy like him. And we can constantly work to honour the Triple Gem in the most active way: We can strive to see the Buddha, which for us can mean striving to be present whenever possible at a site such as an International Meditation Centre, a place where there is a Pagoda representing the Buddha. We can listen whenever possible to the teaching of the true Dhamma. We can serve the Saṅgha whenever possible.

Khujjutarā was chief among the women lay disciples for extensive knowledge. She was the servant of Queen Samāvati, a wife of King Udena.¹ One day, she heard the Buddha teach and became a Sotāpanna. She told the queen about the Buddha's Teachings, and the queen was so impressed she had Khujjutarā go every day to listen to the Buddha and report back his discourses to her and the five hundred women attending on her. These are said to be the discourses contained in the Itivuttaka. Here we can find an inspiration to learn the Buddha's Teachings so that we can share them with others.

Velukaṇṭakiyā, Nanda's mother, was very highly developed. She made an offering to the Saṅgha headed by Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna, and the Buddha praised her offering as possessing six qualities: the giver was happy before giving, satisfied while giving, and rejoiced after giving; and those who received the gifts were free from greed, free from hatred, and free from delusion.² She had known the chief disciples were coming because she was an Anāgāmi and she had developed the special powers that made it possible to see Vessavaṇa, one of the Four Great Kings of the first Deva world, when he went

¹For the story given here, see DPPN I 719ff.

²See *The Perfection of Generosity*, pp. 65f.

by.¹ He had heard her reciting one of the discourses in the Sutta-nipāta and responded, “Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu” when she finished. Then he told her the chief disciples would be coming with a group of bhikkhus the next day. He asked her to give them a meal and share the merits with him.

Velukaṇṭakiyā did as requested and after the meal, Ven. Sāriputta asked her how she had known they were coming. When she explained, Sāriputta said it was marvellous that she was able to speak face to face with such a powerful Deva. Then Velukaṇṭakiyā said that was not the only good quality she possessed. She had been able to remain tranquil when the king’s men killed her only son and when her deceased husband appeared to her in his new life as a Yakkha. From the day she married, she had never been unfaithful to her husband, even in thought. From the day she became a lay disciple of the Buddha’s, she could not remember a single intentional transgression of any step of the training. She was able to develop the four Jhānas. And finally, she told Ven. Sāriputta that she had eliminated the five lower fetters—in other words, she was a Non-Returner.

So Velukaṇṭakiyā too is a disciple we will find hard to emulate. How many of us can say we remain calm even when minor things go wrong in our lives, not to mention anything as serious as the death of a child? How many of us never break the precepts even in our minds? Indeed, we have a difficult task ahead of us. But it is one well worth doing. It is the most important task of all: working for true happiness, working for the Nibbānic Peace Within.

¹GS IV 35-38.

APARIHĀNIYA DHAMMĀ: THE CONDITIONS OF WELFARE*

Introduction

When our teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin was teaching at the International Meditation Centre in Yangon, he was very concerned at times about the welfare of his disciples. He would give Dhamma talks dealing with this subject very often to remind us of what we must do in order to work for our own welfare as well as to help us understand and master the subject thoroughly. We are recording here his talk based on the Buddha's exposition of the *aparihāniya dhammā* (the Conditions of Welfare) so that serious students of the Buddha-Dhamma can refer to it whenever necessary.

Aparihāniya dhammā

The seven conditions which lead to the welfare of communities and several groups of conditions which lead to the welfare of those fully practising the Dhamma are given by the Buddha in a discourse recorded in the Mahā-Parinibbāna-sutta.¹ At one time, when the Buddha was residing at Vesālī at the Sārandada shrine, he taught the Licchavis the seven conditions for the welfare of a nation. The Licchavis were Khattiyas, one of the clans recognized as being of Aryan descent and were the rulers of the time. The Buddha came from a similar background. Vesālī was the capital of the

* Published in *The Light of Dhamma*, Vol. IV, n° 3 (1984), pp. 15-20.

¹THIH, pp. 231-277 (for the story of the Licchavis, see pp. 231-234; also found at GS IV 15-16); DB II 78-191.

Vajjian confederacy to which the Licchavis also belonged and so they are referred to as Vajjians. They were a strong people because they were united. If one Licchavi was sick, all the others would visit him. The whole clan would join in any ceremony performed in a Licchavi's home, and they would all come together to honour any distinguished visitors to their city.¹

The Licchavis were handsome and wore brilliantly coloured clothes and rode in brightly painted carriages. The Buddha compared them to the Devas of the Tāvātimsa world.² They are described as being very prosperous and rich,³ but they did not live in idleness and luxury. It is said that they slept on straw beds and were strenuous, diligent and zealous in their service.⁴ And they practised the seven conditions for the welfare of a nation, the *aparihāniya dhammā*. The Pāli word *aparihāniya* means “not causing decay or loss,” or, stated positively, “working for one's welfare.”

The Seven Conditions for the Welfare of a Nation

- (1) Holding frequent meetings which are attended by many people.
- (2) Meeting together harmoniously and leaving together at the end, all going to fulfil their duties.
- (3) Not declaring new laws and not breaking with existing laws, and scrupulously conforming to the laws established in the past.

¹See the commentary on the Mahā-Parinibbāna-sutta (Sv II 519) and DPPN.

²See, for example, DB III 102.

³See Dhp-a (BL III 168).

⁴Sv II 519.

- (4) Honouring, revering, venerating and respecting elders and paying heed to their advice.
- (5) Not forcing girls or women to live with them.
- (6) Honouring, revering, venerating and respecting all their religious monuments.
- (7) Fully protecting Arahats, allowing them to enter the country and allowing them to remain there in comfort.

The Licchavis were so conscientious in performing their duties, the commentary says that even if they had to meet three times in a row, they would not say, “We met yesterday and the day before yesterday, so why are we meeting today?”

The Licchavis were greatly admired for their system of government. They held full and frequent assemblies at which problems affecting either the whole confederation or individual members were fully discussed.¹ They were on friendly terms with their neighbouring countries and rulers: Bimbisāra, the king of Magadha; Pasenadi, the king of Kosala;² and the Mallas.

After the death of Bimbisāra, his son Ajātasattu wanted to expand Magadha and he resolved to destroy the Licchavis. In order to find out if he could succeed, he sent his minister Vassakāra to Rājagaha where the Buddha was residing at the Gijjakūle (Vulture’s Peak) to ask about his chances. Vassakāra exchanged the customary greetings and compliments of politeness and courtesy when he met the Buddha, then he sat down respectfully to one side to give his message.

The Buddha’s attendant, Ven. Ānanda, was standing behind the Buddha fanning him. The Buddha did not answer the question sent by King Ajātasattu directly. Instead, he asked Ānanda about the seven conditions for the welfare of a nation.

¹Sv II 517f.

²MLS II 287.

“Ānanda, have you not heard,” the Buddha asked, “that the Vajjians hold frequent meetings which are attended by many people?” Venerable Ānanda answered in the affirmative.

So the Buddha said, “Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians hold frequent meetings and are numerous at the meetings it is to be expected that they will prosper and not decline.” He made the same observation concerning all the seven conditions and stated that as long as the Licchavis maintained these conditions they were safe from their enemies. Vassakāra, however, took a hint from what the Buddha said and decided to use criticism (*upalāpana*) and enmity (*mithu-bhada*, “breaking, so as to cause opposition”) to create dissension among the Licchavis. He contrived a plan and had Ajātasattu expel him from Magadha. He was then welcomed by the unsuspecting Licchavis and became the teacher of their children. This was the perfect position for Vassakāra to make the children quarrel through the use of cunning and by questioning them in secret. The children’s quarrels soon spread to the adults and the Licchavis were no longer a united people. As a result, Ajātasattu was able to conquer them.¹

Conditions of Welfare for the Saṅgha

After the visit from Vassakāra, the Buddha had Venerable Ānanda assemble all the bhikkhus around Rājagaha. When they were assembled, the Buddha gave them a discourse: “Bhikkhus,” he said, “I will teach you seven conditions for the welfare (of the Saṅgha). Listen to them attentively, bear them in mind, and I will speak.”

¹Sv II 522. (The commentary explains that there was a port on the Ganges River the same distance from Ajātasattu’s country as from the Licchavis’, and a rich consignment of perfumes was brought there. Both prepared to attack, but the Licchavis stole a march on Ajātasattu and twice made off with everything, and the latter was very angry.)

“Yes Lord,” the bhikkhus said, agreeing to do so. And the Buddha enumerated several sets of conditions for the welfare of the Saṅgha.

I. The First Set of Seven Conditions
for the Welfare of the Saṅgha

- (1) The bhikkhus should hold frequent meetings, attended by many.
- (2) The bhikkhus should meet together in harmony, leaving together at the end, all going to fulfil their duties.
- (3) The bhikkhus should not declare new rules, should not break the existing rules, and should scrupulously conform to the rules laid down in the past.
- (4) The bhikkhus should be devoted to the Elders (Theras) who have been bhikkhus for a long time, who are fathers of the Saṅgha, the guides of the Saṅgha. They should honour, revere, venerate and respect them, and pay heed to their advice.
- (5) The bhikkhus should not fall under the power of craving (*taṇhā*) which leads to continued rebirth.
- (6) The bhikkhus should delight in dwelling in solitude (literally: living in the forest).
- (7) The bhikkhus should each establish constant mindfulness (*sati*) in themselves so that their companions in leading the life of purity (*sa-brahma-cārī*) who, like them, are of moral conduct may approach them and live comfortably with them.

For each of these conditions, the Buddha said that as long as they were observed and as long as the bhikkhus were instructed in them, the Saṅgha could be expected to grow and not decline. You will notice that the first four conditions are the same as in the list given for lay communities. The rules for

the Saṅgha (number 3) were all given by the Buddha and to this day none has been deleted and none has been added.

The Buddha then gave another seven conditions:

II. The Second Set of Seven Conditions for the Welfare of the Saṅgha (Conditions of Action)¹

- (1) The bhikkhus should not be fond of work (appropriate to a layman), should not delight in business and should not be intent on delight in work (appropriate to a layman).
- (2) The bhikkhus should not be fond of unsuitable talk or gossip (*bhassa*), should not delight in unsuitable talk or gossip, and should not be intent on delight in unsuitable talk or gossip.
- (3) The bhikkhus should not be fond of sleeping, should not delight in sleeping, and should not be intent on delighting in sleeping.
- (4) The bhikkhus should not be fond of society, should not delight in society, and should not be intent on delighting in company.
- (5) The bhikkhus should not be fond of harbouring bad intentions or wishes (*pāpicchā*), and should not come under the control of evil.
- (6) The bhikkhus should not be a friend, companion or intimate of those who do evil.
- (7) The bhikkhus should not stop halfway (to the goal), after achieving an insignificant state. (Commentary: They should not stop halfway on the path to Arahatship.)

¹Cf. the list of six conditions at A III 310 (GS III 221).

As long as these conditions are respected, the Buddha said, and as long as the bhikkhus are instructed in them, the Saṅgha could be expected to grow and not decline.

III. The Third Set of Conditions for
the Welfare of the Saṅgha
(Conditions of Believing)

- (1) Faith or Confidence (*saddhā*)
- (2) Conscience (leading to modest conduct) (*hiri*)
- (3) Moral dread (of doing wrong) (*ottappa*)
- (4) Being very learned (*bahu-ssuta*)
- (5) Of firm energy (*āraddha-viriya*)
- (6) Fully mindful (*upatṭhita-sati*)
- (7) Possessed of wisdom (*paññavanta*)

As long as these conditions are respected, as long as the bhikkhus are instructed in them, the bhikkhus could be expected to grow and not decline.

IV. The Fourth Set of Conditions for
the Welfare of the Saṅgha
(Conditions of Awakening)¹

- (1) Mindfulness (*sati*)
- (2) Investigation of the Dhamma (*dhamma-vicaya*)
- (3) Energy (*viriya*)
- (4) Happiness (*pīti*)
- (5) Tranquillity (*passaddhi*)
- (6) Concentration (*samādhi*)
- (7) Equanimity (*upekkhā*)

¹These conditions are also found at S V 85 (KS V 72).

As long as these conditions are respected, as long as the bhikkhus are instructed in them, the bhikkhus could be expected to grow and not decline.

V. The Fifth Set of Conditions for the Welfare of the Saṅgha (Conditions of Awareness)

- (1) Awareness of Impermanence (*anicca-sañña*)
- (2) Awareness of Non-self (*anatta-sañña*)
- (3) Awareness of Impurity (*asubha-sañña*)
- (4) Awareness of Danger (*ādīnava-sañña*)
- (5) Awareness of Overcoming (*pahāna-sañña*)
- (6) Awareness of Emancipation (*virāga-sañña*)
- (7) Awareness of Cessation (*nirodha-sañña*)

As long as these conditions are respected, as long as the bhikkhus are instructed in them, the bhikkhus could be expected to grow and not decline. (The first four of these will lead to making progress [“overcoming,” number five] and to final liberation [“emancipation” and “cessation,” numbers six and seven]. Even after final liberation they can all be maintained.)

In this same discourse, the Buddha gave three additional lists. One was another list of six conditions for the welfare of the Saṅgha, and the other two were lists of conditions contributing to decline: the first to the decline of bhikkhus when training and the second to the decline of lay disciples.

VI. Six Conditions for the Welfare of the Saṅgha (Living Together in Harmony)

- (1) The bhikkhus should help their companions in the life of purity with loving kindness in all their actions.
- (2) The bhikkhus should help their companions in the life of purity with loving kindness in their speech.

- (3) The bhikkhus should help their companions in the life of purity with loving kindness in their thoughts.
- (4) The bhikkhus should share with their virtuous companions in the life of purity what is lawfully received according to the rules—even as little as the contents of their bowl, (not eating) without sharing with others. (Commentary: Sharing material possessions—especially food—and personal possessions without thinking, “I will give only so much,” or, “I will give to a certain person but not to another person.”)
- (5) The bhikkhus should live united in virtue (*sīla*) with their companions in the life of purity, both in private and in public—virtue that is conducive to concentration (*samādhi*), untarnished, undisturbed, liberating, unblemished, without defect, unbroken.
- (6) The bhikkhus should live united in right view (*diṭṭhi*) with their companions in the life of purity, both in private and in public—the noble right view that leads to the complete extinction of suffering (*dukkha*), that leads to liberation and to escape (from rebirth) for the one who puts it into practice.

VII. Seven Conditions Leading to the Decline of a Monk When Training

- (1) Delight in action
- (2) Delight in talk
- (3) Delight in sleeping
- (4) Delight in company
- (5) Delight in sensual pleasures
- (6) Lack of moderation in eating
- (7) Failure to respect the wisdom of experienced monks

VIII. Seven Conditions Leading to a Lay Disciple's Decline

- (1) He fails to visit the monks.
- (2) He neglects to listen to the teaching.
- (3) He does not train in higher morality.
- (4) He puts little trust in elder, novice or midterm monks.
- (5) He listens to the Dhamma with a critical mind, looking for faults.
- (6) He looks for someone outside the Order to venerate and respect.
- (7) He serves someone outside the Order.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin commented on this discourse of the Buddha by asking us: "Now, what do you all want? Prosperity or decline? Prosperity, of course!"

In Myanmar (Burma), Buddhists know the Pāli texts of the five Nikāyas which give the stories from the days of the Buddha. They know the way in which Vassakāra did not benefit from the Buddha's discourse, but rather distorted the teachings to serve his selfish desires. How unfortunate he was—so close to the Dhamma, and yet so far! When Buddhists in Myanmar see a person acting like Vassakāra, they will call him by Vassakāra's name. This is a hint to the person who sows dissension among those around him, so that he may have a chance to correct himself before he has gone too far. When such actions are brought to the attention of the elders and teachers or presiding bhikkhus of the Saṅgha, they give a talk on the *aparihāniya dhammā*, just as Sayagyi instructed us at the International Meditation Centre in Yangon.

We should do our best to fulfil these conditions that work for our welfare—observing them scrupulously in order to grow in the Dhamma rather than retrogress. This discourse by Sayagyi, which faithfully gives the Buddha's instructions,

should be passed on by us so that our fellow meditators and those who follow in our footsteps can prosper as well.

Today is an auspicious occasion: October 12, 1983, is the fifth anniversary of Mother Sayamagyi's and Sayagyi U Chit Tin's coming out of Myanmar to teach the Buddha-Dhamma in the West. This Dhamma discourse has been chosen as the Dhamma message for all students in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin.

May you all grow in the Dhamma and be happy!

May you all be able to fulfil the conditions for welfare!

May the Pure Dhamma long endure!

Mother Sayamagyi and Sayagyi U Chit Tin

October 12, 1983

Mervelier, Switzerland (Meditation Camp)

BEING ASSURED OF ATTAINING NIBBĀNA

1. Attaining Assurance

In the Sotāpatti-sutta of the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyutta-nikāya,¹ many discourses are grouped together concerning the attaining of the stage of a Stream-Winner. Most of the discourses were given to laypeople, and so they are of particular interest to those who are practising the Buddha's Teachings while remaining laypeople.

Attaining the stage of a Stream-Winner or higher is the only way a person can be completely sure that he or she is assured of escaping from the suffering of continued existence. The most complete description in this group of discourses outlining what is involved in being a Stream-Winner is given by the Buddha to the Kosalan laymen of the village of Veḷudvāra.² The villagers told the Buddha they enjoyed their lives as laymen and wished to be assured of rebirth in the higher realms. Evidently the Buddha saw that they were ready to go even further, and he taught them not only how to attain rebirth in the Deva worlds, but also how to eventually attain release from all suffering.³

The Buddha begins by teaching the villagers concerning virtuous conduct (*sīla*). They should consider what causes them suffering, then abstain from such actions and encourage others to abstain from them. They should abstain from killing,

¹KS V 296-351.

²KS V 307-311.

³Compare his discourse to these villagers with the discourse to the Kālāmans, GS I 170-175.

stealing, adultery, lying, slander, harsh speech and frivolous talk.¹ In addition to virtuous conduct, the layman should be established in the four desirable conditions (*akaṅkhiya thāna*): complete confidence (*aveccapasāda*) in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, and the virtues which the Noble Ones consider to be lovely (*ariyakanta sīlā*) —virtuous conduct which is unbroken, unflawed, unspotted, unblemished, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished and leading to concentration.²

This second mention of virtue shows the importance of keeping the precepts at the highest possible level. In the *Visudhimagga*, Ashin Buddhaghosa says that virtue, being pure of the defilement of misconduct, is the reason for Stream-Entry and Once-Returning.³ As the Buddha points out, virtuous conduct leads to concentration (*samādhi*). Ashin Buddhaghosa says concentration means one is purified from craving, and is the reason for becoming a Non-Returner. It is understanding (*paññā*) that finally leads to Arahatsip. Thus, a person who wishes to escape from suffering must first develop ordinary virtuous conduct, then go on to the higher virtue of the Noble Ones.

