

BASED ON THE TALK

What Are Humans Doing?

Edited by

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How would you answer this question?

Think about it. This is a question worthy of reflection. We are born into this world as humans. We live for a brief period as humans. Then one day we die, discarding our human form. At best, our passage from birth to death is fleeting. Time is limited. So, what exactly are we humans doing with our lives during this brief journey?

This question is easy to ask, but not easy to answer. People from all walks of life strive for wealth, fame, public praise, for admiration, honor and position. They crave these conventional goals largely because their attainment symbolizes worldly achievement. Those who have earned or inherited wealth or fame are singled out as successful and influential. They are admired because their chosen way of life is well-known and acceptable. Sharing worldly goals that are 'validated by consensus,' they preserve the mundane social order. Life for them appears safe, secure, and knowable. However, this way of life only binds them

to craving and clinging and reinforces the existing status-quo. There are those others, however, who diligently strive to make an end of craving and clinging. Swimming against the tide of popular opinion, these are people who are not warmly embraced by the world-at-large – or sometimes even by their own families. Society wonders why anyone in their right mind would willingly choose to swim against the stream of popular opinion.

Change threatens the status quo. It can feel like an abandonment to those 'left behind.' Relatives really don't want their loved ones to change. When people think they know what to expect from one another, they feel comfortable. They want things to remain just as they were.

For those whose level of understanding is limited to what they can know and see with their physical senses, it is difficult to recognize or accept profound transformation in others. Such people think that their friends or loved ones have lost touch with reason. Why else would they abandon their old familiar ways? The whole process confuses and threatens them. It's not hard to imagine their distress over this.

Human beings are born with craving, live with craving and most of us die with craving. That is why our Buddha said: "Craving leads the world." We plan our activities and pursuits around craving. We promote and defend craving. And, many of us try our best to dissuade others who desire to put an end to craving from even trying to do so. Craving is a prescription for suffering.

It begs the question: What are humans doing? What are we really doing? Because I wanted to know the answer to this question, I gave it a great deal of thought. The

right answer, however, isn't obvious and it didn't come easily.

Clearly, we have more to do in life than simply make a living. As important as food, clothing, shelter and money are for human security and well being, by themselves they don't give real meaning or purpose to our lives.

I realized that the purpose of human existence was not the accumulation of wealth or fame. Nor do we live only for the mere acquisition of public praise, admiration, worldly position or advanced academic degrees after our names. Reason dictates that there is more to life than this, much, much more. Although I thought I understood this, when I first thought about it I did not truthfully know what to do or what needed to be done. Eventually I learned that when we finally know what we are doing, we begin to know what we need to do.

Like so many others, I tried in vain to find purpose and attainment through education, though I soon discovered its limitations and boundaries. So, finally, seeking the answer I longed for, I turned to the teachings of the omniscient Buddha whose knowledge is unlimited and without boundaries. When I did, I truly came to know and see what we humans are doing and what else we need to do.

Let us look into two important questions:

1. What are we doing?
2. What else do we need to do?

These two questions are the subject of tonight's talk which is based on selections from the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Dhammapada, the Abhidhammā

and commentaries.

My duty as a monk is to pass on, to the best of my ability, the true Dhamma of the Lord Buddha which is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. With this intention, let me begin with the first question: "What are humans doing?" When I ask this question of different people I get different answers. Their answers, of course, depend on their personal likes and dislikes. However, I usually hear some variation on the general theme of being committed to achieving material success, status and security in the world. This deeply-seated desire sets the course of their lives. To that end, most people want enough education or training to prepare them to compete for good jobs. With good jobs they hope to earn a lot of money, increase their wealth and improve their standing in the community. They think that this as a logical way to get ahead in the world and believe that happiness is found in worldly success.

I am a human being like you, a citizen of the human world. I really wanted to know what we are doing here and, more specifically, what I should do and why.

These simple questions are profound. For the correct answer to this question a Buddha had to arise in the world. And even though our Buddha long ago took his final Nibbāna, his teachings have been preserved and handed down over the past 2500 years from one generation of monks to another – first orally, then later in writing.

Happily, the Buddha's teachings remain unadulterated even to this day. They have been meticulously recorded and preserved and can be studied through reading books. Some of the suttas are easily understood. Others are more

difficult to comprehend. In such cases the role of bhikkhus, who can present the facts by relating one sutta to another, obviously becomes important.

My first reference in tonight’s talk comes from the Devatā Saü yutta in the Sagāthā Vagga Saü yutta. The title of the sutta is *Oghatarana*, which means crossing (*tarana*) – the flood (*ogha*).

“On one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Sāvatti in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. Then, when the night had advanced, a certain devata of stunning beauty, illuminating the entire Jeta’s Grove, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and said to him:

“How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?”

“By not stopping and by not struggling, I crossed the flood difficult to cross.”

Let us examine the attitude of the deva mentioned in the commentary. This thought appeared in the mind of the deva: “I know the Buddha has crossed the flood and what the floods are, but I do not know how he crossed. If he just tells me how he crossed, I will quickly understand.” The deva was rather proud of himself.

The Buddha, Knower of all, the One who knows the right time, the right person, the right place and the right way to speak, could see the pride in the deva. Knowing this, the Buddha intentionally gave him an obscure, difficult to understand reply. The Buddha knew that the deva needed to be humbled, that he was stiff with conceit yet imagined himself wise. Realizing that the deva would not be able to penetrate the teaching unless he first changed

his attitude, the Buddha purposefully intended to confuse him in order to cut through his pride. This is real love and shows us the deep compassion of the Buddha. When the deva heard the Buddha’s answer he felt uneasy, and, being unable to perceive its meaning he was humbled. He then asked the Buddha another question.

“But how is it, dear sir, that by not stopping and by not struggling you crossed the flood difficult to cross.”

The Buddha replied: “When I came to a standstill, I sank. When I struggled, I was swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not stopping and by not struggling, I crossed the flood difficult to cross.”

Upon hearing this answer the deva penetrated the Buddha’s meaning and, at that moment, he became a Sotāpanna.

Although almost all the suttas that appear in the Devatā Saü yutta of the Sagāthā Vagga Saü yutta are brief, the devas and brahmas who’s minds are sharp can break through to the true meaning and directly experience the teaching at the end. We humans, however, still have difficulty understanding the deeper meaning of these suttas – even after we read and study them. Those who have knowledge of the Abhidhammā know what the floods are, but others do not.

When I started reading this sutta, I did not understand the meaning. It was only after reading the commentary explanation that I came to understand it, though it was still only intellectual understanding, not direct realization. To figure out what the sutta is saying is difficult

enough, but to directly penetrate its meaning is another matter all together.

In an attempt to help you know what we humans are doing and what else we need to do, I would like to share with you the profound meaning of this sutta.

The first question of the deva is: “How did you cross the flood?”

Here we need to know what the floods are. There are four floods. These four appear in the Abhidhammā. They are:

- (i) the flood of sensuality (*kāmogha*)
- (ii) the flood of becoming (*bhavogha*)
- (iii) the flood of wrong views (*ditthogha*)
- (iv) the flood of ignorance (*avijjogha*)

Ogha means flood;

Just as the great floods of nature sweep men and animals into the sea, so also these four floods sweep beings into the great ocean of the rounds of rebirth (*saii sāra*).

Let me explain the first one:

(i) the flood of sensuality (kāmogha)

It is the desire and lust for the five cords of sensual pleasure: visible objects, sound objects, smell objects, taste objects and tangible objects. Because of these, beings are subject to rebirth in the sensual realms: the human realm, deva realms and the four miserable realms.

Humans continually chase after sensual pleasures, trying to possess sensual objects. We are irresistibly drawn to them and are constantly busy and preoccupied in our

pursuit of beautiful objects, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. Our desire for them is nothing short of lust. We believe that we can’t live without them. For many of us, satisfying our sensual longings becomes the central purpose of our lives.

In the time of the Buddha there were five kings headed by King Pasenadi of Kosala. These five kings were absolutely enjoying themselves with the five cords of sensual pleasure when a question occurred to them: “What is the chief of all sensual pleasures?”

Some among them said: “Forms are the chief of sensual pleasures.” Some said: “Sound is chief.” Some said: “Odors are chief.” Some said: “Tastes are chief.” And some said: “Tangible objects are chief.”

Since those kings were unable to convince one another, King Pasenadi of Kosala said to them: “Come, dear sirs, let us approach the Blessed One and question him about this matter. As the Blessed One answers us, so we should remember it.”

“All right, dear sir,” Those kings replied. Then those five kings, headed by King Pasenadi, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. Once they were seated King Pasenadi recounted their entire discussion to the Blessed One, asking: “What now, Venerable Sir, is the chief of sensual pleasures?”

“Great king, I say that what is chief among the five cords of sensual pleasure is determined by whatever is most agreeable. Those same forms that are agreeable to one person, great king, are disagreeable to another. When one is pleased and completely satisfied with certain forms, then one does not yearn for any other form higher or more

sublime than those forms. For him those forms are then supreme; for him those forms are unsurpassed.”

The Buddha explained in the same way for the other objects.

We can imagine that those kings enjoyed every kind of sensual pleasure, but what they really wanted to know was which sensual pleasure is the chief of all.

People of every age immerse themselves in sensual pleasures. Why do people want wealth, fame, and status? It is because of desire and lust for sensuality. They believe that with wealth and power they will have secure and happy lives and be able to satisfy all their desires.

From the worldly point of view, we see most of mankind living and dying in the grip of their desires and lust for sensuality. They are swept away in the flood of sensuality. They are being sunk in it. It becomes difficult for them to cross.

(ii) the flood of becoming (bhavogha)

It is the desire and lust for rūpa-brahma (form-sphere becoming) and arūpa-brahma (formless-sphere becoming) and it is also the attachment to jhāna (absorption concentration) which can lead to rebirth in the Brahma worlds.

Here at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, many meditators are developing concentration through Mindfulness of Breathing. When they have developed concentration through Mindfulness of Breathing, they can eventually enter absorption concentration which is very profound. Meditators who have attained this level of concentration experience progressively deeper stages of concentration known as first, second, third and fourth jhānas.

According to the Buddha, one who is concentrated knows and sees things as they really are. So, after developing this powerful absorption concentration up to the fourth jhāna, meditators are given instructions in the practice of Four Elements meditation, so they can know and see ultimate materiality as it really is.

When meditators can systematically discern the four elements that compose the body, concentration improves and the body begins to emit light. With continued practice, this light (which is often first seen as grey) begins to change from grey to white. Eventually, it becomes brighter and brighter until the entire body is seen as a block of bright light. In due course this perception breaks down into very tiny, minuscule particles, called rūpa-kalāpas. With continued practice meditators see 8, 9 and 10 types of materiality within each rūpa kalāpa. These 8, 9 and 10 types of materiality are the ultimate materiality of the physical body.

Once meditators are able to discern the four elements internally up to their ultimate reality, they then go on to discern the four elements externally. They see all external animate and inanimate objects as rūpa-kalāpas, arising and perishing very rapidly. At this point, they no longer see men, women, trees or other conventional forms but, rather, they see only rūpa-kalāpas rapidly arising and perishing. They are then seeing materiality as it really is, as taught by the Buddha.

Next, meditators move on to the analysis of ultimate mentality. With this practice they actually come to know and see the mental process as it arises and passes away in a series of mind moments, with consciousness and its as-

sociated mental factors present in each moment. This happens very rapidly.

When meditators know and see ultimate materiality and mentality, as they really are, rapidly arising and perishing, they frequently report that life is really suffering. They say, “We don’t want any more existences.” I sometimes ask them, if they can’t make an end of suffering in their present life, where they want to be reborn? They respond that they want to be born in the brahma world. They believe that life in the brahma realm will bring them release from a great deal of suffering because rūpa-brahmas (form-sphere brahmas) have only eye and ear-sensitivities but no nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity or body-sensitivity. This means that they are released from the desire and lust for odors, tastes and touches. Contrast that to how hungry we humans are for these sensual pleasures.

Those wise meditators who have a sense of urgency become aware of the problems inherent in having these sensitivities. Suppose that a meditator has practiced mastery of first jhāna concentration in order to enter the first jhāna at will. If he can enter the first jhāna at the near death moment, he will be born in the first jhāna brahma world.

The flood of becoming is the attachment to life in the Brahma world and to jhāna concentration. Because of the desire and lust for rūpa-brahma (form-sphere becoming) and arūpa-brahma (formless-sphere becoming) and because of attachment to jhāna, beings are swept away in the current of the flood of becoming. They sink in it. It becomes difficult for them to cross.

(iii) the flood of wrong views (ditthogha)

There are sixty-two wrong views (see Brahmajāla Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya); among them the most important that we need to relinquish is the wrong view of self-identity. Due to this wrong view, we suffer and risk falling into one of the four woeful planes. So, additional practice is necessary, in order to remove the wrong view of self-identity.

After meditators can directly discern ultimate materiality and mentality, they move on to the practice of “Dependent Origination” (*Paticcasamupāda*). With this practice comes the direct knowledge of cause and effect. Once they have directly discerned cause and effect, they continue on to insight meditation. It is at the stage of insight meditation that they examine the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self throughout the mind-matter complex. When a meditator’s insight matures, Path Knowledge arises. At this point, he or she sees Nibbāna. Materiality and mentality cease to be.

When Path Knowledge arises defilements are eradicated step-by-step. With the attainment of the first Path comes Stream Entry, the first fruit of enlightenment. One becomes a Sotāpanna. At the moment of this profound attainment, the defilements of self-identity, doubt and attachment to rites and rituals are eradicated once and for all. One who has attained Stream Entry knows and sees the workings of his or her defilements clearly. They understand ‘wrong view’ as any gross or subtle clinging to a belief in the concept of ‘I’, ‘me’ or ‘mine’. They no longer see greed as ‘my’ greed or hatred as ‘my’ hatred. And, they no longer harm themselves by willful or conscious physical and verbal actions that can lead to rebirth in any one

of the four woeful planes.

For most people, however, the flood of wrong view is overwhelming. Like programmed robots, we continue to indulge in unwholesome deeds in spite of our best intentions not to do so. We don't really want to change nor do we comprehend the truth of why we need to change. This leads to endless rounds of suffering in the four woeful planes.

Due to this wrong view, numberless beings are swept away in the flood of wrong view. They sink in it. It becomes difficult for them to cross.

(iv) the flood of ignorance (avijjogha)

This is not knowing the Four Noble Truths: *suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering.*

Discerning ultimate mentality and materiality is to directly know and see the First Noble Truth, the truth of suffering.

Discerning cause and effect is to directly know and see the Second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering.

Realizing the Deathless, Nibbāna, is to directly know and see the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering.

In order to directly know and see the First, Second and Third Noble Truths, it is necessary to take on the training of morality, the training of concentration and the training of insight meditation. The Fourth Noble Truth is practicing the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

According to the Buddha,

Conventionally we see men, women, dogs, devas and

so on. But ultimately there is no one. There is only ultimate mentality and materiality.

Those who have penetrated ultimate mentality and materiality know and see things as they really are. They agree with the Buddha. They venerate the Dhamma. They regard the Sangha with respect. Right view illuminates their lives.

Have you ever inquired into why we are born as men or women? All around us we see men and women, dogs, chickens, and birds. Why are we born as humans and those other creatures born as dogs or chickens or birds? The cause is ignorance. To make this more understandable, I'll tell you about the practice of a meditator who penetrated the past causes responsible for the present results in her life.

She is an educated woman who lives in a large town.

When she directly discerned the cause of her present life, she saw an incident that occurred at the near-death moment of her previous life. It was a wholesome deed. She was offering fruit to a Buddhist monk. In that life she was a poor uneducated village woman who felt upset and dissatisfied with the conditions of her life.

While she was making the offering to the monk, she made a wish to become an educated woman. The image of that incident (offering fruit to the monk while wishing to become an educated woman) appeared to her at her near-death moment as if she was reliving it. It was this wish, the object of her near-death moment that created the desired result in her present life. In her specific case, there are five causes which generated the present effect. They are:

1. *Avijjā* (Ignorance): Her deluded thinking created the belief that an educated woman living in a large town truly exists.
2. *Taṇhā* (craving): Her desire to live the life of an educated woman created strong craving;
3. *Upādāna* (clinging): Holding onto the idea of living the life of an educated woman created strong clinging.
4. *Kusala sankhāra* (volitional formations): Her wholesome intention to offer fruit to a Buddhist monk created volitional formation.
5. *Kamma*: Her previous actions (either in this life or past lives) reappeared at her near-death moment, as if she was reliving them. Technically, this is *kamma*.

We can see, in this example, the relationship between the flood of ignorance, the flood of wrong view and the flood of sensuality. Not knowing the truth, which is ignorance, causes attachment to desire to arise – in this woman’s case, her desire to live the life of an educated woman. Because of our ignorance, we humans are exposed to many unexpected dangers. For clarity I will tell you a story.

One day a husband and wife set out across a desert. Their provisions were limited and, because they lacked sufficient food and drink for their journey, they soon felt tired and exhausted. Fortunately, they came to a village where a compassionate man kindly offered them well-prepared food. The husband was so hungry that he ate without noticing his measure. At the same time the villager fed his dog, giving the dog the same food that he offered

to the hungry husband and wife.

Seeing this, a thought appeared in the mind of the husband who had suffered so much on his journey across the desert and was upset about the conditions of his life: ‘Oh, it is better to be a dog.’

With this thought in mind, he continued eating until he made himself sick and died right then and there. In his next life, he took rebirth as a dog.

Because of *avijjā* (ignorance) the deluded man believed that the dog truly existed and *taṇhā* (craving) arose.

Because of *taṇhā* (craving) *upādāna* (clinging) arose.

Because of *upādāna* (clinging) *akusala sankhāra* (unwholesome volitional formations) arose.

Because of *akusala sankhāra* (unwholesome volitional formations) *kamma* arose.

Because of all of these the man was reborn as a dog.

That is why I said, ‘humans are exposed to many unexpected dangers because of not knowing the truth.’

Suppose there is a prisoner in a small room with a very small window. Because his life is extremely unpleasant, when he sees a bird flying outside the window, the thought may arise in him, ‘It is better to be a bird.’ If this *kamma* becomes his near-death object, he will be born as a bird in his next life.

Because we don’t know the truth, we are attached to both good and bad, superior and inferior, beauty and ugliness.

Due to ignorance, we crave existence for its own sake no matter what. It does not matter to most of us whether

it is existence in the human realm, the deva realms or the brahma realms. Our desire for existence is so strong in fact that we even believe existence in one of the miserable realms is better than not existing at all.

It is true that the flood of sensuality (*kāmogha*), the flood of becoming (*bhavogha*), the flood of wrong views (*dīthogha*) and the flood of ignorance (*avijjogha*) are the floods difficult to cross.

One conditions another, *i.e.*, one reinforces and influences another and makes it stronger. One defiles another, or one supports another. These are the relations of the four floods.

We see the words ‘stopping’ and ‘struggling’ in the Buddha’s answer to the deva. Now that we all know what the floods are, do you understand what the Buddha meant?

The meaning of “stopping” is to perform unwholesome actions that lead to the four woeful realms.

The meaning of “struggling” is to perform wholesome actions that lead back to the human, deva or Brahma realms.

To help make it clear, let’s look at the way most human beings live. What are they doing?

Do they mostly perform ‘wholesome’ or ‘unwholesome’ acts? Unwholesome! Right? Let me ask you another question:

Do people really know the difference between ‘wholesome’ and ‘unwholesome’? Many would say, yes, of course – even ordinary people know the difference between ‘wholesome’ and ‘unwholesome.’ Do you agree?

Let me quote some words of the Buddha. At one time the Buddha was asked why, when everybody wished to be happy, most people were not happy? The Buddha answered that it was due to jealousy and stinginess.

Owing to these defilements, many people seek happiness for themselves but they ignore the welfare of others, even to the extent of causing others harm. However, to seek happiness in the wrong way brings little joy and much suffering. The worst part about this is that such people are mostly unaware that they are wrong, because they cannot differentiate between what is ‘wholesome’ and what is ‘unwholesome.’ You may not agree. If so, let me ask you a few more questions.

In the morning when you read the newspaper, what does morning news teach you? In the evening when you sit down to watch television, what does the TV teach you? This isn’t personal. The media teaches us how to fuel our greed. It bombards us with the never-ending message that when we cultivate and satisfy sensual pleasure, we will find happiness. It also promotes and glorifies violence. In the pursuit of sensual gratification, violence often takes place. In short, the content of newspapers and TV is filled with teachings that generally increase our greed, anger and delusion. Under their powerful influence, many people are led astray and onto the wrong path.

But does the fault really lie with what the mass media feeds us? After all, it just provides people with what they want and think is good. But what is good or not good does not always depend on what we think. The Buddha pointed this out in many suttas.

Once a famous stage manager and actor named

Tālāputa went to see the Buddha. He told the Buddha his teacher said because actors make people laugh with false stories they would, after death, be reborn in the company of *laughing devas*. He asked the Buddha for his opinion on this matter. The Buddha told him not to ask that question. However, the stage manager insisted and asked the same question three times. Then the Buddha told him that, if that kamma ripened, he would be reborn in the *laughing hell*. The reason is that he brought defiled or tainted happiness to many people, and made their greed, anger and delusion increase.

Thus, one of the benefits that Buddhism provides for humanity is the knowledge of what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. This kind of ‘right view’ is a very important factor for our individual welfare as well as for that of others. It is only with ‘right view’ that we can know how to walk on the right path. For example, after listening to the Buddha, the stage manager Tālāputa gave up his acting career and became a bhikkhu and practiced meditation. Before long, he attained arahantship.

Without right view, one often acts out of ignorance, chasing after sensual pleasures, craving name and fame, drinking and gambling. Such unrestrained self-indulgence leads to suffering. On the other hand, a person with right view engages in wholesome deeds, such as offering *dāna*, practicing virtuous conduct, cultivating loving-kindness and compassion, and purifying his mind through meditation. This leads to happiness.

In the Dhammapada verses 316 and 317, the Buddha says:

‘Those who are ashamed of what is not shameful, and unashamed of what is shameful, such beings, embracing wrong views, go to the woeful state.’

‘Those who see fear in the non-fearsome, and do not see fear in the fearsome, such beings, embracing wrong views, go to the woeful state.’

These words of the Buddha are a reflection of our modern age. For example, many poor people are ashamed of their poverty and many rich people are proud of their wealth; unattractive people are ashamed of their ugliness and beautiful people are proud of their beauty. But are money and beauty the yardsticks of what is shameful and what is not shameful? Certainly they are not. In either case, if a person is virtuous, then there is nothing to be ashamed of, but if the person is immoral, then even if he is very rich and handsome there is nothing to be proud of. Knowing this you should always examine whether what you are about to do is wholesome or unwholesome.

I hope that this helps you to see how people really do not know the difference between what is wholesome and unwholesome. Generally, what they like, they think is right (wholesome). What they dislike, they think is wrong (unwholesome). But wholesome and unwholesome can not be known by likes and dislikes. Right can not be wrong; wrong can not be right. Wholesome itself is wholesome; unwholesome is unwholesome. Personal preference can’t change them.

Returning to the sutta, the second question of the deva is:

“How is it, dear sir, that by not stopping and by

not struggling you crossed the flood difficult to cross?”

The Buddha answers this question by saying: “When I came to a standstill, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not stopping and by not struggling I crossed the flood difficult to cross.”

“When I came to a standstill, then I sank” means if he performed unwholesome actions, he fell into the four woeful planes. “But when I struggled, then I got swept away” means if he performed wholesome actions, he was still reborn as a human or a deva or a Brahma. It is in this way that by not stopping and by not struggling he crossed the flood.

According to the Buddha: Mind itself is pure in origin but, because of associated unwholesome mental factors such as greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy and stinginess, it becomes defiled. It inclines towards doing unwholesome actions almost all the time. Among associated unwholesome mental factors greed, which is craving, leads the world. That is why we see people around the world marching in the streets demanding that which they crave. Some are seeking better pay, others revenge, some cruel and unusual punishment, others support authorized killing or political changes, some want changes to educational systems. Some are even demanding the right to choose or perform abortions. All of these demands are rooted in hunger for sensual desire and the wish to have our personal views and opinions validated. It is obviously impossible to satisfy all these demands. Yet when people don't

get what they want they react with anger and become bitter. Hatred arises in their mind. Conversely, when they get what they want they are happy and proud of themselves. If someone else is successful, however, jealousy often arises in them. But, if they themselves are successful, what do they do? They tend to get bigheaded. Morning till night people spend hour after hour engaging in bodily, verbal and mental unwholesome actions. Is it any wonder why we all suffer so much?

Between birth and death we live mostly in the homes of greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy and stinginess. These are homes that are truly bad for us. Even though we live in physical houses that we call home, for most of us our real home is the abode of greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy and stinginess. These primal defilements come along with us at birth, and they trouble us throughout our lives. Most of us, unfortunately, are caught in their grip. They indeed become our real home.