These four desirable conditions are also called the four Factors of Stream-Entry (*sotāpattiyaṅga*),⁴ the mirror of the

¹Here the Buddha gives only seven points. Right livelihood is usually added to these for a set of eight precepts. Right livelihood is implied in the seven given here, for if they are followed, right livelihood will result. Cf. Ledi Sayadaw, *The Requisites of Enlightenment, The Wheel*, 171/174, p. 10, fn. 19. In GS IV 169, the Buddha gives these seven precepts and adds abstaining from intoxicants as the eighth.

²These are discussed by Ledi Sayadaw in *Requisites*, pp. 78f.

³*Path*, Chapter I ¶¶3f.

⁴KS V 300.

Dhamma (*Dhammādāsa*),¹ the four producers of meritorious and skilful actions (*puññābhisandā kusalābhisandā*),² and the four Deva paths to the Deva realms (*devānaṃ devapadāni*).³

In another discourse, the Buddha tells the bhikkhus that these four Factors of Stream-Entry should be taught to those with whom they are in sympathy, those who consider that the bhikkhus should be listened to, whether friends or companions, kinsmen or blood-relatives. The Bhikkhus should urge these people to undertake the four Factors of Stream-Entry; they should be established and made to stand firm in these factors.⁴

In his discourse to the laymen Isidatta and Purāṇa,⁵ the Buddha gives a slightly different list of four Producers of Meritorious and Skilful actions which are possessed by a Stream-Winner. These are: complete confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and being generous. The two laymen were in charge of protecting the wives of King Kosala when they rode on their elephants to the royal park. The two men had already pointed out to the Buddha that on these occasions they also had to protect themselves. Not only were their actions pure, they said, but they were also able to guard their minds so well that no sensuous thoughts arose even when they were exposed to the beautiful wives of the king. This shows not only how highly developed they were in virtue, but also how good their concentration was, for other-

¹KS V 312.

²KS V 336.

³KS V 337.

⁴KS V 317. The commentary defines kinsmen as being in-laws, etc. Cf. GS I 202f., where only three factors are given (complete confidence in the Triple Gem).

⁵KS V 303-307.

wise they would not have been able to control their thoughts. The Buddha made it clear that he knew they were unequalled among the Kosalans in distributing gifts with impartiality among those who were of virtuous conduct and of lovely deportment. After another discourse, when the laywoman Kāli-Godhā declares she is possessed of these four qualities, the Buddha confirms that she is a Stream-Winner.¹

In three of the discourses in the group we are discussing here, there are four other things given as Factors of Stream-Entry. These four complement the ones already given. They are of particular interest as they are directly concerned with how to develop the mind. They are: (1) associating with virtuous people (*sappurisa-samseva*), (2) listening to the True Doctrine (*saddhamma-savana*), (3) thoroughly fixing the mind (*yoniso-manasi-kāra*), and, (4) practising the Doctrine through [conforming to the right] Doctrine (*Dhammānu-dhamma-paṭipatti*).² In the first of the three discourses, the Buddha asks Venerable Sāriputta to explain what the Stream is; Sāriputta answers that it is the Noble Eightfold Path.

The immediate advantages of becoming a Stream-Winner are pointed out in several of the discourses. The most important advantage is that one is released forever from rebirth in hell (*niraya*), rebirth as a member of the animal realm (*tiracchāna-yonika*), rebirth in the realm of the departed (*pitti-visayo*), and in the states of ruin, difficulty and loss (*apāya-duggati-vinipata*).³ One is assured of no longer experiencing the mental states of the lower realms (*avinipāta-dhamma*), for one is destined for Full Awakening (*sambodhi-parāyana*).

¹KS V 340.

²KS V 340.

³KS V 297.

Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna points out that the four Factors of Stream-Entry lead to rebirth in the higher worlds. Two discourses are given by Ven. Sāriputta to the layman Anāthapiṇḍika when the latter was ill.¹ Sāriputta tells him his pains will go away if he will reflect on his own complete confidence in the Triple Gem, his possession of virtuous conduct considered to be lovely by the Noble Ones, his practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, and his own right knowledge and right release. So we see the immediate benefits that can be gained through the practice. Venerable Sariputta points out that without these qualities, ordinary persons, when they think of these things, are filled with terror, trembling, and the fear of death because of what may happen to them after they die.

The Buddha gave another description of the advantages of the Four Factors of Stream-Entry in a discourse to the layman Nandaka, a minister of the Licchavīs.² These advantages are: long life as a human and in the higher realms, beauty, happiness, a good name, ruling power both as a human and in the higher worlds. At this point Nandaka was informed it was time for his bath, but he replied, “Enough of this external bathing, my good man! Enough of that! This internal bathing will suffice: this confidence in the Blessed One.”

In another discourse, the Buddha points out that the Devas are glad to talk to those who are possessed of complete confidence in the Triple Gem and the virtues considered to be lovely by the Noble Ones, and that they invite such Noble Disciples to enter their company.³

The Buddha emphasizes the importance of the four Factors of Stream-Entry in several similes. In the first discourse in the

¹KS V 327-333.

²KS V 335f.

³KS V 338.

section, he tells the bhikkhus that being released from rebirth in the four lower planes is far better than being a Universal Monarch who can enjoy the sensual pleasures of the Deva world. Being a Universal Monarch is not worth one-sixteenth part of attaining the four Factors of Stream-Entry.¹

In another discourse, he tells them that these four conditions flow on to reach the further shore and lead to the destruction of the taints (*āsavas*), just as rainwater flows down from the mountains filling pools and lakes so that they flow into streams and rivers which in turn flow down to the ocean to fill it. In a similar comparison, he says that the floods of merit gained by the Noble disciple who attains the four Conditions of Stream-Entry are incalculable, boundless, just as the amount of water in the ocean is boundless.²

2. The Importance of Maintaining the Practice

A person who has attained the Path and Fruition State of a Stream-Winner has eliminated three of the ten fetters (*sam-vojana*) which bind individuals to continued existence and suffering. Five of these fetters are known as the higher fetters because they lead to existence in the higher planes, and five are called the lower fetters as they lead to the lower planes of suffering.³ The Stream-Winner eliminates three of the lower fetters: (1) belief in a lasting, controlling self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*),

¹KS V 339.

²This comparison of boundless merit with the ocean is given for both types of the four Factors of Stream-Entry, KS V 342-344. See also above, "Floods of Merit," pp. 95-100.

³See *Path*, Chapter XXII ¶48.

(2) sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), and (3) misapprehension about rules of virtuous conduct and vows (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*).¹

The lower fetters which are not eliminated at this stage are: craving for sense desire (*kāma-rāga*) and ill will (*vyāpāda*). The five higher fetters are not eliminated until the highest stage of Awakening, Arahatsip. They are: craving existence in the fine-material worlds (*rūpa-rāga*), craving existence in the immaterial worlds (*arūpa-rāga*), pride (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).

In terms of the seven inherent tendencies (*anusaya*), a Stream-Winner gets rid of false views (*diṭṭhi*) and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), but five still remain. Two of these remaining tendencies are eliminated at the third stage of Non-Returner: greed for sense desires (*kāma-rāga*) and resentment (*paṭigha*). The last three are not eliminated until one attains Arahatsip: pride (*māna*), craving for continued existence (*bhava-rāga*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).²

We have already seen that a Stream-Winner is assured of eventually attaining complete freedom from suffering. At most, he will be reborn seven times in the worlds of sensual desires which include the human world and the six Deva realms. Ashin Buddhaghosa says, “However negligent he may be, [the Stream-Winner] is bound to make an end of suffering when he has travelled and traversed the round of rebirths among Devas and human beings for the seventh time.”³ In *The Expositor* it is said that a Stream-Winner terminates the results of volitional actions for all his lives except the last seven.⁴ A

¹For more details, see *Path*, Chapter XVII ¶¶241-243, Chapter XIX ¶¶6, 10.

²See *Path*, Chapter XXII ¶¶60, 73.

³*Path*, Chapter XXII ¶8.

⁴Page 316; see p. 461, note 2, for a correction in the translation.

Stream-Winner, however, can still experience unwholesome desires. Also in *The Expositor*, a very vivid description of these desires is given in depicting the nature of a Once-Returner—the next step after Stream-Entry: “For to the Once-Returner the inherent tendencies do not arise frequently as they do for the majority who follow the round of rebirths. They arise occasionally like the sparse blades of grass in an imperfectly mown field. And when it does arise it does not arise crushing, spreading, covering, making darkness, as in the case of the people who follow the round of rebirths.”¹

In the group of discourses on Stream-Entry in *The Kindred Sayings*,² there is a discourse given by the Buddha to the layman Nandiya the Sakyan in which he explains how a Noble disciple can lack the four factors of Stream-Entry. A Noble disciple here means a Stream-Winner.³ If he is negligent, the Buddha explains, even though he has complete confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and even though he is blessed with the virtues dear to the Noble Ones, he will be content with those and will not continue striving for seclusion during the daytime or for solitude at night. Thus, he will not experience happiness and tranquillity, the factors arising from the first *jhānas*. Without these factors, he will not be mindful (*asati*). He will live in misery (*dukkha*), with a mind that is not concentrated, and therefore [higher] mental states (*dhammā*) will not be clear to him. The commentary says that here, the higher mental states that are not clear are calm (*samatha*) and insight (*Vipassanā*).⁴

¹*Path*, p. 319 (U Pe Maung Tin’s translation).

²KS V 340-342.

³See the commentary on the word *ariya-sāvaka* in an earlier discourse: Spk II 43.

⁴Spk III 289.

Three verses in the Jewel Discourse¹ mention the possibility that a Stream-Winner may be very negligent:²

Those who understand clearly the noble truths (which have been) well taught by the one of deep wisdom, even though they are very negligent will not take an eighth existence. This outstanding jewel too is in the Order, by this truth may there be well-being.

At the same time as his attainment of insight, three things become abandoned: the (false) view of individuality, doubt, and whatever (misapprehension about) rules of virtuous conduct and vows there may be. He is also completely released from the four bad transitions and (is) not capable of committing the six great crimes. This outstanding jewel too is in the Order, by this truth may there be well-being.

Although he commits an evil deed, by body, speech, or by mind, he is incapable of hiding it. This incapability is said (to belong) to one who has seen the state (of Nibbāna). This outstanding jewel too is in the Order, by this truth may there be well-being.

The commentary says that “very negligent” means that a Stream-Winner may have opportunities for negligence through enjoying lives as a Deva king or a Universal Monarch, but even so, in his seventh future existence he will develop insight and attain Arahantship. This negligence, however, does not mean that a Stream-Winner is capable of committing acts that

¹Ratana-sutta, trans. by Mr K.R. Norman in GD 37-39 (vv 230-232) and by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Minor Readings*, pp. 4-6 (vv 9-11) with the commentary in *The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, pp. 204-210. The commentary on GD 37-39 is the same as for *Minor Readings* for these verses.

²We use Mr Norman’s translation here.

will lead to existence in the four bad planes of existence, which the commentary specifies are hell, the animal realm, the realm of ghosts (*petas*) and the realm of demons (*asuras*). He cannot commit the six major crimes: killing one's mother, one's father, or an Arahant; drawing the blood of a Buddha, causing a schism in the Saṅgha, and choosing someone other than the Buddha for one's teacher.

The commentary goes on to say that the six major crimes are mentioned more to condemn the state of the ordinary person rather than the Stream-Winner, for a Stream-Winner who has perfected right view will not even kill an ant. These crimes are also mentioned to show that the Stream-Winner does not commit them in his future lives, even if he does not know at that time that he has achieved the first Path. It is part of his nature to avoid committing the six major crimes and to avoid breaking the five precepts. In addition, he will not go to a teacher other than the Buddha.

A Stream-Winner can commit minor wrong deeds. The commentary¹ gives several examples which apply to bhikkhus, but several would apply to laypeople as well. These include gossip and harsh speech and the occasional arousing of greed and hate. A Stream-Winner, however, is incapable of hiding any wrong action he has done, even for an instant. He immediately reveals it to the teacher or to wise companions in the higher life. He acts in accordance with the True Doctrine, restraining himself where necessary, saying, "I shall not do that again." He recoils from any wrong action just as an infant will withdraw its hand if it touches a hot coal.²

¹*Illus* 209f.

²This image is quoted in the commentary from MLS I 386.

The *Piṭaka-Disclosure*,¹ in commenting on the four types of persons given in *The Gradual Sayings*,² points out that such a text does not necessarily mention exceptions to the rule. In the text, the Buddha says that a person who cultivates sensual desires and does evil deeds is one who goes with the stream. The word “stream” here refers to the streams of craving that lead to the mistaken view that there is a permanent ego, to uncertainty, and to misapprehension about rules of virtuous conduct and vows. Due to this, a person does the wrong kind of deeds which lead to innumerable future existences. There are cases, the commentary says, of Stream-Winners who cultivate sensual desires and who do evil deeds connected with sensual desires.³

The same text in *The Gradual Sayings* describes a Stream-Winner as a person who does not cultivate sensual desires and who does no evil deed. Here again the commentary says that there may be people who do not follow the Buddha’s Teachings, who fulfil these moral requirements, but who do not go against the stream of continued existences. No examples are given, but this comment shows how important insight is.

Another detail of interest in the text from *The Gradual Sayings* is that the Buddha describes the Stream-Winner as a person who lives the higher life perfectly, but with suffering, dejection, tears, and lamentation. This is because there is still more to understand before attachment to the world of sense desires and to the higher planes of existences is eliminated.⁴

¹Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *Peṭakopadesa*, pp. 311f. (¶974).

²GS II 4-6.

³*Piṭaka-Disclosure*, ¶962.

⁴Cf. the story of the laywoman Visākhā who was a Stream-Winner and who lamented the death of her granddaughter (Dhp-a V 213, BL III 84f.).

Ashin Buddhaghosa explains that a Stream-Winner will be assailed by sensual desires if he does not review the defilements he has abandoned and those which are still remaining.¹ He cites the layman Mahānāma the Sakyan as an example of this type of person. His reference is to a discourse in *The Middle Length Sayings*.² This is a very appropriate discourse to include along with our examination of the group of discourses on Stream-Winning, for in the group are several discourses addressed to Mahānāma the Sakyan who was worried about his future lives.

Mahānāma the Sakyan was declared by the Buddha to be chief among his lay disciples who gave choice alms food.³ He became a Stream-Winner by just seeing the Buddha.⁴

His attainment can be inferred from another of the discourses in the group on Stream-Winning.⁵ When another member of his clan, Godha the Sakyan, mentions complete confidence in the Triple Gem as the three blessings of a Stream-Winner, Mahānāma adds a fourth quality: the virtues that the Noble Ones consider to be lovely and that lead to concentration. Godha suggests that they verify this with the Buddha. Mahānāma recounts all he and Godha have said and then affirms his complete confidence in the Buddha. He says that even if the Saṅghas, lay disciples, and the whole world agreed about (a question) concerning the doctrine but were not in agreement with the Buddha, Mahānāma would side with the Buddha.

¹*Path*, Chapter XXII ¶ 21.

²MLS I 119-124, Cūḷadukkhakkhanda-sutta. There were several people of the same name at the time of the Buddha. See entries in DPPN.

³GS I 23.

⁴According to the commentary (Mp I 393).

⁵KS V 322f.

Mahānāma came from the same clan as the Buddha and was his cousin. We can see from his story that some of the benefits of attaining Stream-Entry are only for those who continue to strive. On at least two occasions Mahānāma was worried about what would happen to him when he died.¹ It may be that he was concerned because he had played a trick on King Pasenadi which had ended very tragically for the Sakyan clan.²

King Pasenadi thought that he could win favour with the Saṅgha if he married into the clan of the Buddha. When he asked the Sakyans for a bride, they did not wish to send one, for they were a very proud people and considered the king of inferior birth. Mahānāma offered to resolve the problem by sending a daughter he had had with a slave-woman. By pretending to eat with her, he led King Pasenadi's messengers to believe that his daughter Vāsabhakhattiyā was of full status among the Sakyans. The trick worked and she had a son, Viḍūḍabha, by King Pasenadi. When the son grew up, he learned about the trick and vowed to punish the Sakyans. He usurped his father's throne, attacked the Sakyans and slew a great many of them. So we can see that Mahānāma the Sakyan had good cause to feel concerned about his past deeds and what would result from them.

In the discourse in *The Middle Length Sayings*, Mahānāma tells the Buddha that he understands from what the Buddha has taught that greed, aversion, and confusion are depravities of the mind, but at times he finds that these mental states of greed, aversion, and confusion take hold of his mind. In *The Kindred Sayings*, Mahānāma tells the Buddha that his

¹KS V 320

²For the story, see the Dhp-a (BL II 30-46) and the introductory story to Jātaka n° 465.

thoughts are bewildered by noise and activity when he enters the crowded city of Kapilavatthu in the evening.¹ He cannot keep his mind fixed on the Triple Gem, even though he has just been attending on the Buddha and the Saṅgha. He wonders what his destiny would be if he should die at such a moment.

The Buddha tells Mahānāma that he could subjectively get rid of the quality in himself that leads to aversion and confusion taking hold of his mind. To do this, he should not dwell in a house (in other words, he should live in seclusion, which generally refers to ordaining as a bhikkhu), and he should not enjoy sensual pleasures. It is because he has not eliminated that quality subjectively that he lives in a house and enjoys sensual pleasures.

As for Mahānāma's worry about death, the Buddha is reassuring. He tells Mahānāma that he need have no fear. He says his death will be blameless and explains that those who have long developed their minds in faith, in virtue, in learning, in giving up, and in insight will have minds which will go upwards and go to [the highest] attainment (*visesa-gāmi*), even if their material bodies be devoured by crows and vultures or kites and dogs. On another occasion, the Buddha gives the four Factors of Stream-Entry as the things which assure a Noble disciple that he bends, slopes and tends to Nibbāna just as a tree that bends, slopes and tends to the east will fall to the east if its root is cut.²

On two other occasions, Mahānāma questioned the Buddha concerning another layman, Sarakāni the Sakyan. A number of Sakyans learned that the Buddha declared after

¹KS V 320f.

²The same metaphor is used in referring to cultivating and making much of the Noble Eightfold Path, KS V 38.

Sarakāni died that he was a Stream-Winner. The Sakyans were indignant saying that Sarakāni had failed in the training and taken to drink.

The Buddha told Mahānāma that a lay disciple who had for a long time taken refuge in the Triple Gem could not go to the lower realms, and Sarakāni had truly taken refuge. The Buddha goes on to give a list of six categories of persons who are assured of release. These include: Arahats, Non-Returners, Once-Returners, Stream-Winners, and two other categories that are described as follows: (1) There are those who do not have complete confidence in the Triple Gem, who do not have bright and swift wisdom and have not attained [complete] release, but who do possess the five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. In addition, they sufficiently approve of the Doctrine of the Buddha through insight.¹ (2) The last category includes those who only possess the five faculties just mentioned and who have sufficient faith in and affection for the Buddha.²

At the conclusion of the first of these two discourses, the Buddha says that if the great *sāl* trees standing nearby could understand and distinguish right speech from wrong speech, he would declare them to be Stream-Winners. He goes on to say that Sarakāni had undertaken the training at his death.

At the conclusion of the second of these discourses, the Buddha compares working incorrectly with bad ground which

¹Cf. MLS I 182, 279, where six categories are also given, the fifth being bhikkhus who are striving for the Doctrine and faith. At p. 279, they are compared to a new-born calf that crosses the Ganges and goes safely beyond by following the lowing of its mother.

²The commentary to MLS I 182 says these are Cūḷa-sotāpannas. At MLS I 279 this category is defined as those who think they should listen to and place faith in the Buddha. For them, there will be welfare and happiness for a long time.

is sown with broken, rotten seeds that are spoiled by wind and heat. They are incapable of sprouting, badly planted, and there is not enough rain. The seeds, therefore, would not grow, increase and be abundant. In the same way, if the Doctrine is wrongly taught and poorly explained it does not lead to tranquillity and when it is not taught by a Buddha, then it is like bad ground. The person who lives following this wrong doctrine is like the bad seed.

On the other hand, the Buddha says that his Doctrine is correctly taught, it is correctly explained, it leads to profit and tranquillity, and it is taught by a Buddha. Thus, it is like good ground. The disciples who live following this Doctrine, who are obedient to it and practise its precepts, are like unbroken seeds that are not rotten, that are unspoiled by wind and heat, capable of sprouting, correctly planted, and that receive enough rain. They will grow, increase and be abundant. Sarakāni was such a disciple.

3. How Laymen Should Practise

These texts show us how important it is to continually make the right kind of effort. Let us examine the effort to be made in more detail, and see how lay disciples of today who are practising Buddhist meditation can make progress.

Many students who have taken a course of meditation in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin may well sympathize with Mahānāma's worries. As much as they wish to follow the Buddha's Teachings, they too find that when they return to their everyday life, it is very difficult to keep the mind concentrated.

During a ten-day retreat, the conditions are conducive to training the mind to calm down and remain on the breath. It is then possible to develop insight into the changing nature of everything within the body and mind. But as soon as one is in

a situation where the senses are flooded with distracting sights, sounds, odours, and so forth, the mind is easily led astray. When attention is gone, a person finds himself saying and doing things that go against his own interests. At times, it will be possible to struggle and avoid doing wrong actions. At other times, one may find that many excuses begin to pass through the mind. Doubts begin to occur. The desire for sense-pleasures begins to get the upper hand over any wisdom we have acquired.

At times like these, it would be helpful to remember the advice the Buddha gave when Mahānāma said greed, aversion or confusion took hold of his mind.¹ The Buddha told Mahānāma that as a Bodhisatta he had understood that sense-pleasures are of little satisfaction, of much ill, of much tribulation and that there was peril in them. Even so, he did not make progress in his work and realized he was not yet unseduced by sense-pleasures.

He goes on to enumerate the five strands of sense-pleasures: visible material shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical contact, all of them agreeable, pleasant, desired, enticing, and alluring. Whatever happiness might come from them is merely the satisfaction of sense-pleasures.

Then he goes on to describe the peril in sense-pleasures. He takes the case of a young man from a good family who works for his living. He is afflicted by the cold, heat, insect bites, wind, sun, creeping things, and dying from hunger and thirst. If he works very hard without gaining possessions, he grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, wails, and is disillusioned. He thinks to himself, "All my effort is in vain, my striving is without result."

¹See MLS I 120f., 112-115 for the passage repeated from another discourse.

If, on the other hand, he does gain possessions, then he has to worry about them and wonders how he can protect them from being taken away by the king or thieves, from being burnt or carried away by floods, or taken by heirs he does not like. But these things happen, and he grieves and mourns, etc., as before.

Next, the Buddha explains that the sense-pleasures are the cause for disputes among kings, nobles, brahmans, householders, family members, and friends. They quarrel, contend and dispute with one another and physically attack each other. They even go so far as to kill each other or cause deadly pain. Because of sense-pleasures, wars are fought. Men are also led to steal, wait in ambush, commit adultery, and because of these actions, they are arrested and punished.¹

Sense-pleasures are the reason people behave wrongly in body, speech and mind. Due to this, when they die, they arise in the lower realms including the lowest, the Niraya hell.

After this frightening picture of the world we live in, the Buddha goes on to recount an incident that shows the alternative he attained when he was able to go beyond the sense-pleasures, unskilled states of mind and even further still. On one occasion, a group of Jain ascetics suggested that their teacher knew better how to overcome the maturing of past evil actions. They obviously saw the Buddha's Middle Path as not painful enough. They thought happiness could only be attained through pain. The Jains claimed that if it were possible to gain happiness through happiness, King Seniya Bimbisāra of Magadha would be happier than the Buddha. The Buddha pointed out that he could experience pure happiness without moving his body or saying a word for seven days and nights at a time.

¹See MLS I 115 for a long list of the punishments current at that time.

This is an appropriate reminder that, as Sayagyi U Ba Khin said, there is no need for the gritting of teeth. In reviewing the dangers of being seized by sense-pleasures, we must also remember that there is an alternative. Even if the highest happiness of Nibbāna or the relative happiness of deep concentration have not been experienced, one ten-day course of developing concentration and insight will give us sufficient experience of the fact that a calm mind and an understanding mind is better than a mind full of greed, aversion and delusion.

If we work in this way, unpleasant experiences in everyday life can help to spur us on to keep up our practice. In the commentary to the verses spoken by the Theras and Therīs, they are shown as reaching a stage when this vision of the dangers of the conditioned world caused a positive agitation in their mind (*samvega*) —a sense of urgency that they must work for release from all this suffering. The stronger our sense of urgency, the more we will be ready to make the right effort ourselves.

Balancing the vision of the dangers of the conditioned world with remembering the happiness to be gained by concentration has certain dangers. The inherent tendencies that tie us to continued existence will indicate why. They are: greed for sense-pleasures, resentment, pride, false view, uncertainty, greed for future existence, and ignorance. Our concentration may be strong, but the appreciation of impermanence weak or not seen correctly. When this happens, we will have a tendency to desire rebirth in favourable circumstances.

This is not necessarily bad for a person who is incapable of developing further. On the other hand, anyone who can successfully complete a ten-day meditation course can attain a deeper appreciation of the true nature of all conditioned existences and aim for the highest goal of Nibbana.

When Mahānāma asked the Buddha how a wise disciple should advise a fellow wise disciple, the Buddha spoke of this deeper appreciation that we should remember as we practise as laypeople.¹ Mahānāma asked the Buddha how to advise a fellow wise disciple who is seriously ill. The Buddha first gave him the same advice Ven. Sāriputta gave to the layman Anāthapiṇḍika. The layman who is sick should be encouraged to take comfort in his complete confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, and in the virtues that the Noble Ones consider to be lovely. If the sick layman then says that he longs for his parents, he should be reminded that he is subject to death and so should abandon that longing. If he still longs for his children, he should be reminded of the same thing. Once those longings are abandoned, he will still long for sense-pleasures and he should be advised to abandon them. Once that is done, it should be pointed out that the realm of the Four Deva Kings is better than the human world and his thought should be fixed on the divine delights to be experienced in that realm. Then, step by step, the layman's thoughts are guided upwards from one Deva realm to the next, and finally up to the Brahmā realms. Then he should be reminded that even the Brahmā realms are impermanent, not lasting, included in the worlds where there is individual existence. The sick layman should fix his mind on cessation, that is to say, Nibbāna.

Combining these two approaches will help to give us a balanced attitude. When the sense-desires take hold of our minds, we can combat them by remembering how dangerous they are. If we find we are not strongly attracted by the sense-pleasures in the human world, we can remember the dangers in the pleasures of the higher realms which are attained by

¹KS V 349-351.

developing concentration. And at all times we can continually bear in mind the importance of striving for the final release of Nibbāna.

THE GOOD FRIEND*

*Kalyāṇamittatā muninā lokam ādissa vaṇṇitā.
Kalyāṇamitte bhajamāno api bālo paṇḍito assa.*

*Bhajitabbā sappurisā paññā tathā pavaḍḍhati
bhajantānam
Bhajamāno sappurise sabbehi dukkhehi mucceyya.*

The state of having good friends has been praised by the sage (the Buddha) with reference to the world; if he resorted to good friends, even a fool would be wise.

Good men are to be resorted to; in this way the wisdom of those who resort to them increases. Resorting to good men, one would be released from all pains.

Therīgāthā vv. 213-214¹

The Buddha made very clear the importance of having a good friend (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*).² When Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha that half of the life of purity (*brahma-cariya*) was the state of having a good friend (*kalyāṇa*), having good

* First printed in *The Maha Bodhi*, Vol. 93, nos. 4-6 (1985), pp. 49-56.

¹Based on the translation by K.R. Norman, *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns* (Pali Text Society, 1989). For the Pāḷi, we follow the edition by L. Alsdorf in Appendix II of the Pali Text Society's 1966 edition of *Therīgāthā*.

²For a detailed discussion of the Pāḷi terms and the concept of the good friend in the canon and commentaries, see Steven Collins, "Kalyāṇamitta and Kalyāṇamittatā," *Pali Text Society Journal* XI (1987) pp. 51-72. See this article for references to other passages on the good friend.

companions, and being inclined to good friends, the Buddha corrected him. “Do not say that, Ānanda,” he said. “Having a good friend, having good companions, and being inclined to good friends is the whole of the life of purity, not the half.” And he went on to explain that this was so because it means that one will develop the Noble Eightfold Path, which is based on detachment, on dispassion, on cessation, involving maturity of relinquishing. “It is because I am a good friend to them that living beings subject to birth are freed from birth,” he said.¹

The highest order of friendship, of course, is with the best of friends, the Buddha. But let us consider first some of the general qualities of a good friend and the advantages of associating with them before going into the more important aspect of the good friend as the meditation teacher.

Once, when the Buddha was living among the Koliyans at Kakkarapatta, a man name Dīghajānu Byagghapajja requested that the Buddha give a discourse on the Dhamma and teach things that would be helpful in this life and in lives to come for laymen such as him.² We can assume from this request that Byagghapajja was not concerned with aiming higher: with developing his concentration and insight. The Buddha complied by giving a discourse, and in it, he lists four conditions that lead to a man’s advantage and happiness in this life. These are: (1) being alert, (2) being wary, (3) keeping good company, and (4) leading a balanced life.

¹KS I 113f.; V 2f. The last statement is quoted in *Path*, Chapter III ¶62. Collins (*op. cit.*, p. 70, n. 23) quotes the commentary (Spk I 156f.) where it is said that Ānanda thought that half of the life of purity was the state of having a good friend and that half was individual effort (*paccatta-purisa-kara*). The commentary explains that these two cannot be separated.

²GS IV 187-191.

Good company, the Buddha explained, means that wherever a layman goes, wherever he talks with other laymen, he chooses men who possess the four qualities that lead to happiness in future lives: faith, virtue, charity, and wisdom. He will emulate those who are full of faith, virtue, charity, and wisdom.

The Buddha also mentions friendship in speaking of the four ways in which the layman can lose his wealth. These four are: looseness with women, debauchery in drinking, dishonesty in gambling and in friendship, and companionship and intimacy with those who do evil. Abstinence from these four will lead to greater wealth. So we can see that even on the mundane level, a good friend is very important.

Friendship is given as one of seven things that prevent decline for a bhikkhu: (1) reverence for the Buddha, (2) the Dhamma, and (3) the Saṅgha; (4) the (moral) training, (5) concentration, (6) right speech, and (7) good friendship.

The Buddha also told the bhikkhus to cultivate the friend who possessed the following seven qualities: a friend (1) gives what is hard to give, (2) does what is hard to do, (3) bears what is hard to bear, (4) confesses his own secret, (5) keeps others' secrets, (6) does not forsake a person in time of want, and (7) does not despise a person who is ruined.

A third set of seven qualities of a friend are: being (1) genial, (2) pleasant, (3) serious, (4) self-composed, (5) a speaker (of good), (6) mild, (7) profound in speech, and (7) being one who does not urge (one on) at the wrong time.¹

In *The Path of Purification*² Ashin Buddhaghosa included in his discussion of virtue the bad effects of wrong friendship and the good effects of good friendship. The virtue will

¹GS IV 17-19.

²Chapter I §14.

diminish in a man who does not visit the virtuous but rather cultivates the unvirtuous, a person who, in his ignorance, sees no fault in a transgression here. As a result of such association and action, his mind will often be full of wrong thoughts and he will not guard his faculties.

Later in the same chapter,¹ we find long lists of both the wrong and the right kinds of people to associate with: bhikkhus should not frequent prostitutes, widows, old maids, eunuchs, bhikkhunīs, or taverns. They should not live associated with kings, kings' ministers, sectarians, sectarians' disciples, or in unbecoming association with laymen. They should not cultivate, frequent or honour families that are faithless, untrusting, abusive, and rude, who wish harm, ill, woe, who wish no surcease of bondage for bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs or for men and women who are disciples.

In the *Dialogues of the Buddha*,² details are given concerning the qualities of good and bad friends. Four types of people are to be considered as foes disguised as friends, and four reasons for this are given for each:

- (1) A grasping person is rapacious, gives little and asks much, does his duty out of fear, and pursues his own interests.
- (2) A man of words, not deeds, makes friendly remarks about the past and about the future, tries to win favour by empty sayings, and when the opportunity for service comes, he says he cannot help.
- (3) The flatterer agrees to do wrong and does not agree to do right, praises you to your face and speaks ill of you to others.

¹*Path*, Chapter I ¶45.

²DB III 177-182 (THIH 464ff.) [D III 185ff.].

(4) The companion down the wrong path is a companion when you indulge in strong drink, when you frequent the streets at untimely hours, when you go to shows and fairs, and when you gamble.

Having recognized such false friends, the wise man should avoid them from afar, for they lead to peril and dread.

Four types of people are to be considered as good-hearted friends, and four reasons for this are given for each:

(1) The helper guards you when you are off your guard, guards your property when you are off your guard; he is a refuge when you are afraid, and he gives you double what you require when you need something for your work.

(2) The friend who is the same in happiness and adversity tells you his secrets, keeps your secrets, does not forsake you when you are in trouble, and lays down even his life for your sake.

(3) The friend who declares what you need to do restrains you from doing wrong, tells you to do what is right, informs you of what you had not heard before, and reveals to you the way to future happy abodes.

(4) The friend who sympathizes does not rejoice over your misfortunes, rejoices over your prosperity, restrains anyone who is speaking ill of you, and commends anyone who is praising you.

Wise people should know that these four types are their friends and should devote themselves to them as a mother devotes herself to her child.

In this same discourse,¹ the Buddha explains how the layman should act towards his friends and companions. He should minister to them with generosity, courtesy, and benevolence, by treating them as he treats himself and by being as good as his word. As a result, his friends and companions will love him, protect him when he is off his guard, and guard his property when he is off his guard. They become his refuge in danger, they will not forsake him in his troubles, and they will show consideration for his family.

On another occasion,² the Buddha explained to King Pasenadi the advantages to be expected if one has a good friend, has good companions, and is inclined to good friends. In order to do so, he said, one must be diligent in good actions. If the king did this, the Buddha told him, then others would follow his example. The nobles and ladies of his court and his subjects in both the town and country would also be diligent. Living in this manner, the king would be guarded and preserved as would be the house of his women and his treasury and storehouses.

More important than friendship that leads to mundane happiness is friendship leading to perfect happiness, Nibbāna. The qualities of a good friend who will lead others to the highest happiness are enumerated.³ The good friend has ten subjects of conversation: talk that is (1) concerned with effacement, (2) favours the mind's release, (3) leads to complete dispassion, (4) to fading, (5) to cessation, (6) to peace, (7) to direct knowledge, (8) to Awakening, (9) to Nibbāna; that is to say, (10) talk on wanting little, contentment, seclusion, aloofness from contact, strenuousness, virtue, concentration,

¹DB III 182 (THIH 467) [D III 190].

²KS I 112-115 [S I 87-89].

³*Path*, Chapter I ¶49.

understanding, deliverance, and knowledge and vision of deliverance. In the good friend's presence, one hears what has not been heard, corrects what has been heard, gets rid of doubt, rectifies one's view, and gains confidence. By training under a good friend, one grows in faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and understanding.

In one discourse, the Buddha emphasizes how essential friendship is in winning liberation. "For the bhikkhu who is a learner and who has not attained mental perfection," he said, "but who dwells with the desire for peace from bondage in his mind, as far as what is called 'an external factor,' I see no other single factor as helpful as possessing good friends.¹ Bhikkhus, he who has good friends abandons the unprofitable (*akusala*) and develops the profitable (*kusala*)." And the Buddha gave the following verse:

<i>Kalyāṇamitto yo bhikkhu</i>	<i>sappaṭisso sagāravo</i>
<i>Karaṃ mittānaṃ vacanaṃ</i>	<i>sampajāno patissato</i>
<i>Pāpuṇe anupubbena</i>	<i>sabbasaṃyojanakkhayaṃ.</i>

The bhikkhu who has a good friend, who is deferential (to him), who is respectful (to him), who does what friends advise, if he is attentive and mindful, he will eventually destroy all the fetters.

Itivuttaka, p. 10²

In *The Gradual Sayings*,³ we find several indications of the importance of having good friends. This is given first in a list of things that have the power to cause good states that have not

¹As Steven Collins points out (*op. cit.*, p. 71, n. 42), the preceding discourse (It 10, MA II 121) and similar parallel discourses at S V 101f. (KS V 84f.) give the best internal (or subjective) factor as "careful attention."

²MA II 122.

³GS I 10-12.

yet arisen to come up and the power to cause evil states already arisen to wane. It is included in lists of the things that lead to great profit (in a general list, and, in lists separating subjective factors and external factors, among the latter).