The Dhammapada commentary says:

For the heedless, the four woeful states are like their permanent home.

As we all know, we don't often stay long where we are only visitors. It is natural for us to return to our home.

In the same way, the human and deva realms are places we temporarily visit only when the time is ripe. Sooner or later, along with our defilements, we have to return to our real home somewhere in the four woeful planes.

The chance of being born in a happy realm or a miserable one is clearly declared by Lord Buddha. The Mahāvagga Saṁyutta says:

On one occasion, the Blessed One took up a little bit of soil on the tip of his fingernail and addressed the bhikkhus thus:

“What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more: The little bit of soil on the tip of my fingernail or the great earth?”

“Venerable Sir, the great earth is more. The little bit of soil that the Blessed One has taken up on the tip of his fingernail is trifling. Compared to the great earth, the little bit of soil that the Blessed One has taken up on the tip of his fingernail does not bear comparison, does not amount even to a fraction.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away as human beings, are reborn among human beings. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away as human beings, are reborn in hell.

Why? Because, bhikkhus, they have not seen the Four Noble Truths. What four? The Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’”

The Buddha then continued: “So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away as human beings, are reborn among human beings or the devas. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away as human beings, are reborn in hell, in the animal realm, in the sphere of ghosts.

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away as devas, are reborn among the devas or human beings. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away as devas, are reborn in hell, in the animal realm, in the sphere of ghosts.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away from hell, are reborn among human beings or the devas. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away from hell, are reborn in hell, in the animal realm, in the sphere of ghosts.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away from the animal realm, are reborn among human beings or the devas. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away from the animal realm, are reborn in hell, in the animal realm, in the sphere of ghosts.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who, when they pass away from the sphere of ghosts, are reborn among human beings or the devas. But those beings are more numerous who, when they pass away from the sphere of ghosts, are reborn in hell, in the animal realm, in the sphere of ghosts.”

Why? Because they have not seen the Four Noble Truths! Because of not knowing the Four Noble Truths, we live mostly in the home of greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy and stinginess. This is the reason why few are reborn among human beings and the devas, but many more are born in hell, in the animal realm, or in the sphere of ghosts.

According to the Buddha: “Those beings are few who abstain from wine, liquors, and intoxicants that are a basis for negligence. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from wines, liquors, and intoxicants that are a basis for negligence.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who honor their mother and father. But those beings are more numerous who do not honor them.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who honor recluses. But those beings are more numerous who do not honor recluses.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who respect their elders in the family. But those beings are more numerous who do not respect their elders in the family.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who abstain from the destruction of life. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from the destruction of life.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who abstain from taking what is not given. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from taking what is not given.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who abstain from sexual misconduct. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from sexual misconduct.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who abstain from false speech and divisive speech. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from false speech and divisive speech.”

“So too, bhikkhus, those beings are few who abstain from harsh speech and idle chatter. But those beings are more numerous who do not abstain from harsh speech and idle chatter.”

There are very few people who are performing wholesome actions. Instead, the great masses of humanity are engaging in unwholesome actions. As the Buddha pointed out, those performing wholesome actions are like the little bit of soil on the tip of his fingernail and those others who are engaging in unwholesome actions are like the great earth. Few can be reborn among human beings or devas. Most people on this great earth will be reborn in hell, in the animal realm, or in the sphere of ghosts. Why? The doors to these miserable states are opened by unwholesome deeds which we do in this life.

What happens if we fall to the four woeful planes? This is explained in the sutta named “Yoke with a Hole”. It is from Mahāvagga Saū yutta. In that sutta the Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus suppose a man would throw a yoke with a single hole into the great ocean and in it there is a blind turtle which comes to the surface once every hundred years. What do you think, bhikkhus,

would that blind turtle, coming to the surface once every hundred years, insert its neck into that yoke with a single hole?”

“If it would ever do so, Venerable Sir, it would be only after a very long time.”

“Sooner, I say, would that blind turtle, coming to the surface once every hundred years, insert its neck into that yoke with a single hole than the fool who has gone once to the nether world would regain the human state.

Why? Because in the nether world there is no conduct guided by the Dhamma, no righteous conduct, no wholesome activity, no meritorious activity. The more powerful ones are eating the weaker ones. They are killing and eating each other.”

That’s why if we fall to the four woeful planes it’s so difficult to be reborn among human beings or the devas. It does not matter how rich or poor we are, how beautiful or ugly we are or how high or low our living standards are. To avoid rebirth in hell, in the animal realm or in the sphere of ghosts, one needs to do good.

Even though it is better to be reborn among humans or the devas than in the nether world, with existence there is always birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. We are not free from this whole mass of suffering.

Even though we know, ‘Man is mortal,’ when we are waiting for our last hour, we are afraid of death; we fear death. We grieve, we lament and become bewildered. To make it clear, let me quote a sutta from Aṅguttara Nikāya.

The title of the sutta is Abhaya Sutta, fearless. In it our Buddha said:

“There is indeed, brahmin, such a mortal who fears death, who is afraid of death. Who is the one who fears death?”

“There is, brahmin, a person who is not free from lust for sensual pleasures, not free from the desire and affection for them, not free from thirsting and fevering after them, not free from craving for sensual pleasures. Then it happens that a grave illness befalls him. Thus afflicted by a grave illness, he thinks: ‘Oh, those beloved sensual pleasures will leave me, and I shall have to leave them! Thereupon he grieves, moans, laments, weeps, beating his breast and becomes bewildered. This mortal is one who fears death, who is afraid of death.’”

How can we be reborn in the happy states if we died in this way?

“Further, brahmin, there is a person who is not free from lust for this body, not free from the desire and affection for it, not free from thirsting and fevering after it, not free from craving for the body. Then it happens that a grave illness befalls him. Thus afflicted by a grave illness, he thinks: ‘Oh, this beloved body will leave me, and I shall have to leave it! Thereupon he grieves, moans, laments, weeps, beating his breast and becomes bewildered. This mortal is one who fears death, who is afraid of death.’”

How can we be reborn in the happy states if we died in this way?

“Further, brahmin, there is a person who has not done anything good and wholesome, who has not made a shelter for himself; but he has done what is evil, cruel and wicked. Then it happens that a grave illness befalls him. Thus afflicted by a grave illness, he thinks: ‘Oh, I have not done anything good and wholesome, I have not made a shelter for myself, but I have done what is evil, cruel and wicked. I shall go hereafter to the destiny of those who do such deeds.’ Thereupon he grieves, moans, laments, weeps, beating his breast and becomes bewildered. This mortal is one who fears death, who is afraid of death.”

“Further, brahmin, there is a person who has doubts and perplexity about good Dhamma and has not come to certainty in it. Then it happens that a grave illness befalls him. Thus afflicted by a grave illness, he thinks: ‘Oh, I am full of doubts and perplexity about good Dhamma and have not come to certainty in it. I shall go hereafter to the destiny of those who do such deeds.’ Thereupon he grieves, moans, laments, weeps, beating his breast and becomes bewildered. This mortal is one who fears death, who is afraid of death.”

“These, brahmin, are four mortals who fear death and are afraid of death.”

Do you think it would be good to be included in these four types of mortals who fear death, are proud of themselves, and are heedless about doing what they need to do? We should give this careful consideration. All suffering arises due to becoming. So, becoming is not praise-

worthy!

That’s why the Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, just as even a trifling bit of dung has an ill smell, so likewise do I not favor ‘becoming’ even for a trifling time, not even for the lasting of a finger-snap.”

So now we know what we are doing. We are ‘sinking and being ‘swept away.’ We sink into the four woeful planes by stopping and we are swept again and again by struggling and being reborn as humans or devas.

Let me ask you one more question: What else do we need to do?

In the Oghatarana Sutta, the Buddha answered:

“When I came to a standstill, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away, It is in this way, friend, that by not stopping and by not struggling I crossed the flood difficult to cross.”

What is the meaning of “by not stopping and by not struggling I crossed the flood difficult to cross?” In the commentary ‘not stopping and not struggling’ means following the Middle Way. The Middle Way means the way leading to Nibbāna which is the Eightfold Noble Path.

Having heard this the deva became a Sotāpanna.

So great was his respect for the Buddha that the deva, who had seen the True Dhamma, recited this stanza:

“After a long time at last I see

A brahmin (a Buddha) who is fully quenched,

Who by not stopping, not struggling,

Has crossed over attachment to the world.”

Our Bodhisatta and many people of his day (and even some today) have crossed the flood by not stopping and by not struggling. These people have followed the Middle Way. They have realized Nibbāna.

May we all be able to follow that Way.

May we all be able to cross the flood that is difficult to cross.

May you all attain final Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

The talk given on *Sunday*,

10th October 2005 at Pa-Auk Tawya in *Myanmar*

and

November 2005 at Shuang Lin Monastery & Tisarana in *Singapore*

BASED ON THE TALK

A Life of True Security

Edited by

~ Bhikkhu Moneyya

~ Bhikkhu Suññātagavesaka and

~ Gary Chan in Sydney

BASED ON THE TALK

A Life Of True Security

From time immemorial, we humans have sought protection against the countless dangers that threaten to engulf us and our loved ones, as well as entire nations and society as a whole. Some dangers we can see, they touch and harm us through our physical organs; others arise mysteriously and imperceptibly to plague us like ghosts and goblins in the night. Man counters them with various rites and rituals. Some of these are colorful and elaborate; some even seem to produce the desired result. But, without our knowing their long-term effects or when our life circumstances will change, even the most powerful ritual cannot protect us from the result of our past kamma.

Equally elaborate is the protection and security we build around ourselves to counter physical dangers and threats. Health insurance, life insurance, police, vaccinations, medical checkups, vitamins, organic food, low cholesterol diets, fallout shelters, and bullet-proof vests are just some of the measures we employ to protect ourselves against the danger of the unknown. How often do we see rings of bodyguards surrounding important personages

or security systems and guard dogs at the homes of the wealthy? Nations, too, stockpile huge armories of weapons; some even want to send their weapons into outer space.

When people see a person surrounded by signs and symbols of external security, such as armed guards and kung-fu experts, they are almost always impressed. Some even crave such a show of security. They mistakenly believe that this will help bring them the security that they crave.

Let us now ask ourselves two important questions:

- ♦ what is a life of true security?
- ♦ how is a life of true security developed?

These two questions are the subject of my talk tonight. I am basing this talk on selections from the Saṅgīyutta Nikāya, the Aṅguttara Nikāya and the Dhammapada. Thus, the foundation for my talk tonight is the Dhamma of our Lord Buddha. Once I present the facts, you can draw your own conclusions.

Let us begin with the first question: “What is a life of true security?”

In order to give the correct answer to this question, a Buddha has to arise in the world. Why? Just as darkness disappears with the rising of the sun, ignorance disappears with the arising of a Buddha. It is only with the arising of a Buddha that we can understand what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. When we put that understanding into practice we can dispel our own ignorance. Only then can we truly know the difference between reality and illusion, wholesome and unwholesome,

sau sara and Nibbana.

Let us now refer to the teachings of Lord Buddha.

My first reference comes from the Kosala Sāu yutta in the Sagāthā Vagga Sāu yutta. The title of the sutta is *Attarakkhita*, which means *self (Atta)-protected (rakkhita)*.

“Once, when our Lord Buddha was staying in Sāvatti, King Pasenadi of Kosala visited the Lord. Having paid proper respects to the Lord and sitting to one side, the King addressed the Lord:

‘Venerable Sir. While I was alone in seclusion, this question arose in my mind, ‘Who protect themselves and who leave themselves unprotected?’

“Then it occurred to me, ‘those who engage in misconduct with the body, misconduct in speech and misconduct in the mind do leave themselves unprotected. Even though a company of elephant troops may protect them; or a company of soldiers who fight on horseback; or a company of soldiers who fight on chariots; or a company of soldiers who fight on foot may protect them, still they leave themselves unprotected.’

‘For what reason? The reason is that that protection is external, not internal. Therefore, they leave themselves unprotected. However, those who engage in good conduct with the body, good conduct in speech and good conduct in the mind will protect themselves even though they have no companies of special soldiers to protect them.’

‘For what reason? The reason is that that protection is internal, not external. Therefore, they pro-

tect themselves.”

The Buddha agreed with the King, saying, “So it is, great King; so it is”, thereon repeating the entire previous statement of King Pasenadi, Lord Buddha then went on to recite this stanza:

“Good is restraint with the body,
 Restraint by speech is also good;
 Good is restraint in the mind,
 Restraint everywhere is good.
 Conscientious, everywhere restrained,
 One is said to be protected.”

Reading this sutta, we may know to some extent who is protected and who is unprotected. However, in order to really know how to gain ‘true security’ for ourselves, we need to reflect deeply.

When we thoroughly understand the nature of security, then even if we have no external protection, we need not fear. Why? Remember the stanza recited by the Buddha to King Pasenadi?

“Good is restraint with the body,
 Restraint by speech is also good,
 Good is restraint in the mind,
 Restraint everywhere is good.
 Conscientious, everywhere restrained,
 One is said to be protected.”

The meaning of this verse is that good (wholesome) bodily,

verbal and mental conduct is the foundation for real self-protection and is effective even if we have no external protection. In fact when we protect ourselves internally, the need for external protection is substantially reduced.

Moreover, we should consider this: Those who have superior or extensive external protection often become proud, arrogant or over-confident. When they mistake external protection for real protection, they become careless in their behavior with others. They speak or act carelessly and have little consideration for the happiness and well being of others. Their only concern is for their own happiness and well being. With such wrong conduct, they leave themselves unprotected. This is not a life of true security.

On the other hand, as the Buddha explains in the *Attarakkhita Sutta*, those who want to protect themselves and want true security should perform wholesome bodily, verbal and mental actions.

Please keep in mind the following two important points:

1. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is not a teaching that cannot be understood and practiced. On the contrary, that Dhamma is one that can be understood and practiced.
2. The Dhamma is taught entirely for the benefit of humans and devas who recognize its benefit and seek it out, both for themselves and others.

In order to live a life of true security, the Buddha taught that wholesome bodily, verbal and mental actions protect us from grief, worry, fear and danger, as well as the suf-

fering arising from rebirth in the four woeful states. Unwholesome bodily, verbal and mental actions, on the other hand, are the cause of grief, worry, fear, danger and rebirth in the lower states.

Why is that so? To understand right and wrong bodily, verbal and mental actions, we must analyze their causes. When we know their causes, we can start to train ourselves to suppress, reduce or even eradicate them.

Let me ask you a few simple questions:

Can you find any greed in your mind right now? Can you find any anger in your mind right now?

You will probably answer ‘No’.

Even if after exhaustively searching your mind you cannot find a single unwholesome quality, that does not mean unwholesome qualities do not exist. They do exist – but at this moment they exist only as latent defilements (*anusaya kilesā*) lying dormant at the base of the mental continuum. Until we eradicate these defilements with path-knowledge, they accompany us from rebirth to rebirth and bind us to the wheel of existence.

Let me illustrate:

Immediately after death-consciousness, rebirth-consciousness arises. ‘*Anusaya kilesā*,’ the latent defilements which we are talking about, lie dormant at the moment of death-consciousness and the immediately following moment of rebirth-consciousness. Thus, at the arising of every rebirth-consciousness, the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion also arise, but only as ‘*anusaya kilesā*’. They exist unseen, in a state of potentiality, just as the potential exists in every seed to generate a plant and in

every plant to produce its corresponding fruit. We know these latent defilements exist because they arise when suitable conditions are present, just as the plant arises from the seed in the presence of moisture, and the fruit arises from the plant in the presence of sunlight.

Defilements can be classified into three stages:

1. The Stage of Dormancy (*Anusaya*), when the defilement lies inactive and latent at the base of the mental continuum.
2. The Stage of Obsession (*Pariyuṭṭhāna*), when the mind becomes fixated on the defilement. It is at this crucial point that the defilement rises to the surface of the mind, as it transits from dormancy to activity upon making contact with suitable conditions.
3. The Stage of Transgression (*Vīikkama*), when bodily, verbal and mental wrong actions are performed.

As we have already looked at stage one, the Stage of Dormancy, let us now look at stage two, the Stage of Obsession. When we see an attractive object, a desire for that object often arises in the mind. Defilements transit from dormancy to activity in the sense that one is now ready to act, are now prepared to act *i.e.*, to perform unwholesome bodily and verbal actions. The same basic pattern occurs with the defilements rooted in hatred and delusion. When we see an object that we do not like, aversion arises. Likewise, when we see an object without knowing that its fundamental nature is impermanence, suffering and non-self, delusion arises.

At this Stage of Obsession, if we keep our mindful-

ness, the defilement can be suppressed. In this way, we can prevent unwholesome actions from being performed. However, when there is a lack of mindfulness, our 'obsession' quickly and invariably gives rise to wrong action. This is the Stage of Transgression.

Let me go one step further:

There are six sense-doors on which visible objects, sound objects, smell objects, taste objects, tangible objects and mind objects can impinge. Due to unwise attention greed arises upon contact with a desirable object. In the same way, due to unwise attention hatred arises upon contact with an undesirable object. Whenever greed or hatred arises delusion follows.

The nature of greed is wanting or desiring. Its function is to stick like glue. When desire for an object arises, greed sticks to the object. Thus, greed is only doing its job. Hatred and delusion also have their jobs to do.

The problem comes with self-identity, which ensures that greed, hatred and delusion cannot be separated from 'I', 'me', and 'mine'.

Due to self-identity, defilements (like greed, hatred and delusion) and the 'I' cannot be separated. Thus, when greed, hatred and delusion arise, we take them to be 'my' greed, 'my' hatred and 'my' delusion. The same applies to pride, jealousy, envy and so on.

Due to wrong view, *i.e.*, seeing things as 'I', 'me', and 'mine', we perform unwholesome actions. If we examine these wrong actions, we see that bodily and verbal wrong actions are the end result of mental wrong actions. If mental actions are wholesome, the resulting bodily and

verbal actions are also wholesome. If mental actions are unwholesome, the resulting bodily and verbal actions are likewise unwholesome. Lacking mindfulness, we are not aware of our defilements as they progress from the Stage of Dormancy to the Stage of Obsession and then finally to the Stage of Transgression. When this occurs it is too late to stop the process and we have no choice but to suffer the consequences.

In describing Right Effort, Lord Buddha advises us to suppress unwholesome mental states and to develop wholesome mental states. This advice is given in the *Sacitta Sutta* (sutta of Self-Examination) from the *Anguttara Nikāya, Chapter of Ten (X.51)*. In this sutta, the Buddha states:

“Bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu is not skillful in the habit of other’s thoughts, he should train himself to be skillful in the habit of his own mind.”

This means that if we are not skillful in reading the thoughts and habits of other minds, we should train ourselves to be skillful in knowing the thoughts and habits of our own mind.

The Buddha continues:

“Just as a man or woman is fond of self-beautification, examining the image of his or her own face in a bright clear mirror or a bowl of clear water; just so, if he or she sees any dirt or blemish on the face, he or she will try to remove it. If he or she sees no dirt or blemish, she will be pleased, thinking, ‘How clean am I. How fortunate am I!’

“In the same way, bhikkhus, self-examination is for the improvement of skillful qualities (*kusala*

dhamma). A bhikkhu should examine himself, asking, ‘Is my mind clogged with much desire to get the possessions of others? Is it clogged with thoughts of ill-will? With sloth and torpor? With restlessness? Often with doubt? With much anger? With sensual thoughts? With thoughts of exhaustion? With laziness? With distraction?’”

In short, is my mind clogged with the three defilements of greed, hatred and delusion?’

It is only through this constant self-examination, that we can know whether our minds are clogged with defilements or free of them. Being mindful in this way will encourage us to put forth greater effort to abandon unwholesome (unskillful qualities). This advice, given by Lord Buddha, is as valid today as it was over 2,500 years ago.

Today people all over the world love physical beauty. They constantly look at their faces in mirrors to spot dirt and blemishes, checking whether their hair is in place, looking for various ways to enhance their physical image. So much time is spent in this way! But how many people take time to examine themselves for greed, anger, delusion, jealousy, envy, stinginess, pride, etc., when these defilements rise to the surface of the mind? I think very few indeed.

How rare it is to find an individual who can recognize the arising of defilements and then willingly suppress them. The rest of us give free rein to our defilements and allow them to run rampant in our mind. As if this were not enough our defilements are promoted and bolstered by the media to make sure that we all become addicted to them.

At this point, let me ask you another question. What is more beautiful: a beautiful face or a beautiful mind? Shouldn't the answer be beautiful mind? It is not because of beautifying our faces that we are reborn as humans. It is because of beautifying and purifying our minds.

That being so, shouldn't we reverse the 'time-and-effort scale'? Wouldn't it be better if we spent more time putting forth effort to cultivate wholesome qualities and eradicate unwholesome qualities and less time and effort on physical beauty and self-admiration? If we do not do this how will we be protected? Remember what the Buddha said in the *Attarakkhita Sutta*?

“Restraint everywhere is good.

Conscientious, everywhere restrained,

One is said to be protected.”

In order to further illustrate how latent defilements lead to bodily and verbal wrong actions, let me next refer to the *Vidūdabha Story* which occurs in the *Dhammapada, Book IV, Flower, Puppha Vagga*. This story dramatically demonstrates the importance of suppressing and reducing unwholesome qualities at the earlier stages of the mental process.

One day King Pasenadi saw thousands of bhikkhus passing through the streets going to the houses of Anāthapiṇḍika, Cūla Anāthapiṇḍika, Visākhā and Suppavāsā for their meals. Desiring to perform such meritorious deeds as well, the King set forth to invite the Buddha and one thousand bhikkhus to also take meals at his palace. He was granted the opportunity to do so for seven days consecutively. He did

so diligently and graciously.

On the seventh day, he invited the Buddha to continue to have meals regularly in the royal palace. However, it is not the habit of Buddhas to regularly accept food from the same person, as Buddhas arise for the benefit of the many. So the Lord asked Venerable Ānanda and five hundred other bhikkhus to do so in his place. For seven days the King served Venerable Ānanda and the Sangha attentively.

However, on the next day, the eighth day, the King was so busy with his royal duties that he forgot to serve the Sangha. On the ninth day it happened again. On the tenth day, when the time for the start of the meal had passed, all the bhikkhus left the palace leaving only Venerable Ānanda behind. Actually, food had been prepared but the King had forgotten to order his servants to serve the meals in his absence. Without the King's order, no one dared to do so. When the King found out later that the Sangha had left without taking the prepared food, he felt offended. He went to the Buddha to complain.

The Buddha released the bhikkhus from blame and told the King truthfully that the bhikkhus lacked confidence in him. For that reason they had left. Realizing and accepting his fault, King Pasenadi designed to regain the confidence of the Buddha and his Sangha. He thought that the best way was to establish a strong relationship between himself and the Buddha. A marriage with a Sakiya lady, a relative of the Buddha was considered an appropri-

ate way. So he sent an ambassador to the Sakiyas requesting a Sakiyan daughter in marriage.

The Sakiyas were worried about potential problems if they did not send a lady to marry the King. Kosala was a much bigger and stronger state than Sakiya. King Mahā Nāma of the Sakiyas decided to send Vāsabhakhattiyā, the beautiful daughter of King Mahā Nāma by a slave-woman. King Pasenadi married her and soon she became the mother of a son, Vidūdabha.

From the age of seven, Prince Vidūdabha constantly asked about his mother's family. At sixteen, Prince Vidūdabha persistently asked to visit his maternal grandfather, King Mahā Nāma. Finally, his mother, Vāsabhakhattiyā, agreed to let him go. As she was aware of her own lineage, and therefore anticipated potential problems, she sent a letter ahead to the Sakiyas stating that she was happy where she was. She requested that for the happiness and peace of all concerned, the Sakiyas would do well not to behave proudly towards her son.

Prince Vidūdabha went to the Sakiyan capital, Kapilavathu with a large retinue. His Sakiyan relatives welcomed him very well and gave him many gifts. In the course of the visit, the Prince noted something strange. No relative paid respects to him. He himself had paid respects to all the relatives who were senior to him. When he enquired, he found out that all the princes younger than him were not there. (When the relatives of the Buddha knew of his coming, they decided not to pay respects to him,

as he was the son of a slave-woman. So they sent away all the princes who were younger than him.)

Nonetheless, he stayed there for three days before returning to Kosala. After he left, one of his servants realized that he had forgotten something at Kapilavathu. So he went back to collect it. There he saw a slave-woman washing with milk the seat that Prince Vidūdabha had used. Curious, the servant asked the slave why she was washing the seat with milk. She replied that the seat had been used by the son of a slave-woman, Prince Vidūdabha.

In a short time, that incident became common gossip. Soon it came to the ears of the Prince. With his pride pricked and deeply affected by this news, strong hatred arose in his mind. Hatred came to the surface of his mind.