In *The Kindred Sayings*,¹ the Buddha tells the bhikkhus, “Those for whom you have fellow-feeling, those who may deem you worth listening to, your friends and colleagues, your kinsmen and blood-relations, ought to be roused, admonished and established in the comprehension of the Four Noble Truths.” Similarly,² he says the same people “should be advised about, grounded in, established in the four constituents of attaining the first stage of Awakening, Sotāpanna.” These four constituents are: loyalty to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and being blessed with the virtue dear to Noble Persons—unbroken virtue leading to concentration of the mind. Having good friends is also given as the first of several qualities that are forerunners and harbingers of the arising of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is based on seclusion, dispassion, cessation, and which ends in relinquishing.³ The other qualities are: virtue, desire (to do good), self-possession, the attainment of right view, earnestness, and wise attention.

In *The Gradual Sayings*⁴ the Buddha gives five conditions as belonging to Awakening. The first of these is having a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade. “This may be expected of a bhikkhu who has a good friend, companion, comrade,” the Buddha said, “he will be virtuous, restrained, perfect in behaviour, and will undertake the training. He will

¹KS V 368.

²KS V 317f.

³KS V 27-30.

⁴GS IV 232.

employ right speech. He will dwell strenuous in purpose and will not shirk the burden of righteousness. He will have wisdom and noble penetration concerning the way to the utter destruction of pain (*dukkha*).” In other words, if he has the first condition—a good friend—he will acquire the other four conditions.

The same list of five conditions leading to an emancipated mind is given elsewhere in the same collection.¹ These conditions were explained by the Buddha to Meghiya, who at that time was his attendant. Meghiya had seen a mango grove that was pleasing and beautiful, so he thought to himself that it would be a good place to meditate. He went to ask the Buddha to permit him to meditate in the grove. The Buddha knew that this was not a good place for Meghiya to meditate, but instead of refusing to let him go, he answered a little indirectly, giving Meghiya a hint. “I am alone, Meghiya,” the Buddha said. “Stay a while till some other bhikkhu comes.” But Meghiya did not catch the hint and asked permission three times. In his final answer, the Buddha makes it clear that he is giving permission because Meghiya insists and because to answer otherwise would give the impression the Buddha was discouraging someone from meditating. “What can we say to you, Meghiya, when you repeat: ‘I would strive’?” he said. “Do as you think fit, Meghiya.”

When Meghiya tried to meditate, three sorts of evil thoughts kept coming: sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill-will, and cruel thoughts. This was because in a past life he had been a king in that same place. As he had had wives in that past life, sensual thoughts arose when he tried to meditate, and because he had passed judgement on criminals there, the thoughts of ill-will and cruelty arose. Meghiya thought to himself, “It is

¹GS V 234-237.

amazing and astonishing. By faith alone I have gone forth from home to this homeless state; yet I am still dogged by these evil thoughts.” Then he went to the Buddha and explained everything to him.

The Buddha did not criticize Meghiya, or tell him “I told you so,” or explain away what had happened. Instead, he explained the five conditions leading to an emancipated mind given above: a good friend, being virtuous, right speech, being strenuous in purpose, and being possessed of wisdom. Both these groups of five are completed by four more conditions: (1) reflections on the foul (which is particularly appropriate for bhikkhus) to put away passion, (2) being established in loving kindness to put away ill will, (3) mindfulness of breathing to cut off distractions, and (4) the thought of impermanence (*anicca*) to uproot the conceit “I am.” The first two of these are directly related to the problems Meghiya was having trying to meditate in the mango grove.

This story gives a very good example of why the best good friend of all is the Buddha. He is best able to foresee potential problems for a person. And he understands best what instructions are the most appropriate to give. But, as we can see from Meghiya’s story, even the best of friends cannot force someone to work properly.

In this connection, we might mention the importance of right association as explained in *The Path of Purification*.¹ Avoiding people without understanding and cultivating people with understanding are included among the seven things that lead to the arising of investigation-of-states, one of the factors of Awakening. Avoiding rough people and cultivating refined people are among the eleven things leading to the factor of Awakening of happiness.

¹Chapter IV ¶¶54ff.

The most complete discussion of the good friend as the meditation teacher is found in *The Path of Purification*. This is the aspect of friendship that is most important to anyone who wishes to make an end of suffering. Ashin Buddhaghosa explains in detail what one must do to make progress on the Path of Awakening. First, one must be established in virtue. Next, one should overcome any of the ten impediments one may have. By this is meant impediments to meditation.¹ Briefly stated, they are: being preoccupied about one's dwelling, about one's family, about gain, about one's own students, about building work that is in progress, about travel, about fellow workers, being distracted by illness, by responsibility for the texts, and the supernormal powers of the ordinary person that are hard to maintain. The last is only an impediment for insight as the powers are gained through concentration, but the other nine are all impediments for concentration.

The story given to illustrate the importance of not letting the texts become an impediment is of interest as it shows some important aspects concerning the relationship between teacher and student. At one time, there was an elder who was a Stream-Winner named Tipiṭaka-Cūla-Abhaya. Elder Abhaya assembled the bhikkhus and said that he would explain the three Piṭakas, but this was before he had learned the commentaries. The bhikkhus told him, "Which teachers' teaching is it? Unless you give only the teaching of our own teachers, we shall not let you speak." His preceptor listened to part of his explanation and then advised him to go learn from their own teachers and sent him to Elder Mahā-Dhammarakkhita.

Elder Dhammarakkhita consented to let Elder Abhaya recite the texts by night so that he could give the explanation by day,

¹For details on these, see *Path*, Chapter III ¶¶29-56.

and they went through the canon. After it was over, Elder Dhammarakkhita, who had been teaching Elder Abhaya, sat down on a mat on the ground in front of Elder Abhaya and said, “Friend, explain a meditation subject to me.”

“What are you saying, venerable sir,” Elder Abhaya answered, “have I not heard it all from you? What can I explain to you that you do not already know?”

Then the senior elder said, “The Path is different for one who has actually travelled by it.” So Elder Abhaya consented and taught Elder Dhammarakkhita a meditation subject.

Later, he heard that Elder Dhammarakkhita had attained Nibbāna, and he said, “The Arahāt path befits our teacher, friends. Our teacher was a true thoroughbred. He sat down on a mat before his own Dhamma pupil and said, ‘Explain a meditation subject to me.’ The Arahāt path befits our teacher, friends.”

This story is a good illustration of the type of humility that is required for the next step on the Path to Nibbāna. After establishing himself in virtue and overcoming the impediments, the student “should then approach the good friend, the giver of a meditation subject, and he should learn from among the forty meditation subjects one that suits his own temperament. After that he should avoid a (place) unfavourable to the development of concentration and go to live in one that is favourable. Then he should sever the lesser impediments and not overlook any of the directions for development.”¹

“Meditation subjects are of two kinds,” Ashin Buddhaghosa explains, “that is, generally useful meditation subjects and special meditation subjects. Loving kindness towards the Community of Bhikkhus, etc., and also mindfulness of death are what are called generally useful meditation subjects. ... A

¹*Path*, Chapter III ¶28.

special meditation subject is that one from among the forty meditation subjects that is suitable to a man's own temperament.... So it is the one who gives this twofold meditation subject that is called the giver of a meditation subject.”¹

“It is only the Fully Awakened One who possesses all the aspects of the good friend,” Ashin Buddhaghosa continues. “Since that is so, while he is available, only a meditation subject taken in the Blessed One's presence is well taken. But after his final attainment of Nibbāna, it is proper to take it from any one of the eighty great disciples still living. When they are no longer available, one who wants to take a particular meditation subject should take it from someone with taints (*āsava*) destroyed, (an Arahāt) who has, by means of that particular meditation subject, produced the fourfold and fivefold *jhāna*, and has reached the destruction of the taints by augmenting insight that had that *jhāna* as its proximate cause.”

Then Ashin Buddhaghosa says that an Arahāt will say that he is one whose taints are destroyed—that is to say, he will declare himself to be an Arahāt—when he knows that his instructions will be carried out.

“So if someone with cankers destroyed is available,” Ashin Buddhaghosa continues, “that is good. If not, then one should take (the meditation subject) from a Non-Returner, a Once-Returner, a Stream-Enterer, an ordinary man who has obtained *jhāna*, one who knows the three Piṭakas, one who knows two Piṭakas, one who knows one Piṭaka, in descending order (as available). If not even one who knows one Piṭaka is available, then it should be taken from one who is familiar with one Collection together with its commentary and one who is himself conscientious. For a teacher such as this who knows the

¹*Path*, Chapter III ¶¶57, 60.

texts, guards the heritage, and protects the tradition will follow the teachers' opinion rather than his own."¹

From what is said here, it is obvious that the more highly developed, the further along the path a person is, the better he will be as a good friend. It is noteworthy that knowledge of the texts is so important for the teacher who is an ordinary man, who has not reached at least the first stage of Awakening. This may seem to be in contradiction to the fact that being distracted by responsibility for the texts is included in the impediments to meditation. But Ashin Buddhaghosa makes it clear in his discussion of this impediment that what is meant is neglecting one's meditation through reciting the canon, and this applies to the student, not the teacher. "Guarding the heritage," of course, means keeping the pure Buddha-Dhamma without trying to add to it or to take away from it, and not distorting it in any way. This is particularly difficult for an ordinary person who has not personally experienced for himself the most profound aspects of the Four Noble Truths. So we see that the teacher who is an ordinary person and who knows the texts will guard the heritage and protect the tradition. He will do so through following his own teachers' guidance rather than by relying on his own opinion. Ashin Buddhaghosa concludes the remarks given above by saying, "Therefore the Ancient Elders said three times, 'One who is conscientious will guard (the heritage).'"

Ashin Buddhaghosa next gives some information about the different approaches used by teachers:² "Now those beginning with one whose taints are destroyed mentioned above will describe only the Path they have themselves reached. But with a learned man, his instructions and his answers to questions

¹*Path*, Chapter III ¶¶62-64.

²*Path*, Chapter III ¶65.

are purified by his having approached various teachers, and so he will explain a meditation subject showing a broad track, like a big elephant going through a stretch of jungle, and he will select discourses in the canon and reasons from here and there, adding (explanations of) what is suitable and unsuitable. So a meditation subject should be taken by approaching the good friend such as this, the giver of a meditation subject, and by doing all the duties to him.”

This does not mean that a teacher who uses a broad track is the superior teacher. As we have seen in the story of Elder Abhaya and Elder Dhammarakkhita, the man who knew all the canon and the commentaries on it was the one who approached the man who had attained the first stage of Awakening.

Ashin Buddhaghosa’s discussion of the duties of the meditator towards his teacher applies mainly to bhikkhus. But the basic principle to be applied should be followed by laymen also. This means that one should show every respect to the teacher, being courteous to him. Ashin Buddhaghosa does mention one case when the student may request that the time set for explaining the meditation subject be changed. If he is ill, he should let it be known and propose a time appropriate for him. “For if a meditation subject is expounded at an inconvenient time, one cannot give attention,” Ashin Buddhaghosa says.¹

Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, in his book *The Requisites of Enlightenment*,² discusses wrong teachings and makes many important points concerning the Buddha-Dhamma today that will serve to compliment our discussion of the good friend. Ven. Ledi Sayadaw says that it is essential for laypeople to keep the five precepts (permanent morality, *nicca-sīla*) and this

¹*Path*, Chapter III ¶73.

²*Wheel* nos. 171-174.

leads to good conduct (*caraṇa*). Combined with right knowledge (*vijjā*), this enables them to attain the Paths and the Fruition States. Many people today keep these precepts, but people who have developed perfect concentration are very rare, as are people who have attained insight. “Such people are very rare,” Ledi Sayadaw points out, “because these are times when wrong teachings (*micchā-dhamma*) are ripe—wrong teachings that are likely to cause danger and obstruction to the Dhamma (*dhammantarāya*).”¹

Ven. Ledi Sayadaw then gives an explanation of wrong teachings that we would like to quote at length:²

Wrong Teachings. By wrong teachings likely to cause obstruction to the Dhamma are meant such views, practices, and limitations as the inability to see the dangers of repeated rebirths (*samsāra*), the belief that these are times when the Paths and Fruition States can no longer be attained, the tendency to defer effort until one’s perfections (*pāramī*) ripen, the belief that people today are endowed with only two root-conditions (*dvi-hetuka*),³ and the belief that the great teachers of the past never existed, etc.

Even though it does not reach the ultimate (Nibbāna), no wholesome volitional action (*kusala-kamma*) is ever rendered futile. If effort is made, a wholesome volitional action is instrumental in producing perfection in those who do not possess perfection. If no effort is made, the opportunity to acquire perfection is lost. If those whose perfections are immature put forth effort, their perfections become ripe and mature. Such people can attain the Paths

¹*Op. cit.*, p. 24.

²*Op. cit.*, 25f.

³That is to say, people today are only capable of non-greed and non-hatred and cannot attain non-delusion.

and Fruition States in their next existence within the present Dispensation (*Sāsana*). If no effort is made, the opportunity for the perfection (that is immature) to ripen is lost. If those whose perfection is ripe and mature put forth effort, the Paths and the Fruition States can be attained within this life. If no effort is made, the opportunity to attain the Paths and Fruition States is lost.

If people with only two root-conditions put forth effort, they can become endowed with all three root-conditions (*ti-hetuka*) in their next existence. If they do not put forth effort, they cannot ascend from the stage of having two root-conditions and will slide down to the stage of being without any root-conditions (*ahetuka*).

Suppose there is a person who plans to become a bhikkhu. If another person says to him, “Only entertain the intention if you can remain a monk all your life. Otherwise, don’t entertain the idea.” This would amount to obstructing the Dhamma.

The Buddha said, “I declare that the mere arising of an intention of performing good deeds is productive of great benefit.”¹

To disparage either the act of generosity (*dāna*) or to discourage the person who is generous may invoke the obstruction of the Dhamma for a person; that is to say, he causes obstruction to the performance of meritorious actions. If acts of virtue, concentration, and insight, or if those who perform these acts are disparaged, it may be an obstruction of the Dhamma. If obstruction to meritorious actions is caused, one is liable to be bereft of power and influence, of property and riches, and one may be abjectly poor in future lives. If obstruction to the Dhamma is

¹MLS I 55.

caused, one is liable to be defective in conduct and behaviour and defective of sense and thus utterly low and debased in the existences that follow. Hence, all beware!

In the discourse to Venerable Cunda that Ledi Sayadaw quotes above, the Buddha pointed out the importance of working on one's own development in order to help others.¹ "This situation does not occur, Cunda," he said, "when one sunk in the mud will by himself pull out another who is sunk in the mud. But this situation occurs, Cunda, when one not sunk in the mud will by himself pull out another who is sunk in the mud.

"This situation does not occur, Cunda, when one who is not tamed, not trained, not utterly quenched, will by himself tame, train, make another utterly quenched. But this situation occurs, Cunda, when one who is tamed, trained, utterly quenched, will by himself tame, train, make another utterly quenched."

¹MLS I 56.

INSIGHT MEDITATION: THE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM DEVELOPING VIPASSANĀ

*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upasampadā,
Sacittapariyodapanam, etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ.*

Not doing any evil, undertaking skilful actions,
Purifying one's mind: this is the teaching of the Buddhas.

Dhammapada v 183; Dīgha-nikāya I 49

These verses sum up in a few words what the Buddha taught during the forty-five years after his Awakening. They are part of the original brief instructions for the monks (bhikkhus) which the Buddha Gotama said were given by a former Buddha named Vipassī.¹ It is a résumé of the rules to follow and was used when the members of the Saṅgha, the Community of Bhikkhus, were very pure and did not need detailed rules.

For us today, no doubt, a fuller explanation will be helpful. There are three aspects to the training taught by the Buddha: (1) First, there is morality (*sīla*). This is what is meant by doing no evil. Leading a moral life will be the foundation on which the other steps are built. (2) Developing concentration (*samādhi*) is the next step. By learning to concentrate the mind we can acquire temporary purity and develop the instrument which is necessary for making significant progress. This is what is meant by undertaking skilful actions. (3) Understanding the true nature of our own minds and bodies is possible through insight meditation. This is true wisdom (*paññā*) and will lead to lasting purity. This is what is meant by purifying one's own mind.

¹See D II 49 (DB II 38f.) and Dhp-a III 236f. (BL III 60f.). In BL these verses are part of the Pātimokkha given by the seven Buddhas preceding Buddha Gotama.

Let us look in more detail at this third step. Our teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, compared concentration of the mind with a powerful magnifying lens. This lens can be used to examine the inherent tendencies which exist within oneself, he said.¹ The meditation student can become sensitive to the processes which are constantly taking place inside his own mind and body. In the terminology of modern-day science, we would say he is put in touch with the sub-atomic reactions that are constantly going on within all living beings. Once the student is engrossed in these sensations, he realizes that his physical body is changing mass, and that the mental awareness of these changes is constantly changing as well. In this way, the student experiences for himself one of the three basic truths that apply to all conditioned phenomena: they are all changing, *Anicca*. None of them is permanent, eternal.

The other two characteristics of conditioned phenomena are: all conditioned states are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and all phenomena—whether conditioned or unconditioned—are without self (*anattā*). These three conditions are like three legs holding up a stool. If we can understand one of them, we can understand all three, just as we can make the stool fall down by removing any one of the three legs.

Of these three characteristics, *anicca* or change is the most appropriate one to try to understand for most people. Our attachment to our ego is so strong, it is very difficult to begin by seeing through the illusion that there is some eternal soul within. There is a risk that we will either play games with mental concepts or that we will fall into the trap of thinking that lack of self means annihilation.

¹ For this discussion, see *Dhamma Texts* by Sayagyi U Ba Khin (Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust, U.K., 1991), p. 68.

Venerable Ledi Sayadaw of Myanmar pointed out that a full appreciation of unsatisfactoriness, or, as the word *dukkha* is often translated, suffering, is also very difficult.¹ It is only when the highest level of Awakening, Arahatsip, has been attained that *dukkha* is fully understood.

In several discourses, the Buddha pointed out how understanding impermanence leads to understanding the other two characteristics.² He spoke of the mind and body as being impermanent. “Whatever is impermanent is unsatisfactory. Whatever is unsatisfactory is not self.”³ As Sayagyi U Ba Khin points out, we can start with the fundamental concept of *anicca*: change is taking place at all times in everything that exists, whether animate or inanimate. It follows, therefore, that *dukkha*, suffering, is innate in everything that is the result of a cause. This is because every part of a living being is made up of minute particles, called *kalāpas* in Buddhism, and they are in a state of perpetual combustion.