Thereupon, he swore the following oath,

“As they now wash my seat with milk, when I become king so will I wash it with their blood!”

Thus, through wrong verbal action, he bound himself tightly to his Sakiyan relatives with strong hatred and resentment. Here, I would like to remind each of you to carefully reflect on the nature of human beings. Everyone, whether of high or low status, inferior or superior, poor or rich, stupid or intelligent, ignorant or wise, has a high opinion of himself. Most people think only of their own self-importance. If someone treats them poorly, regards them as worthless or low and behaves disrespectfully towards them, it can cause hurt, resentment and anger. A desire to retaliate may arise in the mind.

Back to the sutta. When Prince Vidūdabha became King, he remembered the insult he had suffered and the oath he had sworn against the Sakiyas. He soon assembled a large force to take revenge and set out for Kapilavathu. The Buddha, aware of the impending destruction of his relatives by King Vidūdabha, sat in the shade of a small tree on the Sakiyan side of the border with Kosala.

On the way to Kapilavathu, King Vidūdabha saw the Buddha in the shade of the small tree and he asked the Buddha why he chose a small tree when there were much bigger and shadier trees on the Kosalan side of the border. The Buddha replied,

“In all the shades in the world, the shade of relatives is coolest and the best.”

Realizing that the Buddha wanted to protect his relatives, the King turned his forces back. On two other occasions, the same thing happened. However, on the fourth occasion, realizing the futility of trying to stop the invasion, the Buddha withdrew his attempt to protect his relatives. King Vidūdabha sallied forth and killed his Sakiyan relatives violently. He killed all except those princes and princesses who were with his grandfather, King Mahā Nāma. Having destroyed them, he washed his seat with their blood as he had vowed.

We now see that the Stage of Obsession (*pariyuṭṭhāna*) has shifted to the Stage of Transgression (*Vitikkama*) which involves bodily wrong action, in this case, killing.

When people heard about that terrible revenge-

killing, they uttered with grief and disbelief,

“The kamma that the relatives of the Buddha had accumulated when Vidūdabha was sixteen was just minor. What the King has done is very terrible and excessive. It should not be such.”

When the utterance came to the ears of the Buddha, the Lord explained that,

“The kamma that my relatives did in the present life is very minor but it is not because of that present kamma that they have been destroyed. In a previous existence, they threw poison into a water-body to destroy water creatures. That unwholesome act has now made someone appear to perform the act of killing them. The present killing is a result of that past kamma.”

That kamma has opened the door to give its results.

In another verse from the Dhammapada, the Buddha explains:

“The evil he himself has done, born of himself and produced by himself, grinds him as a diamond grinds a hard gem.” (Dhammapada. 161)

Based on this understanding is it really necessary to complain that others have hurt us, insulted us or found fault with us? According to the Buddha, who is to blame? Should we not blame ourselves for having performed the kamma that results in mental or physical pain? This being the case, let us cease to respond unwisely towards anybody in our present life – no matter how much that person tries to harm us. If we just allow the kamma to ripen

as it ripens and accept its result accordingly, our kammic load will be lightened and our future will become that much brighter. Let us, therefore, welcome with a smile the results of past kamma.

If we respond with wrong bodily or verbal actions, such actions will only add to our kammic debt – a debt which we may very well have to pay for in the future. Therefore, let us reflect carefully and thoroughly before we take any actions. Performing wholesome actions will improve our future existence. Performing unwholesome actions will surely lead to more suffering. Those with wisdom and discrimination will know which type of action to choose.

Let us now go back to the Sacitta Sutta:

“If, on examination, a bhikkhu knows that his mind is not usually with much desire for the belongings of others; is without much thoughts of ill-will; is usually free of sloth and torpor; is free of restlessness; is free of doubt; is without much anger; is with very few unhealthy thoughts; is not with body exhausted; is not lazy or is not un-concentrated, the bhikkhu should not be satisfied. He should put in more effort to establish those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the eventual ending of all taints.”

How can we establish these skillful qualities to a higher degree? Firstly, we keep *sīla* and abstain from the unwise acts of killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, telling lies and consuming drugs and alcohol. In this way, we purify our bodily and verbal actions, and protect ourselves from the results of these unwholesome actions. Such are the benefits of *sīla*.

Secondly, we need to purify our mental action. This is accomplished by the practice of samatha meditation, in which deep concentration is developed. For many practitioners, here at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, this includes the cultivation and practice of *jhāna* (*absorption concentration*). In this state of absorption, which can last for one, two, three or more hours, the meditator focuses solely on the meditation object. As a result, latent defilements are unable to rise to the surface of the mind – they remain in the Stage of Dormancy. Since they do not reach the Stage of Obsession, they are unable to progress to the Stage of Transgression. Thus, the mind is temporarily purified of unwholesome mental actions.

Let me summarize the first two trainings:

By keeping *sīla* we protect ourselves from performing bodily and verbal wrong actions. By practicing absorption concentration, we protect ourselves from performing wrong mental actions. However, lying at the base of our mental continuum there are still defilements in the Stage of Dormancy. Given suitable conditions, these latent defilements quickly rise to the surface of the mind unless they have already been eradicated.

Think about the example of Vidūdabha after he heard the news concerning the washing of his seat. His dormant defilements of anger and hatred rapidly arose as obsessions, and then quickly turned into transgressions. This led to and resulted in the violent slaughter of his relatives which in turn generated new defiling kamma that he paid for just as quickly. As he was returning to Kosala after the slaughter, he and many of his men perished in a great flood while camped on the banks of the river, *Aciravatī*.

According to the Buddha, “*Two arrows follow all beings: one is wholesome and the other unwholesome.*” These are arrows of the past. Thus, when we perform unwholesome actions in the present life, such unwholesome actions can cause the results of our past unwholesome kamma to ripen – thus, for a minor transgression (*which is only a supporting cause*) we may end up paying a big price. Conversely, when we perform wholesome actions in the present life, such wholesome actions can cause the results of our past wholesome kamma to ripen – thus for a single good action, we may reap great benefits.

Back to our story: If Vidūdabha had been mindful and practiced wise-attention, he would have been able to keep the defilements of anger and hatred from rising to the surface of his mind, and he would not have gone on to slaughter his relatives. Moreover, he and many of his men would not have been drowned.

Now, we know how latent defilements rise to the surface of the mind and become transgressions, and how to protect ourselves from these transgressions. However, I have not yet explained how to eradicate latent defilements. If we want to eradicate these defilements we must go on to the third training, the practice of insight meditation.

There are two basic ways to approach insight meditation. One is to develop absorption concentration through Mindfulness of Breathing or other samatha meditation and then to go on to Four Elements meditation for insight meditation. The other approach, for those who wish to take a more direct route to the practice of vipassanā is to begin with Four Elements meditation. In this approach, we analyze the elements that compose the physical body. As con-

centration improves, the body begins to emit light. With continued practice this light changes from grey to white. Eventually, it becomes brighter and brighter until we see the entire body as a block of bright light. As we continue to discern the four elements in that block of light, it finally breaks down into very small particles, called *rūpa-kalāpas*. With continued practice, we will see 8, 9 or 10 types of materiality within each *rūpa-kalāpa*. These 8, 9 or 10 types of materiality are the ultimate reality of the physical body.

Having discerned the four elements internally up to their ultimate reality, we then go on to discern the four elements externally, seeing all external animate and inanimate objects as *rūpa-kalāpas*, arising and perishing very rapidly. At this point, we no longer see men, women, trees or other conventional forms but only *rūpa-kalāpas* rapidly arising and perishing. We are now seeing things as they really are, just as we have been taught to do by the Buddha.

The next step is to analyze ultimate mentality. When we are successful in this practice we can know and see the mental process, arising in a series of mind moments, with consciousness and associated mental factors present in each moment.

After knowing and seeing ultimate materiality and mentality, we go on to practise “Dependent Origination” (*Patīccasamupāda*) in order to know cause and effect. Once we have discerned cause and effect, we go on to insight meditation by examining the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self throughout the mind-matter complex. When our insight matures, Path

Knowledge arises. We see Nibbāna. There materiality and mentality cease.

With the arising of Path Knowledge, defilements are eradicated step by step. With the first Path, we attain the first fruit of enlightenment as a Sotāpanna. With this attainment, the defilements of self-identity, doubt and attachment to rites and rituals are eradicated. We now know and see the workings of defilements clearly. We clearly see wrong view as ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’. We no longer see greed as ‘my’ greed or hatred as ‘my’ hatred. We no longer harm ourselves by consciously performing wrong physical and verbal actions which can lead to rebirth in the four woeful planes.

Conclusion

If we want a life of true security, we must practice the three trainings of *sīla* (virtue), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). When our insight matures, the first path and fruition will arise. With this attainment, we protect ourselves from performing countless wrong physical and verbal actions.

Now I would like to ask you one final question, “How much effort are you willing to put into your practice?”

According to the Buddha,

“Just as a person whose head is on fire will put forth extra determination, effort, diligence, etc., to put out the fire on his head; so, too, should a bhikkhu put forth extra determination, effort, etc., to abandon unwholesome, unskillful qualities in the mind.”

Here, the Buddha is describing Right Effort. Without

Right Effort, how can we expect to attain the goal? If we fail to achieve our objective in this lifetime, then we may one day deeply regret that we did not put forth the effort when we had the opportunity. May each of us put forth the necessary effort and may we rouse the energy to make an end of suffering. When arahant path and fruition arise, all our defilements are destroyed without remainder and rebirth comes to an end. There will be peace. Only then does our life become “a life of true security”.

May we all transform our lives into lives of true security.

May each and every one of us attain Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

The talk given on *Sunday*,
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and
November 2005 at Shuang Lin Monastery in *Singapore*

BASED ON THE TALK

Three Sayings of Devas

Edited by

~ Bhikkhu Suññātagavesaka

BASED ON THE TALK

Three Sayings of Devas

Nothing happens without cause. Every effect has its cause.

Those reborn among humans and devas take birth in these realms because of past wholesome deeds. Wholesome deeds, such as offering *dāna*, keeping virtue and meditation practice cause the conditions for birth in the world of humans or devas. Unwholesome deeds, on the other hand, cause the conditions for existence in the woe-ful realms among hell beings, animal beings or hungry ghosts.

Wholesome deeds produce wholesome results.

Unwholesome deeds produce unwholesome results.

That is why the Buddha said: “It is not true that right or wrong actions produce the same results. Righteous actions lead to the good realms; unrighteous actions lead to the bad realms.”

The actions we perform now create or cause the conditions that we come into contact with in the future. The consequences of those actions determine our future. While

we may hope for good results such as birth in the human or deva realms, it is our actions, not our hopes, that determine the results.

As humans, we know about the human realm. However, we do not know much about the deva realm. Let us study the difference between them by comparing these two realms.

Unlike humans, devas do not need to go through a 9 or 10 month gestation period in a mother’s womb. At the moment of their appearance in a deva realm, they are born fully formed, with adult bodies.

Devas, like humans, are the benefactors of their own wholesome past deeds. However, they enjoy sensual pleasures that are so vastly superior to what humans experience that it is impossible to make a comparison. The loftiest and most magnificent beauty, sounds, smells, tastes and touches that we experience in the human realm only hint at the beauty and sublime sensuality experienced in the deva realms.

In order to better appreciate this description of the deva worlds, I quote from the *Māgandiya Sutta* in the *Majjima Nikāya*. Therein the Buddha said:

“Suppose, *Māgandiya*, a householder or a householder’s son was rich, with great wealth and property and, being provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure, he might enjoy himself with forms cognizable by the eyes that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. He might enjoy himself with sounds cognizable by the ear ... with smell cognizable by the nose ... with

flavors cognizable by the tongue ... with tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. Having conducted himself well in body, speech, and mind, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he might reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world in the retinue of the gods of the Thirty-three, and there, surrounded by a group of nymphs in the Nandana Grove, he would enjoy himself, provided and endowed with the five cords of divine sensual pleasure. Suppose he saw a householder or a householder's son enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five cords of human sensual pleasure. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that young god surrounded by the group of nymphs in the Nandana Grove, enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five cords of divine sensual pleasure, envy the householder or the householder's son for the five cords of human sensual pleasure or would he be enticed by human sensual pleasure?"

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because heavenly sensual pleasures are more excellent and sublime than human sensual pleasures."

We now can understand that even the most sublime human sensual pleasures are no more than mundane and commonplace by comparison to those sensual pleasures that the heavenly ones delight in.

Furthermore, the human life span is short when compared to the life span of devas.

According to the Buddha:

"Bhikkhus, each fifty years of mankind is but a single night and day to the hosts of the Four Royal devas; their month has thirty of those nights, their year twelve months.

Bhikkhus, each hundred years of mankind is but a single night and day to the devas of the Thirty; their month has thirty of those nights, their year twelve months."

How very short the human life span is! Compared to the life span of devas, our life span is hardly more than a fraction. However, even though their life span is extremely long they, too, must one day die.

Devas die because of four causes.

1. The expiration of their life-span
2. The expiration of their previous meritorious deeds
3. Because they forget to eat food. And,
4. The arising of consciousness rooted in aversion.

Although the first two causes of death are easy to understand, the last two are not. Let me try to further explain: Because heavenly sensual pleasures are so sublime, devas at times forget about eating. When they do, their bodies become depleted and exhausted. Without food, even devas will die. This is the third type of death – death which is attributable to simply forgetting to eat.

The fourth type of death is caused by the arising of consciousness rooted in aversion. Sometimes dissatisfaction arises when one sees someone's success. This dissatisfaction can have the characteristics of jealousy, resentment, aversion and envy – of not taking pleasure in the

prosperity of others. Its function is not to take delight in the good fortune or happiness of others.

Jealousy and envy can arise only with consciousness rooted in aversion. Aversion, jealousy and envy make the mind hot, tired and exhausted. Unchecked, such behavior can bring about a person's death.

Because of jealousy, dissatisfaction and not taking delight in the prosperity and success of others, some devas die.

We now know the four causes that result in the death of devas. But what happens to a deva when he or she is about to pass away?

Let us look again at the Buddha's teaching. This one is from chapter three in the Itivuttaka. Therein the Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, when a deva is about to pass away from a company of devas, five foretelling signs appear: His flower-garlands wither, his clothes become soiled, sweat is released from his armpits, his bodily radiance fades, and the deva takes no delight in his heavenly throne.”

The beautiful flower-garlands that a deva puts on at birth are highly fragrant. These heavenly flowers remain fresh and continue to bloom throughout the deva's long life. It is only near the time that a deva is about to die that his or her garland withers.

Likewise, a deva's clothes are always beautiful and clean. There is never a need to wash them. However, when a deva is about to pass away, his or her clothing becomes dirty.

We humans also suffer from heat and cold, but devas do not. We humans need to work but devas do not need to work. Humans sweat, devas never sweat. It is only when a deva is about to pass away that sweat is released from his or her body.

A deva's previous wholesome deeds create the causes that determine their present life conditions in the deva realms. The greater the number of wholesome deeds that they performed in their past, the longer their life-span, the more magnificent their beauty, the greater their happiness, and the more widespread and superior their fame and power. It is solely because of past wholesome kamma that beings are born in the deva realms into a large company of companions.

When a deva wishes to eat, delicious food simply appears. Like humans, devas consume food, but unlike humans their digestive process doesn't produce excrement. There are no toilets anywhere in the deva realms. How wonderful their world is! How beautiful and clean it must be! Their bodies, too, are radiant, emitting bright and brilliant light. However, when they are about to pass away, their bodily radiance also grows fainter and fades away.

Even though the deva's world is in a celestial realm that he or she delights in, when a deva is about to die, there is no more delight to be found there.

Do these foretelling signs always appear in all devas when they are about to pass away?

It is explained in the Majjima Nikāya commentary:

“Among devas, some are of much merit; some are not. When the former are about to pass away, five foretelling

signs appear. But for the latter, these signs appear not. This is the difference between them.”

When a deva of lesser merit passes away, his body vanishes like the flame of a lamp and he takes rebirth in any one of the sensual realms.

Returning to the sutta: At the point in time when devas discern the foretelling signs of approaching death, they encourage one another in three ways with the words:

“Go from here, friend to a good destination. Having gone to a good destination, gain the gain that is good to gain. Having gained the gain that is good to gain, become well-established in it.”

When this was said, a certain bhikkhu asked the Lord: “Venerable Sir, what is the devas’ meaning of going to a good destination? What is their meaning of the gain that is good to gain? What is their meaning of becoming well-established?”

“The human state, bhikkhus, is the devas’ meaning of going to a good destination.”

Why is the human state a good destination?

Because, in the human state, there are a lot of opportunities to do wholesome deeds such as offering *dāna*, cultivating *sīla* and practicing *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation. For these reasons it is said that the human world is a good destination.

It is easy to perform *dāna* here. Why? There must be three suitable conditions: Things to offer, the volition to offer those things and someone to receive the offerings.

In the human world these three conditions are easy to

find. With income and earnings people have the means to offer things. They can offer more or less, good or bad, depending on their individual circumstances. The volition to offer things can also be easily cultivated and refined. And, finally, we have only to look around to see that the world is filled with those who need and are worthy to receive that which is offered. So, we see that the human world is a good destination.

Devas are born receivers. Due to their kamma every imaginable and desirable sensual object is readily available and waiting for them. This is the fruit of their previous wholesome deeds which has ripened and is now present to serve them in the deva realms.

They don’t need to worry about food, clothes or places to live in. They don’t need to work. They don’t need to earn money. They don’t need to cook. They don’t need to wash their clothes. They don’t need to see doctors. Sickness and old-age are not obvious in the deva realms. Imagine how excellent it is there!

Female devas are inconceivably beautiful and look like they are sixteen years old for their entire lifetime. Male devas look as if they are only twenty years old. They spend whole life times enjoying the most sublime sensual pleasures. Their world is completely pleasurable. It is filled with beauty beyond words, likewise with sounds, tastes, smells and tactile sensations; so much so that they can easily forget about doing wholesome deeds. They live there because of their own kamma. They don’t need anyone to offer them anything. It is difficult to find the opportunity to give *dāna* in the deva’s realm. But, just because it is difficult does not mean devas cannot do *dāna*. They can

do *dāna*. As an example: When the Buddha arose in the world, the devas were able to offer *dāna* by infusing nutritive essence into the food *dāna* offered to the Buddha everyday by humans. There are other ways they managed to offer *dāna*, too.

As for *sīla*, there are 227 bhikkhus-precepts, as well as ten precepts, nine precepts, eight precepts and five precepts which human beings are encouraged to keep.

The Buddha permitted only humans to ordain as bhikkhus, but not devas. Therefore 227 bhikkhus-precepts turn out to be for the welfare, happiness and benefit of human bhikkhus. They are for those who ordain and obey and respect the rules and who love keeping them. They are not for those who do not. It is only when a Buddha arises in the world that the 227 bhikkhus-precepts are offered to human beings. This is the rare opportunity we humans are getting.

Humans can quite easily set up circumstances for keeping other precepts. But, because of the sublime sensuality found in the deva realms, it is generally more difficult for devas to keep them.

However, there is something that many people don't know: After the Buddha's Enlightenment, he gave his first talk to five ascetics, but only one among them realized the true Dhamma, while the devas and brahmas who realized the true Dhamma were many. So there are many enlightened devas with perfected *sīla* and who now live in the deva realms.

It is easier for human beings than it is for devas to abandon their attachment to visible objects, sound objects, smell objects, taste objects and tangible objects that we all

come into contact with in our daily life. If we are willing, we will find ample opportunities to practice and keep the precepts.

But devas, who live in celestial splendor with magnificent sensual objects to sidetrack them, find it much more difficult to restrain themselves let alone to abandon their attachment to the intensity and sensual delights of their world.

Human beings, on the other hand, generally experience difficulties and suffering in their lives. Because of this, they remember the value of doing wholesome deeds. But, devas who live lives full of sensual pleasures become heedless about cultivating wholesome deeds.

Female devas are amazingly beautiful.

Their physical touch is so fine that male devas are attracted by them and find it hard to stay away from them. To give you an idea about how beautiful they are, I will quote one of the stories from Dhammapada, Book 1, Story 9.

You may know Prince Nanda? He is a younger brother of the Buddha. Prince Nanda married a very beautiful lady named Janapada-Kalyānī. On their wedding day our Buddha entered their house for alms. After the wedding ceremony ended, the Buddha placed his bowl in the hand of Prince Nanda. Then, rising from his seat, he departed without taking the bowl from the hands of the Prince. Out of respect to the Buddha, Prince Nanda did not dare call attention to the fact that he still had the Buddha's bowl. He thought to himself, "He will take his bowl at the head of the stairs." But even when the Buddha reached the head of the stairs, he did not take his bowl. Nanda

thought, “He will take it at the foot of the stairs.” But the Buddha did not take his bowl even there. Nanda thought, “He will take his bowl in the palace platform.” But the Buddha did not take his bowl even there.

Even though Prince Nanda strongly desired to return to his wife, so great was his respect for the Buddha that he did not dare speak about the Buddha taking back his bowl. Instead, much against his own will, he followed the Buddha thinking all the while “The Buddha will take his bowl here! The Buddha will take his bowl there! He will take his bowl over there!”

At that moment, his wife, Janapada-Kalyānī, the belle-of-the-country received word: “My lady, the Exalted One has taken Prince Nanda away with him.” Hearing this news Janapada-Kalyānī, with tears streaming down her face and hair half-combed, ran after Prince Nanda as fast as she could and said to him “Sir, please return immediately.” Her words caused a tremble in Nanda’s heart. Despite that the Buddha, still without taking his bowl, led Nanda to his monastery where he said to him, “Nanda, would you like to become a monk?” So great was Prince Nanda’s respect for the Buddha that he dared not say, “I don’t wish to become a bhikkhu.” So he said instead, “Yes, I would like to become a monk.” Then the Buddha ordained him as a bhikkhu.

Nanda felt so discontented that he told his troubles to a large company of Bhikkhus, saying “Venerable Sangha, I am dissatisfied. I am now living the Religious Life but I cannot continue to live the Religious Life any longer. I intend to abandon the higher precepts and to return to the lower life, the life of layman.”

The Buddha, hearing of this incident, said to him, “Nanda, is the report true that you told a large company of bhikkhus, “Venerable Sangha, I am dissatisfied. I am now living the Religious Life, but I cannot continue to live the Religious Life any longer. I intend to abandon the higher precepts and to return to the lower life, the life of layman?” “It is quite true, Venerable Sir.” The Buddha then said to Nanda, “Why are you dissatisfied with the Religious Life you are now living? Why cannot you continue to live the Religious Life any longer? Why do you intend to abandon the higher precepts and to return to the lower life, the life of layman?”

“Venerable Sir, when I left my palace my wife, Janapada-Kalyānī, with her hair half-combed, took leave of me, saying, ‘Sir, please return immediately.’ Venerable Sir, it is because I keep remembering her that I am dissatisfied. I am now living the Religious Life, but I cannot continue to live the Religious Life any longer. I intend to abandon the higher precepts and to return to the lower life, the life of layman.”

Then the Buddha took Bhikkhu Nanda by the arm, and by his psychic power guided him to the devas’ world. On the way the Buddha pointed out to Venerable Nanda a greedy ugly female monkey which had lost her ears and nose and tail in a fire. The monkey was seated on a burnt stump.

When they reached the world of the devas the Buddha pointed out five hundred amazingly beautiful female devas who came to wait upon Sakka, the king of the devas.

After the Buddha had shown Bhikkhu Nanda these two sights, he asked him this question, “Nanda, whom do

you regard as being the more beautiful, your wife Janapada-Kalyānī or these five hundred female devas?”

“Venerable Sir, compared to these five hundred amazingly beautiful female devas, my wife Janapada-Kalyānī looks like the greedy ugly female monkey which has lost her ears and nose and tail in a fire. In comparison to these female devas, my wife does not amount to even a fraction. These five hundred female devas are infinitely more beautiful.

How surprising it is! Compared to the female devas, even Janapada-Kalyānī, the belle-of-the-country, looks like an ugly monkey.

Now let us turn to the practice of samatha and vipassanā meditation.

Concentration can be developed only when we are free from sensual pleasures and the hindrances. As you have heard, there are five hundred very beautiful female devas to the left and right of each male deva. Heavenly sensual pleasures are so fine that it is difficult for ordinary devas to cultivate wholesome deeds. Therefore devas declare that the human state is a good destination.

The reason our Bodhisatta chose not to spend his whole life span in the deva realms, whenever he was born there, was because he could not fulfill the perfections there. Instead, as the Bodhisatta, he was able to make a determination (*adhithāna*) to return to the human world where this is easier. So when we are humans, we really need to practice meditation to penetrate the Dhamma as it really is. I have now explained why the devas say ‘the human state is a good destination’.

However, for those who practiced *sīla*, *samādhi* and *vipassanā* systematically and deeply when they were humans, being reborn among the devas hastens their attainment. Why? According to the Buddha, there are many Dhamma-friends in the deva realm. When they see you there they recognize you and remind you to practice meditation and when that happens you can penetrate the Dhamma very quickly.

The answer to the second question is:

“Having become a human being, acquiring faith in the Dhamma-and-Discipline taught by the Tathāgata is the devas’ meaning of ‘the gain that is good to gain.’”

To share how important it is to acquire faith in the Dhamma-and-Discipline, let me quote the words of the Buddha from Saṁ yutta Nikāya. Our Buddha said:

“Faith is a person’s partner;
If lack of faith does not persist,
Fame and reputation thereby come to him,
And he goes to heaven on leaving the body.”

People have different kinds of companions: teachers, friends, wives, husbands, children, protectors and so on. They are not our real companions. They are only with us temporarily, not permanently. Such companions cannot follow us when we die. What follows us when we leave this body is a companion called ‘Faith’. It is because of faith that we perform wholesome deeds such as offering *dāna*, keeping the precepts and engaging in meditation practice. Thereby, fame and reputation come to us, and when we leave the body, we will go to the good destination.

“Faith is a man’s best treasure,” said the Buddha.

All accumulated wealth such as gold, money, jewels and any person or thing that a man considers valuable is defined as ‘treasure.’ But living and non-living things are really not a man’s best treasure. When we die we have to leave them all behind. With faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, and in kamma and its result, we do wholesome deeds such as offering *dāna*, keeping the precepts and practicing meditation. Knowing the benefit that results from such actions, we know that this is man’s best treasure. So, the wise invests the strength of living things and accumulated-non-living things in the fertile field called the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. In doing so, good results will follow us like our shadow, and we can take them away with us when we leave this body. That is the reason why our Buddha said “Faith is a man’s best treasure.”

“Faith secures provisions for a journey.”

Whenever we start a journey we need a variety of provisions: food, water, vehicles, money for traveling expenses, etc. The longer our journey, the more provisions we need to carry. If we lack any of these provisions and if that lack persists, our journey becomes long and difficult. In the same way, when we start the journey to Nibbāna, where all suffering ceases, we need the right provisions. The manner in which we carry them with us is through accumulating wholesome deeds. All wholesome deeds have roots in ‘Faith’: faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, and faith in kamma and its result. If a lack of faith in any of these persists, we will be short of the necessary provisions for the journey to Nibbāna.

Let’s look at this from another perspective.

When we teach Mindfulness of Breathing meditation, we see that there are some yogis who improve quickly, some slowly and others that cannot improve. We know that because of past practice, the quick ones improve quickly. When they can perceive ‘dependent origination’ which is discerning causes and effects, they realize that they have practiced Mindfulness of Breathing meditation in their past existences. They come to know that they have already cultivated the provisions that enable them to develop concentration quickly in this life.

Likewise, when some yogis start the practice of knowing and seeing ultimate mentality and materiality, it goes smoothly for them; others encounter difficulties. This is also because of their past practice. What they have accumulated by faith in their past is the treasure that they now carry with them, as provisions on the journey to Nibbāna. Because of this they know and see the Dhamma as it really is.

There are some who have practiced insight meditation deeply in their past existences. These meditators make rapid progress. They can quickly see Nibbāna in this present life, by practicing serenity and insight meditation.

All the wholesome actions that we have performed, because of ‘Faith,’ collect as our right and proper provisions. Due to this, our Buddha declared, “Faith secures provisions for a journey.”

“Faith is the seed.”

“We reap what we sow. If we plant wholesome seeds such as offering *dāna*, keeping precepts and practicing meditation with faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, they will bring forth the desirable fruits of

long life, beauty, wealth, happiness, fame and power when we are once again reborn among humans and devas. They will help us to know and see Nibbāna. Therefore, the seed of faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, must be planted in order to bear the fruit called Nibbāna.

“By faith one crosses over the flood.”

It is hard to cross the flood of saṃsāra. Even though we know it is impossible to cross over the flood called the rounds of rebirth in a ship, with faith one can cross over this flood so difficult to cross. If faith has been well-established, the human world is indeed a good destination. It is here that we can most easily ‘gain the gain that is good to gain.’ If we cannot, we have come to a good destination in vain.

When faith is steadfast, firmly rooted, established and strong, not to be destroyed by any recluses or brahmins or devas or Māra or Brahmas or by anyone else in the world: this is what the devas mean by becoming “well-established.”

When a person has realized Nibbāna with first Path and Fruition knowledge, no one in the world can destroy his faith; no one ever again has the power to take that knowledge away from him or make him change. With first Path and Fruition knowledge, his faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha becomes unshakable. His faith is said to be “well-established.”

There is a story about this. In the time of the Buddha, there was a man called Surambaṭṭha. When he heard the teachings directly from the Tathāgata, Surambaṭṭha became a Sotāpanna. Afterwards, the Buddha departed.

After a while, Māra decided to test Surambaṭṭha’s faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. For this reason he took on a Buddha-like appearance and went to see Surambaṭṭha.

When Surambaṭṭha saw that the Buddha had come back again, he paid his respects and waited for the Buddha to say something. Māra, looking like the Buddha, said, “Surambaṭṭha, I have told you that the five-aggregates have the nature of impermanence, suffering and non-self. Now note that there are also some dhammas which are permanent, pleasant and self.”

Surambaṭṭha was not fooled. Knowing the nature of the Buddha, he knew that the Buddha never says anything that is misleading or wrong. Furthermore, he himself had penetrated the Dhamma as it really is. Even Māra could not make him change. When Surambaṭṭha asked, ‘Are you Māra?’, Māra confessed that he was. Surambaṭṭha then said to him, “My faith is unshakable. It has been rooted and is well-established in me. Māra, if you appeared as a hundred or thousands in number, you still could not change me. Leave here.”

Here we should consider how Surambaṭṭha, as a Sotāpanna, had established unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. If he were an ordinary person, he might have believed Māra.

There are great differences between a Sotāpanna and an ordinary person. This was declared by the Buddha in the Saccasaṃyutta of Mahāvagga Saṃyutta. The title of the sutta is ‘The Fingernail’. Therein it was said:

“On one occasion, the Blessed One took up a little bit of soil on the tip of his fingernail and addressed the

bhikkhus thus:

“What do you think, bhikkhus, which is more: the little bit of soil on the tip of my fingernail or the great earth?”

“Venerable Sir, the great earth is more. The little bit of soil that the Blessed One has taken up on the tip of his fingernail is trifling. Compared to the great earth, the little bit of soil that the Blessed One has taken up on the tip of his fingernail does not bear comparison, does not amount even to a fraction.”

“So too, bhikkhus, for a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough, the suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated is more, while that which remains is trifling. Compared to the former mass of suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated, the latter does not bear comparison, does not amount even to a fraction, as there is a maximum of seven more lives. He is one who understands as it really is: This is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, and this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.”

The first noble person, a Sotāpanna, is completely free from suffering in the four woeful states. Ordinary people are still subject to suffering there.

Because of not knowing the Four Noble Truths, ordinary people are subject to many dangers. One of the dangers is not recognizing the right teacher to follow. That is why the commentary explains that *ordinary people are those who look up to many different teachers*. However, if you have

accumulated enough wholesome actions in your past to differentiate the right teacher from the wrong teacher, it means you have been taught the right teaching from someone in your past. You are being driven by the force of past good actions. That’s why I encourage you to learn the true teaching of the Buddha in this present life. Be concerned about whether or not someone is teaching in accordance with the Buddha’s true teaching. Do you know that no one can teach the path leading to Nibbāna themselves? Keep in mind that the Buddha taught the path leading to Nibbāna. It is his teaching. It comes to us directly from him.

Between birth and death, please reflect on these questions: How many teachers have you searched for, expecting something from them? Have you been satisfied with them or not? Are you still hoping to find other teachers? Yes? You should know that no worldly teachers can make you feel satisfied and content. Why? Because both you and they are driven in a specific direction, by defilements such as greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy and stinginess. We are all slaves of the defilements, not the masters. They lead us onto the wrong path. Usually people act from the intention to satisfy their worldly desires and cravings. Craving, which is almost always hunger for something, is a defilement. For example, we approach someone for something we want and they welcome us because of something they want. This type of relationship does not foster truth. It does not eradicate defilements. Because of these defilements, we will not really be satisfied with who we are nor will they be satisfied with who they are. People often decide something or someone is good or bad, based on the prospect of reciprocity or benefit. This way of think-

ing is subject to their changing likes and dislikes and is ego-driven, self-serving and fundamentally dishonest.

You may read books written by different teachers about meditation practice which bring up many doubts in you. You may find it hard to decide who among them is right or wrong. How can you know? Once you have seen the Four Noble Truths, you can easily discern which of these books is right and which is wrong.

It is only when you meet someone who teaches you how to eradicate the defilements in order to see Nibbāna, and after having seen Nibbāna, that your mind will finally be fulfilled. Once you have seen the Four Noble Truths, you see the Buddha. You will no longer need to search for any other teachers. That's why our Buddha said:

“The one who sees the Dhamma, sees me.”

The one who has seen Nibbāna will not look for other teachers. He then has only one teacher, the Buddha. Because his faith is rooted and well-established in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, it can be said that his faith is unshakable.

May you all be able to establish unshakable-faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

May you all attain Nibbāna, the Peace.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

The talk given on *Sunday*,
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BASED ON THE TALK

Giving What?

Edited by

~ Bhikkhu Suññātagavesaka

BASED ON THE TALK

Giving What?

There are two kinds of actions performed by worldly people: Good actions and bad actions. Good actions give good results while bad actions give bad results. Whether good or bad, one day all actions produce their results. We should, therefore, carefully consider the possible results of our actions before we act.

When we look around us we see disparity. Some people are rich; some are poor. Some are beautiful; some are ugly. Some live long, but some die young. Some are famous; most are ordinary. Some are powerful; others are weak. These inequalities do not appear by chance. It is not someone's good luck that they are healthy, or another's bad luck that they are unhealthy. All such inequalities among human beings result from our own intentions and actions. Each person reaps the fruit of his own actions.

On one occasion, the Buddha was asked, "What are the causes and conditions why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and

healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What are the causes and conditions, Master Gotama, why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?"

The Buddha answered, "Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is actions that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."

The Buddha explained the meaning.

One who kills living beings will himself lead a short life; one who abstains from killing living beings will himself lead a long life.

One who injures living beings will be a sickly person, whilst one who abstains from injuring living beings will lead a healthy life.

Display of anger, hatred and bitterness will lead to ugliness; the absence of such negative emotions will be rewarded with beauty.

One who feels envious of the gains, honor, respect and veneration being received by others will be deprived of companions; one who rejoices at the esteem and honor bestowed upon others will be blessed with a multitude of companions.

Not giving food, clothing, carriages, garlands, scents, beds, dwelling and lamps to recluses or brahmins leads to poverty; giving such requisites to them leads to wealth.

One who does not honor those worthy of honor will be low-born, whilst one who honors those to whom honor is due will be high-born.

Not visiting a recluse or brahmin and asking questions such as, “Venerable sir, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blameable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kinds of action will lead to my harm and suffering for a long time? What kinds of actions will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time? Not visiting and asking such questions leads to stupidity; visiting a recluse or brahmin and asking such questions leads to wisdom.

Every result has its own cause. Different causes generate different results. These are experienced in our surroundings, and are the result of our previous actions. External beings are not responsible for the conditions of our life. It is our own past deeds that condition our lives.

It is through our own intentions and actions that we cast a mold for our life. What we do today will bear fruit tomorrow, not only in this life but also in future lives.

Just as a skillful artist has the ability to produce a masterpiece, in the same way, a skillful person has the ability to act in ways that will bring into being a future life masterpiece. On the other hand, unskillful actions will cause the opposite effect.

We need the right knowledge and skill to produce a masterpiece.

This knowledge can be gained through learning the Lord Buddha’s teaching. The Itivuttaka said:

“There are these three grounds for meritorious activity. Which three? The ground for meritorious activity made of giving, the ground for meritorious activity made of virtue, and the ground for meritorious activity made of development [meditation]. These are the three grounds for meritorious activity.”

Among the three, let us give priority tonight to exploring the ground for meritorious activity made of giving. Through the act of giving, people create a better mold for a better life.

The Buddha said:

“If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of selfishness overcomes their minds.”

Because of not knowing the results of giving and sharing as the Buddha knows, stinginess overcomes our minds. That’s why the Buddha said:

“Giving seems like a battle.

Through stinginess and negligence

A gift is not given.”

I am going to speak to you tonight about the benefit of giving and sharing.

This talk is based on a sutta from the Devatā Saü yutta in the Sagātha Vagga Saü yutta that points out the importance of knowing what to give. The title of the sutta is *Kindada* which means ‘**Giving what?**’

Before I begin, let me first explain the difference between the resultant experience of those who give alms – in contrast to those who don’t, by quoting a sutta called ‘**the Benefits of Alms-giving**’. It is from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, chapter five. Therein we read:

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. At that time Princess Sumana, with a following of five hundred court ladies in five hundred chariots, came to see the Blessed One. Having arrived, she paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and said:

“Buddha, suppose there are two disciples of the Buddha who are equal in faith, equal in virtue and equal in wisdom. But one is an alms-giver and the other is not. Then these two, after death, would be reborn in a happy state, in a heavenly world. Having thus become devas, Buddha, would there be any distinction or difference between them?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a deva, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: in divine life-span, divine beauty, divine happiness, divine fame and divine power.”

“But if these two, Buddha, pass away from there and return to this world here, would there still be

some distinction or difference between them when they become humans again?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a human being, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: in human life-span, human beauty, human happiness, human fame and human power.”

“But if these two, Buddha, should go forth from home into the homeless life of monkhood, will there still be any distinction or difference between them when they are monks?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a monk, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: he is often asked to accept robes, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept almsfood, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept a dwelling, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept medicine, and it is rare that he is not asked. Further, his fellow monks are usually friendly towards him in deeds, words and thoughts; it is rare that they are unfriendly. The gifts they bring him are mostly pleasing, and it is rare that they are not.”

“But, Buddha, if both attain arahantship, would there still be some distinction or difference between them?”

“In that case, Sumana, I declare, there will not be any difference between one liberation and the other.”

“It is wonderful, Buddha, it is marvellous! One has, indeed, good reason to give alms, good reason to do meritorious deeds, if they will be of help to one as a deva, of help as a human, of help as a monk.”

Moreover, the Aṅguttara Nikāya says:

“Monks, in giving a meal, a giver gives five things to a receiver. What five?

He gives life, beauty, ease, strength and wisdom; but in giving these he becomes a partaker in each quality, in heaven and among men.

Our body is composed of four types of materiality: they are kamma produced materiality, consciousness produced-materiality, nutriment produced-materiality and temperature produced materiality.

Past kamma conditioned its materiality; consciousness and temperature also condition their respective materiality while the food we eat conditions nutriment produced-materiality. Food is one of the four causes which sustains our life. We cannot live without it.

That’s why giving alms is, in truth, giving life.

Food is a requisite that is essential for our survival and well-being. Health and human beauty depend on nourishment from food. If we go without food for only a few days, we begin to feel weak, our strength wanes and we quickly run out of the energy to do even simple everyday activities. We discover that our contemplative response diminishes and our rational ability is reduced. This is due to the active relationship between mind and body.

When we are hungry we suffer. If we are hungry for

long, we suffer a lot. We all know that this is a fact of life. On the other hand, once we have eaten we feel at ease and experience an immediate sense of well-being. With the return of our strength and energy, we are able to once again devote our lives to more than just our mere survival.

The Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, there are these five timely gifts. What five?

“One gives to the guest; to the traveller; to the sick; when food is hard to get; and the first-fruits of the field he sets before the virtuous.”

“Bhikkhus, these are the five timely gifts.”

If we need a better life, we need to give the five timely gifts. Why?

Let us reflect on our own life experience.

We need food to eat, clothes to wear, places to live and medicine to prevent and cure diseases. Can we get them when we need them?

There may be many who go without. It is because of not having given the five timely gifts.”

That’s why the Lord Buddha further instructed:

“Bhikkhus, do not fear meritorious deeds [offering *dāna*, keeping precepts, practicing meditation]. This is an expression denoting happiness, what is desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable, that is, ‘meritorious deeds.’ For I know full well, bhikkhus, that for a long time I experienced desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable results from performing

meritorious deeds.”

How can we experience desirable results by accumulating wholesome deeds?

To consider that question, we need to investigate the real meaning of meritorious giving. Let us begin by seeking guidance from the sutta named “**Giving What?**”

“On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then, when the night had advanced, a certain devata of stunning beauty, illuminating the entire Jeta’s Monastery, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and said to him:

“Giving what does one give strength?

Giving what does one give beauty?

Giving what does one give ease?

Giving what does one give sight?

Who is the giver of all?

Being asked, please explain to me.”

The Blessed One stated:

“Giving food, one gives strength;

Giving clothes, one gives beauty;

Giving a vehicle, one gives ease;

Giving a lamp, one gives sight.

“The one who gives a residence

Is the giver of all.

But the one who teaches the Dhamma

Is the giver of the Deathless.”

The first question is:

Buddha, “Giving what does one give strength?”

Our Buddha answers, “Giving food, one gives strength.”

The commentary explains:

What if a strong person were to go without food for two or three days? Even he would find it difficult to stand. On the other hand, if a weak person is nourished with meals, he soon recovers his strength. Therefore the Buddha said, “Giving food, one gives strength.”

The second question is:

Buddha, “Giving what, does one give beauty?”

The Buddha answers, “Giving clothes, one gives beauty.”

Everybody wants to be beautiful. Nowadays, in developed countries around the world, men and women both undergo plastic surgery on a regular basis. They are all hoping that they will wake up after their surgeries with new and beautiful faces. Naively, they believe that cosmetic surgery will make them happy. In fact, what they really end up with is not happiness but rather unforeseen trouble and worry. Even the most skilled plastic surgeon can not put a stop to the natural aging process. In order to maintain their skin, after their surgery, they become dependent on expensive lotions and creams. Even so, sooner or later their face-lifts need redoing and it is back

to the plastic surgeon's office over and over again. They become slaves to their own foolish vanity. In the end, it is futile and only leads to dukkha.

The Buddha cautions that hatred is for ugliness; non-hatred is for beauty and that those who want beauty should never get angry. So, don't ever get angry with anybody – then you won't need a plastic surgeon.

What actions mark anger? Harsh speech, angry looks, arguing, inappropriate criticism, dissatisfaction, complaining, finger pointing and ill-will are some of the marks of anger. If we, ourselves, want to be beautiful, we must avoid giving in to anger and to the causes of anger.

These are bodily wrong action and verbal wrong action. In order to avoid doing these wrong actions, we must be skillful in reading the habits of our own mind. Please remember the words of the Buddha that I referred to in my second talk **“A Life of True Security”**.

“Bhikkhus, if you are not skillful in reading the habit of others' minds, be skillful in reading the habit of one's own mind.”

There is a tale from the Jātaka Stories about this. In that story we meet a woman who lacked skill in reading the habits of her own mind. One day while irritated, she stared upon an Undeclared Enlightened One (*paccekabuddha*) with an angry look and spoke to him using harsh speech. This action made her become extremely ugly.

Once upon a time, in this story, a king of Benares, Baka by name, ruled his country righteously. At that time, a certain poor man who lived by the eastern gate of Benares

had a daughter named Pañcapapa.

It is said that in a former existence, as a poor man's daughter, this woman was kneading clay and plastering a wall.

At that time a *paccekabuddha* thought, “Where am I to get clay to make this mountain cave neat and trim?” He knew that he could get it in Benares. So, putting on his robes and with bowl in hand he went into the city and took his stand not far from this woman. As it happened, she was angry, and when she looked at the *paccekabuddha* she thought, “In his wicked heart he is begging for clay as well as alms.” The *paccekabuddha* stood without moving. Finally, when she saw that he remained motionless she had a change of heart and, looking at him once more she said “Monk, you have not got any clay.” After that she took a big lump of clay and put it in his bowl, and with this clay he was able to make things neat in the mountain cave.

In her subsequent life, as a result of having given the *paccekabuddha* that lump of clay, her body was soft to the touch. However, because of her angry look her hands, feet, mouth, eyes and nose were extremely ugly. In that life, she was known by the name of *Pañcapapa* (The Five Defects).

Is a woman beautiful when she's angry? As we all know, when a woman is angry she looks ugly, and when that kamma ripens she will be ugly. If we wish for beauty and other good rewards, we must avoid anger and be clever and skillful with our thoughts, words and deeds. The kammās we bring into being give rise to different results. Some actions have serious results while the outcome of

others is small and insignificant.

Should we happen to hurt, harm or destroy small beings, in general, the results of that action (*kamma*) will be relatively minor. But, on the other hand, if we hurt, harm or destroy large beings, the results will be the opposite other extreme.

In the same way, if we harm or destroy or insult a man of virtue, the results will be different than if we harm or destroy or insult a man of no virtue. When we are with the virtuous, we need to be mindful and attentive at all times and be especially on guard against doing anything unwholesome.

A person like a *paccakabuddha* is a Supreme One. Even if the action directed towards him is fairly weak or minor, the kammic results turn out to be heavy.

If we grow a sweet fruit tree in a fertile field, it will bear fruits that are sweet and delicious. If we sow a bitter seed in the same fertile field, the taste of the fruit will be bitter. We must always be adept when performing bodily and verbal actions. It is through them that we construct the conditions that influence and mold our lives.

Returning to the sutta, the deva's third question is: "Giving what does one give ease?"

The Buddha answers, "Giving a vehicle, one gives ease (a gift of well-being)."

It is explained in the commentary that a vehicle means anything which can make travel possible, convenient or comfortable. This could be a horse or an elephant, etc. Bhikkhus, however, are not permitted to accept vehicles such as horses and elephants. It is not suitable to offer

such things to bhikkhus. On the other hand, umbrellas, slippers, walking-sticks, accessories in travel and other types of vehicles not powered by man or animals are examples of vehicles that are allowable for bhikkhus. They can be offered. Giving these is also called giving vehicles. In the same way, a person is offering a vehicle (*i.e.*, anything which can make travel possible, convenient or comfortable) when he repairs roads, builds stairs and bridges, or arranges car, bus, boat, ship or air tickets for travel. So, we see that by giving a vehicle one gives ease.

The deva's fourth question is: "Giving what does one give sight?"

The Buddha answers, "Giving a lamp, one gives sight."

Even those with good eyes cannot see things in the dark. However, when given a lamp to light up the dark, one can see things as they are. So the Buddha said that by giving a lamp, one gives sight to those who need sight. Therefore, by giving candles, torch lights, electric lights and other lights which make things visible for those who need light, one is giving sight.

The deva's fifth question is: "Who is the giver of all?"

Our Buddha answered: "The one who gives a residence is the giver of all."

Why? Because after going for alms, one feels tired and weak. But when they return, take a drink of water, have a shower and enter a building where they can take rest, they feel safe, as well as fresh and strong. So, by giving a residence, one gives strength.

‘*Rupatīti Rūpan*’ These are the words from the *Visud-dhimagga*. They mean our body is always changing because of heat or cold. For instance, when we go outside we are exposed to the elements. Our appearance can be blemished by blistering sunlight or by dusty, windy weather. After coming back inside, however, we can clean up, take rest and quickly regain our appearance and complexion. So, by giving a residence, one also gives beauty.

Moreover, for those of us who wander outside or for anyone who walks outside, the bites of mosquitoes, snakes, scorpions, centipedes and other dangerous insects is an ever-present threat. We are at risk of coming down with malaria or other painful diseases if we are bitten. We also face the on-going problem of protecting our feet from thorns growing on the roadways and pathways that we wander along. By dwelling in buildings or residences, though, we are freed from all these different types of danger. We are safe and at ease and have a place to study, learn or teach without having to worry about somewhere to live. So we can see that by giving a residence, one truly gives a gift of ease and well-being.

In the same way, when we travel or go somewhere and it’s hot and dusty outside, we often feel eye strain or eye irritation which is a stinging uncomfortable sensation. But by entering and resting in the protection of a dwelling, our eyes soon get back to normal and our sight clears up. So, by giving a residence, we also see how one is giving the gift of sight.

Furthermore, when practicing serenity and insight meditation while sitting safely inside buildings and residences, meditators can penetrate the dhamma as they re-

ally are and to see Nibbāna. So, through the act of giving a residence, one is also providing a safe and clean environment in which to practice serenity and insight meditation, in order to know and see the dhamma as they really are and to see Nibbāna.

Before concluding my talk, I will quote a Velāma sutta from Aṅguttara Nikāya, chapter nine.