Finally, the last characteristic of *anattā*, no-self, is reached. “As the course of meditation progresses,” Sayagyi wrote, “the student comes to the realization that there is no substantiality in his so-called self, and there is no such thing as the core of a being. Eventually he breaks down the ego-centralism in himself--both in respect to mind and body. He then emerges out of meditation with a new outlook—ego-less and selfless—alive to the fact that whatever happens in this universe is subject to the fundamental laws of cause and effect.

¹See his Uttamapurisa-dīpanī (*An Exposition on the Greatest Man*). An English translation has been prepared by U Tin U.

²See, for example, S III 45 (KS III 39f.) and S IV 1 f. (KS IV 1 f.).

³See for example D III 227 (DB III 219), M I 37 (MLS I 47).

He knows, with his inward eye, the illusory nature of the separate self.”¹

In Vipassanā courses in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, this understanding of the changes taking place within is developed through a very simple technique. Once the students have reached a satisfactory level in concentration, they then go through their bodies systematically, experiencing whatever sensation is present in the various parts of the body when they place their attention there. The method is very straightforward and does not involve imagination, analyzing the anatomy, or provoking sensations. The students simply observe the reality of whatever sensation is present, or, at times, they observe a lack of sensation. With practice, the students are able to feel subtler and subtler sensations, until finally, the successful students will be able to understand the true nature of their mind and body and go beyond the sensations.

The Six Qualities of the Dhamma

It is possible today, to find out for oneself the truth of what the Buddha taught twenty-five centuries ago. This Teaching, the Dhamma, has six qualities which give us a good idea of why it is still so up-to-date and useful to us all today.

These six qualities are:²

- (1) the Truth, the Dhamma, has been well taught by the Buddha,
- (2) it is visible here and now,
- (3) it is immediate in its results,
- (4) it invites inspection,
- (5) it leads forward, and
- (6) it can be personally experienced by the wise.

¹*Dhamma Texts*, p. 69.

²See, for example, D III 227 (DB III 219), M I 37 (MLS I 47).

Ashin Buddhaghosa explains these six qualities in detail in his commentary, *The Path of Purification*.¹ The fact that the Dhamma has been well taught by the Buddha means that it is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end. He showed the life of purity in all its details. The Dhamma can be followed by those who are ready to listen. It is unequivocal and reasonable. Nothing has been left out and nothing remains that should be added. Sayagyi summed up this quality as follows: “The Dhamma is not the result of conjecture or speculation, but the result of personal attainments, and it is precise in every respect.”²

The Dhamma is visible here and now because it can be seen by those who attain insight into their own minds and bodies. Once we see it truly, it will conquer all the negative forces within that have kept us bound to continued suffering. As Sayagyi said, “The Dhamma produces beneficial results here and now for those who practise it in accordance with the techniques evolved by the Buddha.”

The Dhamma is immediate because it bears fruit without delay. If we are only striving for future worldly happiness by doing good volitional deeds, such as being generous, the results may be a long time in coming, but if we work for the true happiness to be gained by insight into the unconditioned state of Nibbāna, we will find the results are instantaneous. “The effect of the Dhamma on the person practising it,” Sayagyi said, “is immediate in that it has the quality of simultaneously removing the causes of suffering [as] the understanding of the Truth of Suffering [is gained].”

The Dhamma invites inspection. It exists and it is pure. When the Buddha invites us to discover the truth for our-

¹Chapter VII ¶¶69-79.

²For these quotations on the six qualities see *Dhamma Texts*, pp. 64f.

selves, he is not like someone who is empty-handed or who proposes something impure. As Sayagyi put it, “The Dhamma can stand the test of those who are anxious to try it. They can know for themselves what the benefits are.”

The Dhamma leads us to final liberation. Thus, it is worthy of our treating it as a shelter that will offer protection if we realize it for ourselves. It leads us on by the Noble Path to Nibbāna. “The Dhamma is part of one's self,” Sayagyi said, “and is therefore susceptible to ready investigation.”

Finally, the Dhamma can be personally experienced by the wise. The key word here is “the wise”, for it is only those who work themselves who attain liberation. It is not something someone else can give us. We must work for it ourselves. As Sayagyi points out, by the wise are meant those who attain one of the four stages of Awakening.

The Benefits of Meditation¹

Practising true Buddhist meditation will begin to give results long before we reach the final goal. And it can be helpful to people from all walks of life and of other religions. As Sayagyi pointed out:

It is a common belief that a man whose power of concentration is good and who can secure a perfect balance of mind at will can achieve better results than a person who is not so developed. There are, therefore, definitely many advantages that accrue to a person who undergoes a successful course of training in meditation, whether he be a religious man, an administrator, a politician, a businessman or a student.

¹This section is based on *Dhamma Texts*. See in particular pages 37, 69, and 77-79.

Sayagyi knew from personal experience that loving kindness reinforced with the power of Truth makes a tangible difference for the better in the domain of human relations.

The most important benefit of true Buddhist meditation is the highest goal of full Awakening, Nibbāna. But Sayagyi did not limit his teachings only to people who accepted this as their primary goal. He welcomed people of other beliefs, or who had no belief, encouraging them to make as much progress as possible, and he pointed out that there are “very minor by-products” of meditation which to many will seem major goals.

Today is not the age for showing miracles, Sayagyi said. It is rather a time for people to find out through their own experience how meditation can remove the physical and mental ills they suffer from.

Concentration will help us calm down our agitated, worried minds. It will help us work more efficiently, and enable us to stop being the helpless victims of our own anger, hatred, lust, and strong desires. Learning to control our mind, to have it stay on a subject when we place it there, will enable us to dissolve the darkness clouding our mind and mentally see its inherent luminosity.

Sayagyi pointed out that Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, all have a tradition of working for the inner light that arises when the mind is concentrated and pure. This is usually considered to be extremely difficult, but he found that “under the proper guide, the inner peace and purity of mind with light can be secured by one and all irrespective of their religion or creed.”

In Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā*) as taught by Sayagyi U Ba Khin, the student goes beyond concentration. He or she gains a proper understanding of the positive forces associated with good actions and the negative forces associated with bad actions. Through directly experiencing the impermanence

(*anicca*) of the positive and negative reactions which are taking place in our bodies at all times, we come to know nature as it truly is. This direct knowing of inner changes brings into action the sparkling illumination of the power of the unconditioned and unchanging (*Nibbāna-dhātu*). This power can do more than give the temporary purification that comes with concentrating the mind. It can dispel impurities or poisons which are the products of past bad actions and which are the source of our physical and mental ills. *Nibbāna-dhātu* eliminates negative forces just as fire burns up fuel.

Sayagyi had students who suffered from such illnesses as hypertension, T.B., migraine, asthma, thrombosis, etc. Their very first ten-day course was able to give them relief, and some students through continued practice and longer courses were able to root out their diseases altogether. It is not always easy, of course. And upheavals are to be expected. These can grow in intensity, “so much so,” Sayagyi wrote, “that one might feel as though his body were just electricity and a mass of suffering.” Many are the people who have gone through such experiences and come out purified of the root causes of their suffering.

Sayagyi said that even one of the most dreaded menaces to our health could be overcome through meditation:

Mankind today is facing the danger of radioactive poisons. If such poisons absorbed by a man exceed the maximum permissible concentration (m.p.c.), he enters the danger zone.

I have a firm belief that the *Nibbāna-dhātu* which a person in true Buddhist Meditation develops is *power* that will be strong enough to eradicate the radioactive poisons, if any, in him.

THE MIDDLE PRACTICE

“Kāmesu brahmacariyavā Metteyā” ti Bhagavā

“vītataṇho sadā sato

Saṅkhāya nibbuto bhikkhu tassa no santi iñjita.

So ubh’ antam abbhiññāya majjhe mantā na lippati

Taṃ brūmi mahāpariso ti so idha sibbanim accagā” ti.

“The bhikkhu who lives the holy life amidst sensual pleasures, Mettaya,” said the Blessed One, “with craving gone, always mindful, quenched after consideration—for him, there are no commotions.

“That thinker, knowing both ends, does not cling to the middle. Him I call a great man. He has gone beyond the seamstress here.”

Sutta-nipata vv 1041-1042¹

The Buddha began his first discourse² by saying that the way to Nibbāna, the end of all suffering, was the middle practice (*majjhima paṭipāda*). This discourse was very appropriate for the five ascetics to whom he was speaking. They had known him as the prince who gave up all the comforts of life as a layman in order to search for the ultimate truth. They had helped him when he tried extreme ascetic practices. In his description of these practices,³ the Buddha said that he had tried all sorts of extremes of heat and cold, he ate so little he fell down in a faint, and he even stopped his breath.

¹The translation is based on K.R. Norman’s GD II vv. 1041-1042.

²BD IV 15-19, KS V 356-360.

³MLS I 103-108.

The Buddha's control over his own mind, even before his Awakening, was so complete that these extremes did not disturb his thoughts. He realized, however, that with the body so disturbed, it would be impossible to reach his goal. He decided to follow a moderate approach, eating enough to keep his body going comfortably. The five ascetics did not understand. They thought he had given up and returned to a life of luxury. They decided to leave him, and so, the Buddha was alone when he reached his goal.

He taught these same five ascetics first because they had been so helpful to him. As always, his discourse is perfectly suited to his audience. He begins by telling them that a person who has gone forth from lay life should avoid two extremes. One extreme is connected with sensual desire and means one is attached to the sensual pleasures of a life of luxury which is inferior, vulgar, associated with the ordinary man, ignoble, and associated with what is unprofitable. The other extreme is being attached to exhausting oneself, which is misery, ignoble, and associated with what is unprofitable.

The middle practice, he said, produces vision, produces knowledge, leads to tranquillity, personal knowledge, to perfect Awakening, to Nibbāna. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, which we can sum up in the three aspects of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

The Buddha specifically mentions this moderate approach as appropriate for those who have renounced lay life. But what about laypeople? Can they also follow the middle practice? The answer is to be found in a discourse which the Buddha gave to a village chieftain named Rāsiya.¹

Rāsiya asked the Buddha if it was true that the Buddha categorically disapproved of and condemned all ascetics who

¹KS IV 234-244.

led severe lives, that he censured all asceticism. The Buddha says that he has been misrepresented and in his discourse he makes clear that there is a difference between saying that extreme ascetic practices are to be censured and saying that everything done by the person who follows them is to be censured.

Of particular interest to us, however, is what the Buddha has to say concerning those who have not given up sensual pleasures. He included this, no doubt, because a discussion of the ascetic practices without any mention of the other extreme would have been incomplete, and this other extreme was more pertinent to Rāsiya as a layman.

The Buddha begins with the same instructions he gave in the first part of his discourse, which we have already mentioned, but here, instead of continuing with the Four Noble Truths, he shows what is to be censured and what is to be praised concerning those who either practise extreme asceticism or lead lives surrounded by sensual pleasures.

The Buddha says the following actions are to be censured in those who enjoy sensual pleasures:

- (1) seeking possessions through violent means which are immoral (*adhamma*),
- (2) not making oneself happy and satisfied,
- (3) not doing meritorious deeds,
- (4) enjoying the use of one's possessions, even if they are acquired without using immoral, violent means, while being addicted to, infatuated with, and bound to them, not seeing the danger (in this), and not knowing how to escape.

The opposite of these wrong actions is praiseworthy. That is to say, in this context, the Buddha gives the following actions as the proper measure of lay life:

(1) Possessions—or we might say “earning one’s living”—should be sought through moral, non-violent means. This, of course, is given in more detail by the Buddha in many other discourses. If a layperson practises the precepts of not killing, not stealing, and not lying, then right livelihood will be attained.

(2) We should work for our own happiness and satisfaction. One of the most important motivations for all people is the pursuit of happiness. It is often assumed that trying to be happy is selfish and entails neglecting others, but if we have a fuller understanding of human nature we come to realize that not only must we find happiness ourselves before we can help others, but that harming others will make us unhappy.

(3) We should do meritorious deeds. This aspect can be summed up by generosity. As will be seen in the last point, it is important to work for true happiness which goes beyond material possessions. In order to do this, we should be generous with the goal of attaining Nibbāna.

(4) We should enjoy the use of our possessions without being addicted to, infatuated with, or bound to them. We should see the danger in this and know how to escape. As laypeople, we do not have to be blinded by greed. We can live moral lives, remembering that the highest happiness is in ending the suffering that inevitably accompanies conditioned existence. We can be aware of the danger of being slaves of our possessions. The happiness associated with them is short-lived. If we crave for them, we will be unhappy when we do not get what we want. We will be unhappy when we obtain what we do not want. In this way, we can be aware of the danger in being attached to possessions.

Knowing the way to escape from this danger means understanding the Buddha’s Teachings. This is only possible through putting them into practice. It is possible for those who

live surrounded by the pleasures of the senses to do more than lead moral lives, share their possessions, and do meritorious actions. If we do not go further, we will only be making sure that in future lives we will have good fortune, but there is only one way to escape the possibility that some wrong action of ours will bring us great suffering, and that is to develop our concentration and then use this concentration to develop insight into the true nature of conditioned existence. This insight will lead to experiencing the true happiness of the ultimate goal, Nibbāna.

If we could always do good, it would be possible to have eternal happiness in life after life, but for most of us, our actions are a combination of good and bad actions. This is clearly shown in this discourse by the Buddha, for he tells Rāsiya that there are three types of people who enjoy pleasures:

- (1) those who seek possessions through violent means which are immoral,
- (2) those who seek possessions through both violent and non-violent means which are either moral or immoral, and
- (3) those who seek possessions only through non-violent, moral means.

Most of us come under the second, mixed category. In fact, it is only those who have passed beyond the stage of the ordinary individual and who are firmly established in at least the first of the four stages of Awakening who are assured of not doing actions that may lead to the lower worlds of great suffering. Even those who have reached the highest stage of Arahatsip may experience the physically painful results of past bad actions.

The better our control is over our mind, the better we will be able to understand not only the difference between good and wrong actions, but even more important, the truth concerning our existence, our world. This is why Sayagyi U Ba Khin dedicated so much of his time and energy to practising and teaching Buddhist meditation to others. He chose one of the many methods taught by the Buddha that enables us to concentrate our minds, to control our minds and make them stay on a given object. Sayagyi taught the development of the mind through mindfulness of the breath (*Ānāpāna*). Once a good level of concentration is reached, the students then develop their understanding by gaining insight (*Vipassanā*) into the reality of suffering and its origin by observing the physical sensations within the body and appreciating their ever-changing, unsatisfactory nature. At the same time, an appreciation of the ever-changing nature of the accompanying mental states is also gained.

Laypeople may not be able to renounce the pleasures of family life and of owning many possessions, but it is possible to set aside periods each day to work on their concentration and insight. Ten-day retreats can be made from time to time in order to lessen the day-to-day distractions of lay life and make more progress on the path to true happiness. In this way, students of Buddhist meditation are able to practise the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to Awakening, to the end of all ignorance. This Path, as we have seen, is the middle practice, the moderate path that avoids the two extremes of being submerged in deceptive, temporary sensual pleasures or being tormented by exaggerated ascetic practices.

In his discourse to Rāsiya, the Buddha goes on to explain that those who leave lay life in order to follow exhausting practices can attain praiseworthy states and states which are to be censured. Their motivation in torturing themselves comes

from their belief that by doing so they will be assured of attaining a profitable mental state (*kusala-dhamma*) and will see for themselves a truly distinctive, noble knowledge and vision (*ariya-ñāṇa-dassana-visesa*) through transcending the human mental state (*uttara-manussa-dhammā*). The method they use is to be censured. If they attain either of these goals, that is praiseworthy.

In other discourses, the Buddha says that some ascetics who practise severe austerities can be reborn in heavenly worlds.¹ This is possible if they are able to make skilful mental states increase and unskilful mental states decrease,² but such practices cannot lead to the complete destruction of suffering.³ Exaggerated effort, unbalanced effort, will not lead to the ultimate goal. The Buddha discovered that uninterrupted thought and uninterrupted investigating for too long a time makes the body weary, and if the body is weary, the mind will be agitated. When the mind is agitated, it is not concentrated. Progress towards Nibbāna can only be made when the mind is steady, calm, one-pointed, and concentrated.⁴

In the West today, we do not see people renouncing lay life and undergoing severe ascetic practices, but many people do have the mistaken idea that if they subject themselves to physical and mental suffering, this will in some way purify them. Special diets or fasting, going without sleep, or adopting painful physical postures are some of the exaggerations attempted with regard to the body. Indulging thoughts of self-reproach and guilt, or entertaining thoughts of doubt about the

¹DB I 224.

²GS V 132.

³MLS I 108.

⁴MLS I 150.

method of work or about one's own ability, are examples of mental torture.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin instructed his students to avoid all self torture. He used the term "zestful ease" to describe the right approach. This means that the student should work directly on developing concentration and insight as long as the mind is able to remain steady, calm, and one-pointed. When the student finds that the work is physically tiring, then he or she should give the body rest. In this way, it will be possible to continue the effort to maintain a calm mind at all times.

It is very important that we correctly understand what is meant by the middle way, the moderate practice. The English expression "the golden mean"¹ expresses the idea very well. It is defined as meaning, "the way of wisdom and safety between extremes; sufficiency without excess; moderation."² It is all too easy, however, to incorrectly identify the extremes and in this way to come up with a medium path that is still a wrong path. We could take any of the basic five moral precepts and say that we will not go to extremes but only break them with moderation. This, of course, would be entirely wrong.

In the first sermon and in the discourse to Rāsiya, the Buddha identifies the middle practice as being the Noble Eightfold Path. In other discourses, we find explanations which expand on this and make it plain that this path includes all efforts which lead to the goal of the cessation of suffering. In the first sermon, it is clear that the Noble Eightfold Path is for understanding the Four Noble Truths.

In the discourse to Rāsiya, the Buddha explains that three things are instantaneous, not subject to decay, immediate,

¹Adapted from a Latin poem by Horace (Odes II x 5): *aurea mediocritas*.

²*Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (1922).

invite one to come and see, lead onwards, and are to be experienced by the wise for themselves.¹ These three things are the elimination of the three roots which are present when unwholesome deeds are done: desire (*rāga*),² hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).³

Venerable Sāriputta identifies the middle practice in similar terms. The middle practice is the Noble Eightfold Path and it gets rid of greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*). Its qualities of producing vision and knowledge, and leading to tranquillity, personal knowledge, perfect Awakening, and Nibbāna, are the antithesis of ignorance. Venerable Sāriputta goes on to identify other pairs in place of greed and hatred. In leading to Nibbāna, the path eliminates anger (*kodha*) and enmity (*upanāho*), hypocrisy (*makkho*) and malice (*paḷāsa*), envy (*issā*) and selfishness (*macchera*), deceit (*māyā*) and treachery (*sātheyya*), stubbornness (*thambha*) and impetuosity (*sārambha*), arrogance (*māna*) and pride (*atimāno*), conceit (*mada*) and indolence (*pamāda*).