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. At that time Anāthapiṇḍika came to see the Blessed One. Having arrived, he paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and the Blessed One asked him thus:

“Is alms given in your family, householder?” “Yes, Buddha, it is given in my family. But it consists of a coarse mess of broken rice grains together with sour gruel.”

“Householder, whether one gives coarse alms or choice, if one gives casually, without thought or interest, not with one’s own hand, but gives as if throwing and with no view to kamma and its result in the future; then when that giving bears fruit, the alms-giver’s mind will not turn to the enjoyment of excellent food, of fine clothing, of rich carriages, or to the enjoyment of the five senses; and one’s sons and one’s daughters, one’s slaves, servants and workfolk will have no desire to listen to one, no desire to lend an ear, nor bring understanding to bear on what one says. And for what reason? Such is the result, householder, of deeds done casually.”

Now we see one cause for taking little enjoyment in excellent food or fine clothing. We also see why sons, daughters, servants and others refuse to be obedient. This is kamma and its result.

The Buddha continued:

“But whether one gives coarse alms or choice, householder, if one gives respectfully and considerately, after taking thought, with one’s own hand, gives not like throwing and with view to kamma and its result in the future; then when that giving bears fruit, the alms-giver’s mind will turn to the enjoyment of excellent food, of fine clothing, of valuable carriages, to the enjoyment of the excellence of the five senses; and one’s sons and one’s daughters, one’s slaves, servants and workfolk will have the desire to listen to one, will lend an ear and bring understanding to bear on what one says. And for what reason? Such is the result, householder, of deeds done respectfully and considerately.”

For even more clarity concerning beneficial ways of giving, the Buddha stated:

“Long ago, there lived a brahmin called Velāma. He gave very rich gifts, such as these: He gave eighty four thousand golden bowls filled with silver; he gave eighty four thousand silver bowls filled with gold; he gave eighty four thousand copper bowls filled with treasure, and many other valuable things.

Perhaps, householder, you may think thus: ‘Maybe Velāma, the brahmin, who made that very rich gift, was someone else.’ But think not so, for it

was I, who at that time was Velāma, the brahmin. It was I who made that very rich gift.

But when the gift was given, householder, there was no one worthy to receive the gift; there was none to sanctify that gift. For, though brahman Velāma gave that very rich gift, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one person of right view, a Stream-enterer (*Sotāpanna*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred persons of right view, Stream-enterers, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Once-returned (*Saghāthāgāmi*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Once-returneds, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Non-returned (*Anāgāmi*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Non-returneds, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Arahant.

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Arahants, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed an Undeclared Enlightened One (*paccekabuddha*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred *Paccekabuddhas*, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one *Tathāgata*, Arahant, Fully Awakened One.”

We now know about the importance of how to give and something about the results of giving. In finishing

my talk tonight, I want to recount how the Buddha concluded his talk. These are the last words of the Buddha in the sutta, the apex of the teaching: “But the one who teaches the Dhamma is the giver of the Deathless.”

In the commentary it is explained:

The one who gives Dhamma talks, who explains the meaning of the commentaries, who teaches the Pāli texts, who answers questions related to the Dhamma, and who teaches meditation practice is one who teaches the way that leads to Nibbāna. He is the giver of the Deathless. Because he teaches this supreme teaching he will himself, in the end, attain Nibbāna, the Deathless.

In the Itivuttaka it also says:

“There are these two kinds of giving: The giving of material things and the giving of the Dhamma. Of these two kinds of giving, this is supreme: The giving of the Dhamma. There are these two kinds of sharing: The sharing of material things and the sharing of the Dhamma. Of these two kinds of sharing, this is supreme: The sharing of the Dhamma. There are these two kinds of help: help with material things and help with the Dhamma. Of the two, this is supreme: Help with the Dhamma.”

That’s why our Buddha said in the Dhammapada:

“Sabbadānaü dhammadānaü jināti,
 sabbarasaü dhammaraso jināti;
 sabbaratiü dhammarati jināti,
 taṇhakkhaya sabbadukkhāü jināti”ti.

This means:

The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts;

The taste of Dhamma excels all tastes;

The delight in Dhamma excels all delights.

Freedom from craving vanquishes all suffering.

May you all be able to give the excellent gifts.

May you all be able to taste the excellent tastes.

May you all be able to delight in the excellent delights.

May you all be able to vanquish all suffering.

May you all be the giver of the Deathless, Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

BASED ON THE TALK

Recollection of Death

Edited by

~ Bhikkhu Suññātagavesaka

BASED ON THE TALK

Recollection Of Death

“Heedfulness is the way to Deathless.

Heedlessness is the way to death.

The Heedful die not.

The Heedless are as if dead already.”

These are the words of the Buddha from the *Dhammapada*. Those who are heedful die not. Why? The heedful do meritorious deeds. They give and are charitable and they keep the moral precepts. They practice the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*). Once meditators successfully develop concentration, they proceed to the practice of insight meditation (*Vipassanā*), to see things as they really are. When their insight-knowledge matures, the supramundane Path and Fruition Knowledge arises. The Path Knowledge eradicates defilements step-by-step without remainder. They see Nibbāna, the Deathless. So the Buddha said, ‘Heedfulness is the way to Deathless.’ It is also said, ‘The heedful die not.’ This does not mean that

they will not grow old or die. It means that because of the fourth Path (*Arahant Path*) and Fruition Knowledge they are no longer subject to rebirth. Therefore whether they are physically alive or dead, because they are no longer subject to birth and death, they are considered not to die.

On the contrary, those who are heedless are as if dead already. Why? They do not think about giving, nor do they think about keeping the moral precepts or practicing the three trainings: the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*). The purpose of practicing these trainings is to know and see the Four Noble Truths — the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering, and to abandon attachment to sensuality, becoming, wrong view and ignorance. Because they do not practice these three trainings they do not see things as they really are. Without seeing things as they really are, attachment to sensuality, becoming, wrong view and ignorance arises and with it rebirth – again and again. That’s why the Buddha said, ‘heedlessness is the way to death’ and ‘the heedless are as if dead already.’ According to the commentary, one who is heedless cannot be liberated from rebirth. When he is reborn, he must grow old and die. So, if we don’t want to die again and again, be heedful.

Tonight I will talk about the subject of death. Whenever we talk about death, we have to talk about birth too. But before I begin to talk about meditation on death, I want to point out that human behavior in the face of birth and death is, indeed, very strange. Why? At birth, when a child is born crying, people smile. Their faces shine with

happy delighted expressions. But at death, when someone's last hour arrives, people cry. Their facial expressions convey sorrow and grief. These two behaviors strike me as very odd. When someone is born crying, people smile, but when someone is awaiting his last hour, people cry.

Actually, instead of only being happy and smiling at the birth of a new infant, we ought to also give careful consideration to what awaits that child. Why? Because he comes into a world that is a mass of suffering, he, too, will suffer. Like all humans beings, that newborn baby is bound for dukkha, not for sukha. Like them he, too, will also be the cause of much dukkha for both himself and others.

That small baby will also experience the many different types of suffering that we ourselves have experienced in this life. He was born and is, therefore, subject to sickness. Because he was born he is subject to aging. Because he was born he is subject to worry. Because he was born he is subject to sorrow. Because he was born he is subject to grief. Because he was born he is subject to fear. Because he was born he cannot escape death. These are lamentable conditions. Furthermore, because of ignorance, he may continue to accumulate more and more unwholesome deeds throughout the duration of his life. Most people amass a stockpile of unwholesome deeds over the course of a lifetime. If he does, he may fall into one of the four woeful states upon dying. So, a compelling case can be made for saying that 'birth keeps one in bondage.'

Upon reflection we see that birth brings along with it much suffering and pain. But people don't like to admit this. Parents spend their lives trying to provide for their

children's welfare. They wear themselves out for their children. Day-by-day their bodies become older and older, weaker and weaker. Finally, one day they die. Birth leads to death. It is inescapable. Our ending is guaranteed by our beginning. No one can avoid death.

This is the *Dukkha* that follows birth. This is the *Dukkha* born of birth. It is natural for people to be pleased by the arrival of a baby. Nevertheless, birth is pleasing, in large part, only because people don't see or acknowledge the inherent *Dukkha* that exists in it.

Even though people know that humans are mortal, they do not want to experience their own mortality. Some people even think just to see a dead-body is inauspicious, so they try to avoid all such occasions. I have students who have actually never seen a dead body, at any time in their lives. When I teach them the meditation practice that is a recollection of death, I encounter difficulty. Why? Because, in order to practice recollection of death, they need to take a dead body as their meditation object. When I give them the instruction, what do they say? "I never saw a dead body in my life." Some say, "In my country seeing a dead body is considered inauspicious." So, even though death is as much a part of life as birth, they have no direct experience with ever having seen a dead body. So, when I teach them the 'Recollection of Death meditation', I have to search for photos of corpses to show them. Only then are they able to take a dead body as their meditation object.

In contrast, whenever I see a corpse I consider it an auspicious occasion. Why? It gives me the motivation to reflect on my own death. When I look at a dead body I

feel that I'm seeing something undeniably real. It gives me an opportunity to think about the true nature of the body. This has been my experience ever since I was a young boy. Whenever I saw a dead body it made me think! Whenever I set eyes on the ugly repulsive complexion of a dead body, I also looked at my own complexion and felt as if it changed. I knew my life would end; that I, too, would die. Even then, at that young age, I felt that life was futile. A compelling sense of urgency arose in me. But because I was still very young, I didn't know what to do about the contradictory feelings of futility and urgency. As I grew older, they became an important part of my practice.

So, we can say that seeing a dead body is really an auspicious occasion. It is, in fact, an opportunity to reflect deeply for those who have wise attention, but is lost on those who don't have wise attention. Seeing a dead body is an opportunity for liberation. In the Buddha's time he had many disciples who, because of seeing a dead body and meditating on death, were able to make an end of suffering.

So, seeing a dead body is truly an opportunity for our liberation.

I want to share my experience with all of you. One of the main causes leading to my ordination was seeing a dead body. The mother of one of my students had been ill for a long time. I was one of her care-givers. While she seemed to improve from day-to-day and it appeared as though she would recover, after some time her condition declined and in the end she died. At that time, I wasn't thinking about my own death. I was totally focused on trying to build up my life. I was working to earn money. I

was working to amass wealth. It was easy not to think about my death when I was so hard at work collecting 'things' to inflate and improve my life. But when she died it was a wake-up call. A sense of urgency arose in me.

We had taken very good care of her, providing her with the most excellent medicines, good food and good accommodation. But nothing could save her. When her time ripened, she died. Even though we gave her the best and most expensive medicine and she appeared to be getting better, in the end her condition unexpectedly changed and she died. She was still young. Her death took me by surprise and gave rise to a feeling of urgency in me.

I understood then that one day my life would also end. I, too, would die. But, of course, I didn't know when I would die, where I would die and how I would die. I wondered: 'How long will I live?' I didn't know. I reflected: "Death is certain. Life is uncertain. I will surely die. My life will end in death. But I don't know when and where I will die." I considered the possibility that I could fall into one of the four woeful realms. Just the thought frightened me. I certainly knew that I wanted to be free from suffering in the four woeful realms. The question of 'how' then filled my mind. I realized that I needed to change my way of living while I still had the time and opportunity to do what I needed to do. I realized that changes were needed *now*, before I die." At that time, the sense of urgency that filled me was overwhelming. It was so strong; I didn't want to do anything but practice meditation. Not long afterwards, I found myself in robes.

This personal story illustrates why seeing a dead body is really an auspicious occasion. It is a wake-up call, a teach-

ing that points to liberation, to freedom from suffering. If we see with wise attention, we will be inspired to do good things and to practice with determination and diligence.

Whenever we see a newborn baby we know that between his or her birth and death that human being will come into contact with a lot of expected and unexpected, desirable and undesirable things. Although we are happy to see birth, most of us do not want to think about meeting death. But, if the truth be told, seeing a dead body is an advantage to someone who reflects well on it. If we talk about death, we must talk about causes of death, as well. Some die when they are young. Some die when they are old. Why? The Buddha explains why in the *Abhidhammā*. There are four causes:

1. Some die due to the expiration of their life span (*Āyukkhaya-marana*).
2. Some die due to the expiration of their reproductive Kammic force (*Kammakkhaya-marana*).
3. Some die due to the expiration of both reproductive Kammic force and life-span (*Ubhayakkhaya-marana*).
4. Some die due to destructive-Kamma (*Upacchedaka-marana*). They may die in an accident. Their life-span still remains and their Kammic force still remains, but because of destructive Kamma they are destroyed and they die.

We all remember how shocked and frightened people were because of the giant **tsunami** that not long ago killed so many people. Thousands upon thousands were either injured or swept away in that natural disaster. Even today we don't really know how many people were affected

by the destructive force of that 'killer wave,' – young and old alike, rich and poor. It was a colossal tragedy, the result of destructive Kamma, in Pāḷi, *Upacchedaka-marana*, the fourth cause of Death.

Everyone dies because of one of these four causes. Some die because of expiration of their life-span, some die of expiration of reproductive kammic force, some die of the expiration of both, and some die of destructive Kamma.

I want to tell you a story. This story is from the Saū yutta Nikāya. In the Buddha's time there was a Deva, Subrahmā, who was happily abiding in the Deva world with a retinue of one thousand female devas. In this story, Subrahmā was sitting under a tree, in the Nandana Grove, among five hundred female devas. The other five hundred had climbed up the tree. They were singing and throwing flowers down from the tree. Those female devas who remained under the tree with Subrahmā gathered up the flowers and made wreaths of them for him. His companions were all happily singing and dancing. But suddenly, the devas up in the tree stopped singing. There was silence. Subrahmā wondered what happened. He looked up and saw that the tree was empty.

Five hundred of Subrahmā's female companions had simply vanished.

The desire to know where they went arose in his mind. When he looked for them with his divine eye, he discovered that they had suddenly died but were immediately reborn in the Avīci hell. It is a very terrible hell. Five hundred female Devas from his retinue who were happily singing and throwing flowers down from the tree suddenly

died and fell into that terrible hell.

As you know separation from those whom we love is suffering. No less so for Devas; Subrahmā felt very, very sad. He suffered very much. He felt intense grief. At the same time, heedful attention arose in him. He examined his own life-span and saw that he himself, along with the remaining five hundred female Devas were due to die in seven days and that they also would take rebirth in the same hell.

Let me ask you a question. What do you think? Which grief would be greater, the grief that arose in the young Deva's mind when he was separated from those original five hundred devas whom he loved, or the grief that arose in him when he saw that he and his remaining retinue were going to suffer in the same hell soon?

For sure, the stronger grief would be that which arose in him for himself and his remaining retinue when he saw the coming terrible suffering that they all were also headed towards. Before, he suffered for those whom he loved and lost. Now, he suffered for himself. Intense grief arose in his mind. The fear of suffering in hell is so deep-seated and terrifying that a sense of urgency immediately arose in him.

Driven by this sense of urgency and in absolute fear, Subrahmā went to see the Buddha and asked for comfort and help. In the presence of the Buddha, he recited this verse:

“Always frightened is this mind,
The mind is always agitated
About unarisen problems

And about arisen ones.

If there exists release from fear,

Being asked, pleased declare it to me.”

Even though devas are normally very happy, Subrahmā was now anxious and terrified. His fear was so dreadful and continuous that he uttered the words ‘*always frightened is this mind, the mind is always agitated.*’ He was concerned about both arisen problems and unarisen ones. In this case, the arisen problem was the sudden death and shocking destination of the five hundred female devas from his retinue. The unarisen one was even more problematic – his own imminent death and descent into hell along with the rest of his remaining retinue. Motivated by a sense of urgency, he asked the Buddha to make known the way to release.

The Buddha answered as follows:

“Not apart from enlightenment and austerity

(*i.e.*, duthaṅga¹ practices),

Not apart from restraint of the sense faculties,

Not apart from relinquishing all,

Do I see any safety for living beings?”

The Buddha instructed Subrahmā that meditation practice is a source of comfort. So strong was the deva's sense of urgency that, having heard it, he and his retinue penetrated the Buddha's meaning and at that moment they attained stream-entry; they became Sotāpannas. They were all completely freed from suffering in the four woe-

¹ - It is an ascetic practice undertaken in order to perfect those special qualities of fewness of wishes, contentment, etc., by which virtue is cleansed.

ful states. Path Knowledge removed the defilements that would subject them to suffering in any one of those states. How wonderful it is!

Here we all need to think about the chances of being reborn in one of the four woeful realms compared to being reborn in one of the happy realms. You may remember, in an earlier talk I quoted from a Sutta wherein the Buddha asked a group of his monks which is greater, the little bit of soil on the tip of his fingernail or the soil of the great earth. Their answer, of course, was the soil of the great earth. According to the Buddha, just as the soil of the great earth is more than the soil on the tip of his fingernail, many more people are likely to fall into one of the four woeful realms when they die rather than being reborn in one of the happy realms.

Saü sāra is without a discoverable beginning. For uncountable lifetimes we have all been amassing both unwholesome deeds and wholesome deeds. Unfortunately, most of us accumulate more unwholesome deeds during our lifetimes than wholesome ones. If we don't practice meditation before we pass away, if we don't prepare for death while there is still time to do so, we can't penetrate the Dhamma as it really is and, therefore, we too, just like those five hundred female Devas, may fall into one of the four woeful states upon our deaths. .

Subrahmā and his remaining retinue of Devas foresaw that they would suffer in the hell unless they changed their way of living. Urgency arose in them. In the same way if we knew that we would die in seven days and suffer in hell, would we change our way of living, would we focus on meditation practice in order to be free from such

a destiny?

The Buddha pointed out to his monks that the way to deathless is brought forth through mindfulness on death. He said:

“Monks, Mindfulness of death, if developed and cultivated, brings great fruit and benefit: it merges in the Deathless, ends in Deathless. Therefore, monks, you should develop mindfulness of death.”

If we reflect on death every day, every morning, every evening, and every night; heedfulness will arise and right attitude will follow.

Without mindfulness of one's own certain death, people become heedless. If people really accepted that they too would sooner or later depart this life, they would be more heedful and not be so proud and full of self-importance. It's more likely that they would be humble; that they would live humbly.

If they reflected on their death everyday they would be gentle. Their minds would incline towards wholesome actions rather than unwholesome actions. They would mostly choose to do wholesome actions. So we see that suffering from greed, hatred, jealousy and stinginess can be solved by reflecting on death, particularly one's own death.

There is another story from the *Dhammapada* in which the Buddha talked about a young woman, a certain weaver's daughter, who developed mindfulness on death. This practice brought her great fruit and benefit.

One day, when the Blessed One came to Ālavī, the people of Ālavī invited the Buddha to a meal and offered him alms. At the end of the meal the Buddha gave a talk

saying, “Practice meditation on death, saying to yourselves, ‘Uncertain is my life. Certain is my death. I shall surely die. My life will end in death. Life is unstable. Death is sure. Death! Death ! And Death.’”

According to the Buddha, those who have not practiced meditation on death tremble and fear when their last hour comes. They die confused, often screaming in terror, much like a man without a stick is stricken with fear when he unexpectedly stumbles upon a snake on his path. Those who practice meditation on death have no cause to fear when their last hour arrives. They are like a steadfast man who seeing a snake, even at a distance, takes it up with his stick and throws it away. If we reflect on death while there is still time to do so – each day, every morning and every evening, we will gain great benefit which we will be glad about later. Therefore practice meditation on death.

Meditation on death can be developed by bringing to mind a corpse that we have seen. Here at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery we teach Mindfulness of Breathing to develop absorption concentration up to fourth jhāna. This is taught as a lead up to the practice of repulsiveness meditation. When the light produced by absorption concentration is bright and clear, we instruct meditators to take, as their meditation object, the most repulsive corpse of the same sex that they can ever remember seeing. Then, with the assistance of the light of concentration, they are instructed to visualize that corpse so that it is exactly as they saw it previously. Calmly concentrating their mind on it, they are to note it as, ‘repulsive, repulsive’ (*Patikkūla, Patikkūla*).

When the mind stays constantly on that object for one

or two hours, the first jhāna can be attained.

According to the *Mahasatipatthāna Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* Commentary, to practice meditation on death we must re-establish the first jhāna with the repulsiveness of a corpse, and with that external corpse as the object of meditation, we should then reflect: ‘This body of mine is also of a nature to die. Indeed, it will die just like this one. It cannot avoid becoming like this.’ By keeping the mind concentrated and mindful on our own mortality, we also find that the sense of urgency (*Saṃvega*) develops. When that urgency is present, it is possible to see one’s own body in the place of that repulsive corpse. Then perceiving that the life-faculty has been cut off in that image of their own body, meditators should concentrate on the absence of the life-faculty with one of the following thoughts:

1. My death is certain; my life is uncertain.

(*maranāṃ me dhuvaṃ, jīvitaṃ me adhuvaṃ*),

2. I shall certainly die (*maranāṃ me bhavissati*),

3. My life will end in death (*maranapariyosanaṃ me jīvitaṃ*),

4. Death, death (*maranāṃ, maranāṃ*).

We should choose one and note it in any language. Simply continue to concentrate on the image of the absence of the life-faculty in the image of our own corpse until the jhāna factors arise. It should be noted, however, that with this meditation subject we can only attain access concentration.

Back to the story: With the exception of one young woman, all those who heard the Buddha’s talk remained as wrapped up in their worldly duties as before. Only the

weaver's daughter, a mere sixteen years of age, said to herself, "Marvelous indeed is the speech of the Buddha; it behooves me to practice meditation on death. It tells me that I ought to practice...." And, she did nothing else but practice meditation on death, day and night, for the next three years.

One day, as the Buddha surveyed the world at early dawn, he perceived the young weaver's daughter had entered the Net of his Knowledge. When he saw her, he pondered within himself, "What will happen?" He became aware of the following: "From the day when this young woman heard my discourse on the Law, she has practiced meditation on death for three years. I will now go to and ask this young woman four questions. On each of the four points, she will answer me correctly and I will congratulate her. I will then recite the stanza, '*Blind is this world.*' At the end of the recitation, she will become a stream-enterer. Because of her, my discourse will be profitable to the many as well." So the Blessed One, with his retinue of five hundred monks, departed from Jetavana, and in due course arrived at Aggālava monastery.

When the people of Ālavī heard that the Buddha had come, they went to the monastery and invited him to be their guest. The young weaver's daughter also heard that he had come, and her heart was filled with joy at the thought, "Our father, our master, our teacher, one whose face is like the full moon, the mighty Gotama Buddha has come." And she reflected, "Now, for the first time in three years, I can go to see the Buddha. The hue and color of his body is as the hue and color of gold. Now I can go to hear him teach the Dhamma, containing within it all sweetness."

As she was thinking about this, her father was leaving for his workshop and said to her, "Daughter, a garment for a customer is on the loom, and a span of it is yet incomplete. I must finish it today. Quickly refill the shuttle and bring it to me." The young woman thought, "I wish to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma, but my father has given me a job to do. Shall I go to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma or shall I refill the shuttle and carry it to my father first?" This thought then occurred to her, "If I fail to bring my father the shuttle, he will strike me and beat me. Therefore, I will refill the shuttle first and give it to him, then I will go to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma." So she sat down on a stool and refilled the shuttle.

The people of Ālavī waited upon the Buddha and offered him food. When the meal was over they took his bowl and stood waiting to hear him speak. But the Buddha only said, "I made this journey of thirty miles for the sake of a certain young woman, but she has not yet had the opportunity to be present. When she finds the opportunity to be present, I will give the talk." Having said this, the Buddha remained silent. So did those who came to hear him remain silent. (When the Buddha is silent, neither men nor gods dare utter a sound.)

After the weaver's daughter had refilled the shuttle, she put it in her shuttle-basket and set out in the direction of her father's workshop. On her way there she stopped in the outer circle of the worshippers gathered around the Blessed One and stood gazing at the Buddha. The Buddha lifted up his head and gazed at her. By gazing at her she knew, "The Buddha, sitting in this group of people, signifies by gazing at me that he wants me to come for-

ward. His sole desire is I come into his very presence.” So she set her shuttle-basket on the ground and stepped into the presence of the Buddha.

(Why did the Buddha gaze at her? The following thought arose in him, “If this young lady goes hence, she will die as an ordinary one, and uncertain will be her future state. But if she comes to me, she will establish the first Path and Fruition, and her future state will be certain, for she will be born in the World of the Tusita gods.”)

Having approached the Buddha and paid him respect, the young woman sat in silence in the middle of the worshipers gathered around the Blessed One. The Buddha then asked her four questions.

1. “Young lady, where did you come from?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”
2. “Where will you go?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”
3. “Don’t you know?” “I know, Venerable Sir.”
4. “Do you really know?” “I know not, Venerable Sir.”

Many people were offended and said, “Look at her, this daughter of a weaver talks as she pleases with the Supreme Enlightened One.

When he asked her, ‘Where did you come from?’ she should have answered, ‘From the weaver’s house.’

And when he asked her, ‘Where will you go?’ she should have answered, ‘To the weaver’s workshop.’”

But, the Buddha put the multitude into silence. He continued questioning her, as follows: “Young lady when

I asked you, “Where did you come from?” Why did you say, “I know not.” She answered, “Venerable Sir, you yourself knew that I had come from the house of my father, the weaver. So when you asked me, ‘Where did you come from?’ I knew very well that the meaning was, ‘From what past existence did I come here? It was because of this that I answered I know not.’ Then the Buddha said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her, and asked her yet another question, “When I asked you, “Where will you go?” Why did you say, “I know not.” She answered, “Venerable Sir, you yourself knew that I was on my way to my father’s workshop with my shuttle-basket in hand. So when you asked me, ‘Where will you go? I understood it to mean, where I will be reborn. But I don’t know where I shall be reborn when I pass away from this present existence so I answered that I know not.” Again the Buddha said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a second time and asked her yet another question, “When I asked you, ‘Don’t you know?’ why did you say, ‘I know?’” “Venerable Sir, I do know that one day I shall surely die and, therefore, I could respond that ‘I know.’” The Buddha once again said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a third time, and asked her one final question, “When I asked you, ‘Do you really know?’ why did you say to me, ‘I know not?’” “Venerable Sir, I only know that I shall surely die. I do not know at

what time I shall die, whether in the night or during the day or early in the morning. Therefore, I said ‘I know not’.” The Buddha said to her again, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have correctly answered the question I asked you.”

The Buddha congratulated her a fourth time, and having done so, addressed the group of people assembled as follows” “So many of you have failed to understand the words she spoke. You were offended. Those who do not possess the Eye of Understanding, they are blind. But those who possess the Eye of Understanding, they see.” Having stated this, he recited the following Stanza:

“Blind is this world; few are there here that see;

As few go to heaven as birds escape from a net.”

At the end of the talk the young weaver’s daughter attained the first Path and Fruition Knowledge. She became a Sotāpanna because she had practiced meditation on death for 3 years. As you all heard, even though there were a lot of people who listened to the Buddha’s original talk, they all – with the exception of the young weaver’s daughter – remained wrapped-up in their worldly duties, attending to business as usual.

When the Buddha came back to the Ālavī and asked his four questions, the only one who understood was that young woman. What should we think? We should think about perfections. The weaver’s daughter was someone who had already practiced meditation in her past life. Because of this when the Buddha surveyed the world at early dawn, she appeared in the eye of the Buddha.

It was for her sake that the Buddha went to Ālavī. It

was for her sake, that he taught the practice of ‘meditation on death.’ The young weaver’s daughter appreciated this teaching very much. She liked it very much. Among the devotees, she alone took the teaching and put it into practice. After hearing the Buddha’s teaching, she practiced ‘meditation on death’ day and night for 3 years.

Today some of my students in this very monastery are inclined to practice recollection on death. If they really emphasize this meditation practice, a sense of urgency arises in their mind. They know that one day, sooner or later, they too will die. This understanding gives rise to a sense of urgency and they become heedful, always trying to be mindful of their meditation object.

Even if you cannot practice recollection of death systematically by entering into jhāna concentration, you all can reflect on death like this: ‘This morning I may die. Today I may die. Tonight I may die.’ If you reflect like this again and again every day, you will become heedful. You will become established in goodness. You will not waste your time. You will always pay attention to your meditation object, if you simply remember to reflect on death. When you give emphasis to this meditation practice, a sense of urgency will arise in your mind. Then, when you are instructed to practice serenity and insight meditation step-by-step systematically by the teacher, and, if your past perfections and present effort are strong enough, then when your insight matures, at that time Path and Fruition Knowledge will arise.

Nowadays people have not cultivated their perfections to the same high level as the people who were alive in the Buddha’s time. At that time, there were many who attained

the supreme states of *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgami*, *Anāgāmi* and *Arahant* after merely listening to the Buddha speak. Nowadays though, such people would indeed be hard to find. Practically speaking, this means that today laypeople and monastics alike cannot attain Path and Fruition Knowledge after merely listening to a Dhamma talk. Today, people need to practice systematically, step-by-step.

When I was in Singapore one layman asked me this question: ‘Is it necessary to practice in such a systematic way?’ He said to me, “In the Buddha’s time many people attained noblehood after merely listening to a very short Dhamma talk. Did they practice in such a systematic, step-by-step way? Is it necessary to practice *Sīla* (the training of morality), *Samādhi* (the training of concentration) and *Paññā* (the training of insight) systematically? The answer is “yes”. I explained to him that we are not like the people who lived in the time of the Buddha. We are living today, and this is an age wherein we need to be practical and practice systematically.’

Even here at Pa-Auk some of my students have asked me, ‘Is it necessary to practice *Rūpa*? No one besides Pa-Auk teachers teach it. The one who asked me this question is smiling. He is practicing *Rūpa* meditation now.

The answer is again “yes”. Nowadays please don’t expect to see Nibbāna without following step-by-step systematic instructions.

One day, I will give a more detailed explanation about this. What I want to point out for the purposes of this talk is that the young woman in our story, after hearing the Buddha’s teaching, actually followed his advice. From that day onwards, she practiced meditation on death for the

next three years. When the Buddha returned to Ālavi afterwards, it was for her sake. He gave his talk there for the sake of her attainment and for the benefit of the many.

When you are in the presence of a living Buddha, he will teach you directly. If you have already perfected your pāramis, the Buddha can teach you the most suitable meditation object for you to attain Nibbāna quickly. But now you are not in the presence of the Buddha but rather you are in my presence. I can only instruct meditation practice step-by-step, systematically, following the original teachings of the Buddha. Nowadays, it is very important to follow the instructions and practice systematically, day-by-day. By doing so, even if you cannot now attain Nibbāna, in the future your practice will be beneficial and will help you to attain Nibbāna, to see the Deathless.

After the weaver’s daughter heard the stanza “**Blind is this world ...**” recited by the Buddha, she attained stream-entry and became a Sotāpanna.

She then took up her shuttle-basket and proceeded to her father’s workshop. When she arrived, he was asleep despite the fact that he was sitting upright at his loom. His daughter didn’t notice that he was asleep when she handed him the shuttle-basket. As she did so, the basket hit the tip of the loom and fell with a clatter, making a loud sound. Her father awoke suddenly and accidentally pulled the shuttle. The tip of the shuttle struck his daughter in her breast. She died there and was immediately reborn in the world of the Tusita gods. Her father looked at her, as she lay there, her whole body spotted with blood. He knew that she was dead.

His grief was intense. With eyes filled with tears he went

to see the Buddha and told him what had happened. He appealed to the Blessed One, “Venerable Sir, comfort me, extinguish my grief.” The Buddha comforted him, saying, “Grieve not my disciple, for in the round of existences without conceivable beginning, you have shed, over the death of your daughter, tears more abundant than the waters contained in the four great oceans.” Upon hearing this he was comforted, his grief reduced, and he requested the Buddha to admit him into the Order and allow him to ordain. The weaver practiced diligently and not long afterwards he too attained Arahantship. Because of practicing meditation on death, his daughter attained Sotāpanna and he attained Arahantship. Meditation on death brought them both great benefit and led to their liberation.

So every day we should reflect and meditate on death. We should diligently and systematically practice recollection of death.

One day we will surely die.

The day we were born, we were crying while others smiled.

But on the day of our death, others will be crying.

Should we participate with those who are crying on that day? We should not.

If we practice diligently and become noble ones, we will not depart this life crying. We will die smiling.

So,

May you all practice recollection of death.

May you all be heedful.

May you all attain Nibbāna, the Deathless, in this very

life.

May all of us strive diligently for liberation.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

The talk given *on Sunday*,
18th December 2005 at Pa-Auk Tawya in *Myanmar*.

BASED ON THE TALK

Profound Dhamma

Edited by

~ Bhikkhu Suññātagavesaka

BASED ON THE TALK

Profound Dhamma

Today is the first day of the new year, 2006. On this day people greet one another by saying, 'Happy New Year'. Even though people all over the world say 'Happy New Year' to one another, I sense they are not really happy. Do you agree? Why? Most people seek happiness in the sensual world. They seek happiness in the external world, but real happiness is not found in the external world. Real happiness is calm. It is peaceful and harmless. Real happiness is found within oneself. We attain real happiness through self-realization. We do not find real happiness in the external world.

On this first day of each new year, people all over the world eagerly make plans. They hope to fill their lives with happiness. What could be more natural? Unfortunately, most people think that happiness can be gained through external activities, acquisitions or relationships. The truth is, in spite of all their plans and efforts, real happiness is unfamiliar to most people. Obsessively seeking happiness in sensual objects, in the sensual world, is exhausting. This

gives birth to *Dukkha* whether it is New Year's Day or the middle of summer. People finally do exhaust themselves in their habitual pursuit for external happiness. When that happens they have to rest and refresh themselves. Unfortunately, before long they are up to their familiar old habits of seeking happiness in the sensual world. Such people are like hungry ghosts, never satisfied, always craving for more of one thing or another.

But, some people are not utterly seduced by worldly sensual pursuits. They have stopped looking for happiness outside of themselves. Seeing all of you here on this New Year's Day of 2006 is wonderful. Knowing that you are in search of real happiness and that your efforts and practice is helping, not only yourselves but many other beings as well, makes me very happy for you. So, even though it is not part of our Myanmar cultural heritage to greet one another by saying 'Happy New Year,' on this first day of 2006 I heartily say to each one of you, 'Happy New Year.' You are true seekers! You are all here in search of true happiness. Congratulations!

On the occasion of this New Year's Day, let us compare the difference between people in this monastery and people in the world.

While people in the world are seeking happiness in the sensual world, people in the monastery are seeking happiness in the peaceful world, the world of the Dhamma revealed by the Buddha.

While people in the world are seeking happiness in the external world, we all are seeking happiness in the inner world.

While people in the world are listening to music, we

are listening to the Dhamma.

While people in the world are watching TV, you are watching Venerable Revata. (Laughter!)

While people in the world are emotionally excited, dancing and singing, we are calmly practicing serenity and insight meditation.

Life is so different here. That's why I congratulate all of you!

On this remarkable day, I will give the remarkable talk that is titled '**Profound Dhamma**'. But before beginning my talk, let me ask you some questions. Why does the New Year of 2006 come into being? The answer is simple: Because the previous year, 2005, has ended. This is the action of cause and effect. Without 2005 ending, 2006 can not begin.

A second question: Why are we aging, getting older and older day-by-day? The answer is because there is no escape from the inevitability of arising and passing away that both differentiates and characterizes the various different stages of our lives. Just as days turn into nights and weeks turn into months, boyhood soon enough becomes manhood. In the same way, the old year gives way to new year, in the constant ebb and flow of endings and beginnings. Being subject to this never-ending process, we grow older. We age. This happens because of cause and effect.

A third question: 'How did we become graduates?' We attended primary school, secondary school, high school, college, or university. We passed from one level to another, and by doing so we acquired the skills needed to attend

new classes at higher and higher levels until we eventually graduated. It is impossible to earn a degree, impossible to become a graduate in any other way. Every effect has its cause. This is another example of cause and effect in action.

Now let us look at cause and effect in relation to the Dhamma, the truth.

On this remarkable day, I will give the talk 'Profound Dhamma,' the Dhamma which was realized by our Buddha.

How many years did it take the Buddha to perfect his Pāramis? We can not estimate in years. It is said that it took him four incalculable and one hundred thousand eons to fulfill his Pāramis, his Perfections. How very long that is! Does it take that long to graduate? Is it very difficult? Truly, it is not very difficult. Within this very life time we can achieve that goal, if we spend enough time and make the necessary effort. But the Dhamma which was realized by our Buddha is very profound and another matter altogether. It required an incalculable amount of time, even for the Buddha, to perfect his Paramis and penetrate the Dhamma.

It is important to be aware of the differences between an ordinary education, as taught by worldly beings, and the teachings of the Dhamma, as taught by the Buddha. Many people are heedless. They willingly spend fifteen years or more to get a degree from a university, but they don't want to spend much time practicing meditation. When it comes to meditation practice, they want success within one week, two weeks, one month or two months. Is this reasonable? No, it is not reasonable! If we want

immediate results in meditation and expect to be successful within a short time, we need to examine our motives carefully. We might very well end up ashamed of ourselves. Why? The Dhamma penetrated by our Buddha is very profound. It is much more difficult and nothing at all like a formal worldly education.

In school, we are given increasingly difficult lessons. We have to study and work hard in order to keep up so we can advance from one level to the next. It's true that school lessons are difficult but, compared to the Dhamma, they are easy. Also, as I have mentioned, in order to graduate we have to make methodical progress. This means attending consecutive classes, one after another, step-by-step. Without the lessons of primary school, it would not be easy to learn the lessons of secondary school. Without secondary school lessons, it would be impossible for most of us to undertake high school lessons. Without high school, a university education would be out of the question. So even though a formal worldly education is not as difficult as the Dhamma, in order to be successful we need to apply ourselves in a systematic way, advancing from level-to-level, step-by-step.

The Dhamma penetrated by the Buddha is profoundly deep. It, too, requires systematic, step-by-step practice. This is the only way to penetrate the Dhamma. This systematic approach is a sure way to enlightenment. Otherwise, it is impossible. When the Buddha attained enlightenment by himself, he too practiced systematically, step-by-step. Then, after his Enlightenment, over the course of the next 45 years, he taught extensively and regularly gave talks in many different places. I am quoting here from one of His talks.

“On one occasion, the Buddha said, ‘Bhikkhus if anyone spoke, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering. It is impossible.

If someone said, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, after having made breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering. It would be possible.

Just as, Bhikkhus, if someone said, having built the lower story of a peak house, I will erect the upper story of a peak house. Is it possible? In the same way, if anyone said, having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way leading to

the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering. It would be possible.”

So the Buddha continued, “Bhikkhus an exertion should be made to understand the Noble Truth of Suffering, an exertion should be made to understand the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, an exertion should be made to understand the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, an exertion should be made to understand the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering.”

We all know that we must penetrate the Four Noble Truths: The Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

It is impossible to completely make an end of suffering without having made the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths. If we want to end suffering we must know and see the Four Noble Truths. To know and see the Four Noble Truths, we must systematically practice meditation under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Otherwise, it is impossible to penetrate the Four Noble Truths. You might ask: Who is a qualified teacher? The Buddha is the qualified teacher. We are merely followers of the Buddha. We teach meditation following his doctrine.

What is the Noble Truth of Suffering? It is the five aggregates of clinging or the five clinging aggregates. In other words, ultimate mentality and materiality is the Noble Truth of Suffering.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, there is neither man or woman, neither is there deva or Brahma, there is only ultimate mentality and materiality. But we say, “I am a man. I am a woman.” How is it then that there is neither man or woman? In the conventional sense, of course, there is man and woman. But ultimately this is not true. To comprehend the Buddha’s meaning and fully understand this teaching, we must break through to the Noble Truth of Suffering. That is to say we must know and see the five aggregates of clinging. This means that we must penetrate ultimate mentality and materiality. But how can we know and see ultimate mentality and materiality? The Buddha instructed meditators to develop concentration. In the Mahāvagga Saū yutta Nikāya, the Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated knows and sees things as they really are.

And what does he know and see as it really is? He knows and sees as it really is: ‘This is suffering.’ He knows and sees as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ He knows and sees as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’ He knows and sees as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’

To know and see the first, second and third Noble Truths we must practice the fourth Noble Truth, that is the Eightfold Noble Path. The Eightfold Noble Path is comprised of the three trainings: The training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*), and the training of insight (*Paññā*).

Sīla	Samādhi	Paññā
Right Speech	Right Effort	Right View
Right Action	Right Mindfulness	Right Thought
Right Livelihood	Right Concentration	

We take on the training of morality (*Sīla*) to cultivate purity of bodily and verbal actions. With the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) we acquire purity of mind. And we undertake the training of insight (*Paññā*) to free us from suffering.

In order to develop concentration, we must practice Samatha Meditation. Do you know how many different kinds of Samatha Meditation Objects the Buddha taught? Forty. Among them, thirty lead to absorption concentration; and the remaining ten to access concentration only. So, we can say that the Buddha taught 40 different types of Samatha meditation objects for the cultivation of two different, but related types of concentration: absorption concentration and access concentration.

Right Concentration is one of the paths appearing in the Buddha's comprehensive Eightfold Noble Path. But, what is 'Right Concentration?' In the *Visuddhimagga*, "The Path of Purification," it explains that 'Right Concentration' is access concentration and the Eight Attainments (*jhānas*, i.e., absorption concentration). Right Concentration is very important. Without concentration, it is impossible to penetrate things as they really are.

When we undertake the training of concentration, we must practice with any one of the meditation objects with which we can attain access concentration or absorption concentration. Here at Pa-Auk Tawya Meditation Cen-

ter, we usually teach most beginners 'Mindfulness of Breathing' (*Ānāpānasati*). When their concentration develops they attain full absorption concentration which is very profound and powerful. However, some beginning meditators are unable to develop concentration through Mindfulness of Breathing, so we alternately teach Four Elements meditation. With Four Elements meditation meditators can attain access concentration.

We must all try our best to develop either access or absorption concentration so that we can penetrate ultimate reality. Without access or absorption concentration, we will not be able to see ultimate mentality and materiality. Simply put, this means that we will not be able to break through to the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering. We will not be capable of knowing and seeing things as they really are.

There are many in this audience who have already penetrated ultimate mentality and materiality. They understand the importance of developing concentration in order to know and see ultimate reality as it really is. Those meditators have seen things as they really are. There are also many among us who have yet to penetrate ultimate mentality and materiality. Nevertheless, they continue to practice conscientiously towards that goal. According to the Buddha, this whole world is composed of very tiny particles. In order for meditators to know and see these particles directly, the Buddha taught 'Four Elements' meditation. What are the four elements? They are earth, water, fire and wind. All living and non-living things are made up of these four elements. When meditators can discern these four elements clearly in their whole body from head to foot and foot to head, again and again, they

will experience their body as a block of the four elements. When this happens the perception of ‘self’ temporarily disappears. Meditators then no longer see the body as a ‘self’, but are now able to correctly perceive the body as a group of four elements. As their concentration improves, the body gradually begins to emit a gray light which becomes brighter and brighter. Next the body turns into a block of light. If meditators continue to discern the four elements in that block of light, it finally breaks down into very small particles that are rapidly arising and passing away. It is a profound experience to see these small particles. Yet the meditator is still only seeing the most subtle concept of conventional materiality. He or she is not yet seeing ultimate materiality. In each particle there are at least eight aspects of materiality. These eight aspects are the elements of earth, water, fire and air, as well as color, odor, flavor and nutritive essence. It is only when meditators can analyze these eight different aspects of materiality, one-by-one in each particle, that they can truly know and see ultimate materiality.

As soon as meditators can discern the four elements internally, in their own bodies, up to directly knowing and seeing ultimate reality, they are then instructed to move on to discerning the four elements externally. The moment they are able to discern four elements in buildings, they see only small particles. When they discern four elements in trees or even in space, they likewise only see small particles. Everything becomes the same. At this point, men, women, trees and all other conventional forms cease to exist. Everything and everybody becomes and is seen as a group of small particles. This is the attainment of true knowledge. It is the knowledge of knowing that there are

really no men or women. There is just ultimate materiality. But when meditators open their eyes again, what do they see? They once again see men and women, and they suffer for seeing them. Why is this? It is because of their defilements. If you don’t want to see men and women, don’t open your eyes again. You must keep your eyes closed all the time (laughter!), otherwise attachment, craving and clinging will arise and you will take on new kamma.

The meditator’s next step is to analyze the different aspects of mentality up to ultimate mentality. When they are successful in this practice they directly know and see the mental process, arising in a series of mind moments, with consciousness and all the associated mental factors present in each mind moment. Meditator’s are then seeing things in the same way as the Buddha described them. They see that men and women truly do not exist, only ultimate mentality and materiality exists. At that point, they break through the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering.

Once meditators know and see ultimate mentality and materiality, they go on to practice “Dependent Origination” (*Patīccasamupāda*) in order to directly know cause and effect. When they have discerned cause and effect, they break through to the Second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering.

Meditators who have practiced Dependent Origination and have directly discerned cause and effect, then progress on to insight meditation (*Vipassanā*). They now are able to discern and examine the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and the non-self nature of ulti-

mate mentality and materiality, along with causes and their effects. When their insight matures, Path Knowledge arises. They see Nibbāna. At that point, materiality and mentality cease and they break through to the Third Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

With the arising of Path Knowledge their defilements are eradicated step-by-step. With the achievement of the first Path, they attain the first fruit of enlightenment and become a Stream Enterer, (*Sotāpanna*). As soon as that happens, the three defilements of self-identity, doubt and attachment to rites and rituals are forever eradicated.

Because they practice the Fourth Noble Truth which is the Eightfold Noble Path or the Three Trainings, they are able to directly know and see the first, second and the third Noble Truths.

When one practices the training of morality (*Sīla*) it could be compared to attending primary school. When one develops concentration (*Samādhi*) it is like attending secondary school. Remember that one has to pass secondary school before they can proceed to high school and university lessons. The practice of insight meditation (*Paññā*) is like attending high school and university. Continuing with this example, earning a degree and graduating from a university is like attaining *Nibbāna*.

There are sixteen steps of insight knowledge that lead to Nibbāna. What are the sixteen insight-knowledges? They are:

1. The Knowledge of analyzing Mentality-Materiality (*nāma-rūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*)
2. The Knowledge of discerning Cause and Ef-

fect (*paccaya-pariggaha ñāṇa*)

3. The Knowledge of Comprehension (*sammasana ñāṇa*)
4. The Knowledge of Arising and Passing away (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*)
5. The Knowledge of Dissolution (*bhaṅga ñāṇa*)
6. The Knowledge of Terror (*bhaya ñāṇa*)
7. The Knowledge of Danger (*ādīnava ñāṇa*)
8. The Knowledge of Disenchantment (*nibbidā ñāṇa*)
9. The Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance (*muñcītukamyatā ñāṇa*)
10. The Knowledge of Reflection (*paṭisankhā ñāṇa*)
11. The Knowledge of Equanimity Towards Formation (*saṅkhārupekkhā ñāṇa*)
12. The Knowledge of Conformity (*anuloma ñāṇa*)
13. The Knowledge of Change-of-Lineage (*gotrabhu ñāṇa*)
14. The Knowledge of the Path (*magga ñāṇa*)
15. The Knowledge of Fruition (*phala ñāṇa*)
16. The Knowledge of Reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa ñāṇa*)

The first insight-knowledge, the Knowledge of analysing ultimate mentality and materiality is knowing and seeing the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering. The second insight-knowledge, the Knowledge of Discerning Cause and effect is knowing and seeing the Second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. Having made the breakthrough to the first insight-

knowledge we can proceed to the second insight-knowledge. However, if we haven't made the breakthrough to the First Noble Truth, it is impossible to breakthrough to the Second Noble Truth which is very profound. That's why, after the Buddha attained full enlightenment, he declared:

“I have attained to this Dhamma which is profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, sublime, beyond reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in sensual pleasures, rejoices in it and engages in it. For those who so delight, rejoice and engage in sensual pleasures this matter is hard to see, that is, specific conditionality, dependent origination. Equally hard to see would be the cessation of all volitional formations, the abandonment of all the substrates of rebirth, the destruction of craving, dispassion, and cessation (*Nibbāna*). And if I were to teach Dhamma to others and they did not understand me, that would be weariness and a trouble to me.”

Do you remember these words? This reflection arose in the mind of the Buddha while he was alone in seclusion, after he had become the fully Enlightened One. At that time, he was dwelling at Uruvela on the bank of the river Nerañjarā at the foot of the Goatherd's Banyan tree. You may remember now.

Shortly after that, this verse arose in the mind of the Blessed One:

“This that I've attained, why should I proclaim?
Those full of lust and hate can never grasp it.

Leading upstream this Dhamma, subtle, deep,
Hard to see, no passion-blinded folk can see it.”

For this reason, as the Buddha thought about his realization, his mind inclined to living at ease. He was not inclined to teach the Dhamma. But, the Brahma Sahampati, who knew and saw within his mind the Buddha's reasoning, thought: “Alas, this world is lost; alas, this world will be destroyed because the mind of the Truth-Finder, the Blessed One, the Arahant, the fully-enlightened Buddha is inclined to living at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma.”

“So this Great Brahma, as swiftly as a strong man might stretch his bent arm, bent it again. Whereupon he disappeared from the Brahma world and immediately reappeared before the Buddha.

Arranging his upper robe over one shoulder and kneeling on his right knee, he paid respect to the Buddha with joined palms and said: “Venerable Sir, may the Blessed One teach the Dhamma, may the Fortunate One teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are perishing through not hearing Dhamma. If the Blessed One teaches the Dhamma, they will become Knowers of Dhamma!”