In several other discourses, the middle practice is identified with the understanding of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).⁴ In answer to questions put by bhikkhus and laymen, the Buddha explains that to adopt wrong beliefs is to go to extremes which will make progress impossible. These wrong beliefs include those based on existence or non-

¹These qualities are those of the Dhamma. One quality, “not subject to decay” (*nijjara*) is not included in other passages (see, for example, MLS I 47), and another, “it is well taught by the Blessed One,” is not mentioned here.

²A synonym of *lobha*.

³Desire is eliminated by the person who is filled with passion (*ratta*), hatred by the evil person (*duṭṭha*), and delusion by the bewildered person (*mūḷha*).

⁴KS II 12f., 17-19, 44, 52f., 53; III 113f.

existence, those based on an enduring self or a self that need not be responsible for its actions, or those based on the dogma that the body and life principle are the same or that they are different. The middle practice is to observe the conditioned nature of existence in order to understand the arising of suffering and its cessation.

One Sutta is particularly appropriate in connection with the middle practice and dependent origination. The verses with which we began were given by the Buddha in answer to questions posed by Tissa Metteyya: “Who is contented here in the world? For whom are there no agitations? What thinker, knowing both extremes, does not cling to the middle? Whom do you call a great man? Who has gone beyond the seamstress here?”¹

A group of elders discussed these questions and offered a number of explanations for the two extremes and the middle way.² The first bhikkhu to give an explanation said that the two extremes are contact (*phassa*) and the arising of contact (*phassa-samudaya*). The middle is the cessation of contact (*phassa-nirodha*). Other bhikkhus said that the following were to be included: the past (*atīta*) and future (*anāgata*) as extremes, the present (*paccuppanna*) as the middle; pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*) as extremes, neither pleasure nor pain (*adukkha-m-asukha*) as the middle; mind (*nāma*) and body (*rūpa*) as extremes, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as the middle; the six internal senses (*cha ajjhāttikāni āyatanāni*) and six external objects of the senses (*cha bāhirāni āyatanāni*) as extremes, consciousness as the middle; the individuality made up of the five aggregates (*sakkāya*) and the arising of that

¹Sn v. 1040; this translation is based on K.R. Norman’s in GD.

²GS III 284-286.

individuality (*sakkāya-samudaya*) as extremes, the cessation of that individuality (*sakkāya-nirodha*) as the middle.

All the bhikkhus identified the seamstress as desire (*taṇhā*), because it truly sews one to rebirth in various lives. In so far as a person knows the knowable and comprehends the comprehensible, knowing the knowable and comprehending the comprehensible, to that extent a person is one who puts an end to suffering in the present existence.

When the bhikkhus asked the Buddha which answer was the best, he replied that all the answers were correct, but he himself would give the answer of the first bhikkhu.

These answers are of special interest to students of Vipassanā meditation. The goal is clearly stated: it is the end of suffering. This must be done through understanding in order to escape from the binding power of desire. In the twelve links of dependent origination, the Buddha explained the arising and cessation of suffering. The terms given by the Buddha and bhikkhus can be related to these links whose arising leads to suffering and whose cessation leads to liberation.

The two extremes in the explanation preferred by the Buddha are contact and the arising of contact. Contact arises dependent on the six senses. Contact ceases when sensations (*vedanā*) cease, and sensations are the basis for the arising of craving, which is identified here as the very thing that binds us to continued suffering.

The other explanations are very close to this one. Dependent origination takes place in the past, present, and future, but it is only in the present that we can do something about cutting through the bonds that tie us to continued suffering. Reacting to pleasant and painful sensations gives rise to desire and hatred. Sensations which are neither pleasant nor painful are

associated with ignorance.¹ All three types of these sensations are impermanent, so we should not cling to any of them.² They arise through contact, and when contact ceases, they cease as well.³ The entity of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) arises because of consciousness. Once this is correctly understood, there will be no more attachment to these. The combination of the various aggregates which is wrongly considered to be a lasting self (*sakkāya*) must also be correctly understood as arising and vanishing.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin selected the method which is most appropriate for laypeople in developing insight. Contact between the senses and stimuli result in sensations. If these sensations are observed to be continually arising and ceasing, as being impermanent (*anicca*), it is possible to stop desire from arising. Experiencing the arising and ceasing that is taking place within our own minds and bodies will lead to true knowledge. The physical sensations in the body are the only ones arising that are immediately experienced as pleasant, painful, or neutral. Therefore, they enable us to develop equanimity by letting go attachment to the pleasant sensations, aversion to the painful sensations, and we can overcome our lack of understanding by seeing the impermanence of the neutral sensations.

As the student of Buddhist meditation makes progress in the control of the mind and understanding of impermanence, the moderate approach will have to be fine-tuned. At first, it may be necessary to struggle just to follow the moral precepts and practise meditation regularly. The temptation at times to make an exhausting forced effort will have to be resisted. With

¹MLS I 366.

²MLS II 179

³KS II 67.

time, the student will develop good habits and become established in the practice.

Once established, times will come when boredom sets in, or complacency. Then it will be necessary to summon up more effort. Finer and finer distinctions will need to be made in keeping the attention properly balanced as it carries on with the essential task of observing what is happening in the body and mind.

It is important to always remember that the goal is the end of all suffering. This is what is meant when the Buddha says in his answer to Tissa Metteyya that the liberated person does not cling to the middle. Practising meditation is the way to make progress on the path leading to Nibbāna. Once the goal is reached, the path is no longer clung to. This does not mean that we should underestimate the importance of the path, but we should be careful not to be attached to past experiences. When the breathing becomes more subtle or when sensations become very subtle, we must not be disappointed. We should rather continue our observation in order to come to the cessation of all these results of past volitional actions.

PRACTISING THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA AS LAYMEN*

In *The Essentials of the Buddha-Dhamma in Meditation Practice*, Sayagyi U Ba Khin points out that during the Buddha's lifetime there were around ninety million people living in Sāvatti and the neighbouring countryside.¹ Of these, approximately fifty million were Ariyas, having reached the first stage of Awakening. We can conclude from these figures that the number of laymen who took to Vipassanā (insight meditation) must have been more than those who were in the Orders of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. Laymen of today should therefore be encouraged in their effort to put into practice the Teachings of the Buddha in their everyday lives. It can be done.

In the collection of the Suttas, there are a number of discourses given by the Buddha to laypeople. Let us look at one given to the brahman householders of Sālā and Verañjā.²

* This talk was given by Sayagyi U Chit Tin on October 12, 1985, to mark the seventh anniversary of when Mother Sayamagyi and he came out of Myanmar to teach the Buddha-Dhamma in the West. It was printed in *The Maha Bodhi*, Vol. 94, nos. 1-3 (1986), pp. 2-8, and *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. VII, n° 3 (1987), pp. 18-25.

¹In Sn-a I 371, 18 crores (180 million) people are mentioned (see DPPN II 1127). Sāvatti was the capital of Kosala and one of the six great cities of India during the lifetime of the Buddha (D II 147). Ashin Buddhaghosa says that Sāvatti was the capital of two countries: Kāsi-Kosala (Sp III 614), so the number of inhabitants mentioned in Sn-a may refer to both countries, and the number in Sāvatti itself might have been half that number.

²M n° 41, n° 42 (MLS I 343-350).

The circumstances of this talk are similar to several others given to laypeople. The people of Sālā and Verañjā had heard of the Buddha and of his reputation. They approached him with a question often asked by laypeople. They wished to know why some people were reborn in lower planes of existence and why others were reborn in the higher planes.

The Buddha answers this question—but he also adds that it is possible to aspire to something far greater than heavenly worlds. The Buddha first gave a very concise reply to their question: some people go to lower worlds including the hells because they live unrighteously and live unbalanced lives; some people go to heavenly worlds through living righteously (*Dhamma-cariyā*) and because they live balanced lives (*sama-cariyā*).

The laymen of each town said that they did not understand the full meaning of what the Buddha had said and they requested that he give them a full explanation. The Buddha then explained that unrighteous living—that is to say, not following the Dhamma—involves wrong actions: unbalanced physical, verbal, and mental actions. On the other hand, righteous living, which follows the Dhamma and is balanced, means actions which are of the opposite kind. In summarizing the Buddha's discourse, we will emphasize the type of life which follows the Dhamma.

The Buddha mentions three kinds of actions of the body. Unrighteous and unbalanced living means killing, stealing, and indulging in sensual pleasures—wrong sexual practices are mentioned in particular. Righteous and balanced living means refraining from killing—a person will lay aside stick and sword, live scrupulously, and be merciful, kindly and compassionate to all living creatures. Such a person does not take what is not given and he restrains himself from indulging in wrong actions with regard to sensual pleasures. Here the

Buddha specifies that a man does not have intercourse with women who are under the protection of others. We can infer from the list that all sexual relations outside of marriage are to be avoided.

There are four kinds of speech. Unrighteous and unbalanced speech includes lies, slander, harsh speech, and frivolous chatter. A person who follows the Dhamma will abandon lying. If he is called as a witness, he will tell what he knows and what he has seen, but if he does not know something, he will say so. He will not intentionally lie for his own sake, for someone else's sake, or in order to obtain material gain.

In avoiding slander, a person will not repeat what he has heard in order to set people against each other. He will work to reconcile those who are disputing and to bring friends close together. He will take pleasure in concord rather than discord. He will delight in concord. It will be a joy to him and will motivate his speech.

In abandoning harsh speech, a person will say what is gentle, pleasing, affectionate, going to the heart, courteous, and pleasant to many people. This is in contrast to the wrong kind of speech which is rough, hard, severe on others, abusive of others, bordering on wrath and not conducive to concentration.

In contrast to indulging in frivolous chatter, a person will speak at the right time, in accordance with fact. He will speak about the goal, about the Dhamma, about discipline. What he says will be worth treasuring. His similes will be timely, with a purpose, and related to the goal.

In a discourse to the bhikkhus, the Buddha distinguished between two kinds of right speech. The first kind of right speech will lead to future lives. It will have taints and will involve clinging to future existence (but it will be on the side

of merit). It involves abstaining from the four kinds of wrong speech: lying, slander, harsh speech and gossiping. The second kind of right speech is Noble (*ariyan*), free of taints, supramundane and part of the Path to Nibbāna. In addition to abstaining from, refraining from, avoidance of and restraint from the four kinds of wrong speech, one should develop the Noble Path through Noble thoughts, thoughts free of the taints, and one should know the Path.¹

The right actions of body and speech that the Buddha taught to the laymen of Sālā and Verañjā are included in the precepts for virtuous living followed by all true Buddhists. The minimum number of precepts, which must be respected at all times, are the five precepts. These include four righteous actions of the body: not killing, not stealing, and abstaining from indulging in sensual pleasures, including adultery and taking intoxicants. The fifth precept is to abstain from lying. So we can see that here, the Buddha gives a more detailed explanation of the control over verbal actions. A group of eight precepts (*ājivatṭhamaka-sīla*) for laypeople includes these four types of right speech.² In addition, there are the three types of right kindly actions the Buddha gave the people of Sālā and Verañjā and the eighth precept is right livelihood.

Of particular interest in this discourse of the Buddha's is the fact that he speaks of mental actions as well as actions of body and speech. The three kinds of unrighteous and unbalanced thoughts include coveting other people's property, being malevolent and corrupt in thought and purpose, and being of wrong view. (These kinds of thoughts have the three roots of wrong action at their source: greed, hatred and delusion

¹M III 73f. (MLS III 116f.).

²For more details about *ājivatṭhamaka-sīla*, see Ledi Sayadaw, *The Requisites of Enlightenment* (Wheel 171/174).

[*lobha, dosa, moha*].) The absence of these three roots will lead to the three kinds of righteous and balanced thoughts.

A person should not covet other people's property. He should not be malevolent in mind or corrupt in his thoughts and purpose. He should think to himself, "May others be friendly, peaceful, secure, happy, and protect themselves." He should have right view, which includes thinking correctly concerning worldly affairs. He should believe that for a person who gives there will be a future result, that sacrifice will give future results, that actions that are well done or badly done will give appropriate results. He should believe that this world exists, as does a world beyond, that fulfilling one's duty to one's mother and father gives good results, that there are beings who are spontaneously reborn, and that there are those in the world who live correctly and who teach about this world and the world beyond, having understood them with their own higher knowledge.

This development of right thoughts will prove to be useful in doing right actions. A person who is free of desire for other people's property will not steal. Those who are free of hatred will not kill, they will not wish to lie or slander or use harsh words. Those who correctly understand the results of actions will not indulge in these kinds of wrong actions, and they will realize that frivolous talk can only lead to suffering in the future.

The Buddha then told the laymen that through the righteous, balanced living he has just described, a person may be reborn as a rich man or in the Deva and Bramhā worlds. Finally, he adds that it can also lead to the highest goal of all, Nibbāna. In this way, a person can destroy the taints and enjoy the freedom of mind and freedom through wisdom by his own higher knowledge. So the Buddha, in addition to answering the laymen's question about what leads to future

suffering and future happiness, also gave them a hint that they should strive for freedom from any future world.

Anyone who has tried to control his thoughts, as recommended by the Buddha, will realize that it is very difficult. The most difficult thing in the world, in fact. This is why it is so important that we learn how to concentrate our thoughts. Through mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*), laypeople today can bring their minds under their own control. The better the control the better they will be able to think the three types of thoughts given by the Buddha and perform good bodily and verbal actions.

Control of thoughts is especially important with regard to speech. At first, we may find that even though we do not exercise complete control we are able to recognize immediately afterwards when we use wrong speech. If we see ourselves more clearly and if we make progress in being honest with ourselves as well as others, we will not try to excuse ourselves and justify our wrong speech. We will face up to our lies. We will admit to ourselves when we are looking for some benefit for ourselves or others. We will also be able to see the effect of our words, and we will see the pain caused if we try to set people against each other. We will soon prefer to look for a way to use gentle speech rather than say something harsh. We will not have the mistaken view that shouting at others is for their own good.

There may be an occasion when a person will speak to another even though the other person will become angry, but such occasions will be very rare. This will only be when one is sure that through speaking to him the person will be easily convinced of what is said and will be persuaded to give up unskilful actions and do what is skilful.¹ The Buddha com-

¹See M n° 103 (MLS III 27).

pared this with the compassion of a parent who will be rough with a baby to get a stick or stone out of its mouth. The important thing in this connection is that one truly knows it is the right time to speak.¹

An illustration of how difficult it is to know when to speak or not is illustrated in the case of the novice Aricavata.² This novice was approached by Prince Jayasena who is described as always pacing up and down and always roaming about. He asked Aricavata if a bhikkhu who was diligent, ardent and self-resolute could attain one-pointedness of mind. Aricavata answered that this was possible. So Prince Jayasena requested that the novice teach him the Dhamma. But the novice hesitated. "If I were to teach you the Dhamma as I have heard it, as I have mastered it," he said, "and if you could not understand the meaning of what I said, that would be wearisome to me, that would be vexing for me." The prince insisted, however, so Aciravata taught him. Then the prince declared that he did not think it was possible for a bhikkhu to attain one-pointedness of mind.

Aciravata went to the Buddha and explained what had happened. The Buddha told him that Prince Jayasena lived surrounded by sensual pleasures. He enjoyed them and was consumed by thoughts of sensual pleasures. He burned with the fever of sensual pleasures and eagerly sought sensual pleasures. Therefore, it was impossible for him to know, see, attain or realize what can be known, seen, attained or realized by renunciation.

The Buddha then pointed out to Aciravata that if he had used appropriate similes, Prince Jayasena would have been able to understand. He should have pointed out that while

¹See M n° 58 (MLS II 62f.).

²See M n° 125 (MLS III 175-183).

animals who receive no training will never be tamed, animals who do receive training will be tamed, or he could have used the illustration of two friends who go up to a mountain. One of them then climbs the mountain and describes the parks, woods, level ground and ponds that he can see. His companion does not believe him. So he has the companion climb up to see for himself. As long as the companion was hemmed in by the mountain slope, he could not see what was to be seen.

The novice Aciravata pointed out that since these two similes had only just then been given by the Buddha, he could not have known them and used them in his discussion with Prince Jayasena.

This incident can be a lesson to people who wish to tell others about the Buddha's Teachings. They should not overestimate their ability to understand how best to explain the Dhamma to others. No one has the ability of the Buddha to know how best to teach others. We can also see the importance of being familiar with the Teachings. The more we understand, the better the chance we will be able to use an appropriate explanation.

The most important lesson to be learned from this discourse, however, is the importance of control over the senses. The restless prince was such a slave to the pleasures of the material world that he could not believe it is possible to control the mind.

The Buddha pointed out in a discourse to a group of bhikkhus the benefits to be derived from mindfulness of the body.¹ Mindfulness of the body, the Buddha explains, leads to a mind which is utterly pure and clean, inwardly settled, calmed, focused and concentrated. On the other hand, he

¹See M n° 119 (MLS III 129-138); for references to Māra, see MLS III pp. 134ff.

warns, if mindfulness of the body is not developed, the leader of negative forces, Māra, will gain access.

It is therefore very important that laypeople be able to control their senses. This will make it possible to follow the precepts and work for happiness in this life and future lives. But more important, it is essential if we are to work for the true happiness of Nibbāna.

The Buddha used very telling images to illustrate the sort of control we need in a discourse addressed to Venerable Ānanda.¹ He tells Ānanda that in the development of control over the senses in the discipline for the Noble, the six senses of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind will be stimulated by shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental states which will be either liked, disliked or both liked and disliked. A person should be able to be aware that such sensations are present very quickly. For sights, it should be as quick as opening or closing the eyes. For sounds, it should be as quick as a finger snap; for smells, as quick as raindrops sliding off a lotus leaf that is slightly slanted; for tastes, as quick as spitting; for touches, as quick as a strong man bending or stretching out his arm; for mental states, as quick as a few drops of water drying up when they fall in a red-hot iron vessel. Whether the sensations arising are liked, disliked or both liked and disliked, it should be all the same to a person. In this way, they will be stopped and equanimity will be established.