“Then the Brahma Sahampati, having said this, continued:

“In the past there appeared in Magadha before thee
An unclean dhamma by impure minds devised

Open this door of the deathless, let them hear
 The Dhamma awakened to by the pure one.
 As on a mountain-peak a watcher sees the folk
 below,
 So, a Man of Wisdom, seeing all, looks down from
 Dhamma's heights!
 Free from woe, look on those who are sunk in grief,
 oppressed with birth and age.
 Arise, hero, victor in battle, leader of the caravan,
 traverse the world!
 Teach, O Blessed One, the Dhamma, and they will
 understand.”

When the Brahma Sahampati said this, the Buddha responded to him thusly: “Brahma, it has occurred to me: ‘I have attained to this Dhamma which is profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, sublime, beyond reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in sensual pleasures, rejoices in it and engages in it. For those who so delight, rejoice and engage in sensual pleasures this matter is hard to see, that is, specific conditionality, dependent origination. Equally hard to see would be the cessation of all volitional formations, the abandonment of all the substrates of rebirth, the destruction of craving, dispassion, and cessation (*Nibbāna*). And if I were to teach Dhamma to others and they did not understand me, that

would be weariness and a trouble to me.”

Why did these thoughts arise in the Buddha's mind? There are several reasons. One is because of the profound Dhamma he penetrated. Another is that not only our Buddha but all previous Buddhas, too, were uninclined to teach this Dhamma after they attained full enlightenment. Another reason is that when this reflection arose in the minds of the previous Buddhas, the Great Brahma likewise had to make the same request to each of them to teach the Dhamma. In the same way, when this reflection arose in the mind of our Buddha, the Great Brahma Shampati made the same request of him to teach the Dhamma. The Buddha understood that people of that day worshipped and venerated the Great Brahma. He knew they would be open to the teachings and inclined to listen once they realized that the Great Brahma, himself, had requested that he teach the Dhamma to them.

Then once again, for a second time, the Great Brahma Shampati asked our Buddha: “Supreme Buddha, may the Blessed One teach the Dhamma, may the Fortunate One teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are perishing through not hearing Dhamma: If the Blessed One teaches the Dhamma, they will become Knowers of Dhamma!”

Then the Buddha explained for a second time why he was inclined to living at ease, and why he was not inclined to teaching the Dhamma.

But the Great Brahma appealed to the Buddha for a third time to teach the Dhamma. At that point our Buddha, recognizing the Brahma's entreaty and,

out of compassion for all beings, surveyed the world with his Buddha's eye. Whereupon he saw beings with little dust in their eyes and beings with much dust in their eyes, beings with sharp faculties and dull, beings of good and bad disposition, beings both easy and hard to teach. Few of them were living in fear of wrongdoing and the world beyond. And just as in a pool of blue, red or white lotuses *some are born in the water, grow in the water, and, not leaving the water, thrive in the water; some are born in the water and reach the surface; while some are born in the water and having reached the surface, grow out of the water and are not polluted by it.* In the same way the Buddha saw some beings with little dust in their eyes.

Three types of persons are mentioned in the simile of lotus. They are like:

1. Lotuses which are born in the water and when having reached the water's surface, grow out of the water and are not polluted by it. This is an *Uggaṭitaññū-person*.
2. Lotuses which are born in the water and that reach the water's surface. This is a *Vipacitaññū-person*.
3. Lotuses which are born in water, grow in water, and, without leaving water, thrive in the water. This is a *Neyya-person*.

However, in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, a fourth type of person is also mentioned. It is like:

4. Lotuses that are born in water, grow in water, and, without leaving water, they die in the water. This is a *Padaparama-person*.

Among these four types of persons, the first three types can make an end of suffering.

The first type of person, (an *Uggaṭitaññū-person*), is one who can awaken by simply listening to condensed instruction. Venerable *Sariputta* is an example of an *Uggaṭitaññū-person*. He attained the state of Sotāpanna, after simply listening to a short stanza with only four lines. So please listen now and find out whether you, too, can attain the level of a Sotāpanna. If you can, I will be very happy.

“Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā;

Tesāi hetuī tathāgato āha,

Te saṅsa yo nirodo;

Evāi vādī mahā samaṇo.”

Venerable *Sariputta* realized the attainment of a Sotāpanna after he heard the words “*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā; Tesāi hetuī tathāgato āha*” but before the word ‘āha’.

We need to understand the reasons for such quick attainment by people who lived in the time of the Buddha. Nowadays people argue about it. Some even believe that it is not necessary to practice. They fantasize that people today can also attain deep states of realization just by listening to a Dhamma talk. To defend their opinion, they point to the many incidences of that happening in the time of the Buddha. If then, why not now? In the commentaries we find the answer. It is explained there that those first followers of the Buddha could penetrate the Dhamma so quickly for the following reasons. In their many previous lives they accumulated four causes:

- a. Mastery of the scriptures (*Pariyatti*)
They studied and became masters of the Dhamma scriptures.
- b. Hearing (*Savana*)
They listened attentively and respectfully to the Dhamma being explained over the course of many, many past lives;
- c. Inquiry (*Paripuccha*)
They scrutinized and discussed the difficult passages and explanations in the texts and commentaries.
- d. Prior effort (*Pubbayoga*)
They engaged in the practice of Samatha-Vipassanā up to the Knowledge of Equanimity Towards Formations (*sāṅkhārupekkhā nāṇa*) during the dispensations of the Buddhas.

It was because of these four causes that people in those days were able to rapidly achieve profound states of attainment, in one of their last lives. And because of these four causes, this result occurred:

- e. Achievement (*adhigama*)
The attainment of the Arahant Path and Fruition, or any other Path and Fruition.

We now know that those who had perfected paramis such as mastery of scriptures (*Pariyatti*), hearing (*Savana*), inquiry (*Paripuccha*) and prior effort (*Pubbayoga*) were able to attain Path and Fruition knowledge quickly, sometimes after only listening to a very short stanza. Among the paramis, 'prior effort' (*Pubbayoga*) was crucial. Because of their accumulated past practice of Samatha-Vipassanā

meditation up to the Knowledge of Equanimity towards the Formations (*sāṅkhārupekkhā nāṇa*) these early disciples were already very close to Path and Fruition Knowledge. When they went for alms, they practiced meditation. When they returned, they practiced meditation. Those early disciples had already made prior effort over the course of many past lives. So in their last life, merely listening to the Dhamma was sufficient for them to see Nibbāna.

Do we now know that we are not the first type of person (an *Uggaṭṭitaññū-person*) or one who can attain profound states of realization after merely listening to condensed instruction?

The second type of person (a *Vipacitaññū-person*) is one who needs detailed instructions. Do you remember the five ascetics who formerly looked after the Bodhisatta during the time that he resolutely committed six years to severe austerity practice? You now remember? When the Bodhisatta gave up that practice, they abandoned him. When the Bodhisatta became a fully enlightened Buddha, he sought out those five ascetics in order to give them a talk. This talk was the first talk given by the Buddha. Do you remember the name of that talk? Dhamma-Wheel Rolling Sutta (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*). In this Sutta the Buddha gave detailed instructions. While listening to it, one among the five ascetics immediately attained the stage of Stream Entry (*Sotāpanna*). It was Venerable Koṇḍañña. When the Buddha instructed the remaining ascetics with further dhamma-talk, the Venerable Vappa and the Venerable Bhaddiya also attained the level of Stream Enterers. After having eaten alms food brought back by those three Stream Enterers, Venerable Koṇḍañña, Venerable Vappa and Venerable Bhaddiya, the Buddha continued to instruct

the two remaining ascetics with more dhamma-talk. Before long, the Venerable Mahānāma and the Venerable Assaji also attained Stream Entry (*Sotāpanna*). We now know that the Venerable Koṇḍañña, the Venerable Vappa and the Venerable Bhaddiya, the Venerable Mahānāma and the Venerable Assaji were the second type of person, a *Vipacitaññu-person*.

There are many among us who have also listened to or read the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. Have we attained Stream Entry? If not, we can safely conclude that we are not the second type of person, a *Vipacitannu-person*, who can realize Nibbāna simply after listening to detailed explanation of the Dhamma.

The third type of person (a *Neyya-person*) is one who cannot attain merely by listening to condensed or detailed instruction. But rather by practicing the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*) step-by-step, systematically, they can realize the Four Noble Truths and realize Nibbāna. I believe that there are many in this audience who are this third type of person. Nowadays the first and second type of persons cannot be found anywhere. However, there are many *Neyya*-persons living amongst us today. To realize Nibbāna, a *Neyya*-person needs to learn the Pāli text, discuss the difficult passages and explanations in the texts and commentaries, and keep in mind what they have studied. They should associate with a good friend or friends and, they have to practice meditation. This is mentioned in the commentary.

Association with a good friend or friends is very important. Even if we cannot gain knowledge of the Pāli

texts and commentary, if we associate with a good friend or friends who can thoroughly guide us in the three trainings, even just this much can lead us to Nibbāna. When the Buddha surveyed the world with his Buddha's eye, he saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust, beings with sharp and dull faculties, beings of good and bad dispositions, and beings both easy and hard to teach. Few of them were living in fear of wrongdoing and the world beyond.

Because of seeing this, the Buddha addressed the Brahma with verses.

“Open to them the door to the Deathless!

Let those who have ears release their faith.

Foreseeing trouble, I did not preach at first,

The excellent Dhamma for men, Brahma!”

The Buddha has opened the door to the Deathless. We must entrust our faith to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. If lack of faith persists it is impossible to open the door to the Deathless. Because of lacking faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, we may sometimes think, ‘Is it really possible to attain *jhāna* concentration simply by focusing on the breath? Or, is it really possible to see light just by focusing on the in and out breath? These thoughts can be troubling and fill our minds with doubts. If this happens, those without faith often cease applying themselves to practice. Their minds become filled with doubts and they soon are lost in thoughts and complaints about this and that. Such pervasive doubting inhibits benefits from arising in their lives. Because of this, the Buddha said:

“Let those who have ears release faith;
Foreseeing trouble, I did not preach at first;
The excellent Dhamma for men, Brahma!”

We have known that after the Buddha had attained enlightenment, he was not inclined to teach the Dhamma. Finally, after being asked for a third time, our Buddha agreed to the request of the Great Brahma. Out of oceanic compassion for all beings, he surveyed the world with his Buddha’s eye. He then saw the first, second and third type of person. I have already given you an explanation of them. Let me now explain the fourth type of person.

The fourth type of person (a *Padaparama-person*) is one whose highest attainment is an intellectual comprehension of the Dhamma texts. Even though such persons practice the training of morality (*Sīla*), the training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the training of insight (*Paññā*) step-by-step, systematically, and even after hearing condensed instruction or detailed instruction, they nevertheless are not able to realize the Four Noble Truths and to see Nibbāna in this very life. All their effort is for their future realization and attainment. What they have accumulated in this present life is the treasure that they will carry with them, as provisions on their journey to *Nibbāna*. Because of this, they will know and see the Dhamma as it really is in future lives.

What should we do if we fall into that fourth kind of person (a *Padaparama*)? If we are the fourth type of person, meditation is indispensable. In this case, it is especially important for us to practice as much meditation as we can in this life. It is for our future realization and attain-

ment.

We now know the four categories of persons mentioned in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and how each type can realize Nibbāna. People in this age, however, are either exclusively the third type of person, a *Neyya-person*, or the fourth type of person, a *Padaparama-person*. (The first two types of persons are not present in our age.) Even though the third type of person, a *Neyya-person*, can realize Nibbāna through practicing the three trainings, the fourth type of person, a *Padaparama-person*, cannot.

Please do not feel sad if you have not yet fully developed the practice of *Samatha-Vipassanā*. The Bodhisatta had been perfecting his *Pāramis* for four incalculable and one hundred thousand eons in order to attain full enlightenment. It took all that time to break through the Four Noble Truths for the realization of Nibbāna. This Dhamma is really profound. We must all be patient. Please take time to practice diligently and patiently.

Why are meditators here at Pa-Auk Tawya Monastery instructed to develop concentration? Consider that the Buddha himself, before attaining full enlightenment under the Bodhi tree on the full moon day during the first watch of the night, practiced *Ānāpānasati* Meditation up to fourth *jhāna* concentration. When he attained that state he inclined and directed his mind to the Knowledge of Recollection of Past Life (*pubbenivāsānusati nāṇa*). He recollected his innumerable past lives, that is to say, he brought to mind and clearly saw one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, spanning many

aeons of world contraction and world expansion. The Buddha recalled detailed specifics of his past life, *i.e.*, there he was so named, of such a race, with such an appearance, such was his food, such his experience of pleasure and pain, such the ending of his life span, his death. Passing away from there, he saw that he reappeared elsewhere. Thus with its aspects and particulars the Buddha recollected his innumerable past lives. He saw uncountable times when he had been born and died. During that first watch on the night of his full enlightenment he penetrated mentality and materiality. He attained the Knowledge of Discerning Mentality and Materiality (*nāma-rūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*).

In the second watch of the night, he inclined and directed his mind to the Knowledge of the Passing Away and Reappearance of Beings (*dibbacakku ñāṇa*). With his divine eye (which is purified and surpasses the human eye), he saw countless beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior beings, fair and ugly beings, happy or unhappy in their destiny. He understood that beings reaped according to their deeds. Unworthy beings who were ill-behaved in body, speech and mind, beings who were revilers of Noble Ones, wrong in their views, who acquired kamma due to wrong views, suffer, on the break up of the body after death, and appear in a state of loss, in an unhappy destiny, in perdition, in hell. But worthy beings who are well-behaved in body, speech and mind, who are not revilers of Noble Ones, who are right in their views, who acquire kamma due to right view, do not suffer on the break up of the body after death. These beings appear in a happy destiny, in the heavenly worlds. Thus with his divine eye, the Buddha saw beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior beings, fair and ugly be-

ings, happy or unhappy in their destiny. He understood that beings reaped according to their deeds. He perceived with his divine eye the knowledge of how beings are born and die. The Pāḷi word for this is *cutupapāta ñāṇa*, the Knowledge of Birth and Death. When the Buddha focused on exactly how beings are born in happy or woeful states, he attained the Knowledge of Discerning Cause and Effect (*paccaya-pariggaha ñāṇa*).

During the third watch of the night, he attained the first Path and Fruition Knowledge, the second Path and Fruition Knowledge, the third Path and Fruition Knowledge, and the fourth Path and Fruition Knowledge – one after another. Path knowledge eradicated his defilements step-by-step without remainder. He finally attained the Knowledge of the Process of Eradicating Defilements (*āsavakkhaya ñāṇa*). He became a Buddha, an Arahant.

These are the words of the Buddha:

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a Bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: ‘Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, there is birth and decay and there is death and falling into other states and being reborn. And no one knows any way of escape from this suffering, this aging and death. When will deliverance be found from this suffering, this aging and death?’

Then, Bhikkhus, it occurred to me: ‘With what being present, does aging and death come to be? What conditions aging and death?’ And then, bhikkhus, through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Birth being present, aging and death comes to be. Birth conditions aging and death.’

Then it occurred to me: ‘What conditions birth?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Becoming conditions birth.’

‘What conditions becoming?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Clinging conditions becoming.’

‘What conditions clinging?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Craving conditions clinging.’

‘What conditions craving?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Feeling conditions craving.’

‘What conditions feeling?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Contact conditions feeling.’

‘What conditions contact?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘The six-sense-bases condition contact.’ “

‘What conditions the six sense-bases?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Mentality and materiality conditions the six sense-bases.’

‘What conditions mentality and materiality?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Consciousness conditions mentality and materiality.’

‘What conditions consciousness?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Volitional formations condition consciousness.’

‘What conditions volitional formations?’ Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘Ignorance conditions volitional formations.’

‘Origination, origination’ - thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge and light.”

Then our Bodhisatta directed careful attention to cessation.

“Then, bhikkhus, it occurred to me: ‘When what does not exist, does aging and death not come to be? With the cessation of what, comes the cessation of aging and death?’

Through careful attention the realization dawned on me: ‘When there is no birth, aging and death does not come to be; with the cessation of birth comes cessation of aging and death.’

‘With the cessation of becoming comes cessation of birth.’

‘With the cessation of clinging comes cessation of becoming.’

‘With the cessation of craving comes cessation of clinging.’

‘With the cessation of feeling comes cessation of craving.’

‘With the cessation of contact comes cessation of feeling.’

‘With the cessation of the six-sense-bases comes

cessation of contact.’

‘With the cessation of mentality and materiality comes cessation of the six-sense-bases.’

‘With the cessation of consciousness comes cessation of mentality and materiality.’

‘With the cessation of volitional formations comes cessation of consciousness.’

‘With the cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations.’

‘With the cessation of volitional formations comes cessation of consciousness. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.’

‘Cessation, cessation - thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.’

It was in the third watch of the night, after reflecting on the causal relationship between the twelve factors of dependent origination, that our Bodhisatta again developed *Ānāpānasati* Concentration up to the fourth jhāna. He then contemplated the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) nature of mentality and materiality, with its causes and their effects. He developed the Knowledge of Comprehension (*sammasana nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Arising and Passing-away (*udayabbaya nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Dissolution (*bhaṅga nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Terror (*bhaya nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Danger (*ādīnava nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Disenchantment (*nibbidā nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance (*muñcitukamyatā nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Reflection (*paṭisankhā nāṇa*), the Knowl-

edge of Equanimity Towards Formations (*sāṅkhārupekkhā nāṇa*), the Knowledge of Conformity (*anuloma nāṇa*) and the Knowledge of Change-of-Lineage (*gotrabhu nāṇa*). Then the Four Paths and Four Fruition Knowledges (*magga and phala nāṇa*) arose in him quickly, one after another. The Path knowledges eradicated his defilements step-by-step without remainder. Our Bodhisatta then became a Buddha, an Arahant. Then the Knowledge of Reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa nāṇa*) arose in him.

We now know that even our Bodhisatta had developed all sixteen insight-knowledges.

Developing the sixteen insight-knowledges is essential for the realization of Nibbāna.

Here at Pa-Auk Tawya Monastery, meditators are being instructed to develop all sixteen-insight-knowledges step-by-step, systematically.

To get a specific degree, we all have attended primary school, secondary school, high school, college and university, one after another.

To realize Nibbāna, let us attend the schools of insight-knowledge one after another.

May you all attain insight-knowledge. May you all practice step-by-step, systematically, for the realization of Nibbāna, the peace.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

The talk given on Sunday,

1st January 2006 at Pa-Auk Tawya in Myanmar.

BASED ON THE ARTICLE

What One Wants to Do

Translated into English by

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BASED ON THE ARTICLE

What One Wants to Do

The questions to be asked...

There are two questions that one needs to ask:

1. What does one want to do?
2. What is it that one is doing?

When one has the answer to those two questions they will know whether or not what they want to do and what they are doing are in agreement.

People need to know what it is they want to do along with what it is they are doing, in order to understand whether their actions and desires are in conformity or at variance with each other.

Each of us is at all times doing one thing or another. We see that there are those among us who are mainly engaged in worldly matters. Others are more involved with a combination of both worldly and religious concerns. And there are some whose main interest and purpose in life is liberation from the world of existence. Regardless of what

kind of activity we are engaged in, each person needs to know if they are in fact doing what they want to do. Some people are, but there are others who are not aware of whether their desired objectives are in accord with their actions.

Should we try to do what we want to do or should we strive to do what ought to be done? These are two important questions that also need to be asked. We discover, in answering them, that in order to do what we want to do we must first of all do what we should do. By doing what we should do, we fulfill the prerequisite for doing that which we want to do. We have to cultivate perseverance, tolerance and patience in order to really do that which we want to do. In other words, we have to train the mind.

The wishes of the mind

As the Buddha once said, "*Cittena niyati loko.*" This means '*the mind is the leader of all beings.*' And, on another occasion the Buddha said, "*Let not your mind lead you, but let your mind be led by you.*" This is the purpose of training the mind. As the noble mind leads one into worthy realms, the ignoble mind leads one into lower realms. It is important, therefore, to know where we are headed. Are we on the road that leads to the deeper meaning and purpose of life, and is it the way leading to the fulfillment of our desired goals? One's objective must, at all times, be to lead the mind rather than to be led by the mind.

There will naturally be differing opinions about life, as long as there are people with contradictory objectives in life. One expects to find such differences amongst a wide-ranging cross-section of people. For our purposes, we ac-

knowledge that most people are different, but we are not concerned with their differences. There are others, however, whose objectives and perceptions are similar, if not the same. The similarity referred to here is one of essence. It is not a sameness in relative form or other kinds of external impressions. For example, monks wear robes. Externally, in appearance at least, they all look more or less alike. This sameness in visible form is not important. What is significant though is the similarity in *mind* essence that is aroused in monks. This fundamental similarity of mind essence is one of the most important goals of monasticism.

The exalted teachings of the Lord Buddha have been offered for the benefit of those with noble ambitions and for those aiming for true liberation. To be noble means to be cultured, honest, respectful, persevering, non-oppressive, benevolent, and sympathetic, to rejoice in the success of another and to maintain equanimity when equanimity is due. These are the qualities of nobility. If, subsequent to bhikkhu ordination, by heeding the teachings of the Lord Buddha, one aspires towards the attainment of nobility and develops morally, becomes highly dedicated and is gradually more inclined to renunciation, that is the essence of a monk. It is this that is important – not merely taking on the form and appearance of monasticism.

Differences in race, caste, wealth and affluence play no part in the real meaning of the Buddha's teachings. Such differentiation between people is rooted in bias and narrow-mindedness. These differences do not bring forth nobility in us nor can they help us make progress towards the goal of liberation.

The Lord Buddha created the Sangha solely for the well-being and benefit of those who, with determination, strive for liberation through noble practice in life. For that reason all disparities and distinctions in race, caste, stature and affluence have necessarily been eradicated within the Sangha. Those who enter the monkhood filled with magnanimity and faith, and free from prejudice, are en-route to their destination and goal – liberation. In the Sangha, all bhikkhus are equally venerated as monks of the Sakya clan. Their fellowship is one in which no discrimination is replaced by seniority and mutual respect.

On the march towards liberation, the course that we follow needs to be the same. Without following the same course, the ultimate goal cannot be the same.

Because we know that several Omniscient Buddhas formerly achieved the goal of enlightenment, we know that the way to enlightenment already exists. The distinctive feature here is that the way or course to enlightenment is the same. Those who share the goal of enlightenment, also discover that they share the same way or course to enlightenment – that noble way which one must adopt in order to reach that noble goal.

There is a state wherein the suffering of old age, illness, and death, as well as all other kinds of suffering cease to exist. There is, too, the practice and the course by which one can reach the yonder shore of Nibbāna where all forms of suffering completely cease to exist. This is called 'The Practice of the Eightfold Noble Path.' Nibbāna is accessible only when this practice and this course are in concurrence with each other. If these two do not accord, Nibbāna is unattainable. Nibbāna cannot be perceived by

anyone without following this practice and this course. We see in this practice and the pursuit of this course that one is, in fact, doing what ought to be done.

To get the opportunity to do what one wants to do

All those who practice accordingly are bound to reach the goal someday – sooner or later. Naturally, there will be individual differences in the length of time needed by different people to reach the goal. The final goal will be attained swiftly for those who have fulfilled the requirements of acquired virtues (*Pāramis*), and who have arrived at their last existence in the cycles of rebirth. We see that cultivating and fulfilling the acquired virtues really means doing what ought to be done. Therefore, it is imperative to be conscious of performing the deeds that ought to be done.

The practice of the Eightfold Noble Path may also be termed the practice of morality (*Sīla*), concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*Paññā*). For some, just trying to keep the precepts means that they are doing what ought to be done. Observance of the basic precepts is a necessary step that leads one towards right concentration. By taking that step, and then by developing their concentration, one is continuing to do what ought to be done in order to progress on to the practice of insight meditation and the cultivation of wisdom.

The desire to practice insight meditation, wherein one contemplates the three characteristics of conditioned things as impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*), can only arise after one develops concentration. The perfection of concentration means here

that one is doing that which ought to be done. Because of concentration, one is eventually able to directly discern ultimate mentality and materiality. When one is able to discern ultimate mentality and materiality, they can practice insight meditation effectively. Only after insight knowledge matures can one realize the truly tranquil state of Nibbāna. Thus, to systematically develop the practices of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* means that one is ‘doing what ought to be done’ in order to reach the ultimate goal which is Nibbāna.

The only way to arrive at the ultimate goal is to make the powerful resolve to achieve one’s deepest desire and then to place that resolve in the forefront of one’s mind. When one acts motivated by this resolve they are, in effect, doing what ought to be done.