This refers to those who are fully Awakened, Arahats. It is useful to know the goal to be reached, however, and to appreciate how much control over the mind is possible. For those who are still learners, the Buddha points out, sensations

¹See M n° 152 (MLS III 346-350).

will cause them to be troubled and ashamed and the sensations will be loathed.

So we can see how important it is for laypeople to lead righteous and balanced lives, and how essential it is to develop control over the mind and the senses if this is to be done. We can all aspire to the perfect equanimity of the Arahats.

The Buddha in his discourse to the people of Sālā and Verañjā answers their question about what leads to good or bad results in future lives. We do not need to wait until then to reap the benefits of leading righteous, balanced lives. Venerable Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* quotes several texts from the Suttas in which the Buddha describes present benefits.¹

The first quotation is from the Buddha's answer to Venerable Ānanda's question, "What is the object of, what profit is there, in good conduct?"² The Buddha answers that being free of remorse is the object of and profit in good conduct. In other words, if we live moral lives, we will have a clear conscience. Ānanda continued to question the Buddha and through his answers the Buddha showed that freedom from remorse leads to joy, which leads to rapture and so on—through calm, happiness, concentration, seeing things as they really are, turning away, and fading of interest, one reaches the release through knowing and seeing. "So you see, Ānanda," the Buddha concluded, "good conduct leads gradually up to the highest."

Shortly before his death, the Buddha taught the laymen of Pataligama that there are five bad results for the immoral person and five good results for the moral person. If a person is immoral: (1) he is poor through indolence, (2) he has a bad

¹See *Path*, Chapter I ¶23.

²See A V 1ff. (GS V 1-3).

reputation, (3) he is confused and lacks confidence whenever he goes to a meeting, (4) he has anxiety when he dies, and (5) he is reborn in the lower worlds of suffering, including the lowest of the hells.

On the other hand, if a person is moral: (1) he becomes wealthy through being industrious, (2) he has a good reputation, (3) he is confident and self-possessed whenever he goes to a meeting, (4) he dies without anxiety, and (5) he is reborn in a heavenly world.

Even if a person does not feel ready to try for the final goal of Awakening, Nibbāna, these benefits of leading moral lives are well worth the effort. If a person has wealth, a good reputation, self-confidence, and no fear of death and what comes after, he will certainly be much happier than the average person in this world.

If development of the mind and of insight into the true reality of existence is added to moral living, the benefits can be far greater. This is pointed out in Ashin Buddhaghosa's last quotation which is from a discourse given by the Buddha to a group of bhikkhus.¹ Certain aspects of what the Buddha says apply particularly to bhikkhus, but we can apply the basic ideas to the lives of laypeople.

First of all, the Buddha points out that the bhikkhus should respect the moral code, seeing the danger there is in the slightest fault. With this strong basis, they will be able to be intent on internal mental tranquillity with uninterrupted meditation, intent on attaining insight, and intent on seeking seclusion in order to work properly. Laypeople today can also work for mental calm through developing their concentration, even if they do not reach the highest stages of uninterrupted mindfulness that are possible for those who retire from

¹M n° 1 (MLS I 41-45).

everyday life or who make significant progress along the Path to Nibbāna. They can acquire sufficient concentration to began developing insight. Even if laypeople of today do not retire from everyday life permanently, it is possible to do so for certain periods during the day, for a day or more during the month, and for longer periods from time to time to undergo training in developing their concentration and insight through following a meditation course.

The range of benefits that can be expected, as the Buddha explains, go from relatively minor advantages all the way to the highest goal. First of all, a person will be dear to his companions in the life of purity, loved by them, and held in respect and honoured by them. Bhikkhus will receive the four necessities of life, which correspond to the wealth to be expected for laypeople which we mentioned already. If we wish that others who give to us should acquire great merit, then this will be the case, for we will be of great merit ourselves. The more highly developed a person is, the greater the merit there is in giving to him. When others make in giving to us they can share that merit. We will also be able to overcome aversion and craving, as well as fear and dread. The Buddha then enumerates the various stages of concentration, Awakening, and higher mental powers which the bhikkhus could strive to attain. All of these will not be appropriate for laypeople to aspire to, but the first three stages of Awakening are certainly within the grasp of all who have the necessary merits and who make the right kind of effort in this life.

Let us conclude with the Buddha's advice to Ānanda:¹ "Whatever, Ānanda, is to be done out of compassion by a teacher seeking the welfare of his disciples and compassionate for them, that has been done by me for you. ... Meditate,

¹MLS III 350.

Ānanda, do not be slothful, do not be remorseful later. This is our instruction to you.”

October 12, 1985

Campus “De Blokken”

Baarle-Nassau, The Netherlands

PRACTISING WHAT WE PREACH

*Pāmojjakaraṇaṃ thānaṃ etaṃ hoti vijānataṃ
Yadidaṃ bhāvitattānaṃ dhammajīvinam.
Te jotayanti saddhammaṃ bhāsayanti pabhaṅkarā
Ālokaranaṃ dhīrā cakkhumanto raṇaṅjahā.
Yesam ve sāsanaṃ sutvā sammadañjāya paṇḍitā
Jātikkhayam abhiññāya nāgacchanti punabbhavam.*

This is the state of those who cause delight, that is to say, those who discriminate, those with developed self, living according to the doctrine.

They make it shine, they have the true Doctrine proclaimed. Bringers of light, producers of sight, they are firm, those who have vision, who abandon sense desires.

Truly, all those who hear the teaching, (who become) wise men of perfect knowledge, knowing the destruction of birth, do not go to a new life.

Itivuttaka, 108f.

The Right Teacher

These verses conclude a discourse by the Buddha to a group of bhikkhus (monks) in which he describes the qualities of good teachers and the advantages of following them.¹ A good teacher is endowed with virtue, concentration, wisdom, deliverance, and the vision and knowledge of deliverance. A good teacher admonishes, makes others understand, instructs, incites, fills others with enthusiasm, gladdens, is competent as

¹MA II 191f.

a teacher, and is able to see and experience the true doctrine. It is of great profit to see such a teacher, to hear him teach, to meet with him, to sit down and be instructed by him, to remember what he teaches, and to go forth with him. If we join him in practising the teachings, we will be able to grow in and fulfil virtue, concentration, wisdom, and the vision and knowledge of deliverance.

There is a saying in English, “Do as I say, not as I do.” This is the refuge of those who believe they know the right way to act, but who excuse themselves for not being able to put what they believe into action. It may be that what they teach is good. But how can you be sure? If what they say you should do is true, why do they not make the effort themselves? Obviously, their understanding is not complete. The Buddha said that a person who is sunk into the mud cannot pull out another person sunk in the mud, but a person who is not sunk into mud can do so.¹

The Buddha was not that kind of teacher. In speaking of himself, he said, “Bhikkhus, as he speaks, so he does; as he does, so he speaks. This is why he is called a Perfected One (Tathāgata).”² In other words, he practised what he preached, and he preached what he practised. It is important that those who pass on his teachings do the same. The Buddha said that there are three types of teachers:³

(1) There is the teacher who bases what he teaches on tradition, hearsay, report, on the authority of texts. Such a teacher may remember or understand certain parts of

¹MLS I 56.

²GS II 25; MA II 198. Also translated in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s *The Life of the Buddha*, p. 184.

³LS II 400 (cf. 199-201).

what he has learned correctly, but other parts he will not remember or understand correctly.

(2) Other teachers put their faith in logic and investigating. They teach their own system which they have worked out through reasoning and testing. Part of what they teach will be correctly worked out through logic, but part will be incorrect.

(3) The third type of teacher fully understands the truth, the Dhamma, on his own. He directly experiences the truth, which no one has taught him. The Buddha was this third type of teacher.

The Buddha is the teacher in the full sense of the word for those who put his teachings into practice. All other teachers after him depend on him in the sense that the Buddha needed no one to teach him the path to the discovery of truth. Fortunately for others, he was able to teach the way to achieve the final goal of liberation from all suffering. Through following the Buddha's Teachings, others are able to experience the truth for themselves and not depend on tradition or logic. Those who do not realize the truth directly for themselves will, of course, depend on tradition and on logic. Buddhist teachers who have not reached the final goal can make mistakes. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that they practise what they are teaching. They will have to continually examine themselves and be open to correcting their mistakes. They must deepen their intellectual understanding and, more important, their personal understanding through experience.

How to Teach

The Buddha pointed out that it is very difficult to teach the truth, and he gave five things which a teacher should summon up in his mind when giving a discourse on the doctrine to

others:¹ (1) The teacher is intent on giving a gradual discourse—one in which the listener will be introduced to the doctrine in a progressive way, with each step clearly following the other. (2) The teacher is intent on explaining well—using appropriate illustrations, for example. (3) The teacher is intent on teaching with compassion. (4) The teacher is intent on not wishing for material gain. The teachings are freely given without any ulterior motive. (5) The teacher does not give a teaching that will be harmful to himself or to others.

There are many teachers of all sorts of subjects in this world, but there are very few who will fulfil all five of these criteria. This is not necessarily a criticism, of course. People who earn their livelihood by teaching in schools will need to earn enough to live on, so they will be intent on material gain. The other four points, however, could help guide their approach to teaching. Teaching the Dhamma that the Buddha discovered and taught to others is different from ordinary teaching, however. It is very important that the Teachings not be distorted or changed. A teacher who is ever mindful of presenting the Dhamma in an intelligent manner and in a way that is easily understood by his listeners, who is full of compassion for others, who is not looking for riches or personal glory, and who desires that all beings—including himself—be free from harm, such a teacher will help to keep alive the Buddha's Teachings.

In the world today, just as in the time of the Buddha, there are many different teachings, all claiming to lead to ultimate truth. A person who is in search of the truth will need to be very careful if the right path is to be chosen.

¹GS III 136.

Finding the Right Teacher

There was a young Brahman who asked the Buddha about how to recognize the right teacher.¹ Kāpaṭhika was only sixteen years old, but he had already learned the three Vedas of his own religion. He realized when he was listening to the Buddha in conversation with his elders that the Buddha would be able to teach him more. The Buddha pointed out to the young man that a person could have faith in some teaching, be inclined to it, accept it through report or through consideration of logic, or by reflecting on and approving of an opinion. The person may preserve the teaching he learns, but this is not enough for concluding that it alone is truth and all else is false. What is necessary, the Buddha said, is that the person awaken to the truth. For this, one will need a teacher who is free from greed, aversion, and ignorance.

If we are to find the right kind of teacher, we must know what qualities to look for. The Buddha advised the young man to examine a prospective teacher. Thus he will see by the teacher's actions and speech if he is greedy, or full of aversion, or ignorant and confused. It will not always be easy for us to judge correctly, however, as the Buddha pointed out to one of his lay disciples, King Pasenadi of Kosala.² The king asked the Buddha if some passing ascetics were fully Awakened (Arahats) or on the path to full Awakening. The Buddha replied that it would be difficult for someone like the king to know this, because, as a layman, he was still surrounded by sensual pleasures and tied down by a family. He still used perfumes and garlands of flowers and handled money. Even so, the Buddha explained how to judge another person.

¹MLS II 360.

²MA II 79, KS I 104.

To know about another person's virtue (*sīla*), you must live together with that person over a long period of time. To know whether another person is pure of thought, you must have dealings with that person for a long time. To know another person's steadfastness, you must see that person in times of trouble over a long period of time. To know another person's wisdom, you must have conversation with that person over a long period of time. All this is possible only if you pay careful attention and if you are wise yourself.

So we can see that it is not an easy matter to recognize a good teacher. You will note the emphasis the Buddha puts on being able to be attentive and understand what is right. In his advice to a group of laymen, the Buddha gave instructions similar to the ones he gave to Kāpaṭhika.¹ He told the Kālāmas that they can know for themselves that greed, ill-will, and delusion will work against their own interests. Because of these three things, people do unwholesome acts such as killing, stealing, adultery, telling lies, and encouraging others to reach such states which cause loss and sorrow for a long time. And he tells them to reject such things through seeing for themselves that such states are wrong.

Freedom from greed, ill-will, and delusion will lead to avoiding unwholesome acts and to encouraging others to reach such states which will work for their profit and happiness for a long time. The Buddha told them, "When you know for yourselves that these things are profitable, blameless, and lead to profit and happiness when put into practice and undertaken, then, Kalamas, you should undertake to observe them and live in that way."

¹GS I 170-175.

The Wrong Kind of Teacher

We can look for the right teacher through recognizing the right qualities. We can recognize the wrong teacher if he possesses the wrong qualities. One of the two chief disciples, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, gave a discourse in which he outlined ten qualities which show that a person has come to a halt halfway on his way to the goal.¹ If a person possesses these qualities, they will become evident over a period of time, for even if a person is imitating what he considers to be the conduct of a good person, there will be times that his true nature will show through. Thus, we should not follow a person who shows anger, who is grudging, who questions other people's virtues, who is spiteful, envious, stingy, crafty, a trickster, of wicked desires, or who is confused. One of the leading disciples, Venerable Mahā-Cunda, gave another list of ten qualities which indicate that a person is not to be followed.² If a person is immoral, an unbeliever, of little learning, foul-spoken, wicked, slothful, confused, a fraud, difficult to support, and weak in wisdom, then that person is regressing rather than progressing in the Teachings.

Then Ven. Mahā-Cunda gave an illustration. If a person says to us, "If you ever need money, my friend, ask me and I will give it to you." But when the time comes and you ask for the money, he says, "Dig here." You dig, but you do not find any money. When you reproach him, saying, "You told me a lie," he tells you to try elsewhere, then finally he pleads that he was out of his mind, distracted when he made his promise.

¹GS V 106.

²GS V 107f.

Following the Teachings

Once we have found a teacher, the Buddha advised the young man Kāpaṭhika, we should then have confidence in him or her, approach the teacher, sit down near by, and listen attentively to the teaching. We should remember what we hear and put it to the test. By testing the teachings, we approve of them and this leads to a desire to make an effort. Then we consider our effort and strive further. Finally, through being self-resolute, we will eventually realize for ourselves the highest truth itself.

There was a man who applied the sort of examination we have described to the Buddha.¹ The brahman Brahmāyu, who was very learned in his own religion, heard of the reputation of the Buddha. As he was a hundred and twenty years old, he sent his student Uttara to see if what he had heard was true. This young man followed the Buddha like a shadow for seven months and then reported back to Brahmāyu. Uttara's report includes many details on the physical appearance and deportment of the Buddha. Let us simply quote a few remarks that tie in with the qualities of a good teacher. Uttara says that the Buddha "does not strive after hurt of self, he does not strive after hurt of others, he does not strive after hurt of both. The revered Gotama sits down striving only after his own good, the good of others, the good of both, the good of the whole world."²

When the Buddha came to the district where Brahmāyu lived, Brahmāyu went to see him. The Buddha gave him a talk on generosity, morality, and how to attain rebirth in the higher realms. He explained the peril, vanity, and depravity of sensual pleasures and the advantage in renouncing them. Then the

¹MLS II 317-332.

²MLS II 325.

Buddha saw that Brahmāyu's mind was receptive and he taught the Four Noble Truths that are discovered by all the Buddhas: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

The Example Set by Sayagyi U Ba Khin

It is because the Buddha's Teachings have been practised and taught for over 2500 years that we can continue to do so today. The Community of Bhikkhus (monks) has been especially important in this continuation of the Teachings, and we today are very fortunate in being able to come into contact with them. But laymen, too, have been instrumental in keeping the Teachings alive.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was just such a layman.¹ When he learned of the possibility of practising the Dhamma, he risked his career to have a taste. He made rapid progress in his meditation under the guidance of another layman, Saya Thetgyi. His teacher had practised under one of the foremost scholars of his time, the monk Venerable Ledi Sayadaw. Ven. Ledi Sayadaw was well known not only in Myanmar but also in the West, where many of his texts were translated and published.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was also very successful in lay life, rising to the post of Accountant General of Myanmar. He was so effective, the government appointed him to four posts with the status of Head of Department at one time. At the same time, he taught meditation to others. At first, he taught in a room at his office. Then, he formed a Vipassanā Research Group which founded the International Meditation Centre in Yangon.

¹For more information, see *The Anecdotes of Sayagyi U Ba Khin* and *Dhamma Texts*, both published by the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust, U.K.

Those of us who were closely associated with Sayagyi over the years were able to appreciate how scrupulously he followed the Buddha's Teachings himself, and we benefited from the Teachings through his guidance. Sayagyi described himself as an experimentalist, a student of practical Buddhism. He was constantly verifying the results obtained through Buddhist meditation, aware that it is all too easy to deviate from the true path.

The path taught by the Buddha can be summed up under three main headings, which are found in the good qualities a teacher must possess that we have already mentioned. The path includes: (1) virtue or moral action (*sīla*), (2) concentration or purity of mind (*samādhi*), and (3) wisdom or understanding (*paññā*). Sayagyi U Ba Khin was outstanding in all three of these.

As a layman, Sayagyi always observed the five precepts of refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, or taking intoxicants. In addition, he was often able to observe ten precepts for two weeks each month. The ten precepts are the hardest set of rules for laymen to keep as they include not eating after noon and not handling money. This last precept might sound impossible for an Accountant General, but Sayagyi was able to delegate such responsibilities to others.

His honesty was well known in Burma, and it is thanks to the good example which he set that he was able to check corruption and inefficiency in the various departments under his charge. Indeed, a special law was passed, allowing him to continue work long after the mandatory retirement age.

Virtue is the basis on which all other achievements are founded in Buddhist meditation. Without good morals, we cannot hope to attain good concentration—the essential requirement if we are to understand reality. We were con-

stantly reminded of this by Sayagyi, who knew this not only in theory but also through personal experience.

We can best appreciate Sayagyi's command of concentration and wisdom through his teaching. Only a person who had a high level of achievement could teach others to make good progress in these domains.

The Buddha taught many different methods for concentrating the mind. Sayagyi selected the one which is especially appropriate for laypeople. That is not to say that it is easy, but the success of so many of his students, both Burmese and foreigners, showed Sayagyi that this was an appropriate method for laymen. We do not say it is the only method, of course. As we saw, a good teacher does not waste his time disparaging others. At times, when Sayagyi saw that a person was already following a different method and was very committed to it, he would discourage them from mixing methods. Everyone, however, who approached this meditation with an open mind, ready to follow instructions, was welcome. Sayagyi was not interested in personal glory for himself. He was only concerned that the method he used be correct with regard to the Buddha's Teachings, and that those whom he taught would benefit by it.

Some of the other methods which lead to concentration are more appropriate for those who have decided to go forth from lay life and become monks. These methods, if practised correctly, lead to very powerful states of mind—so powerful, that a person who has not adequately cut off attachment to the temporary pleasures of this world will fall into very dangerous traps. In only extremely rare cases can these high states of concentration be attained and correctly maintained by a layman or laywoman.

Sayagyi knew that laypeople could develop insight into the truth of reality if they attained a certain level of concentration—

one lower than the exalted states more appropriate for monks. What was needed was a level of concentration allied to a calm attitude, an equanimous attitude, which enables us to observe the true nature of the sensations in our own bodies objectively. Through observing their constantly changing nature (*anicca*), we are put into contact at the same time with their unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and the lack of a controlling, eternal self (*anattā*).

Many people worked under his guidance and found that the practice was effective, and that it conformed to the Teachings of the Buddha. Even those who did not make significant progress in their meditation were able to experience the benefits that can be enjoyed here and now.

Today, those of us who carry on the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin are very aware of what an important responsibility rests on our shoulders. We must constantly examine ourselves and correct any distortions we may have allowed to creep in, and strive with all our might to live up to the example set by Sayagyi.

It is our fervent wish that others will continue to put these Teachings into practice, find true happiness for themselves, and come out of all their suffering.

TEACHING THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA

The Buddha hesitated after he attained full Awakening.¹ He saw that it would be difficult to those in the world who delighted in sensual pleasures to attain the knowledge which meant the calming of all the habitual tendencies, renouncing all attachment, the destruction of craving, attaining dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. It would be wearying and troublesome to teach what he had attained if others did not understand him.

Brahmā Sahampati was aware of what the Buddha was thinking. According to the commentaries,² this Brahmā had become a Non-Returner under the Buddha Kassapa and was reborn in the Pure Abodes (Suddhāvāsā) of the Brahmā planes. Brahmā Sahampati realized that the world could be lost if the Buddha did not teach others the way to Nibbāna. So he went to the Buddha and requested that he teach. “There are those who have few defilements,” he said, “who are going to ruin through not hearing the Doctrine (Dhamma). They will be the ones who fully understand the Doctrine.”

After being requested to teach three times, the Buddha, out of compassion for the world, surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. He saw that there were all sorts of beings and that many of them would not understand what he had to teach. There were a few, however, who would be able

¹The events after the Buddha's Awakening through the sending out of the first sixty Arahats is found in BD IV 6-29. See also Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, pp. 37-53.

²See DPPN, s.v. Sahampati.

to understand. Seeing this, the Buddha accepted the invitation to teach.

Waiting to be requested before teaching is a tradition which is still followed today. Trying to force the Buddha's Teachings on unwilling people would produce the very result of wearisomeness which made the Buddha hesitate to teach. This does not mean that we remain completely passive, however. Whenever we know that there is some potential for understanding in another person, we can encourage that person to request to be taught. We will not have the ability of a Buddha to see for certain a person's potential, but the more we experience the truth, the better we will be able to judge others and find the right occasion and the right approach.

The Buddha was able to survey the world and see who were the best people to teach first. So he went first to the five ascetics who had helped him during the beginnings of his struggle to attain Awakening. Next, he taught the young man Yassa and fifty-four of his friends. All sixty of these men attained Arahatsip and became bhikkhus. Now that they had understood, the Buddha sent them out to teach the Doctrine.

Atha kho Bhagavā bhikkhu āmantesi: "Muttāhaṃ bhikkhave sabbapāsehi ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā. Caratha bhikkhave cārikam bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam. Mā ekena dve agamittha. Desetha bhikkhave dhammam ādikalyāṇam majjhe kalyāṇam pariyosānakalyāṇam sāttham savyañjanam kevalaparipuṇṇam parisuddham brahmacariyam pakāsetha. Santi sattā apparajakkhajātikā assavanatā dhammassa parihāyanti, bhavissanti dhammassa aññātāro. Aham pi bhikkhave

*yena Uruvelā yena Senānigamo ten' upasamkamissāmi dhammadesanāyā" ti.*¹

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus: "Bhikkhus, I am released from all snares, both divine and human. Bhikkhus, you are also released from all snares, both divine and human. Go, bhikkhus, and wander for the benefit and happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, benefit, and happiness of Devas and men. Two (of you) are not to go by the same (path).² Bhikkhus, teach the meaning and detail of the Doctrine that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, fulfilled in its entirety, wholly pure. Make known the holy life.³ There are those who have few defilements, who are going to ruin through not hearing the Doctrine. They will be the ones who fully understand the Doctrine. And I, bhikkhus, will go to Uruvelā, to Senānigama, to teach the Doctrine.

The spread of the Buddha's Teachings has continued down to today. It has spread all over the world. Those of us who teach in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin are acutely aware of the importance of our mission. It must be carried on

¹Vin I 20.

²Ashin Buddhaghosa explains this in the commentary to the Vinaya-pitāka (Sp 966) as meaning "Two must not go by the same path." In the commentary to Saṃyutta-nikāya (Spk I 172), he says, "Two persons are not to go by one path; for indeed, having gone by the same (path), (when) they teach the doctrine, one (of them) would have to remain silent."

³We follow Ashin Buddhaghosa's discussion of the qualities of the Dhamma (*Path*, Chap. VII ¶¶ 72f.; cf. his commentary on the Dīgha-nikāya, Sv I 175-177) by taking all the adjectives with it rather than having some modify the holy life (*brahmacariya*).

through compassion for others. It is for the benefit and happiness of all those who are able to give it a sincere trial.

The Buddha's instructions are to teach the meaning and detail of the Doctrine which is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Ashin Buddhaghosa discusses the terms in some detail in *The Path of Purification*.¹ He gives a number of explanations for the fact that the Doctrine contained in the texts is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end.

First of all, each verse and each discourse, whether it contains one subject or several subjects, is good. The Teachings will attract those who are ready to be taught, as they are unequivocal in meaning and stand to reason in terms of cause and effect and in the examples given. The conclusion of a discourse will inspire faith in those who hear.

We can see the truth of this through our own experience. The Buddha was very clear in his discourses. When he used a simile to illustrate what he was teaching, he carefully explained each element in it. He did not encourage blind faith based on emotional attachment to a teacher or emotional reactions to attractive ideas that remained vague and open to interpretation. The Buddha said what he had to say in clear language, and invited those he taught to find out the truth through their own experience.

Ashin Buddhaghosa then explains the beginning, middle, and end of the doctrine in terms of the Dispensation (*sāsana*). In an earlier passage,² he explained these in terms of morality, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*). In the passage we are discussing, he presents these three steps in two ways. The first way is the three steps most appropriate for those who have renounced lay life and gone forth. For them,

¹*Path*, Chapter VII ¶¶69-73.

²*Path*, Chapter I ¶10.

the beginning will be morality. The middle will be the calm (*samatha*) attained through high levels of concentration and insight (*Vipassanā*) which leads to the Path and Fruition State. The end or goal is *Nibbāna*.

The second way is more appropriate for laypeople. Its beginning is morality and concentration, its middle is insight and the Path, and its end is the Fruition state and *Nibbāna*.

This second way sums up the approach we use in meditation courses in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. The beginning is the firm foundation on which we can build. Through developing morality and concentration we prepare ourselves for developing insight. The degrees of morality and concentration will not be as high as is usual in the case of *bhikkhus* or *bhikkhunīs*, due to the limitations of lay life. Fortunately for us, it is possible to develop insight even though the highest levels of morality and concentration have not been attained. So we can aspire to the goal of *Nibbāna* which is to be experienced through the Paths and Fruition States.

In his commentary on the *Dīgha-nikāya*,¹ Ashin Buddhaghosa mentions the three steps of morality, concentration, and insight; and in passages quoted from the canon, some other aspects of the Doctrine are included. The beginning can be understood in terms of the beginning of skilful mental states and this includes morality of great purity and right view.² Right view is very important because if we have no confidence in the good results that come from moral living and from working for liberation, we will not make any effort. A tenacious wrong view can be the most dangerous enemy, especially if cause and effect are denied. The middle can be under-

¹Sv I 176.

²Quoted from KS V 121.

stood to mean the Middle Path,¹ and this Path is the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the ultimate goal. The end can be understood to mean the fruit of leading the holy life² and this fruit is the attaining of Nibbāna.³

Ashin Buddhaghosa shows in *The Path of Purification* that the beginning, middle, and end of the Doctrine can be demonstrated through the Triple Gem: the Buddha discovered the truth, the Dhamma, which is the well-regulated Doctrine. The Saṅgha—that is to say, the community of those who realize the Buddha's Teachings—has entered the Noble Path leading to experiencing the truth.

This is the aspect of the Doctrine we depend on so that we will be able to work ourselves. These three aspects are our refuge and protection. Without the Buddha to discover the truth of the Dhamma, it would remain hidden. Without knowledge of the Dhamma, we would never be able to attain release from suffering. Without the Saṅgha to practise and maintain the Teachings, we would not be able to learn of the truth or find those who can guide us.

Another way of understanding the three aspects of the Dhamma is through the types of persons who achieve the goal: there are Teaching Buddhas, who discover what can be attained and teach others to do the same;⁴ there are Pacceka Buddhas, who reach the goal but do not have the ability to put others fully on the path; and there are disciples of a Teaching

¹Ashin Buddhaghosa quotes from the First Sermon (BD IV 15).

²Quote untraced, but see MLS I 190 and KS V 193.

³Quote from MLS I 367.

⁴This aspect is not clear in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's translation. We understand this passage to refer to the three types of goal that can be undertaken when a person hears the Doctrine and first determines to work for Awakening—to either become a Teaching Buddha, a Pacceka Buddha, or a disciple.

Buddha who, through practising his Teachings, are able to attain Awakening.

This explanation reminds us that the Teachings of a Buddha are not always available. For some Buddhas, all the disciples ready to reach the goal encounter those Teaching Buddhas during their lifetime and the Dispensation does not continue afterwards. If this had been the case with Buddha Gotama, we today would not be able to enter the Noble Eight-fold Path. We must make sure that we do not miss this opportunity and that we make it available to as many others as possible.

Finally, Ashin Buddhaghosa speaks of the Dhamma as entailing listening in the beginning, practising in the middle part, and attaining the goal in the end. Through listening to the Doctrine, we are able to suppress the hindrances. Through practising we attain the bliss to be gained through the serenity of concentration and of insight. Once the final goal is achieved, we will attain the state of perfection.¹

In his commentary on the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*,² Ashin Buddhaghosa gives another approach. The three steps can be redefined depending on how far we have come on the path. At the lowest level of achievement, the beginning, middle, and end will be morality, concentration, and insight. At the next level, they will consist in concentration, insight, and the Path. Higher still, they include insight, the Path, and Fruition. At the highest level, we find the Path, Fruition, and Nibbāna.

In addition, he gives the aspects of the work which should be combined: morality and concentration in the beginning;

¹*Tādi-bhava*, translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli by “[unshakable] equipoise.”

²Mp II 201.

insight, and the Path in the middle; and Fruition and Nibbāna in the end.

The Buddha says that the meaning and detail of the Doctrine should be taught. This means that both the spirit and the letter of the Dhamma is to be included. Each of these aspects compliments the other. If we approach the texts looking for the meaning, we will not get lost in technical analysis of the words. If we learn more and more about the language of the texts, we will understand the meaning better.

The Buddha, of course, gave these instructions to disciples who had already realized the final goal. For those of us who have not fully understood, it will be necessary to remember that it is possible to misunderstand. We must keep an open mind, not hesitating to re-examine both the meaning and the letter of the teachings. Most importantly, we must put the teachings into practise if progress is to be made.

Most of us study the teachings in translation. So we should keep in mind the limitations in translating from one language to another. We should continually seek the profound truth that lies behind the words themselves. As Sayagyi U Ba Khin said, “The words of the Buddha in certain teachings are so deep and subtle that I doubt whether there are proper expressions in English or even in the Myanmar language (Burmese) to convey his real meaning.”¹

Ashin Buddhaghosa gives a number of explanations for the terms “meaning” and “detail.”² The meaning of the Doctrine will inspire those who are ready to experience it and the detail will inspire faith in those who lead worldly lives. The meaning refers to understanding the most profound aspects and the detail refers to the Doctrine and the language that

¹See *The Anecdotes of Sayagyi U Ba Khin* (1982), p. 9.

²*Path*, Chapter VII ¶¶72f. We do not include all the details here.

conveys it. Understanding the meaning leads to attaining the goal. Understanding the detail leads to mastering the texts.

In saying that the Doctrine has been fulfilled in its entirety, we should understand that nothing can be added to it. It includes the five aspects of the Doctrine: morality, concentration, understanding, deliverance, and knowledge and vision of deliverance. In our own practice, and in teaching others, we must be careful not to change the Teachings in any way. It is very easy to make mistakes out of a desire to help others, or out of an inability to live up to the high standards of the Doctrine. We cannot argue with the truth. It will be helpful if we are honest with ourselves with respect to our own limitations. Studying the Teachings and having teachers on whom we can rely will be indispensable in avoiding the mistake of trying to add on to the Buddha's Doctrine.

The Doctrine is wholly pure. In other words, nothing can be taken away from it. We cannot follow only part of the Teachings if we are ever to reach the end of suffering. The Teachings are to be used to cross over the dangerous flood of desire and suffering. The Doctrine is not concerned with worldly things. This reminds us that we should not be distracted by lesser goals. The Buddha's Teachings will be incomplete if they are used to gain material benefits, in this world or the next. We must work ourselves, and help others to work, for the true happiness of attaining Nibbāna.

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

by
VEN. LEDI SAYADAW

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa

I.

May the Fully Enlightened One dwell on my head!
It is for the good, gain, benefit, and happiness
Of gods and of men: that a Unique Being, the Bodhisatta,
On a Thursday, the full-moon day of July (*Waso*),
When the monsoon had set in, the timely rain well begun,
Took conception in Mahā-Māyā's womb: the queen of
Suddhodana,
At the request of gods and Devas who assembled together
From the ten thousand universes of the *Jātikhetta*¹

II.

Great were the rejoicings after a lapse of ten months
When his noble birth took place at Lumbinī, near
Kapilavatthu,
Amid the veritable hues of the blooming sal trees,
On a Friday, the full-moon day of May (*Kasone*),
The sixty-eighth year of the Mahā Era, the sixth century
B.C.,
For the good and gain of many: men, deities, and gods.

III.

The royal prince was married to his cousin princess,
Both of them aged only sixteen, and they led
A happy and luxurious life for thirteen years.

¹“The field of birth [of a Buddha].” It includes ten thousand world systems.

Three palaces were built, to suit the three seasons
 Of cold, of heat, of rains; and amid all comforts,
 Prince Siddhattha realized the universality of suffering.
 Upon seeing a decrepit man, a diseased man, a corpse and
 a hermit,
 The four signs of the Devas, he renounced the world,
 Made an historic journey in search of Truth and Eternal
 Peace,
 On a Monday, the full-moon day of July (*Waso*),
 His twenty-ninth year, in the full bloom of his youth.

IV.

For six strenuous years in the forest, after crossing the
 river Anomā,

The ascetic Siddhattha made a super-human struggle,
 Practising severest austerities of various forms.

Finally he found the Middle Path and the Four Noble
 Truths.

On a Wednesday, the full-moon day of May (*Kasone*),
 Seated under the canopy of the Peepul Bodhi tree,
 He eradicated all defilements, dispelled ignorance.
 Wisdom arose, darkness vanished. He became a Buddha—
 An Enlightend or Awakened One—for the gain of many,
 Spreading influence to the ten thousand universes.

V.

To the Migadāya Deer Park at Isipatana the Enlightened
 One went,

Where the Pañcavaggiya, the five energetic ascetics
 Who attended on him during his struggle, were residing,
 Precisely two months after he had attained Buddhahood.
 In his thirty-fifth year, he expounded the First Discourse,
 On a Saturday, the full-moon day of July (*Waso*).

Though addressing directly the diligent ascetics,

Devas and Brahmās from the ten thousand universes came
 And took advantage of the golden opportunity of hearing
 The Sermon: the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*,
 “The Turning (or Establishment) of the Wheel of Truth.”

VI.

Out of compassion for the good and gain
 Of men, Devas and Brahmās, the Buddha Gotama taught
 the Dhamma.

Innumerable beings gained Nibbāna: the Deathless.
 Forty-five years after his long and successful ministry,
 On a Tuesday, the full-moon day of May (*Kasone*),
 The hundred and forty-eighth year of the Mahā Era,
 Upon attaining the ripe age of eighty years, he came
 To Kusinārā, the land of the Mallas, where he laid himself
 down,

Between the twin sal trees, mindful and self-possessed.
 Then the Great Demise of the Buddha Gotama took place.
 The Perfect One had finally attained *Mahā-Parinibbāna*.
 Then there occurred a great earthquake, fearful and hair-
 raising.

Celestial drums resounded with the attainment of ultimate
 extinction.

VII.

At the turn into Kusinārā, in the Mallian sal-tree grove,
 Lay the Blessed One's Golden Body, in a befitting
 manner—

That of a Universal Monarch who turns the Wheel of
 Righteousness.

Many came, paying honour, respect, and veneration to the
 remains,

With music, garlands, and scents; making canopies and
 pavilions.

Mounted on a pyre built with all kinds of scented woods,
 It caught alight by itself, producing neither cinder nor ash,
 On a Sunday, the waning moon day of May (*Kasone*),
 When the Perfect One's Golden Body was consumed by
 the fire element (*tejo-dhātu*),
 There remained sacred relics which Doṇa divided into eight
 parts
 For fair distribution to the kings for erecting eight
 monuments.

VIII.¹

Great were the events that took place on the seven week-
 days

In reverence to the Exalted, the Worthy, the Happy One.
 My salutation, adoration, veneration to him, with utmost
 faith:

I bow, lay prostrate, five points touching the ground
 (*vandana*).²

May I be peaceful and happy! May I gain Nibbāna!
 May all beings be peaceful and happy! May they gain the
 deathless!

This is an adaptation from Ven. Ledi Sayadaw's *Seven-Day Verses* in the Myanmar language (Burmese), translated by Sayagyi U Chit Tin. Known to scholars of many countries, Ven. Ledi Sayadaw was one of the most outstanding Buddhist figures of this age. In February 1895, he went to India on a pilgrimage to visit the holy places associated with the life of Lord Buddha. On his return, he composed these inspiring verses for the benefit of those Buddhists in Myanmar who could not go to the land of the Buddha. The verses became very popular, and even today, they are recited by children in Buddhist homes in Myanmar.

¹This eighth verse, which is left out of some editions, is included in the original text (see *Thinbongyi-tīkā*).

²*I.e.*, the forehead, both forearms, and both lower legs.