Human beings are in general doing what they ought to do in order to survive in society. But simply doing what needs to be done, in order to ‘survive’, does not mean that one is automatically then able to do what they want to do. This is because most people don’t yet have the opportunity to do what they really want to do.

Those who are practicing in order to be liberated are also doing what they need to do. They practice because of their deep desire to be liberated from existence, with the purpose of fulfilling that desire. This is doing exactly what ought to be done so that their desire is fulfilled. In this case, however, doing what ought to be done gives rise to what is desired. That is how it should be understood.

Obviously, the ‘wanting’ that arises from greed and covetousness is not the same as the ‘wanting’ that arises out of the desire for liberation.

Aiming at the Objective

The aspiration to do what one wants to do helps one take aim and have clear objectives and goals. It is like laying down a foundation and performing all the things that need to be done in order to build and reside in a huge and well-made mansion. Laying down the foundation though is not the actual beginning of doing what ought to be done. The prerequisites always come first. One must gather together all the necessary building materials in order to realize his objective. These prerequisites should be considered the beginning of doing what ought to be done. Those who have fulfilled their quota of acquired virtues (*i.e.*, *Pāramis*) are able to do what they want to do, all the while making rapid progress towards the goal. Beings of such good fortune are but few.

When primary preference is given to what one wants to do instead of doing what ought to be done, it becomes a hindrance that blocks the opportunity to do what we really want to do from arising. So, once again we see that it is imperative for us to do what ought to be done in order to satisfy our desire to do what we truly want to do.

Devadatta wished to become a Buddha, but rather than perfecting the virtues required to become a Buddha, he was driven by his appetite to do what he wanted to do. His own self-indulgent craving led to his downfall. It was a case of indulging the defilements of mind.

Those who dare to forfeit their lives

Many people forfeit their lives for the sake of worldly gain or for acceptance, praise, esteem and respect from others. Devadatta is an example of someone who forfeited

his life by following and acting upon his mind's defilements.

Are you doing that which in your heart is truly what you want to do or are you more motivated by the desire for esteem, honor, praise, respect, fame and wealth? One needs to be aware of the difference between these two reasons for wanting to do anything.

There are those who do not attend to their own true desires, but who are exceedingly concerned by the attitudes, views and opinions of others. Their yearning to be accepted, esteemed and understood leads to their demise. Sadly, far too many of us come to the end of the road by giving in to the wishes of others. This state of affairs is all too common in this world.

One cannot live in true peace and tranquility without knowing one's own true attitude and desires. Without the knowledge of one's own true attitude and desires, life is worthless. As long as one is ignorant of what one really wants to do, peace and stability of mind cannot be attained.

The world seeking understanding

A world in which people crave understanding and approval from others is a wearied world full of suffering. Humankind is wearing itself out in a vain attempt at unrelenting self-promotion, hoping for prominence and fame and for the fleeting enjoyments of this worldly abode. Countless lives are being forfeited, at an immense cost, because of this stupidity. All this is caused by ignorance and greed.

Greed has transformed people into beings who are ig-

norant about their own welfare. Striving to meet the demands of greed, they labor under the false impression that they are working for their own benefit. That is why the Lord Buddha said, “He with the distinct mark of greed is ignorant of what is beneficial to his welfare.” (*“Luddho attai na jānāti”*)

There are some who endeavor to maintain peace of mind. They truly want to lead worthwhile lives. The things in life that these people are inclined to want tend to be things that lead towards peace of mind. There are many others, however, who, though desirous of leading a worthy life, are unable to do so because of the defilement of greed. Such people are in great torment. Why are they in torment? Why is tranquility missing in their life? Unaware of the need to examine and understand the causes of their torment, they do not understand why tranquility is missing in their life. They need to look into those causes.

A person must be aware that he wants to do a particular thing. In the past, there were people who understood this. They consciously did what needed to be done for that very reason. There are people in the world today who also understand this, and there will be such people in the future, as well.

Sameness within the Differences

In the effort to get along in the world, people have to find their own way to their own destination. Basically, most people are just fumbling along. It is not certain whether or not they will even arrive. Life provides no guarantees.

People are different; no two are alike. Each individual’s life journey is unique. However, we discover that there is

also sameness in our differences. How is this so? The ‘differences’ are found in a wide-ranging and seemingly infinite variety of human goals. On the other hand, there is ‘sameness’ in the qualities of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) that we commonly make use of on the journey to our different goals.

A Skill that does not need to be Taught

These things – *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* are being cultivated, exercised and portrayed by themselves without the aid of any tutoring or guidance. These things are making their own endeavors in their own way.

Just as the efforts and actions of those who practice the Dhamma lead one way, the somewhat similar efforts and actions of those practicing - greed, hatred and delusion - lead another way. One way leads to freedom. The other way leads to suffering. Although no one is taught the formal skills of greed, hatred or delusion, as goals in themselves, these base characteristics are so interwoven into the fabric of worldly life it seems almost as though they have become a worldly aptitude in their own right. Thus, caught in their grip, people tread the path of suffering, as they make their journey through life. Because of the base nature and quality of these defilements, most people commit one transgression after another. Greed, hatred and delusion can be so blinding and deceptive! That is the reason why the Buddha said:

“He who is clothed in greed is unaware of goodness.”

“He who is wrapped in hatred is unaware of goodness.”

“He who is immersed in delusion is unaware of goodness.”

The Buddha declared that greed, hatred and delusion cloud one’s vision. They have the power to blind us so that we cannot even recognize the issue at hand and know or see our own transgressions.

Short-lived Reality

There are people whose sole aim in life is simply to survive in society, to live in a worldly manner. These people foolishly believe that they can find meaning and purpose in life through a never-ending quest for sensual pleasures. Humans tend to like, want and crave the experience of pleasantness associated with the five senses. Without doubt, there are pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. These pleasures and joys, which arise in dependence on our five senses, are the pleasures and joys of sensuality. It is these sensual pleasures that people endlessly and madly pursue.

The desire to enjoy such pleasures has so overwhelmed humans that it could accurately be termed ‘that which they want to do’. Sadly, the forces of greed, hatred and delusion blind most people. These defilements are further reinforced by the values of society at large; values rooted in greed, hatred and delusion. The craving for gratification and sensual pleasures feels completely natural to most people; so much so, that they actually come to believe that satisfying their craving is really ‘that which they want to do.’ This erroneous belief often changes once they recognize the inherent danger in pursuing such a course of action. But for those who continue to revel in the pleasures of the senses, life is never enough.

Isn’t this what is supposed to be done in life?

People invest so much time in the pursuit of pleasure. The few moments of enjoyment that result from all their efforts are minute in comparison. It is so pitiful, so unworthy! Nevertheless, they strive tirelessly, unashamedly, unremorsefully in the pursuit of sensuality. They might even go so far as to ask, “Isn’t this what is supposed to be done in life?”

If we were to look at the manner in which people pursue sensual pleasures, we would soon discover the motivating force of greed, hatred and delusion. Some people pursue pleasures because of greed. For others the prime motivation is hatred. Greed and hatred always arise together with delusion. Greed, hatred and delusion always culminate in disappointment and failure.

With the arising of greed, in order to obtain that which they want, human beings defy heat and cold. Without concern about the effect of their actions, they destroy, crush and exterminate creatures that bite or are otherwise threatening to them. Hatred accompanies greed. Without any certainty of acquiring what they want, they risk their lives willingly, contending with hardships and hunger. They accept the deception of ignorance (*avijjā*), so they suffer. Their suffering is guaranteed. It is the high cost of wallowing in the delights of sensuality. It exists in the here and now and results from being consumed by uncontrollable craving for sensual pleasures.

These are the dangers of sensuality. Unless one recognizes these dangers one cannot know what ought to be done. Only when one knows and sees the truth of this will they be convinced of what it is they really want to do

and what it is that really needs to be done.

The Debt that is Kamma

The kamma, which leads to rebirth in one of the four woeful planes, proliferates from the pursuit of sensuality. With kamma comes debt, and it is the law of nature that at sometime or another our kammic debt has to be paid. No one prays to be reborn in one of the four woeful planes. Nevertheless, when greed, hatred and delusion motivate us to act in unwholesome ways, it has that result. It is as though we actually prayed for rebirth in a woeful world. When that kamma ripens, we will be carried into one of those woeful realms.

Sometimes sensual pleasures are elusive. When people don't get what they want, they tend to be sad. They lament and grieve and this is suffering. Suffering, in this instance, begins with the craving for sensual pleasures.

Suffering results not only from craving for sensual pleasures, but also from attaining them. Once the sought after pleasures are attained, how can we hold on to them? We are almost immediately troubled by the fear of losing them, so we worry and fret and desperately cling to that which we think gives us pleasure. This, too, is suffering.

Liberation from the anguish and suffering of sensuality is the practice of renunciation.

The meat chunk that is sensual bliss

People kill one another, people harm one another, and they argue with one another all because of wanting to possess the objects of sensuality. Therefore, the Buddha once likened sensuality to a chunk of meat. To a flock of hun-

gry birds trying to pluck it from the beak of a falcon, that chunk of meat becomes the object of their craving. They attack the falcon, as a flock, pecking at his body trying to make him release the chunk of meat. To be able to escape from suffering one must, therefore, entirely let go of the chunk of meat that is sensuality. Suffering will prevail as long as sensuality is not discarded. Holding on, the falcon will be pecked to death; if not to death, he will at the very least experience near-death suffering.

Are defilements a tonic?

Being born, as a human being, is suffering. Our bodies are composed of the five clinging aggregates. These aggregates are our human burden. Who carries this burden? We do. As long as we carry the burden of sensuality, we suffer. Just having a body is already a heavy burden. To take on the added responsibilities of relationships and of owning and maintaining material possessions is too much extra burden for one to carry. It is almost beyond one's capacity to bear this extra burden. Expanding clouds of defilements appear to act as a tonic to aid in supporting that burden. They seem to be urging us, "Go ahead and do it! Take it." As if it were not enough just bearing one's own defilements, they seem to be urging us to bear the defilements of others, too. In any case, this is asking for suffering and hardship. It is surely not inviting peace and tranquility.

People think that sensuality is the highest form of pleasure but we see that it is suffering. On the other hand, people think that renunciation is suffering when it is exactly the opposite. Renunciation leads to delight. It is a state of being filled with ecstasy and rapture. It is, in fact,

the way to the highest pleasure. It is true bliss.

True Peace – Renunciation

To attain the bliss of renunciation one has to understand what renunciation is. Becoming a monk and leading an ascetic life in the forest is one form of renunciation. Another way to practice renunciation is by intentionally dissociating oneself from the trap of all sensual pleasures. Renunciation can be practiced by anyone, at anytime, who sincerely wishes to be free from suffering. Through the practice of renunciation, one is finally able to dispel the fog of defilements once and for all.

Let me explain with the following example:

There are two trees. One is fruitless. The other is fruitful. The latter is heavy with ripe juicy fruit, which is the object of human sensuality. Such a tree attracts those desirous of its fruits. It is true that the fruit of sensuality is indeed beautiful to behold. People will do almost anything to get at it. They will pick the tree bare and ruthlessly throw sticks and stones at it, in an attempt to get at the fruits that are out of reach. Soon enough that tree is stripped of its beauty.

The simple beauty of a tree without fruit, however, becomes more apparent when the fruit-bearing tree gets damaged. When one begins to trust that a life with nothing is a worthy life, then true peace is at hand. This is the life of one who is practicing renunciation.

Inviting Perils

All living beings fear danger. Even though we all wish to be free of fear and anxiety, fear and anxiety accompa-

nies sensuality. So, as long as people are driven by sensuality, they are by nature subject to association with danger. Sensuality is like a powerful magnet that attracts danger from antagonists, enemies, despots and criminals.

Wherever there is sensuality, there is danger. Similarly, whenever there are outstanding kammic debts to be paid, then sooner or later there will be calls for the settlement of those debts. In the unbroken cycles of saü sāra, beings continue to accumulate so much unwholesome kamma. When their unwholesome kamma ripens, it can be as if waters rise, fires flare up and frightening inanimate entities threaten death and destruction – as though those entities actually possessed a life of their own. This is the suffering that arises from craving and clinging rooted in sensuality. For this reason, the dangers of sensuality need to be identified, discerned and eradicated outright.

The suffering of those sharing the same preoccupation

Despite class differences, the search for sensuality is the same. It is a blinding force that mesmerizes those who are driven by their own unquenchable thirst for sensual pleasures. It is one of the main reasons why rulers quarrel with rulers, Brahmins quarrel with Brahmins, the wealthy quarrel with the wealthy, and so on.

Disputes often arise among those with the same self-interests. Paradoxically, common interests often lead to disagreement rather than to accord; they can quickly become the breeding ground of challengers and adversaries or enemies. Jealousy, envy, resentment and malevolence towards others with the same self interests create adversaries. These negative states are rooted in possessiveness and fear. Consequently, we can see how sensual-

ity becomes the cause for strife between parents and children, between siblings and between friends and colleagues. Disputes and quarrels can turn into fights, and fights based on the craving for sensuality can lead to serious injury or even death.

Human beings are slaves to lust and craving, tormented by the defilements of their own mind. They cannot see the ways in which they cater to the whims of their own untrained mind. What's more, they identify with their defilements. Their ego accepts as true the mistaken belief that, "I, myself, am greed; I, myself, am hatred; I, myself, am delusion." In other words, they believe that they and their defilements are one and the same. So, instead of leading their mind, such people are being led by their mind. They are being manipulated by ignorance. This is suffering.

Those who have made advance reservations

Human beings cannot help but accumulate a great deal of unwholesome kamma in the exhausting pursuit for sensual gratification. In order to pay off all those accumulated unwholesome kammic debts in future existences, advanced bookings and reservations are, without a doubt, being made. Even in their present existence, most people suffer from anxiety and fatigue. Many of us shed tears of sorrow due to our intense craving for sensual fulfillment.

Cognizance of the Truth - The most essential aspect

If someone is capable of seeing only that which is visible and of hearing only that which is audible, then he or she will be unprepared for future existences that cannot be seen or heard. It is necessary for human beings to be

able to visualize that which is invisible and to be able to discern that which is inaudible. In order to penetrate the truth, one must be capable of perceiving that which lies beyond what can merely be seen or heard. One must not remain solely dependent upon the visible and the audible.

We know that self-aggrandizement for the sake of being seen or heard has kammic consequences. However, the value of life cannot be elevated with an irrational mentality that is only concerned with superficial worldly appearances. Kamma does not cease to operate just because of pleasant appearances and harmonious sounds. Surely, life's value is not to conform to a world that is only interested in superficial appearances and hearsay. It isn't at all important whether one is acclaimed and recognized by the world. On the other hand, it is essential to be cognizant of the truth.

Those who are enslaving themselves

As we have seen, there are people who do what they want to do simply for the sake of sensual enjoyment. These people are enslaved by their defilements. They capitulate to the impulses of their untamed mind. Their lives are structured around defilements. There are others, however, who practice renunciation for the sake of liberation from sensuality. Liberation can be attained through the noble training of morality (*Sīla*), the noble training of concentration (*Samādhi*) and the noble training of insight (*Paññā*). One takes on these practices because of the genuine desire to attain the bliss of concentration (*jhāna*), the bliss of insight, the bliss of path, the bliss of fruition and the bliss of Nibbāna. This is doing what ought to be done in order to attain that which is truly desired. It is leading the mind

rather than being led by the mind. The process is an expression of wisdom.

Continued journeys of weariness

Defilements overwhelm all those who remain tainted by them. Generally, women have to deal with defilements that are specific challenges for them as women. The same is true for men who also have to deal with defilements that are unique challenges for them, as men.

Therefore, in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, The Lord Buddha spoke thus:

“I know of no other single form by which a man’s heart is so enslaved as it is by that of a woman. A woman’s form obsesses a man’s heart.”

“Similarly, I know of no other single form by which a woman’s heart is so enslaved as it is by that of a man. A man’s form obsesses a woman’s heart.”

The Lord Buddha spoke the same in regard to the senses of sound, smell, taste and touch.

The pursuit of such sensual pleasures often causes human beings to feel enervated, almost as though they were going to wither away. This suffering endures as long as beings are bound to journey through the cycles of rebirths (*Saṁsāra*). The only means of escape is to bring *saṁsāra* to an end. To do this one must irreversibly abandon all craving and lust.

It is important to understand that it is not the sensual pleasures of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch that cause our suffering. *Craving* for the sensual pleasures of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch is what causes our suffer-

ing. As long as craving exists, our never-ending journey through *saṁsāra* shall continue.

Sensuality, Sensitivity, Suffering

There is no effect without a cause. This is the teaching of The Lord Buddha. The Lord Buddha never spoke about causeless effects. As you might expect, the emergence of craving or desire is what causes one to seek the pleasures related to the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Existence has its origin in the craving for life. Within eleven weeks of conception eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity and tongue-sensitivity start to develop. These sensitivities are the receptors of the senses of sight, sound, smell and taste. Sensitivity to touch, however, exists from the moment of conception.

How have these sensitivities come into existence? What are their origins? We need to look for the answers to these questions.

Eye-sensitivity, which is the ability to see a visual object, arises from craving for visual pleasures. This is the perception of sight. Its origin is *kamma*.

Similarly, ear-sensitivity, which is the ability to hear an auditory object, arises from craving for auditory pleasures. This is the perception of hearing. Its origin is also *kamma*.

Likewise, the rest of the sensitivities also originate from their respective cravings and *kamma*.

Forms and appearances are sought after because of eye-sensitivity, which arises from *kamma* and springs from craving to perceive visible objects. In the same way, sounds are sought after because of ear-sensitivity, which arises

from kamma and springs from craving to perceive auditory objects.

Liberation is not possible unless human beings are able to give up the foolish notion and belief that ‘this is what I want to see’ [rather than what the eye-sensitivity desires to see]; ‘this is what I want to hear’ [rather than what the ear-sensitivity desires to hear].’

They believe that it is they themselves who want to enjoy the pleasures of sight. In fact, they are only succumbing to the lust for visual objects. Living in such a misguided way is dishonorable.

If we were to look into the basic causes of the five sense sensitivities, it would point the way to suffering and delusion. To be enslaved to the senses throughout one’s life is no small matter. When one thinks deeply about this, it is clear that a life of sensory enslavement is a life filled with misery and suffering. The ordeals and suffering of existence are, indeed, extensive.

The Causes of Weariness

In the scriptures it says, “The beginning of the six sense-organs is the beginning of existence.” These six sense-organs are the five sensitivities plus the mind-base (*manāyatana*). The Lord Buddha said, “Living beings suffer agony and exhaustion due to the formation of the six-sense-organs.”

Eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body sensitivity are the cause of suffering and agony in living beings. The same is true of the mind-base (*manāyatana*).

Touch arises due to the sensitivities and because of touch, feeling arises. With feeling comes craving. The crav-

ing for forms, the craving for sound and all other such cravings arise. In the same way, with the arising of craving, clinging arises. So, set in motion by intense clinging, resultant wholesome or unwholesome actions arise. They cause birth. Birth being present, becoming, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair come to be.

All the suffering of becoming, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain (illness of the body), displeasure (illness of the mind) and despair (the utter weariness of the mind) is the outcome of unwise-attention and ignorance (*avijjā*).

Daring to endorse unwritten agreements

In our human world, filled with people who lack access to the eye of wisdom, most people revel in the delights of sensuality. They ignore moral codes and are looked down upon and despised by many. With eye-sensitivity, they take pleasure in the beauty and appearance of different ages, both young and old alike. The sad truth is, these people are not looked down upon or despised by most. They are permitted to abandon moral codes through an unwritten agreement.

What one wants to do?

Striving for sensual gratification cannot be termed ‘what one wants to do’. It is merely giving in to the desires dictated by craving and lust, and it makes one subservient to his or her defilements.

What is it that you actually want to do? Do you merely want to indulge your desires and defilements or do you want to be liberated from defilements? These are the two questions that need to be asked.

If sense gratification is your goal, then what you really want to do is simply give in to the insatiable cravings of the defilements. On the other hand, if you come to see the dangers and futility inherent in indulging sensual pleasures, you may begin to yearn for liberation and may start to practice for liberation. When that happens it can be said that what you are doing is for freeing yourself from the manipulation and control of the defilements.

Liberation from defilements is the most worthy and highest goal that humankind can achieve. Life is meaningful only when one works towards that worthy goal. Otherwise, beings are chained to the wheel of becoming, taking birth over and over again in the never-ending cycles of *saṃsāra*. This is not the real meaning or purpose of existence.

To be enslaved in the service of one's defilements is not the meaning of 'doing what one wants to do.' It is just laboring in vain to carry out the wishes of the defilements. One ought to strive instead for freedom from such an existence. Only then can it be said that 'one is doing what one wants to do.'

How to make your mind follow your wish

In order to train one's mind to follow one's true wishes, one has to practice those three noble attributes that are *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*.

The practice of *Sīla* subdues the wishes of defilements. It purifies one's bodily and verbal actions.

The practice of *Samādhi* purifies one's mental actions. It is the practice of training the mind to concentrate on a single object. When one reaches a certain level of devel-

opment in this practice, one is able to direct his mind in accordance with his true wishes. Mental actions remain pure as long as the concentrated mind is steadily focused on a single object.

In order to achieve everlasting purity of the mind, however, one must practice insight meditation (*vipassanā*). It is at the stage of insight meditation that one examines the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self throughout the mind-matter complex. In order to do so, the ultimate truth of mind and matter needs to be experienced and understood with insight. It is, therefore, necessary to attain the knowledge of discerning ultimate mentality and materiality.

Following the attainment of the knowledge of ultimate mentality and materiality comes the knowledge of discerning causes and conditions through the direct discernment of cause and effect (Dependent Origination). This knowledge also needs to be directly realized.

Finally, after having acquired the wisdom of vipassana insight knowledge through contemplating *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* on ultimate truths, there follows a step-by-step development of path and fruition knowledge. Only then can it be said that one has succeeded in mastering the mind in accordance with his or her true wishes. Until then, the mind continues to dictate to him or her. That person who has realized path and fruition knowledge becomes the One referred to as having 'done what ought to be done.'

Development of the Mind in Stages

In the minds of those people whose view of life is limited to the desire for sensuality, what they want to do is merely catering to the dictates of defilements. From their point of view, they see beauty in sensuality. That is why the Lord Buddha said, “If there were no gratification in sensuality, beings would not become enamored with it; but because there is gratification in sensuality, beings become enamored with it.”

In contrast, those who recognize the faults inherent in sensuality see the danger of sensuality. That is why the Lord Buddha said, “If there were no danger in sensuality, beings would not experience revulsion towards it; but because there is danger in sensuality, beings experience revulsion towards it.”

When a person has become fully aware of the disadvantages of sensuality, his or her desires to escort sensuality through life’s journey gradually fades away. It slowly but surely dissipates, then evaporates. Such a person sincerely begins to seek for a way or means to liberate himself from sensuality. This is the gradual development of the mind. It occurs in stages. That is why the Lord Buddha said, “If there were no escape from sensuality, beings would not escape from it; but because there is escape from sensuality, beings escape from it.”

The explicit means and practice for liberation from sensuality can only be found in the precious teachings of the Fully Enlightened Buddhas.

It is only when a virtuous person ardently desires liberation that he or she is inclined and willing to fervently practice. And, it is only through practice that he or she

can gradually free themselves from the clutches of the defilements. Once they are firmly on the path to freedom, such a person is qualified to proclaim, “This truly is what I want to do.” The proclamation is, in effect, practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, which is that which ought to be done and which leads to the eventual termination of all cravings. In other words, by following the Noble Eightfold Path one is gradually liberated from the defilements. All anxieties and miseries are extinguished. When this happens it could be said that that which ought to be done has been accomplished.

The contention between craving and wisdom

Sooner or later, people come to realize that the attainment and enjoyment of sought-after sensual delights in no way extinguishes or satisfies their thirst and craving. They very often discover, after they acquire whatever it was they thought they wanted, that their gratification was short-lived. They have to admit, if just to themselves, that the object of their desire was not what they really wanted after all. This is a precious opportunity for them to investigate the contention between the cravings born from seeking short-lived pleasures, in contrast to the wisdom born from seeking the truth. As long as the quest for sensuality remains unexamined, one’s true actual ‘want’ or ‘wants’ will remain unknown. Whenever craving is present there will always be an endless stream of new ‘wants’ arising. This is suffering.

That’s what I want to do

With liberation comes profound contentment. Liberation is void of craving. The person who ‘wants this’ and

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‘wants that’ is no more. A new person comes into being. For such a person, “What had to be done has been done.”

May you be such a person.

May all beings be blessed with the attainment of the perfections and be able to proclaim, ‘What I want to do is to be liberated.’

May all beings be replete with perfections and virtues.

May all beings practice *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*, which are the prerequisites for liberation.

May all beings be able to reach the yonder shore of Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Bhikkhu Revata

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery,
Myanmar.

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